History Articles: Colonialism in Africa

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Igbo

The Igbo, also called Ibo, ethnic group occupies the lower Niger basin in the area now
known as Southeastern Nigeria. Before amalgamation in 1914, the Igbo were organized into several de-centralized patriarchal units without a hierarchical political structure that characterized the social structures of their neighbors to the North and Southwest, the Hausa and the Yoruba. Igbo people are culturally homogenous and members are united by one language with minor local dialectic variations. There are two types of Igbo people, the Upland Igbo and the lowland Igbo, the majority of whom still live in rural settings. In all of Africa, the Igbo ethnic group is credited for having the most democratic political system because of a clear absence of the chieftaincy system until the British invaded the area toward the end of the 19th century. In a desperate search for leaders, the British colonial officials imposed upon the Igbo a system of warrant chiefs whereby noted Igbo merchants, who had collaborated with the British officials, were appointed warrant chiefs to rule on behalf of the British Crown. Today, Igbo people number between 15-20 million people depending on which census one relies on.

In some oral tradition, the Igbo were supposed to have migrated from Southern Africa, probably a breakaway band of the Zulu or another Bantu ethnic group. They originally settled in the confluence of the Niger-Benue River before migrating southward toward the Lower Niger Basin. Other oral traditions state that Igbo migrated from Egypt, passed through the Sudan, and headed southward to their current location in the Lower Niger basin much like the stories of the Hausas and Yorubas of the same country. However, more recent historical evidence suggests that the majority of the Igbo people, especially those in large cities like Onitsha, the nerve of Igbo culture, migrated from the ancient city of Benin in the 16th century during the reign of Oba Esigie of Benin, who ruled his people from 1504 to 1550. It was at this time that the first contacts with the Portuguese were made. This suggests that most Igbo were originally part of the Edo ethnic group in present day midwestern Nigeria, and most probably related as well to the Ibiobio speaking people, which are considered to be the closest Igbo neighbors.

The Igbo have a vibrant culture which many are proud of today, and it is often displayed in their elegant mode of dressing characterized by a flowing gown, a red or black hat, and a walking stick. In many parts of Igboland, a patrilineal extended family system is the norm; however there are pockets of matrilineal groupings where women dominate all aspects of society. Polygamous marriage is widely practiced with a man having more than one wife, though there is no evidence of a woman having more than one husband. Most Igbo live under an extended family unit which may include generations of related siblings. Before embracing Christianity, Igbo practiced a unique form of traditional African religion which may equate to ancestor worship. The main God is known as Chuckwu, whom the entire village worships, and it is widely recognized as the universal being, the creator. There are also other lesser gods called "Umuagbar," and below these are the "Ndi Ichie" or spirits of the ancestors. Some Igbo subgroups also worship their personal god called chi. An Igbo man carries his chi in his pocket on his way to sell his wares in the market. If he returns with all his wares sold, he pours a drink of gin or palm wine as a libation to his chi, but if he returns home without a good amount of sale, he throws the chi out of the window and replaces it with another one. He settles on the one that brings him personal fortune. Other Igbo people are more practical in their belief system; if the god does not provide, there is no need worshiping such a deity.

The traditional Igbo society was probably the most democratic society in sub-Saharan Africa, with the village assembly being the basis of civil governance, where ordinary citizens could have their say. But with the appointment of the warrant chiefs by the British during the early phase of colonization, this democratic decision-making process
was abolished and replaced by a British style customary system of civil administration dominated by the emerging elite, most especially the warrant chiefs and the Igbo merchant class. At the village level, the king, or eze, rules his people with the assistance of "red-hat" chiefs decked in local red beads indicating their ranks. The Council of Elders also serves in advisory capacity to the king, and together with the beaded chiefs, maintains order and stability in the village. However, with the advent of colonization, the traditional social structure of Igbo society is increasingly giving way to modern ways of life, with Christianity replacing old traditional belief system.

One of the most legendary personalities in Igbo modern history was Dr. Nnamidi Azikiwe, who was born in the northern Nigerian town of Zunguru on November 16, 1904. Dr. Nnamidi Azikiwe attended the Lagos Methodist Boys' High School before proceeding to Lincoln and Howard Universities in the United States. While in the United States, he met leading African American scholars and social activists like Dr. W.E. B. DuBois, who encouraged him to attend the second Pan African Congress in Manchester in 1949, where the main issue of the conference was de-colonization. Dr Azikiwe returned to Africa first to Accra, Ghana, in 1934 to become the editor of the African Morning Post, a platform he used to promote his anti-colonization views. When Nigeria was granted independence in 1960, Dr. Azikiwe became the first president of the country; a position he held before the first military coup of 1966.

With the coup came the Biafra war, under the command of a young Igbo officer, Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu. The war brought much suffering to the Igbo and the nation, and as a group they suffered the worst calamity of their recent history. By the time the war ended in 1970, nearly 3 million Igbo people had been slaughtered by federal forces led by Hausa, Fulani and Yoruba generals. The Biafra war is perhaps the first case of ethnic genocide in Africa and possibly the most brutal.


**Nigeria: Traditions & Etiquette**

Among the widespread social customs in Nigeria are ceremonies that celebrate aspects of family life; festivals that unite the community; major religious festivals and holidays; and sporting competitions, among others. Current lifestyles reflect the retention of traditional practices in occupations and culture, as well as emerging Western-oriented way of life in careers and tastes.

In general, Nigerians are outgoing and friendly. Salutations communicate warmth, and while kisses are uncommon, people may hug, shake hands, and hold one another. It is not regarded as vulgar to speak loudly in public, although the qualities of a gentleman are appreciated in certain quarters. Whether in a bus or an airplane, Nigerians openly discuss their country's or their own aspirations. Their knowledge of other parts of the world is very impressive, with many following international events on a daily basis. Community life is important and Nigerians enjoy social gatherings, celebrations, and parties. Many ethnic groups turn various occasions into parties, enabling their relations and friends to enjoy good food, music, and dancing. For instance, among the Yoruba, a party is called to mark all important ceremonies. The celebrants and others will dance, having money pasted on their foreheads, till the early hours of the morning.
Morning greetings are mandatory in many areas, and one must inquire about the state of health. Among such groups as the Yoruba, all occasions and events have their appropriate greetings. Among the Nupe, titleholders and men of equal age and status crouch low to greet one another, while women will go down on one knee (Yoruba women use both knees). Nupe friends will stretch out their hands until their fingers touch. A younger person will not shake hands with a senior one but will bow. When one meets a senior at his/her home, one is expected to remove one's shoes and wait to be invited to sit before doing so. Among many groups, failure to greet or to answer when greeted is a sign of contention and the need for urgent conflict resolution.

Marriage is one of the most important social customs. Reproduction is so important that many consider it the primary function of marriage. Of course, there is affection and love. Marriage confers respect and status, such that single men and women are pressured to marry, and a woman will tolerate a number of lapses in her husband rather than divorce him. Agrarian communities place a premium on large families in order to build communities and provide a work force that is hard to recruit by other means. While arranged marriages have declined in importance, men and women still announce their choices and decisions to their parents and other family members, with the hope that consent will be granted. Parents ask questions regarding ethnicity, town of origin, religion, and occupation to ensure that a good choice has been made. Most parents still prefer that their children marry a member of the same ethnic group as themselves.

All stages of life are marked by particular customs. One of the earliest and most widely practiced is the naming ceremony for a child. Among the Yoruba, a child must receive a name within seven to nine days of birth, so that the baby may outlive its parents. Grandparents, parents, friends, and others come with names for the baby. Prayers are elaborate, and food items are used as ritual objects to communicate wishes in prayer for the baby. The Igbo do much the same, but they can wait for much longer before performing the ceremony. Among all groups, the child's name has meaning. Christianity has spread in Igboland, most names have come to be preceded by Chi (God) as in Chidi (God is alive).

Children play both indoors and out and can be seen using clay, cornstalks, and paper to make toys of various kinds. Adults engage in all sorts of sports, including boxing, basketball, table and lawn tennis, field hockey, and handball. Wrestling is an old sport in many areas and has developed into a culture of its own. Among the Hausa, wrestling is one of the activities during major celebrations. Communities can compete, as well as individual children and adults. A challenge to a neighboring group can be initiated by a community, and a day is set for the competition. Led by a group of small boys, the competitors will arrive at the neighboring village and will be fed by various households. Drummers will circulate to alert the villagers to the presence of the wrestlers. Mats are spread for elders and referees to sit on; a large crowd gathers; the wrestlers appear in their uniforms, and each spends time praising his prowess. A fight begins when a wrestler makes a challenge with hand signals and agrees to wrestle someone of the same age. The wrestlers' knees and hands must not touch the ground. If both fall on their sides, it is a draw; if one falls on the ground, he loses; and if both fall on the ground, the one on top is the victor.

**Nigeria: Landforms & Climate**

Nigeria is largely level, with coastal plains that gradually rise to rolling hills and a large, stepped plateau in the center of the country. The southeastern region is mountainous. The heavily forested, east-west coastal zone stretches along the Gulf of Guinea and extends inland for roughly 100 miles. The western shoreline is defined by large lagoons, saltwater mangrove swamps, and palm-pandanus and reed swamps.

The east is dominated by the massive Niger River Delta and the estuary of the Cross River, which also contain large areas of both mangrove forest and freshwater swamp. Many types of palm trees grow in the coastal zone, particularly the oil palm. Further inland is the Y-shaped Niger-Benue River Valley, with the Niger River Basin to the west, and the Benue River Basin to the east. Covered in long grasses and dotted with acacia trees, this area, ecologically part of what is known as the Guinea savanna zone, is much drier than the coast.

This landscape gradually gives way to the Northern High Plains, a broad expanse of mostly level land that ranges from the Niger-Benue River Valley to the northern border with Niger. The smooth plain is broken only by the Jos Plateau, located in the center of the country. Sections of the Jos Plateau are hilly, with low granite escarpments facing south, east, and west. The average height of the plateau's peaks is around 2,000 feet. Ecologically, this region is called the Sudan savanna. It is semidesert; the groundcover here is sparse, there are fewer trees, and it is the driest part of the country. While there are several short rivers in northern Nigeria, water conservation is problematic. In its far northeastern corner, Nigeria shares a bit of Lake Chad with the countries of Chad and Niger.

Nigeria's climate is generally hot, humid, and rainy in the south and becomes progressively drier to the north. Temperatures remain high through most of the country. Harmattan winds—strong northeast gusts blowing dust from the Sahara Desert—are frequent from December through February and affect every region except the coastal zone. The country is prone to severe periodic droughts.


**Nigeria: Natural Resources & Agriculture**

As the world's sixth-largest oil producer, Nigeria relies heavily on its petroleum resources. Currently producing about 2 million barrels of oil a day, the nation has plans to increase production to 4.4 million barrels a day by 2020. Due to its location on the oil-rich Gulf of Guinea, Nigeria sits atop an estimated 36 billion barrels of oil as well as more than 100 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. The vast majority of these reserves lie onshore in the Niger Delta area, where the Niger River empties into the Gulf of Guinea via a vast network of estuaries. Many of the largest reserves, however, have been found below the gulf waters at depths of up to 3,000 feet below the sea, and as a result there is also a vast network of offshore oil platforms. Although Nigeria has the world's 10th-largest natural gas reserves, in the past much of this was burned off in large flares. As oil companies and the government have realized the value of collecting the gas, more and
more is being produced for energy. Some three-fifths of the country's power is now produced by natural-gas– or coal-fired thermal energy plants.

Petroleum has largely overshadowed Nigeria's other resources, which include mineral reserves of iron ore, lead, coal, limestone, marble, and gold. These are found primarily in Kogi State and neighboring states in north-central Nigeria. Tin mining is also historically important to Nigeria and began in the Jos Plateau in 1905. Reserves of uranium located in the northeastern region remain undeveloped. Valuable hardwood trees grow well in both the tropical southern rainforests and the mixed deciduous forests of the north. Such hardwoods as mahogany, ebony, and Nigerian walnut are the most heavily harvested species. In addition, some states in the north have begun planting nonnative-tree plantations which double as forest belts to combat desertification. Trees grown in this fashion include teak and gmelina, both valuable as timber, and neem, used in making organic fertilizers, pesticides, and fungicides.

In the precolonial era Nigerians produced sufficient food both to feed themselves and to export surplus. Today, however, the country must import some of its food to feed a rapidly growing and increasingly urban population, which surpassed 140 million in the 2007 census. The economic importance of agriculture in Nigeria has waned with the development of the oil industry, yet one-third of the country is still cultivated.

The most easily farmed soils are in the northern areas surrounding Kano and Sokoto, where land is in high demand and the average farm size is about 7.5 acres. In this region, farmers raise crops for domestic consumption that include corn, millet, rice, and sorghum and cultivate cotton and peanuts for trade. While the rainforest soils of the south are less predictable than those of the north, as they are easily depleted of nutrients, they are also the most productive in the country. Commercial farmers in the south grow oil palm, used in making a wide array of products ranging from margarine to soap; rubber trees; and cacao. Grown in the ethnic Yoruba areas of the southwest, cacao is Nigeria's primary agricultural export and fuels a pattern of seasonal migrant labor from the Ibo-inhabited southeast. Livestock are also important, with the pastoralist Fulani of the north being the primary producers of beef.


**Imperialism in Africa (Overview)**

In the late 1800s, the great European powers once again invaded Africa. However, this time they did not plunder its human resources. This time their actions were spurred by imperialism—by the desire for global domination. Europe's second coming to Africa was for its vast natural resources to meet the needs of the newly industrialized nations of Europe. This scramble for Africa involved the traditional colonial powers France and Great Britain; reinvigorated colonial powers Spain and Portugal; newly formed states Italy and Germany; and one individual, King Leopold II of Belgium. By 1914, almost all of African soil belonged to a European power. Only Liberia—a country formed by freed American slaves—and Ethiopia escaped Europe's grasp.

**Berlin Conference.**
The Berlin West Africa Conference, also known as the Berlin Conference, was held from
November 15, 1884 to January 20, 1885. The great European powers—France, Great Britain, Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Italy, and Spain—and the United States met in Berlin, Germany to divide the African continent into colonial holdings. There were no Africans in attendance. The conference agreed that 1) any sovereign power that wanted to claim any territory should inform the other powers "in order to . . . make good any claim of their own," 2) any such annexation should be validated by effective occupation, and 3) treaties with African rulers were to be considered a valid title to sovereignty. This was the first time in world history that one continent boldly declared its plans to occupy and distribute the territory of another continent. In addition, the conference recognized Leopold II as the sovereign of a new state, the Congo Free State. In fact, the Congo Free State was his personal colony—a private state owned exclusively by Leopold.

Congo Free State.
Leopold II had begun to put together the Congo Free State in 1877 when he formed the Committee for Studies of the Upper Congo following British explorer Henry Morton Stanley's exploration of the area. Leopold II directed Stanley to negotiate with local rulers, and by 1884, Stanley had signed treaties with 450 independent African entities representing 905,000 square miles of territory. Occupying almost all of the Congo River basin, the Congo Free State was 80 times the size of Belgium—three and half times the size of Texas!

Its chief industry was wild rubber production. To gain this precious commodity, the Belgians imposed rubber quotas on each of the villages. As the demand for rubber rose higher and higher, the quotas were also raised higher and higher. Refusal to work or failure to meet the quotas often met with beatings, mutilation, and even death. Another tactic to force the Congolese to "work rubber" was to punish one's loved ones—the price of not working rubber might be the safety or even the life of one's relatives, spouse, or children. It is estimated that during the time Leopold II ruled the Congo Free State, its population was reduced by some 50%. The population of the territory is said to have declined from 20 or 30 million to 8 million.

Indeed, Leopold II built up a huge private fortune through the control of the Congo's vast resources. However, international criticism of the brutal treatment of the Congolese finally forced Leopold II to give up his control of the Congo. He turned it over to the Belgian nation in 1908, and the area became a colony called the Belgian Congo. It was administered by Belgium's parliament until it was granted independence in 1960. Formerly known as Zaire, today the area is called Congo or Democratic Republic of Congo.

Impact of Colonialism.
While Leopold II's actions in the Congo were not necessarily typical of those that occurred in other areas of Africa, the ruthless exploitation that occurred during Europe's scramble for Africa nevertheless resulted in profound, lasting changes for the continent. It destroyed the continent's traditional social, economic, political, and cultural structures. Disease, starvation, and brutality decimated African populations. It created economic dependency on industrialized nations and institutionalized national and international racism against Africans and peoples of African descent. Overall, it resulted in underdevelopment and poverty. Today's Africans continue to struggle to overcome the legacy of colonialism and achieve freedom and respect.
Scramble for Africa

The scramble for Africa was an ambitious and aggressive plan that resulted in the partitioning of one of the largest continents of the world. Fueled by European industrialism and market forces of the late 1800s, the partitioning of the African Continent demonstrated the power of European colonialism.

In the late 1800s, imperialism motivated such nations as the United Kingdom, France, and Germany to occupy unindustrialized regions around the world and claim them as colonial possessions. The conquered territories served their purpose, as European countries utilized the colonies' natural resources for their industrial complexes. European colonists justified their actions with social Darwinism; through natural selection, they argued, the "stronger race" of Europeans would inevitably conquer the "weaker race" of Africans. Another factor in European colonization was the role of missionaries. Adopting a more compassionate form of social Darwinism, missionaries felt their purpose was to uplift and civilize Africans by bringing Christianity to Africa and converting natives who practiced traditional African religions. Eventually, missionaries became an integral part of African life as they brought such Western institutions as health clinics, schools, social services, and churches to African villages.

Serious European colonization of Africa began in 1876, when Belgium held the Brussels Geographical Conference, resulting in the formation of the African International Association. In 1879, the association hired Henry Morton Stanley to explore the Congo. Portugal followed suit by sponsoring a series of African expeditions that resulted in the annexation of independent estates in Mozambique by 1880. France expanded its territorial holdings in 1879 by laying claim to parts of western Sudan, Egypt, Tunisia, and Madagascar. The United Kingdom signaled the beginning of its conquest of Africa by occupying Egypt in 1882.

Because of territorial disputes regarding European colonization in Africa, German prime minister Otto von Bismarck proposed an international conference to settle questions regarding boundaries and claims. Held between November 1884 and February 1885, the Berlin Conference involved 14 nations, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and France. The conference resulted in laying down the guidelines for European colonization, borders, navigation, and trade in Africa.

With the conference, Europe partitioned the entire continent of Africa. Within 30 years of the conference, Africa was divided into more than 50 separate countries under colonial rule. European military forces were quickly deployed into Africa to enforce the new provisions and to protect the interests of the colonizing countries. Africans who opposed European colonization were brutally suppressed by the military, who used such advanced weaponry as the Maxim and Gatling machine guns. Most of Africa remained under colonial rule until the 1950s, when African nationalist movements began fighting for independence.
Leopold II

Leopold II was king of Belgium from 1865 until his death in 1909. He hoped to be remembered for his ability to maintain Belgium's sovereignty, keeping the country out of continental wars throughout the later half of the 19th century. Instead, however, Leopold is widely remembered for expanding Belgian power onto the African continent through his efforts to colonize an area that became known as the Belgian Congo and for his brutal treatment of the African people in that region.

On April 9, 1835, Belgian's King Leopold I and his wife, Louise Marie, celebrated the birth of their second son, Louis Phillippe Marie Victor in Brussels Belgium (he would take the name Leopold II when he later ascended the throne). As Leopold's older brother had only lived a few days, his birth was greeted with great joy by the Belgians, as he was the heir to throne. As a child, Leopold tended to be lazy about his schoolwork although he was interested in politics, business, and geography. He received military training as part of his education, but he did not care for its strict discipline or for riding horses.

In an arrangement made by his father to shore up Belgium's European alliances, Leopold married Maria Henrietta, a daughter of Archduke Joseph of Austria, in late August 1853. They had four children—a daughter, Louise, in 1858; a son, Leopold, the Count of Hainaut, in 1859; a second daughter, Stephanie, in 1864; and a third daughter, Clementine, in 1872. (Unfortunately, the young Count of Hainaut died in 1869 from complications caused by falling from his horse, which left the monarchy without a male heir.)

After his father's death on December 10, 1865, Leopold was crowned king of Belgium. One of his greater achievements was in maintaining Belgium's neutrality amid the many warring factions of Europe. Throughout the 19th century, France, Spain, Austria, Germany, Holland, Prussia, and Russia were involved in continual political and religious disputes, often involving serious threats of war to their neighbors. With much help from his cousin, Queen Victoria of England, and his strong negotiating skills, Leopold was able to diffuse threats to Belgium's sovereignty.

Leopold was involved with many expansion and trading ventures involving business opportunities around the world. One of his first was as sponsor and chief spokesman for the Orient Express. The Orient Express was the first train to offer luxury service for diplomats and businessmen between London and the capitals of Europe, as well as to Istanbul, the gateway to the Near East. He also invested heavily in business ventures in Egypt and the Near East, including the building of the Suez Canal in Egypt. He was less successful in his dealings in the Far East and South America, mainly because the Belgian Parliament would not build a navy to back his enterprises.

Probably Leopold's most notable activity, both for good and bad, was his involvement in the exploration and development of the Belgian Congo in Africa. He had been searching for potential places to colonize for years, but most of the likely territories had already been brought under the control of other European countries. In the 1870s, the Congo River region of central Africa was the last major piece of Africa to be penetrated by Europeans, and Leopold claimed the region for Belgium, initiating efforts to colonize the
area. Leopold invited explorers and geographers to a conference that became known as the Brussels Conference of 1876. During the conference, he created the Association Internationale Africaine (AIA), with its headquarters in Brussels and himself as chairman. The AIA gave Leopold rights to the resources of the Congo, which would be honored by other Europeans. Leopold appointed the famous British explorer, Henry M. Stanley, to organize the colony and define its boundaries. He even convinced the Belgian Parliament to make him the colony's owner rather than the Belgium government.

Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, Leopold was able to accumulate fabulous riches by extracting and selling rubber, ivory, and copper from the Congo. He accomplished this, however, through such inhuman treatment of the African laborers, that when his repressive policies came to the attention of the international public through the work of an evangelical religious group, Leopold was widely condemned. Conditions in the Belgian Congo were so much more horrible even than those in the other European colonies in Africa, that the information created a worldwide uproar. This public outrage had a significant impact on the government, and the Belgian Parliament stepped in on August 20, 1908 and reclaimed ownership of the colony. Leopold's reputation as an evil, uncaring man remained with him for the rest of his life.

Leopold died on December 17, 1909, a few days after an abdominal operation. His wife had died in 1901, and he had finally married his mistress while on his deathbed in order to legitimize the son she had borne him. However, Parliament did not accept his son as his heir, and Leopold II was succeeded as king by his nephew, Albert I, who ruled Belgium until his own death in 1934.


**New Imperialism**

New imperialism is a term used to describe the sudden mania for expansion and conquest that gripped Western powers in the late 19th century. Though Western imperialism was an ancient phenomenon by the 1880s, during the final two decades of the century, the European powers demonstrated an unprecedented enthusiasm for it. The rapidity of their conquests, and their focus on the tropical regions of Asia and Africa—which had previously remained outside of the imperial orbit of Europe—encouraged later scholars to identify the trend as "new" imperialism.

New imperialism appears remarkable in retrospect because it developed so abruptly. As late as the 1870s, most Western governments were staunchly opposed to the idea of conquering and administering new territories. In the 1860s, the Parliament of Great Britain, the world's premier imperial power, went so far as to debate a plan to abandon the nation's tiny colonies on the West African coast. The doctrine of free trade appeared to promise British manufacturers and merchants with everything they needed from the non-Western world, without the expense of conquest and administration. In the colonies with large white settler populations, like South Africa, Canada, and Australia, the British government was moving toward encouraging greater autonomy and independence.

However, such sentiments had limits, and European powers did not consider abandoning possessions that they viewed as crucial to national interests. French Algeria, British India,
and the Dutch Indies were tropical colonies that were seen as economically valuable to the metropole and whose non-European populations could not be trusted with self-government.

Attitudes toward imperialism changed rapidly in the 1870s due to a convergence of trends in Europe and in the non-Western world. One key development was the changing balance of power in Europe. The creation of the new nations of Italy and Germany in the 1860s and 1870s challenged the traditional supremacy of Great Britain and France in Africa and Asia. As new powers, Germany and Italy saw imperial expansion as a way to legitimize their status within Europe. France, whose defeat at the hands of Prussia in 1870 had opened the door to German unification, looked to foreign conquest as a way to offset the nation's humiliation. That desire to improve national status through imperial ventures inspired Italy to conquer the economically worthless regions of Libya and Somalia, while France became master of the arid Sahara region. The imperial fervor of those new powers frightened politicians and businessmen in Great Britain; they feared that foreign imperialism would jeopardize global free trade. Such fears became accentuated after an industrial depression arose in 1873. In the context of high unemployment and slow economic growth, workers and manufacturers throughout the industrial world pressured governments to secure new markets for industrial products and new sources of raw materials for domestic consumption.

In France, as in other Western nations, such issues took on important political consequences in an era of growing democratization. Imperial competition became a favorite subject of a nationalistic popular press, and the rise or fall of a political administration could be tied to the success or failure of imperial ventures. Imperial lobbying groups pressured politicians to undertake new colonial ventures in the name of national security.

Moreover, new imperialism proved more palatable to Western governments in the 1870s because the dangers and expenses of tropical empire had dropped dramatically since the 1860s. By mid-century, European medicine had developed prophylaxis for malaria, the most severe impediment to white rule in tropical Africa, and thus allowed explorers, soldiers, missionaries, and merchants to survive on the continent. The Second Industrial Revolution of the 1860s and 1870s also had developed a set of "tools of empire" that made imperial conquest less hazardous. While British troops had campaigned in India in the 1840s using weapons and artillery that were at times inferior to those of their opponents, by the 1880s, steamships, exploding artillery shells, machine guns, and the telegraph gave European forces an overwhelming advantage over Asian and African armies.

Foremost among the proponents of new imperialism were European and American missionaries, who expected colonialism to provide them with a safe forum for spreading their message. Christian missionaries had been active in Asia and Africa since the 16th century, but their work was limited by the influence of foreign, and often hostile rulers. Evangelical Protestant and Catholic groups expected that European rule in Africa and Asia would aid them in their efforts to gain converts, and many missionaries worked closely with European soldiers and administrators to prepare the conquest of new regions. It is worth noting that many missionaries championed the independence of African and Asian states and worked to stave off imperial encroachment. Overall, though, missionary organizations played an important role in pressuring European governments to conquer new territories, and many facilitated the expansion and administration of those areas.
Intellectually, new imperialism helped to eclipse the Western faith in the universal equality of humanity. That idea had developed during the European Enlightenment of the 18th century and had played an important role in the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The assault on that notion began with the writings of the British naturalist Charles Darwin. Though Darwin himself repudiated the racism of many of his followers, his ideas of human evolution and natural selection appealed to those Europeans seeking to justify the conquest and domination of non-Western peoples. Many "Social Darwinists" were paternalists like the British writer Rudyard Kipling, whose poem "The White Man's Burden" viewed colonialism as the responsibility of all "white" nations. Others saw imperial expansion as a part of a ruthless struggle between races. In such a view, European peoples had either to conquer or submit to the non-Western peoples of the world. By the era of new imperialism, Social Darwinism had become a widely accepted pseudoscience and was used to justify the conquest of African and Asian peoples.

Historians often point to the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 as a watershed in the history of new imperialism. At that conference, European powers assembled to discuss the appropriate rules for establishing their authority in Africa. However, the convocation of the congress reflected the fact that the "scramble for Africa" was already well under way. French military forces had been expanding up the Niger River since the late 1860s, while at the same time, British troops were waging war on independent states in northern and southern Africa. The congress was simply a recognition of the reality of future expansion into Africa and reflected an attempt to prevent imperial rivalry from leading to conflict in Europe.

New imperialism also had its roots in the non-Western world, where political and economic changes placed pressure on European strategic and commercial interests. In Egypt, a revolt against European influence in the internal affairs of the state seemed to threaten European investment in the Suez Canal and led to a British invasion in 1881. In West Africa, competition between African and European merchants on the Niger River inspired the British Royal Navy to intervene in the name of free trade. In many regions of tropical Africa and Asia, contact with the expanding industrial economy created instability that threatened to disrupt Europe's access to foreign markets. Some African and Asian leaders also looked to Europeans as powerful outsiders who could shore up their authority or protect them from hostile neighbors. New imperialism should therefore be seen as a process inspired in part by the pull of the non-Western world.

Despite the rising enthusiasm for imperialism expressed in many Western nations, there were always significant forces working against imperial expansion. Some clergymen regarded wars of imperial expansion as immoral, while businessmen and taxpayers deplored the costs of empire and were skeptical of its potential profitability. Thus, the early stages of new imperialism were dominated by chartered companies. Those privately owned entities attracted investors by receiving official state support for their activities. They created private armies, made treaties with local rulers, and carved out independent territories in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. The British South Africa Company, the Royal Niger Company, the German East Africa Company, and the British North Borneo Company were only a few such organizations that undertook the conquest and administration of tropical colonies with official support but at no cost to the taxpayer. The most notorious of those private ventures was King Leopold II's Belgian Congo, funded by his private fortune. With no oversight from other European powers or the Belgian Parliament, Leopold used ruthless tactics to exploit a vast private estate in central
The use of chartered companies reflects the ambivalence of European governments toward imperial expansion as late as the 1890s. However, the era of such companies was short lived, as the costs of empire swamped the resources of the investors. Wars of conquest in Southern Africa overwhelmed the British South Africa Company, while the moderate profits of the eastern African trade threatened to bankrupt the German East Africa Company. In those and similar cases, European governments were forced to step in and take over for the private companies, which brought vast tropical regions under official imperial control.

In conclusion, new imperialism shaped the political geography of the modern world and hastened the diffusion of Western culture and technology around the globe. However, after virtually all of Africa and much of Asia had been conquered by 1900, Europeans lost interest in their empires. While the activities of explorers and soldiers in the empire had seemed like crucial issues of national importance in the 1890s, by 1903, imperial issues attracted little public attention. The new colonies were given autocratic administrations and were integrated into the economies of the metropole. As the wave of imperial enthusiasm passed, the new colonies received little investment or attention from Europe.


**Missions and Missionaries**

Christian missionaries have played an important, yet inconsistent, role in African history. While the goal of missions has remained the same—to convert indigenous peoples to Christianity, methods and attitudes have changed dramatically over time. During the last 1,500 years, the focus of missionary activity in Africa has shifted from the people in power to the average African. As a result, African Christianity has gone from a religion strongly supported by the state and serving its needs to one that addresses the concerns of the African people and finds its leaders from among them.

**Early Missionary Activity**

In the past the nature of missionary activity in Africa has reflected the social and political conditions in which Christianity developed. As the secular influences on Christianity changed, so did the way in which missionaries approached their task in Africa.

**Initial Successes.**

Africa's connection to Christianity began soon after the founding of the church. According to the Bible, Christian missionaries visited Africa before going to Italy. The apostle Philip is said to have converted a member of the royal court in Ethiopia. Although early Christian missionaries in Africa sought converts among ordinary folk, they worked mainly through traditional power structures. They hoped to convert rulers, who would then force their subjects to adopt the new religion. By the A. D. 500s, Christian missionaries had succeeded in bringing their faith to Egypt, Meroë, Aksum, and Ethiopia. The monastic movement, based on the founding of isolated monasteries that served as centers of Christian faith and learning, developed in Egypt. However, the monastic movement had its earliest successes in Europe, where monasteries became the main
means of missionary activity. By the time monastic Christianity finally reached sub-Saharan Africa, it had become entangled in European politics and served the interests of commercial expansion as well as of faith. With the age of European exploration, missionary activity became closely linked with conquest.

**The Age of Exploration.**
Beginning in the early 1400s, European explorers carried European culture, including Christianity, to the farthest points on the globe. The primary motives for these voyages of discovery were financial profit and the creation of large empires. The church saw the voyages as an opportunity to bring Christianity to new converts in distant lands. Thus, priests and monks often accompanied explorers and conquerors as they sailed to America, Africa, and Asia.

The goals of conquest and accumulating riches clashed with the ideals of Christianity. However, by this time the success of the church was tied directly to the success of the kingdoms and rulers that embraced and supported the faith. To bring the faith to people in other lands, missionaries had to cooperate in the conquest of those lands. A church decree called the Padroado, issued by Pope Nicholas V in 1455, was typical of the type of arrangement the church made with the state. The Page 82 Padroado authorized Portugal to seize land and enslave indigenous peoples wherever Portuguese authority extended.

Conquest was not always necessary to spread Christianity. In Ethiopia and other early centers of African Christianity, the rulers willingly embraced the new faith. Notable among them was King Afonso I of the kingdom of KONGO in central Africa. Afonso made his subjects adopt Christianity, and by 1491 his kingdom had been converted. European nations recognized Kongo as a Christian kingdom, and Kongo officials who visited Lisbon and Rome received warm welcomes.

Despite the acceptance of Christianity in Kongo and a few other African kingdoms, the popularity of the faith eventually declined in many of those states. Local peoples went back to their traditional beliefs and abandoned Christianity, which survived only among foreigners and their agents and slaves. By the 1800s, Christianity had vanished almost without a trace in many places.

**The Influence of Slavery.**
The decline of Christianity in much of Africa was a sign of the weakness of missionary policies. By the late 1700s, most local Africans saw missions as centers of unwanted foreign influence. Missionaries became associated with the merchants and soldiers who killed and enslaved Africans. As it turned out, however, the slave trade provided the motivation for a new, more successful missionary effort in Africa.

In 1807 Great Britain outlawed the slave trade and soon afterward began a campaign to end the trade among other nations. To influence public opinion, antislavery forces recruited former slaves to tell their stories. Besides generating antislavery sentiment among Europeans, such activities also marked the beginning of African participation in the missionary enterprise. It became clear that this participation would play a vital role in missionary success in Africa. Christianity would come to Africa only through indigenous involvement.

**Missionary Efforts After 1800**
Shortly after 1800 various new missionary orders were founded that would lead the effort in Africa. Both Catholics and Protestants adjusted their policies with the aim of producing an indigenous clergy. In this way, members of local populations, rather than Europeans, would be responsible for spreading Christianity in Africa.

**Toward an Indigenous Clergy.**

In 1845 Pope Gregory XVI issued a decree that called for establishing overseas seminaries, or religious schools, to train indigenous clergy in lands conquered by European Catholic powers. At the same time, Protestant missionaries began following a similar path, with missionary organizations such as the Church Missionary Society seeking to enlist African clergy to lead Africans.

In 1861 Henry Venn, a leader of the Church Missionary Society, transferred nine parishes in Sierra Leone to indigenous clergy. Many more would come under African control over the next several years. These events occurred at the same time as the formation of the Niger Mission in Nigeria, headed by Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first African bishop. Such changes marked a turning point for African Christianity, and Crowther played a crucial role in the African missionary enterprise.

Crowther translated the Bible into his native Yoruba language, the first time the Scriptures appeared in an African tongue. He also produced works in the Igbo, Hausa, and Nupe languages. These efforts stimulated Christian missionaries to compile the first written versions of many African languages.

The Bibles, prayer books, dictionaries, and other works that appeared in African languages transformed the spread of Christianity and secular knowledge in Africa. With access to written languages, Africans began to master their own history, and materials written in African languages gave European readers a chance to understand the African point of view. As missionaries and church authorities came to see the importance of an indigenous clergy and African-language scriptures, Africans took a larger role in planning and carrying out missionary policy.

During the late 1800s, a number of independent African churches and movements emerged, many led by charismatic figures such as William Wadé Harris of Ivory Coast. These churches reinterpreted European Christianity in an African environment and redirected growing social unrest into religious channels. Harris and other African prophets also interpreted political events in religious terms, such as seeing the outbreak of World War I as a sign that the end of the world was near.

Most of the new churches and prophetic movements split off from Protestant missions; few developed in areas dominated by Catholic missions. Because Protestant missionaries preached that only those who could read the Bible themselves could be converted, a steady stream of Africans left the church to begin their own sects. The approach of Catholic missionaries was different. They baptized all who entered the church. African Catholics thus had less compelling reasons to leave the church than African Protestants.

**Land Ownership**

In modern Africa conflicting views about land ownership cause legal, political, and economic problems. Traditional African ideas concerning the use, inheritance, and disposal of land differ sharply from those of Western nations. During the colonial era, European powers usually imposed their own ideas about ownership on their African territories, often ignoring indigenous practices. The resulting confusion about land use and ownership has had serious consequences for African nations.

**Systems of Land Ownership.**

The pre-colonial system of land ownership in Africa was, in general, communal rather than individual. Most goods were produced for use by the group and not for sale. For this reason it was important for all members of the society to have access to the land, and different groups could hold different rights to a single plot of land. For example, a chief might claim political rights over a district. At the same time, a local priest might have the right to perform rituals there, while farmers and herders might exercise the right to plant crops or graze livestock on the land.

By contrast, the system of land ownership brought to Africa by the European powers was based on the idea of land as personal property. Under this system individuals possess exclusive control over land, and landowners have the absolute right to use and dispose of their land. This view of land ownership is part of capitalism.

**Impact of Colonialism.**

During the colonial era, Europeans believed that private ownership of land was necessary to bring about modernization and development in Africa. They considered any land that was not permanently occupied or exploited to be available for European settlement or seizure. Areas that had once served as seasonal pasture-land, reserves for hunting or gathering, or the inheritance of a particular family group were given to European settlers. The seizure of communal lands disrupted traditional economies. Many farmers and herders were forced to work as tenant farmers or laborers on land taken by Europeans. Others moved to less desirable plots or went to the cities to look for work.

**Postcolonial Policies.**

After independence much of the property held by Europeans was abandoned or seized by the government. This often led to confusion about who had the right to use the land. A common solution was for the state to nationalize the property, divide it up, and distribute it to new owners. However, these programs often split the land into plots too small to support their owners, and many small farmers ended up selling out to larger ones. In some instances government leaders gave state-owned land to relatives or political supporters. No matter how the land was distributed, the meaning of "ownership" remained unclear. Some people continued to follow indigenous traditions of land use, while others followed the European pattern.

Modern Africa faces a situation in which several forms of land ownership exist side-by-side. However, in most countries the law is only slowly changing to define land rights. Policies relating to land ownership remain a confusing mix of traditional and capitalist approaches. In recent years African policy makers have studied ways to work with these different systems to provide greater access to land for those who need it while still protecting the rights of private property owners.