
AS

HISTORY

1K The making of a Superpower: USA, 1865-1920
Report on the Examination

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General

In general, students' responses were much improved on last year, e.g. approaches to question 1 demonstrated a clear concept of the structure expected. Essay question 3 was much more popular than question 2. Students preferred to complete questions where they could bring in knowledge of African-Americans and inequality and often brought this knowledge in when it was not particularly relevant. Students need to be aware of the different foci of the question and pay attention to the broader themes outlined in the course's six key questions.

Question 1

There was quite a wide range of responses to this question. Almost all students considered the two extracts in turn and linked them to their own knowledge before presenting a conclusion as to which was the most convincing. There is an apparent tendency not to consider the overall argument of the extracts but to pick out phrases and then to examine these individually and factually, rather than analytically, with reference to the focus of the question. The skill of reading for meaning is critical. The weaker students still had a tendency to pick two or three quotes and assess these and some did not grasp the argument of the extracts at all. As was the case last year, students should note that the question uses 'extracts' as the focus of analysis and not 'sources', as some students referred to them as.

Quite often, students picked a quote from an extract and tried to support it using knowledge that was not relevant. For example, students often brought in the many problems that African-Americans were experiencing in the South as evidence but this was not entirely linked to the question of 'divisions in the West'. Students must make sure that their contextual knowledge is linked clearly to the question and they do not wander away from its focus.

Really good answers gave a breakdown of the interpretation given in each extract, in relation to its key themes. For example, there was an evaluation, in Extract A, that cultures worked together and divisions were less of a problem whereas in B, divisions were starkly apparent and caused, on the whole, by white settlers. This then led to a meaningful comparison of the extracts. Too many less able students tried to criticise the extracts for what they omitted rather than for the interpretations they offered.

Question 2

This was the less popular choice but one which was often completed to a very good standard. Successful essays had range and detail. Students are expected to present an understanding over time in the breadth paper but it is important to have some supporting evidence – for example, a clear understanding of the Gilded Age presidents was needed along with supporting evidence like Rutherford B. Hayes being known as 'His Fraudulency'.

The highest rewarded answers had a conceptual element which meant they were able to relate their analysis in terms of continuity or change over time. Less able students tended to describe the reforms (or lack thereof) of each president without really developing a judgement on weakness so analysis of the question sometimes remained implicit.

Question 3

This question was very popular and most students were able to make some relevant comment about divisions in society. However, it was clear that some students did not understand the term 'society' and sometimes wrote an entire essay on the differences of the political parties. Also, there were a number of students who failed to address 'the early 20th century' in their answer and focused solely on events pre-1900.

Students could look at a whole range of different issues which could be relevant to this question such as, for example, the position of African-American pre- and post-WW1, the position of women and the 19th Amendment, immigration and the divide between the 'wets' and the 'drys'. Less able students tended to just describe divisions, sometime with limited reference to society.

There was also a tendency to either concentrate on just a very narrow range such as the position of African-Americans or provide an unbalanced view and focus solely on divisions. Nevertheless, there were some very good answers which were able to offer balanced assessment and come to substantiated judgements.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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