



A-Level History

7042/1K The Making of a Superpower : USA, 1865-1975

Report on the examination

Version: 1.0
June 2025

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General

The vast majority of students found this an accessible paper, offering familiar, well-revised topics with which they felt comfortable. Many students wrote a great deal, although this was not always a guide to quality. Some of these answers became quite descriptive as students sought to show the extent of their knowledge, in the process sometimes losing sight of the question.

In Section A, students were clearly familiar with many of the issues impacting on post-war America. Extensive knowledge, however, was not always accompanied by an understanding of how specific incidents/events fitted into the overall picture. There was also insufficient understanding of how different decades brought different challenges.

Students have been well-trained, and they now clearly have confidence in how to approach Section A. As a result, there were many well-developed answers with a firm focus on both understanding and evaluation. Some, however, remained quite mechanical with and offered unconvincing sections on both support and challenge.

The number of students who continue to compare extracts or to evaluate provenance and bias is very small indeed.

In Section B the essay questions produced a full range of responses, with some exceptional answers and with very few graded at L1. Questions 2 and 3 were more popular than Question 4.

Section A, Q1

Extract A proved the most challenging of the three extracts. It had a wide-ranging remit, referencing some of the major issues of the period. These included general pessimism, the Golden Age/American Dream, American affluence and specific issues including race and gender. A small number of able students were able to suggest an over-arching theme which then gave context to their comments on specific issues. Most students emphasised a selection of headline points with varying judgements as to which constituted the key issue. Stronger responses had something to say on each of these issues, offering contextual evidence to support and/or challenge the premise.

Less successful responses tended to focus on one (or possibly two) issues and identify these as the key points. The issue which came to the fore most often was the position of African Americans, often leading to lengthy accounts, sometimes with very little reference to the extract. This was a common difficulty - too often the evaluation was only loosely linked to the argument in the extract.

Students tended to respond to Extract B in one of three ways. Some emphasised the positive achievements of a 'problem-solving people' who 'attacked the ills in society' until 'difficulties were overcome'. Others drew attention to negative features, to 'huge disappointments, costly failures and tragedies' and to 'unresolved problems'. Most students sought to balance the two viewpoints, recognising successes and achievements but acknowledging outstanding problems. Evaluation was often of a high standard, with students drawing from a rich array of contextual detail. Johnson's Great Society was frequently cited as positive evidence of a

society moving forward, while Vietnam proved the opposite. Less successful responses tended to focus at length on one or two examples and were often quite descriptive. Stronger students were more analytical, using a range of different examples to support a wider point.

Most students recognised that the core argument in Extract C was a positive one and that economic growth and rising living standards were features of the period. Students had no difficulty in providing an array of examples to support that judgement. A small number of students sought to emphasise the negative aspects, mainly that 'one in four Americans was still living in dire poverty'.

Overall, the depth of understanding, the quality of the argument and the effective use of contextual evidence were decisive factors in determining the level and the mark.

Section B, Q2

This proved to be a popular question, requiring students to consider to what extent the failure to establish full civil rights for African Americans in the years 1865 to 1990 was due to the weakness of the Federal Government.

Federal Government weakness and the strength and impact of Southern intransigence were key features in most responses. In high-level, balanced, responses assessment of the Federal Government considered the input of Lincoln, Johnson, Grant and Hayes, also acknowledging that some aspects of government policy were positive and well-intentioned. The extent to which governments were diverted away from civil rights by other issues (the economy, scandals etc) was also a feature of these answers. Consideration of Southern intransigence emphasised the power of Southern Democrats, particularly after 1877, alongside the brutal impact of the KKK. The fact that sharecropping, the only way forward for most African Americans, played into the hands of segregationist Democrats was also noted.

The question produced a full range of responses, with the balance of material reflecting the line of argument adopted by the student. The wording of the question ensured that nearly all answers did focus directly on the Federal Government. A small number of one-sided responses went no further and made no reference to Southern hostility to civil rights.

Section B, Q3

A popular question which required students to consider whether the United States turned away from isolationism in the years 1890 to 1917.

The challenge for students was to make sense of the wide range of foreign policy activities/events which took place during this period, many of which were inspired by different and mixed motives. Almost without exception students argued that there were significant differences in US foreign policy in this period. The most successful responses were rooted in a detailed knowledge of US foreign policy, allowing firm and supported judgements to be made. Less successful responses often adopted a thematic approach considering the impact of different motives – including trade and the need for new markets, the 'civilising mission' and the extension of American power and influence. This approach proved much less likely to lead to a clear, overall judgement.

Some low-level answers overstated the extent to which expansionism replaced isolationism. More balanced responses recognised the strength of isolationist sentiment and its continuing importance for many Americans. Discussion of the reasons for American involvement in the First World War had a clear impact on any final judgement. Responses which stopped in 1912 were clearly limited in scope.

Section B , Q4.

This question required students to consider the extent to which the Democrats' dominance of the US presidency in the years 1932 to 1952 was due to Franklin Roosevelt and his legacy.

Roosevelt and the New Deal featured large in responses. Comments were balanced with most students arguing that this was an important factor in explaining twenty years of Democratic success. Additional factors included the impact of the Second World War, although this was not always linked to FDR. Mention was made of Republican weakness, although this was frequently limited to Hoover, with very few references to later Republican leaders. Truman's role was generally recognised, although evidence of his achievements varied considerably.

This question produced a wide range of responses. Some less successful responses did not go much further than FDR and his contribution to Democratic success. Equally, there were some exceptional, detailed answers which addressed all these issues and offered a balanced assessment of their impact.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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