

At its peak, imperialism was a world-wide event. All industrialized countries started to take over other countries in search of raw materials. This struggle to find new lands led to conflict throughout the world. Some countries started sooner than others. England was, by far, the most powerful country in the world at this time, as they held more lands than any other country. A popular saying at the time was, "the sun never sets on the Union Jack." The Union Jack is the flag of England and because they owned land world wide, there was never a time during the day that the sun set on England's flag.

Several countries were rising in power and wanted more territory. One such country was Germany. Germany's rising power laid the groundwork for conflicts between themselves and England. Other countries wanting to expand their holdings were Japan, Italy, France, and Russia. Eventually, the last areas left to be conquered were Africa and China. The increased pressure of new countries becoming imperialistic, and the lack of new territories to conquer, led to disputes over boundaries between countries. This led to wars in the colonies. All these conflicts eventually resulted in World War I.

The United States saw this as a time where if they did not act they would be closed out of markets to sell their products. This was especially true in China, as this was a huge market for American merchants. European countries were dividing China into pieces called Spheres of Influence. The spheres would only allow one country to buy and sell their products there. Americans pushed for a policy of free trade called the Open Door Policy to allow all nations to trade with China. This policy was never formally approved and the United States continued to try and protect their trading interests in China.