

MARK SCHEME

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level | History

Paper WHI03/1A | Option 1A: The USA, Independence to Civil War, 1763–1865

January 2026 Series

This mark scheme is intended to guide examiners and should be used alongside the Level Descriptors. Candidates may offer valid responses not listed here; examiners should reward well-reasoned and evidenced arguments appropriately. All questions carry 25 marks.

SECTION A – Source Evaluation (Question 1)

Question 1 How far could the historian make use of Sources 1 and 2 together to investigate the significance of the battle of Gettysburg in 1863? [25 marks]

Candidates must evaluate both sources using their content, provenance and historical context, and give a supported overall judgement on how far the sources together are useful for investigating the significance of Gettysburg.

Source 1 – New York newspaper article, 4 July 1863

Nature / Origin / Purpose: An eyewitness newspaper report published on the same day the battle ended. The journalist worked for a Northern (Union-sympathising) press outlet. The report was written to inform and rally the Northern public, meaning its language is highly triumphalist.

Utility – what it shows:

- Immediate Northern reaction to Gettysburg as a decisive Union victory over Lee.
- The emotional and psychological significance — described as the greatest Union triumph of the war, suggesting a turning point in morale.
- Portrays the Army of the Potomac as shifting from a defensive to an offensive posture.
- Use of religious and patriotic language ('God of Battles', 'Justice, Humanity and Freedom') reveals how the battle was framed as a moral cause.
- The claim that Confederate military power 'can never recover' reflects the widely held Northern view that Gettysburg ended Confederate offensive capability.
- Acknowledges the battle is not the final blow — Lee 'has been defeated but not yet annihilated' — providing a nuanced view of military significance.

Limitations:

- Written in the immediate aftermath; the journalist lacks the perspective to assess long-term strategic significance.
- Partisan Northern source; likely to exaggerate Union success and Confederate weakness.
- Does not reflect Confederate perspectives on the battle's significance.
- Omits the enormous casualty figures (~50,000 total) which are central to any assessment of Gettysburg's significance.

Source 2 – The Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln, 19 November 1863

Nature / Origin / Purpose: A formal presidential speech delivered at the dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery, four months after the battle. Lincoln's purpose was to honour the fallen and redefine the purpose of the Civil War in terms of democratic ideals and national survival.

Utility – what it shows:

- Confirms the symbolic and national significance of Gettysburg beyond its military outcome: it became a site of national mourning and commemoration.
- Lincoln frames the battle within the founding ideals of equality and liberty, elevating Gettysburg into the wider narrative of American democratic identity.
- The speech gives insight into how the Union government sought to reinforce public commitment to the war effort at a difficult mid-war moment.
- The reference to 'unfinished work' shows that Lincoln understood Gettysburg as significant but not decisive — the war must continue.
- The famous phrase about government 'of the people, by the people, for the people' demonstrates how Gettysburg became a defining moment for American national ideology.
- Useful for understanding the political significance of Gettysburg in shaping war aims and public resolve.

Limitations:

- A crafted political speech — Lincoln's language is deliberately rhetorical and idealistic, not a factual account of the battle.
- Lincoln himself downplays the speech ('The world will little note nor long remember what we say here'), though ironically the opposite proved true.
- Limited military detail — does not directly address tactical or strategic significance.
- Four months after the battle; does not capture immediate reactions or consequences.

Use Together – Combined Analysis

- Together, the sources cover immediate military reaction (Source 1) and longer-term symbolic/political significance (Source 2), offering complementary perspectives.
- Both agree Gettysburg was a major Union victory and a potential turning point; neither treats it as the final end of the Confederacy.
- Both sources reflect Northern/Union perspectives only — a significant limitation for any balanced historical investigation.
- Contextual knowledge should be deployed: the fall of Vicksburg on 4 July 1863 occurred simultaneously, Confederate casualty rates, Lee's subsequent retreat, the diplomatic impact on Britain and France reconsidering recognition of the Confederacy.
- Candidates should note that the sources are more useful for political and morale significance than for military-strategic assessment.

Level Descriptors for Question 1 (25 marks)

Level	Marks	Descriptor
Level 5	21–25	Analyses both sources with depth, evaluating provenance and content critically. Integrates well-selected contextual knowledge to assess utility and limitations. Reaches a well-supported, balanced overall judgement about how far the sources together are useful.
Level 4	16–20	Analyses both sources and evaluates provenance and content. Uses contextual knowledge to support analysis. Judgement is present and generally well-supported.
Level 3	11–15	Explains how both sources are useful with some reference to provenance or context. Judgement is offered but may not be fully developed or balanced.
Level 2	6–10	Describes the content of both sources with limited analysis. Some reference to provenance or context but not clearly linked to utility. Limited or no judgement.
Level 1	1–5	Offers simple statements about the sources. Little or no provenance analysis. No meaningful judgement.

SECTION B – Thematic Essay (Answer ONE of Questions 2–3)

Question 2 'Resolving the issue of slavery was the main obstacle to the successful development of a new American nation in the years 1775–91.' How far do you agree? [25 marks]

Candidates should address the stated factor (slavery) and consider alternative obstacles, reaching a supported judgement on the relative significance of slavery compared with other challenges facing nation-building.

Evidence supporting the statement (slavery as main obstacle):

- The Constitutional Convention (1787) nearly collapsed over slavery: the Three-Fifths Compromise and the Slave Trade Clause were bitterly contested and essential to Southern ratification.
- The Northwest Ordinance (1787) showed the divisive nature of slavery expansion — prohibiting slavery north of the Ohio River reflected deep sectional tensions even in this period.
- Southern delegates threatened to walk out without protections for slaveholding interests; without compromise, constitutional union may not have been achieved.
- Slavery undermined the stated ideals of the Declaration of Independence (1776) — 'all men are created equal' — creating a fundamental ideological contradiction at the heart of the new nation.
- The continuing profitability of slavery meant Southern states had strong economic incentives to resist any federal interference, complicating economic and political integration.

Evidence against (other significant obstacles):

- **Financial crisis:** The Continental Congress's inability to tax under the Articles of Confederation led to severe debt, hyperinflation, and the collapse of the Continental currency — arguably the most immediate threat to national viability.
- **Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation:** No executive, no power to regulate interstate commerce, no national judiciary, and unanimous amendment requirement made effective governance virtually impossible.
- **Shays' Rebellion (1786–87):** Demonstrated internal disorder and the inability of the federal government to maintain order, directly triggering the Constitutional Convention.
- **Foreign threats:** British forces remained in the Great Lakes region in violation of the 1783 Treaty of Paris; Spanish control of the Mississippi threatened western expansion and trade.
- **Interstate rivalries:** Trade disputes, border conflicts, and competing currency systems threatened to fragment the new nation.
- **Loyalist opposition and lack of national identity:** A significant portion of the population remained Loyalist or apathetic, undermining unity.

Indicative overall judgements:

Strong answers will weigh the relative significance of slavery against structural/financial challenges. A balanced argument might conclude that while slavery was uniquely dangerous in the long term, the more immediate obstacles were the financial weakness and institutional failures of the Confederation period. Alternatively, candidates may argue that slavery was indeed the central obstacle because it threatened the very ideological foundations and Southern participation in the union. Both positions can score Level 5 if well-evidenced and substantiated.

Question 3 'The most important event that contributed to increasing political tensions, in the years 1828–37 and 1850–61, was the Lincoln-Douglas debates.' How far do you agree? [25 marks]

Note: The Lincoln–Douglas debates took place in 1858, which falls within the 1850–61 period. Candidates should address the stated event and evaluate its significance against other key events across both specified periods.

Evidence supporting the statement:

- The 1858 Senate debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas in Illinois were nationally reported and dramatically heightened sectional awareness of the slavery debate.
- Douglas's 'Freeport Doctrine' (that territories could effectively exclude slavery) alienated Southern Democrats, contributing directly to the 1860 Democratic Party split.
- Lincoln's 'House Divided' speech (associated with the debates) framed the nation as unable to endure permanently half slave and half free — radicalising Northern opinion.
- The debates elevated Lincoln to national prominence, making his 1860 presidential candidacy possible — a candidacy whose success triggered Southern secession.

Evidence against — other events in 1828–37:

- **Nullification Crisis (1832–33):** South Carolina's attempt to nullify federal tariffs exposed the fundamental tension between states' rights and federal authority, directly prefiguring secession. Jackson's Force Bill showed how volatile this tension was.
- **Nat Turner's Rebellion (1831):** Increased Southern fears about slave revolts, leading to harsher slave codes and growing Southern defensiveness about the institution.
- **The Gag Rule (1836):** Congress's refusal to receive anti-slavery petitions showed the extent to which slavery had poisoned political discourse.
- **The growth of abolitionism:** Formation of the American Anti-Slavery Society (1833) and publication of *The Liberator* significantly escalated the rhetoric of the slavery debate.

Evidence against — other events in 1850–61:

- **Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Act:** Northern outrage at federal enforcement of slave-catching enormously radicalised Northern opinion and made compromise harder.
- **Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854):** Repealed the Missouri Compromise, opened the question of slavery in new territories, and directly caused massive political realignment — destroying the Whig Party and creating the Republican Party.
- **'Bleeding Kansas' (1855–56):** Guerrilla warfare in Kansas and the caning of Senator Sumner on the Senate floor made sectional violence visible at the national level.
- **Dred Scott decision (1857):** Chief Justice Taney's ruling that Congress had no power to restrict slavery in territories, and that Black Americans had no constitutional rights, was arguably more polarising than the debates.
- **John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry (1859):** Inflamed Southern fears of Northern-sponsored slave revolt and hardened Southern calls for secession.

Indicative overall judgements:

The debates are significant but unlikely to be judged as the single most important factor. Most high-level answers will argue that the Kansas-Nebraska Act or the Dred Scott decision had more direct, structural impacts. The Nullification Crisis is the strongest counter-argument for the 1828–37 period. Candidates may also argue that the debates are better seen as a symptom rather than a cause of sectional tension.

Level Descriptors for Section B Questions (25 marks each)

Level	Marks	Descriptor
Level 5	21–25	Analyses and evaluates a range of factors with precise, accurate evidence. Reaches a convincing, well-substantiated overall judgement that directly addresses the question. Argument is consistently analytical throughout.
Level 4	16–20	Explains several factors with accurate supporting evidence. Judgement is clear and supported. Some analytical development of relative significance.
Level 3	11–15	Explains factors relevant to the question with some supporting evidence. A judgement is attempted but may not be fully sustained or supported throughout.
Level 2	6–10	Describes relevant events or factors with some factual accuracy. Limited explanation of significance. Little or no judgement.

Level 1	1–5	Mostly descriptive, with limited relevance and little or no accurate factual support. No meaningful judgement.
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Total for Paper: 50 marks | Section A: 25 marks | Section B: 25 marks