

How did colonialists justify their actions? essay sample

[Government](#), [Colonialism](#)



Colonialism arose from an ideology, or set of beliefs. The desire to colonise and dominate the world was also driven by philosophies, such as modernism, Mackinder's heartland theory, evangelical Christianity and social Darwinism.

Modernism was a philosophy of ideas from the late nineteenth century about 'modern society'. Modernists believed that the world could be improved by human intervention and achievement.

According to modernists, Europe was the continent most naturally able to give the rest of the world a lead, by colonising. Europeans could portray themselves as modern, civilised, superior and progressive when compared with indigenous peoples, like the Australian aboriginals, who they believed were none of these things.

Early modernists also believe that the British were naturally intelligent and had a natural capacity for ruling over others. Believing in the superiority of the west, modernists assessed overseas for their own ability to contribute to development. This natural sense of suitability for leadership, combined with Mackinder's theory, led many modernists in Britain to believe that Britannia not only could, but should rule the waves.

In 1904, Mackinder, a British geographer, developed theories about global power and the continents. He believed that whoever controlled Europe and Asia – the biggest landmass – would control the world. Mackinder said that Britain with its industrialization and efficient government had shifted the heartland westwards. Two factors caused the heartland to shift geographically towards Britain are, its industrial revolution gave it economic

power and its naval strength gave it sea power. Mackinder also believed that the UK could dominate everywhere from Western Europe to the Pacific, the Eurasian landmass and potentially the world - and become the new pivot.

Part of the thinking behind colonialism was to spread "the Christian word" through churches and schools - known as evangelism. Evangelism brought with it two myths about colonial occupation. First is that the people already living in the new colonies were racially inferior. Second is that colonialism was part of a divine call to civilise the inferior peoples.

This idea was based on social Darwinism - a theory put forward by Herbert Spencer. He believed in natural superiority on the basis of 'might makes right'. His ideas then gained a boost from Darwin's theories about adaptation and natural selection - that the strong should survive over the weak, and therefore improve the gene pool.