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# A-LEVEL HISTORY

Component 1K The making of a Superpower: USA, 1865–1975  
Report on the Examination

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## General

Overall, students responded well to the paper. Students were often able to write at great length, and both types of question, extract and essay, enabled students to present balanced and well-argued responses. Good responses avoided assertion by selecting appropriate and relevant supporting evidence.

Many students were able to demonstrate a good understanding of each period in question and displayed an impressive grasp of content and supporting evidence, sometimes going above and beyond what is required in a breadth paper. The essay question on imperialism and motivating factors, from 1890-1920 (Q02) was more popular than the other essay questions on women and equality, from 1920-1945 (Q03) and on economic growth and prosperity for all, from 1945-1964 (Q04). Whilst, on the whole, students displayed a secure understanding of a range of factors and themes, fewer were able to develop a strong analysis of these issues that was closely focused on the questions posed. As a breadth paper, the more successful students demonstrated a strong understanding and evaluated developments over a period of time.

Candidates who do well in question 01 do not necessarily do equally well on the essay questions. Some candidates appear to respond well to the prompts/pegs provided by the extracts and respond less effectively to the open-ended nature of the essay questions.

## Question 01

Most students had very good knowledge of Gilded Age presidents and were able to identify the main argument of each extract. Whilst better responses considered the various sub-arguments within each extract and focused on the question posed, some students became side-tracked into explaining everything mentioned in the extract, regardless of relevance to the overall question. Many answers now seem to fall into a standard format: the extracts are dealt with in turn, key issues are summarised at the outset, followed by two distinct sections — ways in which the extract is convincing followed by ways in which it is not convincing. Such answers can appear formulaic.

Good answers moved away from a 'line by line' analysis to a detailed evaluation of the arguments given in each extract, in relation to the focus of the question. The better responses often were shorter but had a considered evaluation of the overall argument and then used the elements of the argument to evaluate its overall convincingness. Some students attempted to compare the extracts, which is not required for this question. Strong answers gave clear and supported judgements on the question.

Too many less-able students tried to criticise the extracts for what they omitted rather than for the arguments they offered and this approach made it difficult to draw any meaningful judgements. The best responses included summary judgements after each extract and this meant that a final concluding paragraph was not needed.

Contextual knowledge is an important ingredient of a successful answer. In some cases it was encyclopaedic, dealt with by reference/inference rather than by description and narrative. On weaker answers it was limited, often general and the subject of sometimes-lengthy description.

**Question 02**

This was a popular essay question and the vast majority of the students showed clearly that it was a topic with which they were very familiar. Students were quite well versed in American imperialism in general. The use of the term 'imperialism', as opposed to simply 'foreign policy', was challenging for some candidates but also allowed others to develop a strongly analytical response which defined clearly the meaning of the term 'imperialism'. The best responses included reference to World War One and offered insights into how this was a different kind of foreign policy for the USA.

Strong responses provided a balanced assessment and argued how far national security was the main motivator, in relation to a range of other factors, such as the economy and promoting US influence, in imperialist policy. Some students had very detailed and thorough knowledge of imperialism, although they were less confident with the term 'national security'.

The best responses were able to identify what national security was and show its application in foreign policy whilst also comparing it against other motivating factors. These answers were then able to argue whether other factors were as or more important than national security. One-sided answers, which either focused entirely on national security or completely ignored national security, unfortunately were unable to access higher levels of the mark scheme, whereas students who were able to produce balanced answers with clear links and judgements scored well.

**Question 03**

There were some good answers here from students who understood the clear focus of this question, which did prove to be a challenge for many. Responses tended to be either chronological, effectively looking at the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s in turn, or thematic, grouping material under political/social/economic-employment headings. The chronological approach was often more thorough. On the other hand, the thematic approach reached higher levels of analysis but also led to more significant omissions of relevant material.

Able students were able to focus in on the need to examine the extent of progress for women throughout the time period. Too many students wrote largely on the 'Jazz Age' and 'Flappers' to show progress in the 1920s and judged that the 1930s were barren of progress due to the Great Depression. These answers, therefore, found it difficult to create a substantiated and convincing argument and made only very basic links to the question. Examiners always try to mark positively, but these responses had only a limited understanding of the question.

Conversely, those students who were able to show clear focus and balance, scored very highly. For example, some students were able to write that, in the 1930s, certain Alphabet Agencies, the NRA being one, encouraged lower wages for women, but individuals such as Frances Perkins campaigned against this, which therefore shows a degree of progress. Some students were able to make clear judgements and sustain an analysis with appropriate supporting evidence and move away from a more generalist answer.

**Question 04**

This was, again, a popular question but the quality of answers for this question was mixed. The best answers were balanced and explained in full the causes, nature and evidence for US prosperity in this period. This was then followed by reference to those who failed to share in this prosperity, for example African-Americans, Native Americans or farmers.

A significant number of weaker responses allowed themselves to drift into quite lengthy accounts of the Civil Rights Movement, attempting, usually unsuccessfully, to link it with economic success/failure.

Strong answers were able to focus on the themes of change and continuity and also to show range between 1945 and 1964, as the question required. These answers were able to use supporting evidence and examples to build an argument, mostly starting with the end of World War Two and whether there was prosperity and economic growth for all or whether the status quo prevailed for some until 1964. Unfortunately, some answers to this question took an overly narrow view and failed to cover the entire period without focusing on change or continuity.

Better answers managed to link economic growth with prosperity for the middle classes, the youth and women or the white population and contrast that with the fewer economic opportunities for African-American and minority groups.

The ability to select and deploy accurate and precise supporting detail in support of arguments were key factors that differentiated between the weak, average and very good essays. A number of students need to be reminded that all essay answers require argument and a balanced appraisal and that one-sided answers, or answers that do not attempt to address the full time period in question, will not reach the higher mark ranges.

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

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