



A-Level History

7042/2J America: A Nation Divided, c1845 - 1877

Report on the examination

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Question 01

The source question this year focused on the disputes caused by westward expansion efforts between the years 1845-1848. The selected sources offered a range of arguments from pro-expansionists and anti-slavery expansionists. Overall, most students found something to comment upon and there were some very successful responses alongside some less successful answers. For future series, it is encouraged that content and provenance of the sources be used holistically to form an analytical response, rather than being approached individually.

Source A

Students across the board demonstrated an understanding of the concept of 'Manifest Destiny' and its links to American desire for westward expansion. There was a good degree of understanding of this source's provenance, especially in reference to O'Sullivan and the recent issue of Texas entering the Union. However, the biggest issue with this source was students' attempts to find limitations. Limitations shouldn't be based on omissions of content: often, limitations will be found within the provenance, rather than the content. Of course, content can be seen as limited if an argument put forward is flawed, and knowledge can be used to identify this. A limitation based on 'missing content' is not a valid limitation and cannot be rewarded.

Source B

This source showed much more range in terms of quality of answers. Certainly, students had awareness of who President Polk was and his links to westward expansion and the Mexican War. Knowledge was used well in evaluating this source, however many responses drifted into more narrative recall of the Mexican War rather than continuing to analyse the issues within the question. Furthermore, whilst many students did attempt to focus on the concept of 'disputes', they focused more on Mexico, rather than North and South disputes over land from Mexico.

Source C

Overall, this was the best performing source evaluated by this year's cohort. There was solid understanding of who Wilmot was, and the background context of the Wilmot Proviso was well explained. Many students correctly identified that Wilmot was against slavery expansion, not expansion itself. Some responses ended up being quite narrative, however some provided excellent wider knowledge to support more 'disputes' over expansion.

Question 02

The main focus of this question was the importance of the Lincoln-Douglas debates in increasing sectional tension, in comparison to other factors, in the years 1856-1860. There

was a wide range of topics referred to here, with many students manoeuvring from Bleeding Kansas 1856 to the election of Lincoln in 1860. These topics were well selected and relevant to the question. In terms of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, the most successful answers focused on both Lincoln and Douglas and their role in the debates, offering good to very good understanding. The less successful responses described the debates with some knowledge but fell short of addressing the significance of the debates in line with the increased sectional tensions. Some responses ended up being quite narrative about their chosen topics, limiting their marks. A positive here was that, in comparison to previous years, students have significantly improved in sticking to the specified date range given in the question. There were rare occasions where students went earlier than 1856, but much rarer than previous years.

Question 03

There were some very good responses to this question, focusing on the role of Grant's military leadership. Many students expertly used accurate contextual knowledge linked to Grant and the Civil War. Shiloh, Fort Donelson, Vicksburg and the Overland Campaign were correctly credited to Grant, however, there were too many occasions of Grant being mistaken as the leader of the Battle of Gettysburg. This did sometimes restrict students from achieving higher-level marks. Alternative ideas were used well, such as other military leaders, political leadership or resources. Students had clearly prepared for a more battle-orientated question, however, students should be discouraged from providing lengthy battle narratives.

Question 04

This question focused on responsibility for the failure of Radical Reconstruction between the years 1868-1877. Strengths of the responses for this question were evident in many students using appropriately selected knowledge such as the scandals under Grant, the lack of interest in supporting the South following a Northern economic depression, and the death of significant Radical leaders like Sumner and Stevens. Good counterevidence, such as white supremacist threats, was appropriately selected and well explained by many. Students do, however, need to read the dates more carefully and be more comfortable in identifying the different stages of Reconstruction. There were cases of students focusing on earlier stages of Reconstruction and arguing that Lincoln's Reconstruction and/or Johnson's Reconstruction were to blame. Johnson's Christmas Day Pardon in 1868 was credited, however, his earlier actions in 1865-1867 were not credited as this was not 'Radical Reconstruction'.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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