

## Honors Literature – World History

**TASK:** Read the following text carefully, making all appropriate notations. Identify SOAPStone, DIDLS, PERSIAN, and other information as evidence of your research and analysis of the piece of literature. Answer the related questions on notebook paper or on this document. You may use this information for any written essay on the piece. See the text at the very bottom of these notes.

### **TASK: Comprehension Questions**

1. On the basis of this sample, what aspects of the West's claims to superiority would you say were called into question by the suicidal conflict of the leading powers within European civilization?
2. What aspects of their own civilization do these writers, both implicitly and explicitly, champion as alternatives to the ways of the West?
3. Are these writers in danger of stereotyping both the West and their own civilizations?

## Lessons for the Colonized from the Slaughter in the Trenches

The prolonged and senseless slaughter of the youth of Europe in the trench stalemate on the Western Front did much to erode the image of Europeans as superior, rational, and more civilized beings that they had worked hard to propagate among the colonized peoples in the decades before the Great War. The futility of the seemingly endless slaughter cast doubts on the Europeans' rationality and fitness to rule themselves, *much less the rest of the world*. The destructive uses to which their science and technology were put brought into question the Europeans' long-standing claims that these material advancements tangibly demonstrated their intellectual and organizational superiority over all other peoples. The excerpts below, taken from the writings of some of the leading thinkers and political leaders of the colonized peoples of Africa and Asia, reflect their disillusionment with the West as a result of the war and the continuing turmoil in Europe in the postwar era.

### Rabindranath Tagore

Bengali poet, playwright, and novelist Rabindranath Tagore was one of the earliest non-European recipients of the Nobel Prize for literature.

Has not this truth already come home to you now when this cruel war has driven its claws into the vitals of Europe? When her hoard of wealth is bursting into smoke and her humanity is shattered on her battlefields? You ask in amazement what she has done to deserve this? The answer is, that the West has been systematically petrifying her moral nature in order to lay a solid foundation for her gigantic abstractions of efficiency. She has been all along starving the life of the personal man into that of the professional.

### Mohandas Gandhi

In the years after the First World War, Mohandas Gandhi emerged as India's leading nationalist figure.

India's destiny lies not along the bloody way of the West, but along the *bloodless way of peace that comes from a simple and godly life*. India is in danger of losing her soul. . . . She must not, therefore, lazily and helplessly say, "I cannot escape the onrush from the West." She must be strong enough to resist it for her own sake and that of the world. I make bold to say that the Europeans themselves will

have to remodel their outlooks if they are not to perish under the weight of the comforts to which they are becoming slaves.

### Léopold Sédar Senghor

Senegalese poet and political leader Léopold Sédar Senghor is widely regarded as one of the 20th century's finest writers in the French language.

Lord, the snow of your Peace is your proposal to a divided world to a divided Europe  
To Spain torn apart.  
And I forget  
White hands that fired the shots which brought the empires crumbling  
Hands that flogged the slaves, that flogged You [Jesus Christ]  
Chalk-white hands that buffeted You, powdered painted hands that buffeted me  
Confident hands that delivered me to solitude to hatred  
White hands that felled the forest of palm trees once commanding Africa, in the heart of Africa.

From *Snow upon Paris*

### Aimé Césaire

West Indian poet Aimé Césaire was a founder of the *négritude* movement, which asserted black culture in the late 1920s.

Heia [Praise] for those who have never invented anything  
those who never explored anything  
those who never tamed anything  
those who give themselves up to the essence of all things  
ignorant of surfaces but struck by the movement of all things.

From *Return to My Native Land*

**QUESTIONS** On the basis of this sample, what aspects of the West's claims to superiority would you say were called into question by the suicidal conflict of the leading powers within European civilization? What aspects of their own civilizations do these writers, both implicitly and explicitly, champion as alternatives to the ways of the West? Are these writers in danger of stereotyping both the West and their own civilizations?

