

AS

HISTORY

7041/2Q: The American Dream: reality and illusion, 1945-1980
Report on the Examination

7041
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Overview of the paper

Although number of entries for this option has declined, the understanding of the demands of the paper has generally grown. However, a new kind of source, a press release, was used for Source A this year and many students struggled to infer from it. Whilst there were some good answers to both the essay questions, they required careful reading and planning in order to produce a strong response. Many students would benefit from spending more time reading and thinking about the demands of the question before putting pen to paper.

Question 01

This question focused on the specification bullet point, 'The growth of the American economy in the 1950s and the impact of the 'consumer society'. This is an area that has been covered before and there was some good own knowledge on show, with candidates demonstrating that they had a clear understanding of the period and the changes that consumer society brought. Responses still tended to be disproportionately longer than those for the essay questions (02 and 03), suggesting that students are less inclined to plan their answers to this question. Larger numbers of students are now covering the key areas of provenance (often also making reference to tone), coupled with content and argument, although this did lead to some over-formulaic responses. Too many students still relied on discussion of what was omitted from the sources in making judgements on their utility and this would suggest that there are still students who do not really understand the purpose of the question. Almost universally students chose Source B by Oscar Handlin as the more useful of the two, given that it presented relatively straight-forward message. However when considering Source A, it was surprising how many students were willing to dismiss the source as of little use despite the huge range of material that could be extracted from it. Nevertheless the question was the highest performing of the three suggesting an increasing degree of comfort with the demands of the source question.

Question 02

This question focused on the specification bullet point, "The USA as a Superpower: Truman's character and policies; post-war peace making; the Cold War and 'containment' in Europe and Asia; the response to the rise of Communism in Asia." Marginally the more popular of the two essay questions, this question was, nevertheless quite demanding in terms of the timescale covered. Some students struggled with balance and attempted to turn events into the 'basis of US foreign policy', offering ideas such as 'the Korean war was the basis of foreign policy' despite the chronological and conceptual problems that such an approach led to. Stronger responses demonstrated a good understanding of the Truman Doctrine and were able to look at where it was applied and where it was not. Credit was given for other approaches that did offer an alternative, feasible basis for foreign policy, such as economic support via the Marshall Plan or the need for nuclear power hegemony. With plenty of key events to draw on in the period it was surprising how limited some students knowledge was. Students who tended to perform well had usually planned effectively, with key events covered first and then a structure that made use of them. Good organisation was more frequently seen than in previous years.

Question 03

This question focused on the specification bullet point, 'African-Americans in North and South: the rise of the Civil Rights Movement; the opponents of Civil Rights, including within the Democratic Party; Kennedy's policies in response to the pressures for change.' Although this was marginally the less popular of the two essay questions, it was the best answered, with far more students

getting into the upper range of L4 than in question 02. The question was deliberately provocative and encouraged a balance response. The shorter timeframe put pressure on the quality of students' knowledge but the civil rights part of the specification remains a consistent area of strength. While the question looked superficially straight-forward, some students failed to differentiate between the actions of the movement and the actions of the Kennedy administration. Stronger students were able to draw on a number of key events including Albany, the Sit-ins and Freedom Rides along with Birmingham and the March on Washington. The very best students also managed to bring in the situation in the North and the growth of the NOI discussing how this hampered the wider movement whilst also galvanising campaigning outside the deep south.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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