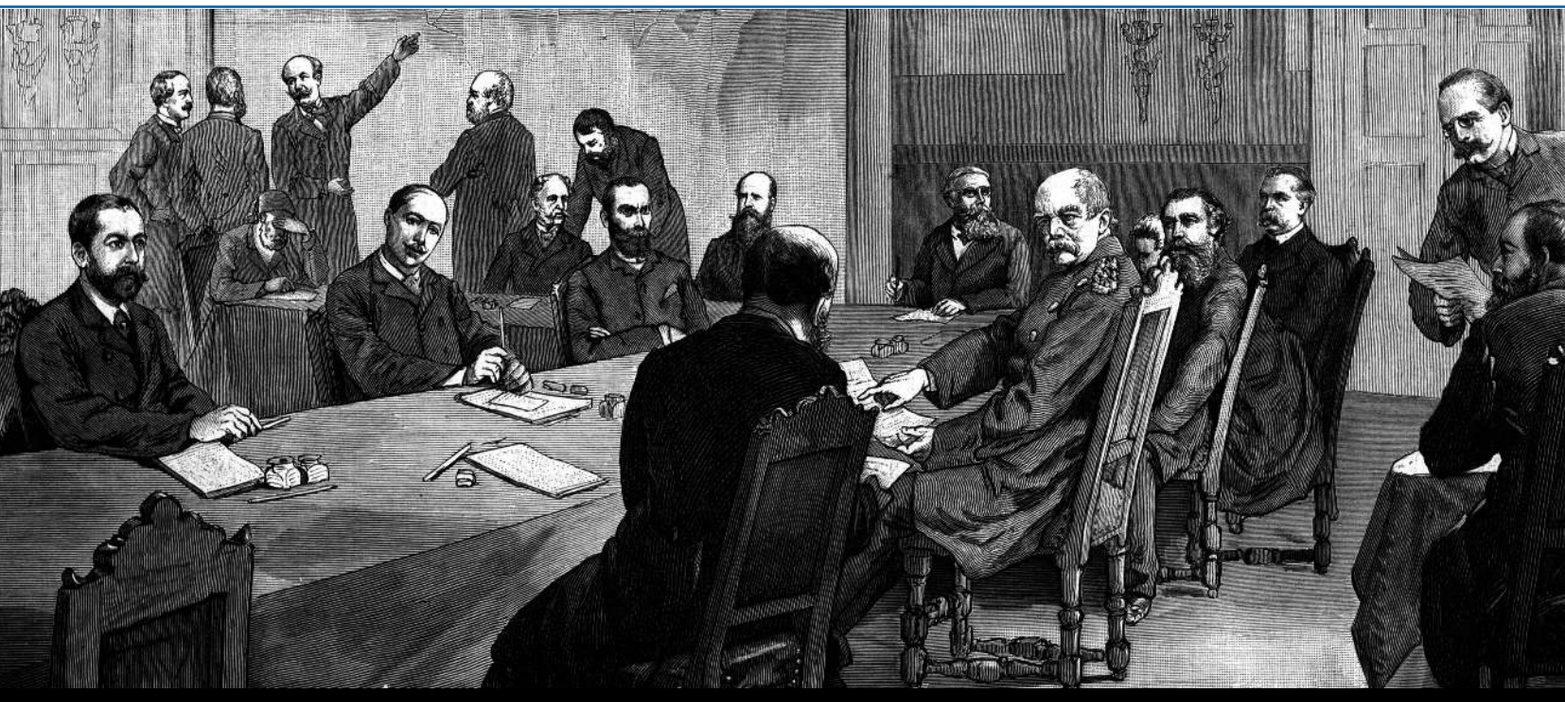
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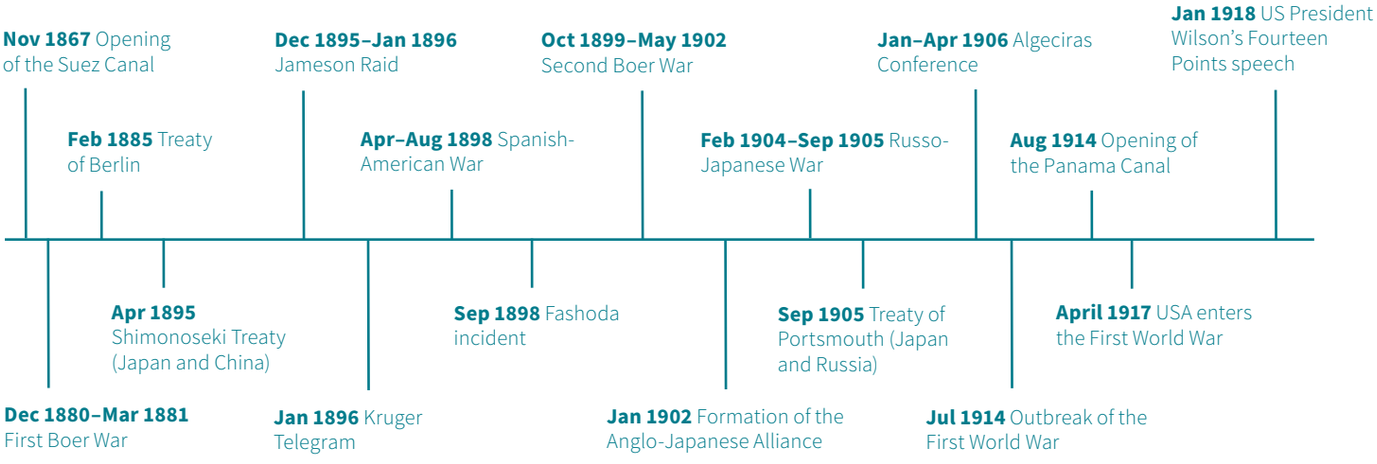
Chapter 1
Empire and the emergence of world powers 1870–1919

Learning Objectives:

In this chapter, you will:

- understand the economic, social and cultural background to European imperialism in the late 19th century
- learn how, when and why various countries developed empires in Africa and China
- find out how the empire-building process affected relations between European countries
- understand the circumstances of Japan and the USA at the beginning of this period, and how they both developed rapidly to become world powers.

Timeline



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Before You Start

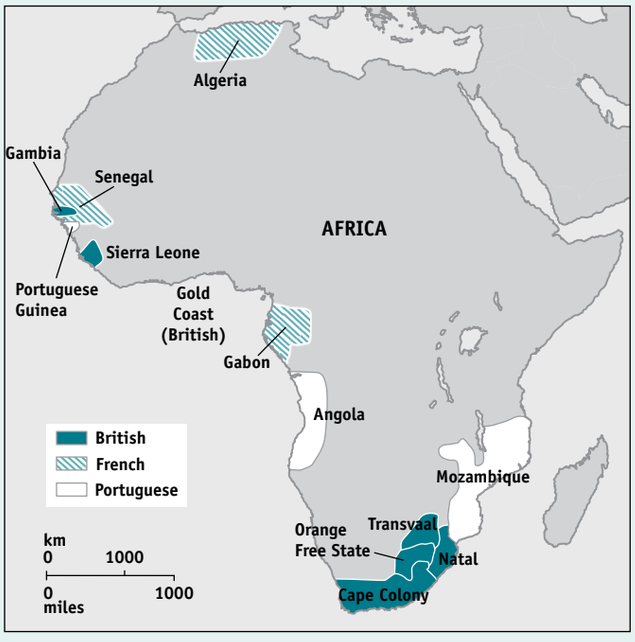


Figure 1.1: European African possessions in 1870

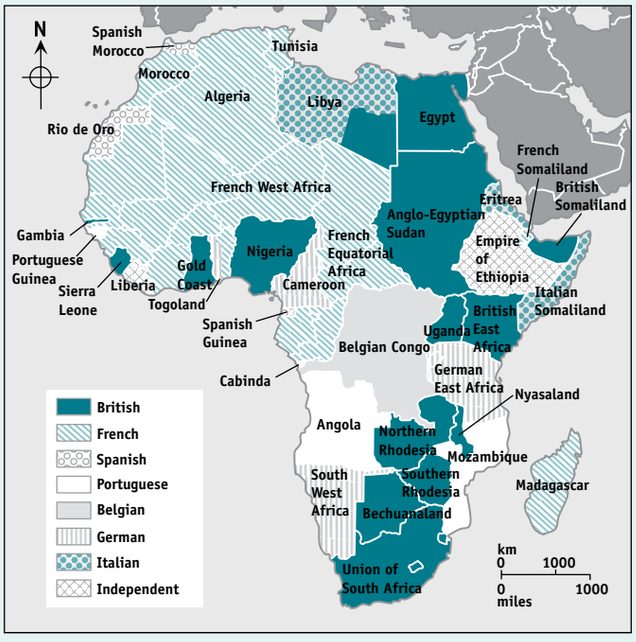


Figure 1.2: European African possessions in 1914

Look carefully at Figures 1.1 and 1.2, maps showing European African possessions in 1870 and 1914. Working in pairs, answer the following questions:

1 **a** What did the African territories controlled by European nations in 1870 have in common?

b What factors might explain this?

2 **a** In what ways had the situation changed by 1914?

b What factors do you think might explain these changes?

c Which parts of Africa remained independent of European control by 1914?

3 Why do you think European nations were able to gain such a powerful influence in Africa in such a short period of time?

4 Make a list of factors that you think might explain why European nations were so keen to gain territory in Africa.

5 How do you think the desire to gain African territory might have affected relations between European countries?

Introduction

European nations had a long tradition of increasing their wealth, prestige and power by seeking overseas possessions. As early as the 16th century, Spain had taken control of large parts of South America. In the 18th century, Britain and France had competed for territory in North America and India. In the early 19th century, Britain already controlled an empire stretching from New Zealand to Canada. Portugal had been exploring the African coast as far as modern Mozambique from the 15th century, with Dutch competition from the 17th century.

By the early 19th century, European involvement in overseas expansion had unquestionably declined. The costs involved in maintaining control over their overseas possessions, which frequently involved expensive wars, proved too great for Europe's **imperial** nations. Britain had lost control over its 13 colonies in North America following the American War of Independence (1775–1883), while Spain no longer had extensive influence in South America. Nevertheless, the desire to identify and exploit profitable ventures overseas remained. As their interests in the Americas declined, European nations began to look

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elsewhere, such as Africa and Asia. This was to lead to a new wave of imperialism in the period from 1871 to 1914.

KEY TERM

Imperialism: the policy of extending a nation's power by gaining political and economic control over more territory. This is sometimes referred to as colonialism and the territories taken under control are known as colonies.

1.1 Why was imperialism a significant force for late 19th-century Europe?

Economic and political motives for imperial expansion

The desire to find and exploit new trading opportunities had been one of the main reasons for imperial expansion in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Following a policy of **mercantilism**, the most powerful European nations aimed to increase their wealth through trade. Their governments established firm control over all aspects of trade with the aim of limiting the cost of imports and increasing the value of exports. This would enable nations to accumulate large quantities of gold and silver. Gaining overseas possessions provided a cheap source of raw materials and labour, and valuable products, such as spices and silks, which were not available in Europe. At the same time, the overseas possessions provided a guaranteed and lucrative market for European goods.

KEY TERM

Mercantilism: an economic policy based on the belief that there was only a limited amount of wealth in the world. European nations aimed to increase their share of that wealth at the expense of their rivals, a situation that encouraged imperialism and led to frequent wars.

Many European businessmen and private companies were able to become extremely wealthy by exploiting this favourable, government-supported trading situation. The most obvious example of this exploitation is the slave trade. From as early as the 16th century, ships had sailed from European ports to the coast of Africa. There the Europeans would acquire slaves, either by bartering with local chieftains or simply by capturing local people. The human cargo was then shipped across the Atlantic Ocean and sold to plantation owners in the USA and Caribbean islands to work as slaves picking cotton, or harvesting tobacco or sugar. The ships would then return to Europe carrying these profitable commodities.

Empires were neither stable nor permanent constructs. Belief in mercantilism began to decline during the 18th century. Maintaining control over overseas possessions and protecting vital trade routes from rival nations was expensive and often led to wars. In the second half of the 18th century, for example, Britain fought hugely expensive wars in an attempt to maintain control over its territorial possessions in North America. While Britain was able to retain Canada, it was finally forced to accept the independence of the United States of America. At the same time, the Spanish Empire in Latin America was collapsing; once Brazil declared full independence from Portugal in 1827 very little remained of the Latin American empires of Spain and Portugal.

Moreover, new economic theories were suggesting that a nation's wealth should not be judged by the amount of gold and silver it possessed, but by its ability to produce goods and services. The most influential of these theories was put forward by the Scottish economist Adam Smith in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776. Smith suggested that, in many respects, imperialism was far from profitable. Writing at a time when Britain was beginning to undergo its industrial revolution, Smith argued that a nation's ability to increase its production of goods and services depended on investment in new methods. Government control over a nation's economy, he concluded, was neither necessary nor desirable. Wealthy individuals would be more likely to invest if they could reap the financial rewards without government interference. In line with these new economic theories, the incentive for government-sponsored imperial expansion declined.

Economic motives for imperial expansion: industrialisation

During the 19th century, however, a new economic motive for imperial expansion developed. The industrial revolution, based on mechanisation, meant that European industry expanded rapidly. Goods were mass-produced on such a scale that it became essential to find new sources of raw materials with which to make them and new markets in which to sell them. Moreover, **entrepreneurs**, who had made rapid profits from industrialisation, sought new places in which to invest their wealth.

KEY TERM

Entrepreneurs: people who invest their money (known as capital) in business ventures. They are prepared to take this financial risk in the hope of making large profits.

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As the first country to undergo an industrial revolution, Britain enjoyed enormous economic advantages during the first half of the 19th century. The development of steam-powered machinery revolutionised Britain's textiles industries, while new techniques were introduced for the production of iron and steel. Railways and steamships enabled Britain to transport its products more efficiently. Britain was 'The Workshop of the World', able to produce goods more quickly and more cheaply than any other country.

As the industrial revolution spread across Europe, Britain's advantageous economic situation ended. In the second half of the 19th century, Britain began to face growing competition from its European rivals and also from the USA, which was rapidly emerging as an economic power in its own right. By 1850, the economies of the German states had been transformed by the development of railways and the formation of a customs union (the *Zollverein*), which enabled greater trade between them. By the time of its unification in 1871, Germany had emerged as a serious industrial and commercial challenger to Britain. Though much slower to industrialise than Germany, France too was making a concerted effort to extend its international trade. With a well-established trading outpost in Senegal, France increased its commercial interests in Africa with the conquest of Algeria (1830–47). Between 1850 and 1870, France developed the second most powerful navy in the world, surpassed only by Britain, and established naval bases in the Indian Ocean (in the Seychelles) and Indo-China (Cambodia and Vietnam) to enhance and protect French trade with Asia.

Economic motives for imperial expansion: the 'Long Depression'

This competition was enhanced by what became known as the 'Long Depression', a period of price **deflation** that lasted from 1873 to 1896. As a result of rapid industrialisation across Europe and the USA, principally in Germany and Britain, the production of goods was outstripping demand. Businessmen and industrialists were forced to lower their prices, which, in turn, led to declining wages and job losses. Governments were put under enormous pressure to protect and promote their nations' economies. European countries, therefore, began competing for new overseas possessions that would provide guaranteed markets for their industrial products.

KEY TERM

Deflation: Falling prices caused by a drop in demand. This leads to falling wages and unemployment, which, in turn, further reduces demand as less people can afford to buy goods.

Economic motives for imperial expansion: competition for raw materials

Just as Europe's industrialised nations needed to find new markets for the huge increase in their output of manufactured products, so they also needed to identify and exploit new sources of raw materials, such as cotton, copper, rubber and tin. Large quantities of these materials could be found in Africa and Asia. For example, raw cotton in Mozambique and India, copper in Southern Africa, rubber in the Congo and tin in British Malaya (modern Malaysia). At the same time, Africa and Asia offered other products that were highly valued in Europe – tea and silk (China), gold and diamonds (the Transvaal), and palm oil (West Africa).

Writing in 1902, the British economist John Hobson summarised the economic reasons for imperial expansion in the last quarter of the 19th century:

> Imperialists argue that we must have new markets for our growing manufactures and new outlets for the investment of our surplus capital. Imperial expansion is a necessity for a nation with our great and growing powers of production. An ever large share of our population is devoted to manufacturing and commerce, and is therefore dependent for life and work upon food and raw materials from foreign lands. In order to buy and pay for these things, we must sell our goods abroad. During the first three-quarters of the 19th century Britain could do so without difficulty by a natural expansion of commerce with European nations and our overseas lands, all of which were far behind us in the main arts of manufacture and trade. So long as Britain held a virtual **monopoly** of the world markets for manufactured goods, imperialism was unnecessary.
>
> **John A. Hobson, 'The Economic Taproot of *Imperialism*', from Imperialism a Study (1902)**

KEY TERM

Monopoly: a market structure characterised by a single seller facing no competition.

Political motives for imperial expansion: growth of nationalism

By 1871, the political map of Europe had been settled. New nation states were declared in Germany and Italy, and borders within Europe had been agreed. Only war could change these borders, and war was something that all

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nations were keen to avoid. Although Russia and Austria continued to eye possibilities in the Balkans following local uprisings against the ruling Ottoman Empire, there was little possibility of expansion within Europe itself. Countries needed to look overseas in order to enhance their own industrialisation and increase their wealth, power, prestige and influence.

KEY TERM

Nationalism: a sense of belonging to a nation and supporting its interests above those of other nations. The belief that your country is superior ethnically, culturally, politically and historically to all other countries.

The late 19th century witnessed an increase in **nationalism** throughout Europe. Germany and Italy were keen to establish themselves as newly unified nation states. France was determined to recover from its humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71). Confronted by increasing economic competition from its European neighbours, Britain proudly boasted about the size of its empire and the power of its navy.

Addressing the British parliament in February 1870, for example, the Earl of Carnarvon said:

> We have an Empire such as no other people ever possessed. Spain had a great empire, but it has almost disappeared. France had considerable possessions across the seas, but it has seen them gradually absorbed by other nations. Britain alone has built up a vast Empire. It is an Empire of which we have reason to be proud.

In the Naval Defence Act, 1889, the British government formally adopted the 'two power standard'. This aimed to ensure that the British navy remained at least as powerful as the combined strength of the next two largest navies (French and Russian at the time).

European governments increasingly portrayed overseas possessions as symbols of national pride and power. French governments, for example, argued that it was France's destiny to be superior to other nations and to spread its language, culture and beliefs to other parts of the world through overseas expansion.

The French politician Paul Doumer argued:

> Just as Rome civilised the barbarians beyond its borders, we too have a duty to extend French culture and religion to the backwards people of the world.

French missionaries in Indo-China, however, did rather more than simply spread Christianity and French culture. Their leaders, such as Bishops Lefèbvre, Pellerin and Puginier actively helped French military forces take control over parts of Vietnam.

Political motives for imperial expansion: imperialism as social policy

By 1870, political power in Europe remained largely in the hands of wealthy landowners, businessmen and entrepreneurs. Many of them stood to gain from overseas expansion. However, their political control was being threatened. Industrialisation had led to the emergence of a large and increasingly organised working class, which demanded social, economic and political reform.

In an effort to reduce this threat, governments portrayed overseas expansion as beneficial to everyone. Senior politicians, such as the long-serving French Prime Minister Jules Ferry and Britain's Joseph Chamberlain, viewed imperialism as a way of diverting popular attention away from social, economic and political inequalities. They argued that imperialism would provide their countries with the finance required to pay for social reform, and improve the condition of the working classes by ensuring steady employment. Governments, therefore, used imperialism as a way of uniting their peoples, regardless of wealth or class, behind a common aim – the development of the economic and political power of their country through overseas expansion.

Political motives for imperial expansion: strategic control of key regions

Prior to 1869, trading with India and the Far East had involved Europeans in a lengthy and hazardous voyage around the southern tip of Africa. To supply and protect its ships on this vital trade route, Britain had established a port in Cape Colony in southern Africa. Between 1859 and 1869, the Suez Canal Company, financed largely by British and French entrepreneurs, constructed a canal

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linking the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea across Egyptian territory. This enabled European ships to travel to and from India and the Far East more quickly and more cost-effectively. However, the instability of the Egyptian government threatened this new trading route and so, in 1882, Britain reluctantly took over the administration of Egypt. Many historians believe that it was the establishment of British power in Egypt that encouraged other European nations to gain territory in Africa. What originated as a strategy to facilitate commercial activity became a political motive for seeking overseas possessions.

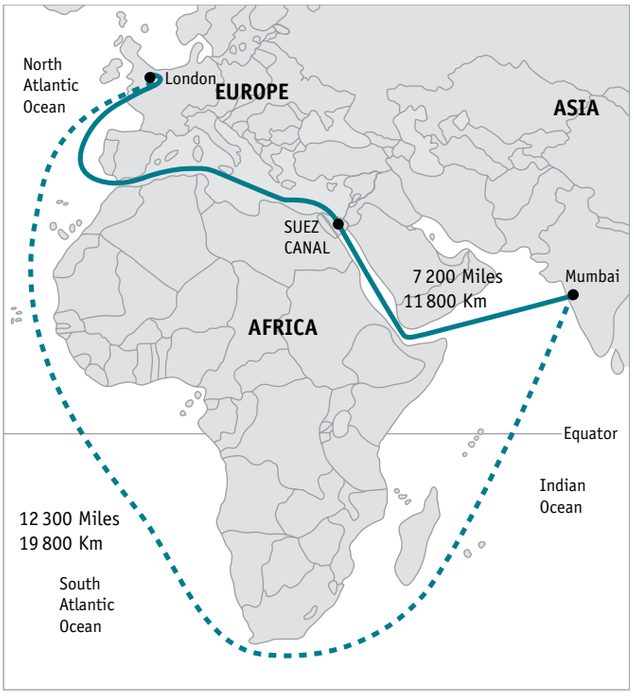


Figure 1.3: The opening of the Suez Canal greatly shortened the journey from Europe to India and the Far East.

ACTIVITY 1.1

The policy of imperial expansion is a political and economic system. In the area of economics, there is a need, felt more and more urgently by the industrialised population of Europe, and especially the people of our rich and hard-working country of France – the need for outlets for exports. What our major industries lack more and more are outlets. Germany and the USA are setting up trade barriers. Not only are these great markets becoming more and more difficult to access, but these great states are beginning to pour into our own markets. Our navy needs safe harbours and supply centres on the high seas. That is why we need imperial expansion. If we do not expand into Africa and the Far East, in less time than you think, France will sink from the first rank of nations to the third or fourth.

Jules François Camille Ferry, speech before the French Chamber of Deputies, 28 March 1884

ACTIVITY 1.1 (CONTINUED)

Should Germany begin on the road to imperialism? I believe we should. We are an industrial nation. In order to maintain our factories and produce our goods we need access to natural resources which can be found in Africa and Asia. Obtaining overseas possessions will open up new markets to trade our goods, and provide our bankers with new projects to invest money in. Imperialism will strengthen our military and defend our nation. By engaging in imperialism we can limit the power of our competitors, Britain and France. We can prevent territory falling into their hands. Taking part in imperialism would increase national pride in Germany. We will show the world that we are a strong nation. We can restore Germany's position as the most prestigious, important and influential nation in Europe.

Friedrich Fabri, *Does Germany Need Colonies?* (1879)

Working in pairs, discuss the following questions and prepare detailed notes:

a Compare and contrast the arguments used by Ferry and Fabri to justify imperial expansion by their respective countries.

b What economic factors encouraged European nations to seek overseas possessions in the late 19th century?

c What political factors encouraged European nations to seek overseas possessions in the late 19th century?

Make sure that your notes include both the economic and the political factors which led to imperialism.

The emergence of 'New Imperialism'

The period from 1871 to 1914 witnessed a new wave of imperialism that is referred to as 'New Imperialism'. There is some disagreement between historians regarding just how 'new' this 'New Imperialism' actually was. Some argue that it was simply a continuation of earlier overseas expansion by European nations, while others suggest that it was fundamentally different in character.

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Nature of 'New Imperialism'

What is referred to as 'New Imperialism' by historians had three main characteristics:

1 **Geographic scope:** whereas previous imperialism had been largely focused on the 'New World' (North and South America), 'New Imperialism' centred on Africa and Asia. Explorers had shown that the African interior contained an abundant supply of valuable minerals and other raw materials including rubber and tin. One of the most famous explorers was David Livingstone, a Scottish missionary, who discovered the source of the River Nile. His African expeditions were heavily funded by the British government, which realised the potential value of his discoveries. Meanwhile, the crumbling Chinese Empire offered opportunities to increase vital trade links with the Far East. The French explorer Henri Mouhot led several expeditions to Siam, Cambodia and Laos, his discoveries paving the way for subsequent French imperial control over large areas of Indo-China.

2 **Maintaining peaceful relations:** although the rush to acquire new overseas possessions inevitably involved rivalry between European nations, there was a very real attempt to prevent this leading to the constant warfare that had characterised earlier imperialism. The Treaty of Berlin (1885), for example, effectively laid down rules by which European nations should carry out their plans for expansion in Africa – a clear attempt to avoid possible confrontation. In China, imperial nations occupied their own discrete areas of influence, and, indeed, were prepared to collaborate against the Chinese.

3 **New imperial countries:** earlier imperialism had been carried out by the main European powers – Britain, France, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands. With 'New Imperialism', the desire for overseas expansion was no longer confined to the great powers of Europe. Massive industrial growth led the USA to seek greater control over Central and South America, together with access to trading rights in Asia. This required the development of a strong navy and the acquisition of overseas bases from which it could operate. Meanwhile, Japan embarked on its own industrial and military revolutions, enabling it to seek greater power and influence within Asia. This was to bring Japan into immediate conflict with one of the major European powers, Russia, and made subsequent rivalry with the USA more likely.

Factors enabling 'New Imperialism'

If 'New Imperialism' was motivated by political, economic and strategic issues, social and technological factors made it possible:

1 **Medical advancement**: in the late 18th century, Africa was known as 'the white man's grave' because of the dangers of diseases such as malaria. The medicine quinine, discovered by French scientists in 1817, proved to be an effective treatment for malaria. As fears of contracting and dying of diseases gradually faded, the African interior and the jungles of Asia became more accessible to Europeans.

2 **Technological advancement**: the industrial revolution had led to the introduction of new methods of producing iron and steel both cheaply and in large quantities. For example, Henry Bessemer's system for the mass production of high-quality steel became widely used after 1856. This facilitated developments in railways and steamships, which made transport both quicker and safer. Iron-hulled, steam-driven ships (which, unlike sailing ships, did not need deep hulls for stability and did not depend on wind power) were able to navigate rivers such as the Congo, the Zambezi and the Niger, offering easier access to the African interior. Similarly, communications systems were greatly improved. A telegraph network was established, and by 1891 its cables reached from London to North and South America, India and New Zealand. This made it far easier for imperial nations to administer and control their overseas possessions.

   At the same time, the development of fast-firing rifles, machine guns and heavy artillery gave Europeans a distinct advantage over poorly armed Africans. For example, although vastly outnumbered by their African opponents, the possession of machine guns enabled British soldiers to gain rapid victory in the Matabele War of 1893. With such effective weaponry, territory in both Africa and Asia could be taken with little effective resistance from the local people.

Opposition to slavery

By 1820, most European governments had banned the slave trade, arguing that slavery was 'repugnant to the principles of natural justice' (P. E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, 290). It was known that slavery remained common in Africa and that many African

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chieftains continued to barter in human beings. Many Europeans believed that they had a moral duty to put an end to this practice.

The theory of racial superiority

In the early 19th century, scientists such as Johann Friedrich Blumenbach and Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau developed theories regarding the classification of races. White people were classified as racially superior to other groups, such as Asians and Africans. The publication in 1859 of Charles Darwin's influential book *On The Origins of Species* was widely, if mistakenly, interpreted as providing further scientific justification for such theories. It appeared to imply that certain races were inferior, being less evolved and thus less human than others. These views, presented through poor science and consciously or unconsciously motivated by political and ideological factors, were widely accepted both in Europe and in the USA. Convinced of their racial superiority, many Europeans believed that they had a duty to bring order, stability and civilisation to the lives of 'pagan' Africans and Asians. The missionary-explorer David Livingstone, for example, argued that it was essential to introduce Africans and Asians to the three 'Cs' – commerce, Christianity and civilisation.

The French economist, Paul Leroy Beaulieu, writing in 1891, suggested that:

> The great part of the world is inhabited by barbarian tribes or savages who participate in wars without end and brutal customs. They do not know how to work, invent, or exploit their land and its natural resources. The civilised people of the west have a duty to spread knowledge of medicine, law and Christian religion.
>
> **Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, *On the Desirability of Imperialism* (1891)**

The claim that European nations were gaining overseas possessions in order to improve the lives of local people provided convenient justification for actions that were, in reality, motivated by self-interest and characterised by exploitation. Lord Lugard, a British soldier and explorer who was later governor of the British colony of Nigeria.

While recognising that Africans may have benefitted from the British presence on their continent, Lord Lugard, a British soldier and explorer who was later governor of the British colony of Nigeria, openly accepted that Britain's main motive was to 'serve our own interest as a nation' by enhancing trade. It is interesting to note that he clearly saw nothing wrong in this, claiming that it was Britain's 'right' to take such action, quickly dismissing the views of those who argued that Africa 'belongs to the native'. In asserting that Britain had every right to take possession of African land in order to address its own national interests, Lord Lugard was clearly implying that the rights and needs of Europeans outweighed those of Africans. In this, he was conforming to the widespread belief in European racia superiority.

In Germany, Social Democrat politician August Bebel addressed the Reichstag in 1906 pledging SPD support for German imperialism as 'a great cultural mission', even though he had in 1899 told the same assembly that 'the substance of all colonisation is to exploit a foreign population to the utmost degree':

As Sebastian Conrad comments in his *German Colonialism: A Short History* (Cambridge University Press, 2012, 35) 'there was no question of even the SPD actually opposing colonisation as such'.

ACTIVITY 1.2

> It is well to realise that it is for our advantage – and not alone at the dictates of duty – that we have undertaken responsibilities in East Africa. It is in order to foster the growth of the trade of this country, and to find an outlet for our manufactures that our far-seeing statesmen and our commercial men advocate colonial expansion . . . There are some who say we have no right in Africa at all, that it 'belongs to the native'. I hold that our right is the necessity that is upon us to provide for our ever-growing population and to stimulate trade by finding new markets, since we know what misery trade depression brings at home. While thus serving our own interest as a nation, we may bring at the same time many advantages to Africa.
>
> **F. D. Lugard, *The Rise of Our East African Empire* (1893)**

Answer the following questions and then discuss your answers in pairs or small groups.

a In your own words, explain why the opening of the Suez Canal was so important to European nations.

b What did Lord Lugard say were the reasons for British imperialism in the late 19th century?

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ACTIVITY 1.2 (CONTINUED)

c How did European nations attempt to justify their takeover of African territory in the late 19th century? List the three most important factors.

d Put into an order of significance the various reasons why European countries began to seek territory in Africa during the late 19th century. Put what you consider to be the most important factor at the top, and the least important at the bottom. Hold a group discussion on the reasons. Each student should make the case for their most important factor. Remember you must provide evidence for your reason.

Nature and purpose of the 'scramble for Africa'

In 1870, only 10% of Africa was under direct European control, most of it in the coastal regions. Europeans knew little about the African interior, other than that it seemed to be a mysterious, inhospitable and dangerous place. As medical advancements reduced the health risks and steam ships made river transport more accessible, explorers began to venture into Africa. Some, such as David Livingstone, were missionaries, determined to bring Christianity to the 'uncivilised' African natives. Others were financed by wealthy entrepreneurs, keen to find new resources and trading opportunities. One of the most famous explorers, Henry Morton Stanley, was hired by **Leopold II, King of Belgium**, to secure treaties with local chieftains along the course of the Congo River.

KING LEOPOLD II OF BELGIUM (1835–1909)



Leopold was King of Belgium from 1865 to 1909. He financed the colonisation of the Congo Free State (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), which he exploited in order to make money from ivory and rubber. Leopold's regime in Africa was characterised by cruelty towards the native inhabitants, and he was eventually forced to hand control of the Congo to the Belgian government in 1908.

As increasing exploration reduced European fears of Africa, the opportunities it offered became increasingly apparent. The last quarter of the 19th century witnessed what contemporary journalists labelled the 'scramble for Africa' – a rush by European nations to take control of African territory. By 1900, over 90% of the African continent was under the control of European nations.

Britain

Britain's original concern had been to protect its vital Indian Ocean trading routes, and this explains its interest in Egypt and South Africa. The discovery of gold, diamonds and other valuable minerals in the Boers' independent republic in the Transvaal (South Africa) alerted Britain to the economic rewards that might be gained by acquiring further land in Africa. Determined to prevent other European countries, particularly France and Germany, from gaining these potentially mineral-rich areas for themselves, Britain moved quickly to secure as much of Africa as possible. Encouraged by the success of imperialist adventurers such as Cecil Rhodes, Britain took possession of most of southern and East Africa in the last 20 years of the 19th century. By 1900, British possessions in Africa included Egypt, the Sudan, British East Africa (Kenya and Uganda), British Somaliland, Southern and Northern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe and Zambia), Bechuanaland (Botswana), Orange Free State and the Transvaal (South Africa), Gambia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, British Gold Coast (Ghana) and Nyasaland (Malawi). These countries accounted for more than 30% of Africa's population. Rhodes's ambition was to build a railway and telegraph line from Cairo in the north to the Cape in the south, thus reinforcing Britain's commercial gain from its African possessions. The British magazine *Punch* published a cartoon of Rhodes in 1892 (Figure 1.4).

Given the USA's own history of having to fight for independence from Britain, it is perhaps not surprising that many Americans were heavily critical of European imperialism. An American cartoon, published around 1900, reflects a rather different impression of Britain's activities in Africa. Britain is shown in the form of a wild-eyed man eating Africa in order to fuel an insatiable hunger (Figure 1.5).

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Figure 1.4: Imperialist, explorer and businessman Rhodes as a colossus bestriding Africa. Caption reads: 'The Rhodes Colossus Striding from Cape Town to Cairo.'



Figure 1.5: An American view of Britain's relationship with Africa. The image caption reads: 'Don't bite off more than you can chew, John'.

ACTIVITY 1.3

a Comment on the British cartoon depicting Cecil Rhodes (Figure 1.4), making reference to:
- where he is standing (both feet)
- cable
- gun
- facial expression
- size
- cartoonist's message.

b In what ways does the American cartoon (Figure 1.5) give a contrasting impression of Britain's activities in Africa? What does this suggest about the American attitude towards imperialism? Discuss your answers in pairs or small groups.

France

While Britain concentrated on East Africa, France was more active in the west and north-west of the continent. Earlier in the 19th century, economic and diplomatic disputes, and the desire for a popular military success, had led France to invade what is now Algeria. Partly as a result of involvement in the slave trade, France controlled the coastal regions of Senegal. In the late 19th century, the French then moved inland in search of raw materials, such as palm oil and timber, and new markets for France's industrial output. French politicians, determined to enhance their country's wealth, prestige and power following defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, saw the development of a large overseas empire as essential.

Belgium

Belgium itself had only been independent since 1830, but King Leopold II of Belgium was determined to enhance his country's prestige and his own wealth by claiming the enormous Congo basin. Leopold was prepared to use his own money to pay for African territory that was considerably larger than Belgium itself. He saw the enormous financial advantages to be gained by exploiting the Congo's large quantities of raw rubber, a commodity much in demand in Europe.

Portugal

Building on long-standing contacts with the African coast from the first wave of western exploration in the 16th century, and determined not to be left behind in the race to acquire African land, Portugal extended its long-established claims to Angola and Mozambique.

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