

Chapter 26 Terms to Know

White Man's Burden:

Written by the Englishman Rudyard Kipling and published in 1899, the “White Man’s Burden” was a poem that was often used to characterize imperialism in a dignified light. The basic concept behind it was that the unruly peoples of the Third World (often of color) were the burden of the civilized white man’s world. It was destiny that these cultured people were to enlighten the “barbaric” world of the Africans, Asians, and South Americans. It played a key role in the U.S.A’s decision to keep the Philippines under their control following the Spanish-American War in 1898 and drove the West to believe that their efforts to impose modern politics, medicine, and society were to the benefit of these peoples. The “White Man’s Burden” also spurred on Labouchere’s “Brown Man’s Burden” and other rebuttals to the twisted ideology represented in their predecessor. It was crucial to the age of imperialism as it reflects the attitude towards expansion and even promotes it as well as represents the desire of both Europe and America to civilize the world— at least, to their own standards.

Suez Canal:

Constructed by the French from 1859 to 1869 as an alternative pathway to Asia instead of traveling around the Cape of Good Hope, the Suez Canal connected the Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Suez. The modernization policies of Egypt’s prince Ismail during the construction prompted the French project. However, Khedive Ismail racked up a vast amount of debt, leading England and France to bailout Egypt to save their bondholders. England, with the help of Benjamin Disraeli, fully emerged as the dominant country in Egypt’s affairs following the fall of Nationalists like Ahmed Arabi and the flight of Khedive Tewfiq, securing their hold on the canal. The Suez Canal was important as it was a life-line for Britain to reach the jewel of their empire, India, giving them a reason to conquer Egypt, and it also increased worldwide trade on a mammoth scale.

British Opium Trade:

Prior to the 1820s, Europe was forced to bend to the will of the Chinese market, which demanded payments in silver and restricted foreign trade severely to the city of Canton; to the Chinese, the European states had little to offer them— that is, until the British developed the British Opium Trade, an illegal smuggling ring that legally grew opium in India and then shipped the product to Chinese traders, giving the British a foothold in the Chinese market. Against the struggles of the Qing regime and their envoy Lin Zexu (Lin Tse-hsu), the British merchants were forced out, triggering Queen Victoria to declare two consecutive “Opium Wars”, both of which the Chinese lost. By the 1860s, the Treaty of Nanjing (Nanking) and the Treaty of Tianjin (Tientsin) had forced the region to reimburse the British for the lost opium, give up Hong Kong, and open many cities to foreign trade. The Asian nation would continue to lose people to the drug and lose silver to Europe. This economic gambit would start China’s downward spiral throughout the rest of the century, opening the country to the West and reflecting Britain’s insatiable greed.

Treaty of Nanking (1842):

The treaty that ended the First Opium War (1839-1842), the Treaty of Nanking had major conditions for China: The country would have to surrender the island of Hong Kong to Victorian Britain, pay \$100 million in compensation for the opium confiscated by Lin Zexu that, ironically, Britain had been illegally selling, and open four major cities to international trade with low tariffs. This perpetuated the Opium Trade (that was still prohibited by the Chinese government). The treaty’s importance is reflected in its widening of the European sphere of influence in the now-opened China as key cities became foreign trade centers, and the British acquisition of Hong Kong, a future center of Anglo-Chinese relations.