

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

HISTORY A

H505

For first teaching in 2015

Y319/01 Autumn 2020 series

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.



Reports for the Autumn 2020 series will provide a broad commentary about candidate performance, with the aim for them to be useful future teaching tools. As an exception for this series they will not contain any questions from the question paper nor examples of candidate answers.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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Paper Y319 series overview

Y319 is one of twenty one components for the revised A Level examination for GCE History. This component tests an extended period of History of at least one hundred years through an interpretation option on a named in depth topic and two essays. The paper is divided into two sections. In Section A candidates are required to use contextual knowledge to test the views of two historians about one of the three named in depth topics or an aspect of one. The question does not require them to comment on the style of writing or the provenance of the interpretation. In Section B candidates are required to answer two essay questions from a choice of three.

To do well on Section A, candidates need to explain the view of each interpretation in relation to the question and then evaluate the interpretation by the application of contextual knowledge. Responses should show an understanding of the wider debate connected to the issue.

To do well on Section B, candidates need to make connections and links across the whole period, explaining similarities and differences between the events they are discussing in order to show an awareness of continuity and change across the whole period unless instructed otherwise. The comparisons made may be either between periods within the topic or between regions. The strongest answers will test a hypothesis and reach a supported judgement.

<i>Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:</i>	<i>Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showed a clear understanding of the views of the two interpretations in relation to the question • were able to use contextual knowledge to test the interpretations, linking that knowledge directly to the interpretation through evaluative words • were able to consider both the strengths and limitations of both interpretations using contextual knowledge • in answering the essay questions, covered the whole period in a balanced way • adopted a thematic approach • made links and comparisons between aspects of the topic • explained the links and comparisons • supported their arguments with precise and relevant examples • reached a supported judgement about the issue in the question • demonstrated an understanding and familiarity with the different command verbs e.g. identify, describe, explain and discuss. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showed a limited understanding of one or both of the interpretations • did not go beyond a basic explanation of part of the interpretation • did not link any contextual knowledge directly to the interpretation and therefore did not evaluate the interpretation • in answering the essay adopted a chronological rather than thematic approach • did not make links or comparisons even if events from different parts of the period were discussed in the same paragraph • did not cover the whole period • did not focus on the precise wording of the question • made unsupported comments about issues which were no more than assertions.

Section A overview

The interpretation question was, on the whole, answered well. Most candidates were able to access the higher levels by clearly linking their own knowledge to the views and opinions mentioned. At the top end, candidates used precise and accurate own knowledge, explaining that A reflected the view that the Nation of Islam both brought attention to white supremacy and brought concessions from the government through fear of the alternatives to more peaceful civil rights organisations. B took a more negative view of the divisions within the civil rights movement as Black Power rejected non violence. The most successful answers dealt with each interpretation in turn before coming to a measured conclusion. Answers which attempted a thematic approach often were confused and lacked evaluation, leading to an essay-like approach. Centres should be aware that credit is given in assessing the relative convincingness of the views that are present in EACH interpretation.

Answers which went on to list impacts that were not present in each interpretation did not score highly, as they were not explicitly evaluating the view of each historian. This was often highlighted or prefixed by the phrase 'fails to mention'. Candidates should not be evaluating what is not there, but instead focusing on the actual views presented and testing them against historical knowledge. Centres should also be aware that there is no requirement to mention other historians.

Section B overview

Question 2

This was the most popular question and the most successful candidates had a good knowledge of the role of the Supreme Court in the struggle for African American civil rights and were able to compare it to other branches of government such as Presidents, Congress and state governments in the south. The key to a successful answer was synthesis or comparisons across the period and avoiding a chronological or descriptive approach. A few of the lower achieving candidates mistook this for a comparison question with the role of African American leaders and this led to much irrelevance.

Question 3

This was also a popular question and led to some strong responses which compared the activism of Native Americans over the period with other factors such as the Federal Government. Some established effective themes such as land, political and cultural rights in order to achieve synthesis over the whole period. A few weaker responses felt that as the main activism came in the 60s and 70s this was a reason to ignore anything up to this point which made their essays very unbalanced.

Question 4

This was the least popular question but was on the whole well answered. The unity and divisions between American women were well known and some of the best responses ranged across class, religion and race. Weaker responses tended to focus on the later period or mist the focus of the question and wrote about the progress that women made.

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