



History 7042

Additional Specimen Question Paper 2J (A-level)

Question 01 Student 1

Specimen Answer and Commentary

V1.0

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 2J (A-level): Additional specimen question paper

01 With reference to these sources and your understanding of the historical context, assess the value of these three sources to an historian studying the Compromise of 1850.

[30 marks]

Student response

Source A is a famous speech made by Daniel Webster in favour of the 1850 Compromise. The source is therefore useful to an historian as it highlights the arguments from a leading Northern Senator, which convinced many in the Senate to support the Compromise. Daniel Webster was a leading Northern Whig who would be able to broaden the appeal of the Compromise that had been proposed by the leading Southern Whig Henry Clay. This would be helpful to a historian as it shows that both Northern and Southern Whigs supported the Compromise. There was some surprise at Webster's support for the Compromise as he was seen as an opponent of slavery and the Compromise contained the controversial Fugitive Slave Act. Webster received a backlash in New England from abolitionists and has been accused of being inconsistent. The speech is therefore useful to historians as it shows that a leading figure was willing to put some of his beliefs to one side in order to find compromise over sectional issues. This highlights that the 1850 Compromise was a moment where leading political figures hoped that they could bring the USA together. The fact that Webster had his eye on high office most notably the Presidency is important when examining this extract. The speech could be seen as an attempt by Webster to gain support from Southern Whigs to bolster any future hopes he had for becoming President. The speech was made without much preparation and when Webster was suffering from ill health. All of this could be important to historians as it can be seen to show how close to failure the Compromise was. It could also however be used to suggest that Webster's speech was opportunist rather than showing a genuine desire for compromise.

The tone of Source A is designed to present Webster as a humble servant of the nation, he suggests he is not fit 'the helm' of the nation in the storm of the time. Historians may consider this to be false modesty or alternatively an indication of the severity of the crisis. He flatters the Senate 'a body the country looks, with confidence, for wise, moderate, patriotic and healing counsels'. This may help historians identify this as a speech aimed at persuading the Senate.

Webster stresses that he is speaking as 'an American' and Senator rather than a 'Massachusetts' or 'Northern' man showing that he is arguing that people needed to put aside sectional differences in favour of the national good. This is a good summary of the key argument for compromise and therefore useful to historians. There was real fear that sectionalism was becoming beyond control especially with talk of secession from the likes of Calhoun from the South. It was really important that Clay and Douglas who were driving the push for Compromise found voices that would support their position and Webster is clearly doing this in the extract.

Webster describes the potential threat to 'our institutions and government'. His argument would appeal to Senators given the uncertainty of what would happen if there was a failure to reach

compromise. Many Senators feared the collapse of the existing system in which they held a key position. The fact that Webster is playing on these fears to promote compromise would be useful to historians as it shows the atmosphere in the Senate.

Webster states that he is willing to play his part in finding compromise but does not see himself as taking the lead in the move to compromise. This is useful as it shows Webster's willingness to back his potential rivals for high office in Clay and Douglas in order to achieve compromise.

Source B is from a book written by Jefferson Davis who was President of the Confederacy during the Civil War. It was published in 1881 so is looking back on the Compromise of 1850 with hindsight and the knowledge that ultimately compromise failed. Jefferson Davis is likely to have wanted to use his book to present himself and the decision to secede in a positive light and find others to blame for the Civil War. The extract will therefore be useful to historians giving them a good insight into a Confederate version of history. The usefulness of the extract may be seen as being limited by the fact that Davis is looking to publicly defend his own actions and so may distort what happened.

At the time of the 1850 Compromise Jefferson Davis was an up and coming figure in Southern politics. The key defender of Southern States rights at the time was Calhoun but he died not long after the Compromise, Davis was seen as potentially the man to take on his mantle. The extract is useful to historians in this respect as it gives the view of a politician who was at the start of his career rather than that of the likes of Clay, Webster or Calhoun who would not live long beyond the passing of the Compromise.

Davis' tone displays the level 'excitement' in March 1850 surrounding compromise and the fact that he did get caught up in this excitement. Many in the South in 1850 shared this feeling. They believed there was not enough in the Compromise for the South with many of the compromise points favouring the North.

Interesting Davis argues that Clay who proposed the Compromise 'liked' Webster's speech less than Davis did himself (as a strong supporter of slavery and the South). This is interesting to the historian as it suggests that there were divides between the big hitters in the Compromise group.

Davis makes a number of strong statements, firstly suggesting that he was asked to join the pro-compromise camp but declined showing attempts to woo Southern Senators by the compromise group. Davis argues that even Clay believed that 'our young friend here may face trouble in the future' suggesting that that the Union faced potential conflict in that the compromise had failed to prevent. This maybe of limited use as it is possible that the author's hindsight that the Civil War happened is affecting his recollection of the events. Davis argues that he never supported compromise and knew it would not succeed, though that this was the moment where genuine compromise should have been found as he 'impatiently declared my unwillingness to transfer to the future generations a problem which they would be less able to meet'. Here he seems to be transferring blame for the war from his generation to that of Clay and Webster.

Source C is from the a newspaper report giving a popular positive view of the 1850 Compromise. The New York Herald is described as a controversial newspaper which suggests that it does not always agree with mainstream opinion in the North, particularly on slavery (it supported slavery, which was unusual for a Northern newspaper). Historians may therefore consider it limited in its usefulness to gather the opinion of the general population in the north.

However it is important to consider that there were many in the north who were not hostile to slavery and welcomed the compromise. New York is arguably more likely to have some pro-Southern attitudes as a major port in which many jobs were reliant on the export of cotton.

The tone of the extract is highly positive with phrases such as ‘most important measures’ and ‘a manner satisfactory to all’. Historians may consider that not all would share these sentiments but that many did. The language of the extract clearly demonstrates a strong dislike for those ‘ultras and fanatics of different sections’, this may well be referring to abolitionists. There was anger in the north about the Fugitive Slave Bill in particular in the north but this is not reflected in the emphasis of the extract, which limits its usefulness to a degree.

The extract highlights the gaining ‘of territory through the Mexican war’ as a cause of tension which was certainly true with the controversial Wilmot Proviso of 1846 and disagreement on the future of California which was settled by the 1850 Compromise along with agreements of the territory of New Mexico. Whilst this suggests the extract is useful and insightful the failure to mention any objections to the Fugitive slave Bill suggests otherwise. Many Americans did consider the whole debate over the extension of slavery and the sectional tension it caused a ‘disagreeable subject’ which is a useful point.

The end of the extract talks about the ‘uneasiness to the friends of the Union everywhere’ which was certainly the case and there was widespread relief when the Compromise passed especially in the north. The extract is calling for an end to ‘agitation’ and suggests that supporters of American political institutions ‘home and abroad’ would be relieved which was again true. The usefulness of this is however limited as there is no suggestion that there was still tension and that many were not happy with all aspects of the Compromise. Douglas had had to break the Compromise down into its constituent parts to get it through the Houses of Congress suggesting that many individual parts faced opposition in either the North (e.g. The Fugitive Slave Law) or South (e.g. California entering as a free state). The extract therefore is useful in giving an opinion from some in the North but not everyone

Commentary – Level 5

This is a full and effective answer which examines the significance of provenance, tone and argument in each source with appropriate deployment of knowledge of context. It is very comprehensive in its assessment of Source A in particular and the assessment of Source C could be developed, but this is a Level 5 answer.