

Compare the importance of the 3 major reasons why Britain joined the Scramble For Africa' 1868 - 1902

There are three main reasons why Britain joined the 'Scramble for Africa' in 1868. These are for: economic purposes; European rivalries and tensions; and geo-political advances. Each of these were factors for the British interest in Africa, although each one for its own reasons.

The first theory of the British interest in Africa is that the Financiers of Britain had built up enormous surplus capital, due to the unequal distribution of profits in the industrial sector in Britain. This left the financiers of Britain with no choice but to invest this capital abroad, with Africa offering the most chance of profits. This sucked the government in as many of these rich investors had invested in Africa were connected to the government, so needed to intervene to protect their investments. The varied industries of Africa meant that it was the perfect place for the British investors: whether it is the cocoa beans of Nigeria or the oil rivers of West Africa. This theory is taken further by the competition between the great powers for the raw material markets of Africa, as Britain was incapable of producing all the raw materials it needed, so needed to go further a field to a country rich in raw material and cheap labour, but poor in leadership and resistance. A newer theory surrounding the British economic interest involves the idea of 'Gentlemanly Capitalism' this involves the idea that the elite of London could 'open up' Africa, e.g. to drain Africa of its resources for its own financial gain. This is the clearest representation of British economic interests in Africa as it shows the greed of the British financiers.

This alone however cannot explain the initial involvement of Britain as trade alone cannot induce a country to overrun

and rule another, therefore there must have been a further explanation of the involvement in Africa.

The next theory can go some way to explain the involvement in Africa. This reason for joining the 'Scramble for Africa' seeks to explain British interest through the European Rivalries and tensions, which were happening at the time. This is the quarrel between the great European powers, which escalated to quarrels over Africa. The main theory, put out by A.J Taylor puts Germany as a key player in the rivalries and tensions. This theory attempts to show Bismarck as actually attempting to take over Africa to bring it closer to France. These expansionist tendencies led Britain to believe that Germany was attempting to cash in on Africa, which provoked Britain to expand even further. It was this competitiveness and need to be the best that led Britain to keep expanding and expanding. It shows that Britain was only interested in projecting its rival tendencies through their expansion into a new and larger continent. Thus doing so would put its rivalries into action. British government and 'Fat cats' were the front-runners in the political struggle taking place. It would be a political triumph if Britain could take over Africa. Others believe, however that Bismarck was just trying to prevent a union between Britain and France. It seems strange, however, that the European powers let their disagreements escalate into such large rivalries. By letting their rivalries cascade into such large disagreements and tensions they ran the risk of entering war with each other, which dragged down the powers in to such hostility and tension that someone just had to give, but it was not going to be Britain. She had her claws firmly in Africa and was not going to let go.

There is a third theory, which attempts to prove that the reason Britain went into Africa was to for its own geo-political and strategic reasons. She was attempting to secure the important areas of Africa, and by protecting the key routes to India and the Far East. This theory, set about by Robinson and

Gallagher, believed that Britain was drawn in to Africa because of its instability and vulnerability, which they sought to exploit. They needed to secure the areas of the Suez Canal and the Cape route, both of great importance to Britain. They also needed to strengthen its hold in Egypt. It was these expansionist policies that led Britain to take hold of Sudan Cairo and Egypt, as both were of great financial importance to Britain. She was prepared to go to great lengths to protect these areas of great importance them, both politically and economically.

There is, in my opinion, no single reason for Britain to have entered Africa in 1868. Each of the three reasons: economic, geopolitical and European rivalries each had connections with the other, thus influencing the decisions of the government and 'fat cats'. Britain would not have entered Africa under the pretence of European rivalries if it did not expect to have made financial gain. Nor would She have entered the scramble under the hope of making economic progress if Britain did not expect to expand Herself geographic. Therefore, in conclusion, I do not believe that any of the theories for Britain joining the 'Scramble for Africa" would have existed if she did not have interest in any of the other gains she would make, whether it be economic, geo-political or due to European rivalries: each of these co-existed in the eyes of the British government when they decided to take on the Africa.