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Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2021

Pearson Edexcel International A Level
History

International Advanced

Paper 3: Thematic Study with Source Evaluation
Option 1A: The USA, Independence to Civil War,
1763–1865

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Principal Examiner Report WHI03 A

WHI03 1A 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 candidate 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. Most plans were of a reasonable length and detail so as to outline the overall argument but occasionally they became so lengthy that they constricted the time available to actually write the response.However, 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, generalised and ill focused answers. However,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. Those that were more successful drew inferences from the sources,supported them with appropriate quotations and interrogated the evidence with support from relevant contextual knowledge that was applied to illuminate the points being made. The question requires candidates to use the sources 'together' and it was pleasing to see that the majority of candidates continue to be aware of this requirement. It can be achieved using a variety of different approaches.

In section B centres do need to be aware that questions can address the same time periods from the specification and that there is no requirement to always cover all key topics in an individual paper. 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. 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 and were able to draw out inferences from them which related to the nature of President Jackson's opposition to the Bank of the United States in July 1832. 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. Jackson implies that hitherto Congress has favoured elites and the wealthy over the wider populace ('have encouraged government to make only them richer through Acts of Congress.')). 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. Therefore some candidates focused successfully on the political circumstances of 1830's America and differing perceptions of Jackson at the time to support their judgements. 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 responses 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. On occasions the answers drifted away from the focus on the nature of Jackson's opposition and concentrated simply on the issue of Jackson's popularity to the detriment of the overall mark. Direct focus on the specific issue in the question is essential. 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 valid criteria for judgement. Candidates are asked to evaluate what is there rather than what is not. If the author of the source has omitted something intentionally in order to modify meaning or distort the message of the source, then it will be relevant to discuss that in reaching a conclusion. However, discussion of all the things that the sources might have contained but failed to do so is unlikely to contribute to developing the argument.

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 a mixture of stereotypical judgements or questionable assumptions such as Jackson, as President, knew what he was talking about or Webster was a lawyer and so could not be trusted.

Question 2

This was the least popular of the two questions. The question considered whether the development of a new American Nation, in the years 1776-91, was hindered mainly by disagreements between the states. Stronger responses clearly weighed up the issue across the whole period. Key areas such as federalism, war with Great Britain, constitutional disagreements and attitudes to slavery were explored and discussed using valid criteria to judge success.

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 often only considered part of the time period in any depth and so made it difficult to address all the demands and to make supported judgements relevant to the question.

Question 3

There were more responses to this question in which candidates had to consider whether the Dred Scott Supreme Court decision of 1857 was the most significant event relating to slavery in the years 1850-65. Strong answers successfully considered the significance of the case itself and weighed it up against other important events across the period before making supported judgements. These included such as the compromise of 1850, Bleeding Kansas, John Brown's attempt at provoking rebellion and the Emancipation Proclamation 1863. Judgements made were clear, well supported and based on clearly established criteria.

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 period and this made it harder to make supported judgements relevant to the question. Occasional responses showed little understanding of the Dred Scott decision and largely became a narrative of events from the period. This 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 both supported and 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
- Candidates need to consider the weight the evidence has in helping them reach judgements relevant to the enquiry
- 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 from which it is drawn.
- 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 criteria such 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.

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