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Q. How did the imperialist expansion during the 16th to the 18th centuries differ from that during the late 19th to early 20th centuries? (250 words)

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Approach

- Explain the term imperialism
- Distinguish how old imperialism differed from new imperialism
- Conclude by stating the consequences of imperialism on world

Answer

Imperialism was the mercantilist policy developed by Europe which involved the forceful extension and subjugation of a nation's sovereignty for selfish territorial and economic gains. This is done by force and it is characterized by eventual political domination of conquered states.

In their efforts to find a direct trade route to Asia, European nations established colonies in the Americas, India, South Africa, and the East Indies, and gained territory along the coasts of Africa and China as early as the 16th century. This phase is known as old imperialism. Meanwhile, Europe's Commercial Revolution created new needs and desires for wealth and raw materials. Mercantilists maintained that colonies could serve as a source of wealth, while personal motives by rulers, statesmen, explorers, and missionaries supported the imperial belief in "Glory, God, and Gold". They set up trading posts and gained footholds on the coasts of Africa and China, and worked closely with the local rulers to ensure the protection of European economic interests. Nations that played a major role in Old Imperialism were Spain, Portugal, Netherlands, France, Britain.

New Imperialism

In the Age of New Imperialism that began in the 1870s, European states established vast empires mainly in Africa, but also in Asia and the Middle East. Unlike the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century method of establishing settlements, the new imperialists set up the administration of the native areas for the benefit of the colonial power.

- New imperialism instead was inspired by a larger economic purpose. This includes the need for cheap raw materials which include precious metals, vegetable oils, dyes, cotton, and Indian hemp etc.
- New imperialism is characterized by large profits through limited military and financial risks. As explained, the colonies also served as an outlet for surplus material and population.
- European nations pursued an aggressive expansion policy that was motivated by economic needs that were created by the Industrial Revolution. Between 1870 and 1914, Europe went through a “Second Industrial Revolution,” which quickened the pace of change as science, technology, and industry spurred economic growth.
- The development of the railroad, the internal combustion engine, and electrical power generation contributed to the growing industrial economies of Europe and their need to seek new avenues of expansion.
- The expansion policy was also motivated by political needs that associated empire building with national greatness, and social and religious reasons that promoted the superiority of Western society over “backward” societies.
- Through the use of direct military force, economic spheres of influence, and annexation, European countries dominated the continents of Africa and Asia.

Imperialism, thus can be understood as a story of deception, brutality and armed might. The imperialist powers, however, might justify their enslavement of other nations and people in the name of spreading civilization but their zeal for new markets, raw material and cheap labour created many small wars and two world conflicts.