

chapter 14

World Trade and Empires, 1839–1914



The nineteenth century was an age of imperialism—an age in which European nations expended a great deal of energy and money expanding their empires. Their motives were threefold. First, they expected economic profits from their colonies, many of which were rich in the natural resources and raw materials—including human beings—necessary to keep the European factories going. Second, no nation wanted to grant supremacy to the others; as long as one nation was establishing overseas colonies, other nations would follow suit simply to maintain a balance of power. Third, Christian churches that had steadily been losing power and influence in Europe saw colonization of Africa and Asia as a splendid opportunity for missionary work. Fourth, the sense of racial superiority that characterized Europeans made them feel it was their responsibility to impose their culture on peoples they regarded as uncivilized or inferior.

The opening of the Suez Canal connected the Mediterranean and Red Seas and thus provided a much shorter and more efficient shipping route between Europe and Asia. It also provided a means of communication and troop transport.

CHAPTER 14 OBJECTIVES

- Describe the motives that led various European nations to build foreign empires.
- Describe the period of British rule in India.
- Describe European colonization and conquest in Southeast Asia and Africa.

Chapter 14 Time Line

- 1840 First Opium War
- 1848 France annexes Algeria
- 1850 Britain gains control over India
- 1852 Boers (Dutch) establish South African Republic
- 1854 Boers establish Orange Free State
- 1856 Second Opium War
- 1857 Sepoy Mutiny in India
- 1880 France establishes protectorate in Congo
- 1882 Britain establishes protectorate in Egypt
- 1884 Nations meet at Berlin and agree on division of Africa
- 1886 British take Burma
- 1887 France conquers Indochina (Vietnam)
- 1898 Britain conquers the Sudan

India

England first established trade relations with India in 1608, with the arrival in India of the British East India Company. Its purpose was to make profits from trade between India and Europe. Such trade had been proved highly profitable by the experience of the Dutch and Portuguese in Southeast Asia. England was soon sailing west with shiploads of Indian cotton. As England's textile mills were the cornerstone of its economy, the trade with India assumed enormous importance. England could not grow its own cotton because it did not have the right climate.

Belatedly realizing that the British were establishing a trade monopoly with India, France formed the French East India Company in the 1700s. Hostility and resentment between the two companies broke out in 1744; during the Seven Years' War, the British drove France from India. As of 1765, Britain controlled one of the richest provinces in India—Bengal, on the east coast of India at the mouth of the Ganges River.

The collapse of India's Mughal Empire in the late 1700s allowed Britain to take over the entire nation from its power base in Bengal. This was a slow process, not completed until the annexation of Punjab in 1849. Many Indians resisted the British takeover, most famously during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. (*Sepoy* is an Indian term meaning "soldier.") In May 1857, Indian troops mutinied against British commanders at Meerut, near New Delhi. This touched off a wave of other mutinies and popular uprisings in central and northeastern India. The resistance was swiftly crushed, in part because different segments of Indian society were not united against the British; some even fought on the British side. In 1858, the East India Company was dissolved and Britain formally annexed India.

England maintained an exploitative and paternalistic relationship with India, which it valued not as an ancient civilization but as a source of manpower and a market for British manufactured goods. Since it was impossible to rule India effectively from faraway Britain, the British established both a bureaucratic and a military presence on the subcontinent. British military officers commanded both British and Indian troops, and British civil servants—along with Indians in subordinate positions—carried out the day-to-day business of governing. The British would occupy India until after World War II.

The British takeover and occupation had mixed effects on India. On the positive side, English became the one common language in a nation where hundreds of dialects were spoken; Britain also introduced Western ideas of education and women's rights to India. On the negative side, the British maintained an attitude of racial and cultural superiority throughout their stay in India, which the Indians naturally found both objectionable and unjustified, given that Indian culture, literature, and art long predated British. The spirit of nationalism was not confined to Europe; it arose in India too.

While Western European nations had a shared Classical heritage, a common way of life, a common cultural understanding, and a common religious history, Britain and India did not have these things in common. The Indian and European civilizations had created two cultures so different that there was almost no mutual understanding, and a great deal of suspicion and mistrust.

China and Southeast Asia

With the exception of Siam (present-day Thailand), nearly all the islands and kingdoms of Southeast Asia were under European sway by the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Most of the colonization took place after 1870. Thanks to the strength and military skill of Indian troops, Britain took over Burma and Singapore. Singapore was important for the protection of British shipping lanes, and Burma was ruled by an ambitious dynasty that threatened British supremacy in the region.

Britain's power base in India enabled it to open up trade with Manchu (Qing) China, which had maintained a highly favorable trade balance with Britain up to this time, for two reasons. First, the Chinese were not interested in acquiring Western goods, insisting instead on being paid in silver. Second, the Chinese did not desire any cultural exchange with the West; from the Chinese point of view, exposure to Western culture and ideas meant contamination. This attitude meant that only certain Chinese ports were open to Western traders, and the behavior of those who went ashore was strictly regulated.

Westerners traded with China despite the unfavorable financial balance, because China provided goods they could not purchase elsewhere. Tea was the favorite beverage in Britain, and China was also the source of porcelain, ceramics, silks, and other luxury goods. Britain and other Western nations pressured China to relax its restrictive policies, but to no avail—until the British hit on the effective but morally bankrupt notion of offering opium, cultivated in British India, as payment for Chinese goods.

The nineteenth century was an era of abysmal medical ignorance, and both Western and Eastern doctors prescribed opium as a painkiller. However, society was well aware that opium was a hallucinogenic, used illegitimately (not illegally in all countries) as what is today called a “recreational” drug. The Chinese had used opium for medicinal purposes for centuries, but placed a ban on its purchase or use without a doctor's prescription. However, China was not without its drug-dealers and opium addicts. The sudden rise in the availability of opium allowed the Chinese underworld excellent opportunities for profit, and the desirability of the opium caused a 180-degree shift in the trade balance between China and Britain.

The Manchus banned the importation of the drug. This provoked the British warships to fire on China, inaugurating the First Opium War in 1840. By 1842 the Chinese, unable to match the British military power, conceded defeat and

accepted British demands to resume the importation of opium and to sign new treaties. Historians refer to these agreements as “unequal treaties” because they were all but signed at gunpoint, with one side dictating all the terms. The treaties specified that the Chinese would open several ports for trade; that China would provide equal access and privileges to all Western trading partners; and that foreigners, if accused of any crimes in China, would be tried by their own nations rather than in Chinese courts—a proceeding known as “extraterritoriality.” The First Opium War effectively ended China’s reign as a world power until after World War II.

Britain and France formed an alliance and won further concessions from the Manchus in the Second Opium War, fought from 1856 to 1860. At the same time, Russia took the opportunity to seize a large expanse of Siberian territory from China. After two more wars, one with France and one with Japan, China was cornered. The West forced the Qing government to adopt a free trade policy. Although the Qing emperor remained on the throne, he had little authority over events. Britain, France, Germany, Japan, and Russia established spheres of influence over most of China.

The Dutch won a power struggle on the island of Java in 1830 and gained huge profits by purchasing Javanese crops (sugar, coffee, and tea) very cheaply and selling them in Europe at much higher prices.

France was also active in Southeast Asia. In 1858–1859 the French invaded Vietnam and established a colony despite resistance from both Vietnam and China. By 1884, France had established protectorates in Annam and Tonkin; three years later they had taken over Cambodia. The French administered the area as the Union of Indochina. It was valuable for its natural resource of rubber, timber, and rice.

The Takeover of Africa

On the eve of World War I, in 1914, almost the entire continent of Africa was under European rule. The only exceptions were the independent nations of Ethiopia on the Red Sea and tiny Liberia on the Atlantic coast.

In the nineteenth century, Europeans regarded Africa as a literal and figurative economic gold mine. Literally, the southern half of the continent had fairly extensive resources of gold (and diamonds). Figuratively, Africa was a repository of natural resources that Europe could not provide for itself, such as rubber and a variety of minerals. Africa boasted a variety of climates, and many

regions of the continent were ideal for the cultivation of cotton, coffee, and cocoa—all highly valued in Europe.

Europe had made enormous profits from the slave trade before the mid-1700s. Although European nations did not use African slave labor on the continent, they did carry shiploads of slaves to their colonies across the Atlantic. Millions of Africans—many sold to the traders by Africans from rival tribes—were kidnapped, transported, and sold into labor in the cotton or sugarcane fields of the Caribbean Islands, Latin America, and the southern United States. Britain alone shipped more than 3 million Africans across the ocean.

African tribal culture was centuries old by the time the first Europeans made contact with the continent. The continent was not culturally homogeneous; it was home to a large number of tribes who spoke different languages and had a great variety of customs. However, none of these was recognizable to a European as a civilized culture. European invaders of Africa behaved exactly as they had in the Americas in the 1500s: They conquered with their superior fire power, imposed their own culture and language on the native peoples, and exploited them.

In most cases, the Africans were simply not prepared for the European aggression. In some cases, Africans even welcomed Europeans as potential allies against their traditional local rivals. Africans were prone to accommodate the Europeans rather than risk armed confrontation, which they had no hope of winning due to their lack of sophisticated arms. Yet, they found many means of both passive and active resistance—everything from nonpayment of tributes and taxes to full-scale rebellion. European control was much more present in urban areas than in the countryside. Additionally, many areas of Africa were largely inaccessible without a modern transportation network, which took some time to build. European occupation therefore had relatively little effect on thousands of rural Africans.

Christian missionaries began playing an active role in Africa around the late 1700s, with the Baptist Missionary Society being founded in 1795. The men and women who traveled to Africa did not merely spread the gospel; they provided practical, down-to-earth help in a number of areas. First, they brought medicines and medical help. Malaria, which was spread by mosquitoes, was (and still is) epidemic throughout most of southern Africa. The missionaries brought and distributed quinine, which helped to combat it. Second, they were teachers. They held classes for children and adults, teaching them to read and write—not just in European languages, but in their own. Unlike the more secular colonizers, the missionaries lived among the people, ate the same food,

and worked hard to learn the languages. It was the missionaries who were responsible, in many cases, for creating written forms of many of the African languages for the first time. This creation of a whole class of literate, educated Africans would prove crucial in the drive for African self-determination and independence that began after World War II. Third, the missionaries used what influence they had to try to persuade the Africans to discontinue some of their cruelest traditional practices, such as human sacrifice, slavery, and polygamy.

The European trade in African slaves was a source of vast profits for Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Portugal. Africans also profited; Europeans paid them large sums of money to round up victims from hostile tribes. From the mid-1700s until the slave trade died out, most African slaves were shipped across the ocean to work, usually in the worst and hardest jobs available, in the American colonies.

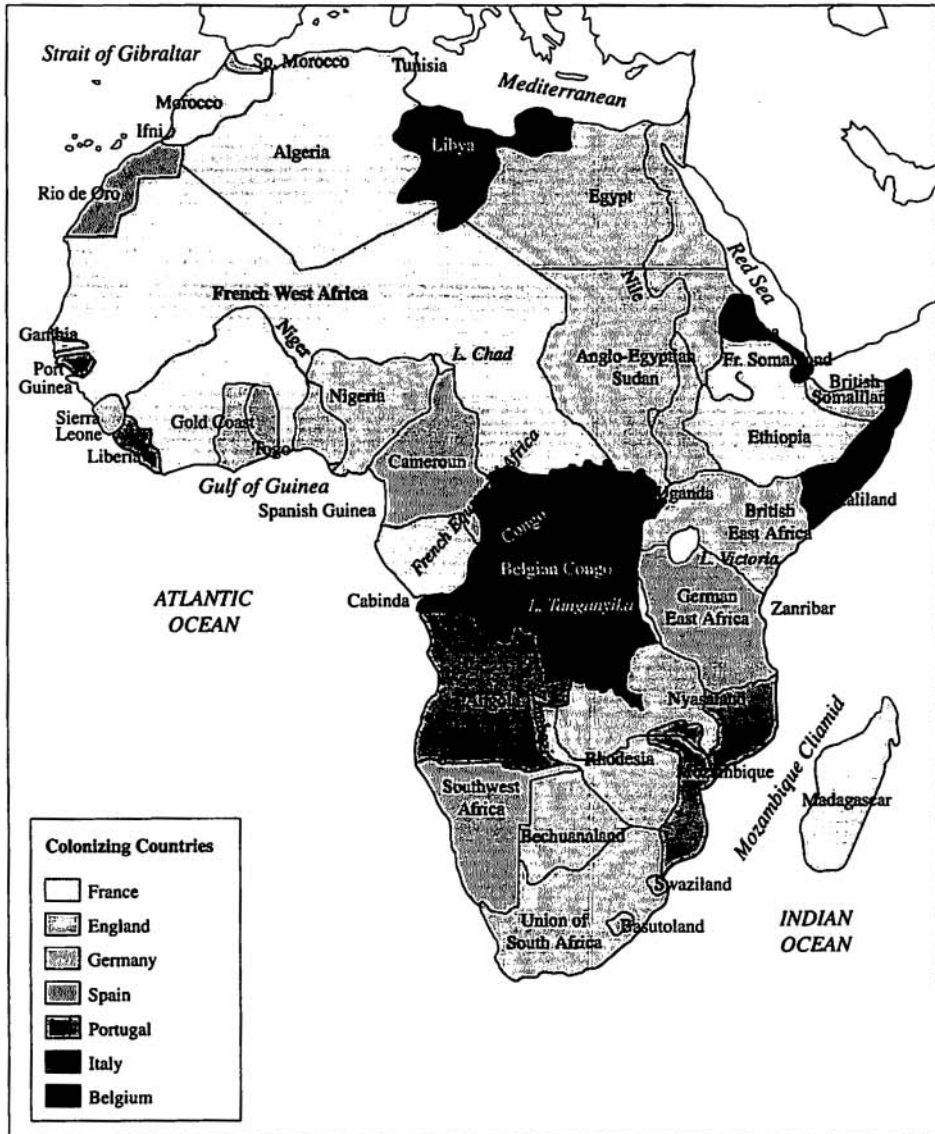
The vast majority of African slaves came from what Europeans had long called the “Gold Coast”—the coastal area of present-day Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Nigeria. The trade in slaves was so brisk for a time that the populations of these areas were decimated.

Olaudah Equiano (also known by the name of Gustavus Vasa), a slave who survived the notorious middle passage—the journey across the Atlantic—gained his freedom as an adult and wrote an important slave narrative. Equiano traveled to Britain in the early 1800s, becoming a well-known public speaker on the issue of abolition. He thus made an important contribution to the change of attitude in Britain that led to its 1807 ban on the slave trade.

Between 1858 and 1869, the French built the Suez Canal across a narrow neck of Egyptian land. This connection between the Mediterranean and Red Seas was to prove of major importance for communication, transport, and trade. The British seized the canal from the French in 1875, and soon after had established virtual control of the Egyptian government, largely for the sake of maintaining control of the canal. The British extended their authority in Egypt into neighboring Sudan. The Sudanese fought back under the leadership of Muhammad Ahmed ibn Ali, known as the Madhi. When the Madhi died, it became clear that effective Sudanese resistance depended on his leadership; without him, the Sudanese succumbed to the British in 1898. In 1899, Britain formally established Anglo-Egyptian rule in the Sudan. Britain also established itself in Nigeria and in the southern region in a colony it named Rhodesia (present-day Zambia and Zimbabwe).

Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Portugal all established a major presence on the African continent. Spain established one small colony on the

Atlantic coast. The Dutch settled in South Africa, where they established the Cape Colony, which the British took over during the Napoleonic Wars. The Boers, as the Dutch South Africans were known, established the South African Republic and the Orange Free State (named for the royal house of Orange) in the mid-nineteenth century. The British eventually drove them out in the Boer War, and South Africa was made a British dominion.



Europe's African Colonies in 1914

QUIZ

- _____ was the Indian raw material most important to the British economy.**
 - Wool
 - Rubber
 - Cotton
 - Diamonds
- The British drove France out of India during _____**
 - the Sepoy Mutiny.
 - the Seven Years' War.
 - the Great War.
 - World War II.
- European religious organizations welcomed colonization primarily because**
 - they believed in European racial superiority.
 - they wanted to make new converts.
 - they no longer felt welcome in Europe.
 - they hoped to make economic gains.
- Why were rural Africans less affected than urban ones by the occupying Europeans?**
 - They were less accessible.
 - They were less educated.
 - They were less wealthy.
 - They were less intimidated.
- The Dutch were able to demand high prices in Europe for Javanese sugar, coffee, and tea because**
 - it cost them a lot of money to transport them to Europe.
 - Europeans did not often travel to Java.
 - the Suez Canal was not opened until 1869.
 - these crops could not be cultivated in the European climate.

6. The Southeast Asian nation of _____ remained independent throughout the period of European colonization.
- A. Java
 - B. Siam
 - C. Vietnam
 - D. Singapore
7. Britain established virtual rule over Egypt in order to maintain control over _____
- A. Nigeria.
 - B. Rhodesia.
 - C. the Suez Canal.
 - D. the Bay of Bengal.
8. Europe made its greatest profits from the Atlantic slave trade between
- A. 1650 and 1750.
 - B. 1750 and 1800.
 - C. 1800 and 1850.
 - D. 1850 and 1900.
9. After the British takeover, India was under the authority of the British monarch, but the day-to-day administration was carried out by
- A. the military.
 - B. the civil service.
 - C. the missionaries.
 - D. the East India Company.
10. The Suez Canal connected the Red Sea with the
- A. Mediterranean Sea.
 - B. Indian Ocean.
 - C. Bay of Bengal.
 - D. Arabian Sea.