Document B: Confucian Essay:

Jia Yi was a Confucian poet and statesman of the Han dynasty who lived from approximately 200 to 168 BCE. Below are excerpts from his essay “The Faults of Qin.”

Chen She was a man who grew up in humble circumstances . . . and was a mere hired field hand and roving conscript of mediocre talent. . . . Yet, even stumbling as he did amidst the ranks of common soldiers and shuffling through the fields, he called forth a tired motley crowd and led a mob of several hundred to turn upon the Qin. . . . They had the whole world come to them like gathering clouds. . . . These men of courage from the East rose together, and in the end they defeated and extinguished the House of Qin. . . . Chen She’s weapons made of farm implements and thorny tree branches were no match in battle against spears and halberds, his roving conscripts in no way compared to the armies of the nine states. . . . Qin, from a tiny base, had become a great power, ruling the land and receiving homage from all quarters for a hundred-odd years. Yet a single common person could nevertheless challenge this empire and cause its ancestral temples to topple and its ruler to die at the hand of others, a laughing-stock in the eyes of all. Why? Because the ruler lacked humaneness and rightness; because preserving power differs fundamentally from seizing power. . . . Had the Second Emperor been even a mediocre ruler who knew how to employ local and capable persons . . . ; had he divided the land and appointed deserving officials . . . ; had he emptied the prisons and reduced harsh punishments . . . ; had he only reduced taxation and statutes to alleviate oppression . . . ; had he indeed fulfilled the wishes of the multitudes and bestowed high virtue on them, he would have certainly brought peace and quiet to the world.

Source: Jia Yi, “The Faults of Qin.”

Comprehension and Contextualization Questions:

1. Who was Jia Yi? How long after the fall of the Qin Dynasty was this document written?
2. The rebel leader Liu Bang founded the Han dynasty in 206 BCE. Jia Yi was a statesman of the Han dynasty. How might this have affected Yi’s account of the fall of Qin?
3. Under Qin, the philosophy and scholars of Confucianism were persecuted. At the beginning of the Han Dynasty, the imperial court accepted both Legalism and Confucianism. How might this have affected Yi’s account?