

## The Age of Imperialism

### ASSIGNMENT DIRECTIONS

As you read, consider the question: what are the lasting effects of imperialism on the world today?

## The Age of Imperialism



This political cartoon from 1898 shows imperial powers fighting over a pie labeled "China" (in French). The imperial powers shown in the front are Queen Victoria (British Empire), Wilhelm II (German Empire), Nicholas II (Imperial Russia), Marianne (French Third Republic), and a samurai (Empire of Japan). Behind them, a Chinese man holds up his hands.

### QUESTION 1 DOK 2 STANDARD RH.7 WH.08

Examine the image carefully. What details do you notice in the image and what do you think they mean?

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## Evidence of imperialism today

The British are known for drinking tea. They're so well known for this habit that it might be surprising to think about where that tea is actually grown. The tea plant<sup>1</sup> flourishes in the misty hills of northern India, more than six thousand miles away.

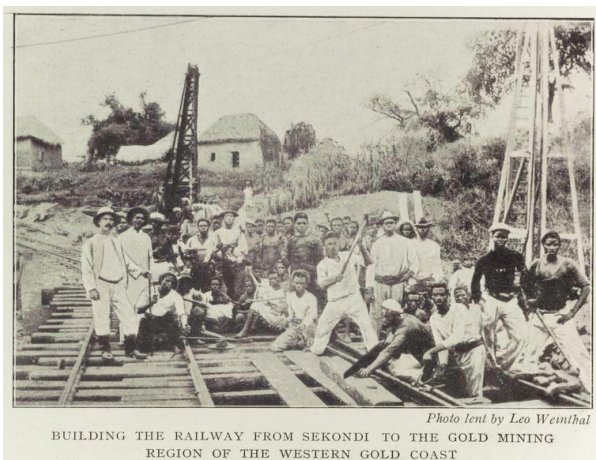
If you walk into a Vietnamese restaurant, you can most likely order a sandwich called "Banh Mi."<sup>2</sup> It's delicious. A crisp French baguette is filled with flavorful pork, marinated vegetables, and cilantro. It's a popular lunch option in Vietnam. But why is a French baguette central to one of the most popular Vietnamese dishes?

Indian tea on British tables and French sourdough at a Vietnamese lunch: these are just some of the byproducts of the Age of Imperialism. From 1800 to 1900, European nations spread their empire around the globe by invading communities and establishing trade ports and local governments. They brought their language and customs with them. They were motivated by the promise of becoming rich from international trade and the idea that their country was superior to others and had the moral duty to spread "civilization."

The results of imperialism were not just tea in London and baguettes in Saigon. Imperialism was violent and stripped countries of their cultures, languages, and resources. It also contributed to worldwide inequality and power structures that continue to keep some countries richer and other countries poorer. There were positive effects too, including the eventual spread of democracy and human rights around the globe.

## Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution, which began towards the end of the 18th Century, was important in bringing about the Age of Imperialism. Colonialism and imperialism had existed prior to the 18th century Age of Imperialism, but what made this era so historically significant was the industrial power that fueled the ability of empires to spread around the globe.



This photo was taken in 1910 on the Gold Coast of western Africa, part of the British Empire. *Source: New York Public Library, from Britain across the seas: Africa; a history and description of the British Empire in Africa, by Johnston, Harry Hamilton.*

QUESTION 2 DOK 3 STANDARD RH.7 WH.07

In examining the picture and the caption below it, explain what you think the purpose of building the railway was.

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The Industrial Revolution was a time when factories and machinery were used to make products on a huge scale. Factories helped turn raw materials like rubber<sup>3</sup> or cotton<sup>4</sup> into finished products quickly. Large-scale factory production also allowed for better ships to be built much faster. Steam railroads and steam shipping<sup>5</sup> sped up the transport of raw materials from the colonies to the colonizing country. European countries also invented new, more deadly weapons that they could use to control the people in the colonies. Finally, the use of new communications technology like the telegraph<sup>6</sup> meant that it was much easier to manage a worldwide empire spread out over millions of miles.

The use of industrial power greatly increased the ability of imperial powers to expand their influence, however the construction of industrial projects often came at great cost to local people. Historians Anthony Clayton and Donald C. Savage described the construction of a railway in Uganda by the British state-owned railway company: "It was decided to build the railway as quickly as possible; its construction was viewed almost as a military attack—casualties were inevitable<sup>7</sup> and might be large if the objective were to be attained and momentum not lost."

**QUESTION 3   DOK 2   STANDARD RH.2   WH.07**

How did Europe's Industrial Revolution contribute to the Age of Imperialism? Select THREE answers that apply.

- ☐ Factories needed raw supplies that could more readily be found in places like India and Africa.
- ☐ The invention of fireworks led to explosives being used in mining.
- ☐ Steam-powered boats allowed manpower and goods to be transported more quickly.
- ☐ The advances in weapons allowed Europeans to dominate other lands using machine guns.

## The importance of maps

At the beginning of the 19th century, there were still large parts of the world that were “unknown” or “unexplored” to Europeans. Most of those parts of the world were actually known and explored to local people, but Europeans considered them “undiscovered” simply because they did not know about them.

Cartographers, or people who made maps, left these spaces blank on their maps. Many parts of Africa, Asia, North America, and the South Pacific were blank on the maps of cartographers at the start of the 19th Century. Each empire wanted to get to those blank spaces and include them in their empire.

Some countries in Europe wanted to spread their empire as far as possible so that they could become more powerful than other countries. Some of them, such as Britain and France, even fought wars over the control of parts of the world that were thousands of miles away.<sup>8</sup>

In 1884 there was a conference in Berlin that included the major powers of Europe. At the time, European powers had little control over the continent of Africa. Leaders from European countries split up Africa amongst themselves using maps. They took little notice of the local cultures and governments, assuming that the blank spots on their maps meant they were free for the taking by Europeans. This incident is known as the “Scramble for Africa” or sometimes the “Conquest of Africa.”

## Darwin's theory corrupted

Charles Darwin<sup>9</sup> was a British scientist who taught that humans evolved, or changed, from animals. Part of his theory was called natural selection. According to natural selection, stronger living things will always overpower weaker living things. Imperialists used this theory about biology to support what they were doing politically. They claimed that stronger nations had a "duty" to "civilize" weaker nations and that stronger races of people should dominate. In 1883, a French politician named Jules Ferry said, "Superior races have a right because they have a duty. They have the duty to civilize the inferior races." Rudyard Kipling coined the phrase "the white man's burden" in a famous poem to explain this mindset.



John Bull (Great Britain) and Uncle Sam (U.S.) bear "The White Man's Burden" by delivering the coloured peoples of the world to civilization. (Judge magazine, 1 April 1899)

### QUESTION 4 DOK 2 STANDARD RH.7 WH.07

Examine the political cartoon above. What do you think the illustrator wants the viewer to think about the "white man's burden"? What details make you say that?

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This way of thinking is now known as social Darwinism, and it is accepted as a false way to interpret Darwin's scientific theory. This fake scientific logic was used to justify imperialism. A similar line of thinking was later

used by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime to justify the Holocaust. Today, it is generally understood to be dangerous and racist.

## Colonialism: Imperialism in action

Sometimes the word colonialism is used instead of imperialism. However, they are slightly different.

We can think of imperialism as the idea of spreading a country's empire around the world. The goal is to exercise power over that other country and bring it into the "empire." Once a new territory is a part of the empire, it takes on the identity of the empire. For example, as the Holy Roman Empire spread throughout the Middle East and Europe, various groups of people came to be considered Roman, and many local cultures took on the identity of the Roman Empire.

Colonialism is often a part of imperialism. When a territory is colonized, the mother country controls the colony, but the colonized territory is considered separate and different. The mother country takes over political control and enforces new laws on the territory. Colonialism almost always involves taking resources from the colony and bringing them back to the mother country. The colony is not always "gobbled up" into the identity of the controlling empire.



This cartoon shows British imperialist Cecil Rhodes<sup>10</sup> standing over the continent of Africa. It was drawn in 1892 and published in *Punch* magazine just after Rhodes declared his plan to connect telegraph lines and railroads through the length of Africa.

The term "cultural imperialism" refers to the way that the culture of the empire changes the culture of the colonized country. This includes the way that people dress, eat, work, and what education they get and religion they follow. The powerful colonizing country often spreads its culture and values to the less powerful country, and local languages, religions, and practices are forgotten.

**QUESTION 5   DOK 2   STANDARD RH.2   WH.07**

How did white Europeans and Americans use Charles Darwin's theory on evolution to justify Europe's imperialism?

- ☐ European scientists were eager to study undiscovered species in the jungles of India and Africa.
- ☐ They cited evolution to explain that the peoples they conquered were an inferior race and needed their leadership.
- ☐ Many championed the European ideas of equality and freedom for all people.
- ☐ Charles Darwin encouraged people to expand the religions in Europe around the globe.

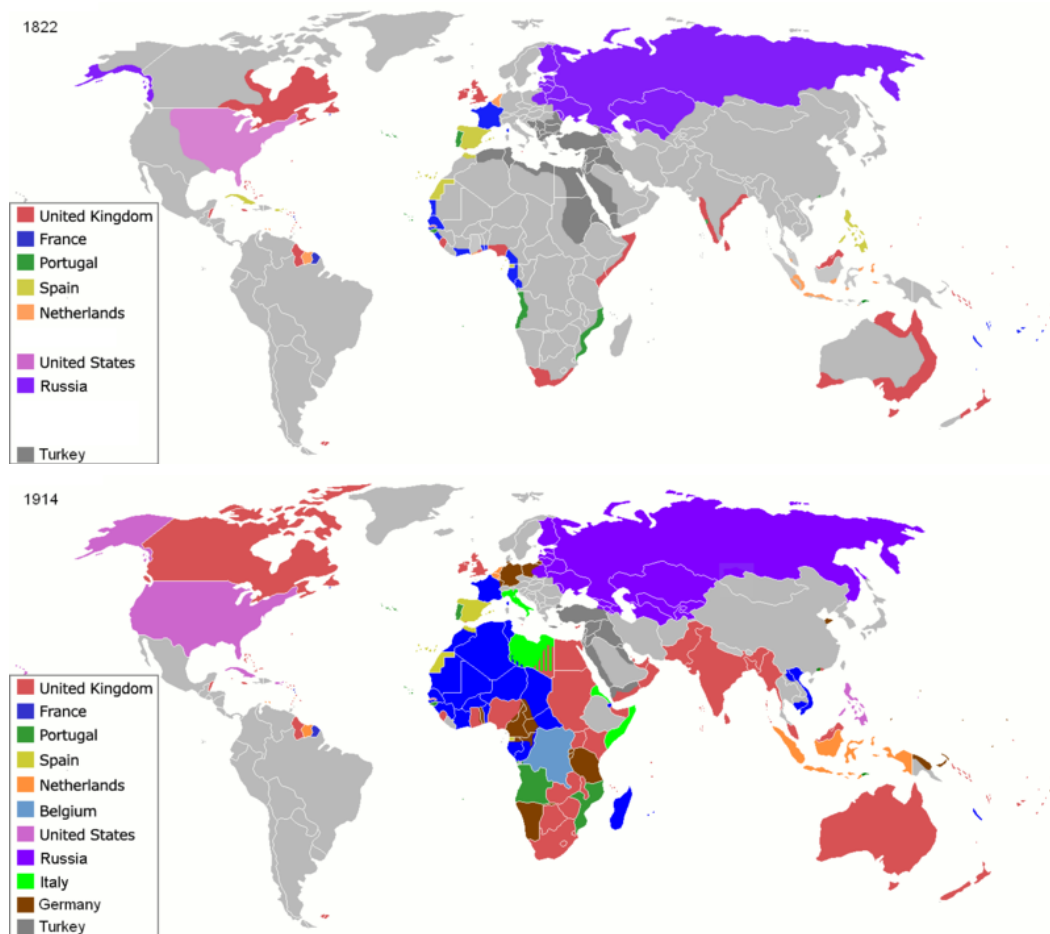
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## How Europe benefited from Imperialism

One of the main ways that the European empires benefited from Imperialism was that it allowed them to make products more cheaply. They were able to get cheap raw materials like rubber, vegetable oils, metals, and cotton. This made Europe richer and led to countries around the world trading with each other.

Here are some important colonial relationships from the Age of Imperialism:

- 1) England colonized India and exported spices, tea, textiles, and jewels.
- 2) Following the defeat of Napoleon in the early 1800s, many of France's early colonies were returned to Britain. France built a second empire starting in 1830 by colonizing Algeria, Senegal, and parts of Indochina, including Vietnam.
- 3) Belgium reaped huge profits from rubber plantations in the Congo, while destroying the rich local economy and culture in the process.



Maps comparing the imperial powers in 1822 after the Napoleonic Wars and in 1914, just before the start of World War I. *Source: Wikimedia Commons*

QUESTION 6 DOK 2 STANDARD RH.7 WH.08

Which imperial power came to control all of Australia, India, and Canada by 1914?

- ☐ France
- ☐ Russia
- ☐ Belgium
- ☐ United Kingdom



**QUESTION 7   DOK 3   STANDARD RH.7   WH.08**

What other significant changes do you notice between 1822 and 1914 on the maps? Explain why the changes are significant.

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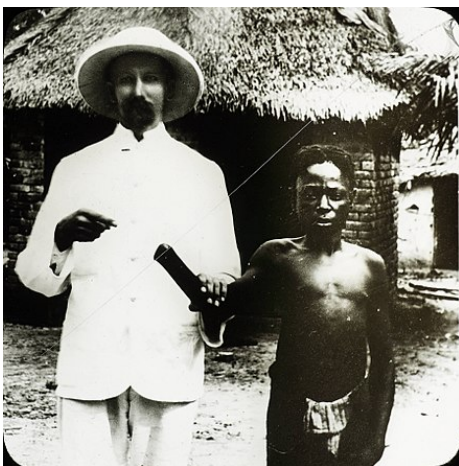
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## Was imperialism good or bad?

Global diversity in language, religion, and culture will likely never return to what it was before European imperial powers swept over the world. Today, European values and language<sup>12</sup> color local languages, cultural beliefs, and values all over the world. Many languages are lost forever.

Another serious consequence of imperialism was also the death and destruction of millions of people who were trapped, bought, and sold as slaves or turned into laborers who worked for very little pay. A global hierarchy of power was established that put the Western European powers on top and other countries on the bottom. This continues to affect countries today that were formerly under imperial control.



The Belgian King Leopold II's rule over the Congo was notoriously brutal to local people. Removing hands was a common punishment when local workers failed to deliver their quota of rubber. *Source: Wikimedia Commons*

Countries that became part of an empire did get improvements in roads, buildings, and technology from the outside world. The ideas of democracy also spread around the world, leading to many independent movements like Gandhi's protests in India.



Gandhi with textile workers in 1931. *Source: Wikimedia Commons*

You need to decide for yourself whether or not imperialism was a good trend in world history or a destructive one. One thing is for certain, though. It changed the cultures, religions, languages, and peoples of the world forever.<sup>13</sup>

**QUESTION 8   DOK 3   STANDARD RH.2   WH.07**

What effects of the Age of Imperialism do we still see in the world today? Give examples from the text in your answer.

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# Notes

1

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The tea plant is most commonly grown in northern India.



2

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Now listed as a traditional Vietnamese food, the baguette was originally termed *bánh tây*, or "Western bread."



3

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Rubber is produced from the rubber tree, where a slice is made under the bark and white latex flows out.



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4

The cotton plant is a shrub that produces green bolls that eventually split open and white cotton fibers spilling out.



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5

Steamboats enabled Europeans to travel across oceans and up rivers deep into unknown territories.



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6

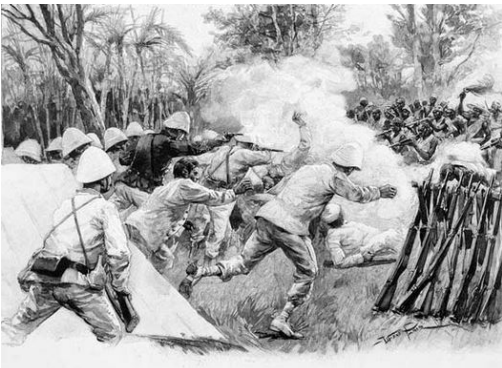
Using Morse code—a series of taps to represent letters—the telegraph sent messages all over the globe. The 50-second video below explains how this works.

► <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O8f9A4xIIWk>

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7

The locals did not want a railway and resisted to the best of their ability. The head of one resistance, Koitalel Arap Samoei, was shot in the face when he met the British to agree to a truce.



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8

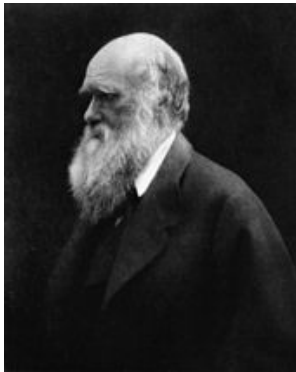
Britain fought against Napoleon's expansion over Europe, not because it believed in the people's rights to rule themselves, but because it wanted the control over the lands that Napoleon was tak...



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9

Charles Darwin put forth the theory of natural selection.



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10

What was Cecile Rhodes looking for? Well, he was at the founding of a modern-day company you may have heard of.





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11

Instead of traditional Indian dress, many modern young people in India dress in Western style.



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12

This can be seen by the fact that many countries still use European languages as their official language, such as Burkina Faso, where the official language is French, but 90% of the population s...



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13

To learn more about the Age of Imperialism, watch this video.

► <https://youtu.be/aJaltUmrGo>