

Section II, Part A

Question 1: Document-Based Question Commentary

Overview

The question asks students to consider how the different ideas of American national identity expressed in the late 19th century affected contemporary debates on U.S. overseas expansionism. Students must read a set of historical documents and then write an essay that contains a plausible thesis, analyzes the documents and explains their relevance to the question, places the documents and the debate into wider historical context, and synthesizes the information to make a larger argument about U.S. history. This question primarily assesses student understanding of events in Period 7 (1890–1945), the theme of America in the World, and the historical thinking skills of historical comparison, historical argumentation, contextualization, appropriate use of historical evidence, and synthesis.

Sample: 1A Score: 7

A. Thesis (+1 point):

This response earns the thesis point near the end of the first paragraph by explaining how the different versions of American identity used by advocates and opponents shaped their positions and arguments regarding expansionism.

B. Analysis of historical evidence and support of argument (+4 points):

This essay achieves one point for including information not found in the documents as evidence in support of the stated thesis, including "big stick" diplomacy and the Roosevelt Corollary. The essay earns all three possible points related to analysis of documents and using documents as evidence. The essay uses all the documents in support of the thesis and correctly extended the analysis of almost every document. The one document it fails to analyze beyond simple use is document 4: while the essay used "militarism" as a reference to Jane Addams' view in document 4, it did not count as extended analysis because "militarism" was given in the document source line.

The essay achieves extended analysis for document 1 by explaining the author's purpose, stating "it would bring them civil rights" and treatment that was "like white soldiers." In the lines preceding the use of document 2, the essay provides the historical context of Washington's Farewell Address. The essay analyzes Theodore Roosevelt's point of view, describing him as an "aggressive imperialist" and further describing his purpose in document 5 as convincing Americans to "parent the Filipinos." The essay provides historical context relevant to document 3 mentioning imperialist senators and the "March of the Flag." The essay successfully contextualizes both documents 6 and 7 by referring to Bryan's arguments as a part of American racism and by citing Mark Twain's position as an example of criticism similar to that of the cartoon in document 7.

C. Contextualization (+1 point):

This essay provides numerous examples that earn one point for contextualization, including yellow journalism, Washington's Farewell Address, March of the Flag, the Spanish American War, and racism. Although some of these examples are mentioned in the extended document analysis and context, the response also provides additional examples that are mentioned beyond the document analysis.

D. Synthesis (+1 point):

This essay crafts a persuasive argument that earns one point for synthesis. This synthesis point could have been granted either for employing disparate evidence to craft a coherent argument or for using other geographical contexts, as in the reference to Latin American poets.

Sample: 1B Score: 6

A. Thesis (+1 point):

The opening paragraph describes “views” of America and contrasts tradition with newer expansionist “views.” The thesis paragraph culminates in the final sentence, which solidifies the thesis and earns the thesis point.

B. Analysis of historical evidence and support of argument (+3 points):

This essay achieves one point for including information not found in the documents as evidence in support of its stated thesis; in particular, the essay uses the example of the annexation of Hawaii. The essay uses almost all the documents in supporting its thesis, but falls one extends analysis short of earning the fourth point in this category. The essay extends its analysis of document 3 by stating McKinley’s purpose as being a desire to keep the colonies. For document 4, the essay mentions Addams as an advocate of birth control, which provides an implicit context of Addams as a social reformer.

The essay analyzes Theodore Roosevelt’s point of view in discussing his expansionist philosophy and by relating the additional historical context of the Panama Revolution. In reference to document 6, the essay relates Bryan’s purpose of opposing imperialism to his campaign for president; placing Bryan as a Democratic candidate for president also extends the analysis by providing a historical context. Lastly, the essay does a thoughtful extended document analysis by contextualizing the cartoon in document 7 as a part of a satirical movement that increased isolationism prior to World War I.

C. Contextualization (+1 point):

This essay earned the contextualization point more for placing the events within the context of competing political parties and aims of Republicans and Democrats rather than for explaining the documents as responses to events of the Spanish American War.

D. Synthesis (+1 point):

In both the introduction and conclusion, the essay extends its argument to other historical periods with relevant commentary, touching on Washington’s Farewell Address and later 20th-century debates over expansionism and isolationism.

Sample: 1C Score: 3

A. Thesis (+1 point):

The first paragraph earns the thesis point by presenting competing views of the United States as either a “spreader of goodwill” or an “imperialist like Spain” and treats the debate about expansionism as an issue of identity.

B. Analysis of historical evidence and support of argument (+1 point):

This essay provides no relevant information beyond that in the documents and therefore does not earn a point for analysis of outside examples. The essay offers a plausible analysis of six documents in supporting its thesis, which earns one point on the rubric under the category of “analysis of documents.”

The essay only successfully extends the analysis of documents 5 and 6. Using document 5, the essay succeeds in describing Roosevelt’s purpose as the author, and for document 6, the essay analyzes Bryan’s point of view as that of a “candidate seeking votes.” For document 4, the characterization of Jane Addams as a “social reformer” does not count because it is given in the source line of the document. If the essay had analyzed at least six documents, it could have earned another two points, or with extended analysis of four or five documents, another point.

C. Contextualization (+1 point):

This essay provides appropriate historical context, showing how U.S. debates originated in a contest between competing imperial powers, thereby earning one point.

D. Synthesis (+0 points):

This essay did not earn the synthesis point because the conclusion fails to extend the essay into a larger argument. The essay neglects to offer disparate examples, additional categories of analysis, or connections to other geographical regions or historical periods.