

World War I Document-Based Question

Directions: The following question requires you to construct a coherent essay that integrates your interpretation and analysis of Documents A – I and your knowledge of the period referred to in the question.

To what degree did African Americans achieve military success fighting for the United States and social success fighting against United States racism during World War I?

Document A: Before the 15th Infantry from New York arrived in Spartanburg, SC for training, the town’s mayor protested to the War Department:

“I was sorry to learn that the Fifteenth Regiment has been ordered here, for, with their northern ideas about race equality, they will probably expect to be treated like white men. I can say right here that they will not be treated as anything except negroes. We shall treat them exactly as we treat our resident negroes. This thing is like waving a red flag in the face of a bull, something that can’t be done without trouble. We have asked Congressman Nicholls to request the War Department not to send the soldiers here. You remember the trouble a couple of weeks ago in Houston.” (Little, 1974, p. 49)

Source: Little, A. (1974). *From Harlem to the Rhine: The Story of New York’s Colored Volunteers*. New York: Haskell House.

Document B: German Leaflet dropped on the 367th Infantry, September 3, 1918

“Hello, boys, what are you doing over here? Fighting the Germans? Why? Have they ever done you any harm? Of course some white folks and the lying English-American papers told you that the Germans ought to be wiped out for the sake of humanity and Democracy. What is Democracy? Personal freedom; all citizens enjoying the same rights socially and before the law. Do you enjoy the same rights as the white people do in America, the land of freedom and Democracy, or are you not rather treated over there as second class citizens?

Can you get into a restaurant where white people dine? Can you get a seat in a theatre where white people sit? Can you get a seat . . . in a railroad car, or can you even ride in the South in the same street car with the white people?

And how about the law? Is lynching and the most horrible crimes committed therewith, a lawful proceeding in a Democratic country? Now all this is entirely different in Germany, where they do like colored people; where they treat them as gentlemen and as white men, and quite a number of colored people have fine positions in business in Berlin and other German cities. Why, then, fight the Germans only for the benefit of the Wall Street robbers, and to protect the millions that they have loaned to the English, French, and Italians.

You have been made the tool of the egoistic and rapacious rich in America, and there is nothing in the whole game for you but broken bones, horrible wounds, spoiled health, or death. No satisfaction whatever will you get out of this unjust war. You have never seen Germany, so you are fools if you allow people to make you hate us. Come over and see for yourself. Let those do the fighting who make the profit out of this war. Don't allow them to use you as common fodder. To carry a gun in this service is not an honor, but a shame. Throw it away and come over to the German lines. You will find friends who will help you."

Source: Edgerton, R. (2001). *Hidden Heroism: Black Soldiers in America's Wars*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Document C: Citations for Distinguished Service in the War

"Private Holmes, Burton (deceased). For extraordinary heroism in an attack in the Champagne sector, Hill 188, September 28, 1918. Private Holmes, after his automatic rifle was out of commission and he himself badly wounded, returned to the Company's headquarters of his own volition, got a reserve automatic rifle, went back and fired with it on the enemy until he was killed. This happened under heavy machine gun and shell fire" (Distinguished Service Cross).

"Private Lee, Robert (deceased). For extraordinary heroism in an attack on Hill 188, Champagne Sector, September 28, 1918. Private Lee showed remarkable bravery and disregard of personal danger under heavy machine gun and shell fire. Being caught in a shell hole by the crossed fire of two enemy machine guns, he helped to kill the crew of a machine gun nest and was still fighting when killed" (Croix de Guerre, Silver Star).

"Private Diggs, Junius. For extraordinary heroism in action near Ardeuil, France, September 30, 1918. After his company had been forced to withdraw from an advanced position under severe machine gun and artillery fire, this soldier went forward and rescued wounded comrades, working persistently until all of them had been carried to shelter" (Distinguished Service Cross, Medaille Militaire, Croix de Guerre, palm).

Source: Heywood, Chester D. (1928). *Negro Combat Troops in the World War: The Story of the 371st Infantry*. (pp. 305-306). Worcester, MA: Commonwealth Press.

Document D: *Saturday Evening Post* article written by Irving S. Cobb, a white journalist, after visiting African American troops on the front lines in France

"I am of the opinion personally . . . and I make the assertion with all the better grace, I think, seeing that I am a Southerner with all the Southerner's inherited and acquired prejudices touching on the race question – that as a result of what our black soldiers are going to do in this war, a word that has been uttered billions of times in our country, sometimes in derision, sometimes in hate, sometimes in all

kindliness – but which I am sure never fell on black ears but it left behind a sting for the heart – is going to have a new meaning for all of us, South and North too, and that hereafter n-i-g-g-e-r will merely be another way of spelling the word American.”

Source: Edgerton, R. (2001). *Hidden Heroism: Black Soldiers in America's Wars*. (p. 90). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Document E: Colonel J. L. A. Linard of the American Expeditionary Force headquarters wrote a document entitled “Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops.” The document was later published in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People journal, *The Crisis*.

To the] French Military Mission. stationed with the American Army. August 7, 1918. Secret information concerning the Black American Troops.

It is important for French officers who have been called upon to exercise command over black American troops, or to live in close contact with them, to have an exact idea of the position occupied by Negroes in the United States. The information set forth in the following communication ought to be given to these officers and it is to their interest to have these matters known and widely. disseminated. It will devolve likewise on the French Military Authorities, through the medium of the Civil Authorities, to give information on this subject to the French population residing in the cantonments occupied by American colored troops.

1. The American attitude upon the Negro question may seem a matter for discussion to many French minds. But we French are not in our province if we undertake to discuss what some call "prejudice." *[recognize that] American opinion is unanimous on the "color question," and does not admit of any discussion.*

The increasing number of Negroes in the United States (about 15,000,000) would create for the white race in the Republic a menace of degeneracy were it not that an impassable gulf has been made between them.

As this danger does not exist for the French race, *the French public has become accustomed to treating the Negro with familiarity and indulgence.*

This indulgence and this familiarity [These] are matters of grievous concern to the Americans. They consider them an affront to their national policy. They are afraid that contact with the French will inspire in black Americans aspirations which to them (the whites) appear intolerable. *It is of the utmost importance that every effort be made to avoid profoundly estranging American opinion.*

Although a citizen of the United States, the black man is regarded by the white American as an inferior being with whom relations of business or service only are possible. The black is constantly being censured for his want of intelligence and discretion, his lack of civic and professional conscience, and for his tendency toward undue familiarity.

The vices of the Negro are a constant menace to the American who has to repress them sternly. For instance, the black American troops in France have, by themselves, given rise to as many complaints for attempted rape as all the rest of the army. And yet the (black American) soldiers sent us have been the choicest with respect to

physique and morals, for the number disqualified at the time of mobilization was enormous.

Conclusion

1. We must prevent the rise of any pronounced degree of intimacy between French officers and black officers. We may be courteous and amiable with these last, but we cannot deal with them on the same plane as with the white American officers without deeply wounding the latter. *We must not eat with [the blacks] them, must not shake hands or seek to talk or meet with them outside of the requirements of military service.*

2. We must not commend too highly the black American troops, particularly in the presence of (white) Americans. It is all right to recognize their good qualities and their services, but only in moderate terms strictly in keeping with the truth.

3. Make a point of keeping the native cantonment population from "spoiling" the Negroes. *(White) Americans become greatly incensed at any public expression of intimacy between white women with black men.* They have recently uttered violent protests against a picture in the "Vie Parisienne" entitled "The Child of the Desert" which shows a (white) woman in a "cabinet particulier" with a Negro. Familiarity on the part of white women with black men is furthermore a source of profound regret to our experienced colonials who see in it an overweening menace to the prestige of the white race.

Military authority cannot intervene directly in this question, but it can through the civil authorities exercise some influence on the population.

[Signed] LINARD

Source: "A French Directive," *The Crisis*, XVIII (May 1919), p. 16-18.

Document F: Henry Johnson's account of the events of May 12, 1918

"There isn't so much to tell," said Johnson with characteristic modesty. There wasn't anything so fine about it. Just fought for my life. A rabbit would have done that."

"Well, anyway, me and Needham Roberts were on patrol on May 15. The corporal wanted to send out two new drafted men on the sentry post for the midnight-to-four job. I told him he was crazy to send untrained men out there and risk the rest of us. I said I'd tackle the job, though I needed sleep."

"German snipers had been shooting our way that night and I told the corporal he wanted men on the job who knew their rifles. He said it was imagination, but anyway he took those green men off and left Needham and me on the posts. I went on at midnight. It was moonlight. Roberts was at the next post. At one o'clock a sniper took a crack at me from a bush fifty yards away. Pretty soon there was more firing and when Sergeant Roy Thompson came along I told him."

"What's the matter men," he asked, "You scared?"

"No I ain't scared," I said, "I came over here to do my bit and I'll do it. But I was jes' lettin' you know there's liable to be some tall scrappin' around this post tonight." He laughed and went on, and I began to get ready. They'd a box of hand grenades there and I took them out of the box and laid them all in a row where they

would be handy. There was about thirty grenades, I guess. I was goin' to bust that Dutch army in pieces if it bothered me."

"Somewhere around two o'clock I heard the Germans cutting our wire out in front and I called to Roberts. When he came I told him to pass the word to the lieutenant. He had just started off when the snippin' and the clippin' of the wires sounded near, so I let go with a hand grenade. There was a yell from a lot of surprised Dutchmen and then they started firing. I hollered to Needham to come back."

"A German grenade got Needham in the arm and through the hip. He was too badly wounded to do any fighting, so I told him to lie in the trench and hand me up grenades."

'Keep your nerve,' I told him. 'All the Dutchmen in the woods are at us, but keep cool and we'll lick 'em.' Roberts crawled into the dugout. Some of the shots got me, one clipped my head, another my lip, another my hand, some in my side and one smashed my left foot so bad that I have a silver plate holding it up now."

"The Germans came from all sides. Roberts kept handing me the grenades and I kept throwing them and the Dutchmen kept squealing, but jes' the same they kept comin' on. When the grenades were all gone I started in with my rifle. That was all right until I shoved in an American cartridge clip—it was a French gun—and it jammed."

"There was nothing to do but use my rifle as a club and jump into them. I banged them on the dome and the side and everywhere I could land until the butt of my rifle busted. One of the Germans hollered, 'Rush him! Rush him!' I decided to do some rushing myself. I grabbed my French bolo knife and slashed in a million directions. Each slash meant something, believe me. I wasn't doing exercises, let me tell you."

"I picked out an officer, a lieutenant I guess he was. I got him and I got some more of them. They knocked me around considerable and whanged me on the head, but I always managed to get back on my feet. There was one guy that bothered me. He climbed on my back and I had some job shaking him off and pitching him over my head. Then I stuck him in the ribs with the bolo. I stuck one guy in the stomach and he yelled in good New York talk: 'That black ___ got me.'"

"I was still banging them when my crowd came up and saved me and beat the Germans off. That fight lasted about an hour. That's about all. There wasn't so much to it."

Source: Irving S. Cobb, *Saturday Evening Post*, June 1918.

Document G: French General Vincendon issued a General Order to the black Illinois men of the 370th after they left the front lines.

"As Lieut. Colonel Duncan said November 28, in offering to me your regimental colors as proof of your love for France and as an expression of your loyalty to the 59th Division and our Army, you have given us of your best and you have given it out of the fullness of your hearts. The blood of your comrades who fell on the soil of France mixed with the blood of our soldiers, renders indissoluble the bonds of affection that unite us. We have, besides, the pride of having worked together at a

magnificent task, and the pride of bearing on our foreheads the ray of a common grandeur” (Sweeney, 1919, p. 155).

Source: Sweeney, W.A. (1919). *History of the American Negro in the Great World War*. Chicago, IL: G. G. Sapp.

Document H: Major J. N. Merrill of the 368th's First Battallion after a failed mission in the Meuse-Argonne offensive campaign on September 26, 1918.

“Without my presence or that of any other white officer right on the firing line I am absolutely positive that not a single colored officer would have advanced with his men. The cowardice shown by the men was abject . . . [the black soldiers are] rank cowards, there is no other word for it.”

Source: Major J. N. Merrill to Commanding Officer, 368th Infantry, October 3, 1918, in *History of Negro Troops in the World War*, Army War College, Historical Section (1942), appendix 33, USAMHI.

Document I: General Robert Lee Bullard, commander of the American Second Army, in a November 1, 1918 diary entry after an investigation of the charges of cowardice against the 368th.

“The negro division seems in a fair way to be a failure . . . It is in a quiet sector yet can hardly take care of itself while to take any offensive actions seems wholly beyond its powers. I have been here now with it three weeks and have been unable to have it make a single raid upon the enemy. They are really inferior soldiers; there is no denying it”

Source: Diary entry, November 1, 1918, box 2, Diary Book #9, Robert Lee Bullard Papers, LOC.

AP US History Generic DBQ Essay Rubric

The 8-9 Essay

- Contains a well-developed thesis that addresses all parts of the question
- Supports the thesis with effective analysis
- Effectively uses a substantial number of documents
- Supports thesis with substantial and relevant outside information
- May contain minor errors
- Is clearly organized and well written

The 5-7 Essay

- Contain a thesis that addresses part of the question
- Has limited or implicit analysis of these ideals
- Effectively uses some documents
- Supports the thesis with some relevant outside information
- May have errors that do not seriously detract from the quality of the essay
- Shows acceptable organization and writing; language errors do not interfere with the comprehension of the essay

The 2-4 Essay

- Contains a limited or underdeveloped thesis
- Lack analysis; deal with the question in a general, simplistic, incomplete, or superficial manner.
- Merely paraphrases, quotes, or briefly cites documents
- Contains little outside information, or information that is inaccurate or irrelevant
- May contain major errors
- May be poorly organized and/or poorly written

The 0-1 Essay

- Lacks a thesis or simply restates the question
- Exhibits inadequate or incorrect understanding of the question
- Has little or no understanding of the documents or ignores them completely
- Contains no outside information