



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel

In GCE History (8HI0/2H)
Advanced Subsidiary

Paper 2: Depth study

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

It is clear that centres are continuing to concentrate AS entry on students who may not be moving on to A Level. However, there was continuing evidence this year that more potential A Level candidates were present in the AS entry than in previous sessions. The percentage of candidates scoring at higher levels was broadly slightly higher than in previous sessions. Nevertheless, Section A source analysis, with its emphasis on value and weight, is not fully appreciated by weaker candidates.

It was pleasing to see candidates able to engage effectively across the ability range with the A Level paper 2H, which deals with 2H.1: The USA, c1920–55: boom, bust and recovery and 2H.2: The USA, 1955–92: conformity and challenge. The paper was divided into two sections: Section A was aimed at the in-depth evaluation and analysis of source material and Section B focused on the evaluation of key features in depth, exploring cause, consequence, change, continuity, similarity, difference and significance. It was clear that standards in Section B continue to be higher than those in Section A and that many candidates at this level find the concept of making an inference from the material within the source too difficult. Teachers and candidates need to follow the requirements of the Section A mark scheme carefully in order to be clear about what is meant by 'value' and 'weight'. As in previous years, some candidates continue to write too much generalised comment without regard to the source material, or to paraphrase the source without considering its value or (Part b) reliability. The major weakness was often in considering the provenance and comments were too often stereotypical, or too often missing entirely. We remind centres that candidates should assess 'weight' by using contextual knowledge to challenge or confirm what is in the source, or to discuss the values of its audience, rather than just claiming that the source discusses an aspect of the topic, so it must have weight. It is also necessary to analyse the nature, origin and purpose of the source through its provenance in order to assess weight. As before, many responses were largely made up of comments about what is missing from the source, suggesting that this made it less valuable, or gave it less weight. Credit is given to comments about what is not in the source only if it is possible to show that this material is missing for a reason, for example because the source is a deliberate piece of propaganda, or, for example, the author is not in a position to comment about key issues and that for this reason the source is unrepresentative. The trend to score higher in the (a) question than the (b) question remained true this year, perhaps because 'weight' is still not fully understood. The detailed knowledge base required to add contextual material was often good, but candidates need to understand that contextual knowledge must be linked to what is in the source and used to confirm or challenge inferences from the source itself, as well as to assess value or weight in the ways described above. Too many candidates are ignoring the substance of the source material and writing detailed material about the theme in general. A reminder: AO1 is not assessed in Section A. There was a little evidence on this paper of candidates having insufficient time to answer both questions. The ability range was very diverse, but the design of the paper allowed all abilities to be catered for. Essay writing in Section B

continues to improve, but it was noticeable this year that weaker candidates did not read the question carefully enough and simply rehearsed what they had learnt. Lack of knowledge was clear on individual questions, and we strongly advise teachers and candidates to pay careful attention to the wording of the specification, as the full range of topics is open for assessment. Candidates continue to identify key themes in an introduction and to make a judgement in a conclusion. The candidates' performance on individual questions is considered in the next section.

8HI0_2H.1_Q01a

Strong responses had a clear focus on the value of the source in terms of the responses to women's roles in the Second World War. At the highest level, candidates selected key points from the source and made valid inferences about them, supporting each one with their own knowledge of the historical context, for example, that women's roles were undergoing a seismic shift from domestic to work duties. Comments about provenance were thoughtful and may have considered that the fact that the date of the source is particularly valuable as it occurs soon after the USA has entered the Second World War and that the purpose of the source is to inform women across the USA about their need to engage with it. Weaker responses simply wrote generally about the idea that this was a government leaflet.

8HI0_2H.1_Q01b

Weaker responses indicated that candidates did not understand the need to make inferences from the source, for example that Randolph is giving his assessment of Garvey nearly half a century after the events – his memory seems sketchy, particularly as he cannot immediately recall the name of so iconic a figure. Many candidates failed to make inferences and simply supported quotations with their wider knowledge about the Harlem Renaissance. Weaker candidates gave weight to the source only because the writer was a civil rights leader. Others missed out any comment about the provenance. However, stronger candidates linked the direction the source was taking: in the culture of the Harlem Renaissance, there was an understanding by black Americans that they were part of something much bigger than their individual selves.

Examiner Tip

Try to integrate contextual knowledge with a supported inference. In this way a valid inference is explained by confirming matters of detail in the source or expanding them. This will enable you to reach Level 3 in both bullet points 1 and 2 of the mark scheme.

8HI0_2H.2_Q02a

Weaker responses indicated that candidates did not understand the need to make inferences from the source, for example, it implies that preparations on the part of the authorities for dealing with student protests were totally inadequate. Many candidates failed to make inferences and simply supported quotations with their wider knowledge about student protests, not always in the context of the Nixon Administration. Weaker

candidates gave value to the source only because it was called for by Nixon. Others missed out any comment about the provenance. However, stronger candidates noted that, in considering the period of protest from 1963-72, the Report is valuable as it lays down new official guidelines by which the authorities should react to student protests, indicating a turning point reached at Kent State. They also supported their responses with stronger contextual material, e.g. that public opinion turned further against the war in southeast Asia as a result of the law enforcers' response to the student protest at Kent State University and that any people in the USA were appalled by the violent reaction.

Examiner Tip

Turn supported inferences into reasoned inferences by using contextual knowledge to confirm or reject the points inferred in the source.

8H10_2H.2_Q02b

Strong responses had a clear focus on the weight of the source in relation to an enquiry into the 'Just Say No' campaign. At the highest level, candidates selected key points from the source and made valid inferences about them, supporting each one with their own knowledge of the historical context, for example, it suggests that Nancy Reagan was keen to use her persona to advantage. Comments about provenance were thoughtful and may have considered that the fact that the aim of the exhibit is to advertise the successes of the 'Just Say No' campaign and, especially, to publicise the legacy of Ronald and Nancy Reagan. Weaker responses simply wrote generally about drug use declining and paraphrased the source.

8H10_2H.1_Q03

Weaker responses indicated one main clear problem in responding to this question. There was often a tendency to write about the automobile industry leading huge numbers of people into leisure activities, opening up a largely irrelevant discussion of cultural changes in the 1920s. The most successful candidates understood the need to link the industry to the economic boom, for example, the fact that over 75 per cent of cars were bought on hire purchase by 1929; this enabled the automobile industry to be the single most important force in the demand-led economic boom, with 30 million vehicles sold in the decade. And that the automobile industry stimulated associated businesses, which led rubber, glass and steel industries to contribute to the economic boom. This proved to be a popular mainstream question and there were some excellent responses balancing the automobile industry with other factors in the boom, such as government policy, advertising and hire purchase, often making links between automobiles and these other criteria.

Examiner Tip

Be sure that you can choose suitable analysis both for and against the proposition when making a judgement about the relative success of the individual named in the question.

It is not possible to make this judgement when set against other stated criteria of dubious validity. Try to offer detailed evidence for each issue, too. Remember that this is a depth study.

8HI0_2H.1_Q04

There were a few very well supported responses, and some candidates had an excellent knowledge of the workings of the Second New Deal changing the lives of disadvantaged Americans. Unfortunately, many candidates were unable to identify the main focal points of the Second New Deal and simply wrote about the New Deal in general, often targeting the main events of 1933-34.

Examiner Tip

In this type of question, it is very important to note the wording of the question and the time period indicated.

8HI0_2H.1_Q05

The very few responses to this question were very generalised and usually wrote vaguely about TV programmes such as 'I Love Lucy'. There did need to be some specific evidence, which was often lacking. There were a handful of strong responses that made detailed points about the nature of most programming, e.g. specific cooking shows, wrestling, particular cartoons, all of which took up most of the broadcast day, and none of which had much of an influence on cultural change. Few candidates were able to mount a convincing counter argument, e.g. that not all TV documentaries in the 1950s were afraid to tackle cultural conformity, like journalist Ed Murrow broadcasting an unflattering portrait of Joseph McCarthy's anti-communism

Examiner Tip

Balanced arguments should try to find about three points on each side, each backed by detailed support. In making a judgement, try to find a clear reason why one side is more convincing, perhaps by illustrating the paramount importance of one point, either in support or against the target focus of the question.

8HI0_2H.2_Q06

Many candidates fell into the trap of rehearsing what they had revised rather than paying close attention to the target focus, which was that **music** (versus other features) was the most significant feature of teenage culture. However, many candidates were able to analyse the significance of rock'n'roll music, especially in the guise of (e.g.) Bill Haley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard, Buddy Holly and Elvis Presley. Most candidates who did read the question carefully provided some very detailed knowledge about the counter features, such as the Beats, who were adept at turning established values against the society that enshrined them. Others noted that global issues, especially 'The Bomb', were the first defining challenge for the post-war younger generation with the development of an anti-nuclear culture among America's teenagers.

Examiner Tip

A clear sense of organisation often sets up the target focus first, before producing the counter argument, rather than sandwiching the latter in the middle of the response.

8HI0_2H.2_Q07

This was a popular question and there were some very thoughtful attempts to demonstrate that LBJ undertook many opportunities to legislate on behalf of the poor. Most were able to balance the argument by indicating that the Vietnam War increasingly stole revenue from the Great Society programme and that Republicans in Congress began to attack it in the last two years of LBJ's presidency.

Examiner Tip

Allow enough time and space in the essay to write a substantial and well-considered conclusion that judges the extent to which the argument suggested by the question is confirmed or challenged. The basis of the judgement is that one aspect is more important, influential or significant, or, as in this case, the extent of change. The best candidates will be able to compare the relative importance / significance / degree of similarity / extent of change (e.g.) of all the key features they have outlined.

8HI0_2H.2_Q08

There were very few responses to this mainstream question, perhaps demonstrating that centres struggled to complete the Specification. The few responses encountered were almost always strong or very strong, considering the impact of the hostage crisis in detail before considering other features that weighed against Carter in his attempt to retain the presidency in the 1980 Election, such as the economy and scandals.

Examiner Tip

Take a highlighter pen to the question as printed and mark out key words and phrases that show the concept, the focus and the chronology to be considered.

Paper Summary

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

Section A

Value of Source Question (Qa)

- Be prepared to make valid inferences rather than to paraphrase the source
- Be prepared to back up inferences by adding additional contextual knowledge from beyond the source
- Explore beyond stereotypical reactions to particular types of provenance. Not all old people are blighted by poor memories; look at the specific stance and/or purpose of the writer
- Avoid discussions about what is missing from the source when assessing its value to the enquiry unless there is a clear reason for the author missing such points

Weight of Source Question (Qb)

In addition to the advice on Qa:

- Be prepared to assess the strength of the source for an enquiry by being aware that the author is writing for a specific audience. Be aware of the values and concerns of that audience
- Try to distinguish between fact and opinion by using your contextual knowledge of the period
- In coming to a judgement about the provenance take account of the weight you may be able to give to the author's evidence in the light of his or her stance and/or purpose
- In assessing weight, it is perfectly permissible to assess reliability by considering what has been perhaps **deliberately** omitted from the source.

Section B Essay questions

- You must provide factual details as evidence. Weaker responses lacked depth and sometimes range
- Plan your answer effectively before you begin
- Pick out three or four key themes and then provide an analysis of (e.g.) the target significance mentioned in the question, setting its importance against other themes rather than providing a description of each
- Pay careful attention to key phrases in the question when analysing
- Try to explore links between issues to make the structure flow more logically.

