



A-LEVEL HISTORY

7042/2Q: The American Dream: reality and illusion, 1945-1980
Report on the Examination

7042
June 2019

Version: 1.0

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General

The paper differentiated well and was highly accessible, with broad coverage of the specification and plenty of scope for less able students to access the questions. Clear signs of a greater understanding of the demands of the sources question emerged and more students were able to access level 3 in this question than in previous years. However, problems still remained with exam technique in terms of the amount of time devoted to answering the 30 mark question in comparison to the two 25 mark essays. The majority of students who scored in the sub 20 mark zone had issues with timing leaving at least one question unfinished. Broader issues of unity and decline in questions 2 and 4 allowed students to discuss the concept of the American Dream whilst a narrow but chronologically longer sources question enabled students to showcase a depth of knowledge on women's rights.

Question 01

This question covered an extended chronological period, touching on three. It took in a number of specification areas including pressures for social change from women and youth, feminism, social divisions and protest movements, the restoration of conservative social policies and the reaction to protest movements and forces of social change, whilst also being quite narrowly focused. As in previous years, one of the notable characteristics were the length of answers by comparison to the two essay questions with the source questions typically being as long as the two essays put together. Some students chose to leave the sources question until last and this often made for a more tightly focused response. This year was notable for more formulaic answers suggesting that students are being taught to examine provenance and context systematically before making a decision on value. While this is not the most elegant approach it ensured that many responses did enough to make level 3. Students generally knew many of the key events covered in the time period and more able students were able to identify Friedan and Schlafly as key players, with some students even being familiar with Solanos. Contextual knowledge was stronger than in previous years but the overwhelming majority of responses ignored the questions focus on the value of the sources for an historian studying the women's movement in the USA in the years 1962 to 1974 and chose to credit source A with having considerable predictive power. Less able students dismissed source B as radical and therefore of no value. Some students failed to identify that Schlafly was a female author which suggested insufficient time had been spent on close reading of the sources. As ever, more time genuinely focusing on the sources and their value before beginning to write an answer would have benefitted many.

Question 02

This was a superficially straightforward question which differentiated students well. The question focused on some of the big ideas of the specification such as the number of Americans who were able to access the 'dream' and enabled students to draw on a host of events in Eisenhower's two terms. Less able students reframed the question as 'Was Eisenhower a good president?' Students scoring in level 2/level 3 understood the need to look at the idea of unity but found their focus drawn to civil rights. This then formed the bulk of their responses. Students who really grasped the scope of the question looked at the extent to which rights were addressed, with some drawing on the material implicit from the sources question. They also went on to look at other areas such as political unity, economic unity and even cultural and geographical unity through the spread of television advertising and the growth of the highways.

The most effective answers engaged with the full meaning of the question. This required addressing the extent to which unity was a consequence of Eisenhower's presidency, or the way it emerged from other factors in spite of Eisenhower's role.

Question 03

This was the most popular. This question facilitated a balanced response, given the clear demands of the question. Most students were able to evaluate the two presidents with a clear understanding of the role of both in the key civil rights legislation of the period. More effective answers differentiated themselves with more detail on the acts and the process of getting them through Congress. The most successful answers also brought in the Presidential responses to the key events instigated by the civil rights movement such as the Sit-ins and Selma and used the events of the long hot summers to suggest that Johnson's achievements were, perhaps, not quite as clearly superior to Kennedy's. The question was very clearly focused on the two civil rights bullet points from the specification in the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies and was, therefore, very accessible to students.

Question 04

This was the best answered 'end of specification' question so far and it was clear that many students had a good understanding of US foreign policy in the last eight years of the period. Again, the most able students engaged with the question in full and looked at the idea of continuous decline. In doing so they were able to point to peaks and troughs in the US position and rule out the idea that the US was sliding down the table. The most able students considered aspects of power that they may not have been taught explicitly but were clearly true, pointing to the continued dominance of the US economy, the size and technical sophistication of the military, the size of the US nuclear arsenal and the growth of US soft power through commerce and media. Many students were able to offer balance but it was interesting to see how many omitted key events such as the end of the Vietnam war, the invasion of Afghanistan or the Iran hostage crisis. Interesting points were made about Watergate, exposing the decline of US moral authority, whilst it was also clear that many students had a limited understanding of US foreign policy in Latin America. The question was clearly focused on the final section of the specification and it was pleasing that many students clearly had a good understanding of this area.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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