



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2012**

History A

40402A

(Specification 4040)

Unit 2A: The American West, 1840–1895

Report on the Examination

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40402A The American West, 1840–1895

General Issues

The general quality of the work produced by students was good and impressed the examiners. Most students demonstrated a broad knowledge of the period and an understanding of the main concepts through the key issues identified in the syllabus and the people and events specified. No part of the paper was misinterpreted, however, there did seem to be rather more students this year who did not attempt some individual questions in their papers. Even weaker students were able to write at often considerable length on the later parts of Questions 1, 2 or 3. While the key issues and trends in the history of the American West that the paper covered seemed well understood, there were some small specific areas where students displayed weaker knowledge and understanding. This was evident in relation to the answers to Question 3. However, it is good to see students in the examination integrating their knowledge of the period with the historical skills they have learned to demonstrate convincing historical reasoning. The value of the large, colour images used in the paper was evident; they proved stimulating and accessible across the full ability range.

The demands of this paper were broadly consistent with those of last year. Both Question 1 and Questions 2 or 3 of Section B offered a manageable and largely enjoyable opportunity for all students to show what they understood, knew and could do. It was noticeable that the more able students distinguished themselves on Question 1(e) and on 2(c) or 3(c). In Question 1 of the paper many students used knowledge well to support their answers to parts 1(c) to 1(e). In Section B students showed a marked preference for Question 2 about the Plains Indians and the Struggle for the Plains rather than Question 3 on Law and Order.

Section A

Question 1(a)

The majority of students successfully comprehended and drew inferences about the Mormons from these sources. Knowledge of the Mormons was not called for, but many students chose to use their own knowledge specifically about polygamy when answering this question. It was a weakness of some answers that they focussed on non-Mormons. However, the majority of students reached a high Level 2, being able to draw more than one valid inference about the Mormons. At Level 2 students typically were able to make comments that the Mormons were not liked by non-Mormons, that they had more than one wife and many children. Answers often went on to make comments that referred to the chaotic nature of the Mormons and that the Mormons seemed 'out of control', or 'unable to keep order'. Some students picked out the word 'swarm' to infer that the Mormons were regarded as insects in their number or as pests; other answers said that the Mormons were regarded as a threat. It was stated in some answers that the Mormons were poor. Able students emphasised the violence and aggression of the Mormons or that their children were neglected. Many students noted the humour involved in the depiction of the Mormons in Source A. There were a small minority of Level 1 responses that simply paraphrased Source B.

Question 1(b)

The majority of students showed comprehension and drew inferences about the different attitudes to Mormons shown in Sources C and D to those in Sources A and B. Students found the sources easy to deal with in terms of their ideas and language. The focus of the marking of this question was the inference that could be made from Sources C and D;

reference to Sources A and B, or the context of these sources was acceptable if it was implicit.

Weaker answers often made a simple comparison between the sources based on what they said or suggested about the Mormons, and for this their responses gained reward at Level 2. Answers at Level 2 often summed up the mood of Source C as peaceful or happy. There was often speculation whether the husband in Sources A or C was Joseph Smith or Brigham Young. Level 2 responses frequently consisted of simple comparisons such as ‘relaxed, enjoyable’ or ‘getting along well together’, as opposed to ‘helpless, unhappy, not caring for their young’. Students made observations about the unruly, unsettled environment in Sources A/B; compared with the calm atmosphere of Sources C/D. Many students were able to reach Level 3 through correctly identifying contrasting attitudes in the two sets of sources. This frequently concentrated on the demeanour of the husband in Sources A and C. He was, as one candidate put it, ‘dysfunctional in A but basks in his glorious life in B’.

Students made observations about the fact that in Sources A/B the atmosphere was violent, manic or chaotic, whereas in Sources C/D it was one of ‘leisurely contentment’ or ‘relaxed pampering’. The most frequent description of the women portrayed in Sources C and D was as ‘classy’, civilised, superior or sophisticated. The relationship between the wives was perceptively described as ‘harmonious’. Students understood Emmeline Wells’ message that polygamy liberated or empowered Mormon women. One candidate referred to a ‘high level of sophistication amongst Mormon women; both in their dress and their activities’. Another aspect of the sources commented on was that in Sources A and B the family seemed poor and crowded into one room whereas in Sources C and D there was plenty of space and wealth. The obedient composure of the children in Source C was contrasted with the neglect of so many babies in Source A. Some examiners noted once again that many students mixed up how and why sources differed in their responses to this question, thus they began answering Question 1(c) during their answer to Question 1(b).

Question 1(c)

In this question students had a clear target to explain why there were differences between Sources A/B and C/D. Students showed understanding of the skill being tested here and most used the differences between the authors or the time of writing to underpin their answers. The general level of thinking in answers to this question was good and led in the main to Level 2 and Level 3 marks.

Although this question elicited a full range of responses, at a basic level a number of students wanted to explain how the sources were different and repeated answers that more properly represented a response to Questions 1(a) and 1(b). Another group of responses tended to discuss the values and opinions behind what the sources showed rather than why they were different. These responses received Level 1 marks (one-two). A common feature of answers at Level 2 was to explain differences between the sources as based on the difference in times of their production. Many students concentrated on the French background of the artist who painted Source C and concluded either that that would make him unbiased or gave him little real knowledge of what he painted. Some students suggested that there were two very different groups of Mormons in the sources. The development of the time differences in detail and context usually brought Level 3 marks to the candidate (six-seven marks) as they expanded on the idea that Sources C and D were produced after the Mormons had moved to Salt Lake City. Many students were keen to mention the banking crisis in connection with Source B or to dismiss the author of Source D because she was a Mormon. Level 4 answers usually involved an understanding of how Sources C and D took place at a time when the Mormons were seeking greater political accommodation with the United States.

Question 1(d)

Students found the source straightforward and it was easy for them to discuss its utility, however there are still those who confuse utility with reliability. The size and use of colour helped students discuss the details of Source E. Although, many students knew that a successful answer to this question involved both content and provenance, the readiness and facility with which students recognise the provenance of the sources in their answers varies from year to year. This seemed to be a year when there was less comment on the provenance of the source with many students not mentioning it at all.

Examiners noted that many students based their answers around the content of the source. These answers were rewarded at Level 2 (three-four marks). It was common for answers to discuss how the painting indicated 'pull' factors, but not the 'push' factors so well. With this in mind the West seemed like a place for families and they would be part of a great movement of white people. This often led to the recognition of the 'manifest destiny' aspects of the painting. Those who 'majored' on content usually achieved a high Level 2, often through their knowledge of all the reasons for westward movement that were not included in Source E. Answers that commented on the content alone in this manner received Level 2 marks. There were a significant number of students who wrote about source's utility for understanding the journey West and/or what white people found when they arrived at their destination. This was not the focus of the question, although this was usually to be found in answers that did include some relevant material.

It was pleasing to see many students reflecting on the source's provenance. The value of the source was frequently considered to lie in the fact that it was a government building, and therefore as such showed a government endorsement and celebration of the move westwards. Students who used the content and commented on provenance were rewarded with Level 3 marks (five-six). At Level 4 there were some very sophisticated answers using the students' own knowledge to demonstrate how this powerful propaganda would be particularly well received by the poor of the cities of the eastern seaboard.

Question 1(e)

There were some good answers to this question and the question proved to be a good discriminator. There were some students who wrote at length about the solutions to the problems and did not extrapolate back to the problem that the solution was meant to address. When answers consisted of a few simple points or general statements about the difficulties for farmer on the plains they were limited to Level 1 marks. Many students offered some more developed comments from their own knowledge about exactly how the problems presented themselves and why they were significant. These answers usually received three to five marks at Level 2. The majority of students were able to explain the problems for white people who tried to settle on the Great Plains. Students noted the problem of finding enough water, especially for crops and animals and the suitability of those crops as well as the hardness of the ground. Many students referred to the attacks by Indians and the problems of disease and medical care in the vastness of the plains. The absence of wood for building was frequently mentioned, as was the solution for shelter – the sod house. Most students' responses demonstrated the use of the sources selectively and appropriately in their answer. Some students, however, became rather distracted at this question, and the unfortunate Donner party received some attention which could not be credited. For students who were able to give factual support and details about several factors six to eight marks were available. At this level some well-developed answers focused on the demands on farmers of having to meet the challenge of farming on the plains over a period of time when their productivity may be variable and the strength sapped by resultant disease and malnutrition. At Level 4 students tended to evaluate different factors and give some weight to their relative importance.

Section B

Question 2(a)

Many students answered this question. It was answered well on the whole with many students scoring Level 2 marks. Most students reached Level 2 by showing knowledge of the role that dances played in the cultural lives of the Indians. Some students at Level 1 tended to describe dances. The dances most frequently referred to were the Buffalo dance, Ghost dance and Sun dance. A small number of responses mentioned a rain dance which did not have relevance for the nomadic plains Indians. At Level 2 answers explained how dances were very visible events that brought the tribe together, that celebrated what was important to the tribe and had a deeply spiritual importance in their lives.

Question 2(b)

This question drew many good answers from the majority of students who tackled it, but there were a minority of weaker answers that lost the focus on 'trust' in the question. Many students relied on Source F as a 'starter' and focused on the violent actions of the whites which undermined and destroyed the trust of the Indians. Although, mentioned at Level 2, students often lacked the specific detail about the Sand Creek Massacre that would have merited Level 3. Those students who examined Source F closely were able to gain an answer worth three to five marks. Students referred to the American flag that flew in the centre of the camp which signified the protection of the regular US army. At Level 3 students were able to recount a trail of broken promises and treaties that led to a lack of trust. The cycle of events that led to a lack of trust on the Indians part was frequently referred to and many answers showed a good understanding of the Second Fort Laramie Treaty, 1868 and the white expedition to the Black Hills in 1874. Students who discussed and explained this in detail were usually rewarded at Level 3. It was sometimes obvious which students had been taught about Sand Creek, as they provided some impressive analysis before moving onto other factors.

Question 2(c)

This question discriminated well. It proved to be more popular than Question 3. There were many excellent answers to this question. Many students knew a great deal about Custer and the mistakes he made and this enabled them to access Level 2 marks with ease. There were fewer answers that briefly summarised several factors that were simply expressed. Examiners frequently saw answers that mentioned Custer's arrogance and ambition such that he was blinded to the realities of the situation he faced. Custer was sure his plan would succeed and he failed to take account of the numbers of Indians involved or the condition of his men. Answers often ignored the focus on Custer's actions and just talk about his deficiencies in general. These answers gained high marks within Level 2. The responses of students at Level 3 were distinguished by their ability to explain reasons in detail. Some of the better answers focused on other factors such as the superior weaponry of the Indians. The confidence that the Indians possessed as a result of Sitting Bull's Sundance and the charismatic, successful warrior - Crazy Horse. The knowledge of the terrain over which the cavalry and Indians fought was another factor that some students discussed. It was in assessing the relative merits of Custer and Sitting Bull's tactics that many answers reached Level 3. Examiners were looking for the emergence of some evaluation of the relative importance of factors at Level 4. The students who reached Level 4 often distinguished, for example, long and short term factors, as well as those things beyond Custer's control and those which might simply be bad luck.

Question 3(a)

This was a popular question. Students clearly knew what vigilantes did – ‘they took the law into their own hands’. At Level 1, answers often described lynching or the likely reasons for it. The most common view was that vigilantes were a good thing because they ‘caught criminals and helped out the over-stretched law enforcement agencies’. At Level 2 students were able to describe on one hand the stabilising effects, in some areas, of vigilantism and on the other, in other areas, the contrary effect of vigilance committees.

Question 3(b)

This question gave a great deal of help in the picture provided. Source G was quite rightly ‘mined’ by many students who used it to comment on lawmen, marshals, rewards, posses, posters, and the use of the railways. There was some repetition of material on vigilantes from Question 3(a), but also good knowledge shown on the role of sheriffs, and Marshalls. Higher marks were gained by students who explained the impact of the telegraph and the introduction of a system of criminal justice, the use of the Pinkerton Agency, and the Texas rangers, judges and courts. Some very good answers referred to the long term pressure for greater law and order due to growing presence of more homesteaders.

Question 3(c)

The question was straightforward and some students enjoyed the opportunity to display their understanding. This was less popular than Question 2(c). At Level 1, students just had a few points to make usually about the cowboys and cattle rustling, or occasionally fence cutting and rebranding. Those answers that tended to mention several factors briefly were rewarded at Level 2. Some students at Level 2 were very knowledgeable about the Johnson County War. Other responses focused on the aspects of the cattle industry that lent themselves to criminality such as rustling, disputes over land and water, gunfights, rebranding and the trampling of crops. It was usually at Level 3 that a range of possible causes of lawlessness were explored such as racial tensions, robberies, and the independent spirit of the West. The better answers at Levels 3 and 4 did appreciate the impact of differing factors, and the way that the distances between places amplified the problem of keeping order and the likelihood that wrong doers would escape.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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