

Examiners' report

GCSE

HISTORY B

(SCHOOLS HISTORY PROJECT)

**OCR Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in
History B (Schools History Project)**

J411

For first teaching in 2016

The Making of America, 1789–1900

J411/37, J411/38 and J411/39

Summer 2025 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate responses is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from [Teach Cambridge](#).

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The Making of America, 1789–1900 overview

The Making of America, 1789–1900 is one of three period study units in the Component Group 3 World History GCSE paper. The focus of assessment for the period study is knowledge and understanding, and explaining and analysing events and periods. The paper has three compulsory questions and a choice of one question from two optional questions.

The period study requires candidates to show an ability to analyse evidence using second order concepts as well as displaying their ability to explain evidence in reference to the question.

To do well, candidates need to be able to present a historical summary of an area of content they have learned, offer an explanation in response to a historical question (e.g. explaining the causes or consequences of something), and recall and apply their knowledge to support and challenge a statement in an essay-style question. The focus is on AO1 and AO2 – knowledge and understanding of key features of the period and the ability to analyse and explain this material. These Assessment Objectives have equal weighting. The period studies are broken down into five sections, and questions are framed around these. Candidates who had a clear understanding of these were able to deploy relevant material on Questions 2, 3, 4 and 5 more effectively.

For Question 2, candidates performed effectively when they structured their answers around clear second order concepts (commonly cause and consequence for this year's question) and those who were able to analyse two examples of a second order concept (or concepts) could access Level 3.

For Question 3, candidates were able to access the higher levels by either identifying or describing a clear measure or event that affecting the lives of African Americans during the Civil War and make an explicit statement of how that measure or event affected their lives. Candidates who gave one such 'explanation' were credited in Level 4, and those with two or more explanations reached Level 5.

Answers in Questions 4 and 5 also built up credit in the higher levels through explanation. Whichever of these optional questions the candidate chose, these explanations were required for Level 3 and higher. Strong answers were able to identify time-relevant examples for the question, support these with appropriate detail and then make an explicit analytical link to the question (why a specific group benefited from the expansion of slavery in Question 4, or why their evidence constituted an important development in Question 5). Candidates who were able to offer at least two explanations for one side of the argument (supporting or challenging the statement in the question) and one explanation for the other side could access Level 5, and Level 6 opened up for those who offered an extra explanation for either side of the argument. The final mark in Level 6 was reserved for those candidates who were able to reach a nuanced understanding of the question and offer a 'clinching argument'.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
- wrote succinct and relevant single answers for Questions 1 (a), (b) and (c) - structured answers for Question 2 around one or more 'second order concepts' (commonly cause and consequence) - made appropriate assessment of the impact of relevant changes to the lives of African Americans during the Civil War in Question 3 - for Question 4, showed clear chronological understanding of the period 1793-1838 and were able to demonstrate why specific groups benefited from the expansion of slavery in this period - answered Question 5 using clear evidence from the period 1877-1900 and made explicit statements analysing why that evidence constituted an 'important development' in the United States.	- spent too much time on Questions 1 (a), (b) and (c) and offered more than one answer to each question (when only the first response can be credited) or offered irrelevant answers - wrote narrative answers to Question 2 or offered material not relevant either to settlement on the Plains or the time period 1861-1877 - addressed Question 3 with highly generalised material about African Americans, confused African Americans with Native Americans or included material that occurred after the Civil War - included material for Question 4 that was either outside of the time period for the question, did not connect to the expansion of slavery or focused on why slavery expanded in this period rather than why certain groups benefited from it - addressed Question 5 in a narrative manner without considering why their material was an 'important development' or included material that was either inaccurate or outside of the date range of the question.

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Question 1 (a)

1

- (a) Name **one** Native American tribe of the East who were affected by the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

[1]

Most candidates were given the available mark for this question. Any relevant tribe affected by the Act was credited: Seminole, Muscogee (or Creek), Cherokee (the most common answer), Choctaw, Chickasaw or any valid sub-nation within that tribe (which was extremely rare). Some candidates offered the name of a tribe that was unaffected by the Act – overwhelmingly the Lakota Sioux – and these were not credited. A few candidates did not address the question at all.

Question 1 (b)

- (b) Give **one** reason why the early Mormon settlers journeyed to Utah in 1847.

[1]

This question was answered less effectively than Question 1(a) since many candidates offered generalised answers that could not be pinned specifically to the motives of early Mormon settlers. Material based around 'persecution' could be applied to groups other than the Mormons, and this was not credited unless the persecution was made specific to the Mormons (such as referencing persecution in Nauvoo, or acknowledging the persecution was due to religion). Some candidates referenced generic reasons for settlement in the West that could not be considered as relevant (for example gold) and these too were not credited. A wide range of material was credited, however – such as the murder of Joseph Smith, the 'pull' factor of Utah as outside US government control or negative reactions to polygamy – and many candidates were able to offer such examples and were given the available mark. Most commonly, references to religious persecution were the subject of candidate's creditable answers.

Question 1 (c)

- (c) Identify **one** law passed to improve the lives of African Americans during the period of Reconstruction (1865–1877).

[1]

Examiners credited either reference to a specific law or the impact of that law, so for example either the 13th Amendment or 'slavery was banned' would have received the available mark. Overwhelmingly, reference to one of the three 'Reconstruction Amendments' or their impact was the route to credit, even though references to the Freedmen's Bureau, the Civil Rights Act (there were two such Acts in this period) and rarely the Enforcement Acts were also seen. Some candidates misinterpreted the question and offered material that was either outside the range of the question (for example the Emancipation Proclamation) or that was detrimental to African American lives rather than improving them.

Brevity in Questions 1 (a), (b) and (c)

Centres are reminded that these questions are short 'gateway' ones intended to ease candidates into the paper, and that they should be answered succinctly (full sentences are not required). Candidates who did so often displayed strong time-management skills throughout the paper. Equally, only the candidate's first answer can be credited. There were instances where a candidate had offered a valid answer to the question but as this followed an incorrect attempt, the valid response could not be credited. Candidates should cross out material that they do not wish to be marked.

Question 2

- 2 Write a clear and organised summary that analyses American settlement on the Plains between 1861 and 1877.

Support your summary with examples.

[9]

This is now a mature specification, and centres have clearly adjusted to the nature of Question 2 since many candidates provided effective answers to it. These candidates clearly recognised that their answers needed to move beyond a narrative and be structured around a second order concept (or concepts) of their choice. The most effective and common second order concept(s) for the question varies according to the specific question on that year's paper and, while they do not need to directly indicate which second order concept(s) they are attempting to analyse, this does need to be clear to examiners. This year, cause and consequence were the most common second order concepts seen and credited and some candidates attempted to consider both. Answers focused around cause frequently considered why there was settlement on the Plains in this period, how settlers overcame the problems they encountered on the Plains, and of the reasons there was conflict between settlers and Native Americans between 1861-1877 (please see Exemplar 1 which deals with all these issues). Answers focused around consequence frequently considered the negative impact of settlement on the Plains, whether to settlers themselves or to the Native Americans (as a consequence of that settlement).

Many candidates produced effective answers rooted both in settlement of the Plains and the relevant time period, with one or more examples of a second order concept analysed (again, please see Exemplar 1). Less effective answers provided either a narrative account of settlement on the Plains, or provided a list of reasons without analysing them, and these answers could not move beyond Level 1. Some candidates offered material that was outside of the time frame in the question (such as the 'Exodusters'), or addressed Native American life on the Plains without associating this with settlement in the period, and it was difficult for examiners to credit such answers.

Assessment for learning



As some second order concepts are more appropriate for a given Question 2 than others, centres might find it useful to break down past questions when preparing candidates for the examination. An A3 planning grid with the past questions along the x-axis and the potential second order concepts along the y-axis could be a highly effectively planning tool, which students could complete either individually or in pairs and then build on through class discussion. While students do not have to explicitly state which second order concept(s) they are constructing their answer around, having a specific concept in mind when writing a paragraph makes it more likely that they will analyse that concept in their answer, and some planning (and modelling) activities in the classroom to support this could be very helpful to their focus when writing class-based assessments and in the examination itself.

Exemplar 1

2		American settlement on the plains can be greatly attributed
		to homesteaders. The 1863 Homesteaders Act provided 160
		free acres of land if the for anyone moving to the Plains and
		cultivating this land for 5 years. This greatly attracted people
		to the Plains as it provided an incentive for people to make their
		residence there, leading to an influx in American settlers.

		However, this settlement of the Plains was not without challenges. The plains often were below freezing in the winter, and 40°C or hotter in summer. There was also a lack of food, which provided fencing, fuel and material for housing. This posed significant challenges, although were fought against by using Buffalo chips as fuel wood, the invention of barbed wire in the 1860s, and the construction of 'sod houses'. This meant that people adapted to the Plains, and led to them having greater survivability.
		However, settlement on the Plains negatively impacted the Plains Indians. The development of these homesteads, as well as an increase in ranching, put stress on Indian lands. For example, the Cheyenne and Lakota Sioux were often being forced out by white settlers building on their land. This led to hostility between the white and Indian peoples.

This response is a good example of an answer that reaches the top of Level 3, and does so by the end of the second paragraph; the third was not needed. Like many strong answers this year, this response focused on the second order concept of causation. The first paragraph successfully analyses the reason the Homestead Act increased settlement (established at 'provided an incentive'; a fuller analytical statement is not required), the second demonstrates valid reasons why settlers solved problems with living on the Plains (there is a clear solution for the specific problems identified) and for good measure the final paragraph analyses why settlement was a cause of conflict with Native Americans ('this led to hostility').

Question 3

3 How did the Civil War affect the lives of African Americans between 1861 and 1865?

Explain your answer.

[10]

This question arises from a key and clear area of the third topic in the specification, and as stated in the 'Overview' section, many candidates approached this question effectively. In order to access Level 4 and higher, candidates were required to give a specific example of a measure or event that affected African American lives in this period, and make an explicit comment on how that event affected their lives. Two such examples opened up Level 5. Most commonly, candidates built their examples around the impact of the Emancipation Proclamation, the Sea Islands 'Experiment' and the 13th Amendment, although strong explanations were also seen drawing from the Second Confiscation Act. It was entirely possible for answers receive credit in Level 4 and higher from accurate material on the African American contribution to the Union Army, or from the negative reaction in the Union to the introduction of conscription and the resulting impact on many African Americans in the North.

Less effective answers were able to identify an effect on African American lives, but did not develop this claim with specific supportive evidence, or offered this evidence but did not make an explicit comment on how it affected African American lives. Some candidates offered material about the army, but whether this related to the Union or Confederate army was unclear, and such material was hard to credit above Level 1, as was generalised commentary about racism that was not rooted in the period of the Civil War itself. Other less successful answers offered material that went beyond the dates specified in the question (for example the 14th and 15th Amendment) or confused material between the Union and the Confederacy. Some candidates write about the causes of the American Civil War and this was not credited by examiners.

Question 4*

- 4* 'Plantation owners were the main group who benefited from slavery's expansion between 1793 and 1838.'

How far do you agree?

Give reasons for your answer.

[18]

Candidates have the option of answering either Question 4 or Question 5, and the majority of candidates chose to answer Question 4. Both questions – and Questions 8 and 9 on Section B – have the same rationale for awarding levels and marks. Candidates who offer valid material for either the stated group or other valid groups are credited in Level 2, with candidates who can then explain why this material led to their benefiting from the expansion of slavery between 1793 and 1838 being able to access Level 3 and beyond. Level 3 is given to candidates who offer one explained reason for either side of the argument (plantation owners being the group that benefited from the expansion of slavery between 1793 and 1838, or other groups benefiting). Level 4 credits candidates who offer two explained reasons which again could be on the same side of the argument, or one on each side. Level 5 credits candidates who offer three explanations providing there is some balance (e.g. two explained points for one side and one for the other) while Level 6 is reserved for candidates who offer four explained points covering both sides of the argument. The final mark – 18 – is reserved for candidates who in addition to reaching Level 6 combine or interact the factors in their answer to offer a supported judgement (or 'clinching argument') about whether the candidate agrees with the statement in the question.

A number of candidates produced strong answers to this question which maintained a focus on issues relevant to the expansion of slavery in this period, identifying a specific group and providing an explicit comment demonstrating why that group (planters or otherwise) benefited as a result. For planters (supporting the statement), common material included economic benefit, for example from the development of the cotton gin, the 'pushing' system or the additional land as a consequence of the Louisiana Purchase, the Missouri Compromise or the Indian Removal Act. Some candidates also referred to the 'Three Fifths Compromise' and how planters gained political power as a consequence, although this had to be developed with a clear understanding of how planters had political influence in the South to be credited. Examiners also had to satisfy themselves that the candidate's material was rooted in the expansion of slavery, and the same was true for explanations that challenged/disagreed with the statement. For this, frequent groups identified were Northern businesses, The South as a whole, slave traders and the US economy as a whole (which examiners credited as identifying a group).

Although strong answers to this question were seen (see Exemplar 2, below) some responses struggled to move beyond the lower levels because of their focus. Some answers were not rooted in the 'expansion of slavery' in this period (for example considering the Louisiana Purchase without connecting this to slavery), and others were structured around why slavery expanded in this period without considering the groups that benefited as a result. Others misinterpreted the question and offered material citing groups who did not benefit from the expansion of slavery, and examiners were unable to credit this. Alternatively, less successful responses disregarded the time frame of the question and wrote about issues occurring after 1838 (such as the Kansas-Nebraska Act) and again such material could not be credited.

Exemplar 2

		The slave trade expansion of slavery
		also benefited many ordinary people such
		as traders. New Orleans was a the hub
		of the 'cotton kingdom' in the deep south.
		As slavery expanded it became a bustling
		city with its population tripling before
		by 1819. It was a seaport with trade links
		to Europe, providing jobs on trade ships
		carrying cotton or in the auction houses
		where enslaved people were sold. For
		many the expansion of slavery and therefore
		the cotton trade was what provided them
		with work, as well as helping to support
		the economy of the country in general.

This response demonstrates the necessary 'moving parts' required for candidates to focus sufficiently on the question to receive credit for an explanation and is helpful as the paragraph concerned is relatively succinct. The candidate identifies a group other than plantation owners that benefited from the expansion of slavery, provides clear supporting detail for this group, and there is a clear reference to the expansion of slavery in the paragraph together with an explicit statement of why the group benefited. Across four paragraphs following this format – two focused on plantation owners and two on other groups – this candidate was able to accumulate sufficient credit to be given a mark in Level 6.

Question 5*

- 5* 'The most important development that took place in the USA between 1877 and 1900 was the changes to the lives of the Native Americans of the Plains.'

How far do you agree?

Give reasons for your answer.

[18]

This was the less popular of the two optional essay questions, even though this question potentially gave candidates wider scope from which to draw their material, and as a consequence a greater proportion of strong answers were seen. Typically, candidates offered one or two paragraphs detailing developments affecting Native Americans (to agree with the statement) and then attempted to challenge the view with material focused around African Americans, developments in agriculture (such as 'bonanza farms'), developments in 'big business' and the growth of cities. Answers which were able to provide specific examples of developments within the period 1877-1900 and make an explicit comment showing why that development was important was credited with explanation. Developments could be considered as damaging or beneficial; either was credited.

Strong answers were seen from candidates from across the ability range. Most commonly, material for Native Americans referred to the impact of assimilation policies, including reservations, boarding schools, the Dawes Act and the actions of the 'Friends of the Indians', and were almost always considered to have had a detrimental impact (although a small number of candidates advanced arguments that the Dawes Act and the 'Friends of the Indians' were beneficial to some Native Americans). Material challenging the statement frequently cited the reversal of the gains African Americans made during Reconstruction, the positive developments for African Americans from initiatives like the Tuskegee Institute, the negative impact of 'bonanza farms' on other inhabitants of the Plains, and positive and negative aspects big business and the growth of cities had on the American people.

Less successful responses offered narrative accounts without an explicit comment on why the developments considered were important, or offered material that was outside of the time period. For example, some candidates wrote about the 'Plains Wars' without considering their impact on the period 1877-1900, or the impact of the Transcontinental railroad. Other candidates were confused as to the provisions of the Dawes Act, believing that the Act created the reservation system rather than seeking to undermine it. As always, centres are encouraged to support their candidates' understanding of the five sections of the specification, since questions are frequently structured around these, and material outside of the period relevant to the question cannot be credited.

Assessment for learning



A significant number of candidates approached the question paper by answering the high tariff questions first. This is an entirely acceptable approach as a way to manage time effectively in the examination, but it is recommended to do this within the specific sections of the paper. Some candidates answered the high tariff questions for this section of the paper (Section A) along with the high tariff questions for Section B before moving to the lower tariff questions for both. This is not a recommended approach since the candidate is increasing their cognitive load by having both sections of the paper in their working memory at the same time.

Exemplar 3

5	While I agree that changes to Native life were important from 1577 to 1900, ultimately change other changes impacted more people. Firstly, I agree because Native Americans faced a massive loss in culture. For example, they lost their nomadic lifestyle, and reservations along with boarding schools were intentionally designed to force the Native Americans to assimilate into White society. More specifically, Indians were forced onto reservations due to settlers on the Plains - the Pueblo People's herds of sheep were dying due to ranchers and Homesteaders fencing off land and water. This As a result, they were forced onto plantations where they were forced to farm squash and corn and live in lodges, removing nomadic aspects. Moreover, the governance government further diluted culture on reservations by putting two contrasting tribes together. For example, the Cheyenne and Arapaho had different cultures, but were put on the same reservation in hopes to remove culture. This meant that Native Americans faced a massive shift in their nomadic culture, and slowly lost their tribal cultures. This was a significant change for all the Native Americans, therefore I agree that this was was one of the most important developments.
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		Secondly, I agree since Native American culture was removed from future generations, significantly changing their way of life. For example, before 1877 children would be brought up by their tribe and learn their tribe's culture. However, by the 1880s, boarding schools ^{like Carlisle} had been introduced which distilled their culture. More specifically, the 1883 Dawes Act
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		introduced boarding schools and meant that Native children would now grow up learning White, Christian values. Natives like La Fleche Picotte graduated and assimilated into White American society, becoming a doctor while even the less successful were forced to conform to American White standards. For example, "Luther" Standing Bear was forced to change their name to a more appropriate, English-sounding name - Luther. This meant that Native culture was slowly ^{diluted} removed from 1877 to 1900, with children being more and more removed from their culture. They ^{thus} this meant that Consequently, the Native American's descendants experienced a massive shift in culture and identity over this period, slowly integrating into the settlers' society and therefore I agree that changes to the lives of Native Americans was the biggest development.
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However, I disagree since Black Americans experienced a massive shift economically, and this could be seen as the most important development for the Black community. For example, some sought to claim land and improve their lives. More specifically, the Exodusters led by Benjamin Singleton in 1879 went to Kansas to claim land promised in the Homestead Act. By 1880 there were 15,000 in Kansas. This meant that African Americans who previously ~~to~~ had no property to their name now had the chance to ~~se~~ farm their own land and make their own

living - they were no longer enslaved nor sharecropping (which offered so little it almost seemed like enslavement). Moreover, Booker T. Washington started the National Negro Business League, funding Black-owned businesses, and ~~by~~ ~~seen~~ by 1900 there were 23,000 teachers, 400 doctors and 300 ~~lawyers~~ ~~off~~ Black lawyers. This was a massive change for Africans in the South typically limited to farm work, and significantly improved their lives financially. Therefore, I disagree since ~~improving~~ economic developments was the most important for the Black community.

Finally, I disagree since the growth of business ~~and~~ ~~then~~ was the most important development. For example, by 1900 Chicago had 15 million people living in it, with skyscrapers (the first ones built in 1870) ~~and~~. This was because it impacted the ~~most~~ biggest range of people. For example, migrants like Andrew Carnegie were able to make fortunes: in 1883 he bought Homestead Steelworks and by 1900 he was the richest man in America. Moreover, 5300 manufacturing firms had been turned into 334 corporations by 1900. This meant that ~~smaller~~ small business owners experienced a massive change in their life - they went from being owners to workers. Moreover, lower class people of all races were able to find employment in these businesses. More specifically, some could be miners for companies like Anaconda, while ~~other~~ people in the Plains could work for

one of the 250 workers per Bonanza farm. This meant that the growth of big businesses impacted the lives of all people - rich and poor, Black and white. Therefore this was the ~~IT~~ also significantly changed the roles of these people, and therefore I disagree since the growth of big business is the most important development - it affected the most people.

While relatively lengthy, this response is a good example of an excellent answer to Question 5 that reaches a nuanced position on the statement in the question and was credited with the 'clinching argument' and so was given Level 6, 18 marks. In each of the four main paragraphs of the essay the candidate identifies and describes valid developments in the period 1877-1900 (the first two attributed to Native Americans and the others attributed to African Americans and the growth of business respectively) and for each there is a clear analysis of why the developments in that paragraph were important in the period. The final paragraph argues that the growth of business had a greater reach than the other material considered, and this was sufficient for a 'clinching argument'.

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