Age of Imperialism

1. At the end of the 1800s and the beginning of 1900s, Europe had a lot of conflicts. In the 1880s, powerful European countries tried to expand their territories beyond their borders in other continents such as Africa and Asia. For example, France and the United Kingdom fought for control of North Africa, and Belgium and Germany wanted to control the Congo in Central Africa. In this competition to gain control of more land, nations started wars in the desire for more territory. These tensions helped start World War I. The growth of imperialism in Europe was an important cause of the war.

Imperialism

2. At the end of the 1800s, the United States wanted to extend its influence in Latin America and East Asia. Meanwhile, the European countries began to gain control of new lands in Africa and Asia during the late 1800s, also known as the Age of Imperialism. These nations wanted to expand their territories. These nations also needed financial resources to support armies and navies. European leaders wanted the raw materials and cheap labor available in Africa and Asia. They also wanted to send their exports to Africa and Asia.

3. Militarism was another reason for expansion. European countries engaged in an arms race, trying to develop more powerful weapons and larger armies than its rivals. The European colonies sometimes provided a protective area against enemy nations. For example, during the 1800s, the United Kingdom fought Russia for control of Central Asia to gain a protective zone to prevent Russia's advances toward the British colony of India. The colonies also provided European powers with ports around the world, which could supply their navies with goods, military supplies, and soldiers.

The Rise of Nationalism

4. Nationalism is a strong feeling of devotion to one's country of origin. In the 1800s many Europeans began to think that a country should be made up of only one single ethnic group. Nationalism can create a spirit of patriotism and an enthusiasm to make sacrifices for others. For instance, nationalism helped unite Italians to fight for freedom from Austria during the 1860s. Von Bismarck was able to join the German states into one nation through encouraging German nationalism during the 1870s.

5. Nationalist movements also can have negative consequences, such as the development of an “us vs. them” mentality. Members of other ethnic groups and nationalities are considered inferior to one's own ethnic group. During the Age of Imperialism, many people living in powerful European nations believed that their nation was superior to other nations in Europe and the rest of the world. To show their strength, the leaders of these countries thought they needed to control more territory and raise a stronger military than other countries.
Inspired by a nationalistic spirit, some ethnic groups wanted to gain independence. This was the case in the Balkans, a region of southeastern Europe that is home to different ethnic groups. Groups like the Serbs, Croats Albanians, Romanians and Turks wanted to have their own country in this region. In the spring of 1914, nationalist struggles in the Balkans would create the spark that ignited World War I.

Taking Sides

As the countries of Europe expanded their territory, they began to fear invasion from their neighbors. The European powers did not want to appear weak and vulnerable. As a result, many nations formed alliances to protect their borders and colonies from invasion.

Austria-Hungary, Germany and Italy formed an alliance against in 1882, named the Triple Alliance. In reaction to the Triple Alliance, Russia and France agreed to an alliance against Germany. In 1907, the United Kingdom, France, and Russia formed an alliance named the Triple Entente to attack Germany if necessary.

These two powerful alliances—the Triple Alliance and Triple Entente—were intended to prevent war, but they also divided Europe into two hostile camps. These alliances created a time bomb in Europe. This political tension made possible the beginning of World War I.