

had lost power, landlords deprived of their estates or their rent, peasants overtaxed and exploited by urban moneylenders and landlords alike, unemployed weavers displaced by machine-manufactured textiles, and religious leaders outraged by missionary preaching. A mutiny among Indian troops in Bengal triggered the rebellion, which soon spread to other regions of the colony and other social groups. Soon much of India was aflame. Some rebel leaders presented their cause as an effort to revive an almost-vanished Mughal Empire and thereby attracted support from those with strong resentments against the British. Although it was crushed in 1858, the rebellion greatly widened the racial divide in colonial India and heightened British intolerance toward Indians, whom they viewed as untrustworthy. Moreover, the rebellion convinced the British government to assume direct control over India, ending the era of British East India Company rule in the subcontinent. Fear of provoking another rebellion also made the British more conservative and cautious about deliberately trying to change Indian society.

Colonial Empires with a Difference

At one level, European colonial empires were but the latest in a very long line of imperial creations, all of which had enlisted cooperation and experienced resistance from their subject peoples, but the nineteenth-century European version of empire was distinctive in several remarkable ways. One was the prominence of race in distinguishing rulers as “superior” to the ruled, as the high tide of scientific racism in Europe coincided with the acquisition of Asian and African colonies. In East Africa, for example, white men expected to be addressed as *bwana* (Swahili for “master”), whereas Europeans regularly called African men “boy.” Particularly affected by European racism were those whose Western education and aspirations most clearly threatened the racial divide. For example, a proposal in 1883 to allow Indian judges to hear cases involving whites provoked outrage and massive demonstrations among European inhabitants of India.

In those colonies that had a large European settler population, the expression of racial distinctions was much more pronounced than in places such as Nigeria, which had few permanently settled whites. The most extreme case was South Africa, where a large European population and the widespread use of African labor in mines and industries brought blacks and whites into closer and more prolonged contact than elsewhere. The racial fears that were aroused resulted in extraordinary efforts to establish race as a legal, not just a customary, feature of South African society. This racial system provided for separate “homelands,” educational systems, residential areas, public facilities, and much more. In what was eventually known as apartheid, South African whites attempted the impossible task of creating an industrializing economy based on cheap African labor while limiting African social and political integration in every conceivable fashion.

A further distinctive feature of nineteenth-century European empires lay in the extent to which colonial states were able to penetrate the societies they governed.

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Anti-imperial opposition took on different forms. The Cherokee Nation within the new United States was formed in the early part of the nineteenth century as some Cherokees feared the encroachment of white settlers and migrated to other areas of North America. As the westward movement gained strength in the United States, the Cherokees were ultimately forced on the “Trail of Tears” to modern-day Oklahoma. Another example is the Zulu Kingdom in southern Africa. Shaka Zulu was able to establish the Zulu Kingdom on the periphery of the Dutch colony of South Africa. Eventually, the Zulu were conquered by the British, and their kingdom became part of the British colonial possessions in South Africa.

AP® Comparison

How were European colonial empires of the nineteenth century different from earlier forms of empire? How were nineteenth-century empires similar to earlier forms of empire?