

The Age of Imperialism



Chapter Themes

- ▶ **Movement** Political, economic, and social factors lead to the Age of Imperialism. *Section 1*
- ▶ **Change** European powers divide most of Africa into colonies, and Africans resist European intervention and colonialism. *Section 2*
- ▶ **Reaction** India and China come under European control or influence, while Japan tries to meet the Western challenge. *Section 3*
- ▶ **Nationalism** Nationalism intensifies in Latin America as United States involvement in the region increases. *Section 4*

The Storyteller

No one knows how the rumor started, but it spread quickly. The bullets for the new rifles, the story went, were greased with the fat of cows and pigs. The sepoys, Indian soldiers in the British army, were outraged. Because Hindus regarded the cow as sacred and Muslims could not touch pork, using these bullets would violate the beliefs of both groups. As a result, the sepoys started a rebellion in May 1857 that soon engulfed much of India.

The Indian Revolt of 1857 was not an isolated incident. As European powers acquired new territories in the 1800s, conflicts between colonial rulers and colonial peoples developed. By the early 1900s European nations ruled large parts of Asia and Africa, while the United States was expanding its interests in Latin America.

Historical Significance

How did the spread of empires affect peoples in Asia, Africa, and Latin America? How did colonial peoples respond to Western rule?

1850

1853 Commodore Perry lands in Japan.

1875

1869 Suez Canal opens.

1900

1885 European powers meet in Berlin to divide Africa into colonies.

1925

1911 China becomes a republic.

1800

c. 1800 Age of Imperialism begins.

1850

c. 1840s French citizens settle in Algeria.

1900

1899 British author Rudyard Kipling writes the poem "The White Man's Burden."

Section 1

Pressures for Expansion

Guide to Reading

Read to Find Out

Main Idea *There were political, economic, and social causes of imperialism.*

► Terms to Define

imperialism, colony, protectorate, sphere of influence

► People to Meet

Cecil Rhodes, Rudyard Kipling

► Places to Locate

Algeria, Australia, New Zealand, Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)

The Storyteller

In India, British schools taught English and required students to adopt Christianity. The wife of a British official described attending a graduation ceremony in the year 1886. "The proceedings began with a hymn. The children sang pretty well, though in a harsh voice.... Then a boy stood up, put his hands together, and repeated the Lord's Prayer. Others followed him, and then Mr.

Summers [the teacher] read a chapter from the Old Testament about Adam and Eve.... We could just tell he was speaking of the various nations—English, Parsee, [Muslim], Hindu, all came from Adam and Eve, we were all one family here."

—adapted from *An Indian Journal*, Nora Scott, 1994

Indians and British



The term **imperialism** is a Latin word from the days of the Roman Empire. Imperialism means one country's domination of the political, economic, and social life of another country. About 2,000 years ago, imperial Rome controlled most of the Mediterranean world. By the end of the 1800s, a handful of European countries, together with the United States, controlled nearly the entire world. Not surprisingly, the era between 1800 and 1914 has come to be known as the Age of Imperialism.

The imperialism of the 1800s resulted from three key factors. First, nationalism prompted rival European nations to build empires in their competitive quests for power. Second, the Industrial Revolution created a tremendous demand for raw materials and expanded markets, which prompted industrialized nations to seek new territories. Finally, both religious fervor and feelings of racial and cultural superiority inspired Europeans to impose their cultures on distant lands.

Political Rivalries

In the mid-1800s European countries saw themselves as actors on the world stage, and each country wanted to play a starring role. If Great Britain started a small colony in distant Asia or Africa, France had to start one too—and so did Belgium, Germany, Italy, Holland, Spain, Portugal, and Russia.

Once begun, the quest for colonies became a continuing enterprise that seemed to have no limits. Slow and difficult communication between remote territories and European capitals often enabled colonial governors and generals to take matters into their own hands. If a colony's borders did not provide military security, for instance, military officials

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Visualizing History

In this cartoon Bismarck (representing Germany), John Bull (representing Great Britain), and Uncle Sam (representing the United States) decide the fate of Samoa. What phrase described Great Britain's vast overseas holdings?

based in the colony used their armies to expand the colony's borders. This strategy worked well enough until colonial governments started claiming the same territories. Then new conflicts arose, and European troops found themselves facing off on remote battlefields in Africa and Asia.

Desire for New Markets

The Industrial Revolution of the 1800s knew no borders. Factories in Europe and the United States consumed tons of raw materials and churned out thousands of manufactured goods. The owners and operators of these factories searched constantly for new sources of raw materials and new markets for their products. They hoped to find both in foreign lands.

Rubber, copper, and gold came from Africa, cotton and jute from India, and tin from Southeast Asia. These raw materials spurred the growth of European and American industries and financial markets, but they represented only the tip of the iceberg. Bananas, oranges, melons, and other exotic fruits made their way to European markets. People in Paris, London, and Berlin drank colonial tea, coffee, and cocoa with their meals and washed themselves with soap made from African palm oil.

The colonies also provided new markets for the finished products of the Industrial Revolution. Tools, weapons, and clothing flowed out of the factories and back to the colonies whose raw materials had made them possible.

Seeking New Opportunities

Imperialism involved more than just guns, battles, raw materials, and manufactured goods. Colonies needed people who were loyal to the imperialist country. Great Britain, France, and Germany needed British, French, and German citizens to run their newly acquired territories and keep them productive.

Throughout the 1800s European leaders urged their citizens to move to far-off colonies. Many of them responded. In the 1840s, for example, thousands of French citizens sailed across the Mediterranean Sea to Algeria, where they started farms and estates on lands seized from local Algerian farmers.

The British, meanwhile, emigrated to the far corners of the globe, hoping to find opportunities not available at home. Many rushed to Australia and New Zealand in the 1850s in search of gold. As the British government continued to acquire vast tracts of land in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, the phrase "the sun never sets on the British Empire" became a popular way of describing Great Britain's vast holdings.

Strong-minded individuals saw emigration as a chance to strike it rich or make a name for themselves. Perhaps the most spectacular success story of the era belonged to Cecil Rhodes, a British adventurer who made a fortune from gold and diamond mining in southern Africa. Rhodes went on to found a colony that bore his name: Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

“Civilizing” Mission

Some emigrants had motives that went beyond mere personal glory and profit. Religious and humanitarian impulses inspired many individuals to leave their secure lives at home and head for the distant colonies. The desire to spread Western technology, religion, customs and traditions also fueled colonial expansion.

During the Age of Imperialism, growing numbers of Catholic and Protestant missionaries decided to bring the Christian message to the most remote corners of Africa and Asia. Over the decades they set up hundreds of Christian missions and preached to thousands of Africans and Asians. Like many other Europeans and Americans of this period, these missionaries believed that Christianity and Western civilization together could benefit and transform the world.

The missionaries were not military conquerors, but they did try to change people’s beliefs and practices. They believed that, in order to become “civilized,” the people of Africa and Asia would have to reject their old religions and convert to Christianity. To achieve this goal, missionaries built churches and taught Christian doctrine. Missionaries often set up schools and hospitals as well.

Other Europeans also believed that Western civilization was superior to the civilizations of colonial peoples. As a result, some colonial officials tried to impose Western customs and traditions on the people they conquered. These officials insisted that their colonial subjects learn European languages, and they encouraged Western lifestyles as well. They also discouraged colonial peoples from practicing traditional customs and rituals.

Some Europeans seized on the theory of social Darwinism as proof of their cultural superiority. This theory adapted Darwin’s ideas about the evolution of animals—particularly his notion of “the survival of the fittest”—to explain differences

among human beings. Social Darwinists believed that white Europeans were the “fittest” people in the world and that they had a duty to spread Western ideas to “backward” peoples.

In 1899 the British writer **Rudyard Kipling** captured the essence of the imperialist attitude in his famous poem “The White Man’s Burden.” Kipling addressed the poem to the United States, which at this time had just begun to acquire and govern colonies of its own:

“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.”

Forms of Imperialism

Imperial nations gained new lands through treaties, purchases, and military conquest. Once in power, they used several forms of territorial control. A **colony** was a territory that an imperial power ruled directly through colonial officials. A **protectorate** had its own government, but its policies were guided by a foreign power. A **sphere of influence** was a region in which the imperial power had exclusive investment or trading rights.

Within these general forms of control, each imperial nation exercised its power differently. The French used their colonial officials to govern, to spread French culture, and to make territories overseas extensions of France. The British, by contrast, focused strictly on administration and were less apt to convert colonial peoples to British ways. The British often allowed local rulers to govern territories as their representatives.