

Chapter 25 Viewpoint Activity

Opinions about the new imperialism differed among the colonial powers themselves as well as the people whose lands were taken over. In the first excerpt, missionary-explorer Dr. David Livingstone (1813–1873) writes in his diary about his feelings about working in Africa (textbook page 636). In the second, Basil Davidson, a modern expert on Africa, reports on some of the reactions of African leaders. ♦ *As you read, think of some other possible points of view on both sides. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Two Views of Imperialism in Africa

David Livingstone (March 1866)

Now that I am on the point of starting another trip into Africa I feel quite exhilarated: when one travels with the specific object in view of ameliorating [improving] the condition of the natives every act becomes ennobled.

Whether exchanging the customary civilities, or arriving at a village, accepting a night's lodging, purchasing food for the party, asking for information, or answering polite African enquiries as to our objects in travelling, we begin to spread a knowledge of that people by whose agency their land will yet become enlightened and freed from the slave trade.

The mere animal pleasure travelling in a wild unexplored country is very great. . . . The effect of travel on a man whose heart is in the right place is that the mind is made more self-reliant: it becomes more confident of its own resources.

Sources: (1) *Last Journals of David Livingstone in Central Africa from 1865 to his death*, ed. Horace Waller (1874), in *The Challenge of Africa* (vol. 12, Encyclopedia of Discovery & Exploration; Aldus 1971); (2) *Let Freedom Come*, by Basil Davidson (Little, Brown, 1978).

Basil Davidson

There were those who welcomed the coming of European rule: usually, this was after the invasions were over. Few who were present at the time seem to have enjoyed it. "I hear your countryman done spoil West Indies," said a Niger Delta ruler to some British visitors in 1841, long before the invasions had begun: "I think he want come spoil we country too." With few exceptions the existing state of Africa found it well to defend themselves. They did this by diplomacy wherever they could, by warfare whenever they must: there were many wars of resistance to invasion.

The Ethiopian emperor Tewodros II spoke for a whole generation of African rulers as early as the 1860s, not long before his suicide after defeat in 1868 by an invading British force. "I know their game," he affirmed. "First the traders and the missionaries: then the ambassadors: then the cannon. It's better to go straight to the cannon." Even so, there was much puzzlement about why Europeans should behave as they did.

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Questions to Discuss

1. According to Livingstone, why does he feel uplifted by the thought of his coming trip to Africa? What long-term goal does he mention?
2. How did the Ethiopian ruler describe the different kinds of Europeans who came to Africa? How did he plan to respond?
3. Distinguishing False from Accurate Images
Do you think Livingstone honestly believed he was helping the Africans? What do you think the Ethiopian ruler would have said if he had met Livingstone? Could both men have been right in their descriptions of the results of European invasion?