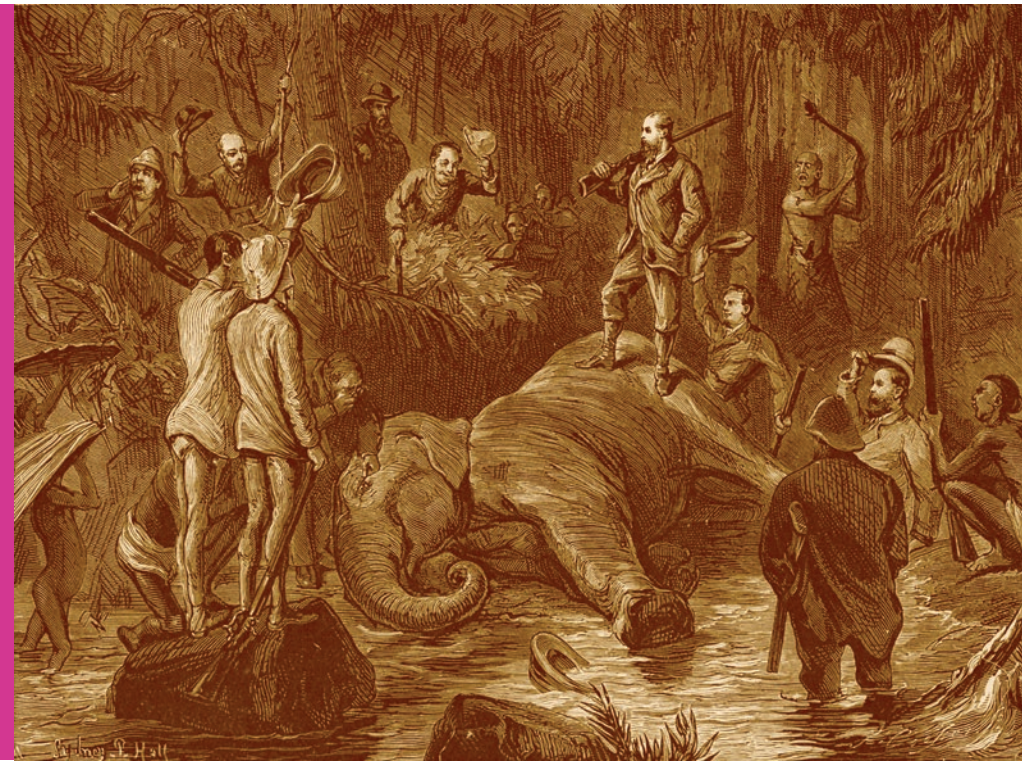


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IMPERIALISM & RESISTANCE SHAPE THE MODERN WORLD

1850 — 1914

810L



A HISTORIAN'S JOURNAL ENTRY / BY SAUL STRAUSSMAN & BRIDGETTE BYRD O'CONNOR

Let's be honest, people have been conquering one another forever. Think about it, during the Age of Exploration (1400s — 1800s) conquerors traveled far beyond their normal lands. They went in search of riches.



BIG HISTORY PROJECT



For example, the Spanish took over parts of the Americas, Africa, and the Pacific Islands. They did so in the name of “God, gold, and glory.” The Spanish king expected the conquistadors to bring home gold, and lots of it. He also expected his soldiers to bring glory to Spain. At the same time, they were told to spread Catholicism across these new territories.

However, in the mid-nineteenth century the conquests changed. In fact, by the mid-nineteenth century there was so much colonial activity that historians gave the period its own name. They called it the Age of Imperialism (1850 — 1914). It was the period of time when imperial or colonial powers colonized much of the world. Most were European nations, though the United States and Japan were involved too.

Let’s try to understand why European colonialism changed in the nineteenth century. We must take a look at three main factors. The first factor has to do with changes in industrialization and economies. They were developing in Europe, the United States, and Japan at this time. The second has to do with the geographic range of these conquests. The colonizers traditionally set up along the coasts of their colonies. Now, they began to move inland. The final big change was the impact colonization had on tens of millions of lives.

When thinking about this period there are three questions we want to answer. Before, just a handful of countries were interested in coastal areas. Why did almost every European country now try to take over large chunks of Africa, the Pacific Islands, and Asia? Secondly, what did both the colonizer and colonized think about this? And third, how did the people who were colonized resist the imperial powers?

These are really big questions to answer. To do so we need to keep a few ideas in mind. One is that imperialism was a global trend. It involved a number of countries. As such, there are several things we need to think about as we seek to understand why they colonized. Likewise, within these countries there were people for and against colonization. Additionally, imperial countries controlled colonies differently. Some ruled them directly. Others governed indirectly. In the second case, European powers controlled a government made up of local people. Finally, there were several different responses from people within these territories. Each reacted differently to being ruled by imperial powers.

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CHANGES HELP BRING ABOUT COLONIZATION

Imperialism in the nineteenth century was driven by industrialization. Remember, the factories established in Europe during industrialization were dependent on raw

materials. They needed to keep their machines operating around the clock. These factories were manufacturing goods at rates never before seen. As a result, industrialized nations needed new markets to sell their finished products in. The supply had far exceeded the demand within the European countries where they were produced. There were too many products, and too few buyers.

Through colonization, European powers could get cheap materials. Then they could make them into products in their factories. And then, they could sell them back to the people they colonized.

The premier of France, Jules Ferry, made a speech to French lawmakers. He pushed for expanding France’s colonies. He mentioned most importantly the need for new markets.

....that need, felt more and more strongly by the industrial populations of Europe and particularly those of our own rich and hard working country: the need for export markets.... (qtd. in Andrea and Overfield 295 — 96)

Clearly Ferry is making an economic case for France to acquire colonies. However, he also adds ideas of cultural and racial superiority to his argument.

Gentlemen, I must speak from a higher and more truthful plane. It must be stated openly that, in effect, superior races have rights over inferior races... I repeat that superior races have a right, because they have a duty. They have the duty to civilize inferior races.... (qtd. in Andrea and Overfield 296)

This belief was certainly shared by many Europeans at this time. Yet, others rejected these ideas. Other French government officials spoke out against Ferry. Unfortunately, Ferry was not the only one to believe in the superiority of Europe. David Livingstone was an English missionary and explorer. He made a similar economic argument. Yet he also added religion to the mix.

My object in going into the country south of the desert was to instruct the natives in a knowledge of Christianity, but...soon found that, for the purpose of commerce, it was necessary to have a path [from the interior] to the sea.

In a commercial point of view, communication with this country is desirable. Angola is wonderfully fertile, producing every kind of tropical plant in rank luxuriance. [C]otton is produced in great abundance,...bananas and pineapples in great luxuriance....

A prospect is now before us of opening Africa for commerce and the Gospel... nor should we lose sight of the inestimable blessing it is in our power to bestow upon the unenlightened African, by giving him the light of Christianity. (qtd. in Brophy, et al 371)

Both Ferry and Livingston make imperialism a moral, civilizing crusade. It might seem confusing. Why would a country undertake such a difficult adventure for that reason? Maybe it was just to add a justification for colonization. Maybe they wanted colonialism to seem like it was about more than money.

Great Britain and France were on the move. They wanted to conquer parts of Africa. Other countries wanted to get involved too. Friedrich Fabri was a German missionary who promoted imperialism. He believed it was essential for Germany to acquire colonies. His reasoning included economic arguments, as well as the mission to civilize. However, Fabri also took a more patriotic, nationalistic approach. He noted that England controlled its colonies with just one-quarter of the troops that Germany had:

That is not only a great economic advantage but also a striking proof of the solid power and cultural fiber of England... [It] would be wise for us Germans to learn about colonial skills from our Anglo-Saxon cousins and to begin a friendly competition with them. (qtd. in Heineman 179)

Each time an industrialized nation joined the colonization race, another nation joined in. They were competing for national honor. Ito Hirobumi was one of the leading samurai of Japan of the time and a former prime minister. He states that imperialism will be a goal for his country. He wants to compete with Europe and America. He said: "The aim of our country" has been to join the "European and American nations which occupy the position of civilized countries (qtd. in Wiesner et al 257)."

Clearly there were many issues during the era of imperialism. Economics, racism, religion, and nationalism were all at play. Wealthy, industrialized nations were conquering people of far away lands. Europeans were not exactly welcome when they arrived. This meant that a strong military was necessary. During the Industrial Revolution great leaps were made in weaponry. There had already been a gap between industrialized nations, such as Europe, the United States, and Japan, and the rest of the world. Now it seemed more like a canyon.

Rifles that could be easily reloaded were invented. The Gatling gun (an early machine gun) was developed. They changed war drastically. Suddenly, the rest of the world could not stop the industrialized nations from taking their lands. Many were armed just with arrows, muskets, and spears.

These new weapons had a devastating effect on the people who tried to fight back against the colonizers. One example occurred in 1898, when the British decided to seize a large region of Sudan from the state of Mahdiyya. In the battle, the Mahdiyya army lost 11,000 soldiers; the British army lost 40.

THE SCRAMBLE FOR TERRITORY

Now we know why imperial nations decided to colonize other parts of the world. Let's now take a look at how successful they were. Take a look at the chart below. We can see that Africa and the Pacific Islands were the focus of European and American colonization.

Percentage of Land Area Controlled by European Powers and the United States in 1900

Region	Percentage Controlled
Africa	90.4
Pacific Islands	98.9
Asia	56.5
Americas	27.3

Source: Shultz, Neal and Elisabeth Sperling. "Landscape Teaching Unit 7.5 The Experience of Colonialism 1850 — 1914." *World History for Us All*. PDF file, 18. See also Supan, Alexander. *Die territorial Entwicklung der Europäischen Kolonien*. Gotha: Perthes, 1906. Print, 254.

Therefore, land was taken at a great pace during the last half of the nineteenth century. As a result, millions of people were suddenly under the rule of a foreign power. The biggest "winner" in this race was Great Britain. It can be seen clearly in the chart on the following page:

Population and Territory Acquired by European Colonial Powers by 1939

Country	Area of Country (in square miles)	Population of Country (in millions)	Area of Colonies (in square miles)	Population of Colonies (in millions)
Great Britain	94,000	45.5	13,100,000	470
France	212,600	42	4,300,000	65
Belgium	11,800	8.3	940,000	13
Netherlands	13,200	8.5	790,000	66
Germany (1914)	210,000	67.5	1,100,000	13

Source: Townshend, Mary Evelyn. *European Colonial Expansion Since 1871*. Chicago: Lippincott, 1941. Print, 19.

It is difficult to figure out who claimed what territory from the tables above. Still, we can see that Great Britain controlled a lot of territory. Take a look at the total land area and population of the colonies under their control. We can get a better idea of the area Great Britain controlled by looking at the following map. It will help us better understand the figures above.

COLLABORATION AND RESISTANCE

The Europeans, Americans, and Japanese clearly had advantages in technology. Even so, it would have been extremely difficult for them to rule over so many people. It was especially difficult because they were spread across such a vast area. According

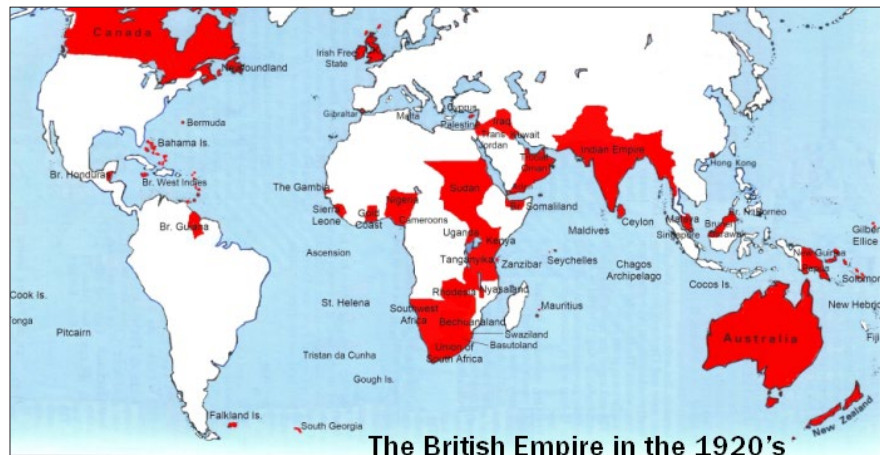
to the chart above, by 1939 Great Britain ruled over more than 515 million people. Their subjects were spread out over a total territory of more than 13 million square miles. Their colonies spanned five continents.

Clearly, the British government faced great challenges as a colonial power. Considering the challenges, they needed the assistance of local people to rule these territories. The people helped them. Some did so willingly. Others were forced to.

Some of the colonized peoples participated in the colonial government. They did so for opportunities to advance within British society. For example, an Indian writer noted that an "India-born [government official] practically cut himself off from his parent society."

He "lived and moved and had his being in the atmosphere so beloved of his British colleagues. In mind and manner he was as much of an Englishman as any Englishman." But doing so had high costs. "It was no small sacrifice for him, because in this way he completely estranged himself from the society of his own people." He became "socially and morally" an outcast. (qtd. in Bulliet et al 811).

European powers also took advantage of conflicts that already existed in a territory. They used their technological superiority to make them worse. The British were able to do this quite successfully in India. Sir James Caird was a member of the British government. In 1878, he explained how Great Britain was able to conquer and control the Indian subcontinent. At the time, there were religious conflicts in India. They eventually led Pakistan and Bangladesh to separate from India. Caird explained how Great Britain controlled the subcontinent. It did so with relatively few men:



Source: James Alcock, *International President, Federal Commonwealth Society*

We have introduced a system the first object of which...is necessarily the subjugation of the people. This is [made] possible by the religious differences between the Hindus and the Mohammedans [Muslims] which prevent their union against us.... A handful of Englishmen could not hold these multitudes on any other principle. The strength we wield is a powerful army, now by the aid of the railway and the telegraph. (qtd. in Sanderson 176 – 77)

The telegraph allowed the British forces to communicate. Trains let them send troops to areas where people revolted. Obviously, many Indians did not want to be under British rule. Still, the British were able to use the quarrels within India against the Indians. Therefore, the question remains: How did the colonized people resist these imperial powers? There is no simple answer to this question. It depends on the location and time period of colonization. However, we investigated further. Some patterns emerged. We can break the responses into four reactions: co-option, military resistance, mysticism, and nationalism. Often there was a mix of these reactions.

The first response was co-option. It is an interesting one. The less technologically advanced country somehow co-opts the ideas of the more technologically advanced country. It copies it. This can be seen in two examples.

The first is Japan during the late nineteenth century. The Japanese government became fearful of the industrialized nations' superior military power. Therefore, the samurai leaders of Japan began an extensive building program. Their goal was to copy the technology of the West. At the same time, they wanted to keep traditional Japanese culture. The two images of the Japanese military shown below offer an interesting comparison. One is before the building program. The other is after.

The second example is that of Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia. He was able to play the colonial powers against one another. He gained support from Russia. Doing so helped him purchase modern weapons. He remade his army based on European ones. With these modern weapons and a trained military, Menelik defeated the invading Italian army.

The response used most often against colonialism was some form of military resistance. Wars of resistance occurred nearly everywhere throughout the Age of Imperialism. One of the most bloody battles took place in the Philippines. Spain was the colonial power there for more than 300 years. The U.S. fought the Spanish in the Spanish-American War. When it ended in 1898, the United States acquired the Philippines, and other territories. The Filipinos declared their independence on January 23, 1899.



Japanese Samurai, 1860s



Japanese Soldiers, 1904

...the Philippine War of Independence began on February 4, 1899. It continued for two years. The United States needed 126,000 soldiers to defeat the Philippine fighters. The war took the lives of 4,234 Americans and 16,000 Filipinos. As often happens, the civilian population suffers the worst. As many as 200,000 civilians may have died from starvation and disease. (Weir)

We can learn from numbers such as these. They show that resisting imperialism by force wasn't very successful. The majority of those who attempted to fight it directly were defeated.

Some also resisted colonization by using mysticism. They turned to traditional spiritual practices. They believed it would protect their fighters from the bullets of the invading forces. However, the use of mysticism in war often meant devastating results for the resisters.

Mysticism movements occurred in many parts of the world. In the American Midwest in the 1890s, the Sioux used the Ghost Dance against the U.S. military. In China from 1899 to 1900, the Chinese staged the Boxer Rebellion against the British and other European powers, the Americans, and the Japanese. They used martial arts and spiritual possession. In East Africa from 1905 to 1907, magic was used in the Maji Maji Rebellion. Resistance fighters there wore a potion when they fought the German military.

Military resistance was just one way of fighting imperialism. Political resistance also found its voice in this time period. The idea of nationalism was often used by imperialists to justify colonization. Resisters soon adopted it. They used it as inspiration for movements against the colonial powers. They demanded to form their independent nations, just like Europe.

India provides us with examples of expressions of national identity. In 1885, Indian intellectuals created the Indian National Congress. It demanded that the British leave India. The Indians wanted the right to govern their own country.

Two of the Congress' most famous members were Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mohandas K. Gandhi. Their message was that Indians should not use military force to drive the British from India. Instead, they encouraged Indians to use political and economic means. Tilak gave a speech to the Indian National Congress in 1907. In it, he said Indians should stop buying British-made goods. He called for a boycott of them. Tilak did not want an armed resistance.

We are not armed, and there is no necessity for arms either. We have a stronger weapon, a political weapon, in boycott....the whole of this administration, which is carried on by a handful of Englishmen, is carried on with our assistance. We are all in subordinate service.... The point is to have the entire control in our hands.... Self-government is our goal; At present, we are clerks and willing instruments of our own oppression in the hands of an alien government, and that government is ruling over us not by its innate strength but by keeping us in ignorance and blindness.... (qtd. in Hay 145)

Gandhi is perhaps best known for promoting Indian freedom through nonviolent resistance. One can hear the nationalist pride in the passage below. He chides the British. This is an imaginary dialogue. He wrote it for his book *Hind Swaraj*, or *Indian Home Rule*.

We consider our civilization to be far superior to yours. If you realize this truth, it will be to your advantage and, if you do not, according to your own proverb, you should only live in our country in the same manner as we do...We consider your schools and courts to be useless.... The common language of India is not English but Hindi. You should, therefore, learn it. We can hold communications with you only in our national language. (qtd. in Hay 817 – 18)

CONCLUSION

The Age of Imperialism was caused by several factors. In part, it was spurred on by the Industrial Revolution. The need for raw materials and new markets were the primary economic reasons for European colonization. The imperial powers further justified their expansion. They claimed they had a moral obligation. They said they had a duty to bring civility and religion to the people they conquered.

Imperialism led to societal changes in the colonies. There was no avoiding it. Some of the changes could never be undone. Identities of the colonies were forever altered by imperialism.

The effects of imperialism can still be felt today. Most former colonies are now independent nations. Yet the effects of imperialism remain. Some areas of the world continue to catch up economically and politically with their former rulers.

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Cover image: Albert Edward, Prince of Wales and future King of the United Kingdom and Emperor of India (1901 — 1910), standing on an elephant he has killed during his state visit to India, 1875 — 1876. Courtesy of Lebrecht Music & Arts/Corbis.

This short journal entry is an example of how historians go about exploring important questions and looking at new information. They use a mixture of historical documents and the writings of other historians to inform their thinking. All sources are listed in the working bibliography.