

16.4 Jules Harmand on the Morality of Empire (1910)

Source: Curtin, P. ed., *Imperialism* (NY: Harper & Row), p. 291-293.

Background: Jules Harmand (1845-1921) was a French naval doctor and diplomat in Southeast Asia. In his writing he defended the morality of imperialism based on pseudoscientific views about race. This document is an edited version of a translated excerpt from *Domination et Colonization* (Paris, 1910). In the book, Harmand offered imperial nations advice for the successful management of their colonies.

Instructions: Read passages A – F and answer questions 1- 5. As a follow-up activity, write a 250 – 500 word letter to the French Foreign Minister (c. 1900) either defending or opposing Harmand’s views on imperialism.

Questions

1. What does Harmand describe as a “good native policy”?
2. Although Harmand views depriving people of independence as an “evil deed,” he believed the Western nations were justified in establishing colonies in Asia. Why?
3. According to Harmand, why can colonizers never count on the loyalty of the colonized?
4. Why does Harmand defend autocratic government in colonies?
5. In your opinion, how does Harmand use ideas about racial superiority to defend imperialism?

A. The problem to which all others are subordinate is that of setting up and maintaining a good native policy. In a true empire the best policy will be that which makes best use of the conquered people, creating the least suffering on one hand, and giving them the greatest extent of well-being on the other. It will create such a close relationship between the interests of the conqueror and those of the conquered that anything useful to the first will also be useful to the second.

B. To deprive a people of its independence is in itself an evil deed, and to do so violently most often with motives that are not beyond reproach, is immoral. It is a demonstration of that universal law of the struggle for survival in which we are all engaged, not only on account of our nature, which condemns us to win or die, but also on account of civilization. It cannot permit such vast and fertile regions of the globe to be lost to us and to humanity by the incapacity of those who hold them and by the ill treatment given these lands so long as they are left to themselves.

C. The conqueror should have no illusions. Whatever his wisdom, experience, good conduct, or excellent government, he will never inspire those he claims to guide with the feelings of instinctive affection and easy solidarity that make a nation – not after having conquered them and forced them to submit. These feelings can occur only among men who differ but little in blood and historic culture, in customs and ideals. It would be folly for the conquerors to think that they might be loved, blinding themselves to the extent of believing that the dominated society will submit to their rule with pleasure and turn itself over to them with complete confidence.

D. However weak or degraded or barbarous one may imagine the vanquished to be, however evil their natural rulers may be: or, on the contrary, however civilized in their fashion and intelligent; or however deprived one may imagine the people to be of any ethnic or patriotic sense, feudal or religious loyalty toward their princes, they will have always consider the departure or disappearance of the alien power as a deliverance.

E. The conquerors, by the mere fact that they are foreign and conquerors, become an aristocracy, a privileged body with special powers, and their government in its very essence, and in order to carry out fruitfully the demands of the situation, can only be a patriarchal government, a government removed from the concept of equality and hence from political liberty. They must be “good tyrants,” intelligent, kind, enlightened, foresighted and charitable, comprehending and tolerant, but strong.

F. It is necessary to accept as a principle the fact that there is a hierarchy of races and civilizations, and that we belong to the superior race and civilization, still recognizing that, while superiority confers rights, it imposes strict obligations in return. The basic legitimization of conquest over native peoples is the conviction of our superiority, not merely our mechanical, economic, and military superiority, but our moral superiority.