

Imperialism

Factors Favoring Imperialism

The industrialized nations of Europe needed raw materials for their factories. They also needed markets in which to sell their manufactured goods. The answer to both of these problems is imperialism. The takeover of a territory or country by a more powerful nation in order to dominate it politically, socially and economically is called imperialism. A number of circumstances and technological advances helped to promote European imperialism in Africa in the nineteenth century.

The Europeans had many factors that allowed them to dominate the weaker nations of Africa. Europeans enjoyed superior technology and had much more sophisticated weapons which gave them an advantage over weaker nations. The invention of the steam engine allowed Europeans to navigate African rivers into the interior continent which was never possible before. Cables and railroads provided means of transportation and communication between the colony and the nation that controlled it. The discovery of quinine allowed Europeans to enter the interior of Africa without fear of contracting malaria. Africa's various ethnic and language groups promoted disunity and therefore made it easy for the Europeans to conquer these peoples.

1. What is imperialism?
2. What are some factors that allowed the Europeans to dominate Africa?

Types of Colonial Dominance

New economic and political power also played a role in imperialism. The demand for land was also an important motivator for the European's imperialistic needs. Countries would set up military bases and trade outlets throughout the world. European countries were trying to build global empires and the more land and resources they controlled the more powerful they would become. Countries also wanted to spread religions like Christianity to other parts of the world which also helped the growth of imperialism.

There were a few different forms of imperialism. They were colonies, protectorates and spheres of influence. Colonies are regions that are politically controlled by a distant country. Protectorates are a relationship of protection and partial control by a superior power over a dependent country or region. The most important form was a sphere of influence. This is when an area or a part of a country is controlled politically or economically by one nation.

1. What are the motives for imperialism?
2. What forms of colonial dominance are there?

European Division of Africa

Interest in the Congo in central Africa was created in the late 1860s, when a clergyman from Scotland, David Livingstone, journeyed to Africa to search for the source of the Nile River. Livingstone did not communicate with anyone for years, and Henry Stanley was sent to find him. He found Livingstone, and eventually returned to Africa to sign treaties with some of the chiefs in the valley of the Congo River. These gave King Leopold II personal control over the Congo region.

Leopold devastated the economy and society of the Congo by establishing large rubber plantations and forcing the natives to work on them. Not only were working conditions on the

plantations extremely harsh and wages extremely low, but work on the commercial plantation prevented the Congolese from their own private farm lots. By 1908, the efforts of humanitarians worldwide forced the Belgium government to take control of the Congo. The race for empires in Africa began.

1. What did Belgium do to the people of the Congo?

The Berlin Conference

In the 1880s, the French, who already had interests along the Congo River, began to expand their holdings. Although Africans did not display much interest in purchasing European manufactured goods, the industrialized European countries continued their quest for African colonies to appropriate their mineral wealth and raw materials. The Belgian Congo contained rich deposits of copper and tin, and a large supply of rubber trees. Diamonds were discovered in South Africa in 1867 and gold in 1886. The controlling nations established cash-crop plantations to produce rubber, cocoa, palm oil, which was used for lubricating the machinery of European factories.

Fearing the competition for colonies might result in conflict among European nations themselves, the imperialist powers agreed to meet at the Berlin Conference in 1884-1885 to peacefully divide Africa. Noticeably absent from the Conference were representatives from any African tribes. The divisions imposed on Africa by the conference were executed with little regard to partitioning the continent along ethnic or cultural lines. By 1914, all of Africa had been divided among the European powers like Spain, Portugal, Great Britain, France, Belgium, Italy and Germany. Only two countries remained independent Liberia and Ethiopia. The Africans made several attempts to resist the colonial powers; only one, the 1896 Ethiopian resistance against Italy was successful.

1. What was the Berlin Conference?
2. Who was left out of the conference and why?

Conflicts in Africa

The Zulu's moved to South Africa in the 1600s like many other native tribes. But by the 1800s the Zulu's were becoming extremely powerful under their new ruler, Shaka Zulu. Between 1818 and 1828 Shaka started countless wars against nearby tribes. His unique fighting style made his army superior to others. Every tribe he conquered a tribe he asked them to join his tribe and by doing this he was able to build a unified kingdom.

The Dutch controlled an area of South Africa known as Cape Colony. They were able to control it for many years but as Dutch power faded, the British came in and took control of Cape Colony. The Boers hated British rule because they outlawed slavery. In 1899 war broke out between the Boers and the British. The British were eventually victorious, and South Africa belonged to the British.

Because of their disliking of the British the Boers began to move north. As they traveled they ran into the Zulus. The Zulus fought with pride and heart but because of their primitive weapons like spears and arrows they had no chance against the Boers. After years of fighting the Boers defeated the Zulus.

1. Who were the Zulu tribe?
2. What was the Boer War?

The Black Man's Burden, 1903

Kipling's poem The White Man's Burden of 1899 presented one view of imperialism. Edward Morel, a British journalist in the Belgian Congo, drew attention to the abuses of imperialism in 1903. The Congo [for a period known in modern times as Zaïre] was perhaps the most famously exploitative of the European colonies.

It is the Africans who carry the 'Black man's burden'. They have not withered away before the white man's occupation. Indeed ... Africa has ultimately absorbed within itself every Caucasian and... every Semitic invader. In hewing out for himself a fixed abode in Africa, the white man has massacred the African in heaps. The African has survived, and it is well for the white settlers that he has...

What the partial occupation of his soil by the white man has failed to do; what the mapping out of European political 'spheres of influence' has failed to do; what the Maxim and the rifle, the slave gang, labour in the bowels of the earth and the lash, have failed to do; what imported measles, smallpox and syphilis have failed to do; whatever the overseas slave trade failed to do, the power of modern capitalistic exploitation, assisted by modern engines of destruction, may yet succeed in accomplishing.

For from the evils of the latter, scientifically applied and enforced, there is no escape for the African. Its destructive effects are permanent...It kills not the body merely, but the soul. It breaks the spirit. It attacks the African at every turn, from every point of vantage. It wrecks his polity, uproots him from the land, invades his family life, destroys his natural pursuits and occupations, claims his whole time, and enslaves him in his own home...

. . . In Africa, especially in tropical Africa, which a capitalistic imperialism threatens and has already devastated the Africans suffer... The African of the tropics is capable of tremendous physical labors. But he cannot accommodate himself to the European system of monotonous, uninterrupted labour, with its long and regular hours, involving, moreover, as it frequently does... separation from home, a malady to which the African is especially prone...When this abusive system is forced upon him, the African droops and dies.

Nor is violent physical opposition to abuse and injustice henceforth possible for the African in any part of Africa. His chances of effective resistance have been steadily dwindling with the increasing perfectibility in the killing power of modern armament...

Thus the African is really helpless against the material gods of the white man, as embodied in the trinity of imperialism, capitalistic exploitation, and militarism.... the bestial imaginings of civilized man, unrestrained by convention or law; in fine, to kill the soul in a people-this is a crime which transcends physical murder.

From E. D. Morel, *The Black Man's Burden*, in Louis L. Snyder, *The Imperialism Reader* (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1962), pp.163-164. First published in 1920 in Great Britain.

1. What is the Black Man's Burden?
2. How does Morel view European occupation of Africa?

Rudyard Kipling, the White Man's Burden, 1899

This famous poem, written by Britain's imperial poet, was a response to the American take over of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War, but can be used to describe imperialism throughout the world.

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.

Take up the White Man's burden--
In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain
To seek another's profit,
And work another's gain.

Take up the White Man's burden--
No tawdry rule of kings,
But toil of serf and sweeper--
The tale of common things.
The ports ye shall not enter,
The roads ye shall not tread,
Go mark them with your living,
And mark them with your dead.

Take up the White Man's burden--
Ye dare not stoop to less--
Nor call too loud on Freedom
To cloke your weariness;
By all ye cry or whisper,
By all ye leave or do,
The silent, sullen peoples
Shall weigh your gods and you.

1. According to this poem, what is the “White Man’s burden?”

2. How does this poem depict non-European cultures?