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Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In History (WHI03) Paper 1D

Paper 3: Thematic Study with Source Evaluation

Option 1D: Civil Rights and Race Relations in the
USA, 1865–2009

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Principal Examiner Report WHI03 D

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 which might include cause, consequence, significance, similarity/difference and change/continuity.

The time available for the paper did allow candidates the opportunity to plan their work and many took advantage of this as evidenced by the plans included. Also this helped to keep the candidates focused more clearly on the task in hand. 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 candidates as they had to consider two primary sources and their use to the historian in investigating an historical issue. There was some evidence that greater familiarity with this type of question was resulting in less very weak and ill focused answers. Difficulties were still 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. This was particularly the case when dealing with the provenance of the sources where unsupported references to the bias in a source continue but with little reward. Moreover there were a significant number of answers that did refer to the weight of the evidence but with little or no support to back up the point being made. Evaluation needs to be supported with reference to the source. Those that were more successful drew inferences, with support from the sources, and interrogated the evidence with support from relevant contextual knowledge that was applied to illuminate the points being made.

Section B responses generally scored higher marks as there was much greater development and engagement with the stated issues in the questions and a clear awareness of the conceptual focus of them. Many responses showed good knowledge of the periods studied and were able to develop arguments which crossed and linked the key topics being considered. However there were still some answers which only dealt with one of the time periods being questioned about, making it difficult for these to score highly. Although some essays remained predominantly narrative they were in a minority. The generic mark scheme clearly indicates the four bullet-points which are the focus for awarding marks and centres should note how these descriptors progress through the levels. Candidates do need to be aware of key dates, as identified in the specification, and ensure that they draw their evidence in responses from the appropriate time period.

Comments on Individual questions.

Question 1.

For question 1 stronger responses showed a clear understanding of both sources, used them together and were able to draw out inferences from them which related to attitudes by black Americans towards their position in society in the late nineteenth century. Both sources were full of possibilities to draw inferences and to link these to the utility of the sources to the historian in the context of the enquiry (e.g. Washington was using his speech to put increasing pressure on his own community to tackle the problems they faced). Moreover the best answers produced thoughtful observations concerning the provenance of the sources to help judge how far the historian could make use of them to consider the enquiry. 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 (e.g. The increasing implementation of Jim Crow laws was placing great strain on the black American community). 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 enquiry under consideration. The latter point is important as the focus of the answer submitted needs to be directly on the area of enquiry asked in the question.

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. Moreover many responses focused too much attention on what the sources left out and used this as the basis for their evaluation. Unless candidates can show that omissions are deliberate, this line of argument carries little value. Source material cannot be expected to include everything, so observing that the source doesn't mention a specific point, unless being used for an example of deliberate omission is unlikely to be a valid criteria for judgement. Candidates are asked to evaluate what is there rather than what is not.

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. Moreover in a number of cases knowledge displayed didn't relate to the sources but explored black concerns beyond the late nineteenth century. Knowledge that is deployed by the candidates needs to be something that could possibly have been known or understood by the author of the source, and so applied to the source, rather than something that had not yet taken place. In other instances, where utility was addressed through the provenance it was often based on either stereotypical judgements or questionable assumptions. This often took the form of comments such as the speech is by Booker T Washington and he knew what he was talking about (Source 2) or as Turner is a Bishop we can trust everything he says (Source 1).

Question 2

This was the most popular of the two questions. The question considered whether developments in the years 1933–45 under Roosevelt's presidency improved the lives of black Americans more than the developments in the years 1865–77. Stronger responses clearly addressed the developments over both periods and weighed up the relative importance of President Roosevelt's decisions as one of them. Key areas such as the period of the New Deal and the Reconstruction years were explored and discussed using valid criteria to judge the extent of agreement. Counterarguments relating to the lack of real progression in both periods or the relative importance of one period over the other were often discussed well. The very best were wide-ranging in the evidence they assembled and sustained in their argument.

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 actual decisions that President Roosevelt made and so struggled to make supported judgements relevant to the question. Occasional responses only engaged with one of the two periods given in the question and so limited severely their ability to score highly.

Question 3

This question was less popular and asked candidates to look at whether the rulings of the Supreme Court in the Brown case (1954) was the most significant factor in advancing civil rights in the years 1954-2009. Strong answers successfully looked at the Brown ruling of the Supreme Court and its relative importance. These included its importance in successfully challenging Plessy v Ferguson but also considered the difficulties involved in implementation when weighing up the evidence. The best answers then considered and weighed up the relative importance of other factors in advancing the cause of civil rights. Popular amongst these were the influence of certain presidents such as John F Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson as well as the work of civil rights activists.

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 bring in supporting examples from across the whole period and this made it harder to make supported judgements relevant to the question. Occasional responses showed little understanding of what the Brown case actually was and so limited severely their ability to score highly.

Students are offered the following advice for the future:

Section A

- Candidates 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.
- Candidates need to move beyond stereotypical judgements or assumptions that are questionable and unsupported when engaging with the provenance of the source. References to the biased nature of sources must be explained and supported in the context of the enquiry in the question.
- Candidates need to consider the weight the evidence has in helping them reach judgements relevant to the enquiry and support their comments with direct reference to the sources or provenance.
- Candidates 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 at the time it was produced.
- Sources should be interrogated, with distinctions being made between such things as claims and opinions. The sources should be used together at some point in the answer.
- Candidates 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

- Candidates 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
- Candidates 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
- Candidates should consider what criteria might be used to shape or reinforce the judgements being made. For example in a continuity/change question such criteria as political, social or economic, if relevant, might help to provide a framework
- Candidates need to avoid description and develop analytical responses which make clear and supported judgements relevant to the question
- Candidates should try to establish links between the arguments being made and, if relevant, weigh up the relative importance of them.