

AS

History

7041 2Q: The American Dream: Reality and Illusion, 1945-1963
Report on the Examination

7041/2Q
June 2018

Version: 1.0

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General

The third year of this specification saw continued improvements in some areas. The lack of consistent reference to tone and provenance in the sources question is an ongoing issue and the desire of students to leap into an answer without thinking it through remains. Disproportionate time is still spent on Question 1 in comparison to the essay question which can result in students going round in circles rather than addressing the question. However it is reassuring to see that students are moving away from a focus on the specification as purely an expanded civil rights course and seeing rather that there are other elements that must be considered in question response. The desire to see questions through the lens of civil rights as the major factor remains prevalent in some students however.

Question 1

Problems of provenance and tone were the biggest issue with this question where around half of the students provided little to no comment on tone while several saw provenance as an opportunity to repeat what was provided in the question paper. Many students would have benefitted from more time thinking about the provenance of both sources. A, for example featured little comment on the fact that this was a speech to the senate and many students saw it as evidence that Eastland did not know about that racism existed. B, on the other hand, led many students to conclude that ED Nixon referred to Vice President Nixon despite the very clear attribution. Whilst it would be understandable if students did not know who ED Nixon was, or to a lesser extent who Eastland was, the desire to plough on with writing hampered a fuller understanding.

A second concern was the number of students who dismissed one or other of the sources as useless for explaining the problems faced by African-Americans in advancing their civil rights in the mid-1950s. More successful students were very focused on this and could get a surprising amount from the sources. A for example was deemed not just to highlight how there was wilful ignorance of the problem but also how a lack of political representation was a further barrier. Successful students also brought out how politicians muddled the question of civil rights by attempting to conflate it with states' rights and introduce the spectre of the civil war with rhetoric like 'draw the line.' A common pattern in successful students answers was a chronology of key events around the period highlighted by the question which seemed to prompt students into including the Southern Manifesto or the 1957 Civil Rights act which helped to bring out a better, more supported response.

Question 2

This question was very clearly focused on the specification bullet point, 'The United States in 1945 and the legacies of the world war: the powers of the presidency; the main political parties; post-war prosperity; regional, ethnic and social divisions' but many students chose to interpret it as a question about US unity under Truman and followed this with discussions of McCarthyism and the Korean War. While discussion of the growing fear of communism could have been a valid point arguments saying the country was not united because of McCarthy were taken as being outside the timeframe. There was, of course, a huge range of material and students who adopted a structure that looked at political, social and economic divisions did well. Better still were those who looked at the question through the lens of the specification's encouragement to examine 'American identity at home and abroad, anti-communism, social equality, ethnic identities and federal versus states' rights'. Weaker students saw this as a purely civil rights question but then struggled with

relevant material from the end of the war and often ventured into the 1960s for their evidence. Again, this was not given credit. The best answers looked at unity through the war victory and the opportunities this gave to women and ethnic minorities but balanced this against the political problems at home that saw a very tight election, the differences in wealth and societal structure between the North and South and, increasingly, the different character of the west coast. There was plenty to write about and some answers were exceptionally well done.

Question 3

The 'New Frontier' is a very clear part of the specification and for many students this proved an attractive question with a good balance between students choosing question 2 and 3. Students who knew the domestic policies of the New Frontier well were most successful and could talk with great detail about the different policies. The most successful students though focused on the question and looked at whether civil rights policies also addressed poverty as opposed to merely highlighting the Omnibus Housing Act and the increase in the Minimum Wage as the only policies directly targeted at ending poverty. As such the question proved to be an effective differentiator with students also bringing in the space race and aspects of foreign policy although where this made up the bulk of the answer at the expense of domestic policies it was given less credit.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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