

2018 AP World History Scoring Commentary

Evaluate the extent to which railroads affected the process of empire-building in Afro-Eurasia between 1860 and 1918.

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Railroads extensively affected the process of empire-building in Afro-Eurasia as a means of transportation of goods, people and ideas. Railroads had an impact on every aspect of society; they served as ways to transport soldiers and military technology for expansion, they spread ideologies and a sense of nationalism.

Since 1453, when Constantinople was taken by the Ottoman Empire, cutting off Europeans from trade with India and Southeast Asia, the European nations have tried to find ways engage in economic transactions with Asia. Even after when explores like Vasco da Gama and Bartholomeu Dias found a route around the African continent, Europe didn't play a major role in Indian Ocean trade until their development of and adoption of advanced technologies like the astrolabe and later Industrial revolution technologies like the steam boat. Despite all their development, European nation mostly implemented port cities activities in Melaka, Java, and Calicut (eventually Hong Kong) with indirect rule through an economic viewpoint (British East India Co and Dutch East Indies Co).

In 1847 the Indian soldiers under the indirect rule of the British East India Company rebelled, the Sepoy Rebellion, causing the British Royalty (Queen Victoria) to set up a direct form of rule in India, the 'Raj'. This led to the spread of European technology (namely railroads) to the region. As shown in [document 1](#), railway travel in India was discriminatory in its treatment of the Indians regardless of their social status or Caste. This document was written by high-caste Indians who, despite having a western education and being at the top of the Hindus social structure, were feeling the effect of railroads. This is furthered by the fact that Europeans felt a sense of duty because of their superiority, to bring order to the uncivilized barbarians of Afro-Eurasia. As stated in [document 6](#) - written by the French governor of (French colonized) West Africa, likely to promote railroads in Africa (into the Central region) to connect European spheres of influence (which were claimed at the 1884 Berlin Conference) - railroads are the perfect, non-natural means of communication by which the economic activity in sub Saharan Africa can be achieved. In a sense, railroads were both a way to foster trans regional trades, and economic prosperity within a state through jobs. As depicted in [document 2](#), by a Qing dynasty official, likely to convince the government to industrialize and adopt new technologies (like the Japanese had) in their current economic state (being exploited by westerners through unequal treaties) - construction projects would promote jobs for the per. As a government project, railroads also helped foster a sense of nationalism. As shown in [document 3](#), released by the Ottoman government, likely from the perspective of hope for economic gain and political reverence (in a time where their global influence had been diminished by European technology) - the railroad from Mecca to Medina, the 2 holy Muslim cities, would foster a sense of community across the Dar a Salam and Muslim nation). In India as well, railroads would foster a sense of nationalism between the regions of the subcontinent. As shown in [document 7](#), the railroads in imperial India connected the region like never before, due to the fact that for most its history the region's been largely decentralized and culturally separate (except large empires like gathering Mughals). The railroads, most important, proved to be a helpful tool in the development of a strong military. As shown in [document 5](#) - written by an English politician likely to encourage British military action and expansion in East Asia (not just economic), to prevent Russian domination - railroads could be used to transport soldiers quickly. This mobility ensures the ability to consolidate holding far away and protect economic and political interest when state building across large region like shown in [document 4](#).

The response earned 1 point for **thesis/claim** because it claims that railroads served the empire-building project by transporting people (including soldiers) and ideologies like racism or nationalism.

The response earned 1 point for **contextualization** in the second paragraph because it describes a broader historical context of navigational, industrial, and transport technology relevant to the role of railroads in the process of empire-building in Afro-Eurasia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The response earned 1 point for using **evidence beyond the documents** because it discusses the use of railroads and the spread of British culture and empire in the specific instance of the British Raj.

The response earned 2 points for using evidence from the documents because all seven documents are used to support an argument in response to the prompt.

The response earned 1 point for document sourcing because it explains for documents 1, 6, 2, 3, 7, and 5 how the documents' purpose, audience, point of view, or historical situation is relevant to the argument. The response discusses the historical situation of these documents by linking them to background developments like social Darwinism, the Berlin Conference, Japanese industrialization, diminishing Ottoman influence, South Asian decentralized traditions, and English/Russian rivalry.

The response **did not** earn the point for demonstrating a complex understanding because although it introduces some limited nuance in sourcing discussion for individual documents, the complexity of the argument as a whole is insufficient. The central claim about railroads helping to strengthen the empire is a fairly simple argument. It is certainly plausible, but nonetheless lacking the complex qualification or interrelated corroboration that characterizes the more complex responses to this prompt. Furthermore, the abrupt and occasionally absent transitions between documents and ideas detract from the response's ability to present a coherent and complex argument.