



THINKING NATION

Prompt

Evaluate the historical significance of the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Write the prompt in your own words

Contextualizing the January 2021 Insurrection



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Hook

Rumors can ruin friendships. Imagine that one of your former friends begins to spread a false rumor about you to the whole school. Many of your friends begin to share the same rumor, despite there being no evidence that it is true. A few even come to ask you if it is true. Not only do you tell them it isn't, but you show them how it would be so impossible for the rumor to be true given the circumstances. While they do believe you, they stay silent. They watch the rumor spread across the school and don't challenge it, because they value the relationship they built with the original rumor creator. They don't want to jeopardize that, and they are not willing to stand up for the truth that could protect your name.

You feel abandoned, but with everyone believing the rumor and not the truth, no matter how many times you share it, you feel helpless. The person who spread the rumor grows in popularity at your expense. Saddened, you aren't sure what to do and no one is willing to stand alongside you.

1. The above scenario is something no one would want to experience. What ideas do you have about getting the truth out there in order to squash the rumor?
2. Why is important to stand against rumors even if you may not directly benefit from making such a stance?

Brainstorm: What do I already know?

Use this space to write down anything you already know about the subject of this DBQ: **The January 6, 2021 insurrection at the United States Capitol.** What was happening during this time? What people are significant and relevant?

How does this connect to the U.S. Constitution?

On January 6, 2021, Congress was to complete its constitutional duty of counting each state's electoral votes. According to the 12th Amendment, "The President of the Senate [the Vice President] shall, in the presence of the Senate and House of Representatives, open all the certificates and the votes shall then be counted." While this process is usually simply procedural, it does leave the option for members of both houses of Congress to object to these counts. If a member of both the House and the Senate object to counting a particular state's electoral votes, each house of Congress must return to their chambers and debate that objection. In solidarity with President Trump's baseless claims of widespread voter fraud, some Republicans announced that they would object to states like Wisconsin, Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Georgia. These objections would only delay the finally counting of the vote and not actually change the outcome. Still, they claimed that they were ensuring that the voices of their constituents, who believed that the election was rigged, were heard. Early on in the state count, objections were made to Arizona's votes. During this debate, the Capitol went on lockdown after rioters breached the building.

After hours of lockdown, the joint session of Congress was able to continue. In these late night hours, seven Republican senators and 138 Republicans in the House maintained their objection to Pennsylvania's votes. While members of the House objected to the votes from Georgia, Michigan, and Nevada, no senators did, and thus no debates occurred. By 3 a.m. on January 7th, the count was complete. The Constitutional process withstood the insurrection, and the last step in the election process was finished.

1. Which Constitutional Amendment outlines the process for counting each state's electoral votes in Congress?



What connection can be made to the past?

When southern states seceded from the United States in late 1860 and early 1861, their motives were clear. The Vice President of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens, demonstrated this in his famous “Cornerstone Speech.” “Our new government is founded” he declared, “upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.” Simply, the Confederacy fought the United States in order to preserve slavery.

After the Civil War ended and the South lost, however, many people tried to hide these clear motives. White Americans, North and South, wanted to reconcile with one another; therefore, they tried to hide their motivation to preserve inhuman bondage behind the lie of “state’s rights.” Unfortunately, this “Lost Cause” ideology, born of fraudulent history, persisted in American culture.

Similar to that Lost Cause ideology, the claims of voter fraud that led to the January 6 insurrection were built on distortions of reality. In the 19th century, white southerners claimed a myth: that though their cause was just, northern industrial might was too strong. Now in 2020-21, a new myth serves as the foundation of this new lost cause, that Trump’s defeat was not because his ideas were wrong and democracy voted him out, but because there was widespread voter fraud, despite no evidence sustaining that claim.

1. Describe the “Lost Cause” ideology that southerners falsely claimed after the Civil War (1861-65).

What vocabulary should I know?

1. U.S. Capitol ____

A. a group of people who want to attack someone who they think has committed a serious crime.

2. insurrection ____

B. a proceeding granted to Congress in Article I of the Constitution to address serious misconduct by a public official, which can lead to removal from office.

3. Christian nationalism ____

C. a sudden, violent, and illegal seizure of power from a government.

4. impeachment ____

D. a type of nationalism that contends that America has been and should always be distinctively ‘Christian’ from top to bottom and it aims to keep it this way.

5. coup d’etat ____

E. the meeting place of the United States Congress and the seat of the legislative branch of the U.S. Government.

6. lynch mob ____

F. a violent uprising against an authority or government.



What is the context?

While history is so much more than single events, certain events often allow historians to anchor historical eras to particular actions. The insurrection at the U.S. Capitol was such an event. Future historians will analyze this event in order to better understand the United States in this particular time period. This DBQ asks you to begin this process.

On November 3, 2020, millions of voters cast their ballots for the nation's next president. Due to the coronavirus pandemic that engulfed the globe throughout 2020, millions more had already cast their ballots in the weeks before, either through early voting stations or by mail. After days of tallying votes, on November 7, Joe Biden was declared the winner and would become the 46th president **(A)**.

When the current president, Donald Trump, began to see his lead slip in some swing states, he argued that widespread voter fraud was the only explanation. Over the next two-and-a-half months, despite no evidence of widespread fraud materializing and federal courts dismissing over 80 lawsuits on Trump's behalf—citing that they lacked evidence—Trump continued to bolster this narrative that the election was stolen from him because of fraud **(B)**.

News outlets that favored Trump echoed his baseless claims and many Republican members of Congress stood by him publicly, even if they privately knew his accusations had no merit. Many people took to social media, virally spreading these false claims. So many, in fact, that polls suggest that as many as 75% of Republicans believed voter fraud to be rampant **(C)**.

On January 6th, the final step in the electoral process was to take place in Washington, D.C. The joint Houses of Congress were to count each state's electoral votes, cementing Biden's victory two weeks before Inauguration Day **(D)**. During this process, protesters breached Capitol grounds, charged Capitol Police, broke down barriers, and eventually broke windows to open doors and enter the Capitol.

After hours of occupying the Capitol, destroying and stealing property and violently confronting Capitol Police, these protesters-turned-insurrectionists were removed and Congress completed their constitutional duty of counting the votes. But great damage was done. After months of President Trump spreading false claims about election integrity in order to maintain his executive power, his supporters took his words literally. The culmination was a violent coup attempt that shook the center of U.S. democracy. Even though it failed, the divisions which inspired it live on **(E)**.

For this DBQ, use the documents provided and your understanding of this historical moment to answer the question: **Evaluate the historical significance of the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.**

A. Why did the counting of votes take multiple days?

B. How did federal courts respond to Trump's lawsuits claiming voter fraud?

C. Did Trump's claims of voter fraud take hold? Explain.

D. What process was set to take place at the Capitol on January 6th?

E. In one sentence, what happened at the Capitol on January 6th?



Prompt

Evaluate the historical significance of the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Targeted Historical Thinking Skill:

CONTEXTUALIZATION

Thinking historically means interpreting historical events, developments, or processes in light of the surrounding historical context.

Documents

Document A: Donald Trump, “Save America Rally” Speech, January 6, 2021.

Document B: Kellie Carter Jackson, “The Inaction of Capitol Police Was by Design,” *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2021.

Document C: Emma Green, “A Christian Insurrection,” *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2021; Photos with Christian symbols outside of the U.S. Capitol, January 6, 2021.

Document D: Guy Lancaster, “A Modern Day Lynch Mob Invaded the Capitol on January 6,” *History News Network*, January 10, 2021; Photo of gallows set up by protesters outside of the U.S. Capitol, January 6, 2021.

Document E: Photo of Kevin Seefried carrying a Confederate Battle Flag through the U.S. Capitol, January 6, 2021.

Document F: “Impeaching Donald John Trump, President of the United States, for high crimes and misdemeanors,” House Resolution 24, January 11, 2021 (passed on January 13).

Document G: Memorandum for the Joint Force [of the United States Military], January 12, 2021.



Document A

Source: Donald Trump, “Save America Rally” Speech, January 6, 2021.

Note: President Trump gave this speech to thousands of his supporters outside of the White House hours before many marched to the Capitol, eventually storming the building.

I just, again, I want to thank you. It’s just a great honor to have this kind of crowd and to be before you. Hundreds of thousands of American patriots are committed to the honesty of our elections and the integrity of our glorious Republic. All of us here today do not want to see our election victory stolen by emboldened radical left Democrats, which is what they’re doing and stolen by the fake news media... We will never give up. We will never concede, it doesn’t happen. You don’t concede when there’s theft involved. Our country has had enough... To use a favorite term that all of you people really came up with, we will “stop the steal.” Today I will lay out just some of the evidence proving that we won this election, and we won it by a landslide. This was not a close election... We will not let them silence your voices. We’re not going to let it happen...

Crowd: “Fight for Trump! Fight for Trump! Fight for Trump!”

Many of you have traveled from all across the nation to be here... There’s never been a movement like this ever, ever for the extraordinary love for this amazing country and this amazing movement. Thank you.

Crowd: “We love Trump! We love Trump! We love Trump!”

...For years, Democrats have gotten away with election fraud and weak Republicans, and that’s what they are... the weak Republicans, they’re pathetic Republicans... But just remember this. You’re stronger, you’re smarter... You’re the people that built this nation. You’re not the people that tore down our nation...

After this, we’re going to walk down [to the Capitol] and I’ll be there with you... because you’ll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength, and you have to be strong... I know that everyone here will soon be marching over to the Capitol building to peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard.

Our brightest days are before us, our greatest achievements still wait... And we fight. We fight like Hell and if you don’t fight like Hell, you’re not going to have a country anymore.

1. For what reasons does President Trump claim that protestors are gathered in Washington, D.C. on January 6, 2021?
2. Citing evidence from this speech, why is the January 6th insurrection historically significant?



Document B

Source: Kellie Carter Jackson, “The Inaction of Capitol Police Was by Design,” *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2021.

Note: Kellie Carter Jackson is an assistant professor of Africana studies at Wellesley College.

What Americans witnessed on their TV screens on Wednesday was not just an insurrection against American democracy—it was also an expression of white supremacy. As mobs of white Trump supporters stormed the Capitol building to ransack offices, terrorize lawmakers, and interrupt the certification of the presidential election, they were met with a notably weak show of force by the Capitol Police, who were responsible for quelling the insurrection...

Why did law enforcement assume that they’d encounter violence from protesters marching for Black lives in June, but think that a largely white crowd of pro-Trump extremists and conspiracy theorists would remain peaceful? ...police brutality against Black Americans and police inaction toward white Americans is not some surprising anomaly; it is the status quo...

The genesis of modern American policing can be traced in part to the institution of chattel slavery and its white-supremacist orthodoxy... [W.E.B.] Du Bois characterized occurrences such as this one as part of the “double system of justice, which erred on the white side by undue leniency and... practical immunity.”...

The mob attacks on the Capitol are not so much “unprecedented” as they are consistent with America’s history of white backlash to racial equality and white entitlement to political, economic, and social control... Wednesday’s violence claims no legitimate grievances. It is merely the perpetual retaliation to racial progress... This was not an uprising against a tyrannical government; it was an uprising against a multicultural government. And the police reaction—calm, measured, tolerant—to that uprising suggests that when it comes to engaging in violence against the state, white perpetrators have nothing to lose.

1. According to Kellie Carter Jackson, what did the response by Capitol Police reveal about policing in the United States?
2. Based on this article, why is the January 6th insurrection historically significant?



Document C

Source: Emma Green, “A Christian Insurrection,” *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2021; Photos with Christian symbols outside of the U.S. Capitol, January 6, 2021.

Note: All Pictures are cropped © [Tyler Merbler](#), [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)

The name of God was everywhere during Wednesday’s insurrection against the American government. The mob carried signs and flag declaring JESUS SAVES! and GOD, GUNS & GUTS MADE AMERICA, LET’S KEEP ALL THREE. Some were participants in the Jericho March, a gathering of Christians to “pray, march, fast, and rally for election integrity.”

...

The Jericho March, [which took place on December 12, 2020] is evidence that Donald Trump has bent elements of American Christianity to his will, and that many Christians have obligingly remade their faith in his image. Defiant masses literally broke down the walls of government, some believing they were marching under Jesus’s banner to implement God’s will to keep Trump in the White House.



1. Emma Green’s article calls what happened on January 6, “A Christian Insurrection.” What elements of Christianity were present that day?
2. Consider the vocabulary word, “Christian nationalism” when looking at these photos. With this in mind, why is the January 6th insurrection historically significant?

Document D

Source: Guy Lancaster, "A Modern Day Lynch Mob Invaded the Capitol on January 6," *History News Network*, January 10, 2021; Photo of gallows set up by protesters outside of the U.S. Capitol, January 6, 2021.

The terrorists who stormed the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, were nothing less than an old-fashioned lynch mob... And every other facet of their actions harkens back to the spectacle lynchings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

First, just consider the impunity with which they operated. These terrorists besieged the capitol building and then roamed its halls undisguised. Likewise, ...the greatest manifestation of [a lynch] mob's impunity was taking pictures of themselves with the lynching victim, knowing full well that documenting their crimes would not affect their lives at all. And so did we see the terrorists of January 6 extensively document their attacks upon police and their acts of property damage, all on social media.

Next, both groups, those older lynch mobs and these more modern terrorists, collected souvenirs of their deeds... On June 19, 1913, the mob that lynched Will Norman in downtown Hot Springs, Arkansas... burned his body to ashes and then sifted through the remains to gather up bits of bone that could be kept or sold to tourists. Our more modern American terrorist groups are likewise obsessed with souvenirs of their deeds... with one terrorist in a Trump hat even making off with a podium.

Finally, we must consider the relationship between the mob and law enforcement. Lynch mobs actually had a very good relationship with the police... [and on] January 6, 2021... We saw a diminished mobilization of Capitol Police in the face of well-planned mob violence. We saw those police essentially open the gates to the terrorists, take selfies with them, help them down the stairs, and only make a handful of arrests.

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1. What comparisons does Guy Lancaster, a historian, make between the January 6th insurrection and lynch mobs, who killed hundreds of Black Americans during Jim Crow?
2. Based on this article, why is the January 6th insurrection historically significant?

Document E

Source: Photo of Kevin Seefried carrying a Confederate Battle Flag through the U.S. Capitol, January 6, 2021. Photo cropped from FBI ["Seeking Information" Poster](#).

Note: In a deep sense of historical irony, behind Seefried, who holds the Confederate flag, is a portrait of 19th century Senator, Charles Sumner, on the right and 7th Vice President, John C. Calhoun, on the left. Sumner was one of the most vocal abolitionists in Congress before and during the Civil War. He stood against everything the Confederacy stood for. Conversely, Calhoun, who died a decade before the Civil War began, was a staunch supporter of slavery, even calling it a "positive good" on the Senate floor in 1837.



1. Even during the Civil War, this flag never made it into the Capitol. With this history in mind, why is this picture significant?
2. If you were asked to describe the January 6th insurrection using just this picture, how would you describe it?

Document F

Source: “Impeaching Donald John Trump, President of the United States, for high crimes and misdemeanors,” House Resolution 24, January 11, 2021 (passed on January 13).

Resolved, That Donald John Trump, President of the United States, is impeached for high crimes and misdemeanors...

ARTICLE I: INCITEMENT OF INSURRECTION

[S]ection 3 of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution prohibits any person who has “engaged in insurrection or rebellion against” the United States from “hold[ing] any office ... under the United States”... Donald John Trump engaged in high Crimes and Misdemeanors by inciting violence against the Government of the United States, in that:

In the months preceding the Joint Session [of Congress to count the votes for the Electoral College on January 6, 2021], President Trump repeatedly issued false statements asserting that the Presidential election results were the product of widespread fraud and should not be accepted by the American people or certified by State or Federal officials. Shortly before the Joint Session commenced, President Trump, addressed a crowd at the Ellipse in Washington, DC. There, he... willfully made statements... such as: “if you don’t fight like hell you’re not going to have a country anymore”. Thus incited by President Trump, members of the crowd he had addressed... unlawfully breached and vandalized the Capitol, injured and killed law enforcement personnel, menaced Members of Congress, the Vice President, and Congressional personnel, and engaged in other violent, deadly, destructive, and seditious acts.

...President Trump gravely endangered the security of the [U.S] and its institutions of Government. He threatened the integrity of the democratic system, interfered with the peaceful transition of power, and imperiled a coequal branch of Government...

Donald John Trump, by such conduct, has demonstrated that he will remain a threat to national security, democracy, and the Constitution if allowed to remain in office... [he] thus warrants impeachment and trial, removal from office, and disqualification to hold and enjoy any office of honor, trust, or profit under the United States.

1. What evidence is provided for the second impeachment of President Trump?
2. Citing evidence from these articles of impeachment, why is the January 6th insurrection historically significant?



Document G

Source: Memorandum for the Joint Force [of the United States Military], January 12, 2021.

Note: This Message to the U.S. Troops was signed the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the body of the most senior uniformed leaders within the United States Department of Defense.

The American people have trusted the Armed Forces of the United States to protect them and our Constitution for almost 250 years. As we have done throughout our history, the U.S. military will obey lawful orders from civilian leadership, support civil authorities to protect lives and property, ensure public safety in accordance with the law, and remain fully committed to protecting and defending the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

The violent riot in Washington, D.C. on January 6, 2021 was a direct assault on the U.S. Congress, the Capitol building, and our Constitutional process. We mourn the deaths of the two Capitol policemen and others connected to these unprecedented events.

We witnessed actions inside the Capitol building that were inconsistent with the rule of law. The rights of freedom of speech and assembly do not give anyone the right to resort to violence, sedition and insurrection.

As Service Members, we must embody the values and ideals of the Nation. We support and defend the Constitution. Any act to disrupt the Constitutional process is not only against our traditions, values, and oath; it is against the law.

1. This memo was written and signed by the most senior officials in the U.S. Department of Defense. How do they describe the events of January 6th?
2. Why is it significant that the U.S. Department of Defense published this memo?

How will my essay be graded?

Category	Criteria	
Thesis (0-1 point) (CCSS RH9-12.2; WHST9-12.1a)	Clear thesis which makes a historically defensible claim.	
Purpose (0-2 points) (CCSS RH9-12.2; WHST9-12.1)	2 points	Argument is maintained throughout paper by using logical and historical reasoning and analysis to connect the evidence to the argument.
	1 point	Argument is mostly maintained throughout paper.
	0 points	Argument is not maintained.
Textual Evidence (0-2 points) (CCSS RH9-12.1; WHST9-12.1)	2 points	All but 1 of available documents are used appropriately as relevant evidence (can be direct quotes or paraphrase) to support paper's argument using <i>at least one</i> of the key sourcing strategies for <i>at least one</i> of the documents.
	1 point	All but 1 of available documents are used appropriately (can be direct quotes or paraphrase) but sourcing is unclear for <i>at least one</i> of the documents, OR more than half of documents are used.
	0 points	Less than half of documents are used in the paper.
Outside Evidence (0-1 point) (CCSS RH9-12.1; WHST9-12.1b)	1 point for use of relevant historical evidence to support the argument that goes beyond the documents. This outside evidence should be included in the body paragraphs and/or conclusion.	
Historical Thinking Skill: Contextualization (0-3 points)	3 points	The historical context of the specific historical event, development, or process outlined in the DBQ task is accurately described. Historical context is used to explain the influence <i>and/or</i> historical significance of the specific historical event, development or process.
	2 points	The historical context of the specific historical event, development, or process outlined in the DBQ task is accurately described, but is not used to explain anything deeper.
	1 point	The historical context of the specific historical event, development, or process outlined in the DBQ task is merely referenced.
	0 points	Any use of historical context is not visible.
Writing Mechanics (0-1 points) (CCSS WHST9-12.1b; WHST9-12.4)	1 point	Writing style, spelling, and grammar errors are few if any and don't interfere with the paper's clarity.
	0.5 points	Writing style, spelling, and grammar errors exist, and at times can interfere with the paper's clarity.
	0 points	Writing style, spelling, and grammar significantly inhibits the paper's clarity.
TOTAL:	_____/10	

Essay Outline

Thesis paragraph (rough draft):

Topic 1:

Document(s)

Outside Information

Topic 2:

Document(s)

Outside Information

Topic 3:

Document(s)

Outside Information

Conclusion (main ideas rephrased and overall conclusion of essay):