**Primary Source Essay**

**Instructions:**

1. Answer the following question in the form of an original essay: ***How did the proponents of imperialism rationalize Belgium’s actions in the Congo during the late 19th and early 20th centuries?***
2. Your essay must…
   1. have a clear thesis (be sure to underline your thesis)
   2. be at least five paragraphs long

* Remember, a paragraph is a series of related sentences developing a central idea. The central idea in each paragraph must support your broader argument (your thesis).
* Good paragraphs must be long enough to develop the central idea. As a result, very short paragraphs are usually ineffective. A good paragraph is often about a half page long.
  1. incorporate and cite information from the textbook
  2. incorporate and cite information from Adam Hochschild's lecture "Object of Plunder: The Congo through the Centuries."
  3. incorporate and cite information from all four of the primary sources below

1. Your paper must be formatted as follows:
   1. Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced, one-inch margins.
   2. Your name and an original title at the top of the first page.
   3. You must cite key information and quotations taken from the six required sources in the following manner:

* (Hansen & Curtis, 2016) for the textbook
* (Hochschild, 2014) for Adam Hochschild's lecture "Object of Plunder: The Congo through the Centuries”
* (King Leopold II, 1883) for the Letter from King Leopold II to the Missionaries, 1883
* (Williams, 1890) for George Washington Williams’ Open Letter to King Leopold II, 1890
* (King Leopold II, 1890) for the Letter from King Leopold II to Minister Beernaert, 1890
* (Leroy-Beaulieu, 1891) for Leroy-Beaulieu on the Desirability of Imperialism, 1891

EXAMPLE: Leopold argued that small nations had “a moral and material interest” in expanding beyond their borders (King Leopold II, 1890).

**Grading Rubric:**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| D and below | C | B | A |
| * Lacks a thesis * Doesn’t incorporates or cites information from sources * Paragraphs don’t develop one central idea * Paragraphs don’t convincingly support the thesis * Extensive inaccuracies * Extensive formatting errors | * Lacks a thesis * Incorporates and cites information from sources * Most paragraphs don’t develop one central idea * Most paragraphs don’t convincingly support the thesis * Inaccuracies * Formatting errors | * Has a thesis * Incorporates and cites information from sources * Most paragraphs develop one central idea * Most paragraph convincingly supports the thesis * Some inaccuracies * Some formatting errors | * Has a convincing thesis * Incorporates and cites information from all six sources * Each paragraph develops one central idea * Each paragraph convincingly supports the thesis * Detailed and accurate * Formatted correctly |

**Letter from King Leopold II to the Missionaries, 1883**

*The following is an excerpt from a private letter written by King Leopold to a group of Belgian missionaries about to leave for the Congo in 1883.*

Reverends, Fathers and Dear Compatriots:

The task that is given to you is very difficult. You will go certainly to evangelize, but your priority must be Belgium interests. Your principal mission in the Congo is never to teach the savages to know God, this they know already. They speak and submit to a Mungu, one Nzambi, one Nzakomba, and what else I don’t know (all of these are native African gods). Your essential role is to facilitate the task of administrators and industrialists, which means you will go to interpret the gospel in the way it will be the best to protect our interests in that part of the world. Your knowledge of the gospel will allow you to find texts encouraging your followers to love poverty, like “Happier are the poor because they will inherit the heaven" and, "It’s very difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of God." You have to make them abandon everything which gives them the courage to affront [resist] us. Evangelize the savages so that they stay forever in submission to the white colonialists, so they never revolt against the restraints they are undergoing. Recite every day-"Happy are those who are weeping because the kingdom of God is for them." Convert the blacks always by using the whip.

**Letter from King Leopold II to Minister Beernaert, 1890**

*Auguste Beernaert (1829-1912) was the Prime Minister of Belgium from 1884-1894.*

Dear Minister,

I have never ceased to call the attention of my countrymen to the need to turn our view toward overseas lands.

History teaches that countries with small territories have a moral and material interest in extending their influence beyond their narrow borders. Greece founded opulent cities, bastions of arts and civilization, on the shores of the Mediterranean. Later, Venice built its grandeur on its maritime and commercial relations no less than on its political success. The Netherlands have 30 million subjects in the Indies who exchange tropical products for the products of the mother country.

It is in serving the cause of humanity and progress that peoples of the second rank appear as useful members of the great family of nations. A manufacturing and commercial nation like ours, more than any other, must do its best to secure opportunities for all its workers, whether intellectual, capitalist, or manual.

These patriotic preoccupations dominated my life. It is they that caused the creation of the African effort.

My pains were not sterile: a young and vast State, led from Brussels, has peacefully taken its place in the sun, thanks to the kind support of the powers which have applauded its beginnings. Belgians administer it, while other compatriots, more numerous every day, are already making a profit on their capital.

The immense river system of the Upper Congo opens the way for our efforts for rapid and economical ways of communication that will allow us to penetrate directly into the center of the African continent. The building of the railroad in the cataract area, assured from now on thanks to the recent vote of the legislature, will notably increase the ease of access. Under these conditions, a great future is reserved for the Congo, whose immense value will soon shine out to all eyes.

Soon after that memorable act, I thought it my duty, when death will come to strike me, to make it easy for Belgium to profit from my work, as well as that of those who helped me to found and direct it and to whom I give thanks here once again. I thus made, as Sovereign of the Congo Free State, the will that I am sending you; I will request that you communicate it to the legislative Chambers at what seems to you the most opportune moment.

The beginning of enterprises such as those that have so preoccupied me is difficult and onerous. I insisted on bearing the charges. A King, to give service to his country, must not fear to conceive and pursue the realization of a project so adventurous in appearance. The riches of a Sovereign consist of public prosperity. That alone can appear to his eyes as an enviable treasure, which he should try constantly to build up.

Until the day of my death, I will continue with the same thoughts of national interest that have guided me until now, to direct and sustain our African efforts, but if, without waiting for that date, it makes sense for the country to contract closer ties with my Congo possessions, I would not hesitate to make them available to it, I would be happy, while I am alive, to see it in full benefit towards the Chambers as towards the Government for the aid that they gave to me on several occasions in this creation.

I do not think I am mistaken in affirming that Belgium will gain genuine advantages and will see opening before her, on a new continent, happy and wide perspectives.

Believe me, dear Minister,

Your very devoted,

Leopold.

**Paul Leroy-Beaulieu on the Desirability of Imperialism, 1891**

*Paul Leroy-Beaulieu (1943-1916) was a French economist*.

It is impossible not to consider imperialism as one of the tasks imposed on the civilized states for the last four centuries, more particularly on our age.

The present-day world is composed of four different parts in terms of types of civilization. That of Western civilization-our own part. A second part *[is]*inhabited by people of a different civilization, but organized in compact, coherent and stable societies and destined by their history and present character to govern themselves-the Chinese and Japanese peoples for example. In the third part live peoples advanced enough in some respects, but ones which either stagnated or bad not been able to constitute themselves as unified, peaceful, progressive nations, following a regular development. . . . India before the British conquest, Java, and the Indochinese peninsula represent particularly this third type.

Finally, a great part of the world is inhabited by barbarian tribes or savages, some given over to wars without end and to brutal customs, and others knowing so little of the arts and being so little accustomed to work and to invention that they do not know how to exploit their land and its natural riches. They live in little groups, impoverished and scattered, in enormous territories which could nourish vast numbers of people with ease.

This state of the world implies for the civilized people a right of intervention . . . ln the affairs of the peoples of the last two categories.

It is neither natural nor just for the civilized people of the West to be cooped up indefinitely and jammed into the restricted spaces which were their first home. Nor is it natural and just that they there accumulate the marvels of science, the arts and civilization, that they see the rate of interest fall more each day for lack of good investment Opportunities, while they leave perhaps half the world to little groups of ignorant, ineffectual men who are like feeble children . . . or to exhausted populations, without energy, without direction, who may be compared to old men.

Imperialism is often confused with commerce or with the opening of commercial markets. . . . Imperialism means something quite different from the sale or purchase of commodities. It entails a profound action on a people and a territory, providing the inhabitants with some education and regular justice, teaching them the division of labor and the uses of capital when they are ignorant of these things. It opens an area not only to the merchandise of the mother country, but to its capital and its savings, to its engineers, to its overseers, to its emigrants. . . . Such a transformation of a barbarian country cannot be accomplished by simple commercial relations.

Imperialism is thus the systematic action of an organized people upon another people whose organization is defective; and it presupposes that it is the state itself, and not only some individuals, which is responsible for the mission. […]

Colonization by capital is a very important phenomenon. . . . European capitalists--and by this word we mean not only a banker, but every person putting aside a little money, a modest employee, a peasant, a worker, a spinster or a widow--can work effectively at colonization, the exploitation of the globe, without leaving their firesides. . . . All they need do is place their savings in an industrial enterprise which constructs railroads, digs canals, erects factories, clears the land in the young countries. In putting their savings to this use, the inhabitants of the old world are not in any way delinquent in their duty to their home country. The countries where civilization is old, like England or France, are enormous producers of capital, and the difficulties in employing their colossal annual savings remuneratively in their own lands becomes great. Of course, the substantial funds of the old countries can always be put into industrial, agricultural or social improvements; but the export of a part of these funds across the seas to the adolescent countries, is much more productive for the entire human race. The same capital which will produce 3 or 4 per cent when invested in agriculture in France brings 10, *15,*or 20 per cent in an agricultural enterprise in the United States, in Canada, on the Plata River, in Australia, or in New Zealand. It is the same for funds put into building railroads. . . . In general terms, the old countries thus are becoming investors to which the rest of the world offers growing profit. .

The great value of colonies . . . is not only that they serve to catch the overflow population of the mother country, nor even that they open a particularly reliable area of investment for excess capital, it is also that they give a sharp stimulus to the commerce of the country, that they strengthen and support its industry and furnish to its inhabitants--industrialists, workers, consumer--a growth of profits, of wages, or of interest. But, . . . these advantages resulting from the prosperity of the colonies, are not limited just to the mother countries; they extend

to all the countries of the old world and in fact there is not a nation which does not derive a real benefit from this increase in the productivity of humanity. . . . Imperialism has caused the opening of new sources of production. . . . It is thus that unknown products have been brought to the consumers of Europe to increase their comfort. . . . That is the first and incontestable result of imperialism. And this is the second: It is to open the new markets for the sale of products manufactured in Europe, markets more profitable and more expandable than those we have been limited to previously, because the new societies have an ability to grow and to create and accumulate riches infinitely greater than the old societies. Thus trade is stimulated and extended, the division of labor is augmented; industry having before it wider openings can and must produce more and such production on a greater scale calls for new improvements and new advances….

The advantages of which we have been speaking so far are general and apply not only to the mother countries, but to all the civilized countries, even those without colonies. . . . *[But]*it appears to us incontestable that the home countries gain a special advantage from their own colonies: first, it is the capital of the citizens of the mother country which is sent there, and in this more productive field it is assured of higher interest, which improves the fortunes of the investors, of which a good number without doubt remain in the mother country. Further, the community of language, habits, and traditions, gives an advantage to the home country over all foreign nations even in free trade with the colonies. The colonists retain for a long time the tastes of the mother country, *[and]*their relations with her have a degree of intimacy which she rarely has with other nations….

It is extremely rare that a colony furnishes a net revenue to the mother country: in infancy it is not able, in maturity it does not want to. . . . Inasmuch as a colony must be administered by functionaries, and defended by soldiers and sailors, drawn from the mother country, it is probable that the mother country will be out of pocket a considerable sum….

Thus it is a great illusion to found colonies in the hopes of revenue: But on the other hand, the costs of colonies to the metropole have been singularly exaggerated by the adversaries of colonization.

The English colonies today cost the country nothing, on the whole at least… Today only her possessions in South Africa require at one time or another substantial expenses. . . . In the not too distant future, perhaps 15 or 20 years, one can hope that the English colonies of Africa . . . no longer will be a charge on the budget even in the least measure. . . . And after all, what are the few hundred thousand pounds which Great Britain actually pays for the upkeep of colonies as against the immense material and moral advantages which they procure for her?

**George Washington Williams’ Open Letter to King Leopold II, 1890**

*George Washington Williams (1849-1891) was an American Civil War veteran, Baptist minister, politician, lawyer, journalist, and writer of African-American history.*

Good and Great Friend,

I have the honour to submit for your Majesty’s consideration some reflections respecting the Independent State of Congo [...]

It afforded me great pleasure to avail myself of the opportunity afforded me last year, of visiting your State in Africa; and how thoroughly I have been disenchanted, disappointed and disheartened, it is now my painful duty to make known to your Majesty in plain but respectful language. […]

When I arrived in the Congo, I naturally sought for the results of the brilliant programme: “fostering care”, “benevolent enterprise”, an “honest and practical effort” to increase the knowledge of the natives “and secure their welfare”. I had never been able to conceive of Europeans, establishing a government in a tropical country, without building a hospital; and yet from the mouth of the Congo River to its head-waters, here at the seventh cataract, a distance of 1,448 miles, there is not a solitary hospital for Europeans, and only three sheds for sick Africans in the service of the State, not fit to be occupied by a horse. […] There is not a single chaplain in the employ of your Majesty’s Government to console the sick or bury the dead. Your white men sicken and die in their quarters or on the caravan road, and seldom have Christian burial. With few exceptions, the surgeons of your Majesty’s Government have been gentlemen of professional ability, devoted to duty, but usually left with few medical stores and no quarters in which to treat their patients. The African soldiers and labourers of your Majesty’s Government fare worse than the whites, because they have poorer quarters, quite as bad as those of the natives; and in the sheds, called hospitals, they languish upon a bed of bamboo poles without blankets, pillows or any food different from that served to them when well, rice and fish.

I was anxious to see to what extent the natives had “adopted the fostering care” of your Majesty’s “benevolent enterprise,” and I was doomed to bitter disappointment. Instead of the natives of the Congo “adopting the fostering care” of your Majesty’s Government, they everywhere complain that their land has been taken from them by force; that the Government is cruel and arbitrary, and declare that they neither love nor respect the Government and its flag. Your Majesty’s Government has sequestered their land, burned their towns, stolen their property, enslaved their women and children, and committed other crimes too numerous to mention in detail. […]

There has been, to my absolute knowledge, no “honest and practical effort made to increase their knowledge and secure their welfare.” Your Majesty’s Government has never spent one franc for educational purposes, nor instituted any practical system of industrialism. […]

All the crimes perpetrated in the Congo have been done in your name, and you must answer at the bar of Public Sentiment for the misgovernment of a people, whose lives and fortunes were entrusted to you by the august Conference of Berlin, 1884—1 885. […]

GEO. W. WILLIAMS

Stanley Falls, Central Africa,

July 18th, 1890.