

## Topic 6.1 - Rationales for Imperialism (1750–1900)

### Standards Alignment

Theme	Learning Objective	Key Concept (KC)
Cultural Developments and Interactions (CDI)	Unit 6: Learning Objective A – Explain how ideologies contributed to the development of imperialism from 1750 to 1900.	KC-5.2.III – A range of cultural, religious, and racial ideologies were used to justify imperialism, including Social Darwinism, nationalism, the concept of the civilizing mission, and the desire to religiously convert indigenous populations.

### Student Learning Objectives

- Explain how ideologies justified imperial expansion.
- Identify key beliefs such as Social Darwinism and nationalism.
- Analyze primary sources to understand imperialist perspectives.
- Compare different ideological motivations for imperialism.

### Lesson Overview

Between 1750 and 1900, European powers and other industrializing nations expanded their influence across Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. While economic and political motives were important, many leaders justified imperialism using cultural and ideological beliefs. These ideas often portrayed imperialism as beneficial, necessary, or even morally right. Understanding these justifications helps explain how imperialism was supported and accepted by many people at the time.

### Essential Vocabulary

- **Imperialism:** A policy where a country extends its power over other lands and peoples.
- **Social Darwinism:** The belief that stronger societies are naturally meant to dominate weaker ones.
- **Nationalism:** Pride in one's country that can lead to competition and expansion.
- **Civilizing Mission:** The idea that Europeans had a duty to "improve" other societies.
- **Missionary Work:** Efforts to spread religious beliefs, especially Christianity.

### Background Reading

During the 19th century, industrialized nations increasingly competed for global influence. As they expanded into Africa and Asia, they often used ideology to justify their actions. One major belief was Social Darwinism, which applied Charles Darwin's ideas about natural selection to human societies. Supporters argued that stronger nations were destined to rule weaker ones.

Nationalism also played a major role. As European countries developed strong national identities, they sought to demonstrate their power through empire-building. Colonies were seen as symbols of strength and prestige. At the same time, many Europeans believed they had a responsibility to spread their culture and religion, a belief known as the "civilizing mission."

Religious motivations were also important. Christian missionaries traveled to colonized regions to convert local populations. While some missionaries aimed to help others, their efforts often supported imperial expansion by promoting European values and weakening local traditions.

### Primary Source 1

**Source:** Rudyard Kipling, “*The White Man’s Burden*,” 1899

Full text: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/kipling.asp>

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—  
In patience to abide,  
To veil the threat of terror  
And check the show of pride;  
By open speech and simple,  
An hundred times made plain  
To seek another’s profit,  
And work another’s gain.

### Guided Questions

1. What justification for imperialism is Kipling presenting?
2. How does Kipling describe colonized peoples, and what does this reveal about imperial attitudes?
3. How does this source reflect the idea of the “civilizing mission”?

### Primary Source 2

**Source:** Jules Ferry, Speech to the French Chamber of Deputies, 1884

Full text: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1884ferry.asp>

Gentlemen, we must speak more loudly and more frankly! We must say openly that indeed the superior races have a right over the inferior races. I repeat, that the superior races have a right because they have a duty. They have the duty to civilize the inferior races...

In the history of earlier centuries, these duties, gentlemen, have often been misunderstood. But today, I maintain that European nations have a moral obligation to bring civilization to those parts of the world that have not yet shared in the progress of science, industry, and political organization.

Can we say that French colonial policy is not inspired by this spirit? No! It is not merely a matter of economic interest. It is also a matter of political greatness. A nation which does not expand is a nation which risks decline. France must be strong, and strength comes from influence across the world.

There is another point, gentlemen, that I must address—the humanitarian side. It is necessary to say openly that what we call our colonial policy is not simply a search for markets or resources. It is also an attempt to uplift, to educate, and to improve the conditions of populations who, without our intervention, would remain in a state of stagnation.

Therefore, I say that French expansion is justified not only by national interest, but by a higher mission—the spread of civilization, the advancement of humanity, and the fulfillment of a duty that history has placed upon us.

### Guided Questions (DBQ-Level)

1. **Sourcing:** What is Jules Ferry’s position and audience, and how might this influence his argument?
2. **Contextualization:** How does this speech reflect broader 19th-century European beliefs about race and progress?
3. **Evidence:** Identify TWO different justifications Ferry gives for imperialism.
4. **Analysis:** How does Ferry connect nationalism and imperialism in this speech?
5. **Complexity:** To what extent does Ferry present imperialism as beneficial versus self-interested?

### Key Table: Ideological Justifications for Imperialism

Ideology	Core Belief	How It Justified Imperialism
Social Darwinism	Survival of the fittest among societies	Strong nations should dominate weaker ones
Nationalism	Pride and competition among nations	Empires showed national strength
Civilizing Mission	Duty to “improve” others	Colonization seen as helpful or moral
Religious Motives	Spread of Christianity	Missionaries supported expansion

### Change / Continuity / Comparison

- **Change:** By the 19th century, imperialism was increasingly justified using scientific and racial ideas like Social Darwinism.
- **Continuity:** Religious motivations for expansion continued from earlier periods.
- **Comparison:** European empires often used racial ideologies, while some non-European empires focused more on political or economic control.

### Key Takeaways

- Ideologies played a central role in justifying imperialism.
- Social Darwinism promoted racial hierarchy and dominance.
- Nationalism encouraged competition for colonies.
- The “civilizing mission” framed imperialism as moral.
- Religious motives supported cultural expansion.

**Practice Activity (SAQ Style)****Answer all parts (A, B, C):**

- A. Identify ONE ideology used to justify imperialism from 1750–1900.
- B. Explain ONE way that ideology supported imperial expansion.
- C. Provide ONE example of a historical figure or document that reflects this ideology.

**Primary Source Citations**

- Kipling, Rudyard. “The White Man’s Burden” (1899):  
<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/kipling.asp>
- Ferry, Jules. Speech (1884):  
<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1884ferry.asp>