



History

Paper 1J (AS) Specimen Question Paper

Question 01 Student 2

Specimen Answer and Commentary

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Specimen Answer plus commentary

The following student response is intended to illustrate approaches to assessment. This response has not been completed under timed examination conditions. It is not intended to be viewed as a 'model' answer and the marking has not been subject to the usual standardisation process.

Paper 1J (AS): Specimen question paper

01 With reference to these extracts and your understanding of the historical context, which of these two extracts provides the more convincing interpretation of British expansion in Africa in the late nineteenth century?

[25 marks]

Student response

One interpretation as to why Britain expanded into Africa was due to the threat of security to its previously gained territories such as Cape Colony & Natal. Extract A demonstrates this where it comments on how Britain wanted to "reserve the largest possible sphere for its own future activities". Extract B also shares this common interpretation where it comments "imperial expansion was essentially defensive, new Empire brought into being to protect the old one". This interpretation can be supported by the fact that in 1884 there was a fear that Germany intended to link up with the Boer Transvaal republic, threatening the security of Cape Colony & Natal which were British assets. As a result Britain became involved in the partition of Africa to acquire new land, such as that between Cape Colony & Natal, to try and prevent other European Foreign powers from influencing the African native people in British territory and potentially comprising the integrity of British influence in areas already claimed. Lord Derby provides compelling evidence for this interpretation, commenting on the fact that, for Britain, it was the "difference between wanting new acquisitions and keeping what we have". This illustrates that Britain, rather than wanting to expand its empire into Africa for territorial gain, wanted to protect what it had already worked hard to claim and thus meant it had to secure new land in Africa to achieve this. One historian, A.J.P Taylor supports the security interpretation, believing that Britain expanded in Africa due to " a Struggle for mastery in Europe". This shows that British expansion in Africa was an attempt by Britain to maintain its dominance and thus security of assets not just in Africa but also throughout the rest of Europe. Britain was trying to discourage other European powers from challenging the security of its assets by claiming territory in Africa to promote the great dominance and imperial power of the British Empire. The interpretation that Britain expanded into Africa to secure previous territory is therefore convincing, as it wanted to ensure that areas such as Cape colony and Natal were secure & free from other rival dominance. Britain were fearful that had they not done this there position may have been weakened on the European front and thus the balance of power in Europe may have been compromised, which Britain wanted to avoid at all costs.

The interpretation that Britain expanded into Africa to secure its previous territories however can be challenged as this over exaggerates the desire of other European powers to disrupt Britain's assets. Ronald Hyam argues that politicians were "ever fearful that by creating confused rival claims to the same areas of African land European powers might risk outbreak of war among themselves". This suggests that in fact both the Extracts perceptions of the European threat are largely exaggerated. Moreover, Hyam suggests that European powers wanted to avoid African rulers supporting one European Sphere of Influence over another as this may drag imperial powers into mutual hostilities.

Most European powers wanted to avoid this, especially against Britain, as they were well aware of the power that Britain possessed. The interpretation that the security of British assets already in Africa was threatened is therefore over exaggerated & less convincing, as most European powers didn't want to challenge Britain through fear of entering war against them.

Another interpretation as to why Britain became involved in Africa was due to the unpredictable international relations between itself and other European powers. Extract A identifies this interpretation where it comments on how Britain sped up the partition of Africa when there was the "appearance of new European powers which had not previously shown any interest in Africa". This interpretation can be supported by events in 1884. In 1884 Britain signed a treaty with Portugal, recognising the ancient right of Portugal to the mouth of the river Congo, as they were worried about both French & King Leopold's ambitions to create a West African Empire. This suggests that Britain wanted to ensure that other European powers didn't gain too much influence over Africa and thus surpass Britain in order to maintain a balance of power in Europe. Kennedy does identify and support the interpretation that there was a threat from other European powers trying to "emulate Britain and its great power status". This illustrates that, due to competition from other powers trying to 'emulate' Britain, it had to remain one step ahead in ensuring it wasn't taken over by a rival power, which could compromise the balance of power in Europe. The interpretation that Britain became involved in Africa due to unpredictable international relations is therefore convincing, as Britain couldn't be sure of the intentions of different European powers. Britain had to ensure they could maintain their dominance over Europe and the 'balance of power'. Kennedy summarises this by stating, "Britain had to compete to gain land to defend dominance of imperial rule" This suggests that Britain had no choice but get involved in Africa if they wanted a stable, dominant power base in Europe.

However the interpretation that Britain became involved in Africa because of unpredictable international relations can be challenged as this overplays the threat from the European powers. The threat of European powers in Extract A has been exaggerated and Extract B identifies this flaw in the interpretation by commenting on how there was an "imagined foreign threat". This can be supported by the events that occurred in December 1885, the Berlin conference. The German Chancellor held a conference in Berlin to discuss how European powers could settle differences of territory peacefully. As a result of the conference Britain secured their interests on the Niger & subsequently gained a monopoly over the Palm oil trade on the river Niger, creating Nigeria. This suggests that European powers were willing to negotiate with Britain to come to a solution in which all were happy rather than out right violence and this therefore detracts from how convincing the international interpretation is. It clearly shows that European powers were capable of being rational towards Britain and thus the threat of unpredictable international relations is that of a small one, contrary to what the extract suggests. Furthermore Article 34 created the 'effective occupation' doctrine, which dictates that any European power that took possession of an African land had to inform other European powers. As a result this suggests that other powers were not as much of a threat as perceived and international relations were more positive than once anticipated with other European powers like Germany wanting the scramble for Africa to be as fair and bloodless as possible. The interpretation that Britain became involved due to unpredictable international relations is therefore less convincing as in fact other European powers were willing to recognise Britain's interests and wanted the annexation of Africa to be as fair as possible for everyone with minimal violence.

One final interpretation as to why Britain became involved in the Scramble for Africa was to secure its economic interests. Extract B demonstrates this interpretation where it comments on how “British statesmen & military leaders became obsessed by the need to ... secure the Suez Canal.” There is compelling evidence to suggest that Britain did have economic interests already in Africa & potentially new investments. For example in 1857 Britain became a large shareholder of Suez Canal Company when Disraeli bought Khedive’s four million pounds worth of shares (177,000 out of 400,000), a loan from the Rothschild family. This suggests that, when Egypt became bankrupt in 1875, Britain became involved to try and protect its economic investments in Africa, specifically the Suez Canal. Furthermore they were fearful that British investors might never see the benefit of their investments in Egypt if it fell into economic turmoil, hence why Britain becomes involved in the partition of Africa. Hobson further supports this interpretation when he writes, “imperial expansion arose when financial interests induced the government to intervene to protect their investments”. This suggests that Britain didn’t want to lose its previous assets in Africa, particularly in Egypt perhaps through fear of humiliation in relation to other European powers or back home in Britain itself and so had no choice but to become involved in Africa to secure economic interests. In a separate incident in 1869 British involvement began to increase in South Africa following the discovery of diamonds close to Cape Colony in 1869. This further supports the economic interpretation as Britain had only become interested in South Africa due to potential economic exploitation with the possibility of gain for Britain. The interpretation that Britain became involved in Africa due to economic factors is therefore convincing, as Britain did not want to lose the investment already placed in the Suez Canal. Furthermore if Britain had lost the canal all together it may have harmed their economic prosperity in other areas such as India that the Suez Canal provided a trade route for.

However the interpretation that Britain partook in the partition of Africa purely for economic interest is largely exaggerated as Britain had secured the majority of its economic interests elsewhere. For example the principle areas for British investment were the United States, Canada & Latin America where 7/10 of Britain’s total capital was sent overseas between 1880 and 1914. Moreover in 1914 the total investment in Africa was £37 million where as in the principle areas of British investment like Canada the total investment was £1780 million. This demonstrates that Britain’s economic interests were based far away from the African Continent and, with such a large proportion of investment in these other areas, it is clear that Britain felt more economically confident in those areas compared to Africa. Furthermore the economic interpretation in Extract B focuses too much on the importance of the Suez Canal and thus loses sight that Britain didn’t really want economic influence over many African colonies due to the vast amount of time and effort involved in maintaining protectorates. Percy Anderson, a British civil servant, in 1883 comments on how “ Protectorates are unwelcomed burdens, but in this case it is a question between British protectorates, which would be unwelcomed and French protectorates which would be fatal”. This suggests that Britain was not concerned about economic gain in Africa but more so interested in ensuring stability and dominance to maintain power in Europe. Britain wanted to ensure that other European powers couldn’t use the ‘scramble for Africa’ as an opportunity to rise above British influence. Thus ensuring that areas such as the Suez Canal were protected and functioning as trade routes was paramount to maintain British dominance in Europe. The interpretation that Britain took part in Africa for economic interests is therefore a less convincing interpretation as they had already achieved this elsewhere in the world. In fact economic prosperity and gain in Africa had been the result of Britain trying to strategically secure its position in world dominance over other imperial powers such as France rather than an intention to widen the economic horizon into Africa.

Overall Extract B provides the most convincing interpretation as to why Britain became involved in Africa. Although Extract A identifies British security as an interpretation as to why Britain became involved in Africa, it is Extract B that provides a more convincing interpretation of this. It comments on how “new Empire brought into being to protect the old one”. Britain, rather than being worried just about the threat of other European powers, were more concerned about their world Dominance as a whole and protecting their world Empire, providing a broader and more convincing interpretation of British pursuits in Africa. Furthermore, although possible to challenge the economic interpretation provided in Extract B, it is more supportive of the interpretation that Britain was trying to secure itself as the dominant figure through the use of economic stability. Moreover, in Extract A, there are far more convincing challenges against the interpretations portrayed in the Extract. For example the interpretation of unpredictable European international relations in Extract A has far more evidence that detracts from how convincing this interpretation is. The fact the European powers demonstrate they were willing to come to a mutual arrangement of the partition of Africa, in the December Berlin Conference, shows that they were not as much of a threat as Britain and indeed Extract A first perceive. In fact Extract B even identifies the weakness in this interpretation by commenting on how there was an ‘imagined foreign threat’ suggesting that Extract A has the much less convincing interpretation. On the whole Extract B provides the more convincing interpretation as to why Britain decided to enter the partition of Africa; to protect its dominance as a world figure.

Commentary – Level 5

There are many strengths in this answer. The views and interpretations of each extract are carefully examined and are fully corroborated and then challenged by reference to knowledge of context which is predominantly relevant and effective. There is an effective and persuasive summary and this answer is clearly a Level 5 response.

There are two areas where the answer is less strong. Occasionally, the extract to which knowledge is deployed is not always fully clear and, also occasionally, corroboration relies on the views of other historians rather the historical context itself. It does not quite cover all of the points made in the mark scheme, but this is still a high level response.