
AS

HISTORY

America: A Nation Divided, c1845–1877

7041/2J The origins of the American Civil War, c1845–1861

Report on the Examination

7041

June 2018

Version: 1.0

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General

This was the third year of the new AS and students demonstrated a solid understanding of the course content and demands of the paper. There was a substantial drop in the entry (175 down to 31) making drawing overall conclusions on student performance more difficult. Students generally were able to write substantial answers to both the compulsory source question (Question 01) and their choice of essay question (Question 02 or Question 03). Of the latter, Question 02 proved by far to be the more popular choice, with twice as many students attempting it. The comments which follow are indicative of some of the strengths and weaknesses commonly seen in students' answers in this paper. The introduction in the specification spells out the key concepts of political authority, abolitionism and social justice. The introduction also draws attention to the need to look at social tension and harmony, nationhood and political compromise it is important that students are well versed in these concepts and issues as they the basis of question setting.

Section A:

Question 01 Split in the Democrat Party in 1860.

There were three elements to this question: an evaluation of provenance and tone, an evaluation of content and argument (both requiring some application of own knowledge) and a comparison. Although these three elements did not need to be addressed in equal measure, and it was sufficient for the comparison to emerge in the conclusion (although many good responses did maintain a comparative element throughout the answer), something of each was expected (although not always found) in answers.

Students did not perform as well as the previous year it appeared students found the sources more challenging this year. The mean mark for question 01 fell from 54.58% in 2017 to 50.53% in 2018. The split in the Democrats was generally well known but contextual knowledge was not always well applied. At the top end students knew about the various Democrat Conventions in 1860 and could apply this knowledge to assess the value of the sources. Some of the best responses knew about the role of Yancey in the Charleston convention and the circumstances of the Southern delegates leaving the Convention. A number of students found it difficult to access the higher levels in some cases due to limited assessment of provenance. At the lower end students struggled to go beyond simply repeating the attributions. The top end students made inferences and applied contextual knowledge. With Source A they spoke of Southern Democrats putting forward a pro-slavery platform, blocking the selection of Douglas talked about how left the Convention. With Source B the best answers made inferences about how an abolitionist Republican would see the split of the Democrats as a good thing and blame the slave states representatives for what happened (often referencing the title of his book). In general more could have been made of the dates of the sources with Source A being from the first Convention before the split and Source B written looking back at events 12 years later with the benefit of hindsight. The nature of the sources was explored by some students, to achieve higher marks students need to go beyond suggesting that politicians lie in speeches and books are written to sell.

Students did comment on tone picking up on the passion and hyperbole in Source A and how this is valuable to historians in explaining why the events of the Charleston Convention split the Democrat Party further. The tone of Source B students found more challenging especially with the quoting of a second persons view (Mr Smith of California.) The best answers picked up on the apparent glee of the author at the split with the contrasting of the parties previous 'prestige' with the 'violent and discreditable' acts at the convention.

The content of Source A gave some challenge, the less convincing answers tending to not grasp that it was attacking Douglas, amongst others, who Yancey was picking out as the 'brilliant men' and 'great statesmen' who were becoming 'untrue to the people' and 'ought to be strung upon a political gallows'. Some of the best answers strongly analysed the value of this argument to the historian in showing the breakdown in relations within the Democrat Party and how section was viewed as more significant than party by the likes of Yancey and the others who walked out in protest. Source B's content and argument was understood in terms of the details of the delegations walking out and some good contextual knowledge was applied here. The quote from Mr Smith of California and the accusations he was making about the apparent relish some members had in destroying the Party was only effectively assessed by a few students.

The degree of focus on value and extent of comparison was highly varied. Most students do now comment on value but some still fall into statements on utility or reliability or assess how convincing the views are. Some statements on value are simplistic with a basic insertion of 'this is valuable' or 'this is not valuable' without any explanation as to why. The best answers show clear thought on what would be valuable to a historian researching the split in the Democratic Party and apply this in making judgements. The best comparisons brought in multiple elements such as balancing the importance of Yancey's speech in bringing about division, especially with South's dislike of Douglas with the hindsight available to Wilson.

Section B:

Question 02

There was a marked improvement in performance from question 02 last year with the mean mark moving from 44% to 50%. Two-thirds of the students chose this essay and knowledge about the territories gained from Mexico and the Mexican War itself was generally good. Many students wrote effectively about issues such as the Wilmot Proviso and Calhoun's demands that all territories gained be open to slavery. The best responses examined the extent of sectional tensions this led to with clashes between North and South, President and Congress and the fact that this all led to the need for a significant compromise. There was good knowledge by students on the early part of the specification but some offered descriptive answers going from the Missouri Crisis through to the 1850 Compromise losing sight of the question. Chronology was an issue for some with answers that explored events of the 1850s, such as Kansas-Nebraska and therefore being irrelevant. The very best answers focused on 'seriously damaged' comparing relations before and after the gaining of territories from Mexico.

Section B:**Question 03**

This question had the strongest performance- 57.6% (stronger than last year 56.3%) it was however not a popular question, attempted by only one-third of the students. Those who did it generally did it well showing good understanding of abolitionist sentiment by 1854. There was a tendency by some to exaggerate its significance with the number of abolitionist papers being sold being used to support the idea of wide support which the numbers simply don't support. The strongest element of answers was based around excellent knowledge on 'Uncle Tom's Cabin', the very best answers comparing the sales of this book to the much smaller sales of earlier newspaper etc. to effectively highlight the increase in abolitionist sentiment. At the bottom end the idea of 'significant increase' was ignored and actions of abolitionists simply described. The chronology of some students was not secure with events such as John Brown's raid of 1859 being included.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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