

A-level **History**

7042/2G The Birth of the USA, 1760–1801
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

Many students seemed to lack the real grasp of detail which is required for a depth paper, and this meant that frequently essays lacked the supporting evidence to back up any points/arguments made, meaning that many answers never got above level 3 of the mark scheme. It should be said however that balance was done much better by students. With regards to the source question students should be reminded that a comparison of sources is not required at A-level.

Q1

A number of students either failed to read carefully, or misunderstood, the attribution for source A which explained the context of the letter, and this created problems regarding Conway's motives. Others mistook Gates, and even Conway, for British generals, which also caused problems. At the higher end there was good awareness of the 'Conway Cabal' and even of Gouverneur Morris having the casting vote in Congress to keep Washington as commander of the army, but this depth of knowledge was the exception.

Source B was better done than source A generally and many students picked up on the time which had elapsed since the war and Washington's death and its potential influence on value, as well as Jefferson having fallen out with Washington during the latter's presidency. A number of students were under the impression that Jefferson was away in Paris for the duration of the War of Independence which caused problems. Source C from Washington himself proved to be awkward for a number of students who strayed from focusing on Washington's military leadership. Less able students again either did not carefully read the attribution or were confused about dates, and assumed that source C was regarding Washington's resignation as President. Students should aim to give as much effort to source C as to the other sources to ensure a consistent answer overall.

Students would do well to follow the structures suggested in the AQA online model answers and mark schemes, and this would avoid the problems of provenance being omitted. Students writing 'this source shows...' is always an ominous sign and something to avoid. 'Own evidence' must always be used to support anything stated in a source to validate its value. With the sources question there was much inconsistency across the three sources within answers.

It should be remembered that students are not required to compare the 3 sources at all nor to reach any over-arching conclusion which discuss all three sources together on the A-level paper. Neither is credit given for simply regurgitating attributions in the hope that in some way this will pick up marks for dealing with provenance. Provenance must always be dealt with in relation to the value of the source.

Q2

There were clearly problems with students not understanding that c1760 meant circa 1760, or what circa meant, and this sometimes meant that answers focused either on the period leading up to 1760, or the period after 1760, which often caused imbalance. The term 'neglect' also caused problems for some, who did not pick up on the idea of 'salutary neglect' and argued that by the British treating the colonists unfairly from 1763 onwards they were somehow neglecting them. Where this was specifically tied to the British neglecting the views of colonists credit was given. It was surprising how many students did not refer to the Seven Years War given that '1760' was the year mentioned in the question.

Q3

This posed major problems of producing evidence for a number of students, who could often provide something concrete regarding the Stamp Act and the Townshend Duties but struggled with

other events from the period, and ended up relying on assertion. There was also a very general tendency to produce Boston-centred answers which pretty much ignored colonies other than Massachusetts during the period. Comments such as ‘John Adams was an elite’ suggest a poor command/understanding of vocabulary which can detract from an answer. Any focus on ‘loyalism’ amongst different groups was credited where relevant and accurate. There were some problems with chronology where students brought in events which took place after 1770. This question also tended to spawn repetitious conclusions which may have been an indication that students lacked things to say outside the 1765-67 period, but even so, it may be worth reminding students that lengthy conclusions which simply repeat arguments and content which have already been covered in an essay will not gain extra credit.

Q4

There was a tendency to highlight problems and then to assert that they hindered the development of the republic without really explaining how, and occasionally the period 1787-89 was omitted from the answer, which is quite a big omission from a question which only spanned six/seven years. Stronger answers sometimes put forward neat counter-arguments that inter-state disputes actually facilitated the development of the republic by picking up on the initial dispute between Maryland and Virginia over the Potomac River, and following its ramifications. Some of the discussion on slavery from weaker students often slipped into a North/South dichotomy more befitting of the nineteenth century than the eighteenth. Some answers unfortunately got into Hamilton’s financial reforms and the development of the two-party system which were outside of the time period expressed in the question.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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