
A-level History

7042/2J America: A Nation Divided, c1845–1877
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

This was the first cohort of students to undertake this new linear A-level exam on America: A Nation Divided, c1845. This paper tests A02 which requires students to evaluate the value of primary sources to historians in relations to answering a particular questions. This is a depth unit and therefore a high level of specific detail is required in students answers for them to achieve high level marks. It is important that students concentrate on the time period and specifics of questions asked. There was 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. 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

01

On average students performed less well on this question than they did on the essay questions. There were issues with students' response to this question, in particular their understanding of what adds or limits the value of sources to a historian in relation to answering particular questions, in this case in studying President Johnson and Reconstruction. There were a number of answers that failed to directly address value at all or instead addressed 'how convincing?' or 'how reliable?' or 'how useful?'. Those who did address value would often make generalised or simplistic statements about sources being 'valuable as they came from a Northern Senator' or 'valuable as they are from an official document' without then going on to explain why this made the source valuable or indeed of limited value. Generalised statements based on whether the author is from the North or South or based on the type of source are best avoided. All statements about value or lack of it should be supported by explanation. Generally speaking students understood the sources provenance, content and to a degree tones but fewer than expected students were able to then turn this understanding into good use analysing how valuable the different sources were.

Source A

The author of the source was well known but analysis of the value of him speaking about Johnson was only well done by some. Better students pointed out that as a 'Radical' Republican Sumner did not speak for all in the party and certainly not all in the North. Whilst the best students spotted that the date of the source was before Congress was reconvened and Early into Johnson's time in office many ignored the date and were critical of it not addressing events that had not taken place when it was written. Few students wrote about the audience of the speech accurately with some stating it was to Congress. The best students identified that Sumner was addressing a crowd in Boston, which was renowned as a hot bed of radical thinking. Tone was generally understood but only the best students then went on to explain why the tone either added or diminished value to an historian studying President Johnson and Reconstruction.

A large number of students wrote about events that took place under Lincoln such as the '10% Plan' and Wade-Davis Bill these events were both outside the dates and under a different President to the question. Understanding of content was generally good apart from Sumner claims not having any 'sentiment of vengeance'. Value statements were however not always supported with appropriate contextual knowledge with some students not having a firm grasp of chronology.

The provenance of B appeared to be more challenging to students than A. There were a number of students who erroneously believed this to be a newspaper based in Harper's Ferry when in fact it is a publication from New York. The date again was significant coming from the same month as Congress reconvened in 1865. There were similar errors in chronology and focus as in Source A. A number of students struggled in evaluating the value of a publication with a moderate stance and either mistook this to mean it had no view point or leanings making it of value as a neutral stance or stated the source was limited as it was from a newspaper. The best students picked up on this source being in-line with Johnson and valuable in showing that moderate Northern opinion was in support of him in late 1865. Tone again was identified but many students were unable to convincingly connect this to value.

The content was generally well understood and the best students could identify views expressed about Johnson's views and attitudes that are not supported by events especially regarding 'Negro suffrage'. Whilst many students were able to identify this as not matching his later actions, fewer were able to convincingly discuss the impact this had on the source's value. Simply stating it was not accurate as shown by events that happened after the source was written was not fully convincing. Better answers were able to relate this to how attitudes to Johnson and reconstruction would change but that early in his presidency there was optimism over what he would achieve or to his beliefs regarding states rights and what this might mean for 'under certain conditions'.

The understanding of the provenance of Source C was not as good as was expected and this was often the source that saw the weakest responses. Many students did not seem to know about the powers of pardon as possessed by the President of the USA or about the degree to which Congress had curtailed Johnson's other powers. Students identified this as an official document and as having a formal tone but few were able to convincingly relate this to how valuable it would be to the study of Johnson's Reconstruction policies. The best identified this as his final defiance against Radical Reconstruction and placed in the context of the attempted impeachment that preceded it and of Johnson essentially being a 'Lame-Duck' President with little other recourse in leaving his mark on reconstruction in December 1868.

Students generally understood the content of the source but as with A and B only the best responses convincingly connected this to value. Many brought in good contextual knowledge about the degree of 'peace, order and prosperity' at this point. However on this again there were issues of chronological knowledge with students writing about events under Grant in the 1870s.

Section B

The outcomes on the three essays were very similar. With all three there were lots of students who demonstrated great knowledge of the history contained in the specification but marks would have been even stronger if more students had focused more specifically on the questions and shown more precise knowledge of the key events picked out as the focus of the questions.

02

There was some impressive statistical knowledge on the socio-economic differences between the North and the South in terms of production, railways, immigration and urbanisation. Some students used this very effectively to demonstrate areas of difference and similarity. Some however used statistics from 1860 rather than c1845. Some students focused well on differences and similarities whilst many dealt more with sectional tension (things can be different without necessarily causing tension). The weaker answers tended to draw on generalised statements about the North being industrial and the South agricultural rather than appreciating the level of farming in the North especially the North west and that there was industry notably in border states

such as Virginia. Whilst some covered politics and society effectively others again fell back on generalisations that were often inaccurate about one section supporting one party and the other another and describing ideas about slavery being universal in the South and abolitionism being rampant in the North (which it clearly wasn't c1845). The best answers made good use of the legacy of the past such as Nullification to highlight differences and analyse how significant they were, for example picking out that only South Carolina alone threatened Nullification. The best answered balanced differences with similarities whilst the rest concentrated only on difference.

03

Students of the whole displayed good knowledge of why sectional tension rose between 1858 and 1860. There was generally reasonable knowledge about the Lincoln-Douglas debates and most students wrote about the way Lincoln was portrayed through the debates to the South. The stronger answers dealt very well with the impact of the Freeport Doctrine and the controversy caused by Douglas within the Democrat Party and how this contributed to it splitting. Whilst weaker answers concentrated on the impact the debates had on how Lincoln was perceived the best answers addressed the impact of the Debates on Douglas, Lincoln and their political parties in terms of causing tension. These stronger answers also went on to analyse aspects that limited the debates impact such as them being in Illinois for a Senatorial seat rather than a national election. The very best answers understood Illinois significance geographically and offered insightful analysis into the immediate and slightly longer term impact of the debates.

A large number of answers addressed the Lincoln-Douglas debates briefly and then concentrated the majority of their answer on other factors causing tension in the years 1858-60 such as the raid on Harper's Ferry and the 1860 election campaign. Whilst it is perfectly valid to get balance by addressing other factors students are expected to fully address the focus of the question. This does not mean they have to agree it is the most significant reason but they should spend a reasonable amount of their answer discussing that factor. There seemed to be a number of students who paid only fleeting attention to the actual question before launching into prepared answers on why the Civil War happened. This was particularly clear when the time frame of the question was ignored with students focusing on events before 1858 and also event in 1860. The question also highlighted some students poor grasp of chronology as they played event in 1858 that took place a year or several years earlier.

04

There were students who showed really strong knowledge of the Battle of Gettysburg, the number of casualties on each side, the impact on moral of both the Union and Confederacy and the significant impact on General Lee. Answers were really good when students spent time examining and analysing the strength of the impact of these aspects and whether they met the criteria for being 'decisive'. These strong answers then compared the impact of Gettysburg to the impact of other battles or events that could be considered decisive turning points in the war.

The idea that Union victory could be viewed as inevitable especially due to military and economic might but also due to leadership was clearly very well known and students displayed precise statistics on comparative strength of the two sides. Many answers however did not pay much if any real attention to Gettysburg and the question asked but rather launched into learnt answers on why the Union won. Although there was often much of merit in some of these answers they fell short of the highest levels as they were not answering the question set but rather the one they wanted to be. Chronology again proved to be an issue for the weaker students with confusion over when Gettysburg took place and the order in which the major battles happened and the key events that followed some of them notably the Emancipation Proclamation following on from Antietam.

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.