

Jules Ferry, French Prime Minister, "On French Colonial Expansion", 1884

The policy of colonial expansion ... can be connected to three sets of ideas: economic ideas; the most far-reaching ideas of civilization; and ideas of a political and patriotic sort.

In the area of economics, I am placing before you, with the support of some statistics, the considerations that justify the policy of colonial expansion, as seen from the perspective of a need, felt more and more urgently by the industrialized population of Europe and especially the people of our rich and hardworking country of France: the need for outlets [for exports]. Is this a fantasy? Is this a concern [that can wait] for the future? Or is this not a pressing need, one may say a crying need, of our industrial population? ...

Gentlemen, we must speak more loudly and more honestly! We must say openly that indeed the higher races have a right over the lower races ... [T]he superior races have a right because they have a duty. They have the duty to civilize the inferior races...

I say that French colonial policy, the policy of colonial expansion, the policy that has taken us ... to Saigon, to Indochina, that has led us to Tunisia, to Madagascar - I say that this policy of colonial expansion was inspired by the fact that a navy such as ours cannot do without safe harbors, defenses, supply centers on the high seas ... Are you unaware of this? Look at a map of the world. Gentlemen, these are considerations that merit the full attention of patriots. The conditions of naval warfare have greatly changed ... At present, as you know, a warship ... cannot carry more than two weeks' supply of coal; and a vessel without coal is a wreck on the high seas ... Hence the need to have places of supply, shelters, ports for defense and provisioning ... And that is why we needed Tunisia; that is why we needed Saigon and Indochina; that is why we need Madagascar... and why we shall never leave them! ...

Gentlemen, in Europe such as it is today, in this competition of the many rivals we see rising up around us, some by military or naval improvements, others by the prodigious development of a constantly growing population; in a Europe, or rather in a universe thus constituted, a policy of [colonial] withdrawal or abstention is simply the high road to decadence! In our time nations are great only through the activity they deploy; it is not by spreading the peaceable light of their institutions ... that they are great, in the present day.

Spreading light without acting, without taking part in the affairs of the world, keeping out of all European alliances and seeing as a trap, an adventure, all expansion into Africa or the Orient - for a great nation to live this way, believe me, is to abdicate and, in less time than you may think, to sink from the first rank to the third and fourth.