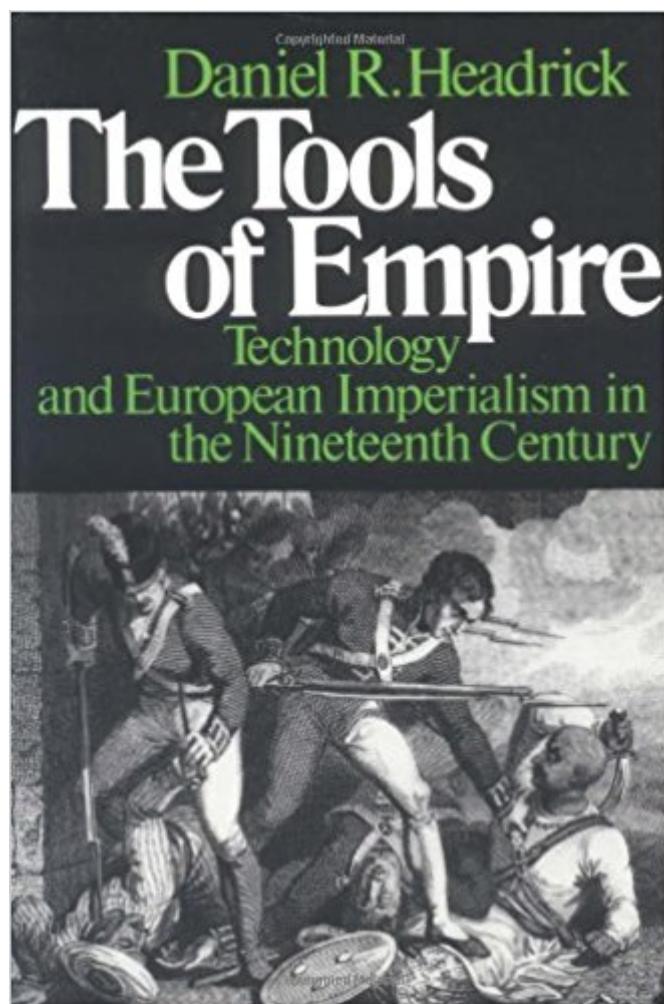


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# The Tools Of Empire: Technology And European Imperialism In The Nineteenth Century



## Synopsis

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## Book Information

Paperback: 221 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (March 26, 1981)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195028325

ISBN-13: 978-0195028324

Product Dimensions: 8.2 x 0.7 x 5.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 17 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #89,426 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #148 in Books > Science & Math > Technology > Social Aspects #156 in Books > Science & Math > Technology > History of Technology #338 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Europe

## Customer Reviews

"The students enjoyed it very much. It was difficult enough to keep a history class challenged, but easy enough for them to enjoy it."--Stephen Miller, University of Connecticut" Ideally suited for undergraduate courses in colonialism and world history."--S. David Knisley, Mars Hill

College"Excellent and moving text!"--Linda Waleda, Portland State University"Excellent study. I have been asked to propose a course on Industrialization, Technology and International Relations... [and] Headrick's work will be included. Thanks for letting me read this fine study."--Thomas Schoonover, University of Southwestern Louisiana"A fine, in-depth work for use with the more cursory textbook treatment of a central element of modern history."--T.R. Cox, San Diego State University

Daniel R. Headrick is Professor of Social Science and History at Roosevelt University and author of numerous books on world history.

Headrick has written an excellent book on how technology allowed and enabled colonial expansion in the 19th century. Although the focus of the book could lead to an interpretation of technological determinism, he does acknowledge that other, related factors had to exist. In fact, the introduction

discusses the twin issues of motive and means, recognizing that both need to exist, the relationship is fluid, and that they are interrelated. However, and keeping in mind the book was written in 1981, the author feels the technological factor has been overlooked or downplayed. The book's thesis is that European powers were able to expand rapidly in the 19th century because technology reduced the cost, in both monetary and human terms, and because it gave them the means to exploit areas of the globe that had been out of reach of coastlines. Headrick argues that the development of steamboats, railroads, weapons, communications, and quinine allowed the penetration of Africa, India, and China which in turn drove down costs, opened up new markets, and provided access to raw materials. The book is an easy and interesting read, and Headrick does make a good argument for the technological factor being a key enabler to colonial expansion.

Headrick does a nice job with this book. Certainly the importance of technology in 19th Century imperialism is a specific topic, and the only people likely to read the book are students and professors. But if you're a student assigned this book, you'll find it informative and easy to read. Headrick attempts to illustrate the significant role that technological advances played in European imperialism during this period. He points to steam boats, improved weaponry and malaria vaccination as the three developments that most facilitated imperialism, and his research is sound. He also explains other breakthroughs that allowed European nations -- Britain in particular -- to get more use out of these colonies. These includes railroads in India and the Suez Canal. The book is not long and it's a pretty smooth read, which is notable considering the topic. I wish there had been some more details about specific conquests and colonies, or even a timeline to help pull it all together. Also, Part 3 is not as cohesive as the first two. But it was worth reading for sure.

I loved this book. I thought it had a very compelling argument for how technology influenced the construction of empires.

I read this book for a class years ago and still use the information in my classroom. Excellent book!

Book was in good condition. Happy to have purchased it.

the author of this book is one of the most important research in history of technology in the world. This book is a great contribution to understand the relationship between science and politics.

it was a wonderful copy, it was practically brand new which is always great. it has very little underlining and high lighting towards the end but its no biggie because the stuff they highlighted is helpful for me as well.

Professor Daniel Headrick contends that historians of imperialism have ignored or even denied the impact of technology on the success of 19th century imperialisms. If so, the imperialists themselves were in no doubt. The American imperialist novelist and journalist Richard Harding Davis often used the phrase “Civilize ‘em with a Krag” in his books, meaning the Krag-Jorgensen rifle that the U.S. Army used to slaughter Filipinos. Although Headrick’s premise is at least dubious, his little book (after subtracting notes, it is scarcely 175 pages long) is a lively rehearsal of the major innovations that made imperialism easy. And he supplies a number of provocative conclusions. One is that the distance between European technique and local skills was never exceeded at any time or anyplace in history, and the greatest distance was attained in the final quarter of the century during the scramble for Africa. At times, intruders encountered people who had never heard of a firearm or a white man. Second, though, is that the distance was narrowing quickly. By 1896, the Abyssinians had firearms as good as the invading Italians (obtained from the Italians, thus confirming one of Lenin’s most famous aphorisms before he even made it). So the Italians were defeated and humiliated by the Africans. It was a lesson that the Americans should have studied. The 19th century was only a golden interlude for imperial technology, and by the 1950s brown people throughout the world were learning to counter firepower and fast transportation with concealment and guerrilla tactics. The United States has lost every war it has participated in since, with one exception. Even before Adowa, Headrick says, the cost advantage of technology was narrowing rapidly. Britain was able to take over India on the cheap, but just a short time later the French had to pay a high price to do the same in Algeria. Firearms are not the only, or even the primary, example of decisive imperial technology. In fact, Headrick identifies 19th century imperialism as an early example of an information society, and claims that information (and organization) rather than machines comprised the decisive technological advantage. His list of key advances includes iron steamships, breechloading repeating rifles and machine guns, flat-bottomed river gunboats, submarine telegraph cables, quinine, the Suez Canal and railroads. He gives just two words to canned food, although in at least one case, canning is credited with conquest. An African economic historian says Uganda was taken over by “British herring.” Generally, colonial needs did not drive technological advances, although occasionally they did. The first boat made with a steel hull was used by David Livingstone, and the first one of

aluminum was used by the French to help penetrate Sudan.

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