



A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/1K: The Making of a Superpower: USA, 1865-1975
Report on the Examination

7042
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General

Overall, students responded very well to the paper. Students were able to write at great length on social, economic and political issues, and were able to present balanced and well-argued responses. There were many examples of excellent responses which avoided assertion by selecting appropriate and relevant supporting evidence. Many students were, again, able to demonstrate a good understanding of each period in question and displayed an impressive grasp of content. The essay questions were all equally popular this year. Students still need to develop the skill of focusing closely on the question and creating a strong analysis of the issue posed. As happened last year, the more successful students demonstrated a clear understanding and evaluated developments over a period of time.

Question 01

Most students had clear and accurate knowledge of economic problems and policies in the 1930s and 1940s and were able to identify some of the main arguments of each extract; short, undeveloped answers were rare. Students found Extract A the most approachable, in part at least because they brought a body of pro-FDR material to bear on the question and therefore found it relatively easy to challenge the central argument. The evaluation of Extract B was sometimes developed into fairly weak agreement, occasionally drawing evidence from Extract A to provide a counter-argument. Many students emphasised the opposition of the Supreme Court as the key issue in extract C.

Understanding the extracts and offering a succinct overall evaluation in relation to the question is the key to securing a mark in the higher mark ranges. Clarity in defining arguments at the outset provides a firm structure for effective evaluation, which needs to be supported by contextual own knowledge. The alternative – a point-by-point approach with no overall definition of argument - can quickly become a fact-check without any sense of the overall significance of the view put forward in the extract.

Some of the better responses were quite short, but had a considered evaluation of the overall argument in relation to its convincingness.

Some students are still attempting to compare the extracts, which is not required for this question. Too many less-able students tried to criticise the extracts for the factual information that they omitted, rather than for the weaknesses in the arguments they offered. This approach made it difficult to draw any meaningful judgements. The weakest answers simply identified random points from each extract and categorised them as 'convincing' or 'not convincing'. Many of the best responses included summary judgements after each extract, although neither these, nor a final concluding paragraph were needed for high marks, provided substantiated judgement was in evidence throughout the answer.

Question 02

This was the most popular question on the paper. Students had quite a good understanding of economic developments in the early period but a number of responses did not get to grips with the core issue of the question – laissez-faire policies. Understanding of the positive and negative effects of 'monopolies' and 'Robber Barons' limited students in some cases, and often led to a one-sided response.

The best responses included reference to 'Robber Barons' and well as 'Captains of Industry' and offered insights into how they contributed to economic development and restriction.

There were a variety of approaches, most of which had some merit. Thematic approaches based upon aspects of economic activity – industry, agriculture, railways, labour relations – often produced the greatest clarity and the most convincing judgements. Another approach was to divide the essay into positive and negative outcomes, although such approaches often proved to be quite simplistic. Others adopted a chronological approach, but there was a danger of this turning into little more than a history of economic developments, with only limited links to laissez-faire.

Some less able students used the question to write detailed, largely descriptive, accounts of the Carnegie, Rockefeller, Vanderbilt and Morgan empires. Other students incorrectly applied the term laissez-faire to social policy in the Deep South or Manifest Destiny in the West.

Question 03

There were some excellent responses to this question, which showed clear and thoughtful understanding of social, political, and economic reasons for the introduction of the Immigration Acts in the 1920s.

Responses tended to be thematic and this worked very well in providing a balanced assessment of the question. The very best answers considered social tensions arising from late 19th century: immigration, events in the period 1914-22 and the Immigration Acts themselves. The weakest answers tended to look at either social tensions from 1890 onwards or events from 1914-22, not both. These answers, therefore, found it difficult to create a substantiated and convincing argument.

A broad understanding of the Immigration of the 1920s was useful but not needed. Some quite sophisticated responses did, however, consider the Immigration Acts in detail and suggested the groups they were intended to exclude. Students who were able to show clear focus and balance, scored very highly.

Question 04

This was, again, a popular question but one that some students found difficult to answer. The best answers analysed the objectives, purpose and developments in the Cold War policies adopted by the USA in this period and how these policies worked out in practice, in relation to particular incidents and events.

The weakest answers offered a descriptive account of some Cold War incidents, often without organisation or structure and with only loose connection to the purpose of the question. Students approached the question in a variety of ways – some chronological, some by Presidential ambition, some by accounts of key incidents, usually beginning with Cuba. Some divided the essay into two clear sections – actions deemed to reduce tensions and actions deemed to increase tensions. All were equally acceptable, provided the focus remained firmly on the question.

Some students openly queried the premise in the question – that the USA sought to reduce tensions. Strong answers were able to show range between 1955 and 1975, as the question required, and included an evaluation from Eisenhower to Nixon.

The ability to select and deploy accurate supporting detail in support of arguments was a key factor that differentiated between the weak, average and very good essays.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.