



History

Paper 2B (A-level) Specimen Question Paper

Question 01 Student 1

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 2B (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 the reasons why Richard of York took up arms between 1450 and 1452.

(30 marks)

Student Response

Richard of York either opposed the king's government took up arms at several points between 1450 and 1452. He was openly sympathetic to the demands of the Jack Cade rebels in late summer 1450. He returned to London at the end of 1450 with armed force and laid complaints against Somerset before parliament. In 1452 he defied royal orders and returned from Ireland at the head of a great force which when it arrived in London attempted to make demands to the king.

Source A is particularly valuable in establishing the earliest clashes involving Richard of York and his alleged grievances at the beginning of the period from 1450 to 1452. According to this source the main reason for conflict was the quarrel that developed between Richard of York and Edmund Beaufort, the duke of Somerset. In its presentation of this the source is reasonably matter of fact but leans in subtle ways to support Richard of York. The conflict between them at Parliament in London in November 1450 has to be set in the context of the popular uprising that had occurred earlier in the year. Discontent at the government of Henry VI headed by William de la Pole, the unpopular Duke of Suffolk, and the collapsing English position in France had led to a serious crisis in Summer 1450 that is known as Jack Cade's rebellion, after its leader. The principal complaint of the protesters who seized the capital was the incompetence and corruption of the king's ministers. These included Suffolk (who was banished but then captured and executed by pirates) but also others like Lord Say who was lynched by the mob. Richard of York had felt alienated from the king and had been replaced as lieutenant in France by Somerset. York therefore blamed the subsequent loss of Normandy on Edmund Beaufort and sought to group him with other courtiers who had been presented as the root of all the problems that Jack Cade and his followers had been protesting about. York also felt aggrieved that he had not been compensated for the financial costs of this post (at one point nearly £40,000) whereas at the same time the Beauforts had received royal patronage and funds even though he had been mostly successful and they had failed in all their expeditions and activities. The Annales refers to the central place that Somerset held in government by the end of 1450 when it claims that 'he controlled everything within the royal household and outside it.' The source makes an oblique reference to Richard of York's particular frustration regarding France when it notes that 'the Duke of Somerset became captain of Calais'. As the only remaining English possession in northern France the fact that it was being handed over to the man that Richard blamed for the rest of the territories was particularly irksome and inflammatory and provoked York to vocal opposition to Somerset as the source recalls. He also makes clear that opposition to Somerset and his followers extended to the Commons. This is unsurprising as Richard of York had presented himself, earlier in the year as the voice of the 'common weal' - the ordinary people, acting for the good of the realm. This had led to suspicion of him among the lords and only a very few of them supported him in the period between 1450 and 1452. One of them was Thomas Courtney, the Earl of Devon, so it is

noteworthy that the Annales recalls a boat belonging to this noble saving Somerset, perhaps in an attempt to demonstrate how law-abiding and pacific York and his supporters were. Although the source also suggests that his supporters 'nominated the Duke of York' to be recognised as Henry VI's 'heir apparent' it would be misleading to see this as suggesting a dynastic motive for York taking up arms between 1450 and 1452. The king had no son so recognition would simply have given Richard of York greater clout in his campaign against Somerset and it is noteworthy that Beaufort and his allies were strong enough to block this. Overall the source is useful in identifying York's frustrations and his focus upon Somerset as the target of his anger.

Source B has a radically different view with regard to the actions and motives of Richard of York. It is principally focused on York's military actions in 1452 and his motives for doing so. The source is strongly critical of York, depicting him as violent and disrespectful of the king in that his men 'broke down the screens and walls in your chamber, having no heed to your high presence'. Richard of York is portrayed as a thug who came 'with many people equipped and arrayed for war.' York is, according to the rolls of parliament a man who had 'malicious intention' to undermine the king's 'power and royal authority' and even to fight Henry VI. The source depicts Richard of York's claim to be standing up for the common weal as a mere 'pretext' and that he stirred up trouble in the realm by writing 'to many cities and to many individuals to raise a general insurrection'. This last point is interesting as this manifesto of Richard's is evidenced in source C. In contrast Henry VI is presented in an exalted fashion as someone who outwitted York with 'the spirit of the wisdom of God' who was able to leave his opponent 'in confusion'. The explanation for all of this open hostility to York is tied up to the nature and time of the record in Source B. It is part of the official record of the infamous Coventry parliament of 1459 that was formally addressed to Henry VI; as such it flatters the king. Known by some as the 'parliament of devils' because of its extremely partisan composition, this body presided over the attainder and exile of the Yorkist lords which by this time included York, Warwick and Salisbury. Indeed the extract here forms part of the justification for the attainder so it is, by its very nature highly partisan. As this event took place at the end of a long and bloody decade of strife and as York's enemies, most prominently Queen Margaret, controlled the parliament the veracity of Source B's content is open to doubt and is rather undermined.

In direct contrast to Source B, Source C justifies Richard of York's actions between 1450 and 1452 and is highly sympathetic to him. This is unsurprising as it was a speech written by the duke himself as an attempt to gather support during his altercation with the Somerset dominated government in 1452. Its tone is therefore one of an angry and wronged man who is attempting to justify his actions. Similarly to Source A the subject of France is prominent and York directly blames Somerset for the loss, pointing out, accurately, that 'Somerset had the command of the lands lost in France'. York presents himself as the victim of Somerset's malice when he claims that Somerset 'labours continually for my undoing'. Source C also hints at a potential dynastic reason for the conflict between York and Somerset when Richard alleges that Somerset seeks to 'corrupt my blood and to disinherit me and my heirs'. This is significant because at the time of Source C Henry VI still had no children and Richard of York was seen by many, if not officially recognised, as his heir. But Somerset, as a Beaufort, shared descent with Henry VI from John of Gaunt, the son of Edward III, therefore, although the Beauforts had been illegitimate and when legitimised had been specifically barred from the throne, the implication is that Somerset saw York as an obstacle to his own royal ambitions. There is no evidence to substantiate this allegation but the king's lack of children was starting to cause real tensions and Richard of York's determination not to surrender his potential claim to succession is another plausible reason as to why he took up arms between 1450 and 1452. In all cases in Source C Richard of York wants to present himself as interested only in 'the well-being and

safeguard of both his royal person and the tranquillity and conservation of the realm'. This is a reference to his references to the so-called common weal in both 1450 and 1452 and it is the genuineness of this that is specifically denied in source B. Finally it is useful to note that Source C makes constant reference of Richard of York's personal loyalty to the king 'the king's true liegeman and servant'. However, his determination to be recognised as heir, though possibly not a direct threat to Henry VI at this time certainly raised suspicions and it is for this reason, no doubt, that upon his failure at Dartford in March 1452 he was made to publically take a new oath of loyalty to Henry VI in St Paul's Cathedral.

In conclusion although all the sources have some value to the perceptions of what Richard of York took up arms between 1450 and 1452 it is clear that source B is of the least use. It is a highly partisan document written at the end of the 1450s and the events subsequent to 1452 clearly colour its recollections of these earlier events. The battle of St Albans in 1455 and the death of Somerset and his supporters by the violence of Richard of York and his supporters must have had an impact on views of his earlier conduct. Given the partisan purpose of the 1459 parliament it cannot give us much meaningful insight into York's reasons between 1450 and 1452. Whilst C is similarly partisan, as it was written by York himself it at least gives us a valuable perspective into how he justified his own actions and how he wanted to be perceived and in many ways it supports the implication in source A that overall the problem and reason for Richard taking up arms was fundamentally a personal conflict between him and Edmund Beaufort, the Duke of Somerset.

Commentary – Level 5

This is a very strong response with confident and appropriate knowledge of the context deployed to assess the value of the sources. The assessment of Sources B and C is especially impressive, commenting on the importance of provenance (although this could be developed further), tone and the content of the sources. The assessment of Source A, whilst strong in the deployment of own knowledge, is less effective in relation to provenance and tone. This is a Level 5 response, but two points should be noted. First, the introduction is general and adds little and the conclusion, whilst thoughtful, is not necessary as there is no requirement for comparative assessment in the question.