

What Was the Driving Force Behind European Imperialism in Africa?

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Overview: For the 300 years between 1500 and 1800, European nations traded for slaves, gold, and ivory along the west coast of Africa, but they did not go deeply into the continent. In the 1800s this changed as European explorers pushed their way into the interiors of western and central Africa. By the 1880s Africa was under full assault as European nations competed with one another for control of the continent. This Mini-Q takes a look at this quest for colonies and asks what was the primary driving force behind it.

The Documents:

Document A: Partition of Africa (map)

Document B: National Pride

Document C: Technology and Imperialism (chart)

Document D: African Colonies and Their Exports (chart)

Document E: Imports and Exports (graph)

Document F: Rudyard Kipling (poem)

A Mini Document Based Question (Mini-Q)

Hook Exercise: Is Imperialism Ever Justified?

Directions: *Imperialism* is an action by a strong nation to take control of another country. For example, the United States was practicing imperialism when it took control of the Philippines in 1899. Throughout history, nations have turned to imperialism for a variety of reasons. Below are five different scenarios, each presenting a different reason for taking control of a country. Next to each scenario check whether imperialistic action is always justified, sometimes justified, or never justified. In each case, provide your rationale, that is, the reasons behind your thinking.

Scenario	Always Justified	Sometimes Justified	Never Justified	Rationale
1. National security: The colonized island country has deepwater ports for refueling the mother country's navy and merchant marine. It also has an airfield.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. National economy and energy independence: The colonized country has much needed oil reserves.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Moral duty: The colonized country has a poor, uneducated population that needs roads, schools, and hospitals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Establishing religious freedom: The colonized country is ruled by a brutal theocracy. Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Jews are denied freedom of worship upon pain of death.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5. Establishing political freedom: The colonized country is run by a tyrant who denies free elections and imprisons all critics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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Before the 19th century, Europeans knew very little about the interior of Africa. Between 1500 and 1800, European presence in Africa was mostly about buying and selling slaves from local chiefs. Slave ships would arrive, trade their pots, cloth and guns for West African slaves, then set sail for the Americas. These ships anchored off the African coastline and their crews seldom left the ship because of the risk of catching **malaria** or other tropical diseases. Europeans were so vulnerable to these diseases that the west coast of Africa, from the Senegal River to Angola, became known as “the white man’s grave.”

In 1807, the British outlawed the **trans-Atlantic slave trade** and in 1833, slavery itself. With the end of slavery, European interests in the continent shifted to **imperialism** and seizing colonies. Serious exploration began. Scotsman Mungo Park gave his life in 1806 while investigating the Niger River region in West Africa. In 1840 David Livingston began more than thirty years in the interior of central Africa. Whereas maps of Africa drawn in 1800 had left great holes in the continent’s center, by 1850 some of the blanks were filling in. Still, as late as 1870 only 10% of Africa was under European control, and most of that was along the edges – French Algeria, British Sierra Leone, Portuguese Angola.

King Leopold of Belgium broke this pattern. In the early 1880s he acquired a private “country” of 900,000 square miles in central Africa. Leopold called his estate Congo Free State. Leopold’s Congo was 95 times the size of Belgium and his purpose was to make money by taking out ivory and rubber. Over the next twenty years Leopold’s managers proceeded to kill, through **forced labor**, horrible mistreatment,

and the introduction of disease, as many as 10,000,000 people. It was not a good beginning for European imperialism in Africa.

During the same years that Leopold was buying the Congo, other European leaders were becoming very aware of two things: First, Africa was filled with incredible natural resources; second, a scramble for these riches could lead to war among the European powers. Otto von Bismarck of Germany proposed that a conference be held in Berlin in 1884 and 1885 to divide up Africa in a reasonable and peaceful manner. No Africans

were invited to attend. At the conference, the European nations (all except Switzerland attended) divided up the African continent by claim and by the **rule of occupation**. It was not enough, for example, for England to claim Nigeria. England also had to prove that it had treaty agreements, buildings, soldiers, and administrators on the ground to support their claim. At Berlin, the European nations also agreed to certain principles regarding coloni-

zation. These included **free trade**, the elimination of slavery, respect for each other’s territorial claims, and improving the “moral and material well-being” of Africans. They did not, however, consider the land claims of Africans.

This short background brings us to the question asked by this Mini-Q. For more than three centuries Europeans had avoided the African interior. Now, powers like England, France, and Germany showed a fresh interest in getting and holding large pieces of the African continent. But why this new interest? More specifically, in the late 19th Century, *what was the driving force behind European imperialism in Africa?*



Background Essay Questions

1. Between 1500 and 1800 what was a main reason Europeans did not enter the interior of Africa?
2. What is the difference between ending the slave trade and ending slavery?
3. What is the connection between a man like Mungo Park and imperialism?
4. What percentage of Africa had been colonized by 1870?
5. What likely explains the poor standing of Leopold II among historians today?
6. When was the Berlin Conference and what did it do?
7. What place were Africans given at the conference table in Berlin?
8. Define the following terms:

malaria

trans-Atlantic slave trade

imperialism

forced labor

rule of occupation

free trade

Timeline

- 1806 – Mungo Park dies exploring the Niger River.
- 1807 – Britain abolishes the trans-Atlantic slave trade.
- 1830 – The French occupy Algeria.
- 1833 – Britain abolishes slavery.
- 1869 – The French complete building the Suez Canal in Egypt.
- 1872 – King Leopold II of Belgium begins to acquire land in the Congo River region.
- 1884 – The Berlin Conference begins to divide up Africa.
- 1914 – World War I begins in Europe.

Understanding the Question and Pre-Bucketing

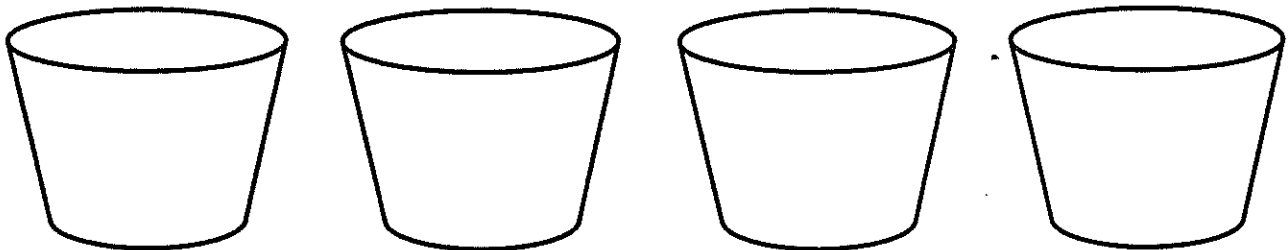
Understanding the Question

1. What is the question asked by this Mini-Q?
2. What terms in the question need to be defined?
3. Rewrite the question in your own words.

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Pre-Bucketing

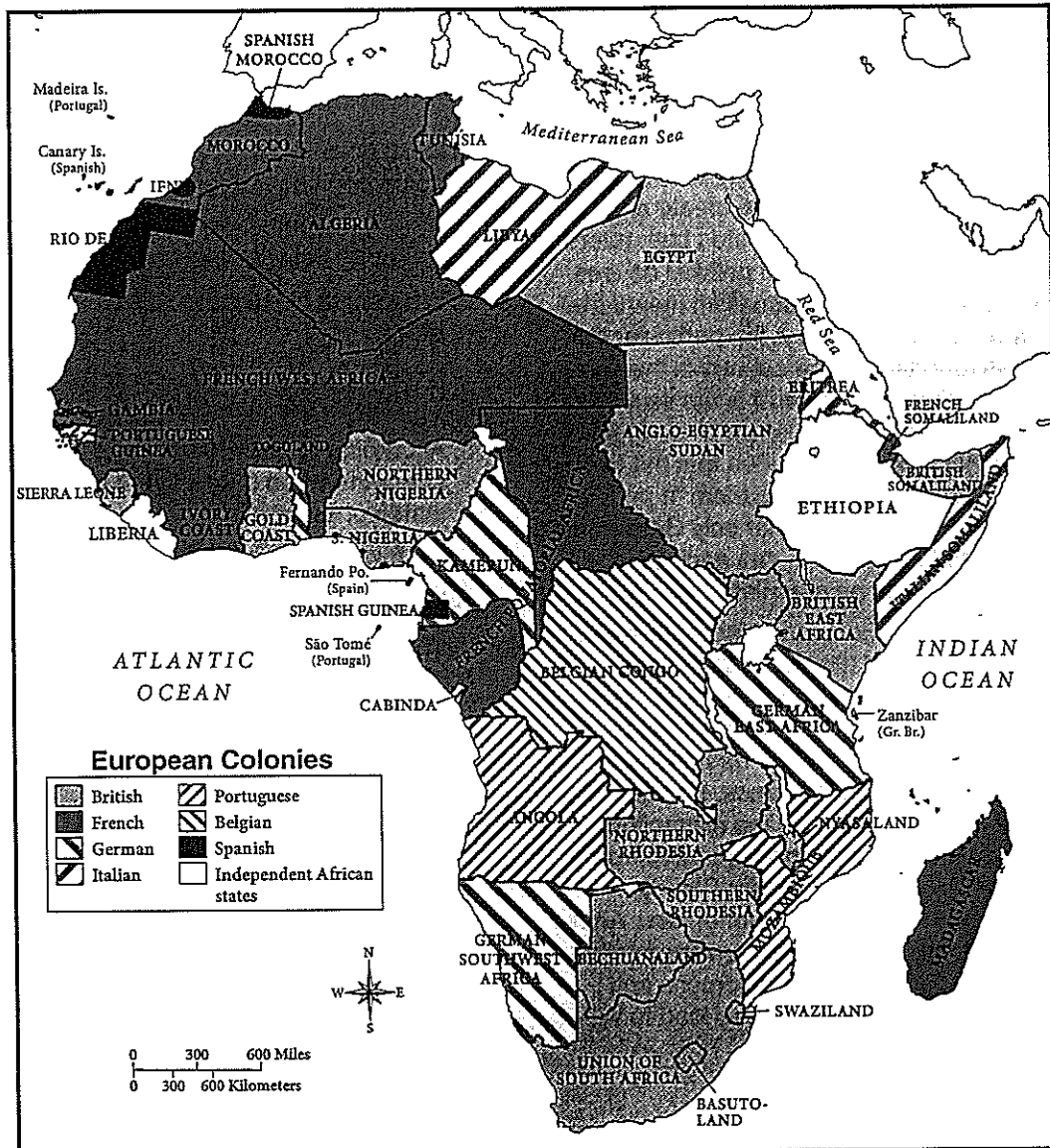
Directions: Using clues from the Mini-Q question, think of possible analytical categories and label the buckets.



Document A

Source: Map created from various sources.

Partition of Africa, 1884-85



Document Analysis

1. How many European countries held African colonies by 1914?
2. Which two European countries were the biggest winners in the race to seize African colonies?
3. Britain had a dream of building a railroad from the Mediterranean Sea to South Africa (i.e. from Cairo to Cape Town). Which country was in the strongest position to block this from happening?
4. By 1885, what were the only two African countries to remain independent?
5. How could this document be used to explain a driving force behind European imperialism in Africa?

Document B

Source: John Ruskin, lecture at Oxford University, February 8, 1870.

Note: John Ruskin (1819-1900) was a well regarded English intellectual, author, and speaker whose interests ranged from art critic to social reformer. This talk at Oxford University was delivered to a standing room only crowd. A short excerpt follows.

[Will the] youths of England, make your country again a royal throne of kings; ... for all the world a source of light, a center of peace?... (T)his is what [England] must either do or perish: she must found colonies as fast and as far as she is able, formed of her most energetic and worthiest men; – seizing every piece of fruitful waste ground she can set her foot on, and there teaching these her colonists ... that their first aim is to be to advance the power of England by land and by sea.

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Source: Freidrich Fabri, *Does Germany Need Colonies?* 1879.

Note: Freidrich Fabri (1824-1891) has been called the “father of the German colonial movement.” Fabri was impressed by the colonial achievements of the English and wanted Germany to do something of the same. His book was quite well received.

But should not the German nation who is fundamentally so very capable, so seaworthy, so industrially and commercially minded ... successfully pave the way for this new course? ... It would be wise if we Germans would learn about colonial skills from our Anglo-Saxon [British] cousins and would begin—in a friendly competition—to strive after them. When the German Reich centuries ago was at the peak of the states in Europe, it was the Number One trade and sea power. Should the New German Reich wish to prove and maintain its newly won position of power for a long time, it will have to take up the same culture-mission and delay no longer to acknowledge its colonial task anew.

Document Analysis

1. What does Ruskin say England must do to again be “a source of light, a center of peace”?
2. What does he say should be the colonists’ “first aim”?
3. According to Fabri, what were Germany’s strengths when it was “at the peak of the states in Europe”?
4. Why does Fabri believe that Germany needs to “strive after” colonies?
5. What is the driving force behind European imperialism in Africa, according to these two sources?

Document C

Source: Information drawn from various sources.

Note: The Industrial Revolution led to many discoveries and inventions that helped Europeans to take over Africa.

Technology and Imperialism

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Technological Development (Date Invented)	Use and Significance
Steam engine (1787) first used in boats; (1804) first used in locomotives	A more constant and forceful source of power than sails on ships or horse-drawn carriages. Faster form of transportation
Method of getting quinine from cinchona tree bark (1820)	Treatment for the disease malaria
Electric telegraph (1837)	Communication over long distances
Bessemer process (1855)	Quicker and cheaper method of manufacturing steel, which was lighter and more durable than iron; used in producing rails, bridges, and tall buildings
Maxim gun (1884)	First machine gun
Repeating rifle (late 1800s)	A faster-loading gun that was able to fire multiple shots more accurately than older muskets

Document Analysis

1. During which century was most of the technology in this chart invented?
2. Which technological advancement cured a tropical disease? Which of the technological developments gave European armies an advantage over African armies?
3. Which of the inventions do you think would have been the most important for spreading European influence in Africa?
4. How could this document be used to explain the primary cause of European imperialism in Africa?
5. Was technology a better driving force behind European imperialism in Africa than national competition? Explain.

Document D

Source: Information drawn from various sources.

Selected African Colonies and Their Exports

African Colony (European Colonizer)	Resources Exported	Industrial or Economic Use
Angola (Portugal)	cotton palm oil and palm-kernel oil coffee and sugar	fabrics soap and candles; some food products food processing
Congo Free State (King Leopold of Belgium)	rubber palm oil and palm-kernel oil ivory	waterproof clothes, tires, electrical insulation soap and candles; some food products handles, piano keys, billiard balls
French West Africa (France)	gum palm oil and palm-kernel oil cotton peanuts, bananas, coffee, cocoa	cosmetics, drugs, food products soap and candles; some food products fabrics food processing
Rhodesia (Great Britain)	copper zinc lead coal	coins, metal alloys, electrical wiring metal alloys, rust protection metal alloys, ammunition fuel
South Africa (Great Britain)	gold diamonds	banking, national currencies, jewelry jewelry, industrial cutting tools
Tanganyika (Germany)	sisal coffee rubber cotton	rope and twine food processing waterproof clothes, tires, electrical insulation fabrics

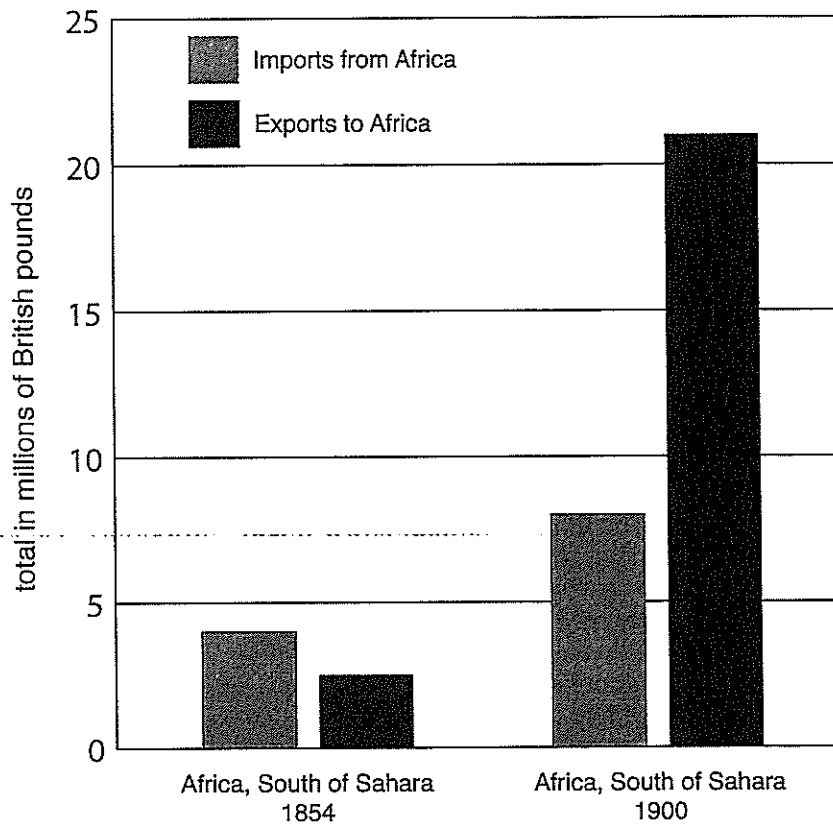
Document Analysis

1. What European industries benefited from African resources?
2. If you owned a textile mill, which colony or colonies would you want your country to rule? Explain.
3. The Age of Imperialism fell right on the coattails of the Industrial Revolution. What is the connection between the two?
4. How could this document be used to explain a primary cause of European imperialism in Africa?

Document E

Source: Trevor Owen Lloyd, *The British Empire: 1558-1995*, 1996.

**Great Britain and South Saharan Africa
Imports and Exports, 1854 and 1900**



Document Analysis

1. How much money did Great Britain make from exports to South Saharan Africa in 1854? In 1900?
2. Describe the difference between Great Britain's imports from and exports to Africa in 1854 and 1900. Which experienced a higher rate of growth?
3. According to this chart, how was Great Britain benefiting from its African colonies?
4. How could this document be used to explain an important cause of European imperialism in Africa?
5. Were economic factors more of driving force behind European imperialism than national pride?
Than improved technology?

Document F

Source: Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," 1899.

Take up the White Man's burden—
Send forth the best ye breed—
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child...

Take up the White Man's burden—
The savage wars of peace—
Fill full the mouth of Famine
And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
The end for others sought,
Watch sloth and heathen Folly
Bring all your hopes to nought...

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Document Analysis

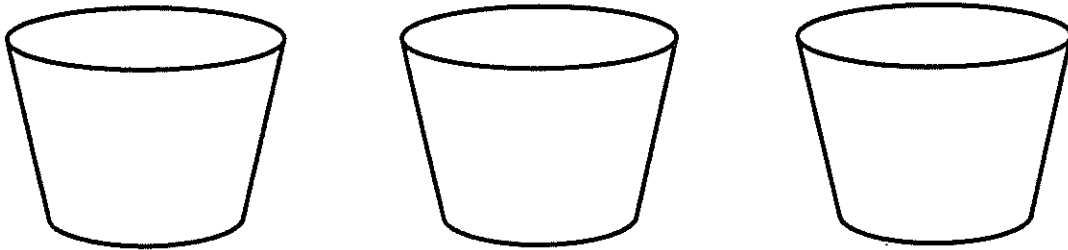
1. Who is Kipling talking to when he says, "Send forth the best ye breed"?
2. Who does Kipling mean when he refers to "Your new-caught, sullen peoples, / Half-devil and half-child"?
3. What does Kipling mean when he commands, "Fill full the mouth of Famine / And bid the sickness cease"?
4. What does the title "The White Man's Burden" mean?
5. How can this document be used to explain a primary cause of European imperialism in Africa?
6. Are cultural attitudes a more important driving force behind European imperialism in Africa than political, technological, or economic reasons? Explain.

Bucketing – Getting Ready to Write

Task One: Bucketing

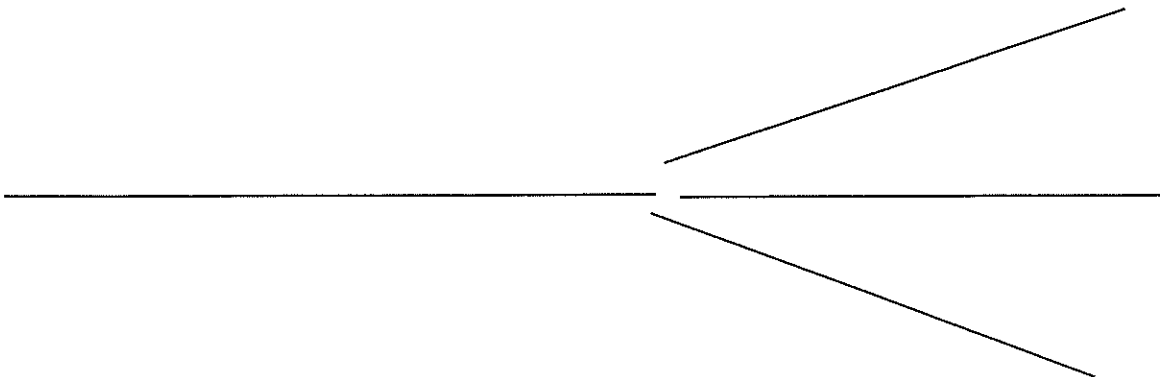
Look over all the documents and organize them into your final buckets. Write labels under each bucket and place the letters of the documents in the buckets where they belong. Remember, your buckets are going to become your body paragraphs. You may want to organize your buckets so that your main driving force or reason is in the last bucket.

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Thesis Development and Road Map

On the chickenfoot below, write your thesis and your road map. Your thesis is always an opinion and answers the Mini-Q question. The road map is created from your bucket labels and lists the topic areas you will examine in order to prove your thesis.



From Thesis to Essay Writing

Mini-Q Essay Outline Guide

Working Title

Paragraph #1

Grabber

Background

Stating the question with key terms defined

Thesis and road map

Paragraph #2

Baby Thesis for bucket one

Evidence: Supporting detail with document citation

Argument: Connecting evidence to the thesis

Paragraph #3

Baby Thesis

Evidence

Argument

Paragraph #4

Baby Thesis

Evidence

Argument

Paragraph #5

Conclusion: "Although" statement followed by restatement of your main idea

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