

TEXT A - ECONOMIC CAUSES

Imperialism is a complex phenomenon with several causes. Let us first consider the economic causes. Sometimes, colonial territories gave colonial powers access to new markets and cheap natural resources. They were also ideal places for capital investments. From this point of view, imperialism was one of the ways the Great Powers were able to face the difficult economic period known as the Great Depression, which started in 1873.

As European powers adopted protectionist policies, it became increasingly important for advanced economies to control large territories in order to develop trade and investments within them.

Key words

The Great Depression (1873-1896) = was a worldwide economic crisis that affected many sectors of the economy. This crisis forced the major industrialized nations, with the exception of Great Britain, to abandon their free trade policies, and place restrictions on trade.

Protectionism = protectionism refers to economic policies that aim to protect home industries from foreign competition.

TEXT B - POLITICAL CAUSES

The main European states took up the race to engage in power politics, in order to increase their international standing and influence. It became imperative for these states to gain power on the international scene. Britain's leadership position in the world, as well as its economic and political dominance were under threat. As to France, its territorial ambitions in Europe were frustrated by the military failures of Napoleon III. Meanwhile, Germany and Japan - but also the "minor" colonial powers including Portugal, Belgium and Italy - were in the process of consolidating their emerging industrial economies.

TEXT C - SOCIAL CAUSES

The Great Powers' expansionist push had the support of the most important industrial groups, the ruling class, and the military élite.

The populace, too, supported it. In a context marked by intense social conflicts and huge transformations within various countries, the call for colonial conquests became a means to achieve social cohesion at home, shifting the focus away from domestic problems.

TEXT D - IDEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL CAUSES

Imperialism cannot be separated from the nationalist and racist ideas which permeated most Europeans societies during the last decades of the 19th century. Unlike the sense of national identity which had emerged from the French Revolution, in this period nationalism was inspired by an authoritative and aggressive ideology based on a sense of cultural and racial superiority. This sense of superiority fomented the expansionist policies of European powers. One of the principles of this ideology was the "right" for powerful and advanced societies to conquer weaker and less advanced ones.

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