Your notes

GCSE History: revision notes

Overseas empires in the nineteenth century

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Why nations built empires

- Economic: industrial countries wanted raw materials such as rubber, cotton, palm oil and minerals, new markets for their goods and places to invest.
- Military and geopolitical: naval bases and coaling stations, control of routes such as the Suez Canal (opened 1869), and rivalry with other powers.
- Religious and cultural: Christian missionaries such as David Livingstone wanted to spread their faith. Many Europeans believed in a "civilising mission", backed by racist ideas of white superiority and Social Darwinism, and colonies brought national prestige.
- New technology made conquest easier: steamships, railways, the telegraph, quinine against malaria and the Maxim machine gun. At the Berlin Conference (1884–85) the European powers set rules for dividing Africa. By 1914 only Ethiopia and Liberia were independent.

Europeans in Africa: three ways of ruling

- France in Senegal: Louis Faidherbe, governor in 1854–61 and 1863–65, expanded French control inland, founded Dakar and created the Tirailleurs Sénégalais, African soldiers in the French army. France used direct rule by French officials and a policy of **assimilation**: Africans who adopted French language and culture could become French citizens. Only a few did, mainly in the Four Communes, which elected a deputy to the French parliament.
- Britain in Nigeria: Frederick Lugard conquered the Sokoto Caliphate in northern Nigeria by 1903 and ruled through the emirs: **indirect rule**. It was cheap and kept local rulers and customs, but strengthened their power, limited Western education in the north, and worked badly in the south-east, where there were no chiefs, so the British appointed "warrant chiefs". Lugard joined north and south as one colony in 1914.

- Belgium in the Congo: King Leopold II had the explorer Stanley make treaties with local rulers, and in 1885 the Congo Free State became his own private possession. His agents and army, the Force Publique, forced people to collect rubber, taking hostages and cutting off hands when quotas were missed. Millions died. Campaigners such as Edmund Morel and Roger Casement, whose report came out in 1904, exposed the abuse, and Belgium took over the colony in 1908.

The British in India, 1857

- The East India Company ruled much of India. Many Indians resented its Westernising reforms and missionaries, and its taking of states such as Jhansi under the **Doctrine of Lapse** and Awadh in 1856.
- The spark was a rumour that the cartridges for the new Enfield rifle were greased with cow and pig fat, offending Hindu and Muslim soldiers (**sepoys**). In May 1857 **sepoys** at Meerut rebelled and marched to Delhi, where they proclaimed the elderly Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, their leader.
- There was fierce fighting at Kanpur, Lucknow and Jhansi, whose Rani Lakshmibai died fighting in 1858. Both sides committed atrocities, and the British took brutal revenge.
- Results: the Government of India Act (1858) ended the Company's rule, and India was ruled by the Crown through a Viceroy. Queen Victoria promised to respect Indian religions and princes and to stop taking land. The army was reorganised with more British soldiers and recruits from groups seen as loyal, the Mughal emperor was exiled, and Victoria became Empress of India in 1877.

The USA, Cuba and the Philippines

- Cubans and Filipinos were fighting for independence from Spain. Cuba's war began in 1895; the Spanish general Weyler forced civilians into camps where many died, which American newspapers reported in sensational "yellow press" stories.
- When the battleship USS Maine exploded in Havana harbour in February 1898, the USA blamed Spain and went to war. Commodore Dewey destroyed the Spanish fleet at Manila Bay, and Spain was beaten within months. In the Treaty of Paris (1898) Spain gave up Cuba and handed Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines to the USA for 20 million dollars.
- Debate in the USA: imperialists such as Theodore Roosevelt wanted bases, trade and power; the Anti-Imperialist League, including Mark Twain, said ruling others betrayed American ideals of freedom.
- Philippines: Emilio Aguinaldo had declared independence in 1898, so Filipinos fought the Philippine–American War (1899–1902). About 200,000 Filipino civilians are estimated to have died. The US built schools and spread English, and set up an elected assembly in 1907, but kept control.
- Cuba: the Teller Amendment had promised not to annex Cuba, but the **Platt Amendment** (1901) let the US intervene and gave it a base at Guantánamo Bay. US troops occupied Cuba until 1902 and returned in 1906.

Your notes

Key terms

Imperialism	One country taking control of other lands and peoples.
Scramble for Africa	The rush by European powers to take African land, about 1880–1914.
Assimilation	The French policy of making colonial people adopt French language and culture.
Indirect rule	The British policy of ruling through local leaders such as the emirs.
Doctrine of Lapse	The East India Company's rule that it took a state if its ruler died without a natural heir.
Sepoy	An Indian soldier in the East India Company's army.
Platt Amendment	The 1901 law that let the USA intervene in Cuba.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What did the Berlin Conference of 1884–85 do?
2. Which two African countries were independent in 1914?
3. Who governed Senegal for France and founded Dakar?
4. What was the French policy of assimilation?
5. Who ruled northern Nigeria through the emirs?
6. Who owned the Congo Free State?
7. Whose 1904 report exposed abuse in the Congo?
8. What sparked the 1857 rebellion in India?

Answers

1. Set rules for European powers dividing Africa
2. Ethiopia and Liberia
3. Louis Faidherbe
4. Africans adopting French language and culture to become French citizens
5. Frederick Lugard
6. King Leopold II of Belgium
7. Roger Casement
8. Rumours that rifle cartridges were greased with cow and pig fat

What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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