

**Lesson 1*****Student Handout 1.1—Perspective: Imperial Powers*****Fundamental Question****Does this development help me maintain or expand my empire?**

At the start of the twentieth century, you sit, so to speak, on top of the world. Over the course of the last century, you built up your country's industrial power and used the economic and military might it brought you to conquer other countries around the world. More than just national glory is at stake. Your industrial economy takes while it gives. It produces great wealth but requires a steady stream of raw materials with which to produce. The colonies provide them. Your factories can out-produce the manufacturers of any non-industrialized country. But without buyers for your products, your businesses are bound to fail. The millions over whom you rule across your empire are consumers your businesses need.

At some basic level, you sense that you need your colonies more than they need you. You have a sinking feeling that your colonies have come to this realization, too. With apprehension, you look ahead to the future. Growing independence movements of all sorts have increased the cost of colonial occupation. If the strength of these movements grows, they will threaten not only the profitability of your empire but its existence.

Add to this pressure from without a pressure from within. A small but growing segment of your own population, not entirely but largely socialist or communist in their political orientation, echoes the anti-imperialist call of the independence movements and couples it with calls for a more equal distribution of wealth at home. The critique is not just moral, but economic. This part of the population would prefer to see government spending on social services rather than on exploiting and keeping order in overseas colonies.

You are not the only empire in the world, either. You have not only the old rivals from the past but new industrial powers. They have rapidly-growing economies and the newest technologies. All your rivals would like to expand their economic reach in the world at the expense of your own.

Looking ahead fifty years to 1950, your main goal is the same as it was in the nineteenth century: expand your empire. If you cannot do that, then, at the very least, do not let it shrink.

*Main examples: Great Britain, France, Russia.*

**Lesson 1*****Student Handout 1.2—Perspective: New Empire-Builders*****Fundamental Question****Does this development grow my empire while older imperial powers decline?**

One hundred years ago, you looked on as other powers, like Britain and France, held dominion over the world. Britain built its industrial base and used that economic might to drive competitors around the world out of business while building an empire on which the sun, famously, never set. So, too, with the French, who built an empire only slightly less titanic than that of the British.

You were behind in the imperial game, even fifty years ago. But now, the future looks bright as you look forward to the twentieth century. It is not that your empire is as big as that of the British Crown—not yet. You know, though, that what goes up must come down. The French are big, and the British bigger. To you, however, this only means that they have more to lose.

How can you beat the powers that rigged the rules of the game in their own favor? Not just by copying them, but by bettering them. Your factories need to be more productive and your businesses more efficient. Your armies must be better trained and better armed. Whatever the means, you need to make sure that your empire grows, either economically or geographically, ideally both. Other empires may need to shrink for this to happen.

This is a tall order and at no point can you afford to rest. This is a national project: the particular desires of elites and, more pressing, working classes must be subordinated to the larger, more important goal of national greatness. You want your rich to enrich themselves further but not on behalf of foreign capital. You want your workers to be able to afford the products they make in the factories, but you want them to love and serve the nation, not a particular social class. Socialists and communists would divide the nation into competing or even warring classes, and they oppose the achievement of national glory through imperial expansion.

You learned the rules of the game in the past century. To be a Great Power, you build an industrial, capitalist economy at home and secure access to materials and markets with a colonial empire. The bigger the empire, the greater the Great Power. As the twentieth century begins, you are playing the game to win.

*Main examples: United States, Germany, Japan.*

**Lesson 1*****Student Handout 1.3—Perspective: Colonized Peoples*****Fundamental Question****Does this development help colonies become free of imperial domination?**

By no measure can you argue that the nineteenth century was good for your country. It is not that all was well one hundred years ago. Even then, European countries like the Netherlands, France, and Britain ruled over much of the globe through their colonial empires, leeching raw materials from conquered lands to feed their growing industrial economies. Even in the regions which remained politically independent, the industrial centers exerted a sort of economic centrifugal force, sucking wealth from the peripheries, from countries like your own.

You face the twentieth century from this disadvantaged position. You know where you need to go, but not quite how to get there. You could push for independence, but the odds seem to be against you. Your elites might come to terms with the imperialists but probably never as equals. Asking for independence is like asking the winning side to forfeit the game. Demanding it, however, could become ugly, if, say, your demands are put forward by intellectuals without connection to the masses. In that case you have too little popular support to back up your demands. Ugly, too, if your demands take the form of a mass movement. A mass movement creates real pressure, but the imperialists' reprisals would surely fall hard on your people.

Of course, the country that colonized you is not the only industrial power in the world. At times you wonder if it would be best to seek help from one of the rival industrial powers. Perhaps the enemy of your enemy is your friend. But perhaps not. Your goal is independence, not to exchange one colonial master for another. You know that at root all industrial powers have the same needs: raw materials and markets. You could change the colonizer, but you would remain a colony economically, if in no other way,

Many of your people, both intellectuals and laborers, see in the international socialist movement an answer to your problems. The industrialized world's strongest critiques of imperialism are voiced by socialists and communists. You are intrigued but concerned. The socialists and communists want your independence too, but they see it as a part of class struggle. Do they really understand the racism you face in the colonies? And after independence, socialists and communists might ask your workers and peasants to rise against your own upper classes.

You have a sure sense that despite all the disadvantages the next fifty years will bring you, at least, close to independence. You know that a small minority of the world's people cannot dominate the majority forever. It only remains to be seen precisely when the colonizers will lose control of their dependencies.

*Primary examples: India, Vietnam, Nigeria.*

**Lesson 1*****Student Handout 1.4—Perspective: Socialists*****Fundamental Question****Does this development diminish the power of capitalism  
in the world and increase the power of workers?**

The Industrial Revolution of the last century gave humanity more power over the world than any other single development in history. At the same time, it produced widespread misery. Never before had laboring people produced, you argue, so much wealth for so relatively few, while gaining so little for themselves. And yet you are hopeful. The simple fact that human beings can produce so much in the age of industry lets you know that the means exist to solve age-old human problems. We can now produce enough for everyone. All that remains is to get unrestrained capitalism, based as it is on the private ownership of productive wealth, out of the way.

Therein lies the problem. On the surface, the capitalists of the world hold all the advantages. Though labor drives modern world production, capital organizes it, not only through corporations and banks but also through states and militaries. Capital pits worker against worker through the competition among industries, nations, and empires. At the start of the twentieth century, the international working class—factory workers in industrialized countries, newly-emancipated slaves in the Western Hemisphere, peasants in the colonies—seems woefully disunited in the face of capitalist oppressors.

You are certain, however, that the situation is not as it appears. Capitalism as a system is dynamic, but unstable. How could a system which takes competition as its cardinal virtue be anything but unstable? In the last century, empires gobbled up lands across the globe, particularly in Africa. Now, the imperial appetite for resources and markets remains, but unclaimed lands are few. Empires, you are sure, will soon go to war to take what belongs to the others. Then, with their attention on each other, they will lose their grip not only on their colonies but also on their own workers.

Your goal in the new century is to restrain capitalism, replacing the excesses of that system with a new world economy dedicated to social justice. Your communist friends, who are more radical socialists, want to terminate capitalism altogether. It is true that what motivates an urban factory worker is different from what motivates a peasant, but both groups share the same capitalist enemy. Perhaps their interests will conflict in the future, but for now they must ally. The nationalist independence movements, so often led by elites who do not have their workers' best interests at heart, nonetheless share with you the common imperialist enemy. The time will come to settle those differences. Until then, you see the cracks in the capitalist system that many others miss. In the next half-century, you know you will see that system crumble.

*Primary examples: Russia/USSR, China.*