

Imperialism



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Note: This article was released prior to the 2015-2016 revision to the AP European History exam. In order to see what is still in the Course and Exam Description, explore the course framework [here](#).

This section of our AP European History crash course will cover the important concept of imperialism insofar as it relates to your AP European History review.

Imperialism is closely related to colonialism. Colonialism aptly describes the motivation to create footholds in newly discovered and claimed lands. Imperialism is similar in that it involves creating those same footholds but in a different capacity. Colonialism falls short in accurately describing the motive that necessitates the term “imperialism”.

Imperialism Cont.

Imperialism, as it must be discussed here and for the purposes of your AP European History review, has a bit of a pernicious streak. Where colonialism implies a peaceful settlement, imperialism implies and overtly pronounces an element of conquering the peoples of a certain place, exploiting the economic advantages of a certain place, and creating a colony there in that certain place in order to maintain rule.

This AP European History crash course will help you better understand imperialism by explaining the concept as it relates to your AP Euro review, giving the details on the major imperial states throughout European history, and providing an example of imperialism on the past AP European History exams.

Continue reading for our crash course on imperialism!

Imperialism—What is it?

For your AP Euro review, you should consider imperialism as the literal nominalization of a country's desire to expand its land holdings and increase its wealth. As a term, it describes the desire to *build an empire*. Described in economic terms, imperialism could be called the struggle for limited resources, such as landmass.

In truth, the definition of imperialism will only help you somewhat in your preparation for the AP European History exam. You really should know how imperialism affected European history in specific instances. There's no more effective way to accomplish that than discussing the major imperial states and their impact on European and world history.

The Age of Imperialism

The Age of Imperialism will be an important topic in your preparation for the AP European History exam. This time period, from the 17th through much of the 20th century, is critical to how we recognize the modern world.

Imperialism Cont.

The Age of Imperialism refers to the period of time in which several European powers looked to extend their economic and political power outside of their borders. This led to the annexation of land in Africa, Asia, and the America, which shaped how we currently observe the world.

Your AP European History review will definitely benefit from an understanding of the individual European powers and their respective actions during the Age of Imperialism.

European Empires During the Age of Imperialism

The most active empire-building countries throughout the Age of Imperialism were Britain, eventually the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Spain. Continue reading for a brief overview of each of these empires that should give you the information you need to begin your AP European History review on imperialism.

Britain & the United Kingdom

The British Empire is known as probably the greatest empire in history. For longer than a century, the British Empire was the most powerful, largest, and most populous empire in the world.

The British Empire began in the late 16th or early 17th century with the establishment of trading posts overseas. It continued on until the period of decolonization ended in the later stages of the 20th century. The British Empire is generally divided into two parts.

The First British Empire: The First British Empire included exploration in Africa and America as well as Asia; saw the rise of British conflict with France globally.

The Second British Empire: The Second British Empire included the loss of the American Colonies, further exploration in the Pacific, war with the French, and run ins with the Russians; the late 20th century saw the full decolonization of most of the landmass of the British Empire.

Imperialism Cont.

France

The activities of the French during the Age of Imperialism are also split into two parts.

The First Colonial Empire: The First Colonial Empire began during the 16th century and continued until the early 19th century; it included the colonization of land in Asia and Africa.

The Second Colonial Empire: The Second Colonial Empire began with the conquest of Algiers and ended with Algerian independence in 1962; it became the second-largest empire behind the British Empire in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Spain

One of the original global empires, the Spanish Empire is known as one of the largest and most powerful in history. The 16th through the late 19th centuries saw Spanish influence in Europe itself, the Americas, Africa, Asian, and Oceania. As is evident, Spain controlled much of North, Latin, and South America.

Germany

The German Colonial Empire did not actually begin until the late 19th century. Due to Germany's disunity, major colonial projects could not be successfully undertaken.

In the 1880s, Germany began to successfully colonize Africa. Germany's colonial empire was effectively ended by the beginning of the First World War.

Imperialism Cont.

Imperialism on the AP European History Exam

Imperialism is mentioned quite often on the AP European History exam. Because the AP Euro exam and corresponding course are undergoing a redesign for the 2015-2016 school year that limits the scope of knowledge you as students are expected to possess, a general understanding of the Age of Imperialism can help enhance your AP European History review.

Consider the following prompt from a 2009 AP Euro document-based question:

“Analyze attitudes toward and evaluate the motivations behind the European acquisition of African colonies in the period 1880 to 1914.”

A general understanding of the empires mentioned above, and a little bit of independent study on each, will reveal that the main motivation for African Colonialism, basically across the board competition for a finite amount of resources that translated to a finite amount of power.

Imperialism on the AP European History Exam—The Bottom Line

Improve the effectiveness of your AP European History review with this crash course on imperialism. Imperialism is a concept that originated with the ancients, but continued to influence European history through the late 20th century. Even today we see the results of imperial attitudes, which are sometimes good and sometimes pernicious.

Continue your preparation for the AP European History exam by reviewing all of our crash courses. This one on imperialism can help you understand how this one idea helped shape the modern world.