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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2017

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level

History Unit 3: WHI03

Paper 1D: Civil Rights and Race Relations in the
USA, 1865-2009

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Introduction

WHI03 is a new International Advanced level examination and was examined for the first time this January. WHI03 1D is divided into two sections. Section A comprises a compulsory source based question and assesses source analysis and evaluation skills (AO2). Section B consists of two essay questions of which the student is expected to answer one of them. They will assess the knowledge and understanding of the period in breadth (AO1). Questions, in this section, will be set so that they connect two or more of the key topics in the specification and will target a range of concepts such as cause, consequence, significance, similarity/difference and change/continuity.

The time available for the paper did allow students the opportunity to plan their work and many took advantage of this as evidenced by the plans included. However, this was not the case with all and it would be advisable for candidates to spend a short while getting their thoughts in order before writing their answers. This would be relevant to both sections of the paper.

In general, it was section A that seemed to present the greater challenge to the students as they had to consider two primary sources and their use to the historian in investigating an historical issue. Difficulties were encountered in moving beyond surface comprehension of the sources and evaluation which was little more than either stereotypical judgements or, at best, questionable assumptions drawn from the sources. Those that were more successful drew inferences from the sources and interrogated the evidence with support from relevant contextual knowledge.

Section B responses generally scored higher marks as there was much greater focus and engagement with the stated issues in the questions. Many responses showed good knowledge of the periods studied and were able to develop arguments which crossed the key topics being considered. Although some essays remained predominantly narrative they were in a minority.

Question 1

For question 1 stronger responses showed a clear understanding of both sources and were able to draw out inferences from them which related to the significance of Martin Luther King to the civil rights movement. Good contextual knowledge was deployed to discuss the strengths of the evidence and some consideration was given to interpreting the material in the context of the values and concerns of the society from which it was derived. The very best interrogated the evidence and made clear supported judgements which weighed up the strengths or otherwise of the material in relation to the investigation under consideration.

Weaker responses appeared in a number of different forms. There were those where paraphrasing of the sources dominated and very few, if any, inferences relevant to the stated issue were made. In these types of responses contextual knowledge was often limited and, if evident, used to simply expand, confirm or challenge matters of detail in the sources. However, in some responses there was considerable knowledge displayed and focused on the specified enquiry but with almost no or exceptionally limited references to the sources. As this question is targeting AO2 (analysis and evaluation of source material) these kinds of responses cannot score highly. In other instances, where utility was addressed through the provenance it was often based on either stereotypical judgements or questionable assumptions.

Question 2

This was by far the more popular of the two questions. The question considered how far the policies of President Roosevelt addressed the political and economic problems of black Americans which had existed since the last decades of the Nineteenth Century. Stronger responses clearly outlined both the political and economic problems that persisted and displayed good knowledge of both the attempts made by Roosevelt and the difficulties he experienced in doing so to weigh up the extent to which he was successful. Key policy areas such as the New Deal were explored and discussed using valid criteria to judge success. Key obstacles to doing more such as the influence of southern Democrats were often discussed well.

Weaker responses tended towards either narrative or generalisation. If analysis was present, the support offered tended to be limited in both range and depth. Weaker responses also found it harder to outline clearly the nature of the problems that persisted by the time Roosevelt was president and so struggled to make supported judgements relevant to the question.

Question 3

There were very few responses to this question in which students had to consider whether American presidents hindered more than helped the civil rights movement across the whole period studied. The hope was that stronger responses would consider a range of presidents that were mentioned in the specification key topics. Ranging from Andrew Johnson to Barack Obama the expectation was that their influence on black American civil rights would be discussed and judgements made in relation to the question as to their overall role. The responses produced didn't quite manage to accomplish this as in some cases irrelevant other issues were debated more prominently rather than presidents. This resulted in ill focused responses. Also there were instances where only a very narrow time band formed the majority of the answer thereby limiting the judgements and therefore the marks that could be awarded.

Students are offered the following advice for the future:

Section A

- Students need to draw from the sources inferences that are relevant to the enquiry in the question. These inferences should be developed through the use of contextual knowledge which is relevant to the enquiry in the question.
- Students need to move beyond stereotypical judgements or assumptions that are questionable and unsupported when engaging with the provenance of the source.
- Students need to consider the weight the evidence has in helping them reach judgements relevant to the enquiry.
- Students should consider the stance or purpose of the author of the source and be aware how this might be affected by the values and concerns of the society from which it is drawn.
- Sources should be interrogated with distinctions being made between such things as claims and opinions.
- Students must avoid engaging with the enquiry simply from their knowledge. The answer needs to be focused on how the sources help the historian and knowledge used to discuss the inferences or points arising from the sources.

Section B

- Students need to read the question carefully so as to fully understand the time periods being considered and the full range of issues that they are being asked to consider
- Students would benefit from taking some time to plan their answers. As the examination is quite generous in its time allocation this would still allow plenty of time to write the answers.
- Students should consider what criteria might be used to shape or reinforce the judgements being made
- Students need to avoid description and develop analytical responses which make clear and supported judgements relevant to the question
- Students should try to establish links between the arguments being made and, if relevant, weigh up the relative importance of them.

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