



Pearson
Edexcel

Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

History

Pearson Edexcel Advanced

Option 2H.1: The USA, c1920-55: boom,
bust and recovery

Option 2H.2: The USA, 1955-92: conformity
and challenge

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Introduction

9HI02H is divided into two sections. Section A comprises a compulsory source based question and assesses source analysis and evaluation skills(AO2). Section B consists of two essay questions, of which the student is expected to answer one. They will assess the knowledge and understanding of the period in breadth (AO1). Questions, in this section, will be set so that they connect two or more of the key topics in the specification and will target a range of concepts which might include cause, consequence, significance, similarity/difference and change/continuity. The time available for the paper did allow candidates the opportunity to plan their work and many took advantage of this as evidenced by the plans included. Also this helped to keep the candidates focused more clearly on the task in hand. Most plans were of a reasonable length and detail so as to outline the overall argument but occasionally they became so lengthy that they constricted the time available to actually write the response. However, it would be advisable for candidates to spend a short while getting their thoughts in order before writing their answers. This would be relevant to both sections of the paper.

In general, it was section A that seemed to present the greater challenge to the candidates as they had to consider two primary sources and their use to the historian in investigating an historical issue. There was some evidence that greater familiarity with this type of question was resulting in fewer very weak, generalised and ill focused answers. Difficulties were still encountered in moving beyond surface comprehension of the sources and evaluation that was little more than either stereotypical judgements or, at best, questionable assumptions drawn from the sources. This was particularly the case when dealing with the provenance of the sources where unsupported references to the bias in a source continue but with little reward. Those that were more successful drew inferences from the sources and interrogated the evidence with support from relevant contextual knowledge that was applied to illuminate the points being made. The question requires candidates to use the sources 'together' and it was pleasing to see that the majority of candidates continue to be aware of this requirement. It can be achieved using a variety of different approaches.

Section B responses generally scored higher marks as there was much greater development and engagement with the stated issues in the questions and a clear awareness of the conceptual focus. Although some essays remained predominantly narrative they were in a minority. The generic mark scheme clearly indicates the four bullet-points which are the focus for awarding marks and centres should note how these descriptors progress through the levels. Candidates do need to be aware of key dates, as identified in the specification, and ensure that they draw their evidence in responses from the appropriate time period.

Comments on Individual questions.

Question 1.

For question 1 stronger responses showed a clear understanding of both sources, used them together and were able to draw out and support inferences from them which related to attitudes in the United States towards the introduction of radio in the 1920s. Both sources were full of possibilities to draw inferences and to link these to the utility of the sources to the historian in the context of the enquiry (e.g. the implication that radio was a wonderful new plaything in a sequence of innovations initially highly popular with all ('everybody was talking, not about the telephone, but about radio.'). Moreover, the best answers produced thoughtful observations concerning the provenance of the sources to help judge how far the historian could make use of them to consider the enquiry. Good contextual knowledge was deployed to discuss the strengths of the evidence and some consideration was given to interpreting the material in the context of the values and concerns of the society from which it was derived (e.g. as Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover was the first broadcast regulator; he warned of the dangers of commercial exploitation of the radio and called for the medium to be taken into public control). The very best interrogated the evidence and made clear supported judgements which weighed up the strengths or otherwise of the material in relation to the enquiry under consideration. The latter point is important as the focus of responses needs to be directly on the area of enquiry asked in the question.

Weaker responses appeared in a number of different forms. There were those where paraphrasing of the sources dominated and very few, if any, inferences relevant to the stated issue were made. In these types of response, contextual knowledge was often limited and, if evident, used to simply expand, confirm or challenge matters of detail in the sources. On occasions the answers drifted away from the focus on the attitudes to radio and concentrated simply on the workings of the economy or baseball, to the detriment of the overall mark. Moreover, many responses focused too much attention on what the sources left out and used this as the basis for their evaluation. Unless candidates can show that omissions are deliberate, this line of argument carries little value. Source material cannot be expected to include everything, so observing that the source doesn't mention a specific point, unless being used for an example of deliberate omission is unlikely to be valid criteria for judgement. Candidates are asked to evaluate what is there rather than what is not. If the author of the source has omitted something intentionally in order to modify meaning or distort the message of the source, then it will be relevant to discuss that in reaching a conclusion. However, discussion of all the things that the sources might have contained, but failed to do so, is unlikely to help in developing the argument. This approach was still evident this year, in a very small cohort.

However, in some responses there was considerable knowledge displayed and focused on the specified enquiry but with almost no or exceptionally limited references to the sources. As this question is targeting AO2 (analysis and evaluation of source material) these kinds of responses cannot score highly. Moreover, in a few cases, knowledge displayed didn't relate to the sources but explored media more generally. In other instances, where utility was addressed through the provenance it was often based on either stereotypical judgements or questionable assumptions. This often took the form of comments such as the extract is by a magazine writer and he knew what he was talking about (Source 2).

Question 2.

This question was widely answered at high levels and stronger responses showed a clear understanding of both sources, used them together and were able to draw out and support inferences from them which related to the impact of the Vietnam War on the US political system. Both sources were full of possibilities to draw inferences and to link these to the utility of the sources to the historian in the context of the enquiry (e.g. that the impact of events was so alarming that an architect of US policy now wished to reveal it to the public even if it meant his going to jail ("Ellsberg said, 'I could be prosecuted'"). Moreover, the best answers produced thoughtful observations concerning the provenance of the sources to help judge how far the historian could make use of them to consider the enquiry. E.g. as an elected member of Congress McGovern is keen to show his loyalty to the US Constitution, despite his stated opposition to the war. His words may not reflect his private attitude towards revealing war secrets. Good contextual knowledge was deployed to discuss the strengths of the evidence and some consideration was given to interpreting the material in the context of the values and concerns of the society from which it was derived (e.g. leaked material would cause further political fallout in the wake of the Kent State University incident).

The very best interrogated the evidence and made clear supported judgements that weighed up the strengths or otherwise of the material in relation to the enquiry under consideration. The latter point is important as the focus of responses needs to be directly on the area of enquiry asked in the question.

Weaker responses appeared in a number of different forms. There were those where paraphrasing of the sources dominated and very few, if any, inferences relevant to the stated issue were made. In these types of response, contextual knowledge was often limited and, if evident, used to simply expand, confirm or challenge matters of detail in the sources. On occasions the answers drifted away from the focus on the impact of the Vietnam War on the US political system and concentrated simply on the events of the Vietnam War, to the detriment of the overall mark. Moreover, some responses focused too much attention on what the sources left out and used this as the basis for their evaluation. Please see the comments about this in Question 1, where candidates were similarly at fault. In some responses there was considerable knowledge displayed and focused on the specified enquiry but with almost no or exceptionally limited references to the sources. Candidates in this bracket gave long descriptions of the history of the Pentagon Papers in the presidential election campaign of 1972. As this question is targeting AO2 (analysis and evaluation of source material) these kinds of responses cannot score highly. Moreover, in a few cases, knowledge displayed didn't relate to the sources at all, but to the course of the Vietnam War more generally. In other instances, where utility was addressed through the provenance it was often based on either stereotypical judgements or questionable assumptions. This often took the form of comments such as the extract is by a Supreme Court judge and he knew what he was talking about (Source 4).

Question 3

The question considered the extent of similarity and difference between two Red Scares in the 20th century. Stronger responses clearly addressed the similarities and differences in the two Red Scares and weighed them up, for example, by commenting on key criteria, such as the first Red Scare was less tied to communism alone, with hostility towards anarchists and xenophobia being strong influences. The second Red Scare was closely associated with the Cold War and with communism. The second Red Scare saw a wider and longer-lasting response from the authorities, from Senate hearings down to investigations even, for example, at workplace level. These and other relevant points were explored and discussed using valid criteria to judge. Counter-arguments relating to similarities were often discussed well and in great detail. The very best were wide-ranging in the evidence they assembled and sustained in their argument.

Weaker responses tended towards either narrative or generalisation. If analysis was present, the support offered tended to be limited in both range and depth. Weaker responses also found it harder to outline clearly the actual similarities and differences and so struggled to make supported judgements relevant to the question.

Question 4

This question was less popular and asked candidates to reach a judgement about the extent to which the Second New Deal brought fundamental reform both to the conditions in work and to the social security of the people of the United States. Almost all the responses were strong answers successfully considering legislation passed by the New Deal on the question focus. They then considered and weighed up the extent to which these measure brought fundamental reform. The quality of the evidence in range and depth was remarkable.

Question 5

The question required candidates to reach a judgement about whether the Iranian hostage crisis was the most fundamental factor behind the declining support for Jimmy Carter during his Presidency. Stronger responses clearly addressed the hostage crisis as an issue and weighed it, for example, by commenting on its electoral impact for Carter compared with other issues where he was losing support, such as in his response to the oil crisis, the challenge posed by the 'Religious Right', or the failure to tackle 'stagflation' in the economy. The very best responses were wide-ranging in the evidence they assembled and sustained in their argument.

Weaker responses tended towards either narrative or generalisation. If analysis was present, the support offered tended to be limited in both range and depth. Weaker responses also found it harder to outline clearly the aspects, other than the hostage crisis, that contributed to the declining popularity of the Carter Presidency.

Question 6

There was only one response to this question, which unfortunately misread the focus and widely described the whole of the civil rights period up to the 1980s, without contributing to the decade in question. Consequently, there was no judgement about the extent to which the years 1981-92 saw deterioration and decline in racial tolerance and integration.

Students are offered the following advice for the future:

Section A

- Candidates need to draw from the sources inferences that are both supported and relevant to the enquiry in the question. These inferences should be developed through the use of contextual knowledge which is relevant to the enquiry in the question
- Candidates need to move beyond stereotypical judgements or assumptions that are questionable and unsupported when engaging with the provenance of the source. References to the biased nature of sources must be explained and supported in the context of the enquiry in the question
- Candidates need to consider the weight the evidence has in helping them reach judgements relevant to the enquiry
- Candidates should consider the stance or purpose of the author of the source and be aware how this might be affected by the values and concerns of the society at the time it was produced
- Sources should be interrogated with distinctions being made between such things as claims and opinions. The sources should be used together at some point in the answer
- Candidates must avoid engaging with the enquiry simply from their knowledge. The answer needs to be focused on how the sources help the historian and knowledge used to discuss the inferences or points arising from the sources.

Section B

- Candidates need to read the question carefully so as to fully understand the time periods being considered and the full range of issues that they are being asked to consider
- Candidates would benefit from taking some time to plan their answers. As the examination is quite generous in its time allocation this would still allow plenty of time to write the answers

- Candidates should consider what criteria might be used to shape or reinforce the judgements being made. For example, in a continuity/change question such criteria as political, social or economic, if relevant, might help to provide a framework
- Candidates need to avoid description and develop analytical responses which make clear and supported judgements relevant to the question
- Candidates should try to establish links between the arguments being made and, if relevant, weigh up the relative importance of them.

