PARK EAST HIGH SCHOOL
Purpose, Preparation, Pride

Name: _____ Date: _____ Period: _____

Sepoys, Cotton, and the British in India


SEPOY INDIAN TROOPS dividing the spoils after their mutiny against British rule (1857-1859).

During the 1700s, the Mughal Empire in India began to weaken. European trading companies competed to extend their control over the subcontinent. By the 1750s, the British East India Company began to wage war on land beyond their coastal ports. The Company also fought against the French East India Company for control of the subcontinent. Eventually, the British East India Company emerged victorious and established a trade monopoly over the subcontinent while simultaneously establishing its rule over the majority of the subcontinent.

Cotton was India's valued export. Cotton cloth woven by Indian weavers was sent to Britain to supply a global demand for fabrics. To maintain its profitable control of cotton and the subcontinent, the British East India Company created huge armies of Indian soldiers or sepoys. These armies defended the company's territory and crushed any resistance. However, it would also be these armies that led to the transfer of the subcontinent from the Company to the British Crown.

Questions:

1. What was happing to the Mughal Empire's control in India? (Be specific and use prior information from earlier this year)

2. Who took control of India after the Mughals? Why?

3. What was the valued Indian export? What happened to it once it left India?

4. What did the British East India Company do to keep control in India?

The Sepoy Rebellion (1857-1859)



Sepoys were Indian soldiers hired to serve in the British East India Company's armies. Yes, it is quite strange to think of a Company having its own army and it is even stranger to consider a Company ruling a nation. However, the British East India Company did govern the subcontinent. In any event, the Sepoys rebelled in 1857. The primary cause of the rebellion was religious. In 1857, the Sepoys were issued new ammunition for their rifles. The new cartridges had to be greased. A rumour spread that the cartridges had a mixture of beef and pork fat. Of course, Hindus are prohibited from touching beef products. The cow is a sacred animal in Hinduism and Hindus cannot kill cows, eat beef, or touch beef products. As the dominant religion in India, many Sepoys were Hindus. Islam is also a popular religion, particularly in northern India. Muslims considered the pig an unclean animal. Muslims are prohibited from eating pork products. Many Sepoys were also Muslims. In response to this direct disregard for their religious beliefs, the Sepoys rebelled. They killed British officers and headed to Delhi to establish a new government. Regular army forces from Britain arrived in 1858 and cruelly put down the revolt. By 1859, the Sepoy Mutiny had ended. However, after the failure of the Company to prevent and crush the rebellion, the British government took over administration of the subcontinent. The British East India Company no longer ruled India. India became a British colony ruled by the government in Great Britain. On a side note about the original cause of the rebellion, whatever the actual reason was, cow and pig fats were not used in the earlier cartridges and East India Company was not running out of cash so the option to use cow and pig grease would not be necessary. There are other incidences too that added to the spread of this rumor, such as that Indians, many times in the light of nationalism, intentionally or unintentionally inferred that the ultimate aim of British-rule was to divert everyone to Christianity by destroying their own religions and faith. The East India Company did get dissolved after battle of 1857 after ruling India for 100 years.

Questions:

1. Who were the Sepoys?

2. Why did the Sepoys rebel in 1857?

3. What was the outcome of the Sepoy Mutiny?

4. What lessons can be learned from the Sepoy Mutiny?

Elisa Greathed:
An Account of the Opening of the Indian Mutiny at Meerut, 1857

Sunday, the 10th of May, dawned in peace and happiness. The early morning service, at the…Church, saw many assembled together, some never to meet on earth again. The day passed in quiet happiness; no thought of danger disturbed the serenity of that happy home. Alas! how differently closed the Sabbath which dawned so tranquilly. We were on the point of going to the evening service, when… Shots and volumes of smoke told of what was going on…The increasing tumult, thickening smoke, and fires all around…On all sides we could hear them smashing and plundering…We owed much to the fidelity of our servants: had but one proved treacherous, our lives must have been sacrificed…After some time…Just as the fire threatened our destruction, we heard the voice of one of our servants calling to us to come down…Our faithful servant, Golab Khan, seeing our perilous situation amidst the increasing flames, and that every moment was precious, with his characteristic presence of mind and quickness, had suddenly thought of a plan by which to draw away the mob, who, after having satisfied themselves with all the plunder they could get, were every moment becoming more eager in their search for us. He boldly went up to them, won their confidence by declaring himself of their faith, and willing to give us up into their hands. He assured them it was useless to continue their search in the house; but if they would all follow him, he would lead them to a haystack, where we had been concealed…The plan succeeded; and so convinced were they that what he had told them was the truth, that not a man remained behind. In this interval we got safely down…but we had only just time to escape into the garden when the mutinous crowd returned, madder than ever at the deception that had been practised on them.

Questions:

1. What happened on the 10th of May?

2. Who protected the narrator and her family?

3. How did he protect the narrator and her family?

4. Why had the Sepoys rebelled (from previous information)?

5. Why do you think the rebellion surprised the British?

Effects of British Imperialism on India

Positive Effects	Negative Effects
• The British built the world's third largest railroad network in India	• The British restricted Indian-owned industries such as cotton textiles
• Railroads and telegraphs united the subcontinent	• The British emphasis on cash crops resulted in a loss of self-sufficiency for many villagers
• The British developed a modern road network and built dams and irrigation canals	• Famines increased as cash crops reduced food production
• Sanitation and public health improved	• Indians faced discrimination from the British in their own land

Ultimately, the British wanted India's resources for its factories. Indian resources were exported to Great Britain and converted into manufactured goods that were sold throughout the world. Of course, manufactured goods were more profitable than raw materials. As such, India exported cheaper resources and was forced to import expensive manufactured goods. By not allowing Indian industries to compete, the subcontinent experienced great poverty. The Indian people suffered as India became an exporter of cash crops and an importer of more expensive finished goods. As Mohandas Gandhi, one of the leaders of India's independence movement, once said, "The industrialized countries of the West were exploiting other nations. India is herself an exploited country

Questions:

1. How did British imperialism benefit Indians?

2. How did British imperialism harm Indians?

3. What is a cash crop?

4. How does dependence on a cash crop harm a region?

5. Why did the British want Indians to export raw materials?

6. What did the British do with India's cotton?

7. Why did the British want to export manufactured goods?

8. What were the reasons why was India was an exploited country?