

Race, Ideology, and the British Empire

Benjamin Kidd, from *The Control of the Tropics* (1898)

http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/victorian/topic_4/kidd.htm

*The Anglo-Irishman Benjamin Kidd (1858–1916) was a civil servant and amateur naturalist who became a best-selling author with his controversial *Social Evolution* (1894).*

.... The ultimate fact underlying all the relations of the white man to the tropics is one which really goes to the root of the whole question of the evolution which the race itself has undergone. The human race reached its earliest development where the conditions of earliest development where the conditions of life were easiest; namely, in the tropics. But throughout the whole period of human history the development of the race has taken place outwards from the tropics. Slowly but surely we see the seat of empire and authority moving like the advancing tide northward. The evolution in character which the race has undergone has been northwards from the tropics. The first step to the solution of the problem before us is simply to acquire the principle that in dealing with the *natural* inhabitants of the tropics we are dealing with peoples who represent the same stage in the history of the development of the race that the child does in the history of the development of the individual. The tropics will not, therefore, be developed by the natives themselves. However we may be inclined to hesitate before reaching this view, it is hard to see how assent to it can be withheld in the face of the consistent verdict of history in the past, and the unvarying support given to it by facts in the present. If there is any one inclined to challenge it, let him reflect for a moment on the evidence on the one side and the difficulty that will present itself to him of producing any serious facts on the other side. If we look to the native social systems of the tropical East, to the primitive savagery of Central Africa, to the West Indian Islands in the past in process of being assisted into the position of modern States by Great Britain, to the Black Republic of Hayti in the present, or to the Black Republic Hayti in the present or to modern Liberia in the future, the lesson seems everywhere the same; it is that there will be no development of the resources of the tropics under native government.

We come, therefore, to a clearly defined position. If we have to meet the fact that by force of circumstances the tropics *must* by force of circumstances the tropics *must* be developed, and if the evidence is equally be developed, and if the evidence is equally emphatic that such a development can only take place under the influence of the white man, we are confronted with a larger issue than any mere question of commercial policy or of national selfishness. The tropics in such circumstances can only be governed as a trust for civilization, and with a full sense of the responsibility which such a trust involves. The first principle of success in undertaking such a duty seems to the writer to be a clear recognition of the cardinal fact that in the tropics the white man lives and works only as a diver lives and works under water. Alike in a moral, in an ethical, and in a political sense, the atmosphere he breathes must be that of another region, that which produced him, and to which he belongs. Neither physically, morally, nor politically, can he be acclimatized in the tropics. The people among whom he lives and works are often separated from him by thousands of years of development; he cannot, therefore, be allowed to administer government from any local and lower standard he may develop. If he has any right there at all, he is there in the name of civilization; if our civilization has any right there at all, it is because it represents higher ideals of humanity, a higher type of social order. This is the lesson which, slowly and painfully, and with many a temporary reversion to older ideas, the British peoples have been learning in India for the last fifty years, and which has recently been applied in other circumstances to the government of Egypt.

Joseph Chamberlain, from "The True Conception of Empire" (1897)

At the Annual Royal Colonial Institute Dinner, Hotel Metropole, March 31, 1897

....It seems to me that there are three distinct stages in our Imperial history. We began to be, and we ultimately became a great Imperial power in the eighteenth century, but, during the greater part of that time, the colonies were regarded, not only by us, but by every European power that possessed them, as possessions valuable in proportion to the pecuniary advantage which they brought to the mother country, which, under that order of ideas, was not truly a mother at all, but appeared rather in the light of a grasping and absentee landlord desiring to take from his tenants the utmost rents he could exact. The colonies were valued and maintained because it was thought that they would be a source of profit — of direct profit — to the mother country.

That was the first stage, and when we were rudely awakened by the War of Independence in America from this dream that the colonies could be held for our profit alone, the second chapter was entered upon, and public opinion seems then to have drifted to the opposite extreme; and, because the colonies were no longer a source of revenue, it seems to have been believed and argued by many people that their separation from us was only a matter of time, and that that separation should be desired and encouraged lest haply they might prove an encumbrance and a source of weakness.

....[W]e have now reached the third stage in our history, and the true conception of our Empire.

What is that conception? As regards the self-governing colonies we no longer talk of them as dependencies. The sense of possession has given place to the sentiment of kinship. We think and speak of them as part of ourselves, as part of the British Empire, united to us, although they may be dispersed throughout the world, by ties of kindred, of religion, of history, and of language, and joined to us by the seas that formerly seemed to divide us.

But the British Empire is not confined to the self-governing colonies and the United Kingdom. It includes a much greater area, a much more numerous population in tropical climes, where no considerable European settlement is possible, and where the native population must always vastly outnumber the white inhabitants; and in these cases also the same change has come over the Imperial idea. Here also the sense of possession has given place to a different sentiment — the sense of obligation. We feel now that our rule over these territories can only be justified if we can show that it adds to the happiness and prosperity of the people, and I maintain that our rule does, and has, brought security and I maintain that our rule does, and has, brought security and peace and comparative prosperity to countries that never knew these blessings before.

In carrying out this work of civilization we are fulfilling what I believe to be our national mission, and we are finding scope for the exercise of these faculties and qualities which have made of us a great governing race. I do not say that our success has been perfect in every case, I do not say that all our methods have been beyond reproach; but I do say that in almost every instance in which the rule of the Queen has been established and the great *Pas Britannica* has been enforced, there has come with it greater security to life and property, and a material improvement in the condition of the bulk of the population. No doubt, in the first instance, when these conquests have been made, there has been bloodshed, there has been loss of life among the native populations, loss of still more precious lives among those who have been

sent out to bring these countries into some kind of disciplined order, but it must be remembered that that is the condition of the mission we have to fulfill.

.....You cannot have omelettes without breaking eggs; you cannot destroy the practices of barbarism, of slavery, of superstition, which for centuries have desolated the interior of Africa, without the use of force; but if you will fairly contrast the gain to humanity with the price which we are bound to pay for it, I think you may well rejoice in the result of such expeditions as those which have been recently conducted with such signal success in Nyassaland, Ashanti, Benin, and Nupé — expeditions which may have, and indeed have, cost valuable lives, but as to which we may rest assured that for one life lost a hundred will be gained, and the cause of civilization and the prosperity of the people will in the long run be eminently advanced. But no doubt such a state of things, such a mission as I have described, involves heavy responsibility. In the wide dominions of the Queen the doors of the temple of Janus are never closed, and it is a gigantic task that we have undertaken when we have determined to wield the scepter of empire. Great is the task, great is the responsibility, but great is the honour; and I am convinced that the conscience and the spirit of the country will rise to the height of its obligations, and that we shall have the strength to fulfil the mission which our history and our national character have imposed upon us.