

Western Imperialism in the 1800s

Introduction

The word “**imperialism**” derives from the Latin term meaning “**Empire.**” It refers to *when a strong nation expands its territory by military conquest, political or economic domination, or colonization.* In world history, there were **three** major periods of Imperialism and Colonization:

1. **Ancient Imperialism.** Examples include Phoenicia, ancient Greece and especially ancient Rome.
2. **European Exploration and Colonialism.** This is when European nations like Spain and Portugal conquered and colonized in Central and South America and the Caribbean; England colonized in North America; and other European nations like France and the Netherlands established colonies in the New World and in Asia.
3. **Modern Western Imperialism.** This is the period we are studying in this unit, when during the Industrial Revolution, European nations created new colonies or dominated in Africa and Asia and the United States in the Americas and in the Pacific Islands.

Several factors motivated Western Imperialism.

1. **First**, industrial nations needed new natural resources for their factories.
2. **Second**, Christian missionaries wanted to spread their religion.
3. **Third, Social Darwinism** led some to believe that Western civilization and the white race was superior to other cultures and races, and therefore had a right to conquer and dominate other societies because of Darwin’s idea of “survival of the fittest.” *Social Darwinism means applying Darwin’s theories of evolution (especially, survival of the fittest) to human societies.*
4. **Finally**, related to Social Darwinism, some thought superior Western societies had a Christian duty to spread their superior culture to other lands. This became known as “**the white man’s burden.**”

Western imperialism *mostly benefitted the dominating nations.* Conquered nations lost natural resources, land, their culture and religion, etc. Imperialism contributed to racism. Western nations imposed their culture using guns and violence – so-called “**gunboat diplomacy.**” As a result, many innocent people died. But there were *some positive benefits* for the dominated nations, including schools, hospitals, roads, factories, railroads, improved health standards, and the introduction of democracy and the rule of law.

Word List

Imperialism

Social Darwinism

Gunboat diplomacy

White Man’s Burden

1. The Scramble for Africa. In the 1880s, European nations scrambled to take over Africa, after diamonds and gold were discovered there. Before, Europeans had only settled along the coasts of Africa, but had not explored Africa’s interior because of its frightening jungles full of wild animals and disease. The discovery of *quinine (tonic water for gin) to combat malaria* helped Europeans fight against sickness from the African jungles.

- After the 1850s, a British missionary named **Dr. David Livingstone** wanted to bring medicine, Jesus and honest business to Africa. He spent 30 years exploring central Africa, then writing books about his adventures that were very popular in England. He died of sickness in Africa, where his heart is buried. The rest of his body was taken back to England and is buried in London's Westminster Abbey.
- In 1871, a journalist for the *New York Herald* named **Henry Morton Stanley** went to find the legendary Livingstone, who was thought to be in trouble. He found Livingstone sick next to Lake Tanganyika, where he asked the famous question, "**Dr. Livingstone, I presume?**"
- Unlike Livingstone, who was a missionary, Stanley wanted to make money in Africa. After Livingstone's death in 1873, Stanley partnered with **Belgium's King Leopold II**. In the **Congo**, Stanley persuaded African chieftains to sign away their rights to their land. The Congo became the private property of King Leopold, whose managers forced to Congolese to pay "taxes" in raw rubber, ivory tusks, etc. If the Congolese did not produce, they were whipped, jailed or killed, and their hands chopped off to prove to Leopold that they had not wasted bullets on hunting. Slowly, news of Leopold's brutality reached Europe, where people were appalled. In 1908, the Belgian government took over the Congo from Leopold, and life in the Congo started to improve.
- As the "**Scramble for Africa**" got underway, European nations met in 1884 and 1885 at the **Berlin Conference**, where they agreed to carve up Africa peacefully. Of course, the Africans themselves were not invited to the conference and had no say whatsoever in the dismantling of their continent. **Any European nation could claim any part of Africa simply by showing up there first, and telling the other European nations.** By 1914, all of Africa had been carved up, except for **Ethiopia** and **Liberia** (the nation created by freed ex-slaves from the United States). Besides England, France controlled the next biggest chunk of Africa, but Germany, Italy, Spain and Portugal also controlled some colonies.
- The Dutch had settled **South Africa** in the 1600s, but Britain gained control of it after the defeat of Napoleon. In the early 1800s, the British and Dutch fought a brutal war against the **Zulus**, led by their chief, **Shaka**, who successfully created a Zulu empire and defeated the Europeans using spears and arrows. However, the British eventually defeated his successors after his death. Diamonds and gold were discovered in South Africa in the late-1800s, and a British businessman named **Cecil Rhodes**, who was governor of the colony, made a fortune. The famous **Rhodes Scholarship** is named after him, as is the country of **Rhodesia** (today known as Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi) in Africa. His great dream was to create **a belt of British colonies from Egypt in the north of Africa to South Africa, all connected by railroad.** British colonists clashed with the Dutch colonists who had preceded them. This eventually led to the **Boer War** in 1899, in which the British brutally defeated the Dutch in 1902. During this war, the British created the first **concentration camps**, forcing Dutch men, women and children to live there, where many died of disease and hunger.

Word List	Livingstone Stanley Scramble for Africa Berlin Conference	King Leopold II of Belgium Malaria Cecil Rhodes Boer War	Concentration Camps
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2. Europeans Claim Muslim Lands. In the 1800s, the **Ottoman Empire** of the Turks (with its capital at **Istanbul**, the former **Constantinople**) became the “**sick man of Europe.**” Pieces of it started to break away and win independence, including **Greece** and **Serbia** in Southeastern Europe.

- In **Egypt**, a nationalist leader named **Muhammad Ali** broke away from Ottoman control. He and his grandson, who succeeded him, modernized Egypt and joined with the French to build the **Suez Canal** in 1869. *It connected the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean*, providing a short cut for ships to sail from Europe to Asia. But Britain had bought stock in the French company that built the canal, and when Egypt could not pay its debts for the canal, the British took over control of the canal and of Egypt.
- Eventually, the British also gained control over **Persia** and **Afghanistan**. In the early 1900s, **oil** was discovered in Persia and a British company was formed to develop Persia’s rich oil fields.
- **Britain** and **Russia** clashed frequently over Ottoman and Muslim territory. The British fought to control Persia and Afghanistan because they wanted to protect their colony of India from the Russians. In the 1850s, *the Russians fought a war with the Ottomans* called the **Crimean War** because they wanted to control the Black Sea. This would give Russia warm water seaports so they could ship grain from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. But Britain and France joined the Ottomans and defeated the Russians. During the Crimean War, a British nurse named **Florence Nightingale** invented modern **nursing** by creating clean, sanitary hospitals for wounded British soldiers.

Word List

Ottoman Empire
Muhammad Ali
Suez Canal

Persia
Crimean War
Florence Nightingale

3. India. The **British Empire** in the 1800s, during the reign of England’s **Queen Victoria**, was immense, covering a fourth of the earth’s land mass and also a fourth of the world’s population. This was called the **Victorian Age**. British schoolchildren were taught that “*the sun never sets over the British Empire.*” India was the “*jewel in the crown*” of the British Empire, especially because of its cotton. In India, the British built railroads, telegraph and telephone lines, dams, bridges, canals, schools and hospitals. The period of British rule over India (from 1757 to 1947) is called the **Raj**. At first, the British controlled India through the **British East India Company**, which even had its own army and employed **sepoys**, or Indian soldiers. In 1857, Indian soldiers rebelled against the British East India Company in what is known as the **Sepoy Mutiny**. It started because of rumors that the British used fat from cows to grease its bullets, and cows are considered sacred animals in India. The rebellion lasted a year. The British government finally took direct control of India from the company. But the British treated Indians as inferior and discriminated against them, causing nationalistic feelings to grow. By the early 1900s, two groups – the mostly Hindu Indian National Congress and the Muslim League – were pushing for self-government. The Indian National Congress was led by **Mohandas Gandhi** and **Nehru**. They fought the British through **non-violent (pacifist)** means. In 1947, Britain created two independent nations out of its colony of India – the mostly Hindu nation of **India**, and the mostly Muslim nation of East and West **Pakistan**. Gandhi was assassinated, and Nehru became president of India. East Pakistan later became the independent nation of **Bangladesh**.

Word	Queen Victoria	“Sun never sets”	British East India Company
List	“jewel in the crown”	Sepoy Mutiny	Gandhi

4. Southeast Asia. Europeans also carved up Southeast Asia. The **Dutch** controlled **Indonesia**. The **British** controlled **Burma** (today, **Myanmar**), **Malaysia** and **Singapore**. The British also controlled **Australia** and **New Zealand**, which it had claimed during the sailing expeditions of Captain Cook. In fact, Australia started out as a penal colony for British prisoners. The **French** grabbed what is called Indochina (today, **Vietnam**, **Cambodia** and **Laos**). Only **Siam** (today, **Thailand**) remained independent, because its king played off the British and French against one another so that his country would remain a free buffer zone between the two. He modernized Siam peacefully.

Imperial Power in Southeast Asia	Modern Nation Today in Southeast Asia
Netherlands (the Dutch)	Indonesia
British	Burma (Myanmar), Malaysia, Singapore; Australia, New Zealand
French	Indochina – Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos
None – it remained independent	Siam (Thailand)

5. China. Although once the most powerful nation in the world in the 1300s and 1400s, China had fallen behind Europe technologically. In the 1700s, China provided England with **tea**. China limited and controlled its trade with Europe by allowing goods shipped to China to come through only one port, Canton.

- **The Opium War, 1839 to 1842.** Britain grew the dangerous drug, **opium**, in India, and started to ship it to China, where many Chinese became addicted. When China tried to make the British stop importing opium, Britain fought China in the **Opium War** and won. Because of this war, Britain gained control of **Hong Kong**.
- At about this same time, a young man, Hong Xiuquan, from southern China formed a peasant army of about a million soldiers and tried to overthrow China’s weak and corrupt government. This was called the **Taiping Rebellion**, which lasted from 1850 to 1864. It was the costliest and most devastating civil war in world history, and second deadliest war in history, next to World War II. Altogether, 20 million to 40 million Chinese died. Hong had visions and believed he was Jesus Christ’s younger brother. He eventually created his own independent government within China, and controlled a third of the country. Hong and his successors eventually fought among themselves and were finally defeated. Hong committed suicide, taking poison in 1864.
- From 1862 to 1908, a woman controlled China – the **Dowager Empress Cixi** (tsoo-shee). She supported traditional values, but also, some reforms. European nations and Japan started to control China’s economy, creating what is called a **Sphere of Influence** in China. Foreign citizens were given **extraterritorial rights** in China, meaning that they were not subject to China laws. In 1899, the United States feared that it would get locked out of Chinese markets, so it declared the **Open Door Policy**, which proposed that China’s “doors” be open to merchants

of all nations. Britain and other European nations agreed to this. Christian missionaries also came to China.

- The Chinese started to resent to influence of foreigners in their country. Peasants and workers formed a secret society called “**the Boxers**” – the Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists. They believed they could ward off bullets using their arms and fists. Their rebellion against foreigners was called the **Boxer Rebellion**. In 1900 in Beijing, they surrounded the European section of the city. The Europeans sent a multinational force of 19,000 soldiers to defeat them. Despite their defeat, China would experience political turmoil for the next 50 years.

Word List

Opium War

Boxer Rebellion

Taiping Rebellion

6. Japan. From the 1600s until the mid-1800s, Japan had isolated itself from the rest of the world. But in 1853, American steamships with cannons entered Japanese waters, commanded by **Commodore Matthew Perry**. They persuaded Japan to start trading with the United States. Eventually, Japan also opened trade with other European nations. In 1867, Japan’s **emperor** overthrew the ruling **shogun** and reigned for 45 years, until 1912. He modernized Japan, turning it into an Asian industrial superpower, equal to Western nations. This period is called the **Meiji Era**, because “meiji” means “enlightened rule.” They copied Germany’s army, Britain’s navy, Germany’s strong central government, and America’s system of schooling. But Japan became more imperialistic. In 1894 and 1895, Japan fought a war with China and won, forcing China to cede control of the island of **Taiwan** to Japan, which made it into a Japanese colony. Next, in 1904, it fought the **Russo-Japanese War** and sank the Russian navy. Next, Japan invaded **Korea** and by 1910, had achieved **annexation** (adding of territory) of Korea to Japan. In Korea, the Japanese were such harsh rulers that Koreans eventually began an underground nationalist movement to expel the Japanese.

Word List

Commodore Matthew Perry

Taiwan

Russo-Japanese War

Korea

7. The United States. During the 1800s, the Spanish and Portuguese colonies of South America and Central America had gained their independence. But most the new Latin American nations were weak, controlled by corrupt military dictators called **caudillos**. In 1823, President James Monroe of the United States had issued the **Monroe Doctrine**, warning European nations to stay out of the Americas. But this allowed the United States to play “bully” in the Americas and to become imperialistic:

- First: The United States spread Westward, fighting the **Mexican-American War** with Mexico that helped it gain **California, Arizona and New Mexico**.
- Next: In the 1800s, American businessmen grew wealthy from sugar plantations in **Hawaii**. But to make more money, they asked for the annexation, or addition, of Hawaii to the U.S. In the 1890s, Hawaii’s **Queen Liliuokalani** tried to regain control of her country for the Hawaiian people. But the American businessmen overthrew her and declared a republic. In 1898, Hawaii became a territory of the United States.
- Next In the same year, 1898, the United States fought a war with Spain called the **Spanish-American War**. It began when a U.S. ship, **the Maine**, blew up in the harbor of Havana, Cuba,

and American newspapers blamed Spain for the attack. Headlines screamed, **“Remember the Maine!”** Even today, nobody knows why the Maine exploded. It may have been sabotage, or it may just have been an accident. **Theodore Roosevelt** (who later would become President of the United States) gained fame by leading his American **Rough Riders** on horseback up **San Juan Hill** in Cuba to defeat the Spanish. In this war, the United States took control of **Puerto Rico, Guam** and the **Philippine Islands** from Spain.

- When Roosevelt became President, he issued the **Roosevelt Corollary** to the Monroe Doctrine. This gave the U.S. the right to act as **“policeman”** in the Americas whenever a problem would swell up. Over the years, the U.S. has sent troops whenever trouble arose in various Latin American countries. Sometimes, U.S. troops have stayed for many years, causing people in Latin America to resent the U.S. and accuse it of imperialism.
- As president, Roosevelt also wanted to build a canal across the Isthmus of Panama, connecting the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. This would give U.S. ships a shortcut so they did not have to go around the bottom of South America to reach California from the East Coast. Colombia controlled the land. Roosevelt offered Colombia \$10 million for the right to build the canal, but Colombia asked for more money. Instead, the U.S. helped the people of Panama revolt for independence. In return, the Panamanians gave the U.S. a 10-mile wide strip of land in Panama to build the **Panama Canal**, which opened in 1914.

Word List

Caudillo

Mexican-American War

Monroe Doctrine

Roosevelt Corollary

Spanish-American War

Hawaii

Panama Canal

Theodore Roosevelt

Puerto Rico

Philippines

