How did European countries, the United States, and Japan explain and justify their invasion and conquest of extensive territories in the late nineteenth century?

1. British Perspective: Charles Wentworth Dilke, 1868

Many who are aware of the power of the English nations are nevertheless disposed to believe that our own is morally, as well as physically, the least powerful of the sections of the race or, in other words, that we are overshadowed by America and Australia. The rise to power of our southern colonies is, however, distant, and an alliance between ourselves and America is still one to be made on equal terms. Although we are forced to contemplate the speedy loss of our manufacturing supremacy as coal becomes cheaper in America and dearer in Old England, we have nevertheless as much to bestow on America as she has to confer on us. The possession of India offers to ourselves that element of vastness of dominion which, in this age, is needed to secure width of thought and nobility of purpose; but to the English race our possession of India, of the coasts of Africa, and of the ports of China offers the possibility of planting free institutions among the black-skinned races of the world.


2. British Perspective: Karl Pearson, 1901

History shows me one way, and one way only in which a high state of civilization has been produced, namely, the struggle of race with race, and the survival of the physically and mentally fitter race. If you want to know whether the lower races of man can evolve a higher type, I fear the only course is to leave them to fight it out among themselves, and even then the struggle for existence between individual and individual, between tribe and tribe, may not be supported by that physical selection due to a particular climate on which probably so much of the Aryan’s success depended. … There is a struggle of race against race and of nation against nation. In the early days of that struggle it was a blind, unconscious struggle of barbaric tribes. At the present day, in the case of the civilized white man, it has become more and more the conscious, carefully directed attempt to fit itself to a continuously changing environment.


3. French Perspective: Edouard Guillon, 1881

[The natives] are great children who are just being admitted to civilization. Our task is traced out in advance. Is it not our duty to direct them, to instruct them, to educate them morally? In Indochina, as in Senegal or in Algeria, as everywhere that we find ourselves in the presence of primitive or corrupt societies, our most useful auxiliaries will be missionaries and schoolmasters. What force can resist the two levers of religion and science? Let us know how to use them, and we shall have accomplished a useful and patriotic work. …

4. French Perspective: Jules Ferry, 1890

Colonial policy is the child of the industrial revolution. For wealthy countries where capital abounds and accumulates fast, where industry is expanding steadily, where even agriculture must become mechanized in order to survive, exports are essential for public prosperity. Both demand for labor and scope for capital investment depend on the foreign market … All over the world, beyond the Vosges, and across the Atlantic, the raising of high tariffs has resulted in an increasing volume of manufactured goods, the disappearance of traditional markets, and the appearance of fierce competition. Countries react by raising their own tariff barriers, but that is not enough … The protectionist system, unless accompanied by a serious colonial policy, is like a steam engine without a safety valve … The European consumer market is saturated; unless we declare modern society bankrupt and prepare, at the dawn of the twentieth century, for its liquidation by revolution (the consequences of which we can scarcely foresee), new consumer markets will have to be created in other parts of the world. … Colonial policy is an international manifestation of the eternal laws of competition.


5. German Perspective: Friedrich Fabri, 1878

The fact is that England tenaciously holds on to its world-wide possessions with scarcely one-fourth the manpower of our [German] continental military state. That is not only a great economic advantage but also a striking proof of the solid power and cultural fiber of England. Great Britain, of course, isolates herself far from the mass warfare of the continent, or only goes into action with dependable allies; hence the insular state has suffered and will suffer no real damage. In any case, it would be wise for us Germans to learn about colonial skills from our Anglo-Saxon cousins and to begin a friendly competition with them. When the German Reich centuries ago stood at the pinnacle of the states of Europe, it was the Number One trade and sea power. If the New Germany wants to protect its newly won position of power for a long time, it must heed its culture-mission and, above all, delay no longer in the task of renewing the call for colonies.

Source: Excerpted from Friedrich Fabri, Bedarf Deutschland der Kolonien, in Heineman, Readings in European History, 179.

6. United States Perspective: Albert T. Beveridge, 1900

God has not been preparing the English-speaking and Teutonic peoples for a thousand years for nothing but vain and idle self-admiration. No! He has made us the master organizers of the world to establish systems where chaos reigns … He has made us adept in government that we may administer government among savages and senile peoples.

7. **United States Perspective**: Alfred T. Mahan, 1890

Whether we will it or no, Americans must now look outward. The growing production of the country demands it. An increasing volume of public sentiment demands it. The position of the United States, between the two Old Worlds and the two great oceans, makes the same claim which will soon be strengthened by the creation of the new link joining the Atlantic and Pacific. The tendency will be maintained and increased by the growth of the European colonies in the Pacific, by the advancing civilization of Japan, and by the rapid peopling of our Pacific States … Three things are needful: First, protection of the chief harbors, by fortifications and coast-defense ships … Secondly, naval force, the arm of offensive power, which alone enables a country to extend its influence outward. Thirdly, no foreign state should henceforth acquire a coaling station within three thousand miles of San Francisco.


8. **Japanese Perspective**: Okubo Toschimichi, 1874

If the people are adequately wealthy, it follows naturally that the country will become strong and wealthy … If so, it will not be difficult for us to compete effectively against major powers. This has always been your subject’s sincere desire. He is even more convinced of the necessity of its implementation today, and is therefore submitting humbly his recommendations for Your Majesty’s august decision.


9. **Japanese Perspective**: Ito Hirobumi, 1895

What then is the aim of the nation? It is the imperial aim decided upon at the time of the [Meiji] Restoration of imperial rule … The aim of our country has been from the very beginning, to attain among the nations of the world the status of a civilized nation and to become a member of the comity of European and American nations which occupy the position of civilized countries.