

Skills Supplement

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Answering Source-based Questions

The Nature of the Third Reich, 1933-9

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IN ALL ADVANCED-LEVEL HISTORY COURSES students will be assessed on their ability to use a variety of sources, along with their own knowledge, to develop an historical judgement. The following exercise is based upon the more demanding sources questions set for A2, using a wide variety of sources, and requiring students to write quite lengthy responses, displaying a range of historical skills, as especially appropriate for a synoptic module. Generally, whereas at AS you are asked more specific questions about the sources, at A2 you are given broader questions, and are expected to judge which aspects of source analysis are needed in your response.

These days many history teachers wisely reduce their stress on the importance of the labels 'primary' and 'secondary', and train students to use the same criteria to assess all sources, concentrating on the source itself, not on its abstract classification. You should examine a source's Origins, Content, Style and Reliability/Value for a purpose. (See *new perspective* Vol 9 Number 3 for more guidance on these aspects.)

The exercise on pages 16 and 17 is in the style of EDEXCEL Module 6, where several primary and secondary sources are combined.

Useful techniques when analysing sources

Techniques. **PLANNING.** Examiners frequently comment on the importance of planning responses, and this refers to longer source-based questions as well as to essays. Before writing your response, you should gut the sources for relevant material, and then plan a structure. The three techniques below might help you achieve a more effective plan and, thus, final answer.

HIGHLIGHTING. You may find it useful to highlight, especially in different colours, keywords and phrases in the

sources. Thus, in the exercise below, highlight the word 'popular' in Question 1 and Question 2, say in yellow, then also highlight all references to issues related to popularity. This should include *all* points relevant to the issue of popularity, that is, counter points such as discontent and opposition. (You might find it even more useful to highlight such counter points in a contrasting colour. This will help you get an overall feel for the amount and balance of the evidence in each source.) Use different colours for Propaganda and Terror/repression in Question 2.

It is also a good idea to highlight in a distinct colour any references the historians make to problems of interpreting sources and of formulating historical judgements, and to any historical debates. Such points can be incorporated into your answer to help develop a more sophisticated historical judgement.

Two cautionary points. You must be wary when deploying highlighting that you use the material in context, as some highlighted phrases can actually be misleading. You must also not necessarily equate the amount of colouring with a strong argument; for example, a very powerful point could be made succinctly.

KEY POINTS GRID. (See grid at the bottom of the page.) An alternative or additional approach is to briefly record key points for each question from each source in a grid. In the examination you are given sufficient time to read and analyse the sources fully, and do not need to rush into writing your answers. You should have plenty of time to gut the sources and complete the grid. Then use it, combined with selective re-reading of the sources assisted by your highlighting, in writing your response. Such a grid helps you get an overall feel for where the evidence is, and is not (as shown by the blank boxes).

(The + / - subsections allow you to record points on the importance of the issue down the left-hand side of the

Source	Propaganda		Repression		Popularity		Nature of History	
	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								

as most people are concerned.

3. Doubts about the continued survival of the regime are widespread, but so is the sense of helplessness as to what might replace it.

Source 6. Bavarian district police report, June 1939.

The uncertainty of the diplomatic situation, the harsh taxation, certain economic difficulties and, in particular, the pressure against the Church are at the moment producing increasing apathy among the rural population as far as nationalist issues are concerned. The Catholic Church is reaping the profit from these burdens. The more attempts are made to keep a watch on the Church or such attempts are even suspected, the more the peasantry support their priests. Catholic churchgoing, participation in various events such as processions, the blessing of the fields, pilgrimages, attendance of services during weekdays, and confession remain strong. For the time being the party's propaganda is helpless in trying to resist this development. The mood is directed less against the State and much more against the party.

Source 7. Joke circulating in Third Reich. (Recorded in F. Hillenbrand, *Underground Humour in Nazi Germany*, 1994.)

Someone opens his mouth too wide and, as a result, spends several weeks of ideological training in a concentration camp. After his discharge he is asked by a friend what life was like there. 'Excellent,' he replied. 'At 9am we were served breakfast in our bedrooms. Then some light work for those who wanted to work, and some sport for those who didn't. Lunch was plain but good and afterwards again some light work. For supper we were served some open sandwiches and pudding. In the evening we had lectures or a film, and played games.'

The questioner is much impressed. 'Incredible!' he says. 'All those lies we hear about the concentration camps. The other day I met Meier who had just been released from one; he told me rather different stories about his camp!'

'Well, yes, but then Meier is back in his camp again.'

A note on vocabulary. Examination Boards sometimes, but not invariably, explain hard words. So try to develop your vocabulary over the course, and develop the skill of working out meanings from the context.

Disparaging: critical
Compounded: reinforced
Eulogies: great praise
Coercion: pressure or force

Questions and comments. (Time: 1 hour 45 minutes.)

- A) Using Sources 1, 4 and your own knowledge, explain why Hitler was more popular than the Nazi party. (20 marks)
- B) Using the evidence of all the sources and your own knowledge, explain how far you agree with the view

that stressing the importance of propaganda and terror in maintaining the Third Reich underestimates the extent to which the regime was genuinely popular. (40 marks)

Question A is more straightforward, using the specific references in the sources identified as well as your own knowledge, substantiated by thorough discussion of the subtle distinction between Hitler and the party, and focusing on the reasons for differences in their popularity. You might, though, want to make some points of caution on the degree of Hitler's popularity.

Question B focusing on the extent of support, gives you the opportunity to write at length (about three to four sides) on the comparative role of propaganda, repression, and genuine support in the stability of the regime. Some of the key points you could make, using your own knowledge to develop ideas in the sources, and adding other relevant points, are:

- i) THE NATURE OF PROPAGANDA, and the extent to which it was more successful in reinforcing existing feelings, rather than dramatically changing deep-seated beliefs, (especially Source 1).
- ii) THE NATURE AND IMPACT OF REPRESSION, including the idea, argued elsewhere in Gellately's pioneering work, that many Germans willingly co-operated with the police, reinforcing the idea that the regime had considerable support, as suggested by his follow-up study, *Backing Hitler*. Source 6, from a police report, is particularly revealing of the limited, even counterproductive, effect of repression and propaganda. Source 7 can be interpreted in various ways, as evidence both of repression, but also of defiance.
- iii) THE COMPLEX ISSUE OF POPULARITY. Here you could use the points made by Kershaw, one of the pioneer historians on the issue of Germans' attitudes towards the regime, particularly the problems of interpreting police and SOPADE reports, illustrated with reference to Sources 4, 5 and 6. The extent to which attitudes may vary over time (for example, contrast 1934 with 1939), by region, for example, strongly Catholic Bavaria, and between individuals could be made. The variations in reactions, and 'shades of grey' point made by Peukert should be included. The need for historians to make tentative judgements, given the problems of evidence, that Kershaw makes would illustrate your understanding of the nature of the historical process, one of the key objectives in this synoptic module. You would also need to refer to other reasons (not identified in the question) for the regime's apparent strength, especially successful policies, illustrated in Sources 1 and 5.
- iv) You might also touch upon the point in Question A about distinctions between the popularity of Hitler, the Nazi party, and also the State (Source 6).

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