

Introduction: Colonialism and the Telling of History

Between November 15, 1884 and February 26, 1885, representatives from fourteen countries came together in Berlin, Germany to divide the continent of Africa among European powers. Although European countries had already claimed parts of the continent, the Berlin Conference paved the way for the colonization of Africa.

The colonial system Europeans imposed denied Africans the ability to decide their own political and economic affairs. European powers exploited Africa's natural and human resources for their own economic benefit, while arguing that they brought morality and economic development to Africans. At the Berlin Conference, European leaders argued that the "civilization" of Africa depended on their involvement in the continent.

“All the Powers exercising sovereign rights or influence in the aforesaid territories bind themselves to watch over the preservation of the native tribes, and to care for the improvement of the conditions of their moral and material well-being....”

—General Act of the Berlin Conference,
Article 6, February 26, 1885

At the time and in later years, European powers claimed that there were benefits to colonialism and glossed over the violent, racist, and destructive aspects of colonial rule. Many Europeans saw Africa as an uncivilized place without history. But Africa was made up of vibrant and evolving societies, with diverse values, languages, and economies. Many African states had long histories of relations with foreign countries prior to the Berlin Conference.

Africans resisted European colonialism throughout the colonial period. While African experiences and voices were silenced in

European accounts of colonial history, these African voices give a much fuller picture of colonialism.

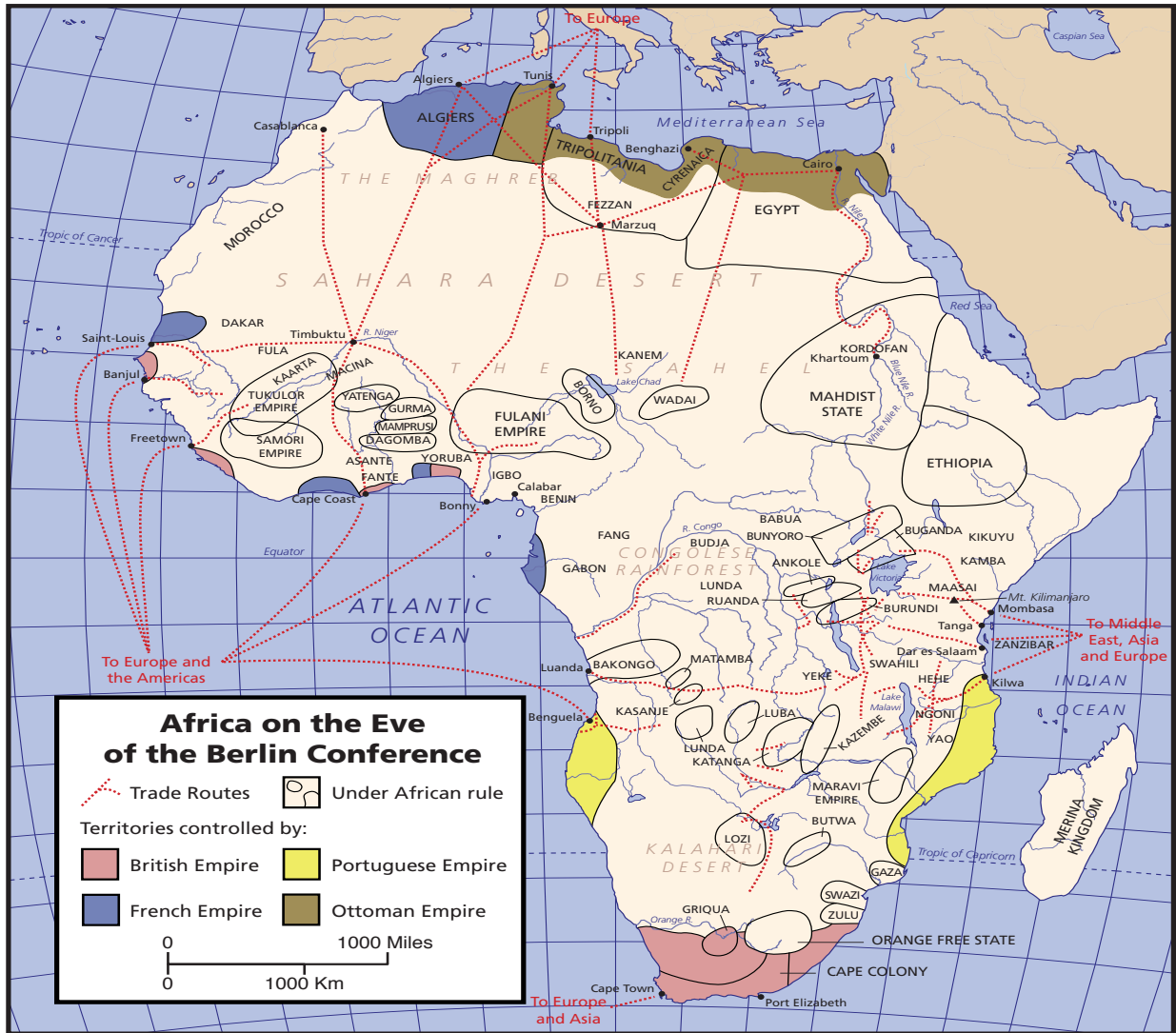
“History will one day have its say, but it will not be the history that is taught in Brussels, Paris, Washington or in the United Nations.... Africa will write her own history, and to the north and south of the Sahara, it will be a glorious and dignified history....”

—Patrice Lumumba, first prime minister of
independent Democratic Republic of the
Congo, 1961

In the coming days, you will explore the history of colonialism and independence in Africa. In particular, you will consider the perspectives of Africans and the ways in which they responded to European colonialism.

The history that you will read is a general one. Africa is a vast continent—more than three times the size of the United States—with more than fifty countries and hundreds of ethnic groups and societies. African experiences of colonialism were diverse. Nevertheless, there are common themes that help us better understand the continent's colonial history and legacies.

In Part I, you will explore Africa in the nineteenth century, and consider the changes colonialism imposed on African governments, economies, and societies. In Part II, you will consider African resistance to colonialism. You will examine the colonial experiences of Africans in four cases: Ghana, Algeria, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. (These are the names they go by after independence.) In Part III, you will explore how African countries won their independence in the mid-twentieth century. You will also consider the effects of colonialism and African independence on the continent and the world.



Africa in the nineteenth century was made up of hundreds of societies and communities. These societies had different forms of government, and diverse economies, cultures, languages, and values. For example, the Asante Kingdom of West Africa ruled an area about the size of modern-day Ghana. They had a strong central government, a standing army with modern weapons, and a system of roads throughout their empire. The Asante were agriculturalists and traders, and collected payment from the communities under their influence.

In contrast, the Igbo of West Africa did not have a centralized government, and most Igbo communities were governed by elected assemblies who ruled by consensus, rather than by a single leader. The Igbo were heavily involved in trade, with trade routes linking them to merchants in North Africa and the Middle East, as well as European traders along the western African coast.

In East Africa, the Maasai were a seminomadic group ruled by male elders who decided the important matters of their communities. The Maasai raised cattle, and traded with neighboring agricultural communities for food and other goods.

Although some general statements about colonialism in Africa are possible, it is important to keep in mind that each of Africa's diverse societies experienced and responded to colonialism in unique ways.

Part I: Africa and the Imposition of Colonialism

Colonialism is a system in which one country takes control of the political and economic affairs of another nation, and imposes policies to control the population. Although European control of some parts of Africa lasted for hundreds of years, the majority of the continent was colonized from about 1884 to 1960.

Colonialism changed African societies in significant ways. For example, colonial rulers shifted the focus of African economies toward trade with Europe and grouped diverse and hostile societies within new colonial borders. But this period was not a complete departure from those that came before it. Relations between Europeans and Africans stretched back hundreds of years. What made the nineteenth century different was that Europeans wanted to take away African sovereignty—the right of Africans to rule themselves.

Africa Before Colonialism

Africa had long been connected to the rest of the world—Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and the Americas. These ties were based mainly on trade, but also on religion and culture. European colonialism would fundamentally alter these connections.

How was Africa connected to the rest of the world?

For centuries prior to European colonialism, Africans traded with other parts of the world. In East Africa, port cities like Mogadishu, Mombasa, and Zanzibar traded gold, ivory, and iron for cotton, silk, and porcelain from the Middle East and Asia. By the nineteenth century, trade routes from the east coast had expanded deep into the interior, linking African societies from as far west as present-day Angola with this transcontinental trade.

North African trade had an equally long history, and was centered around the Mediterranean Sea. This body of water connects North African cities like Algiers, Tripoli, Tunis, and Cairo with ports in southern Europe. The

Part I Definitions

Colonialism—Colonialism is the acquisition and exploitation of territory by a foreign power for its own economic and political benefit.

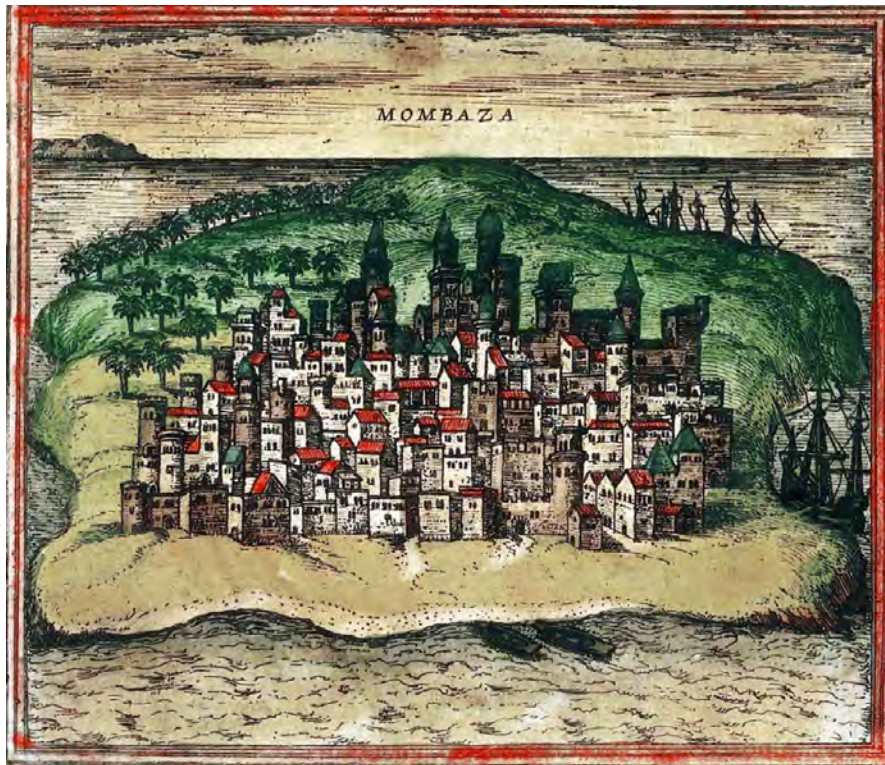
Imperialism—Imperialism is a policy of exerting cultural, economic, or political influence over other societies. Colonialism is a form of imperialism, but imperialism includes a broader array of policies that powerful states use to influence the affairs of weaker states.

southern tip of Spain is just nine miles from northern Morocco.

At various points in its history, North Africa was under the control of the Phoenicians, the Roman Empire, Arab Muslims, and the Ottoman Empire. North Africans traded with communities across southern Europe and the Middle East, as well as with societies across the Sahara Desert in West Africa. As manufacturing grew in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, trade expanded. North Africans exported gold, grains, textiles, and other goods in exchange for European manufactured products.

Trade also brought new ideas and customs. In particular, religions like Islam and Christianity had a significant effect. Islam arrived in Africa during the life of the Prophet Muhammad, when Arabs conquered North Africa in the seventh century. Christianity has an even longer history on the continent, with Christian sects developing in Egypt and Ethiopia as early as the third and fourth centuries. While many Africans converted to Islam and Christianity, many more combined new religious customs with their existing religious practices.

Along with trade and religion came foreign settlement and culture. Africa's coastal cities became cultural blends. For example, European and Ottoman merchants settled along the northern coast to take advantage of trade



People along Africa's coasts had a long history of international trade prior to the nineteenth century. This German engraving from 1572 shows the island and city of Mombasa, part of present-day Kenya. Mombasa was a key port for East African trade with Asia and the Middle East.

opportunities. In the east, Africans, Arabs, and South Asians developed diverse cities based on international trade. The Swahili language—the most widely spoken language in much of East Africa today—developed as a blend of Arabic, Persian, and African languages.

What were the effects of the slave trade on Africa?

International connections also brought violence and change. As early as the seventh century, Arab and African traders in East and North Africa traded in slaves. Captives from Africa were sold in Arab slave markets alongside slaves from across the Middle East and Europe. Many became slaves in the territories of present-day India, Saudi Arabia, China, and Spain. Between 1600 and 1900, approximately 5.5 million people were enslaved in the East African slave trade.

As the slave trade on the East African coast continued to grow, a new slave trade

began along Africa's west and central coasts in the fifteenth century. In need of labor in their new American colonies, Europeans looked to this new Atlantic slave trade, exchanging guns, textiles, and other items for enslaved Africans.

The Atlantic slave trade enslaved and transported people on a scale never seen before. Conditions for Africans enslaved by this trade were exceptionally brutal and dehumanizing. The slave trade destroyed lives, tore communities apart, and led to great population loss. But this trade affected the diverse societies of these regions in different ways. Some African groups were able to take advantage of their superior military power

or access to European guns, and participated as traders. Others saw their entire communities wiped out.

Race was used to justify the Atlantic slave trade. Many whites believed that blacks possessed “weak” character traits like laziness, disobedience, and stupidity, and that slavery was God's way of punishing them. Slave traders also argued that enslaving Africans was actually a blessing to them, since it introduced them to Christianity. They thought that by removing Africans from their “heathen” land, they were actually ensuring their eternal salvation.

The Atlantic slave trade led to the forced enslavement of approximately twelve million Africans by the mid-nineteenth century. Millions more died before reaching the Americas.

What halted the Atlantic slave trade?

The idea that the slave trade was immoral

became widely accepted across Europe in the nineteenth century, thanks in part to the vocal opposition of formerly enslaved Africans and African Americans. In 1807, Britain became the first to abolish the trade. Other countries quickly followed suit, although illegal slave trading in the Atlantic continued until the 1860s. The slave trade on the East African coast increased after the end of the Atlantic slave trade, and continued until World War I.

How did the end of the slave trade affect economies in Africa?

The abolition of the Atlantic slave trade ushered in a period of relative peace for the regions most affected by this trade. It ended the wars and raids for slaves that had disrupted West and Central Africa for nearly two hundred years. At the same time, it was a period of great economic change. The slave trade had made international trade an important element of economic life in these regions. In the decades that followed the abolition of the slave trade, Africans began to grow and trade new items, like spices, coffee, peanuts, cotton, rubber, and ivory. This trade connected many more African societies with the world economy. While the slave trade had primarily involved powerful groups and individuals, this trade in products allowed new groups to participate as producers, merchants, and buyers.

The nineteenth century was a period of economic and political development across the continent. For example, by 1830, Egypt had factories producing cotton, wool, silk, linen textiles, leather, sugar, paper, glass, guns, and gunpowder. Societies in North and East Africa strengthened their militaries, building factories to produce weapons and establishing armies of professional soldiers. While some governments, like those of the Luba of Central Africa and the Oyo of West Africa, were in decline, others like Ethiopia, Madagascar, and Buganda were expanding and strengthening their control over their territories. Some states wrote constitutions and established political unions. African intellectuals spoke out against the racism and discrimination they faced from Europeans.

How were Europeans involved in Africa during this period?

The nineteenth century was also a period in which Africans faced growing European involvement in Africa. In most cases, this involved the expansion of trade—something that many Africans welcomed. European adventurers led expeditions to learn about the interior regions. They built relationships with Africans there and developed trade ties for European merchants. Christian missionaries often followed closely behind, establishing churches and schools to convert Africans to Christianity. Missionaries gathered information about the regions, which later helped Europeans extend control over the interior of Africa. Although some missionaries would speak out against the abuses of the colonial system, most believed that European control was necessary to bring “civilization” to people they viewed as inferior.

In only a few cases did European encroachment amount to control of significant territory in the nineteenth century. For example, South Africa was settled by Europeans in the 1600s. By the 1850s, this region was carved up into colonies controlled by the British and the Afrikaners, descendants of early Dutch settlers. Algeria became a French colony in 1830, and European settlers there numbered approximately one million by the end of the century. But outside of these isolated cases, European influence in Africa remained small and limited to coastal areas. All of this would change in a few short years at the end of the nineteenth century.

Europe’s Conquest of Africa

The European conquest of Africa, also called the “scramble for Africa,” occurred during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. It was a period of European imperialism across the world, as European countries also claimed territories across Southeast Asia. The European conquest of Africa was as far-reaching as it was fast. In 1880, about 80 percent of Africa was independent. By 1900, Europeans had laid claim to all but the African territories of Ethiopia and Liberia.

Why did the European powers want to claim Africa?

The most important factor that motivated European colonial expansion was economic gain. The Industrial Revolution, which began in Britain in the second half of the eighteenth century, transformed the economies of Western Europe. No longer based on farming and handmade products, industrialized European economies mass-produced manufactured goods in factories. The forced labor of enslaved Africans on the plantations of the Americas provided money and resources that fueled this economic revolution.

As other countries caught up to Great Britain, the competition intensified to find sources of raw materials and to sell manufactured goods. Africa had palm oil, cotton, cocoa, rubber, and other raw materials desired by European companies. In the 1870s and 1880s, Europeans found vast reserves of gold and diamonds in South Africa. Many Europeans hoped that similar discoveries would be made in other parts of the continent.

Rival European companies competed with each other and also with local producers and traders as they worked to establish themselves in Africa. African merchants retained some control over prices—for example, by withholding supplies when prices were low in order to drive prices back up. The power of African traders helped convince European governments that taking control of territories in Africa might be necessary to guarantee the profits of their companies.

Social and political factors also encouraged European involvement in Africa. Countries did not want to fall behind in the competition for national prestige and economic growth. In some cases, European countries claimed territory just to keep it from falling into the hands of their rivals.

Europeans used racist ideologies to justify actions overseas, just as they had used them to justify the slave trade. Many in Europe believed that there were significant biological differences between people of different races and ethnicities. Although this theory is false, these ideas made many Europeans feel justi-

fied in taking possession of territories overseas and ruling over the people of Africa and Asia.

“We come among them as members of a superior race and servants of a Government that desires to elevate the more degraded portions of the human family.”

—David Livingstone, British missionary and adventurer who traveled extensively in central and southern Africa, late 1850s

What was the Berlin Conference?

By the late nineteenth century, European countries like Britain, France, and Portugal had been colonizing other nations for centuries. Some European countries held colonies in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia.

European control of Africa began slowly. In many cases, European companies initiated it by attempting to establish exclusive trading rights in particular regions of the continent. These companies negotiated treaties with African leaders in order to control trade and exclude rival companies, using military force when necessary.

In the late nineteenth century, European governments began stepping in to take control of these territories. For example, by the early 1880s, France had taken control of parts of what are today Senegal, Gabon, the Republic of the Congo, and its colony in Algeria. Britain had influence in Ghana, Nigeria, Egypt, and Sierra Leone, as well as South Africa. Portugal had claims in Mozambique and Angola, Germany in Namibia and Cameroon, and Italy in Eritrea and Somaliland.

King Leopold II of Belgium also looked at Africa with interest. Competition between King Leopold and France over a region in Central Africa heightened European rivalries. German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck arranged for an international conference to be held in Berlin, Germany in 1884-1885, in part to reduce the possibility of conflict among the European powers. At the Berlin Conference, countries agreed on a set of rules for “carving up” Africa.

Representatives from fourteen countries came together for the conference. Not a single African representative was at the meeting, and few of the participating diplomats had ever set foot on the African continent.

The Berlin Conference set the guidelines for Europe's colonization of Africa. According to the Berlin Treaty, countries would need to have their claims to territory in Africa ratified by the other European powers. Delegates recognized the Congo Free State (the territory in which King Leopold had established his influence in Central Africa) as a free trade area under Leopold's personal control. The Berlin Treaty also recognized treaties between Europeans and African leaders as legal claims to territory. Significantly, European countries were now required to occupy the territories they claimed.

How did Africans initially respond to European expansion?

After the Berlin Conference, the pace of European expansion in Africa picked up speed. Companies and government representatives from France, Britain, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Belgium all raced to make treaties with African leaders in order to establish their claims to the continent.

Initially, many Africans responded positively to increased European involvement. Treaties usually promised not only trade, but also good relations and protection. Many African leaders believed that allying with Europeans would protect them from threats they faced—whether from other, hostile European groups, rival states, or even their own subjects. Europeans often took advantage of divisions among African groups, for example, by joining with weaker groups to crush a stronger rival. But many African leaders were hesitant to sign agreements that infringed upon their authority by forbidding them to enter into treaties with other European countries. Oftentimes, Africans were tricked or misled about the content of treaties with far-reaching consequences.

“No man if he understood would sign it, and to say that a savage chief has been told that he cedes all rights to the company in exchange for nothing is an obvious untruth. If he has been told that the company will protect him against his enemies, and share in his wars as an ally, he has been told a lie, for the company have no idea of doing any such thing and no force to do it with if they wished.”

—British Captain F.D. Lugard, discussing treaties negotiated between the Imperial British East Africa Company and the Mwanga in present-day Uganda, 1890s



This British political cartoon from the late nineteenth century shows Cecil Rhodes, a British businessman, straddling the African continent. Many British leaders at the time hoped to create a continuous stretch of British-controlled territory in Africa, linking Cape Town (in South Africa) to Cairo (in Egypt). European leaders believed they had the right to claim land in Africa despite opposition from African people.

Missionaries in Africa

Before the late nineteenth century, missionaries were few and far between in Africa. Missionaries' presence was limited to pockets of coastal areas, despite widespread interest in expanding inwards to the interior of Africa. Important developments led to an increase of missionary activity. The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 and advances in transportation and tropical medicine improved missionaries' access to the inland regions of Africa.

Missionaries came to Africa from the colonizing countries—France, Belgium, Great Britain, etc.—as well as other parts of Europe and the United States. They believed that converting as many Africans as possible to Christianity would “civilize” Africans and save them from their “backwardness” and “primitiveness.” Missionaries promoted Christianity as morally and spiritually superior to local religions. Africans often resisted these claims by either refusing to practice a new religion or by blending Christianity with their own practices and beliefs.

Colonial authorities welcomed the presence of missionaries in African colonies and often subsidized their activities. As a result, missionaries played an important role in the day-to-day control of African subjects and in strengthening European imperialism. Missionaries ran schools, which instructed African students in the colonial language; oversaw large tracts of land, which were farmed using African labor; set up health clinics and treated the sick with Western medicine; and traveled to remote regions to spread Christianity and change indigenous cultures. In some colonies, mission work was most the common occupation for foreigners.

One legacy of missionary work in Africa is the number of Africans who practice Christianity today. In 1910, an estimated 1.4 percent of the world's Christian population were African. By 2010, this figure had grown to over 23 percent.

Most Africans had assumed this era of relations with Europe would be the same as in previous years. African leaders did not consider it possible that they would lose the ability to govern themselves. But European's actions soon made it clear that their plans for Africa were very different.

How did Africans resist European encroachment?

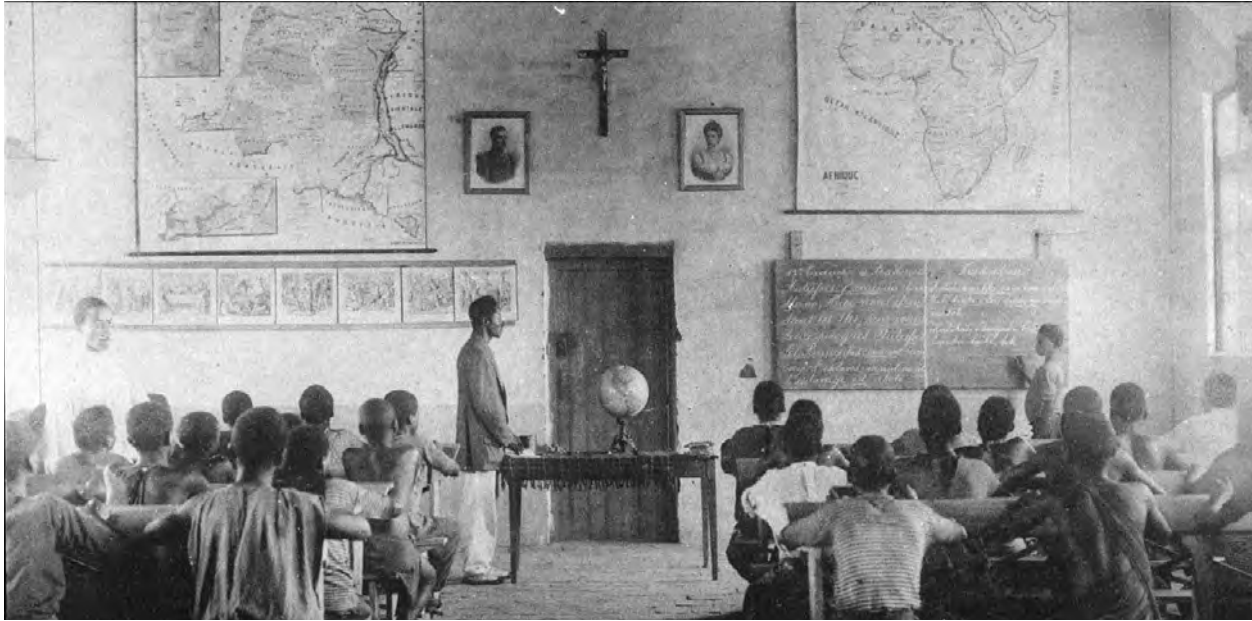
The Berlin Treaty required Europeans to occupy the territories they claimed. In some cases, Europeans established their authority through diplomacy, but in most cases they used military force. As Africans recognized Europe's true intentions, they resisted in a variety of ways. African responses to European invasion were diverse, but all aimed at the same goal: preserving their right to rule themselves.

“I have listened to your words but can find no reason why I should obey you—I would rather die first.... If it

should be friendship that you desire, then I am ready for it...but to be your subject that I cannot be.... I do not fall at your feet, for you are God's creature just as I am.... I am Sultan here in my land. You are Sultan there in yours. Yet listen, I do not say to you that you should obey me; for I know that you are a free man.”

—King Machelamba of the Yao in East Africa
to German commander
Hermann von Wissmann, 1890

African groups used a range of methods to oppose European occupation. Some used diplomacy to try to convince Europeans to withdraw. Some forged alliances with Europeans, hoping that their new allies would respect their sovereignty. In other cases, groups tried to discourage European interest in Africa. For example, in Senegal, a leader named Lat Dior Diop forbade his people from growing peanuts, convinced that the French would leave if they could not get the goods they desired.



Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library

A mission school in the Belgian Congo around 1914. The colonial administration in the Belgian Congo granted land to missionaries for schools. In exchange, the mission schools trained Africans to work in agriculture, the transportation and communications sector, the army, and the lower ranks of the colonial administration. Mission schools in the Belgian Congo focused on primary education. Colonial authorities feared that education beyond the primary level would create a class of highly-educated Congolese who would challenge colonial authority through writing and political organizing.

As Europeans continued to extend their control, many Africans abandoned diplomacy for confrontation. African armies fought Europeans on the battlefield, and used guerrilla warfare to attack European forces. In areas with large Muslim populations, resistance was not just in defense of sovereignty, but also in defense of Islam. Many feared that foreign domination by Christian powers would be disruptive to their cultures and religious practices.

Europeans responded to armed resistance with military force, inflicting devastating losses. For example, at a battle near Karari, Sudan in 1899, British troops and allies killed eleven thousand Sudanese soldiers, while only forty-seven of their own were killed.

What advantages did Europeans hold?

Europeans had a number of significant advantages. Fueled by the Industrial Revolution, European countries had vast material and financial resources to devote to their wars in Africa. European countries had professional

armies and navies, while most African states depended on volunteers and conscripts who could not remain at war for long periods. In addition, the Atlantic slave trade had significantly depleted African populations, leaving many states unable to resist European expansion.

Europe's biggest advantage was technology. Advances in tropical medicine, transportation, and military technology meant that Europeans could move troops further into the interior of Africa than ever before. European militaries had the Maxim gun, the world's first self-powered machine gun. African armies had outdated weapons, in part because at the 1890 Brussels Convention, European powers had agreed not to sell advanced weaponry to Africans. The two African leaders who won battles against European armies—Samore Touré of the Wassoulou Empire in West Africa and Menelik II, emperor of Ethiopia—were the only two African leaders who were able to obtain some of these advanced weapons.

In addition, after the Berlin Conference, European countries were united in their aims for Africa. Any disagreements between the European powers over African territory were settled by negotiation. So while Europeans were able to manipulate the divisions among African groups, Africans were unable to take advantage of divisions among Europeans.

Africa Under Colonialism

By 1900, Europe had laid claim to all of Africa except for Liberia and Ethiopia (see box). It would take years for Europeans to formally govern all of the territories they claimed. Nevertheless, they quickly set to work establishing new systems to achieve their colonial aims.

The European powers' primary goals in colonizing Africa were to obtain raw materials and sell their manufactured goods in African economies. They built roads, railways, and telegraph and telephone lines to support their businesses. They established medical facilities for Europeans living in Africa, set up schools

to educate a handful of Africans for semi-skilled jobs, and, most importantly, acquired land and labor to extract the continent's raw materials.

How did European powers restructure the economies of their colonies?

European countries manipulated African economies in order to extract the maximum amount of raw materials. They reorganized African economies to grow cash crops such as peanuts, cotton, wheat, timber, palm oil, and coffee for export, instead of crops for local consumption.

In places like Kenya, Southern Rhodesia, and Algeria, this cash-crop economy was dominated by European settlers who had come to Africa hoping to make their fortunes. Colonial authorities confiscated the most fertile land and sold it at reduced cost to these settlers. European landowners were able to collect huge profits largely because of the very low wages they paid African workers.

Preserving Independence: The Experiences of Liberia and Ethiopia

By 1900, only two African states had retained their independence: Liberia and Ethiopia.

Liberia had been established by the American Colonization Society in 1822 as a home for free African Americans who wished to return to Africa, as well as for enslaved Africans freed by the U.S. Navy when the slave trade was abolished. While the United States was unwilling to see Liberia recolonized, it did allow Britain and France to interfere in Liberia's internal affairs, dominate Liberia's economy, and seize land along Liberia's borders. Although Liberia was able to avoid becoming a European colony, this independence was largely in name only.

Ethiopia's experience was more extraordinary, and it became a rallying point for Africans across the continent and the world. In 1889, Italy signed the Treaty of Wuchale with Menelik II, who was about to be crowned emperor of Ethiopia. The Amharic-language version of the treaty stated that Menelik could use Italy's assistance to negotiate with the other European powers if he wished. The Italian-language version, on the other hand, made this a requirement. On the basis of this provision, the Italians claimed authority in Ethiopia and renamed the region Italian Abyssinia. When Menelik's appeals for help from the other European powers failed, he began to import advanced weapons and strengthen his control of the region.

Fighting broke out between Ethiopia and Italy in 1894. The Battle of Adowa in 1896 was a total defeat for Italy's army, which was outnumbered nearly six to one by Ethiopian troops. Later that year, in the Treaty of Addis Ababa, Italy annulled the Treaty of Wuchale and recognized the absolute independence of Ethiopia. Ethiopia's ability to remain independent from colonialism has been a source of great pride for Africans and people of African descent throughout the world.

In West Africa, the economy developed differently, with African farmers growing cash crops on their own land for export. While colonial officials forced some communities to grow these crops, others embraced the new economy. In some West African colonies, independent farming allowed Africans to improve their standard of living. But in many places, earnings were so low that Africans needed to grow subsistence crops as well in order to survive. Many European colonial administrators argued that since Africans could grow their own food, they were justified in keeping African wages low and providing no benefits or services to workers.

“I have always noticed that whenever the budget of a native family was properly and regularly kept, it never managed to make ends meet. The life of a native is, in fact, a miracle.”

—French colonial administrator

In other regions, mining was the primary economic activity. For example, the Belgian Congo became a source of copper, cobalt, and diamonds. In South Africa, gold and diamonds made up more than 80 percent of all exports by 1910. Mining wages were also low, and Africans performed the most dangerous jobs.

In Central Africa, in places like the Congo Free State, Cameroon, and Gabon, European governments allowed European companies to run the economy, often with very little oversight. Many of the worst abuses of the colonial system were perpetrated by these companies.

“We had to go further and further into the forest to find the rubber vines, to go without food, and our women had to give up cultivating the fields and gardens. Then we starved. Wild beasts—leopards—killed some of us when we were working away in the forest, and others got lost or died from exposure and starvation, and we begged the white man to leave



Luigi Naretti.

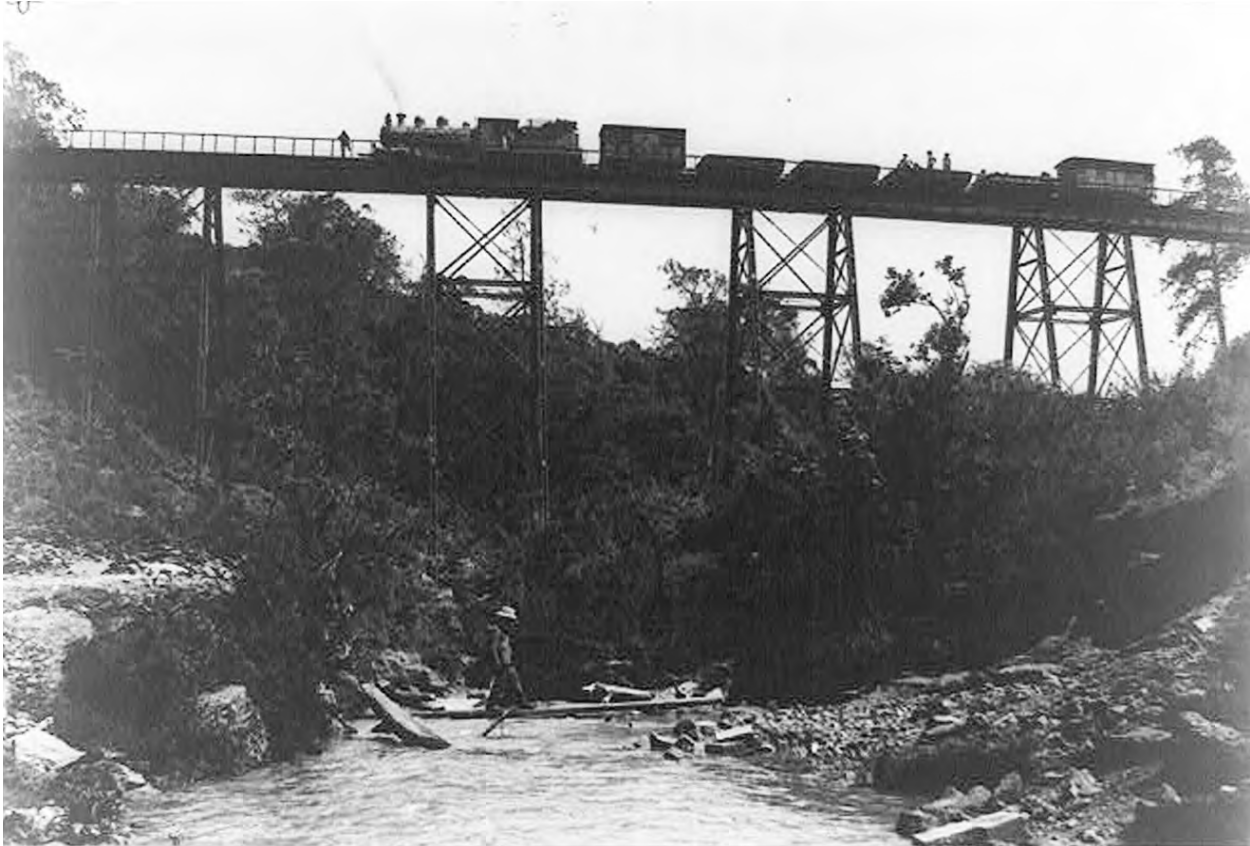
This photograph shows Ras Mengesha Yohannes, an Ethiopian leader in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He fought against the Italian army and helped preserve Ethiopian independence at the Battle of Adowa in 1896.

us alone, saying that we could get no more rubber, but the white men and their soldiers said: ‘Go! You are only beasts yourselves.’”

—A Congolese man to a British official,
1903

How did these new economies put Africans at a disadvantage?

The European powers made each African colony dependent on the production of only a handful of goods. This increased production and efficiency and, therefore, European profits. But this system meant that small changes in the price of a particular good could have serious effects on the economic well-being of a



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-93266.

Building infrastructure such as railways and roads was a top priority for colonial officials. Often built by African laborers, the railways played a critical role in transporting raw materials from the countryside to the ports, where European merchants could export goods to Europe. The bridge in this photograph was part of the railway linking British colonies in present-day Uganda and Kenya with the Indian Ocean.

colony. While Europeans might make less of a profit, Africans could face serious economic hardship.

The European powers also geared their colonial economies entirely toward trade with Europe. Previously, there had been trade between different parts of the African continent, but now all trade was directed overseas. Colonial authorities built roads, railways, and other transportation to link interior regions with port cities where goods could be shipped to and from Europe.

Europeans did not want to develop industries in the colonies that would compete with their industries at home. So, for example, while Sudan and Uganda exported cotton, both colonies imported cotton goods and textiles manufactured in Europe. Similarly, Côte d'Ivoire imported tinned cocoa and chocolate made in Europe from their cacao. Africans

were at a great disadvantage in this trade, because prices for raw materials were significantly lower than the prices for manufactured goods.

Colonial governments also levied a variety of taxes on African individuals and villages in order to raise funds for the colonial system. Officials argued that Africans benefited from colonialism, and so Africans should help fund the colonial system. In reality, the colonial government spent very little on services for Africans, such as education and health care. Instead, most resources were put toward services for Europeans and boosting the colonial economy. In order to pay the high taxes imposed upon them, Africans had to earn money by working for European businesses and settlers.

European colonial policies so greatly favored Europeans that most African traders

and middlemen were forced out of business. European banks refused to grant loans to African entrepreneurs. In Egypt, the most industrialized African state prior to European colonization, British and French policies pushed Egyptian factories and the Egyptian government to bankruptcy.

How did colonial powers govern African societies?

The colonial powers made political and social changes to increase their control of the colonies. European leaders drew new boundaries and grouped together diverse and sometimes rival societies in each colony. At times, the borders of their colonies divided the territory of an African society or ethnic group. They established European languages as the official languages of the colonies, which meant that government affairs, legal proceedings, and other official business were conducted in languages that few Africans could speak.

To manage their colonies, European powers set up new governments, each led by a European governor. Each colonial power took a different approach to ruling their colonial possessions. For example, British leaders believed that someday, in the distant future, their colonies would be self-ruling. They aimed to develop institutions that would prepare their colonial subjects to rule themselves eventually. The French, on the other hand, worked to impose changes on their colonial populations to make them more French in language, values, religion, and cultural practice. This process, known as assimilation, aimed to erase local cultures and replace them with French culture.

The aims of the colonial powers determined the ways in which they governed their colonial territories. For example, the British often governed through a system of indirect rule. In this system, colonial officials employed traditional leaders (leaders holding power by African laws or customs) as agents of the colonial system. Traditional leaders took new roles as tax collectors, census-takers, and recruiters of workers and soldiers. While traditional leaders in this system retained their

positions of power, their authority now came not from their people, but from the colonial system.

In contrast, King Leopold II of Belgium allowed his Congo Free State to be governed by foreign companies. Prioritizing economic gain above all else, he granted these companies huge tracts of land on which they could exploit the Congo's natural resources, and allowed them to govern as they saw fit within their territories.

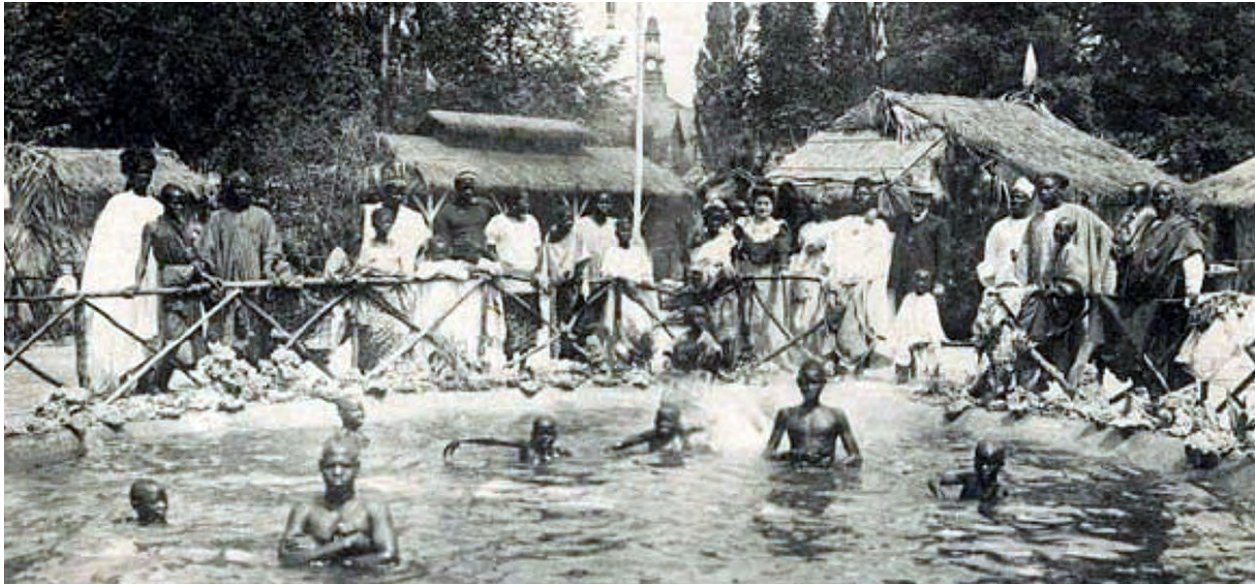
Despite these political changes, African traditional leaders would continue to be important for their communities throughout the colonial period and beyond. Many leaders forced from power by colonial officials led resistance efforts against the colonial authorities. But those who became representatives of the colonial regime often lost the support of their communities. New leaders who had been appointed by the colonial authorities struggled to gain legitimacy in the eyes of Africans.

How did Europeans treat Africans?

The way Europeans interacted with Africans changed in the colonial period. Earlier in the nineteenth century, most Europeans respected the authority of African leaders. Although racism distorted the way Europeans understood other cultures, European traders, missionaries, and explorers generally interacted with Africans on an equal footing.

By the end of the century, Europeans had taken away African independence. They instituted drastic changes with little regard to the desires of Africans. They claimed that these changes were in the best interests of Africans, and believed that Africa's economic, political, and social development would only happen with help from Europe. This belief was rooted in the racist theories that shaped how many Europeans viewed the world.

Racism was apparent in many aspects of life in African colonies. Africans were treated as second-class citizens in their own communities. Europeans built hospitals, schools, and social clubs that Africans could not attend. The few schools for Africans that did



Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. #1953374.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, several European countries and the United States set up exhibitions to “display” African people to their populations. In one particularly appalling case in 1906, a Congolese Pygmy man named Ota Benga was housed in the Bronx Zoo in New York City. Millions of people visited these “human zoos,” which were staged to portray African people as primitive and uncivilized, representing the false and stereotyped images that many people in Europe and the United States expected to see. These exhibitions exemplified the racism, exploitation, and inhumanity at the heart of colonialism. This photograph shows a “Senegalese village” in Paris.

exist taught pupils from a European perspective—for example, with subjects in European history, European ecology, and European literature—with little emphasis on topics relevant in Africa. Europeans belittled African music, art, clothing, and culture. Christian missionaries pressured Africans to abandon their religions and cultures for Christianity. In some colonies, officials could imprison Africans for failing to display proper respect to colonial authorities.

African women lost a great deal of political and economic power during the colonial period. Prior to colonialism, many African societies had female representatives in government, and women played important economic roles as farmers and traders. But European officials treated men as the powerbrokers and leaders in African communities, and passed laws that limited women’s economic independence.

Colonial officials’ top concern was not to improve life for Africans, but to have them work in the colonial economy. While some Africans eagerly participated, others were not so willing. In many regions, officials made work mandatory, and required African men and women to work a certain percentage of every year for colonial businesses.

Working conditions were often unsafe. Employers mistreated their workers and kept wages very low. Some colonial officials set targets for African workers, and beat laborers who failed to meet those targets. In some colonies, if a worker decided to quit his job, he could be arrested.

**“The European merchant is my shepherd,
And I am in want,
He maketh me lie down in cocoa farms;
He leadeth me beside the waters of great
need;
He restoreth my doubt in the pool parts.
Yea, though I walk in the valleys of
starvation,
I do not fear evil:
For thou art against me.
The general managers and profiteers
frighten me.
Thou preparest a reduction in my salary
In the presence of my creditors.
Thou anointest my income with taxes;
My expense runs over my income.
Surely unemployment and poverty will
follow me
All the days of my poor existence,
And I will dwell in a rented house for
ever!”**

— “A Psalm 23, by an African Laborer,”
The African Morning Post, Accra, Ghana,
September 2, 1944



African laborers working on a British-owned logging operation in Ghana.

The National Archives UK, CO 1069-34-18.

In this section, you have read about conditions in Africa prior to European colonization, and considered the changes that colonialism imposed on African societies. You have also read about some early African responses to European encroachment in Africa. In the following section, you will see how African resistance to colonialism evolved over time. You will also explore the ways in which international events gave momentum to the anticolonial movements that sprang up across the continent in the twentieth century.