

Rationales for Imperialism

*Take up the White Man's Burden—
Send forth the best ye breed—
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.*

—Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden,” 1899

Essential Question: What ideologies contributed to the development of imperialism between 1750 and 1900?

Rudyard Kipling was an English writer who spent his youth in British colonial India. The speaker in his poem urged the whites of Western countries to establish colonies for the good of the “inferior” people of the world. Whether Kipling actually supported this idea is not clear, but his poem was used to justify it. Proponents justified European colonization using a variety of explanations, from a belief in nationalism, a desire for economic wealth, a sense of religious duty, and a belief they were biologically superior. These various motives for establishing overseas empires—a policy called **imperialism**—would lead to conflicts in Asia and a scramble to colonize Africa. (See Topic 6.2.)

Nationalist Motives for Imperialism

In Western Europe, revolutions, the rise of nationalism, and the creation of nation-states characterized much of the 1800s. With a strong sense of identity and loyalty to a state, many world powers boldly asserted authority over other territories. Building an empire in Asia or Africa was one way for a country to assert its national identity in the global arena. Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands would long possess overseas colonies.

European Nationalism After losing its American colonies, Britain looked for new lands to open to settlement. In 1788 the first British settlers arrived in the colony of New South Wales on the east coast of the island continent of New

Holland—today’s Australia. (See Topic 6.2.) Britain was also expanding its influence in South Asia, gradually taking control of India from the East India Company. By 1857 Britain controlled the entire Indian subcontinent. Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Burma (Myanmar), the Malay States (which included Singapore), and parts of Borneo in Southeast Asia were also under British control.

France compensated for its humiliating defeat by Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871) by expanding its overseas territories. It had already occupied Algeria in Northern Africa, New Caledonia and other islands in the South Pacific, Senegal in Western Africa, and Indochina in Southeast Asia.

Italy and Germany were newly unified states in the late-19th century. Each wanted colonies not only for economic and strategic reasons but also for prestige. However, neither began acquiring an empire until the mid-1880s.

While Spain had led the quest for colonies in the first wave of imperialism during the 16th and 17th centuries, its power was greatly diminished by the 19th century. It did not play a dominant role in this second wave of imperialism.

Japan in East Asia Japan asserted its nationalist pride through incursions into Korea. This irritated China, a country that had exerted a strong presence in Korea for centuries. The conflict grew into the **Sino-Japanese War** (1894–1895). Japan’s victory gave it control of Korea. Japan also seized Taiwan, which was known as **Formosa** from the time of Portuguese colonization in the 16th century until the end of World War II. (Connect: Identify three events of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that encouraged the growth of Japanese nationalism. See Topic 5.8.)

Cultural and Religious Motives for Imperialism

The Kipling quotation that opens this topic epitomized the condescending attitudes shared by imperialism’s proponents. Referring to colonized peoples as children reflected how colonizers saw themselves as benevolent protectors on a “civilizing mission” rather than invaders.

Racial Ideologies and the Misuse of Science The attitudes of whites toward others were a form of racism. Colonial powers generally believed that they were inherently superior to those they subjugated. Pseudoscientists, people who present theories as science that are actually incompatible with the scientific method, strengthened these attitudes. They claimed to have proof of the intellectual and physical inferiority of nonwhite races. **Phrenologists**, people who studied skull sizes and shapes, believed that a smaller skull size proved the mental feebleness of Africans, indigenous Americans, and Asians. These ideas have been proven false.

Legitimate science was also subverted to support imperialism. British scientist **Charles Darwin’s** 19th-century theory of evolution by natural selection stated that over millions of years, biological competition had “weeded out” the weaker species in nature and that the “fittest” species were the ones that survived. Some thinkers adapted Darwin’s theory of biological evolution to society, creating the theory known as **Social Darwinism**. While Darwin



Source: *The Boy Travelers in Australasia: Adventures of Two Youths in a Journey to the Sandwich, Marquesas, Society, Samoan and Feejee Islands, and Through the Colonies of New Zealand, New South Wales* (1889).

The image of a New Zealand village reflects how Europeans viewed native village people as simple.

himself was not a Social Darwinist, advocates used the “survival of the fittest” theory to argue that the spread of European and U.S. power proved the biological superiority of whites. Writers and politicians then used Social Darwinism to justify further imperialism by powerful countries.

Cultural Ideologies Based on technological superiority over indigenous societies, colonial powers felt justified in superimposing aspects of their own cultures on their colonies. For administrative purposes, many colonies combined into a single colony peoples from several cultures who often spoke different languages and had different customs. Colonizers introduced their own language, which helped to unify these often diverse colonies. They also introduced their political, educational, and religious institutions and exerted other cultural influences on architecture and recreational activities. Expressing the belief of many, Congregationalist minister Josiah Strong wrote in 1885, “Is there room for reasonable doubt that [the Anglo-Saxon] race . . . is destined to dispossess many weaker races, assimilate others, and mold the remainder, until, in a very true and important sense, it has Anglo-Saxonized mankind?”

Religious Motives Missionaries were among the most tireless “civilizing” influences. Like the Spanish and Portuguese Catholic missionaries who combined conquest and evangelism during the Age of Discovery, British

Protestant missionaries of the 18th and 19th centuries also participated in colonization. Critics charged that missionaries supported imperialism by persuading people to give up their traditional beliefs, such as ancestor veneration, and adopt the faith of most Europeans, Christianity. This change in religion could pave the way for others who were more focused on economic gain. In response, missionaries pointed out that they commonly combined religious and humanitarian efforts:

- Missionaries often set up schools for instruction in religion that also taught secular subjects, which prepared students to become teachers, lawyers, and other professionals.
- Many missionaries provided improved medicines and medical care.
- Some missionaries, most famously **David Livingstone** from Scotland, worked in Sub-Saharan Africa to end the illegal slave trade.

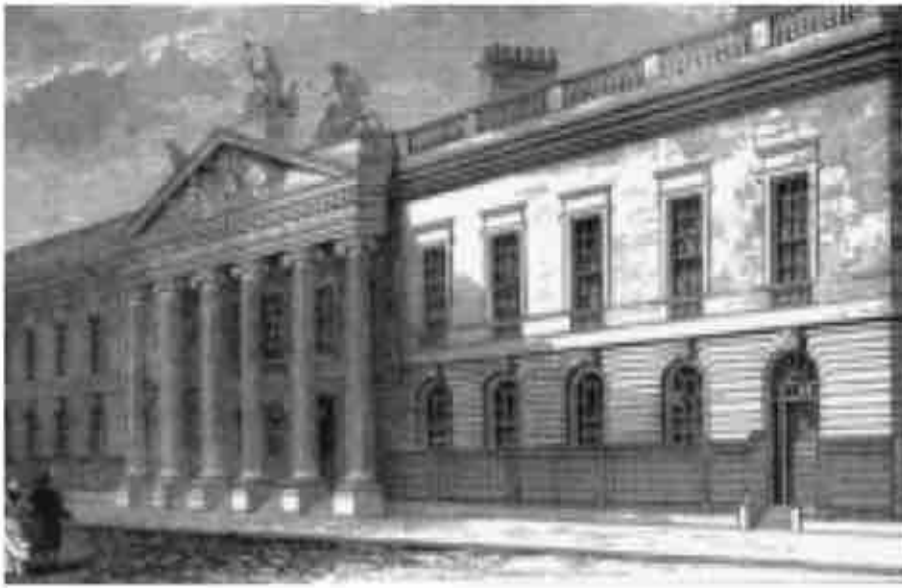
Economic Motives for Imperialism

Some people believe the ideological motivations were more accurately justifications for pursuing economic motives. Seeking ways to maximize profits, companies chartered by the British, French, and Dutch governments signed commercial treaties with local rulers in India, East Africa, and the East Indies. These treaties gave the Europeans the right to establish trading posts and forts to protect their interests. Originally, these companies formed primarily for the spice trade. Many companies had quasi-governmental powers, raising armies and conquering territory to form colonies.

As the Industrial Revolution transformed European economies, the desire for the sources for raw materials and markets for manufactured goods provided by colonies enticed imperial powers to increase their expansion. Imperial powers often competed with one another over the best potential resources, markets, and trade as demands for low-wage labor, access to markets, and control of natural resources increased.

East India Company The English monarch granted the **East India Company (EIC)** a royal charter in 1600 giving it a monopoly on England's trade with India. After driving the Portuguese out of India, the company traded primarily in cotton and silk, indigo, and spices.

Eventually, the EIC expanded its activities from the Persian Gulf to East Asia. By the beginning of the 18th century, it had become the major agent of British imperialism in India, and after 1834 it became the British government's managing agency in India. Starting in 1620, the EIC engaged in the slave trade, and during the 19th century it illegally exported opium to China in exchange for tea. The East India Company is often referred to as the English East India Company or, after 1707, the British East India Company to distinguish it from the Dutch East India Company.



Source: Getty Images

The London office of the East India Company was the headquarters for ruling British India until the British government took charge of the colony in 1858.

Dutch East India Company In 1602 the Dutch government gave the **Dutch East India Company** (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, or **VOC**) a monopoly on trade between the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa and the Straits of Magellan at the southern tip of South America. The VOC concentrated on the islands around Java, replacing the Portuguese who had controlled the region. Corruption and debt led the government to take control of the company’s possessions in 1799, creating the Dutch East Indies (today’s Indonesia).

The “New Imperialism” After the Industrial Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, Britain was the leading economic power throughout the first half of the 19th century and already had a sizable colonial empire. Its colonies provided raw materials such as cotton, wool, jute, vegetable oils, and rubber for its factories, as well as foodstuffs such as wheat, tea, coffee, cocoa, meat, and butter for its growing cities. Its colonies—especially settler colonies such as Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa—also provided markets for British manufactured goods.

As the Second Industrial Revolution progressed, other nations began to challenge Britain’s economic lead. They looked to Asia, Africa, and the Pacific to expand their markets, provide raw materials for their factories, and food for their growing urban populations.

KEY TERMS BY THEME		
<p>GOVERNMENT: Ideas imperialism nationalism</p> <p>GOVERNMENT: Wars Sino-Japanese War</p> <p>GOVERNMENT: Countries Formosa</p>	<p>CULTURE: Ideas phrenologists Charles Darwin Social Darwinism</p> <p>CULTURE: Religion David Livingstone</p>	<p>ECONOMICS: Companies East India Company (EIC) Dutch East India Company (VOC)</p>

MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

Questions 1 to 3 refer to the passage below.

“The English in India had always been somewhat more detached from the indigenous environment than the Dutch in Indonesia. After the 1780s, their isolation gradually intensified and became obvious with the decline in status of Eurasian Anglo-Indians. . . . The club became the center of British social life in India and the other Asian colonies during the Victorian era. In clubs, one could feel like a gentleman among other gentlemen while being served by a native staff. . . . The large clubs of Calcutta remained closed to Indians until 1946. This type of color bar was especially disturbing because it excluded from social recognition the very people who had carried their self-Anglicizing [becoming more like the British] the furthest and loyally supported British rule. . . .

In most regions of Africa . . . the Europeans saw themselves as foreign rulers separated from the African cultures by an abyss. . . . A process of great symptomatic significance was the rejection of the highly educated West Africans who had worked with the early mission. They had envisioned the colonial takeover as an opportunity for a joint European-African effort to modernize and civilize Africa. Instead, they were now, as ‘white Negroes,’ despised by all.”

Jurgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism*, 1997

1. Which theory did Europeans use most directly to justify the social patterns described in the passage?
 - (A) Social Darwinism
 - (B) Pan-Africanism
 - (C) popular sovereignty
 - (D) laissez-faire capitalism
2. Which statement best provides the context for the racial policies described in the passage that shaped imperialism in India and Africa?
 - (A) In both places, the English did not encourage highly educated native people to prepare for self-rule.
 - (B) In both places, a smooth transition of power helped the highly educated native people gain political power.
 - (C) In both places, social clubs were the meeting places for native people planning to fight for self-rule.
 - (D) In both places, the colonizers finally began to respect educated natives, thus weakening their own colonial rule.

3. The context for the European attitudes noted in the passage was that
- (A) Americans were telling the British that “all men are created equal”
 - (B) some scientists claimed Europeans were a biologically superior race
 - (C) most Indians and Africans preferred to create non-British clubs
 - (D) some Europeans wanted native people to leave India and Africa

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Use the passage below to answer all parts of the question that follows.

“Gentlemen, we must speak more loudly and more honestly! We must say openly that indeed the higher races have a right over the lower races. . . .

I repeat, that the superior races have a right because they have a duty. They have the duty to civilize the inferior races. . . . In the history of earlier centuries these duties, gentlemen, have often been misunderstood; and certainly when the Spanish soldiers and explorers introduced slavery into Central America, they did not fulfill their duty as men of a higher race. . . . But, in our time, I maintain that European nations acquit themselves with generosity, with grandeur, and with sincerity of this superior civilizing duty. I say that French colonial policy, the policy of colonial expansion, the policy that has taken us under the Empire [the Second Empire, of Napoleon III], to Saigon, to Indochina [French Southeast Asia], that has led us to Tunisia, to Madagascar—I say that this policy of colonial expansion was inspired by . . . the fact that a navy such as ours cannot do without safe harbors, defenses, supply centers on the high seas Are you unaware of this? Look at a map of the world.”

Jules Ferry, speech on French colonial expansion, 1884

- (A) Describe ONE motive Ferry offers for imperial expansion in the period 1750–1900 other than an economic motive.
 - (B) Explain ONE way in which Ferry’s argument is similar to other arguments of the period 1750–1900.
 - (C) Explain ONE way in which the French Revolution influenced French imperialism in the period 1750–1900.
2. Answer all parts of the question that follows.
- (A) Explain ONE economic motivation behind European imperialism in the 19th century.
 - (B) Explain ONE way in which European colonizers committed a failure of duty, according to Ferry.
 - (C) Explain ONE reason, besides religious conversion, missionaries believed they were helping the colonized lands.

THINK AS A HISTORIAN: EXPLAIN THE CONTEXT OF THE COLONIZATION OF AFRICA

In 1884–1885, in response to Germany’s arrival as a competitive force in Africa, ambassadors from throughout Europe met at the Berlin Conference to develop some guidelines and agreements for colonizing Africa. (See Topic 6.2.)

Read the following excerpt from the General Act of the Berlin Conference. Then explain how it articulates the political, economic, and ideological contexts for the development of European cooperation on colonizing and partitioning Africa.

“WISHING, in a spirit of good and mutual accord, to regulate the conditions most [favorable] to the development of trade and civilization in certain regions of Africa, and to assure to all nations the advantages of free navigation on the two chief rivers of Africa flowing into the Atlantic Ocean; BEING DESIROUS, on the other hand, to obviate [remove] the misunderstanding and disputes which might in the future arise from new acts of occupation on the coast of Africa; and concerned, at the same time, as to the means of furthering the moral and material well-being of the native populations; HAVE RESOLVED, on the invitation addressed to them by the Imperial Government of Germany, in agreement with the Government of the French Republic, to meet for those purposes in Conference at Berlin . . .”

General Act of the Conference at Berlin, 1885

REFLECT ON THE TOPIC ESSENTIAL QUESTION

1. In one to three paragraphs, explain the part ideologies played in the development of imperialism between 1750 and 1900.