



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel
In GCE History (8HI0/1F)
Advanced Subsidiary

Paper 1: Breadth study with interpretations

Option 1F: In search of the American
dream: the USA, c1917–96

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It was pleasing to see candidates able to engage effectively across the ability range in this, Advanced Subsidiary Level, Paper 1F.

The paper is divided into three sections. Section A comprises a choice of essays that assess understanding of the period in depth (AO1) by targeting the second order concepts of cause and/or consequence. Section B offers a further choice of essays, targeting any of the second order concepts of cause, consequence, change and continuity, similarity and difference, and significance. Section C contains a compulsory question which is based on two given extracts. It assesses analysis and evaluation of historical interpretations in context (AO3).

Candidates in the main appeared to organise their time effectively, although there were a few cases of candidates not completing one of the three responses within the time allocated. This was most evident on Section C, as would be expected, although there seemed to be fewer instances of this than has been seen in some previous years. The responses that managed time most effectively planned time accordingly in the first place and offered more direct responses. Where responses lacked focus or included material from outside the parameters of the question, they were both less likely to produce responses at the highest level, but also experience time pressure issues. Those who produced responses that focused sharply on arguing and analysing the given issue in the question, and on Question 5 the given views, rather offering extensive explanations and quotes, were more likely to produce an effective response.

In sections A and B, most candidates were well prepared to write, or to attempt, an analytical response. Stronger answers clearly understood the importance of identifying the appropriate second order concept that was being targeted by the question. A minority of candidates offered substantial knowledge but did not effectively direct this towards the conceptual demands of the question. In the main though, candidates were able to apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner suited to the different demands of questions in these two sections: in terms of the greater depth of knowledge required where section A questions targeted a shorter-period, as compared to the more careful selection generally required for the section B questions covering a broader timespan. One of the central features of responses attaining the highest marks was an ability to consider and evaluate in relation to the specific demands of a particular question. For example, some candidates offered detailed explanation of changes, but the strongest responses tended to offer more consideration of the extent of change.

Candidates do need to formulate their planning so that there is an argument and a counter argument within their answer; some candidates lacked sufficient treatment of these. The generic mark scheme clearly indicates the four bullet-pointed strands which are the focus for awarding marks and centres should note how these strands progress through the levels. Candidates also need to be aware of key dates, as identified in the specification, and ensure that responses sufficiently cover the given period, and do not spend time detailing issues that are outside the timeframe of that particular question.

In Section C, the strongest answers demonstrated a clear focus on the need to discuss different arguments given within the two extracts, clearly recognising these as historical interpretations. Such responses tended to offer comparative analysis of the merits of the different views, exploring the validity of the arguments offered by the two historians in the light of the evidence, both from the within the extracts, and candidates' own contextual knowledge. Such responses tended to avoid attempts to examine the extracts in a manner more suited to AO2, assertions of the inferiority of an extract on the basis of it offering less factual evidence, or a drift away from the specific demands of the question to the wider taught topic. A small minority did approach the question in a manner which would be more suited to an AO1 (i.e. Section A/B) response, engaging with the issue in the

question and showing understanding, but tending to neglect the extracts, or treat them more as sources of information, rather than interpretations.

Question 1

Question 1 was the less popular of the two questions in Section A, and produced a range of responses, the majority of which were able to reach the middle and higher levels. Stronger responses focused carefully on the conceptual demands of the question, clearly considering the consequences of television in the given period. As well as the given issue of an improved cultural experience, a range of issues were examined, including political consequences such as presidential elections, civil rights campaigns and the impact of the coverage of the Vietnam War, as well as consumerism, the impact of television on other leisure activities, and the impact on attendances at sports fixtures or the cinema.

With regards to the given issue, candidates tended to explore the type of programmes that were watched, with reference to a range of shows to examine shared cultural experiences, notions of popular culture and changing cultural tastes, with reference to a range of programmes, including *I Love Lucy*, *Sesame Street* and *Amos 'n' Andy*. Within this, candidates explored the impact developments in television had on issues such as popular culture, education and cultural identity.

Where students were less successful, it tended to be as a result of a lack of, or inconsistent focus on the demands of the question, e.g. comparing the impact of television to other issues such as the car or growth of the suburbs, or other forms of media, or lacking sufficient material to develop points.

Question 2

Question 2 was the more popular choice with candidates in Section A of the paper. Most responses were able to put forward some analysis of the reasons for change in the leisure activities of ordinary Americans and were thus able to access the higher levels. In some cases, the focus and depth on the given reason of affluence was less convincing than on other issues, almost most candidates could point to relevant examples of higher personal spending in the period after 1945. Higher level responses tended to explore the issue further, e.g. making convincing connections between the changes to leisure activities, growing affluence and increased leisure time, and/or were able to identify clear links between rising wages and consumption patterns, exemplified with specific references to points across the period. A significant number argued that the economic issues of the 1970s countered the impact of affluence, although in some cases this was overstated, and in general, there was less confidence in dealing with the later parts of the time frame for this question.

Other factors such as technology and media, the development of new suburban patterns, spectator sports and the growth of car-owning and air travel were discussed effectively by many. Stronger responses made a more direct comparison and contrast between the impact of affluence and the role of other factors, and/or discussed the extent to which these were functions of affluence or distinct factors.

Discriminating factors in performance tended to be: (i) the degree to which material was focused on the conceptual demands of the question, (ii) the ability and willingness to explore a sufficient range of reasons to offer some overall balance, (iii) and the range and depth of knowledge. With regards to (iii), limitations tended to be in terms of the quality of factual and often statistical information to substantiate points, in order to locate them at specific points within the timeframe, e.g. arguments that clearly related to the post-war boom or specific figures on ownership of cars, technological goods or sporting attendances, rather than general claims which could equally have been applied to

the 1920s. Stronger responses offered sufficient coverage of issues (typically the given issue and two or three other substantial points), the necessary detail to substantiate claims, and a clear and critical focus.

Question 3

This was the more popular of the two questions on Section B of the paper. Students, on the whole, answered this question well, although some otherwise strong responses had limited material on the earlier part of the chronology, e.g. focusing mainly on federal intervention, and other factors, from the 1950s and 1960s. Others did manage to explore examples such as the New Deal, or efforts to desegregate the military, and well as relevant other factors from earlier in the period, e.g. the significance of the Great Migration, or the role of legal suits brought by the NAACP.

Responses covered a range of other issues, most notably the role of Civil Rights leaders and the actions of the movement. This was usually done with at least some level of analysis in terms of the question. Less successful responses tended to comment on main events and personalities of the Civil Rights movement with descriptive material, such as offering too detailed an account of Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Whilst it was typical and, in some senses, expected that the 1950s and 1960s would dominate, stronger responses were more likely to offer material on the earlier part of the timeframe. The strongest responses were often able to connect other issues, such as the campaigns, with specific pieces of legislation, exploring the relationship between factors.

Question 4

Question 4 was the less popular of the two within Section B. In general, candidates responded with focused responses, with a variety of issues covered to examine the degree to which there was continuity in the ideas shaping the American political landscape. Most candidates were able to examine a range of issues, with the most common being the return to ideas associated with the Republican 'return to normalcy' and the influence of laissez faire beliefs, the decline of these with Roosevelt's New Deal and the increased emphasis on government intervention, the significance of isolationism across the period, Johnson's Great Society and the extent to which this reflected continuity with or an extension of FDR's programme, the growth of liberalism, the counter culture as a rejection of the mainstream, conservatism and Nixon and the rise of Reagan, anti-communism across the period, and the impact civil rights had on political ideas.

Most candidates were able to use this material to sufficiently engage with the focus of continuity/change to reach levels three or four. Some candidates opted for a thematic approach, whereas others tended to focus on periods within the overall timeframe. Both could be valid, although the latter did produce some responses which tended to elements of description, with less secure focus on exploring the extent to which there was continuity. What separated responses across the levels most tended to be how well material was connected to its influence on the political landscape. Stronger responses demonstrated a wealth of knowledge, and clearly shaped this towards an exploration of continuity/change, with some exploring the relationship between different developments across the period. Whilst there is no ideal formula for such essays, stronger responses tended to ensure the essay is driven by argument over the extent of continuity, with detail selected to support an exploration of this, rather than the other way round, risking lapsing into description. Candidates should also be minded to address the full question, in terms of both the given date range, and the extent of continuity/change.

Question 5

Most candidates were able to access the higher levels, generally by recognising and explaining the arguments in the two extracts and building on this with own knowledge. The strongest responses tended to offer a comparative analysis of the views, discussing and evaluating these in the light of contextual knowledge. Most candidates were able to identify some of the main differences between Extract 1 and Extract 2, such as the emphasis Troy places on the positives of the economic boom, the renewed optimism and extent to which Reagan's attitudes and political ideas Reagan were shared by many Americans, set against the emphasis Hamilton places on the debt and the deficit, financial crisis and scandal, and the growth of income inequality. It was pleasing to see that few responses became side-tracked in an attempted analysis of the provenance of the extracts.

Where candidates were less successful, this tended to be (i) limited use of contextual knowledge, or offering valid contextual knowledge, but with limited linkage to the discussion of the views, or (ii) a tendency to describe and explain the extracts and see them more as sources of information, rather than attempt to discuss and assess the arguments they offered. Thankfully very few responses became side-tracked in an attempted analysis of the provenance of the extracts.

Thankfully, most candidates were able to engage with the extracts as interpretations so, and many reached a supported judgement which flowed from and clearly related to their previous discussion of the views. Stronger responses were generally more likely to recognise and explore connections between the views, e.g. Extract 2's emphasis on the growing debt and increased federal spending, set against Extract 1's argument that deficits looked less significant in the light of economic growth. Overall, Question 5 produced a strong response from a good number of candidates.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

Section A/B responses:

Features commonly found in responses which were successful within the higher levels:

- Candidates paying close attention to the date ranges in the question
- Sufficient consideration given to the issue in the question (e.g. main factor), as well as some other factors
- Explain their judgement fully – this need not be in an artificial or abstract way, but demonstrate their reasoning in relation to the concepts and topic they are writing about in order to justify their judgements
- Focus carefully on the second-order concept targeted in the question
- Give consideration to timing, to enable themselves to complete all three questions with approximately the same time given over to each one
- An appropriate level, in terms of depth of detail and analysis, as required by the question – e.g. a realistic amount to enable a balanced and rounded answer on breadth questions

Common issues which hindered performance:

- Answers which pay little heed to the precise demands of the question, e.g. write about the topic without focusing on the question, or attempt to give an answer to a question that hasn't been asked – most frequently, this meant treating questions which targeted other second-order concepts as causation questions

- Where a response does not give sufficient consideration to the given issue/proposition in the question (e.g. looking at other causes, consequences, etc, with only limited reference to that given in the question)
- Answers which only gave a partial response, e.g. a very limited span of the date range, or covered the stated cause/consequence, with no real consideration of other issues
- Assertion of change, causation, sometimes with formulaic repetition of the words of the question, with limited explanation or analysis of how exactly this was a change, cause, of the issue within the question.
- Judgement is not reached, or not explained
- A lack of detail

Section C responses:

Features commonly found in responses which were successful within the higher levels:

- Candidates paying close attention to the precise demands of the question, as opposed to seemingly pre-prepared material covering the more general controversy as outlined in the specification
- Thorough use of the extracts; this need not mean using every point they raise, but a strong focus on these as views on the question
- A confident attempt to use the two extracts together, e.g. consideration of their differences, attempts to compare their arguments, or evaluate their relative merits
- Careful use of own knowledge, e.g. clearly selected to relate to the issues raised within the sources, confidently using this to examine the arguments made, and reason through these in relation to the given question; at times, this meant selection over sheer amount of knowledge
- Careful reading of the extracts, to ensure the meaning of individual statements and evidence within these were used in the context of the broader arguments made by the authors
- Attempts to see beyond the stark differences between sources, e.g. consideration of the extent to which they disagreed, or attempts to reconcile their arguments

Common issues which hindered performance:

- Limited use of the extracts, or an imbalance in this, e.g. extensive use of one, with limited consideration of the other
- Limited comparison or consideration of the differences between the given interpretations
- Using the extracts merely as sources of support
- Arguing one extract is superior to the other on the basis that it offers more factual evidence to back up the claims made, without genuinely analysing the arguments offered
- Heavy use of own knowledge, or even seemingly pre-prepared arguments, without real consideration of these related to the arguments in the sources
- Statements or evidence from the source being used in a manner contrary to that given in the sources, e.g. through misinterpretation of the meaning of the arguments, or lifting of detail without thought to the context of how it was applied within the extract
- A tendency to see the extracts as being polar opposites, again seemingly through expectation of this, without thought to where there may be degrees of difference, or even common ground