

Scramble for Africa: Printable Documents

Important: You do not need to print these documents if you are working online.

The General Act of the Berlin Conference (February 1885)

At the Berlin Conference, led by German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, 14 Western powers agree on rules for the European occupation of conquered lands in Africa.

[We are] desirous of settling in a spirit of mutual goodwill the most favorable conditions for the development of commerce and civilisation in certain districts in Africa, and ensuring to the natives the advantages of the free navigation of the two chief African rivers that flow into the Atlantic Ocean; ... and at the same time anxious to promote the moral and material welfare of the native races ...

...

Article 6.

All the Powers exercising sovereign rights, or having influence in the said territories, undertake to watch over the preservation of the native races, and the amelioration of the moral and material conditions of their existence, and to co-operate in the suppression of slavery, and above all of the slave trade; they will protect and encourage, without distinction of nationality or creed, all institutions ... tending to educate the natives, and lead them to understand and appreciate the advantages of civilisation.

...

Article 9.

... [T]he Powers which exercise or will exercise rights of sovereignty or influence in the territories forming the basin of the Congo declare that these territories shall serve neither for the place of sale nor the way of transit for the traffic in slaves of any race whatsoever. Each of the Powers undertakes to employ every means that it can to put an end to the trade and to punish those who engage in it.

from The Congo and the Founding of its Free State

Belgian treaty with Congo tribes (March 26, 1884)

In this treaty, and 450 others like it, Henry Stanley secures territory for King Leopold II of Belgium. The Berlin Conference made Leopold's acquisition of territories official in 1885, naming them the "Congo Free State."

Art. I. The chiefs of Ngombi and Mafela recognize that it is highly desirable that the "Association Internationale Africaine" should, for the advancement of civilization and trade, be firmly established in their country. They therefore now, freely of their own accord, for themselves and their heirs and successors for ever, do give up to the said Association the sovereignty and all sovereign and governing rights to all their territories. They also promise to assist the said Association in its work of governing and civilising this country, and to use their influence with all the other inhabitants, with whose unanimous approval they make this treaty, to secure obedience to all laws made by

the said Association, and to assist by labour or otherwise, any works, improvements, or expeditions which the said Association shall cause at any time to be carried out in any part of these territories.

Art. II. The chiefs of Ngombi and Mafela promise at all times to join their forces with those of the said Association, to resist the forcible intrusion or repulse the attacks of foreigners of any nationality or color.

Art. III. ... [T]he chiefs ... solemnly affirm that all this country belongs absolutely to them; that they can freely dispose of it; and that they neither have already, nor will on any future occasion, make any treaties, grants, or sales of any parts of these territories to strangers without the permission of the said Association. All roads and waterways running through this country, the right of collecting tolls on the same, and all game, fishing, mining, and forest rights, are to be the absolute property of the said Association, together with any unoccupied lands as may at any time hereafter be chosen.

Art. IV. The "Association Internationale Africaine" agree to pay to the chiefs ... the following articles of merchandise, [namely], one piece of cloth per month to each of the undersigned chiefs ... and the said chiefs hereby acknowledge to accept this bounty and monthly subsidy in full settlement of all their claims on the said Association.

from The Congo and the Founding of its Free State

French imperialist describes the purpose of colonization (1891)

French imperialist Paul Leroy Beaulieu describes the economic and social arguments supporting imperialism as a necessary and beneficial system.

It is impossible not to consider imperialism as one of the tasks imposed on the civilized states for the last four centuries, more particularly on our age.

...

... [A] great part of the world is inhabited by barbarian tribes or savages, some given over to wars without end and to brutal customs, and others knowing so little of the arts and being so little accustomed to work and to invention that they do not know how to exploit their land and its natural riches. They live in little groups, impoverished and scattered, in enormous territories which could nourish vast numbers of people with ease.

This state of the world implies for the civilized people a right of intervention ...

...

Imperialism is often confused with commerce or with the opening of commercial markets ... Imperialism means something quite different from the sale or purchase of commodities. It entails a profound action on a people and a territory, providing the inhabitants with some education and regular justice, teaching them the division of labour and the uses of capital when they are ignorant of these things ...

Imperialism is thus the systematic action of an organized people upon another people whose organization is defective, and it presupposes that it is the state itself, and not only some individuals, which is responsible for the mission ...

...

The great value of colonies ... is not only that they serve to catch the overflow population of the mother country, nor even that they open a particularly reliable area of investment for excess capital, it is also that they give a sharp stimulus to the commerce of the country ...

from Documents of European Economic History

Request to open trade on the Niger River (February 21, 1877)

In West Africa, 28 tribal chiefs join together to request that Great Britain consider the impact of its trading practices on the native peoples along the Niger River.

We the undersigned Kings and Chiefs of Brass West Coast of Africa beg and pray that you will take our case into consideration.

Many years ago we used to make our living by selling slaves to Europeans which was stopped by your Government and a Treaty made between you and our country that we discontinue doing so, and that we should enter into a legitimate trade and that if we did so an allowance ... should be paid us by the traders on all produce bought. This we did and our trade gradually increased ... We shipped ... about 4,500 to 5,000 tons of palm oil per annum.

To do all this we had to open up place[s] on the Niger, trading Stations or markets as we call them ... Some years ago the White men began trading on the Niger with the intention of opening up this River, this did us no harm as they went up a long way farther than we could go in their Steamers and also bought a different kind of produce to what we were buying, but lately within the last six years they have begun putting trading Stations at our places and consequen[tly] they have stopped our trade completely as well as of those in the Lower part of the River Niger ... This means starvation to my people ... I have about 8,000 people and there are another 8,000 in the lower part of the Niger suffering with me.

It is very hard this on us; in all the other rivers ... the markets are secured to them and why should a difference be made for this my river. We have no land where we can grow plantains or yams and if we cannot trade we must starve, and we earnestly beg and pray that you will take our case into consideration, we do not want anything that is not fair, we only want the markets that we and our money have made to be secured to us and that the white men who have had nothing to do with opening up the Palm Oil trade shall not come and reap all our benefits.

from "King Ockiya and Chiefs of Brass (Nembe) To Lord Derby: Niger Trade"

Imperialist poem and two responses (1899-1900)

British writer Rudyard Kipling describes European imperialism in his 1899 poem "The White Man's Burden." He calls on Europeans to "civilize" the native peoples of foreign lands. The responses that follow question the motives reflected in Kipling's verse.

"The White Man's Burden" by Rudyard Kipling (February, 1899, stanzas 1-3)

Take up the White Man's burden--
Send forth the best ye breed--
Go, bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait, in heavy harness,

On fluttered folk and wild--
Your new-caught sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child.

Take up the White Man's burden--
In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain,
To seek another's profit
And work another's gain.

Take up the White Man's burden--
The savage wars of peace--
Fill full the mouth of Famine,
And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
(The end for others sought)
Watch sloth and heathen folly
Bring all your hope to nought.

from McClure's Magazine

"Kipling's Barbaric Yawp" (July 29, 1899)

Kipling voices violence -- Kipling voices nothing better than that which the world has held and followed since history began. That is to say, Kipling represents power for prowess--violence that good may come: Christianity on the point of a spear--civilization dealt out with a catapult. And the reason we have accepted Kipling and gulped him without question is because as a people we are essentially barbaric.

from The Literary Digest

"A Master in Evil Influence" (November 15, 1900)

The possibilities of self-deception in the human heart are enormous. We, of course, live in a Christian world and it must be that we seek some sort of Christian sanction for what we do. Whatever it be, we like to say we do it for the benefit of others ... The assumption about working for the good of humanity is simply our tribute to the Christian atmosphere in which we live ... Conquest and benevolence do not go together; they never have, they never will.

from City and State