

# A-level **History**

7042/2J America: A Nation Divided, c1845-1877  
Report on the Examination

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## General

This was the second cohort of students to undertake this new linear A-level exam on America: A Nation Divided, c1845. This paper tests A02 which requires students to evaluate the value of primary sources to historians in relations to answering particular questions. This is a depth unit and therefore a high level of specific detail is required in student's answers for them to achieve a high level mark. This year the essays in particular focused on precise aspects of the specification. On two of these essays the overall level of response was in line with last year, however question 2 proved to be more demanding. It is important that students concentrate on the time period and specifics of questions asked. The comments which follow are indicative of some of the strengths and weaknesses commonly seen in students' answers. The introduction in the specification spells out the key concepts of political authority, abolitionism and social justice. The introduction also draws attention to the need to look at social tension and harmony, nationhood and political compromise. It is important that candidates are well versed in these concepts and issues as they the basis of question setting.

## Question 1

This year's paper saw outcomes on the source question overall improve on last year. There was better focus on value than last year but persisting issues with students answering as if the requirements were the same as extract questions from Paper 1. A number of students addressed either how convincing or how useful the sources were rather than how valuable.

Students on the whole were better this year on the content of the sources and applying contextual knowledge to assess the value of this content and arguments. There were however some issues with students approach to provenance. At the very bottom end students were just repeating the attribution. Some students moved on from this to make simplistic statements on value about the author, date, audience or source type. Stronger students started to assess why the authors offered particularly valuable insights into the outbreak of the war.

On Source A there was some disappointing evaluation of provenance in particular. Students knew a great deal about Lincoln's election and the importance of this on sectional tension. Whilst contextual knowledge was generally good it was not always focused on why this speech is valuable or limited but rather on the role of Lincoln and the idea of his election in causing the war. The best candidates knew about the situation at the time of the speech including the states that had seceded and the attempts to resolve the divides. These candidates effectively used this contextual knowledge to assess the value of the speech in assessing Lincoln's approach. The content of the source was well understood and students made good use of the argument in the source that if a war was to break out the blame would fall on the south.

In assessing Source B the majority of students picked up on fact this was a minority view and there was some interesting analysis of the fact that it was not delivered. There was some good contextual knowledge on the level of support/opposition to secession in the south. Some of the best answers effectively assess why the author in particular may have strong loyalty to the Union having been so instrumental in bringing Texas into the USA. There was a good range of responses, from those at the top with an excellent understanding of provenance, tone and content to those at the other end of the scale that simply dismissed the source as it did not comply with the more familiar view.

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Source C was generally well understood, with good knowledge about the attack on Fort Sumter and its role in the outbreak of the war. There was some good assessment of provenance based on South Carolina's stance on secession and antagonism towards the Federal Government standing out along with high status of author. At the other end of the scale there were some very simplistic responses based on the idea that the source is 'bias' and therefore should be avoided. Less effective answers also tended to base their assessment on listing limitation based on omission. This was not very effective.

## Question 2

This was the least popular of the three essays. It is based on the specification content: 'Reactions against abolitionism in the South; political leaders such as Jefferson Davis; popular literature and the press'. It is noted that the questions proved to be highly challenging for students and did not perform as well as the other essay questions. Whilst students demonstrated strong knowledge on abolitionist writings especially 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' and newspapers such as 'The Liberator', knowledge on the Southern Response to this was much less secure. Some answers displayed good knowledge of individual or numerous examples of 'anti-Tom' literature in particular 'The Planter's Northern Bride' in which the 'villains' are abolitionists. Other strong answers focused on comparing the sales of abolitionist and anti-abolitionist literature and the attitudes in the press. Students could have compared the views in literature/ press to those held by political leaders to illustrate how typical the views were.

Many students focused on arguments surrounding expansion of slavery at this point in time, which whilst understandable was only effectively linked back to the question by a minority of students. Abolitionism is a key concept and it is essential that students can assess the attitudes to it across the sectional divide.

A large number of students went beyond 1854 with a large amount of material about 1856 being produced and some going as far as Harper's Ferry in 1859. This material could not be credited given the time constraints on the question that match those in the specification.

## Question 3

This was the best performing question on the paper. Most answers looked effectively at the 10% plan versus the Wade-Davis Bill. The level of detail on these two was highly impressive in some cases and many answers showed strong evaluation that was tightly linked to the question. Some answers were less clear on the issue of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, though the best effectively argued that these actions meant that it was difficult to see Lincoln's actions as 'favourable'. Some answers credited Lincoln with policies/ actions that were not his, nor part of his plans, limiting their effectiveness. Some answers focused on discussion of how the war was pursued rather than plans for after the war. There was some good comparison between the approach of President Lincoln and that of President Johnson which led to some strong analysis and supported judgement. This approach was not however required and answers that did not do this could achieve top marks as well.

#### **Question 4**

This question had the highest standard deviation of any of the questions as there were a good number of excellent answers with a full understanding of the question. At the other end of the scale there were a minority of students who did not know who the 'redeemers' were and in some cases wrote about radical Republicans instead, meaning their answers were highly confused. The question was done well by a good number of students.

Particularly strong were arguments that racist attitudes drove 'redeemers' actions with some excellent supporting detail. Student's knowledge of corruption was highly varied. Some focused on the South and Republican governments, scallywags and carpetbaggers along with institutions in the South such as the Freedman's Bureau. Some answers showed detailed knowledge of the corruption in Grant's administration referring to Credit Mobilier and the Whiskey Ring, amongst others. There was some good knowledge of Southern Democrats election campaigns being focused on removing Republican 'corruption'. The best answers separated what 'redeemers' perceived as being corrupt (all Republicans, all black representatives, all aspects of the Freedman's Bureau) and the genuine level of corruption. Some of the best answers compared to corruption elsewhere, notably New York.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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