



BOARD OF STUDIES
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HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATION

WRITING BOOKLET

Examination

History Extension - JFK

Section	Part	Question Number
2	1	2

Date

3rd November

Number of booklets
used for this question

1 of 2

Instructions

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* My chosen case study is JFK

When trying to analyse the truth of the public and private life of JFK, historians are often left with incomplete and broken parts of what the truth is. Over time, historians have argued many perspectives and even with the extensive research conducted, the full truth can never be entirely comprehended. Simon Schama has supported this view, by arguing that to "reconstruct a dead world in its completeness" - is near impossible.

Theodore 'Ted' Sorenson was a close friend of JFK's and wrote a book in 1965 entitled 'Kennedy'. Sorenson often glorifies and commends the leadership abilities and charismatic qualities that JFK possessed, as one of his closest friends, he still respected the memory of the recently assassinated President. Part of Sorenson's love for ~~Kenne~~ JFK may be due to the fact that he cherishes the memory of JFK he has, but he could never seek out the full truth, whatever

that may be. To try and do so, to reconstruct a past world with full detail, accuracy and completeness would be near impossible, no matter how "thorough or revealing the documentation". Hence, as a historian, Sorenson ~~must~~ ^{will} simply remember JFK with the truths that he remembers and not try and chase after what may have been the truth or "shadows".

Therefore we see that the role of the historian is changing in ways, as he simply documents what he remembers and chooses at times, not the entire spectrum of documents and sources. Therefore, Schama's statement reveals to be very relevant when studying the private and public life of JFK.

An important aspect when considering the manner in which a historian has written history, is their context. Arthur Schlesinger published a book shortly after JFK's death in 1965 entitled 'A Thousand Days'. Without the advantage of time and a bias viewpoint, Schlesinger would have been inclined to like JFK and overlook some or many of

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his faults, as he was both sincerely admirable of the fallen president and ~~not~~ didn't have thorough documentation. It is clear that different historians and people will have different viewpoints, which further makes the search for truth more difficult and reveals the relevance of Schama's statement to us.

Because Schlesinger wrote in a context where JFK was still admired as a hero, his work was likely to reveal these same opinions. Schama states that historians will be "forever chasing shadows" and that total truth of an event will never be fully conceivable. Partly due to the bias and memories people possess, this statement is unfortunately true as many factors influence the historian's ability to paint a complete picture of the truth. Schlesinger is an example of this as he was influenced by his memory and opinion.

~~To support the view of Schama, we see that~~

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To contrast the views of Schlesinger, is Richard Reeves. In 1991, Reeves published a book entitled 'profile of power', which faulted and criticised JFK for many of his acts as President such as the 'Bay of Pigs' and the 'Cuban Missile Crisis'. Because Reeves' context is placed 28 years after JFK was assassinated, it is easier for Reeves to criticise and critically judge JFK.

Reeves is not influenced by any personal memory or opinion towards JFK, hence ~~the~~ why he is so ~~a~~ easily able to criticise him. However, Reeves is still not able to grasp the full truth of JFK's public and private life, as he neither knew him or had memories of him.

This supports Schama's idea that to construct an event of a past, "dead world", will simply leave them "chasing shadows". Reeves isn't able to present the full truth, with the positive and pleasant attributes of JFK. Yet, Schlesinger and Sorenson aren't able to either present the full truth ~~as~~, with the negative and detrimental aspects of his presidency, as they cherish the personal memory of JFK.

This reveals to us that the way these historians have constructed ~~their~~ history, is largely influenced by their context, bias, personal memory and lack of facts. Therefore, ~~the~~ Schama's idea that a historian will painfully attempt to fill in an entire mosaic, becomes increasingly relevant towards society.

Throughout time, history can be altered or documented differently. This is seen through the view of Carl Becker, who wrote an extract in 1959 entitled, "What are historical facts?" In this extract, Becker argues that a person's representation of history is largely dependant on their own knowledge and own prejudices, prepossessions and bias. This is clearly seen when analysing JFK through the different lens' of Schlesinger, Sorenson and Reeves. Each historian's view is largely dependant on their context and personal memory, which reveals how Schama's statement can be relevantly applied to ~~JFK's~~ the debate of JFK's life.

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Becker continues to argue that "The history of an event will never be precisely the same for two different persons, as it is well known that each generation will write history in a new way, and will always add a new construction". This directly explains the reasons as to why Reeves and Schlesinger have opposing views.

Through looking at the numerous perspectives of JFK's life we see that there is an eternal struggle to ascertain and possess the full truth. For example, Schlesinger and Sorenson were not able to see the faults of JFK and this prevented them from grasping the whole truth. However, Reeves could not perceive the numerous positive aspects of JFK's public and private life, as he had no affiliation or memory with the 'dead world' in which he was documenting. Therefore, Schama's statement is revealed to us as horribly relevant and the issues that will be encountered when examining a 'dead world'. Schama's statement will always remain relevant, however it is up to the historian to try and capture and possess the entire truth to the best of their ability.

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