

OXFORD COLLEGES' HISTORY APTITUDE TEST

3 November 2010

Answer **ALL** parts of **BOTH** questions. You have **TWO HOURS** for this test. We recommend that you read the entire paper before beginning to write your answers. Spend about a third of your time on reading, thinking and planning, and the rest of the time writing. Question One should take about twice as much time as Question Two.

If you find the texts difficult and unfamiliar, don't worry: the exercise is intended to be challenging, but we hope you will also find it thought-provoking. There is no 'right' answer to many of the questions: you will be judged on the intelligence of your case, how clearly you make it and how effectively you support it. You should use your own words in answering the questions.

Please do not turn over until you are asked to do so.

QUESTION ONE (70 marks)

This is an adapted section from a book about eighteenth-century British politics. Please read through the extract carefully and think about what it is trying to say. You do not need to know anything about the eighteenth century to answer the questions below, but you should be aware that, while Parliament was a representative assembly, elected by relatively wealthy people including local officials, the central government was a group of ministers appointed by the king.

The argument of this book is not that there existed a hitherto unrecognised, permanently active chain of command reaching from the centre down into the localities, which would nullify the supposed distinction between central and local government, and overturn conventional assumptions about the prevalence of local initiative. For the most part, 'inferior', or local, officials were free to operate in their sphere as they saw fit, subject only to such legal penalties as they risked incurring if they exceeded or abused their authority.

Yet there was one institution of eighteenth-century British government which I have so far left out of account: a national institution which played a crucial role in domestic administration. That is, Parliament. Parliament met more frequently and figured more largely in eighteenth-century Britain than had ever routinely been the case before, because Parliament had acquired a crucial role in propping up the fiscal-military state. Annual acts of Parliament were needed to authorise the raising of vital revenues. Annual 'mutiny' acts were required to keep the standing army legal.

The reason why Parliament was convened annually, and kept in being for four or more months in every year, was thus not primarily so that it could deal with domestic business. But this pattern of meetings had implications for the way domestic issues were handled. The availability of Parliament helped to ensure that statute law¹ retained and developed its role in defining the basic framework within which 'inferior' domestic officials operated. Frequent meetings of Parliament also provided interested parties with unprecedented opportunities to attempt to reshape statute law. The accessibility of Parliament to men closely involved with government in the localities relieved central organs of government from pressure to pay more attention to these matters. Ordinary politically aware Britons often moaned about Parliament's failure to generate enough 'good laws', and certainly leaving such matters to backbenchers was not a recipe for vigorous or ambitious law-making. But ministers would probably have risked more by more frequent action than they did by inaction.

Though it did not usually generate ambitious policy, Parliament was entirely capable of generating national social policies, embodied in statute, often securing significant compliance from those charged with executing them. This system was also open to initiative from below: it had the potential to sustain an inclusive politics of social policy-making. Opportunities to act, both inside and outside Parliament, were quite widely taken up by magistrates and others active in national and local public life, including members of voluntary societies concerned with public welfare and the nation's morals. The eighteenth-century 'public sphere' was better

¹ i.e. acts of Parliament

articulated, and more capable of supporting extra-governmental initiative in public life, than had been the case in earlier centuries. Yet we must not exaggerate the extent to which it empowered ordinary people. Initiatives were relatively few; successful initiatives usually originated – or took definitive shape – high up the social scale.

For all its limitations, in terms of both achievement and accessibility, this order of things had consequences for the functioning of government, for the nature of the British state, and for the character of public life.

- (a) Using your own words, write a single sentence summarising the first paragraph.

(10 marks)

- (b) What does the author see as the strengths and weaknesses of the system described here for the making of social policy? Use your own words and do not write more than fifteen lines.

(20 marks)

- (c) Write an essay of one and a half to three sides assessing the interaction between government and the views of the governed that lay behind any major political event, act or movement. You may answer with reference to any society.

(40 marks)

PLEASE TURN OVER FOR QUESTION TWO

QUESTION TWO (30 marks)

The following extract is taken from an account of the Mi'kmaq people of eastern Canada, written in 1755 by Pierre Maillart, a Catholic missionary priest from France who lived among them. Here, he is describing the ceremonies that follow a feast.

You are not expected to know anything about native American peoples or about the period. You must read carefully and critically, and use your skills of historical analysis to interpret the extract.

The ceremony being over by the men, the girls and women come in, with the oldest at the head of them, and they all dance, spinning round on their heels ... If their dance is approved, the old woman pronounces her thanksgiving in the name of all the girls and women there. The introduction of her speech so strongly characterizes the savages of that sex, and confirms the general observation, that where women once harbour cruelty, they carry it to greater lengths than even the men, whom they frequently encourage to it.

'You men! Who look on me as of an infirm and weak sex, and consequently of all necessity subordinate to you, know that in what I am the Creator has given to my share talents and properties at least as of much worth as yours. I have brought into the world warriors, great hunters, and admirable managers of canoes. This hand has more than once struck a knife into the hearts of the prisoners, who were given up to me for my sport. Let the river sides, I say, as well as the woods, attest their having seen me more than once tear out the heart, entrails, and tongue, of those delivered up to me and roast pieces of their flesh, and cram them down the throats of others whom the like fate awaited. With how many scalps have I not seen my head adorned, as well as those of my daughters. With what exhortations have I not roused up the spirit of our young men to go in quest of the like trophies, that they might achieve the reward, honour and renown annexed to their acquisition. But it is not in these points alone that I have distinguished myself. I have often brought about marriages which have been prolific and have furnished our nation with supports, defenders and subjects to eternize our race and to protect us from the insults of our enemies. These ancient trees, full of knots from the top to the root, whose bark is falling off with age, who yet possess their gum and powers of life, resemble me. I am no longer what I was; all my skin is wrinkled and furrowed, my bones everywhere starting through it. But I have still within me the means to attract the attention of those that know me.'

What can this extract tell us about native American society in the eighteenth century?

End of paper