

# HISTORY (US)

Paper 9279/51

Paper 51

## Key Messages

- For the source-based question, candidates need to *analyse* the sources in order to show how far they support the given hypothesis. This means taking the sources at face value. For higher marks, candidates should *evaluate* the sources, using the source itself, other sources or their own knowledge to decide how reliable the source is.
- For the essay questions, candidates need to develop a balanced argument which answers the question set. That argument should be structured into a series of key points with a paragraph per point. Each point needs explaining, illustrating with relevant and detailed historical evidence and finally each point needs relating to the question. A conclusion is absolutely essential. It must summarise the main points and answer the question directly.
- Candidates can improve responses by including some precise, detailed examples to support their arguments. Many essays in particular involve no more than general historical explanation, often without any reference to specific dates. History is about change and continuity over time. The more specific, both evidence and the candidate's awareness of time, the higher the marks which can be awarded.
- In order to prepare for the examination, candidates are advised to practise writing answers against the clock.

## General Comments

- As candidates become more familiar with source-based question, there is a tendency to use rather formulaic approaches to source analysis and evaluation. Candidates consider each source for reliability and validity. There is no need to distinguish the two. Reliability is the focus of source evaluation on this paper.

## Comments on Specific Questions

### **Section A: Source-Based Question**

#### **Question 1**

The sources included a cartoon of four Southern states following South Carolina in chasing 'the secession humbug' and heading towards the edge of the cliff as they did so. This cartoon gave rise to a range of different interpretations. Some argued that the four states following South Carolina were actually pushing a presumably reluctant South Carolina towards the cliff edge. Others showed they had not fully read the provenance when they stated that the breakaway donkey following a gentler path represented the border states. In terms of origins of the cartoon, some maintained it came from Georgia. The cartoon portrays the secessionist states in such a negative light that it must come from the North.

There is enough in the cartoon to identify its source and evaluate its reliability, even before contextual knowledge is brought into play. The same point applies to Source B as well; lack of specific information about the source should not prevent evaluation. Source B could be evaluated by cross-reference to both the cartoon and to Source E. Many thought the latter to be Robert Toombs' autobiography rather than his biography; at this level candidates are expected to know the difference between the two and its relevance for source evaluation. Source D, from President Grant's memoirs – which can be defined as an autobiography of part of the writer's life – was written at the end of his life as he was dying. In terms of the hypothesis,

elements of all sources could be used for and against, The keyword in the hypothesis is 'fully'.  
effectively to construct their argument, others ignored it completely.

### Question 2

This was popular and reasonably well answered. Most candidates knew something about the topic. Many, however, interpreted the question too generally. They took it to read 'Describe the factors which caused the destruction of the way of life of *Indians* in the *nineteenth century*'. Thus they ignored three key factors in the question. They described rather than assessed. They considered all Indians, not just the Plains Indians. They covered the whole of the nineteenth century rather than the second half. By doing so, they limited the marks they could receive. The more focused the answer, the better candidates could achieve.

### Question 3

This was also a popular choice, those who chose the question knew something about Reconstruction and how far it helped ex-slaves. Most candidates provided arguments and evidence on both sides of the argument. The better answers knew something about the changing nature of Reconstruction within the 10-15 years before its abandonment in 1877. Some went beyond the Reconstruction era to describe the Jim Crow policies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which was appropriate as long as it was linked with Reconstruction. To mention *Plessy vs. Ferguson* in 1896 was to go too far.

### Question 4

A minority of those who attempted this question misinterpreted 'trade unions' to be trade associations rather than labour unions. As there were few formal trade associations at the time, these candidates found it hard to write anything of relevance, even in terms of their redefinition of trade unions. The majority who did define their terms correctly understood that the question allowed the inclusion of other factors which contributed to US economic growth, such as the contribution of the big names of US industry such as Rockefeller and Carnegie. The question required some details of the work of various labour unions, especially in the Progressive era of the early twentieth century, but those efforts were not the exclusive focus of the question.

### Question 5

This question covered a less popular aspect of race relations. Most candidates interpreted it as focusing on military events during the two wars, about which they knew only a little. They neglected the home front. They overlooked the post-war impact of the two wars. Most important of all, they made few comparisons between the two wars and their impact. Answers became a description of the impacts of the two wars rather than a comparison of those impacts. 'Compare and contrast' requires candidates to consider the similarities and differences between the two wars. This approach was taken by a minority of candidates, who did not always provide the detailed examples needed to substantiate their comparisons.

### Question 6

This was a straightforward question which some candidates turned into one solely on the New Deal. The domestic policies of the FDR presidency were certainly part of the answer. However, they were not the whole answer. The Great Depression was essentially economic and thus assessment of the development of the US economy was needed before the New Deal was explained. The same applied to American society. Did the Great Depression divide or unite the American people? Many candidates wrote too generally about both economy and society. In addition, candidates were asked to evaluate and not just describe the effects of the Great Depression. To do so means candidates have to attempt to make some kind of historical judgement about the relative importance of the various developments they explain and illustrate. Few candidates went beyond describing, which limited the marks they could be awarded.

### Question 7

This was a popular question. Some candidates only covered the few years leading to American intervention in the Second World War, from 1937 to 1941. A few more mentioned the America decision not to join the League of Nations in 1919. The long period in between usually received little, if any, coverage. Candidates also tended to focus on US relations with Europe. Relations with China and Japan were infrequently mentioned, those with Central and South America hardly at all. Some candidates even turned the question into an essay on domestic affairs, writing about the inward-looking 'roaring' twenties and the depressed 1930s rather than foreign policy. There were some candidates who made a useful distinction between economic and diplomatic isolationism.

### Question 8

Almost everyone who answered this question disagreed strongly with the assertion. They argued that American life was revolutionised in the 1960s. They usually quoted the experiences of college students, women and African Americans in support of their argument. Often they used examples which came from the 1950s rather than the 1960s. This is a question where some knowledge of historical dates is vital. Elvis Presley rose to fame in the 1950s. The so-called 'British invasion' of groups such as the Beatles did not occur until 1964-5. For women, change was only just starting in the mid to late 1960s. The National Organisation for Women (NOW) was formed in 1966. Again, dates are important. With regard to African-Americans, many candidates concentrated on the methods used by the civil rights movement, often from the 1950s, when they should have focused on the outcomes of the movement for the lives of African Americans. In addition, the counter argument – that changes in lifestyles in the 1960s were NOT revolutionary – needed considering. In the late 1960s, political leaders used the phrase 'the silent majority' to make a clear contrast with the 'noisy minority'. Even President Nixon gave the term his seal of approval in 1969. The vast majority of white middle aged working and middle class Americans experienced no great change in their lifestyles in the 1960s – except when affected by the behaviour and beliefs of their children.