
A-level History

7042/1K The making of a Superpower: USA, 1865–1975
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

Overall, students have responded well to the demands of the new A-Level exam paper. Students were able to write at great length and both types of question, extract and essay, enabled students to present rounded responses.

Many students were able to demonstrate a good understanding of the period and displayed an impressive grasp of content, often over and above that expected in a breadth study. The essay question on Reconstruction (Q.02) was more popular than the other essay questions on isolationism from 1920-1941 (Q.03) and containment in Asia (Q.04). Whilst, on the whole, students displayed a secure understanding of content, fewer were able to select appropriate and relevant evidence in support of an analysis that was closely focused on the questions posed, especially for the extract question. As a breadth paper, the more successful students demonstrated an appreciation of chronology and of change and continuity over time.

Section A

01

Students had very detailed and thorough knowledge of the US economy in the second half of the nineteenth century and the changes that occurred within it. Whilst better responses considered the interpretation of each extract as a whole and focused on the question posed, some students became side-tracked into explaining everything mentioned in the passages, regardless of their relevance to the overall interpretations. For example, immigration in Extract C was assessed in great detail with some students assessing push and pull factors for movement to America. Good answers moved from an overall summary to a breakdown of the interpretation given in each extract, in relation to its key themes. The best responses were able to identify the overall arguments presented in each extract, with the weaker responses adopting a line-by-line approach. Some students attempted to compare the extracts which is not required for this question. There were also cases of unnecessary analysis of provenance and tone by some students. Too many less able students tried to criticise the extracts for what they omitted rather than for the interpretations they offered and this approach made it difficult to draw any meaningful judgements. The best responses included summary judgements after each extract and this meant that a final concluding paragraph was not needed. A small number of responses also did not grasp the time period in question and wrote about the economy in the second half of the twentieth century.

Section B

02

This was a popular essay question. Stronger responses provided a balanced assessment and argued where progress was lost by 1890. The best responses were able to note the differences between Southern and Northern states and provided a balanced judgement with this in mind. Few students engaged with the term Radical Reconstruction and that limited the quality of responses to a degree. Whilst a number of students produced well-balanced responses, showing an appreciation of progress and acknowledging changes over time, less able students tended to list the failures of Reconstruction, giving an assertive link to the question at the end of each paragraph, ignoring any progress that had been made.

03

There were some good answers to this question from students who had a strong understanding of changes and continuities in foreign policy from 1919-1941. Able students were addressed the full time period, usually starting with Wilson and the turning tide towards Normalcy, and ending with situation presented by Pearl Harbor. Many students were able to make clear judgements and sustain an analysis with appropriate supporting evidence.

Some students under-performed by offering only general statements in support of the premise of the quotation without qualification or by ignoring the full time period of the question. There were a number of students who addressed the foreign policy of 1890-1920 and therefore received very little credit.

04

Unfortunately some answers to this question took an overly narrow view and wrote only about the policy of containment in the Korean War and Vietnam War. Whilst this was creditworthy, such responses ignored the need to see the broader implications of containment in Asia. Better answers engaged not only with Korea and Vietnam, but China, Japan, Cambodia and Laos, and the degree to which containment was successful. As with Question 02 and 03, appreciation of chronology and the ability to select and deploy accurate and precise supporting detail in support of arguments were key factors that differentiated between the weak, average and very good essays. A number of students need to be reminded that all essay answers require argument and a balanced appraisal and that one-sided answers will not reach the higher mark ranges. Lower marks also went to the students who discussed containment in Europe or Nixon's policy of Détente, which were not relevant to the question.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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