
AS-LEVEL HISTORY

Component 7041/2J
Report on the Examination

Specification 7041
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Component 7041/2J

America: A Nation Divided, c1845–1877

Component 2J: The origins of the American Civil War, c1845–1861

General Comments

Many students took the new AS format in their stride and used their time to the full to write substantial answers to both the compulsory source question (Q01) and their choice of essay question (Q02 or Q03). Of the latter, Q03 proved the more popular, but there was, nevertheless, a range of very good and weaker answers to both and there was little indication that students were pressed for time to complete their answers. The comments which follow are indicative of some of the strengths and weaknesses commonly seen in students' answers in this session. Question 01 has been addressed in some detail so as to provide teachers with further guidance as to what helped produce a good answer in this new style of question. This aspect of history is new to GCE History at AQA and on the whole students showed a pleasing level of knowledge and understanding. 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 1

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.

In terms of provenance, there were some very good answers but some issues came to light. The majority of students had good knowledge about 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' and were able to bring in this knowledge to comment effectively on the source's value, pointing to its popularity; indeed, many students knew the sales figures for the book. The nature of the source led to some interesting comment with comment, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's source and limited first-hand knowledge. At the top end this was done very well. It is best if students avoid the use of 'bias' as, given the nature of the unit, it is unlikely that many sources will not come very one side or other of the sectional divide and therefore all will have a particular view. Students must note that this question is about value not reliability. There was some weakness in grasping that the description in Source A was of the state of runaway slaves, rather than those on a plantation, and also few students picked up on the illustration of the debate in the North, with the fictional Senator John Bird having voted for the fugitive slave law and his wife reprimanding him for having done so. There was very good knowledge about events surrounding fugitive slaves and attempts to prevent them being returned to their masters including mob action. The best students explained what the Fugitive Slave Law was and the context of the 1850 Compromise. The dates of the sources being 2 and 4 years after the Compromise allowed for some well thought out comment and contextual knowledge

about when they were being written. Source B is from a less well known novel and students showed some good knowledge of the 'anti-Uncle Tom literature'. The fact that Source B was a response to Source A led to some good evaluation of provenance. Good students picked up that Source B differed from Source A in that it is part of the author's introduction, stating their view directly rather than an excerpt from a novel. The best students drew on knowledge to assess provenance looking at the nature, origin (author and date), purpose and audience of the sources. The weaker students simply repeated the attributions and made simple statements about bias, which should be discouraged, especially as the question addresses value not reliability.

There was some good comment on the tone of the sources with Source A having a clearly angry and outraged tone. The best students fully explored the language used and effect it had. Source B proved less straightforward with a more measured tone aimed at persuading any readers that there was no need for slaves to flee. Of all elements, tone was the most commonly ignored by students and it was notable that a number of students failed to address either provenance or tone or in some cases neither of them were addressed.

Content and argument were generally dealt with more effectively than provenance and tone. The best students showed clear understanding of the sources content and argument as a whole and placed them in their historical context, then supported their points with extract from the sources. Those who simply addressed the sources line by line, often commenting on the accuracy of detail rather than value to a historian, were more limited. There was some very good knowledge on the reactions in the North to the Fugitive Slave Act and the way in which defiance of the Act was displayed through personal liberty laws and on occasion mob action. Students displayed some good knowledge of the significance of religion in the abolitionist movement of the context of the second great awakening. Some students saw reference to the fugitive slaves as 'poor, starving creatures' as a sign of Northern racism that is inaccurate in terms of this source. There was good knowledge of slaves' conditions and of slave rebellion used when addressing Source B. The best students understood the vast variations in the conditions in which slaves lived and the way they were treated along with the range of factors that meant slaves were unlikely to rebel or try to escape. At the lower end students either stated the source was lying or in some cases accepted it as being true.

Comparison was probably the most variable element in students' answers. This element is unique to AS and a number of students failed to address it. Others made fairly simplistic statements in their conclusions whilst others still carried out highly impressive comparisons going through all the other elements of the answer (provenance, tone, content and argument). The key to the best comparisons was a focus on the question and in particular on the value of the sources. Whilst many decided this on the basis of which they believed to be a better reflection of the reality of attitudes to slaves and the Fugitive Slave Act, the best students fully explored why the sources though both from works of fiction provide historians with insight into the views of some of the people about the Fugitive Slave Act. Simple statements that either fully accept the value of a source or completely dismiss its value should be avoided.

Section B

Question 02

This essay was considerably less popular than the other optional question. There was a good range of marks in the responses but many students seemed to struggle with some elements. The essay was aiming to address one of the A01 concepts of consequence; this style of question appeared less familiar to some students. The other issue with the question for some students was

chronological knowledge; whilst many were strong on 1845 to 1860, knowledge on the early aspects of the specification appeared in many cases to be considerably thinner. The best students knew about the Missouri Compromise in detail, along with the Nullification Crisis, the issues surrounding Texas and the entry of Texas and other states into the Union as well as potential Westward Expansion and the economic differences between the North and South. It is important to note that one of the three sections in Part One of the specification relates to the period leading up to the situation in c1845. A number of students were let down by poor chronological knowledge and wrote about the late 1840s or even 1850s rather than 'by 1845'. The best students explored the idea of 'maintaining peace' and the significance of balance of numbers of states between the North and the South, whilst weaker students saw any disagreements as 'war' and ignored the many shared ideals and economic interests between the North and South.

Question 03

This essay was the more popular of the two and was on the whole better answered. There were a few issues of confusion amongst some students. Firstly was the issue of which politicians were 'Southern'; the best wrote about Jefferson Davis and those in the South involved in the split in the Democrats in the Conventions before the 1860 election and the secession that followed it. Some students effectively linked Calhoun and his doctrine of secession dating back to the Nullification crisis to the Secession crisis and outbreak of the Civil War. Unfortunately many students focused on politicians they wrongly identified as Southern. Most commonly mistaken for a Southerner was Buchanan followed by Pierce; Douglas was also inaccurately presented as a Southerner by some. Many students offered good balance, looking at the action of Lincoln as well as other factors. Other issues that arose with responses were at times a limited focus on the actual outbreak of the war and rather a much broader focus on why there was sectional tension. Those who focused on the question of responsibility for the outbreak of the Civil War (for example, there was some good discussion of the events at Fort Sumter) scored much more strongly than those who wrote more generally about the causes of sectional tension over time. Weaker students often had little or no comment or knowledge about 1860 or 1861.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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