DBQ 17: Imperialism in India: An Evaluation

Historical Context:

European imperialism in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries resulted in the carving up of areas of Africa and Asia into vast colonial empires. This was the case for British colonialism in India. As imperialism spread, the colonizer and the colony viewed imperialism differently.

Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying documents in Part A. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of the document and the author's point of view. Be sure to:
1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
2. Now, read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions which follow each document.
3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the question.
4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. The essay should be logically presented and should include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge outside of the documents.

Part A: The following documents provide information about the effects of imperialism on India. Examine the documents carefully, and answer the questions that follow.

Document 1

In this excerpt, adapted from O. P. Austin's "Does Colonization Pay?" in The Forum, January 1900, positive and negative results of imperialism are pointed out.

Modern progressive nations [European colonizers] ... seek to control "garden spots" in the tropics. Under their direction, these places can yield the tropical produce that their citizens need. In return the progressive nations bring to the people of those garden spots the foodstuffs, and manufactures they need. They develop the territory by building roads, canals, railways, and telegraphs. The progressive nations can establish schools and newspapers for the people of the colonies. They can also give these people the benefit of other blessings of civilization which they have not the means of creating themselves.
DBQ 17: Imperialism in India: An Evaluation (continued)

Document 2

In this speech, Dadabhai Naoroji, an Indian, describes the effect of imperialism on India.

To sum up the whole, the British rule has been—morally, a great blessing; politically peace and order on one hand... on the other, materially, impoverishment... The natives call the British system... "the knife of sugar." That is to say there is no oppression, it is all smooth and sweet, but it is the knife, nevertheless.

Europeans [the British] occupy almost all the higher places in every department of government... Natives, no matter how fit, are deliberately kept out of the social institutions started by Europeans... All they [the Europeans] do is live off of India while they are here. When they go, they carry all they have gained.

Document 3

This excerpt is adapted from The Economic History of India Under Early British Rule, by an Indian, Komesh Dutt.

Englishmen... have given the people of India the greatest human blessing—peace. They have introduced Western education. This has brought an ancient and civilized nation in touch with modern thought, modern sciences, and modern life. They have built an administration that is strong and efficient. They have framed wise laws and have established courts of justice.
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Document 4

This excerpt is adapted from British historian, J. A. R. Marriott’s book, The English in India, 1932.

British brains, British enterprise, and British capital have changed the face of India. Means of communication have been developed. There are great numbers of bridges, more than 40,000 miles of railway, and 70,000 miles of paved roads. These testify to the skill and industry of British engineers. Irrigation works on a very large scale have brought 30 million acres under cultivation. This has greatly added to the agricultural wealth of the country. Industrialization has also begun. India now has improved sanitation and a higher standard of living. It has a fine transport system and carefully thought-out schemes for relief work. Because of these things famines have now almost disappeared.

List at least five of imperialism cited by this author.

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Document 5

This excerpt, from India: A Restatement by British writer Sir Reginald Coupland, points out the social and economic impact of imperialism on India.

British rule brought with it from the West certain standards of humanity that Indian society had not yet reached. Early action was taken to stop infanticide [the killing of girl babies]. . . . The slave trade was ended and the owning of slaves was forbidden . . . . One result of the new order was a steady rise in the value of India’s export trade.

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(continued)
DBQ 17: Imperialism in India: An Evaluation (continued)

Document 6

This excerpt, from The Discovery of India by Jawaharlal Nehru, explains how India became a “typical” colonial economy.

This process continued throughout the nineteenth century. Other old Indian industries—shipbuilding, metalwork, glass, paper—and many crafts were broken up. Thus the economic development of India was stopped and the growth of new industry was prevented. ... A typical colonial economy was built up. India became an agricultural colony of industrial England. It supplied raw materials and provided markets for England’s industrial goods. The destruction of industry led to unemployment on a vast scale. ... The poverty of the country grew. The standard of living fell to terribly low levels.

What effects of imperialism does Nehru point out?

Document 7

Mohandas Gandhi offers a complaint about imperialism.

You English committed one supreme crime against my people. For a hundred years you have done everything for us. You have given us no responsibility for our own government.

What is Gandhi’s of imperialism?

Part B—Essay

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Document 7b

The age of railroads played a role in and supported the growth of a new period of imperialism.

... Thus, colonial railways were part of this process of the spread of empire, its economic patterns, its ideas and its institutions. The process was essentially the same throughout the world: production of new commodities to feed the burgeoning [quickly growing] industries of the West; new populations to produce them; new patterns of land ownership, often involving the dispossession of previous inhabitants; new legal codes to make the conquered lands safe for investment and exploitation. Such was the story everywhere empires expanded....


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Document 8

This excerpt analyzes the Indian railway system from the Indian nationalist point of view between 1880 and 1905.

... A review of the existing railway policy led them [Indian nationalist leaders] to conclude that it was not primarily regulated in the interests of the Indian people; and that it largely ignored Indian needs, particularly industrial needs, and was mainly meant to serve British economic and political interests. They noted that railways played an important role in imparting colonial character to the Indian economy. They were even able to glimpse the growing connection between railway development in a backward country and the growing power of finance in the advanced metropolitan country and the consequent political complications.

They wanted railways to serve national economic interest by stimulating economic development, which was in turn seen as consisting of industrial and agricultural growth. To them the proper railway policy was one that promoted Indian industry and a proper public works policy one that gave priority to irrigation and agriculture. They desired railway policy to give due weight to the state of Indian finances and Indian economy....


8 According to Bipan Chandra,

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Document 9

... The railroads facilitated, linked, and coordinated a wide variety of socioeconomic processes and cooperated with other large-scale transportation and communication systems. For example, the railroads enabled national markets with converging prices for food grains [to reduce the gap between prices] to emerge in the 1880s; the same railroads made it possible for peasant villagers to undertake quick pilgrimages (within a few days or less) during their brief respite [relief] from the demands of agriculture. The hard backbone of British colonial rule in India, the British soldier and his weaponry, could be quartered in fewer places in the knowledge that the railroads could transport troops rapidly to trouble spots. The publications of what became the outpourings of many presses owned by Indians and printed in Indian languages and in English found profitable markets. The railroads synergistically [mutually] cooperating with the post office facilitated the inexpensive, bulk shipments of books, magazines, and newspapers, among which many came to have nationalist orientations....

Source: Ian J. Kerr, Engines of Change: The Railroads That Made India, Praeger

9 According to Ian Kerr,

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