

Topic 6.2 - State Expansion from 1750 to 1900

Standards Alignment

Theme	Learning Objective	Key Concept (KC)
Governance (GOV)	Unit 6: Learning Objective B – Compare processes by which state power shifted in various parts of the world from 1750 to 1900.	KC-5.2.I.A – Some states with existing colonies strengthened their control over those colonies and in some cases assumed direct control over colonies previously held by non-state entities.
Governance (GOV)	Unit 6: Learning Objective B – Compare processes by which state power shifted in various parts of the world from 1750 to 1900.	KC-5.2.I.B – European states as well as the United States and Japan acquired territories throughout Asia and the Pacific, while Spanish and Portuguese influence declined.
Governance (GOV)	Unit 6: Learning Objective B – Compare processes by which state power shifted in various parts of the world from 1750 to 1900.	KC-5.2.I.C – Many European states used both warfare and diplomacy to expand their empires in Africa.
Governance (GOV)	Unit 6: Learning Objective B – Compare processes by which state power shifted in various parts of the world from 1750 to 1900.	KC-5.2.I.D – Europeans established settler colonies in some parts of their empires.
Governance (GOV)	Unit 6: Learning Objective B – Compare processes by which state power shifted in various parts of the world from 1750 to 1900.	KC-5.2.II.B – The United States, Russia, and Japan expanded their land holdings by conquering and settling neighboring territories.

Student Learning Objectives

- Compare different processes of state expansion across regions.
- Explain how governments increased and centralized control.
- Identify differences between land-based and maritime empires.
- Analyze primary sources related to imperial policy and expansion.

Lesson Overview

Between 1750 and 1900, states around the world expanded their power through conquest, colonization, and diplomacy. European empires strengthened control over overseas territories, often replacing private companies with direct rule. At the same time, land-based empires such as the United States, Russia, and Japan expanded into neighboring regions. These shifts reshaped global power and created new political systems while often displacing indigenous populations.

Essential Vocabulary

- **Direct rule:** When a government controls a colony itself rather than through a company
- **Sphere of influence:** A region where a country has special economic or political power
- **Protectorate:** A territory that has its own government but is controlled by a stronger state
- **Territorial consolidation:** The process of strengthening control over existing lands
- **Expansionism:** A policy of growing a country's territory or influence

Background Reading

During the 19th century, many states expanded their power by increasing control over territories. European governments often took direct control of colonies that had previously been managed by private companies. For example, Britain assumed direct rule over India after the Indian Rebellion of 1857, marking a shift toward stronger state authority.

At the same time, imperial competition intensified. European nations expanded into Africa using both military conquest and diplomatic agreements. The Berlin Conference formalized this process by dividing Africa among European powers. Meanwhile, Spain and Portugal declined as dominant imperial forces, while newer powers such as Germany and Belgium expanded.

Land-based empires also grew. The United States expanded westward across North America and into the Pacific. Russia extended its influence into Central Asia, and Japan began imperial expansion after the Meiji Restoration. While methods differed, all of these expansions involved strengthening state control and reshaping political boundaries.

Primary Source 1

Source: General Act of the Berlin Conference (1885)

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1885berlin.asp>

The signatory Powers of this Act recognize the obligation to ensure the establishment of authority in the regions occupied by them on the coasts of the African continent sufficient to protect existing rights and, as the case may be, freedom of trade and of transit under the conditions agreed upon...

All the Powers exercising sovereign rights or influence in the aforesaid territories bind themselves to watch over the preservation of the native tribes, and to care for the improvement of the conditions of their moral and material well-being, and to help in suppressing slavery...

Any Power which henceforth takes possession of a tract of land on the coasts of the African continent outside of its present possessions shall accompany the respective act with a notification addressed to the other signatory Powers...

Guided Questions

1. What is the **historical situation** that led to this agreement?
2. How does the document justify European expansion in Africa?
3. What role does **diplomacy** play in the process of imperial expansion shown here?
4. What is one **intended audience** of this document, and how does that shape its language?
5. How does this source illustrate a shift in how states exercised power?

Primary Source 2

Source: U.S. President James K. Polk, Message to Congress on the Mexican War (1846) <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1846polkwar.asp>

Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon American soil... As war exists, and notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself, we are called upon by every consideration of duty and patriotism to vindicate with decision the honor, the rights, and the interests of our country...

The strong arm of the nation is invoked to avenge our wrongs... and in defense of our national rights we shall not fail to prosecute the war with vigor... until a just peace shall be secured...

In further vindication of our rights and defense of our territory, I recommend that Congress recognize the existence of war... and place at the disposition of the Executive the means of prosecuting the war with vigor...

Guided Questions

1. What justification does Polk use for U.S. expansion?
2. How does this document reflect the use of **warfare** in state expansion?
3. What does the language suggest about Polk's **purpose and audience**?
4. How does this example compare to European expansion in Africa?
5. What does this reveal about land-based expansion compared to overseas empires?

Comparing State Expansion

Type of Empire	Method	Example	Key Feature
European overseas	Diplomacy + conquest	Berlin Conference	Division of territories
British Empire	Direct rule	India (post-1857)	Centralized control
United States	Warfare + settlement	Mexican-American War	Territorial expansion
Russia	Land conquest	Central Asia	Contiguous expansion
Japan	Regional imperialism	Korea	Rapid modernization + expansion

Change / Continuity / Comparison

- **Change:** Increased direct state control over colonies replaced company rule.
- **Continuity:** Expansion through conquest remained a common strategy.
- **Comparison:** European empires expanded overseas, while the U.S., Russia, and Japan expanded into neighboring territories.

Key Takeaways

- States expanded power through both diplomacy and warfare.
- European governments increased direct control over colonies.
- New powers like the U.S. and Japan emerged as imperial states.
- Expansion methods varied by geography and political context.
- Indigenous populations were often displaced or controlled.

Practice Section – SAQs

SAQ 1 (No Stimulus)

- A. Identify ONE method of state expansion from 1750–1900.
- B. Explain ONE way that method increased state power.
- C. Provide ONE example of a state that used this method.

SAQ 2 (Stimulus-Based)

Stimulus: Berlin Conference excerpt above

- A. Identify ONE goal of the agreement.
- B. Explain ONE way the agreement reflects diplomatic expansion.
- C. Explain ONE consequence of this agreement for Africa.

SAQ 3 (Stimulus-Based)

Stimulus: Polk message excerpt above

- A. Identify ONE justification Polk gives for war.
- B. Explain ONE way this reflects expansionist policy.
- C. Explain ONE result of this conflict.

SAQ 4 (Comparative)

- A. Identify ONE similarity between U.S. and Russian expansion.
- B. Identify ONE difference between European overseas empires and land-based empires.
- C. Explain ONE reason for this difference.

SAQ 5 (Causation/CCOT)

- A. Identify ONE change in imperial expansion from earlier periods.
- B. Identify ONE continuity in expansion methods.
- C. Explain ONE cause of increased state control in this period.

Primary Source Citations

- Berlin Conference (1885):
<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1885berlin.asp>
- Polk War Message (1846):
<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1846polkwar.asp>