

HISTORY (US)

Paper 9279/53

Paper 53

Key Messages

The most important messages are worth emphasising.

- For all questions, read the question very carefully. For each question, ask yourself what period you have to cover and what the key words in the question are. Use those words to provide the framework of your answer. Always write a conclusion which answers the question directly.
- For the compulsory source-based question, make sure you both analyse and evaluate the five sources. Again, write a conclusion which summarises your assessment of how accurately the sources support the hypothesis.
- For the essays, use your arguments to organise your work into paragraphs. Then make sure that your arguments are supported by examples which are both detailed and relevant.
- Keep a close eye on the clock.

B GENERAL COMMENTS

Most candidates were well prepared. Virtually all candidates wrote four answers, one source-based question, and three essays as required. Some, however, were unable to find four questions which they could answer in more but a few lines. Few seemed to run out of time. Most candidates had some understanding of the topic and question but often lacked the detailed knowledge and the sharp focus on the question needed to ensure success. A few candidates did have excellent knowledge and understanding and also wrote clear and literate answers. More specific comments are made below.

C COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Question 1

Candidates analysed the five sources, often at considerable length. Most also evaluated the sources, which is the higher-level skill and thus gaining more marks. If anything, the analysis tended to crowd out evaluation. Candidates would do better if they quickly analysed what each source was saying in relation to the hypothesis before evaluating their reliability at greater length.

Some candidates found **Source A**, the cartoon, problematic. This cartoon was meant to be a source which challenged the assertion that the Republican party was fully united behind Lincoln's candidacy. There are several pieces of evidence which support this interpretation: firstly, the Republican barge is in stormy waters and heading for the rocks; secondly, some want to eject a leading Republican from the party and in election year; thirdly, talk that the party might do better if divided; fourthly, the sub-heading of the cartoon, 'the Republican barge in danger'. (Very few, if any, candidates mentioned this sub-heading.) Despite all this, some candidates interpreted the cartoon as evidence for the assertion. They argued that by throwing Seward overboard the party was uniting behind Lincoln, who was an experienced pilot and thus able to steer the party away from the rocks. This interpretation has some plausibility but it caused problems for some who held it because they interpreted the other four sources as also supporting the assertion. This meant that they identified no sources as opposed to the assertion, which in turn limited their argument. It is important to remember that each set of sources will contain one source which challenges the assertion.

As for evaluating Source A, the other sources provide plenty of evidence, especially in relation to the ejection of Seward. Sources B, D and E show how Seward was a major figure in the party. Thus in one respect,

Source A is very unreliable indeed. Some candidates used their own knowledge to make the cartoon of Seward and Lincoln, mentioning Seward's membership of Lincoln's cabinet in 1861. This is a poor evaluation of Source A.

Source B shows a pro-Seward state delegation eventually but willingly supporting Lincoln's nomination as presidential candidate. Thus it supports the assertion, though the time of and the audience for the speech suggests that Schurz would say that anyway, making it less than wholly reliable. Much the same goes for **Source C**, a campaign song performed at a state meeting to ratify Lincoln's candidacy. Many commented on the military imagery of the song, which they took literally and thereby linked with the outbreak of the civil war. The fifth line of the third verse, 'with ballots for bullets', shows this interpretation to be mistaken. It was a political war that the Republicans were so keen to wage.

Source D is important because it is from Seward himself, initially the favourite for nomination as the party's presidential candidate. It shows Seward to be fully behind Lincoln's candidacy. Seward is making this commitment in a public speech, however, and just two months before the election. His statement of support cannot be fully trusted, though Source E limits scepticism about its reliability, as mentioned below.

Source E is from an abolitionist and pro-Republican journal. Source E is similar to Source B in that Seward was its first choice, Lincoln it's second. It comments favourably on Seward's behaviour since losing the nomination before finding virtues in Lincoln's candidature. The source also mentions some divisions within the party over policy matters, which could be used to challenge the hypothesis that the party was fully united behind Lincoln.

Of the five sources, the cartoon and the song are clearly too subjective while Schurz and Seward are party politicians speaking in public. Source E is partisan but not narrowly party political. Contextual knowledge supports much of what it says. Thus it is probably the most reliable, if not necessarily the most useful of the five sources.

Question 2

This was both popular and well answered, if in rather general terms. Most candidates knew when the first transcontinental railroad was built – in the 1860s – and also knew that people had rushed to California in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Thus transcontinental railroads were a consequence of westward expansion. The second half of the assertion also needed consideration: how far did these railroads cause westward expansion? It's worth remembering that by the end of the nineteenth century there were five transcontinental railroads. These made travelling across the USA much easier, opening the West to people from the East and from Europe. Some railroad companies went so far as to advertise in Europe; the more people who travelled on their trains, the more business they would have. Many candidates did consider the consequential impact of the railroads, if less thoroughly than they did the causal relationship.

Question 3

This was popular, as is any question on the civil war and reconstruction. Candidates had a general understanding of the Emancipation Proclamation without appreciating some of the finer points surrounding its introduction and impact. In words, the proclamation freed slaves in eleven Southern states, some 75% of the four million slaves, and not the five border states which joined the North. In reality, slaves were freed only in those parts of the Southern states under Northern control, which in January 1863 meant a maximum of some 50,000, just over 1% of the total. Thus the immediate impact of the Proclamation was more symbolic than practical. However, it was a great symbol of the new focus of the North's war effort, as most candidates recognised.

There are three points of detail worth noting. Firstly, The Proclamation was an executive order of the President, issued under his powers as Commander-in-Chief. It was not legislation and it did not require Congressional approval. Secondly, the Proclamation was issued in two stages: the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in September 1862 and the full Proclamation in January 1863. Thirdly, the Preliminary Proclamation was issued after the North's first military success at Antietam. Many thought the relevant battle was Gettysburg.

Question 4

The question attracted too few responses for comments to be made.

Question 5

This question was very popular. It is pleasing to report that most candidates wrote answers that were relevant, thoughtful and balanced. They analysed arguments for and against the proposition, using their knowledge to support these arguments. Most also confined their answers to the first half of the twentieth century, resisting the temptation to refer to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Few, however, considered changes in the position of African Americans between 1900 and 1950. What might have been true of differences between North and South in 1900 was often untrue fifty years later, especially during and after world war two.

Question 6

This question proved challenging for candidates. Many candidates were much more confident about the causes of the Great Crash, on which they focused for much of the essay. When it came to explaining the links between the Great Crash and the Great Depression, many assumed that the policies of President Hoover were either wholly or almost wholly to blame. The errors of the Federal Reserve were completely overlooked. The international dimension was almost always overlooked. According to the candidates who answered this question, the Great Depression was a solely American phenomenon. In reality, not only was the system of international banking and finance working badly by the early 1930s but there was no international consensus about how best to fix it. This international instability was bound to disrupt demand for American goods and finance.

Question 7

This was a demanding question but popular and reasonably well answered. Most candidates made some valid comparisons between US entry into the two world wars. When it came to the First World War, most saw the sinking of the *Lusitania* as a major factor. This assertion shows the importance of having some chronological knowledge. The *Lusitania* was sunk in May 1915, almost two years before the USA declared war on Germany. More relevant was the German return to the strategy of unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917. It is also important to realise that President Wilson delivered his Fourteen Points in January 1918, well after the USA had joined the war and not before, as many candidates argued. For the Second World War, many candidates knew that Germany declared war on the USA after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour rather than the other way round, which showed a welcome command of the detail of the topic.

Question 8

This question on post war history attracted relatively few responses. Candidates did not need to know the details of economic growth in order to answer this question. They had to consider its consequences for US society. Long-term economic growth meant rising living standards. Greater prosperity in mid twentieth century America was more evenly spread across society – certainly white society – than is the case in the early 21st century. Particular beneficiaries were women, especially married women, and the young, especially teenagers and adolescents. This prosperity, much based on federal government expenditure, was also spread more evenly across the USA as technology such as air conditioning allowed more people to move to the south and south west.