

The Reach of Imperialism 1800-1914

THE STORY MATTERS...

After 1870 the industrialized nations of Europe engaged in an unprecedented competition to acquire overseas colonies. A struggle for economic and military power largely motivated this intense rivalry, which historians refer to as the “new imperialism.” The “Jewel in the Crown” of the vast British Empire was India. The British attempted to dominate every aspect of Indian life, including the culture. One Indian who resisted this cultural imperialism was the Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore

Lesson 25-2

Empire Building in Africa

READING HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

uncharted traditions

Content Vocabulary

annex indigenous

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- What effect might social, economic, and religious conflicts have on a country?

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

During the late nineteenth century, the major European powers scrambled to colonize Africa. Virtually all of Africa was under European rule by 1900. Maintaining that rule was not easy, however. African nationalism emerged during the early part of the twentieth century.

West Africa and North Africa

GUIDING QUESTION *Why were European countries interested in West Africa and North Africa?*

Before 1880, Europeans controlled little of the African continent directly. They were content to let African rulers and merchants represent European interests. Between 1880 and 1900, however, Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, spurred by intense rivalries among themselves, placed virtually all of Africa under European rule.

West Africa

Europeans had a keen interest in Africa’s raw materials, especially those of West Africa – peanuts, timber, hides, and palm oil. Earlier in the nineteenth century, Europeans had profited from the slave trade in this region of Africa. By the late 1800s, however, trade in enslaved people had virtually ended. As the slave trade declined, Europe’s interest in other forms of trade increased. The growing European presence in West Africa led to increasing tensions with African governments in the region.

For a long time, most African states were able to maintain their independence. However, in 1874 Great Britain **annexed** (incorporated a country within another country) the west coastal states as the first British colony of Gold Coast. At about the same time, Britain established a

protectorate in Nigeria. By 1900, France had added the huge area of French West Africa to its colonial empire. This left France in control of the largest part of West Africa. In addition, Germany controlled Togo, Cameroon, German Southwest Africa, and German East Africa.

North Africa

Egypt had been part of the Ottoman Empire, but as Ottoman rule declined, the Egyptians sought their independence. In 1805 an officer of the Ottoman army named Muhammad Ali seized power and established a separate Egyptian state,

During the next 30 years, Muhammad Ali introduced a series of reforms to bring Egypt into the modern world. He modernized the army, set up a public school system, and helped create small industries that refined sugar, produced textiles and munitions, and built ships.

The growing economic importance of the Nile Valley in Egypt, along with the development of steamships, gave Europeans the desire to build a canal east of Cairo to connect the Mediterranean and Red Seas. Such a canal would allow transport between Europe and Asia, without traveling around Africa. In 1854 a French entrepreneur, Ferdinand de Lesseps, signed a contract to begin building the Suez Canal. The canal was completed in 1869.

The British took an active interest in Egypt after the Suez Canal was opened. Believing that the canal was its “lifeline to India,” Great Britain tried to gain as much control as possible over the canal area.

In 1875 Britain bought Egypt’s share in the Suez Canal. When an Egyptian army revolt against foreign influence broke out in 1881, Britain suppressed the revolt. Egypt became a British protectorate in 1914.

The British believed that they should also control Sudan, south of Egypt, to protect their interests in Egypt and the Suez Canal. In 1881 Muslim cleric Muhammad Ahmad, known as the Mahdi (in Arabic, “the rightly guided one”), launched a revolt that brought much of Sudan under his control.

Britain sent a military force under General Charles Gordon to restore Egyptian authority over Sudan.

However, Muhammad Ahmad's troops wiped out Gordon's army at Khartoum in 1885. General Gordon himself died in the battle. Not until 1898 were British troops able to seize Sudan.

The French also had colonies in North Africa. In 1879 after about 150,000 French people had settled in the region of Algeria, the French government established control there. Two years later, France imposed a protectorate on neighboring Tunisia. In 1912 France established a protectorate over much of Morocco.

Italy joined the competition for colonies in North Africa by attempting to take over Ethiopia. In 1896, however, the Italian invading forces were defeated. Italy now was the only European state defeated by an African state. This humbling loss led Italy to try again in 1911. Italy invaded and seized Turkish Tripoli, which it renamed Libya

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Summarizing What motivated the British to compete for control of Egypt?

Central and East Africa

GUIDING QUESTION *Why did European countries compete for colonies in Central Africa and East Africa?*

Central Africa

Central African territories were soon added to the list of European colonies. European explorers aroused popular interest in the dense tropical jungles of Central Africa.

David Livingstone was one such explorer. He arrived in Africa in 1841 as a 27-year-old medical missionary. During the 30 years he spent in Africa, Livingstone trekked through regions uncharted by Europeans. He sometimes traveled by canoe, but mostly Livingstone walked and spent much of his time exploring the interior of the continent.

During his travels through Africa, Livingstone made detailed notes of his discoveries. He sent this information back to London whenever he could. The maps of Africa were often redrawn based on Livingstone's eyewitness accounts and reports. A major goal of Livingstone's explorations was to find a navigable river that would open Central Africa to European commerce and to Christianity.

When Livingstone disappeared for a while, an American newspaper, the New York Herald, hired a young journalist, Henry Stanley, to find the explorer. Stanley did find him, on the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika. Overwhelmed by finding Livingstone alive if not well, Stanley greeted the explorer with these now-famous words, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?"

After Livingstone's death in 1873, Stanley decided to carry on the great explorer's work. Unlike Livingstone, however, Henry Stanley had a strong dislike of Africa. He once said, "I detest the land most heartily."

In the 1870s, Stanley explored the Congo River in Central Africa and sailed down it to the Atlantic Ocean. Soon, he was encouraging the British to send settlers to the Congo River basin. When Britain refused, Stanley turned

to King Leopold II of Belgium.

King Leopold II was the real driving force behind the colonization of Central Africa. He rushed enthusiastically into the pursuit of an empire in Africa. "To open to civilization," he said, "the only part of our globe where it has yet to penetrate, to pierce the darkness which envelops whole populations, it is, I dare to say, a crusade worthy of this century of progress." Profit, however, was equally important to Leopold. In 1877 he hired Henry Stanley to set up Belgian settlements in the Congo.

Leopold's claim to the vast territories of the Congo aroused widespread concern among other European states. France, in particular, rushed to plant its flag in the heart of Africa. Leopold ended up with the territories around the Congo River. France occupied the areas farther north.

East Africa

By 1885 Britain and Germany had become the chief rivals in East Africa. Germany came late to the ranks of the imperialist powers. At first, the German chancellor Otto von Bismarck had downplayed the importance of colonies. As more and more Germans called for a German empire, however, Bismarck became a convert to colonialism. As he expressed it, "All this colonial business is a sham, but we need it for the elections."

In addition to its West African holdings, Germany tried to develop colonies in East Africa. Most of East Africa had not yet been claimed by any other power. However, the British were also interested in the area because control of East Africa would connect the British Empire in Africa from South Africa to Egypt. Portugal and Belgium also claimed parts of East Africa.

To settle conflicting claims, European countries met at the Berlin Conference in 1884 and 1885. The conference officially recognized both British and German claims for territory in East Africa. Portugal received a clear claim on Mozambique. No African delegates, however, were present at this conference.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Explaining How did Leopold's aggression promote Western imperialism in Africa?

South Africa

GUIDING QUESTION *How was European dominance different in South Africa?*

Nowhere in Africa did the European presence grow more rapidly than in the south. By 1865 the total white population of South Africa had risen to nearly 200,000 people. The Boers, or Afrikaners – as the descendants of the original Dutch settlers were called – had occupied Cape Town and surrounding areas in South Africa since the seventeenth century. During the Napoleonic Wars, however, the British seized these lands from the Dutch. Afterward, the British encouraged settlers to come to what they called Cape Colony.

The Boer Republics

In the 1830s, disgusted with British rule, the Boers

moved from the coastal lands and headed northward on the Great Trek. Altogether one out of every five Dutch-speaking South Africans joined the trek. Their parties eventually settled in the region between the Orange and Vaal (VAHL) Rivers and in the region north of the Vaal River. In these areas, the Boers formed two independent republics – the Orange Free State and the Transvaal (later called the South African Republic).

The Boers believed that white superiority was ordained by God. They denied non-Europeans any place in their society, other than as laborers or servants. As they settled the lands, the Boers put many of the **indigenous** peoples, those native to a region, in these areas on reservations.

The Boers had frequently battled the indigenous Zulu people. In the early nineteenth century, the Zulu, under a talented ruler named Shaka, had carved out their own empire. Even after Shaka's death, the Zulu remained powerful. In the late 1800s, the Zulu were defeated when the British military joined the conflict.

Cecil Rhodes

In the 1880s, British policy in South Africa was influenced by Cecil Rhodes.

Rhodes had founded diamond and gold mining companies that had made him a fortune. Rhodes was a great champion of British expansion. He said once, "I think what [God] would like me to do is to paint as much of Africa British red as possible." One of Rhodes's goals was to create a series of British colonies "from the Cape to Cairo" – all linked by a railroad.

When gold and diamonds were discovered in the Transvaal, British settlers swarmed in looking to make their fortunes. The Boer residents resented the settlers and they were sometimes mistreated.

Rhodes then secretly backed a raid that was meant to spark an uprising among British settlers against the Transvaal government. The raid failed, and the British government forced Rhodes to resign as head of the Cape Colony. This action was too late, however, to prevent a war between the British and the Boers.

The Boer War

This war, called the Boer War, dragged on from 1899 to 1902. Fierce guerrilla resistance by the Boers angered the British. They responded by burning crops and forcing about 120,000 Boer women and children into detention camps, where lack of food caused some 20,000 deaths. Eventually, the vastly larger British army won. A peace treaty was signed in 1902.

In 1910 the British created an independent Union of South Africa, which combined the old Cape Colony and the Boer republics. The new state would be a self-governing nation within the British Empire. To appease the Boers, the British agreed that only whites, with a few propertied Africans, would vote.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Identifying Central Issues What role did Cecil Rhodes play in promoting British imperialism in the south of Africa?

Effects of Imperialism

GUIDING QUESTION How did European governance lead to African nationalism?

By 1914 Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Portugal had divided up Africa. Only Liberia, which had been created as a homeland for the formerly enslaved persons of the United States, and Ethiopia remained free states. African peoples who dared to resist were devastated by the Europeans' superior military force.

As was true in Southeast Asia, most European governments ruled their new territories in Africa with the least effort and expense possible. Indirect rule meant relying on existing political elites and institutions. The British especially followed this approach. At first, in some areas, the British simply asked a local ruler to accept British authority and to fly the British flag over official buildings.

The concept of indirect rule was introduced in the Islamic state of Sokoto, in northern Nigeria, beginning in 1903. This system of indirect rule in Sokoto had one good feature: It did not disrupt local customs and institutions. However, it did have some unfortunate consequences.

The system of indirect rule was basically a fraud because British administrators made all major decisions. The local African authorities served chiefly to enforce those decisions.

Analyzing PRIMARY SOURCES

Imperialism in Africa

"Some time ago a party of men came to my country, the principal one appearing to be a man called Rudd. They asked me for a place to dig for gold, and said they would give me certain things for the right to do so. I told them to bring what they could give and I would show them what I would give. A document was written and presented to me for signature. I asked what it contained, and was told that in it were my words and the words of those men. I put my hand to it. About three months afterwards I heard from other sources that I had given by the document the right to all the minerals of my country."

– Lobengula, a southern African king, in a letter to Queen Victoria, quoted in *The Imperialism Reader*

ANALYZING

How did the Europeans take advantage of Lobengula?

Another problem was that the policy of indirect rule kept the old African elite in power. Such a policy provided few opportunities for ambitious and talented young Africans from outside the old elite. In this way British indirect rule sowed the seeds for class and ethnic tensions, which erupted after independence came in the twentieth century.

Most other European nations governed their African possessions through a form of direct rule. This was true in the French colonies. At the top was a French official,

usually known as a governor-general. He was appointed from Paris and governed with the aid of a bureaucracy in the capital city of the colony.

The French ideal was to assimilate African subjects into French culture rather than preserve indigenous traditions. Africans were eligible to run for positions the established office and even serve in the French National Assembly in Paris. A few were customs officers and a few were appointed to high-powered positions in the colonial administration.

Rise of African Nationalism

A new class of leaders emerged in Africa by the beginning of the twentieth century. Educated in colonial schools or in Western nations, they were the first generation of Africans to know a great deal about the West.

The members of this new class admired Western culture and sometimes disliked the ways of their own countries. They were eager to introduce Western ideas and institutions into their own societies. Still, many of these new leaders came to resent the foreigners and their arrogant contempt for African peoples. These intellectuals recognized the gap between theory and practice in colonial policy. Westerners had exalted democracy, equality, and political freedom but did not apply these values in the colonies.

There were few democratic institutions. African peoples could have only low-paying jobs in the colonial bureaucracy. To many Africans, colonialism had meant losing their farmlands or working on plantations or in factories run by foreigners. Some African leaders lost even more, such as the rights to mine the natural resources in

their country.

Middle-class Africans did not suffer as much as poor African peasants. However, members of the middle class also had complaints. They usually qualified only for menial jobs in the government or business. Even then, their salaries were lower than those of Europeans in similar jobs.

Europeans expressed their assumed superiority over Africans in other ways. Segregated clubs, schools, and churches were set up as more European officials brought their wives and began to raise families. Europeans were also condescending in their relationships with Africans. For instance, Europeans had a habit of addressing Africans by their first names.

Such conditions led many members of the new urban educated class to feel great confusion toward their colonial rulers and the civilization the colonists represented. Some educated Africans found aspects of Western culture to be more attractive than their own. However, these intellectuals fiercely hated colonial rule and were determined to assert their own nationality and cultural destiny. Out of this mixture of hopes and resentments emerged the first stirrings of modern nationalism in Africa.

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, resentment turned to action. Across Africa, indigenous peoples began to organize political parties and movements seeking the end of foreign rule. They wanted to be independent and self-governing.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Drawing Conclusions In what ways were Western nations hypocritical in their treatment of their colonies?

REVIEWING VOCABULARY

annex	to incorporate into an existing political unit, such as a city or country
indigenous	native to a region