

READING COMPREHENSIONS_02

Instructions

To summarize the Classic Maya collapse, we can tentatively identify five strands. I acknowledge, however, that Maya archaeologists still disagree vigorously among themselves in part, because the different strands evidently varied in importance among different parts of the Maya realm; because detailed archaeological studies are available for only some Maya sites; and because it remains puzzling why most of the Maya heartland remained nearly empty of population and failed to recover after the collapse and after re-growth of forests.

With those caveats, it appears to me that one strand consisted of population growth outstripping available resources: a dilemma similar to the one foreseen by Thomas Malthus in 1798 and being played out today in Rwanda, Haiti and elsewhere. As the archaeologist David Webster succinctly puts it, "Too many farmers grew too many crops on too much of landscape." Compounding that mismatch between population and resources was the second strand: the effects of deforestation and hillside erosion, which caused a decrease in the amount of useable farmland at a time when more rather than less farmland was needed, and possibly exacerbated by an anthropogenic drought resulting from deforestation, by soil nutrient depletion and other soil problems, and by the struggle to prevent bracken ferns from overrunning the fields

The third strand consisted of increased fighting, as more and more people fought over fewer resources. Maya warfare, already endemic, peaked just before the collapse. That is not surprising when one reflects that at least five million people, perhaps many more, were crammed into an area smaller than the US state of Colorado (104,000 square miles). That warfare would have decreased further the amount of land available for agriculture, by creating no-man's lands between principalities where it was now unsafe to farm. Bringing matters to a head was the strand of climate change. The drought at the time of the Classic collapse was not the first drought that the Maya had lived through, but it was the most severe. At the time of previous droughts, there were still uninhabited parts of the Maya landscape, and people at a site affected by drought could save themselves by moving to another site. However, by the time of the Classic collapse the landscape was now full, there was no useful unoccupied land in the vicinity on which to begin anew, and the whole population could not be accommodated in the few areas that continued to have reliable water supplies.

As our fifth strand, we have to wonder why the kings and nobles failed to recognize and solve these seemingly obvious problems undermining their society. Their attention was evidently focused on their short-term concerns of enriching themselves, waging wars,

erecting monuments, competing with each other, and extracting enough food from the peasants to support all those activities. Like most leaders throughout human history, the Maya kings and nobles did not heed long-term problems, insofar as they perceived them.

Finally, while we still have some other past societies to consider before we switch our attention to the modern world, we must already be struck by some parallels between the Maya and the past societies. As on Mangareva, the Maya environmental and population problems led to increasing warfare and civil strife. Similarly, on Easter Island and at Chaco Canyon, the Maya peak population numbers were followed swiftly by political and social collapse. Paralleling the eventual extension of agriculture from Easter Island's coastal lowlands to its uplands, and from the Mimbres floodplain to the hills, Copan's inhabitants also expanded from the floodplain to the more fragile hill slopes, leaving them with a larger population to feed when the agricultural boom in the hills went bust. Like Easter Island chiefs erecting ever larger statues, eventually crowned by pukao, and like Anasazi elite treating themselves to necklaces of 2,000 turquoise beads, Maya kings sought to outdo each other with more and more impressive temples, covered with thicker and thicker plaster — reminiscent in turn of the extravagant conspicuous consumption by modern American CEOs. The passivity of Easter chiefs and Maya kings in the face of the real big threats to their societies completes our list of disquieting parallels.

Question 1

According to the passage, which of the following best represents the factor that has been cited by the author in the context of Rwanda and Haiti?

- A) Various ethnic groups competing for land and other resources
- B) Various ethnic groups competing for limited land resources
- C) Various ethnic groups fighting with each other
- D) Various ethnic groups competing for political power
- E) Various ethnic groups fighting for their identity

Question 2

By an anthropogenic drought, the author means

- A) a drought caused by lack of rains.
- B) a drought caused due to deforestation.

- C) a drought caused by failure to prevent bracken ferns from overrunning the fields.
- D) a drought caused by actions of human beings.
- E) a drought caused by climate changes.

Question 3

According to the passage, the drought at the time of Maya collapse had a different impact compared to the droughts earlier because

- A) the Maya kings continued to be extravagant when common people were suffering.
- B) it happened at the time of collapse of leadership among Mayas.
- C) it happened when the Maya population had occupied all available land suited for agriculture.
- D) it was followed by internecine warfare among Mayans.
- E) irreversible environmental degradation led to this drought.

Question 4

According to the author, why is it difficult to explain the reasons for Maya collapse?

- A) Copan inhabitants destroyed all records of that period.
- B) The constant deforestation and hillside erosion have wiped out all traces of the Maya kingdom.
- C) Archaeological sites of Mayas do not provide any consistent evidence.
- D) It has not been possible to ascertain which of the factors best explains why the Maya civilization collapsed.
- E) At least five million people were crammed into a small area.

Question 5

Which factor has not been cited as one of the factors causing the collapse of Maya society?

- A) Environmental degradation due to excess population

- B) Social collapse due to excess population
- C) Increased warfare among Maya people
- D) Climate change
- E) Obsession of Maya population with their own short-term concerns

Instructions

Right through history, imperial powers have clung to their possessions to death. Why, then, did Britain in 1947 give up the jewel in its crown, India? For many reasons. The independence struggle exposed the hollowness of the white man's burden. Provincial self-rule since 1935 paved the way for full self-rule. Churchill resisted independence, but the Labour government of Atlee was anti-imperialist by ideology. Finally, the Royal Indian Navy mutiny in 1946 raised fears of a second Sepoy mutiny, and convinced British waverers that it was safer to withdraw gracefully. But politico-military explanations are not enough. The basis of empire was always money. The end of empire had much to do with the fact that British imperialism had ceased to be profitable. World War II left Britain victorious but deeply indebted, needing Marshall Aid and loans from the World Bank. This constituted a strong financial case for ending the no-longer profitable empire.

Empire building is expensive. The US is spending one billion dollars a day in operations in Iraq that fall well short of full scale imperialism. Through the centuries, empire building was costly, yet constantly undertaken because it promised high returns. The investment was in armies and conquest. The returns came through plunder and taxes from the conquered.

No immorality was attached to imperial loot and plunder. The biggest conquerors were typically revered (hence titles like Alexander the Great, Akbar the Great, and Peter the Great). The bigger and richer the empire, the more the plunderer was admired. This mindset gradually changed with the rise of new ideas about equality and governing for the public good, ideas that culminated in the French and American revolutions.

Robert Clive was impeached for making a little money on the side, and so was Warren Hastings. The white man's burden came up as a new moral rationale for conquest. It was supposedly for the good of the conquered. This led to much muddled hypocrisy. On the one hand, the empire needed to be profitable. On the other hand, the white man's burden made brazen loot impossible.

An additional factor deterring loot was the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny. Though crushed, it reminded the British vividly that they were a tiny ethnic group who could not rule a gigantic subcontinent without the support of important locals. After 1857, the British stopped annexing one princely state after another, and instead treated the princes as allies. Land

revenue was fixed in absolute terms, partly to prevent local unrest and partly to promote the notion of the white man's burden. The empire proclaimed itself to be a protector of the Indian peasant against exploitation by Indian elites. This was denounced as hypocrisy by nationalists like Dadabhoi Naoroji in the 19th century, who complained that land taxes led to an enormous drain from India to Britain. Objective calculations by historians like Angus Maddison suggest a drain of perhaps 1.6 percent of Indian Gross National Product in the 19th century. But land revenue was more or less fixed by the Raj in absolute terms, and so its real value diminished rapidly with inflation in the 20th century. By World War II, India had ceased to be a profit center for the British Empire.

Historically, conquered nations paid taxes to finance fresh wars of the conqueror. India itself was asked to pay a large sum at the end of World War I to help repair Britain's finances. But, as shown by historian Indivar Kamtekar, the independence movement led by Gandhiji changed the political landscape, and made mass taxation of India increasingly difficult. By World War II, this had become politically impossible. Far from taxing India to pay for World War II, Britain actually began paying India for its contribution of men and goods. Troops from white dominions like Australia; Canada and New Zealand were paid for entirely by these countries, but Indian costs were shared by the British government. Britain paid in the form of nonconvertible sterling balances, which mounted swiftly. The conqueror was paying the conquered, undercutting the profitability on which all empire is founded. Churchill opposed this, and wanted to tax India rather than owe it money. But he was overruled by Indian hands who said India would resist payment, and paralyze the war effort. Leo Amery, Secretary of State for India, said that when you are driving in a taxi to the station to catch a life-or-death train, you do not loudly announce that you have doubts whether to pay the fare. Thus, World War II converted India from a debtor to a creditor with over one billion pounds in sterling balances. Britain, meanwhile, became the biggest debtor in the world. It's not worth ruling over people you are afraid to tax.

Question 6

Why didn't Britain tax India to finance its World War II efforts?

- A) Australia, Canada and New Zealand had offered to pay for Indian troops.
- B) India has already paid a sufficiently large sum during World War I.
- C) It was afraid that if India refused to pay, Britain's war efforts would be jeopardized.
- D) The British empire was built on the premise that the conqueror pays the conquered.

Question 7

What was the main lesson the British learned from the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857.

- A) That the local princes were allies, not foes.
- B) That the land revenue from India would decline dramatically.
- C) That the British were a small ethnic group.
- D) That India would be increasingly difficult to rule.

Question 8

Which of the following best captures the meaning of the 'white man's burden', as it is used by the author?

- A) The British claim to a civilizing mission directed at ensuring the good of the natives.
- B) The inspiration for the French and American revolutions.
- C) The resource drain that had to be borne by the home country's white population.
- D) An imperative that made open looting of resources impossible.

Question 9

Which one of the following best expresses the main purpose of the author?

- A) To present the various reasons that can lead to the collapse of an empire and the granting of independence of the subjects of an empire.
- B) To point out the critical role played by the 'white man's burden' in making a colonizing power give up its claims to native possessions.
- C) To highlight the contradictory impulse underpinning empire building which is a costly business but very attractive at the same time.
- D) To illustrate how erosion of the financial basis of an empire supports the granting of independence to an empire's constituents.

Answer:-

1. Answer: A
2. Answer: D
3. Answer: C
4. Answer: D

5. Answer: E
6. Answer: C
7. Answer: C
8. Answer: A
9. Answer: D