



A-Level History

7042/2Q The American Dream: reality and illusion,
1945 - 1980

Report on the examination

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General

The examination was fully accessible and allowed for a wide range of marks to be given across the whole paper. Students are very adept at creating well-structured answers, particularly in questions 02, 03, and 04. There were some good examples of high-level responses for each question on the paper. However, as has been the case in previous years, the source question proved the most challenging aspect for many. Students still need to focus on the core value of the source for the issue in question and avoid an overly descriptive account of context. There are still instances of students comparing the sources, which is not needed for Question 01. For essay questions, the most successful responses engaged closely with the specific wording and brought in a wide range of precise supporting evidence, whilst thinking clearly about their line of argument.

Students balanced their time appropriately between the source question and the two essay responses, with only limited examples of unfinished essay questions.

Question 01

This question was about responses to the campaign for African American Civil Rights in the years 1945 to 1950. It was focused on the wider bullet point in the specification on Truman and Post-War America, 1945 to 1950, specifically on bullet point four. However, students did have the ability to bring in other relevant knowledge from other areas of the specification. Students generally understood the aims and demands of the campaign for Civil Rights under Truman. Some less successful answers focused too much on describing Civil Rights issues for African Americans, but higher-attaining responses were able to apply much wider knowledge of responses to the campaign in this period in support of analysis of the value of the sources.

Many answers tended to be formulaic, with students assessing the provenance of sources and then the content of the sources. This limits the response for many students, as they neglect to assess the value of the source as a whole. Provenance remains a demanding skill for some students who find it difficult to go beyond stock phraseology, such as “source A is from Truman therefore it will be honest”; “source B is from Eisenhower therefore it is biased towards Truman”; “source C is from a Chief Justice therefore it be truthful”. Such commentaries are rewarded at a basic level, but better answers were more nuanced and, where possible, supported through contextual own knowledge.

Tone is still a difficult skill for students to address. If dealt with effectively, then students will be rewarded for commenting upon the tone of the source, but stock identification of tone is not rewarded. A top-level response does not necessarily require a focus on tone. Students should focus on strengthening their summative judgements of value for each source.

Generally, the students understood and engaged well with Source A. The best answers linked Truman’s Civil Rights aims with his Fair Deal, the FEPC, and to Secure These Rights. Desegregation of the Army was also used well. A small number of students offered only

general context on Truman's background and made unsupported claims that he was biased or limited as source. Source B was often not assessed successfully, as many students wrote about Eisenhower as President, which was not the correct time-period referred to in the question. The most successful answers showed that some responses to Truman's Civil Rights aims would be negative, or at least cautious, towards pushing forward with Civil Rights legislation. Regarding Source C, many students tended to repeat the content of the source, or take a line-by-line approach, which is unhelpful. The most successful answers had a good awareness of Supreme Court rulings during this period and highlighted the work of individuals like Thurgood Marshall in leading action against discrimination.

Question 02

This was the most popular question by far and offered students a broad range of features to write about. It was evident in the responses to this question that many students had prepared thoroughly for this topic, with knowledge of Eisenhower's aims and approaches well embedded. The higher-level answers were analytical throughout and were able to show balance for each Cold War issue. Top answers were able to identify long-term problem areas, like Cuba and Vietnam. The less successful answers were very narrative or descriptive, giving a step-by-step account of each foreign policy issue. There were too many answers that gave partial or limited judgements and concluded that issues like Hungary were a blanket failure or that America was successful because the country had more nuclear arms than Russia. Some Level 2 answers drifted into describing events from the Cold War and struggled to move into Level 3 without demonstrating a clear link to the focus of the question. Strong answers linked each action to whether or not they showed success in Eisenhower's handling of events and often looked at longer term successes or failures.

Question 03

This was the second most popular of the essay questions, producing another wide range of responses. It focused mainly on the first bullet point from Republican reaction: the Nixon Presidency, 1968 to 1974, but students were also able to draw upon relevant material from the section on the Johnson Presidency, 1963 to 1968.

Successful answers were able to include Nixon's experiences in the 1960 election and evidence how that impacted his approach in 1968. There was good knowledge of groups like the 'Silent Majority' and why they were more in favour of Nixon in 1968. Less successful answers were overly focused on the 1960 election and made little reference to 1968. Too many responses only commented on Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and detailed events in Vietnam, rather than how these events divided the Democrat Party. Level 3 responses achieved more of an effective focus on the question, however, they still struggled to control description and narrative in places, especially on the issue of Vietnam. Level 3 answers also tended to lack some range and depth.

Question 04

This was the least popular of the three essay questions and the one which students found most challenging. The most successful answers focused analytically on issues such as the ERA, the role of women, the status of African Americans in society, and the Gay Liberation Movement. Features like this were used to evidence and corroborate the judgement that America was socially divided or united. Several responses in these higher levels also engaged effectively with the precise wording of the question, assessing whether America was completely 'united' or completely 'divided', or indeed adopting an alternative word as a final judgement.

Too many answers wrote in depth about foreign policy and the state of the economy and then tried to argue that these events showed unity or disunity. For example, many students wrote about high inflation in the period but neglected to link that to public discontent and disunity. There were many responses which wrote in detail about the Watergate scandal, arguing that this event caused America to be divided which was not always convincing. Level 3 answers also tended to lack some range and depth of content. Answers in Levels 4 and 5 were much more precisely focused on the concept of 'united'.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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