



History 7042
Specimen Question Paper 2M (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 2M (A-level): 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 living conditions in the 1930s.

[30 marks]

Student response

Source A offers a good deal of value to historians as the author, Seebohm Rowntree, conducted a number of studies within York into poverty over several decades. He toured the poorer parts of the city and directly interviewed members of the working class, thus giving historians a clear insight into living conditions. However, the provenance of the source also means that there are some limitations upon its value. Firstly, this only offers an insight into the conditions of the poorest workers in one city within Northern England (and the north was quite different to the south) within just one year, 1936. Secondly, the fact that Rowntree is a philanthropist means that it is likely that he will focus on the negative aspects of life for the poorest in society, in order to try and elicit sympathy and help in his drive for charity to be given. However, the tone of the source, which is quite balanced and factual (supported by specific statistics) leads to the conclusion that the inherent bias does not limit the value too much. Indeed, Rowntree offers valuable comparisons with the early social studies from the turn of the century, which helps to qualify his statements and lends credence to his views.

Rowntree's arguments about living conditions is clearly that much has improved since the turn of the century. Indeed he discusses cheap transportation which came as a result of the widespread extension of the railways and wider leisure opportunities through wireless and the cinema. His views can be corroborated by other sources which discuss the greater leisure time enjoyed in the 1930s, helped partly by the provision of paid holidays and the general fall in the cost of living, which increases his value to an historian. Equally his claims about the numbers living on, or below, the poverty line could be supported by other statistics such as unemployment figures. However, the narrow focus of this source means that the value is limited as there was a real divide in terms of living conditions within the 1930s, and Rowntree cannot give us the full picture as he has focused on such a narrow range. This limits his value.

Source B seems to offer quite a lot of value to an historian as it discusses life in Yorkshire and Lancashire primarily, but does reference the regional differences between north and south. The book Orwell was writing was published by a socialist organisation, which might lead us to question just how valuable this source is, as there is a clear bias in favour of the working class and the unemployed. However, this makes the source incredibly valuable as Orwell's whole reason behind his journey was to study the effects of unemployment and poverty in the north, and thus he becomes a valuable eye witness. The tone of the source is quite emotive ('cruel and evil', 'life is dreadful'), which helps to provide a vivid and useful picture of life in many northern towns. However, the fact that there is a preoccupation with living conditions in a particular region, does limit the value as there is only limited information about life in the south.

Orwell tends to generalise about every northerner and focuses very heavily on the negatives. This content can be supported by evidence, however. The Means Test of 1934 was deeply divisive and did lead to increased numbers of elderly people having to seek direct help from the state. Unemployment figures were especially high in the industrial areas of the north, for example the ship building area of Jarrow experienced unemployment rates of around 70%, and this even led to the Jarrow Crusade of 1936. His comment about there being no work available was upheld by statistics which showed that most of the unemployed in the 1930s were long-term unemployed. This clear understanding of the regional nature of long term unemployment, which affected the declining staple industries the most, helps to make B very valuable. However, his value is more limited as he is quite limited in what he says about the south of the country and so he does not give a very clear picture beyond unemployment being 'scattered and unobtrusive'.

Source C is useful to historians as Priestly gives a view here of a different portion of the country to that given in sources A and B. He is focusing on the more southern, suburban parts of the country which were less affected by long term unemployment. The fact that the provenance tells us that he toured the whole country suggests that this is a valuable source as he has no clear agenda to write about a particular region, he is simply recording his findings as he witnessed them. The fact that the book was published in 1934 might limit its value, however, as living conditions did change dramatically as the decade continued. For example, unemployment did decline considerably once rearmament began and the effects of the Depression became more distant as the decade progressed, which means that the full picture is not provided here. Priestley's tone is quite critical; he is clearly not impressed by portion of England he is discussing in in this source ("unfortunately it is a bit too cheap") and so he is more likely to focus on the negatives rather than giving a full and unbiased picture for historians to use.

The content of the source makes it very valuable for historians as he gives numerous examples to support his comments about the 'Americanisation' of society such as cinemas, cheap housing, motor cars and department stores. Certainly, for those in employment in the 1930s there was more disposable income, mainly because food prices reduced, and this was often spent on leisure activities in a way that had not been seen before. Indeed, working hours reduced and the introduction of paid holidays meant that many families could afford a holiday for the first time, and thus places like Butlins began to open by the end of the decade. New inventions meant that consumables became cheaper, as did foodstuffs, and thus department stores like Woolworths became more popular with customers. Many families could afford to buy their own homes in the new towns that were springing up (e.g. Milton Keynes) and this is one of the things Priestly refers to ("bungalows with tiny garages"). However, his comments about people in the last few lines ("without ambition to think and act for themselves") suggests a highly critical attitude, thus limiting his value as he is obviously seeking to prove a point in his writing, and thus might not be giving a full and clear picture.

Commentary – Level 4

There is discussion of provenance, tone and argument of each source and appropriate if not always fully developed deployment of contextual knowledge to support balanced assessment. There is then, a clear attempt to look at the strengths and weaknesses of each source in relation to their value.

The major weakness of the answer lies in the failure to identify fully and comment on, the arguments that are advanced by the authors, as opposed to the focus on description and

summary of what it said. Source A, for example, does identify how living standards have generally risen, but the answer does not draw out the argument about relative poverty and Rowntree's assertion that the problems could be relatively easily solved. Similarly, Priestley's scathing opinion of the Americanisation of Britain is not fully developed.

This is a low Level 4 answer with thoughtful comments on provenance and tone, but less developed assessment of content and argument.