

### Activity 3. John Ruskin on Imperial Duty (1870)

**Source:** [http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/20century/topic\\_1/jnruskin.htm](http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/20century/topic_1/jnruskin.htm) (Accessed February 15, 2010).

**Instructions:** John Ruskin was a well-known English writer and thinker. In an 1870 lecture at Oxford University titled “Imperial Duty,” he argued that imperialism was a positive force because it spread British civilization to the rest of the world. Read the excerpts from his speech, identify his key arguments, and write a 250-word reply either agreeing or disagreeing with his positions.

A. There is a destiny now possible to us — the highest ever set before a nation to be accepted or refused. We are still undegenerate [unspoiled] in race; a race mingled of the best northern blood. We are not yet dissolute in temper, but still have the firmness to govern, and the grace to obey. We have been taught a religion of pure mercy, which we must either now betray, or learn to defend by fulfilling. And we are rich in an inheritance of honor, bequeathed to us through a thousand years of noble history, which it should be our daily thirst to increase with splendid avarice, so that Englishmen, if it be a sin to covet honor, should be the most offending souls alive.

B. Will you, youths of England, make your country again a royal throne of kings; a sceptred isle, for all the world a source of light, a centre for peace; mistress of Learning and of the Arts . . . There is indeed a course of beneficent glory open to us, such as never was yet offered to any poor group of mortal souls. But it must be — it is with us, now, “Reign or Die.” And if it shall be said of this country, . . . she must found colonies as fast and as far as she is able, formed of her most energetic and worthiest men; — seizing every piece of fruitful waste ground she can set her foot on, and there teaching these her colonists that their chief virtue is to be fidelity to their country, and that their first aim is to be to advance the power of England by land and sea.