

Imperialism and decolonization in britain and france history essay



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Imperialism was all about strong countries controlling weaker countries and ruling them under their own political power, possess their land and take control of their natural resources. Both Britain and France are typical examples of imperialism and they both had the same aims of exploitation, prestige and power. In detail of these two empires, this essay is going to explain to what extent were there similarities in the process and consequences of de-colonisation in the British and French Empires between 1880 and 1963. In Asia, the British colonised countries like India whereas Indo- china was colonised by the French. Both empires were also involved in the scramble of Africa, though it was the British who colonised more countries than all the other stronger European countries.

Britain was known for its large military navy and its commercial trade and after it colonised India, it became the biggest Empire with a population of about 400 million people across its colonies of which India was the largest. India was seen as the “Jewel in the crown” of the British Empire and was of key significance to Britain. Because India was rich in natural resources like textiles and gold, Britain relied heavily on it as a source of raw materials which made Britain grow rapidly in its economic gain. This meant they had to look for an export market in other non- colonialists states, which meant they had to colonise more countries around the world in order to make their trade route more secure and effective.

Like many colonial powers, Britain was no exception in taking advantage of the illiteracy and diversity of the people in its colonies. In India, a group of collaborators was educated, in order for Britain to make its rule highly effective amongst the Indians. The ratio of the white people was small

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compared to the Indians, so they could not operate in non urban areas without the support of loyal Indians to the British rule which also included the Maharajahs. The educated Indians soon became aware of the political wave around them and the exploitations that were being imposed on British colonies. They formed the Indian National Congress as a pressure group to fight against British rule. Mahatma Ghandi who was working as a lawyer in South Africa witnessed the rate of racism that was being carried out on the non European people. He later came and joined the congress party and carried out passive resistance which attracted many Indian people to join in their campaign of Independence.

World War II, brought great change for the British Empire, with increasing pressure for India to be de-colonised, the British promised them Independence if they agreed to take part in the war. However, there were several issues concerning the de-colonisation of India, but the main one was the religious conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims, who could not agree on the federal system of government. So it was decided that there should be a partition of India. This would create a new Muslim independent state called Pakistan. With India's declaration of independence, it became obvious that it was only a matter of time before Britain's other colonies demanded their own independence and by 1957 to 1963 many of Britain's colonies in Asia and Africa had also gained their independence.

Similar to Britain, France was another great imperial power who de-colonised after the Second World War. Unlike Britain, France had been occupied during the Second World War by the Germans. While the British realised the colonies were beginning to become a burden, the French believed they had <https://assignbuster.com/imperialism-and-decolonization-in-britain-and-france-history-essay/>

to re-assert their national prestige by keeping control of their colonies. This may explain why the French experience of de-colonisation was so different to Britain's. French de-colonisation involved war, but Britain's was about agreeing to certain policies from their opposition. Indo-China had been under French rule since the 19th Century. During the Second World War with France occupied, the French colonies were open to attack and Indo-China was invaded and occupied by the Japanese. This was an advantage for the Vietnamese to fight for their independence. A large coalition movement called the Vietminh which was led by Ho Chi Minh fought a guerrilla war against the invaders and won. However, the French refused to accept it and tried to reassert its influence through a policy of divide and rule, but the Vietminh who were strongly supported by Russia and China because of communism did not make it easy for the French to re-colonise and they fought a war that lasted nine years.

As much as decolonisation in India was different from Indo-China, it was also highly evident in Africa where both the British and the French had colonised Ghana and Algeria respectively. The French faced great resistance from the Arabs who were the majority of the people in Algeria. Military colonists settled there in high numbers and Algeria was considered to be a 'genuine department' of France and encouraged the French settlers to make their homes in Algeria. Nationalist groups were formed in both Ghana and Algeria, but the British quickly compromised to the demands of their opposition whereas the French resisted and its army played a crucial role in its resistance. They were determined not to let go because they thought they were let down by the politicians in what had occurred in Indo-China.

In conclusion, it can be strongly agreed that to an extent that there were similarities in the process and consequences of decolonisation in the British and French Empires between 1880 and 1963, though there a few differences. Both Empires had the same intentions of colonialism. It was all about power, prestige and economical gain through exploitation. The major difference between the British and French decolonisation was the method with which they were carried out. The British accepted that they could not keep control of their colonies indefinitely and therefore went about trying to give them independence, however, the French on the other hand refused to give their colonies independence easily. In their colonies, both were opposed with nationalist groups, which made them to deploy large numbers of their army in order to protect their colonies. It was a very expensive process and was another factor for decolonisation. The cost of maintaining colonial ties with countries out weighed the benefits of those ties. This was realised by Britain soon after the war but wasn't realised by France until De Gaulle came back into power in 1958. Both Empires dived up their colonies such as India and Indo- China. The decolonisation process from both Empires also resulted in many deaths, mainly to the people of their colonies. In the end, though the French were more aggressive to let go of her colonies than the British, they both granted most of their colonies their independence by 1963.