

DBQ 7: Causes of the New Imperialism

(Adapted from *Document-Based Assessment for Global History*, Walch Education)

Historical Context: Between 1870 and 1920, European imperialism accelerated due to economic, political and social forces. The Industrial Revolution stirred the ambitions of European nations, and with the advances in technology, these nations were able to spread their control over the less-developed areas of the world. This empire-building frenzy has been studied by historians who offer a variety of perspectives on its causes.

Part A: The following documents provide information about the causes for the new imperialism. Examine the documents carefully, and answer the questions that follow.

Document 1: This excerpt is from *Imperialism and World Politics*, written by Parker T. Moon. He points out which groups were most interested in imperialism.

The makers of cotton and iron goods have been very much interested in imperialism. This group of import interests has been greatly strengthened by the demand of giant industries for colonial raw materials . . . Shipowners demand coaling stations for their vessels and naval bases for protection. To these interests may be added the makers of armaments and of uniforms. The producers of telegraph and railway material and other supplies used by the government in its colony may also be included. . . . Finally, the most powerful business groups are the bankers. Banks makes loans to colonies and backward countries for building railways and steamship lines.

Question: Which groups are seeking colonies according to this author? Explain each group's reason.

Document 2: This statement was written by U.S. Senator Beveridge in 1898.

American factories are making more than the American people can use; American soil is producing more than they can consume. Fate has written our policy for us; the trade of the world must and shall be ours. . . . We will establish trading posts throughout the world as distributing points for American products. We will cover the ocean with our merchant marines. We will build a navy to the measure of our greatness.

Question: According to Senator Beveridge, why should America become imperialistic?

Document 3: Raymond Aron, in *The Century of Total War*, suggests another cause for imperialism.

None of the colonial undertakings was motivated by the quest for capitalist profits; they all originated in political ambitions . . . the nations' will to power . . . glory or national greatness.

Question: What does this author say was the cause for imperialism?

Document 4: Cecil Rhodes, a successful British imperialist in Africa, expresses his position in *Confession of Faith*, written in 1877.

I contend that we [Britons] are the finest race in the world, and the more of the world we inhabit, the better is it for the human race. . . . It is our duty to seize every opportunity of acquiring more territory and we should keep this one idea steadily before our eyes that more territory simple means more of the Anglo-Saxon race, more of the best, the most human, most honorable race the world possesses.

Question: What does Cecil Rhodes believe is the reason for imperialism?

Document 5: In *The Diplomacy of Imperialism*, William L. Langer suggests another reason.

But the economic side . . . must not be allowed to obscure [hide] the other factors. Psychologically speaking . . . evolutionary teaching [about the “survival of the fittest”] was perhaps most crucial. It not only justified competition and struggle but introduced an element of ruthlessness.

Question: According to Langer, what was the reason for the new imperialism?

Document 6: In *The White Man’s Burden* Rudyard Kipling offers another explanation for imperialism.

Take up the white man’s burden
Send for the best yet breed
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives’ need,
To wait, in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild
Your new caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.

Question: According to the poem, what is the “white man’s burden?”

Document 7: President William McKinley explains why the United States took over the Philippines. We could not leave them to themselves. They were unfit for self-government. There was nothing left for us to do but to take them over. Then we would be able to educate the Filipinos. We could uplift and civilize and Christianize them.

Question: How does President McKinley explain the U.S. takeover of the Philippines?

Document 8: This is from a letter sent by Phan Thanh Gian, governor of a Vietnamese state, to his administrators in 1867.

Now, the French are come, with their powerful weapons of war to cause dissension among us. We are weak against them; our commanders and our soldiers have been vanquished. . . .The French have immense warships, filled with soldiers and armed with huge cannons. No one can resist them. They go where they want, the strongest ramparts fall before them.

Question: How does this Vietnamese man explain French imperialism in Indochina?

Part B—Essay

Which economic, political, and social forces were most responsible for the new imperialism that began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?