

## Case Studies in Brief

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### Ghana: What were the aims of British indirect rule?

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Beginning in 1850, the southern region of present-day Ghana came under British colonial rule. It was known as the Gold Coast colony. British colonial officials governed Ghana by a policy of indirect rule, making traditional leaders the administrators of colonial rule. They argued that this system respected traditional political structures while exposing African leaders to the “civilizing” influence of European cultural and political values. This policy came under sharp criticism from educated Africans in the colony. They criticized indirect rule because it limited the role of public participation by making traditional leaders accountable to colonial authorities, rather than to their people. Africans in the Gold Coast gained their independence from Britain in 1957.

### Algeria: What were the effects of assimilation?

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The French invaded Algeria in 1830. Thereafter, they considered their colony of Algeria to be a province of mainland France. French leaders viewed their culture as superior and instituted policies to assimilate Algerians—for example, by encouraging people to speak French, limiting the influence of Islam, and educating Algerians about French history, literature, and political ideas. Many Algerians worked hard to protect or regain aspects of their culture that came under attack from French colonialism. Algerians gained their independence from France in 1962, after a long and bloody war for independence.

### Democratic Republic of the Congo: How did colonialism affect people in the Congo?

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The region that is today the Democratic Republic of the Congo became the personal possession of King Leopold II of Belgium after the Berlin Conference in 1885. Leopold’s top priority was to make money from his colonial venture, and the colony became infamous for its harsh abuse of the African population. Fierce international criticism of this brutality forced Leopold to cede control to Belgium in 1908. The Belgians believed that their colonial subjects were happy with colonial rule, and considered the Belgian Congo to be a “model colony.” But Africans knew well the abuse, violence, and humiliation they suffered as a result of the colonial system. Africans in the Congo gained their independence from Belgium in 1960.

### Kenya: Who had the right to land in Kenya and why?

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Kenya became a British colonial possession in 1895. Kenyan experiences of colonialism were colored by the region’s role as a “settler colony” (a colony where large numbers of Europeans came to live and make their fortunes). Land was a controversial issue during the colonial period, and a major source of African frustration with the colonial system. The British claimed that European control of Kenya’s best land was necessary for the economic development of the colony. For Africans in Kenya, the issue of land was a simple one—as the original inhabitants of the region, they should have the right to all lands in Kenya. In the early 1950s, African frustration sparked a violent uprising called the Mau Mau revolt. Kenyans gained their independence from Britain in 1963.

## Ghana: What were the aims of British indirect rule?

*Indirect rule was the method the British used to govern their African colonies, giving African traditional leaders new roles as colonial administrators. (Traditional leaders are rulers holding power by African laws or customs.) In this case study, you will explore the political effects of colonialism, and the ways in which traditional leaders, educated elites, and British colonial officials competed for political authority. As you read, consider the power held by each of these groups. Why did they hold positions of power? What sort of authority did they have? In what ways was their authority limited?*

Ghana is a country on the coast of West Africa with a long history of international trade. Africans in the northern part of present-day Ghana had strong connections to North Africa through trade, and were heavily influenced by Islam. Coastal traders in the south established relationships with Europeans in the fifteenth century, first trading gold and ivory, and later becoming involved in the Atlantic slave trade. Africans held a great deal of power in these relationships. For example, groups on the coast refused to allow Europeans to travel inland as a way of maintaining control over trade.

### **How did Ghana become a British colony?**

By the early nineteenth century, Britain had become the dominant trading power in the region. In 1850, the British formalized their control of the coastal region—which it called the Gold Coast—by making it a colonial protectorate. The British wanted to protect their merchants from the Asante, a powerful African state that controlled the land to the north and had dominated trade in the region for centuries.

In the Gold Coast, the British introduced new techniques and procedures to increase trade and maximize their control. Africans continued to produce palm oil, mine gold (now in mines controlled by foreign companies), and collect ivory for export, but the railroad and system of roads built by the British made this trade more efficient. In the early twentieth century, the British also encouraged farmers to grow cocoa. Cocoa quickly became one of the colony's top exports. Farmers could grow cocoa alongside their food crops, and the growth in trade led to an increase in the standard of living for many Africans. Unlike other colonies, Africans in the Gold Coast often worked for themselves or for other Africans.



The British appointed a British governor to rule the colony, but largely depended on indirect rule, that is, governing through African traditional leaders who took new roles as colonial administrators. In 1874, the British made the Gold Coast an official colony. Colonial officials established a legislative council—including appointed African representatives starting in 1889, and elected African representatives beginning in 1925—but this body could only advise the governor.

African resistance—particularly by the Asante—slowed British influence in the region. At times, the British considered withdrawing entirely from the Gold Coast because of the animosity of the Asante. Until 1901, the

colony only consisted of the coastal region due to fierce opposition from the Asante. Ashantiland (the region controlled by the Asante). The central and northern regions came under British control by 1946, after numerous British military campaigns against the Asante.

Asante aggression encouraged many coastal groups to ally with the British in the nineteenth century, which helped the British control the coast. Since these groups had allied with the British voluntarily, many of their leaders believed they had the right to some degree of independence.

### ***What was life like in the colony?***

Centuries of contact with Europeans had created a class of merchants, traditional leaders, and professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and teachers who were familiar with Western culture and politics. Many were frustrated that profits from trade now belonged to the British and that Africans had little power in government.

Although traditional leaders had some authority, ultimate power was held by the British

governor. The system of indirect rule meant that there was no political role for African professionals. The British argued that indirect rule made further African representation in government unnecessary because the people's interests were represented by their traditional leaders. Professionals voiced their opposition to this system through petitions, newspaper articles, and appeals to the British government.

### ***How did people in the Gold Coast resist colonialism?***

As the number of educated Africans grew in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the call for greater African political power mounted. Africans formed a number of political parties, including the National Congress of British West Africa, which brought together representatives from Britain's West African colonies—the Gold Coast, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Gambia. Africans in the cities also formed religious, ethnic, and literary societies, and published newspapers that became important places for political debate.

The political organizations of the Gold Coast were among the first in colonial Africa,



Meeting of the Gold Coast legislative assembly, 1957. Unlike Africans in many other colonies, Africans in the Gold Coast were able to participate in government prior to independence.

The National Archives, United Kingdom. CO 1069-53-76.

but only a minority of Africans were involved. Most people in the Gold Coast were small farmers or laborers who wanted their traditional leaders to maintain authority. And although traditional leaders were accountable to colonial officials, they also organized resistance to protect the interests of their people. For example, in 1937, traditional leaders organized a boycott of the foreign-owned cocoa companies. For seven months, farmers refused to sell their cocoa, crippling the Gold Coast's economy.

The structure of the colonial government put traditional leaders and educated Africans in competition with each other for political power. But in the 1930s and 1940s, leaders on both sides began to recognize their common interests. They forged relationships to form a more united front to call for reform and, eventually, independence from Britain.

### ***How did Ghanaians gain their independence?***

World War II proved to be a turning point for colonialism in the Gold Coast. African soldiers returned from the battlefield to face unemployment and economic hardship at home. Many joined with educated Africans in the cities to put pressure on the colonial government. In 1947, African leaders formed a political party called the United Gold Coast Congress (UGCC) to call for self-government. The UGCC was a moderate nationalist group made up of traditional leaders, wealthy businessmen, and professionals. It advocated for gradual change through political reform.

But many Africans were not willing to wait for gradual change. Economic challenges sparked boycotts and riots in a number of towns in early 1948. In 1949, a political leader named Kwame Nkrumah split from the UGCC to form the Convention People's Party (CPP), which called for immediate self-government. Nkrumah's message held broad appeal for workers, farmers, and other Ghanaians. In 1950, the CPP initiated a number of strikes and demonstrations, some of which turned violent.

The colonial authorities arrested Nkrumah, but the following year he was elected to the legislative council. The governor released Nkrumah from jail and allowed him to form a government as "leader of government business" (a position similar to prime minister). The British authorities still controlled many aspects of the Gold Coast, including defense, finance, and justice. Over the next five years, political reform gradually led to a new government in which power was held by elected Africans.

At the same time, political opposition to the CPP mounted. Other African political parties opposed the strong centralized government being created and controlled by the CPP. In 1956, the British called for another election to ensure that the CPP still had a majority of support. With 57 percent of the vote, the CPP won the election. On March 6, 1957, the Gold Coast became the independent state of Ghana, with Kwame Nkrumah as its first prime minister.



Mr. Seth Kobla Anthony (right), Ghana's first representative to the United Nations, shakes hands with UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld after having presented his credentials to the UN. Ghana became a member of the UN on March 8, 1957, two days after independence.

UN Photo # 88452.

## From the Historical Record

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**Overview:** *According to African laws, traditional leaders in the Gold Coast needed the consent of the people to govern; they did not hold their positions by “right” like a European king or queen. African laws also allowed a community to destool, or unseat, a traditional leader who was not meeting the community’s expectations.*

*British colonial officials governed Ghana by a policy of indirect rule, making traditional leaders the administrators of colonial rule. Colonialism put limits on the power of traditional leaders, who now had to meet the demands of colonial authorities.*

*The following sources are from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and include excerpts from African newspapers, as well as reports and speeches by British colonial officials.*

### Perspectives of Colonial Officials

**Background:** *The British believed that making traditional leaders (called “stools”) the face of the colonial system would minimize resistance among the population. They argued that this system respected traditional political structures while exposing African leaders to the “civilizing” influence of European cultural and political values. Colonial officials criticized educated Africans, arguing that their calls for more political power weakened the power of traditional leaders.*

*William Ormsby-Gore, British under-secretary of state for the colonies, in a report to Parliament about his visit to West Africa in 1926*

“It is the policy of the Government, as far as the general administration of the Colony is concerned, to rule as far as possible through these tribal organisations and not to allow these to be undermined and overthrown by the destructive influences caused by the spread of alien civilization. Nevertheless there is no doubt that at the present time there is a considerable decay in the power, influence and prestige of the Head Chiefs and the tribal

authority. This is in part attributed to the fact that Head Chiefs no longer have the power of life and death, nor are they able to check disobedience by force of arms. Many are also in financial difficulties owing to the absence of native treasuries or any secured source of income. Trouble is often caused by the tendency of the younger men with a veneer of education to disrespect the conservatism of some of the Chiefs and Councils....

“Apart from the fact that it has always been the policy of Government to rule through the tribal organisation, there is, in fact, no alternative course at the present stage in the development of the country. The people are closely attached to their stools with the exception of a few people in the coast towns, and are in no way ready for a change.”

*Hugh Charles Clifford, British governor of the Gold Coast, as quoted in The Gold Coast Independent, November 30, 1918*

“They [traditional rulers] spend their lives among the people, whose interests they are selected to represent; they are in close and daily touch with them; and they have individually been elected by their...[fellow]...tribesmen as the principal directors of their affairs.”

*James Marshall, judge of the Supreme Court of the Gold Coast Colony, in 1886, quoted in The Gold Coast Independent, December 2, 1922*

“[W]henever [British] rule is carried out and enforced according to European ideas, without consideration of the ideas equally ancient and equally deep rooted, which pervade the native mind, it may break and destroy, but without securing any real improvement. My own experience of the West Coast of Africa is that that Government has for the time succeeded best with natives, which has treated them with consideration for their native laws, habits and customs, instead of ordering all these to be suppressed as nonsense, and insisting on the wondering negro at once submitting to the British Constitution, and adopting our ideas of life and civilization....

“The natives of the Gold Coast and West Africa have a system of laws and customs which it would be better to guide, modify, and amend, rather than to destroy by ordinances and force. So they have their Chiefs and Court forms and etiquette, their own customs and mode of living which will not be improved by ridicule or forced abolition.”

*Frederick Gordon Guggisberg, governor of the Gold Coast, 1927*

**Note:** In 1925, a new constitution allowed Africans to elect nine representatives to the Gold Coast legislative council. Six of these representatives would be traditional leaders, and they would be elected by provincial councils made up of the top traditional leaders in each region.

“It was at the preservation of native institutions that I aimed when devising what is the outstanding feature of the new Constitution: the Provincial Councils. These Provincial Councils are really the breakwaters, defending our native constitutions, institutions, and customs against the disintegrating waves of Western civilization. They are the chief means by which the nationality of the Africans of the Gold Coast will be built up out of many scattered tribes; for it must be remembered that, although each Council functions for its own Province, yet arrangements have been made by which these Councils can meet and discuss many questions....

“The new Constitution is far more solidly based on the institutions which the people of this country have found best suited to them, and far more likely to develop into something bigger and wider than any mushroom constitution based on the ballot-box and the eloquence of politicians over whom the people have no control except at election time.”

## Perspectives of Africans

**Background:** Africans criticized indirect rule because it limited the role of public participation by making traditional leaders accountable to colonial authorities, rather than to their people. They claimed that the British

*used traditional leaders to control the population and suppress other forms of political participation.*

*From an article in The Gold Coast Leader, July 12, 1902*

“Sir Matthew [governor of the Gold Coast] is reported to have stated, among other remarks, to the assembled kings and Chiefs, during his visit: ‘The Resident tells me that the Golden Stool has to do with your religion and I am not going to interfere with your religion, so long as nothing inhuman or immoral is done under its sanction. I do not propose to interfere with your native custom and native administration where these do no harm. I am not going to do away with native chiefs or the native way of choosing them, but, of course, I will allow no one to sit on a stool if I know him to be disloyal, and I will remove any one from his stool who behaves badly to the Government. So long as they behave well, I will support the power of the native chiefs who have been duly elected in accordance with native custom and whose election I have recognized on the recommendation of the Resident.’...

“[W]e are aware that the present Ashanti kings and chiefs are the creations of the Government, although they were no doubt enstooled ‘in accordance with native custom.’ ‘Elected in accordance with native custom,’ they certainly were not, for except in a very few instances, they are all Government nominees; men who sided with, acted as spies, informants...for the Government, men in short who are traitors to their King....”

*“An Open Letter to his Excellency Brigadier-General F.G. Guggisberg,” The Gold Coast Leader, December 17, 1921*

“We fear, Sir, that you have no real regard for public opinion.... Under the guise of supporting Native Institutions you merely support those Chiefs who can lend themselves as tools in carrying out your pet schemes. And you know we speak the truth....

“We really think that the time has come for Government to pay heed to public opinion, and until there is some indication that way we

shall continue to protest in the name of a long-suffering public.”

*“Editorial Notes,” The Gold Coast Leader, March 26, 1921*

“The policy of Indirect Rule which this establishment was set up to pursue has some suspicious features about it and we have regarded it as our duty to put our people on their guard.... We think the best definition of Indirect Rule is, a system by which an alien government is enabled to place a Native State in the hollow of its hands and in such a way that it has only to pull the wires to start a Chief and his people dancing to its piping; it is a system by which the political officer can drive the wedge of divide-and-rule through any tendency on the part of the people to come together to develop political ideals.”

*“Editorial Notes,” The Gold Coast Leader, March 26, 1921*

“Indirect Rule may also turn out to be a disintegrating force in the working of our indigenous institutions. We know from experience that one of the objects of Indirect Rule is to suppress the educated African who is too articulate to be convenient to British repressive policy, and to draw a line between him and his uneducated brother. Fortunately... [t]hose of our Rulers who fully realize the responsibility of their position and the source of their power know also that the educated Natives are as much their children as the uneducated.”

*Article in The Gold Coast Leader, May 22, 1926*

“The issue is one of life and death with us, for if you perpetuate the possibility of the return of the dummies [chiefs appointed by colonial authorities] to the Legislature, our national independence is gone for ever. Probably that is what has been aimed at all the time, to so gag the people that while they have a machinery ostensibly of an advanced type, yet to be truly and really voiceless in the affairs of their own country.”

*“Letter from a Gold Coast NCO” [noncommissioned officer] stationed in India during World War II, September 4, 1945*

“We have to struggle for liberty; at home the suppression is great.”

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

“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!”

## Democratic Republic of the Congo: How did colonialism affect people in the Congo?

*In this case study, you will explore the colonial experiences of people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and assess interpretations of this history by Belgian and Congolese leaders. As you read, consider why the Belgian king and people in the Congo had very different views of the effects of colonialism. Why are these differences significant?*

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), located in Central Africa, is the second largest country in Africa and one of the most geographically diverse and mineral-rich countries in the world.

### **How did the Congo become a Belgian colony?**

For more than seventy-five years, the region of the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo was occupied and controlled by Europeans—first by King Leopold II of Belgium, and then by the Belgian government. Leopold's personal control and the role of European companies in governing the Congo made colonialism there uniquely brutal. Europe recognized King Leopold's claims to the region at the Berlin Conference in 1885. Belgium's government was not interested in administering a colony, so the Congo Free State became the king's personal landholding.

Leopold's top priority was to make money from his colonial venture. Initially, colonial officials constructed an economy based on the export of rubber and ivory to Europe. The economy was controlled by Leopold, his family, and a few powerful companies that Leopold allowed to operate in the Congo. Despite Leopold's claim that he was there on a humanitarian crusade, the economy of the colony was based on the forced labor of Africans, who were required to meet daily quotas of rubber and ivory collection. When people did not collect enough rubber, colonial and company officials inflicted brutal punishments. Rape, mutilation, and murder were commonplace.

In 1901 alone, six thousand tons of rubber left the colony. Much of the vast wealth taken from the Congo was put toward public works and development in Belgium. At the same time, as many as ten million Congolese died in the first two decades of colonialism, largely as a result of colonial abuses.



As the international community became aware of the abuses of the Congo's colonial system under King Leopold, public pressure forced Leopold to cede the Congo to the Belgian government, which reluctantly took control in 1908.

### **What was life like in the colony?**

The Congo Free State was more than seventy-six times the size of Belgium. Its population was diverse, with approximately 250 different ethnic groups. The new borders cut through a number of existing African states, leaving groups such as the Kongo, Ngbandi, and Tutsi divided by colonial boundaries.

Laws prevented Africans from travelling freely across provincial borders and practicing non-European religions. Africans were



also subjected to physical punishment for offenses as minor as disrespecting a European.

Africans in the rural areas were forced to collect ivory and rubber, or grow crops such as cotton, coffee, and tea for export. Discoveries of precious metals and minerals such as cobalt, gold, copper, and diamonds led to the further extraction of Congo's resources for European gain. Many Africans were recruited to work in the mines and labored under harsh working conditions. Colonial officials forced others to work for the Force Publique, a police force that maintained order by intimidating and abusing local populations. Members of this force were subject to poor pay, brutal working and living conditions, and violent abuse at the hands of their Belgian officers.

By 1958, Europeans had 42 percent of the colony's income, with a population of just 110,000, while 13.5 million Congolese controlled the remaining 58 percent. The colony—renamed the Belgian Congo in 1908—was racially segregated and highly unequal. While the government provided some social services and primary education for many Africans, the 99 percent of the population that was black could not be treated in white hospitals, live in neighborhoods reserved for white people, or travel freely throughout the colony. Because of colonial restrictions, there were no African doctors or government administrators and few African professionals in other fields. Only seventeen Congolese people had a university degree at the time of Congo's independence in 1960.



King Leopold II's rule in the Congo was characterized by extreme brutality. These images from the early twentieth century show Africans who had been mutilated by colonial officials for not fulfilling their daily quotas of ivory or rubber collection. While many European leaders claimed that the abuses in the Congo were far worse than any other colony, colonialism by its very nature was violent and oppressive.

### ***How did people in the Congo resist colonialism?***

The Congo had been a key location in the Atlantic slave trade. King Leopold's officials found a region still weakened from the upheavals of that period when they arrived. Although this initially made it difficult for some Congolese societies to resist, people found a variety of ways to stand up to Leopold's rule.

In many cases it was ordinary people who were on the frontlines of resistance. While some groups organized armed resistance to the colonial system, more common strategies included desertion (leaving jobs because of low wages or brutal conditions), migration (avoiding tax collectors by crossing into neighboring colonies), or withdrawing to remote regions that were not yet under colonial control. Resistance to colonialism in the rural areas remained strong throughout the colonial period, and would provide an important boost to nationalist groups later in the century.

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Used with permission.



Wikimedia Commons. Archief van het Koninklijk Paleis, Brussels.

In this photograph, King Albert I and Queen Elisabeth of Belgium visit Léopoldville (named for King Leopold II), the capital of the Belgian Congo, in 1928. While many European leaders argued that colonialism brought great benefits to people in Africa, many Africans faced poverty, abuse, and discrimination under the colonial system.

### ***How did Congolese people gain their independence?***

Although there had been resistance to colonialism since the 1800s, it was not until the 1950s that the various social and ethnic groups in the Congo began to unite and call for independence. There were a number of factors at the root of this, including increasing unrest among the Congo's large working class, colonial reforms that allowed Africans to form political parties, and growing international criticism of colonialism. In addition, African independence was gaining momentum across the continent. For example, in 1956, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia all gained their independence, and new independence movements formed in Angola and Guinea-Bissau. These events further convinced the Congolese that the time for independence was at hand.

Congolese leaders began to work with the Belgians to negotiate an independence

agreement. In 1959, popular protests shook the capital city Léopoldville for three days. By 1960, parts of the colony were in open rebellion. People had stopped paying taxes, following colonial laws, and recognizing the authority of colonial officials.

In most British and French colonies, colonial governments made some attempts to prepare Africans for self-rule, for example, by training African civil servants for new roles in government. But within one year of the first protests, the Belgians announced that they would grant independence to the Congo. After a hastily prepared election, the Belgians left. Six months later, in 1960, Patrice-Emery Lumumba became prime minister and Joseph Kasa-Vubu president of an independent Congo.

## From the Historical Record

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**Overview:** *The following speeches were given at the independence ceremonies in Léopoldville (capital of the Congo) on June 30, 1960—the date of the Congo’s independence. The first was given by King Baudouin, king of the Belgians from 1951 to 1993 and great grand-nephew of Leopold II. The second was given by Patrice Lumumba, newly-elected prime minister of the Congo. Lumumba’s speech shocked the Belgians for its harsh critique of Belgian colonialism. These two speeches display the contrasting ways in which Belgians and Africans viewed colonialism in the Congo.*

### King Baudouin’s Independence Day Speech

**Background:** *Like many European leaders during the colonial period, King Baudouin of Belgium believed that colonialism brought great benefits to people in Africa. The Belgians in particular believed that their colonial subjects were happy with colonial rule, and considered the Belgian Congo to be a “model colony.” In the following speech, he praises colonial officials for fulfilling King Leopold’s II mission to bring “civilization” to the Congo.*

“Mr. President,

“Sirs,

“The independence of the Congo is formed by the outcome of the work conceived by King Leopold II’s genius, undertaken by Him with tenacious and continuous courage with Belgium’s perseverance. It marks a decisive hour in the destinies not only of the Congo itself, but, I do not hesitate to affirm, of the whole of Africa.

“Over the course of 80 years, Belgium sent the best of its sons to our soil, first to deliver the basin of the Congo from the odious slave trafficking that decimated its populations; then to bring ethnic groups together with one another who, once enemies, learned to build the greatest of independent African States together; finally, to call for a happier life in the diverse regions of the Congo that you represent here, united by the same Parliament.

“In this historical moment, our thought to all must turn towards the pioneers of the African emancipation and towards those, who

after them made the Congo what it is today. They deserve both OUR admiration and YOUR recognition because it is those who, consecrate all of their efforts and even their lives to a great ideal, have brought you peace and have enriched your moral and material patrimony. They must never be forgotten, neither by Belgium nor by the Congo.

“When Leopold II undertook the great work that today finds its crowning, it is not presented to you in conquering but in civilizing....

“The Congo was equipped with railroads, roads, air and maritime routes that, in putting your populations in contact with one another, have favored their unity and have enlarged the country to the dimensions of the world.

“A medical service, which has taken several decades to be established, was patiently organized and has delivered you from sicknesses, however devastating.... Agriculture was improved and modernized. Large cities have been built and, across the whole country, living and hygienic conditions have translated into remarkable progress. Industrial enterprises have made the natural riches of the soil valuable. The expansion of economic activity has been considerable, also raising the well-being of your populations and equipping the Country with technicians indispensable to its development....

“The great movement of independence that sweeps all of Africa has found, nearby the Belgian powers, the biggest comprehension. Facing the unanimous desires of your populations, we have not hesitated to recognize your independence from this time on.

“It is up to you now, Sirs, to demonstrate that we were right to trust you....

“Your task is immense and you are the first to realize it. The principal dangers that threaten you are: the inexperience of the populations to govern themselves, tribal fighting, that formerly have done so much harm that, at no price, must not be begun again, the attraction that might exercise itself on a certain region of foreign powers, ready to profit from the least lapse....

“Do not fear turning yourselves towards us. We are ready to stay by your side to help you with our advice, to share with you technicians and functionaries [government employees] that you will need....

“Sirs,...

“Remain united, and you will know to show yourself deserving the great role that you have been called to play in the history of Africa.

“Congoleses people,

“My country and I recognize you with joy and emotion that the Congo attains this 30th of June 1960, in full agreement and friendship with Belgium, to independence and international sovereignty.

“May God protect the Congo!”

### Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba’s Independence Day Speech

**Background:** *African people knew well the suffering and struggle that characterized their experiences during the colonial period. Prime Minister Lumumba’s speech was fiercely critical of the effects of Belgian colonialism as he described the abuse, violence, and humiliation inherent in the colonial system.*

“Men and women of the Congo,

“Victorious fighters for independence, today victorious, I greet you in the name of the Congoleses Government. All of you, my friends, who have fought tirelessly at our sides, I ask you to make this June 30, 1960, an illustrious date that you will keep indelibly engraved in

your hearts, a date of significance of which you will teach to your children, so that they will make known to their sons and to their grandchildren the glorious history of our fight for liberty.

“For this independence of the Congo, even as it is celebrated today with Belgium, a friendly country with whom we deal as equal to equal, no Congoleses worthy of the name will ever be able to forget that it was by fighting that it has been won, a day-to-day fight, an ardent and idealistic fight, a fight in which we were spared neither privation nor suffering, and for which we gave our strength and our blood.

“We are proud of this struggle, of tears, of fire, and of blood, to the depths of our being, for it was a noble and just struggle, and indispensable to put an end to the humiliating slavery which was imposed upon us by force.

“This was our fate for eighty years of a colonial regime; our wounds are too fresh and too painful still for us to drive them from our memory. We have known harassing work, exacted in exchange for salaries which did not permit us to eat enough to drive away hunger, or to clothe ourselves, or to house ourselves decently, or to raise our children as creatures dear to us.

“We have known ironies, insults, blows that we endured morning, noon, and evening, because we are Negroes. Who will forget that to a black one said ‘tu,’ certainly not as to a friend, but because the more honorable ‘vous’ was reserved for whites alone?...

“We have seen that the law was not the same for a white and for a black, accommodating for the first, cruel and inhuman for the other....

“We have seen that in the towns there were magnificent houses for the whites and crumbling shanties for the blacks, that a black was not admitted in the motion-picture houses, in the restaurants, in the stores of the Europeans; that a black traveled in the holds, at the feet of the whites in their luxury cabins.

“Who will ever forget the massacres where so many of our brothers perished, the cells into which those who refused to submit to a regime of oppression and exploitation were thrown?”

“All that, my brothers, we have endured.

“But we, whom the vote of your elected representatives have given the right to direct our dear country, we who have suffered in our body and in our heart from colonial oppression, we tell you very loud, all that is henceforth ended.

“The Republic of the Congo has been proclaimed, and our country is now in the hands of its own children.

“Together, my brothers, my sisters, we are going to begin a new struggle, a sublime struggle, which will lead our country to peace, prosperity, and greatness....

“We are going to show the world what the black man can do when he works in freedom, and we are going to make of the Congo the center of the sun’s radiance for all of Africa.

“...And for all that, dear fellow countrymen, be sure that we will count not only on our enormous strength and immense riches but on the assistance of numerous foreign countries whose collaboration we will accept if it is offered freely and with no attempt to impose on us an alien culture of no matter what nature.

“In this domain, Belgium, at last accepting the flow of history, has not tried to oppose our independence and is ready to give us their aid and their friendship, and a treaty has just been signed between our two countries, equal and independent. On our side, while we stay vigilant, we shall respect our obligations, given freely.

“...Glory to the fighters for national liberation!

“Long live independence and African unity!

“Long live the independent and sovereign Congo!”

## Algeria: What were the effects of assimilation?

*Assimilation is the process by which one culture becomes more like another culture. In the case of Algeria, French leaders wanted to change Algeria's culture to make it more French—for example, by encouraging people to speak French, limiting the influence of Islam, and educating Algerians about French history, literature, and political ideas. In this case study, you will explore the effects of French attempts to assimilate Algerians into French society by examining social and cultural colonial policies. As you read, consider how colonial laws pushed Algerians to change their cultural practices. What effects did these changes have?*

Algeria is the largest country in Africa, and was a French colony for more than 130 years—much longer than the colonial experiences of most African countries. Like other countries in North Africa, Algeria has a long history of contact with Europe and the Middle East, and has a large Arab population. The vast majority of Algerians are Muslim.

### How did Algeria become a French colony?

The French army invaded Algeria in 1830. France colonized Algeria for a number of reasons, including a desire to increase trade, spread French culture and religion, and respond to rising diplomatic tensions with Algeria's ruler. Algeria's experience of colonialism was different from that of most African countries because of its relationship to France. Unlike other colonies, Algeria was administered as if it were a province of France, not a separate entity. The French viewed Algeria as an integral part of their country.

Algeria became a French “settler colony,” that is, a colony with a significant population of European settlers that wielded a great deal of political power. The majority of these settlers were small farmers who grew wheat or produced wine. Living in Algeria afforded them a status that they would not otherwise have had in mainland France. This was in large part due to the social divisions in Algerian society. By the late nineteenth century, colonial policies had turned Muslims into second-class citizens compared to European settlers. Laws defined Algerians as “subjects,” rather than citizens unless they agreed to stop following Islamic laws, and governed their behavior with harsh punishments for offenses such as speaking ill of the French government



or being rude to a colonial official. Informal segregation kept Algerians out of certain neighborhoods, beaches, and businesses. Racism and discrimination permeated society. By 1936, out of a population of more than 4.5 million, only 2,500 Muslim Algerians had chosen to become citizens.

### What was life like in the colony?

By the 1930s, inequalities between settlers and Algerians were stark. Colonial policies had divided up communal Algerian lands, allowing settlers to buy thousands of square miles of the best land where they could produce crops for export. Most Algerians, on the other hand, were subsistence farmers on small



Felix Jacques-Antoine Moulin, Archives nationales d'outre-mer, 8Fi427728.

This photograph from 1856-57 shows a French school for girls in Algiers, the capital of Algeria. French was the official language in Algeria throughout the colonial period. Many Algerians who could not speak French were excluded from jobs in government, international business, and other sectors.

plots of land. Poverty, hunger, and malnutrition were widespread. To escape destitution, many migrated to Algeria's towns and cities or worked for low wages on settler farms. Tens of thousands migrated to France.

The French believed their civilization was superior, and viewed Algerian Muslim culture as "primitive" and "medieval." Algerians were frustrated with the inequalities of the colonial system. They resented the ways in which their culture was belittled by colonial policies and settler racism, and were angry about their loss of land. Many refused to accept French rule. At the same time, after more than a century of French rule, some Algerians viewed themselves as French as well as Algerian.

European settlers used their political power to oppress the native population and to protect their own privileges. By 1954, there were nearly one million European settlers liv-

ing in Algeria, almost 80 percent of them born in Algeria. These settlers felt a deep attachment to Algeria as their homeland. Although French politicians often supported measures to assimilate Algerian Muslims and grant them citizenship, settlers opposed any attempts to increase rights for Muslims.

### ***How did people in Algeria resist colonialism?***

When French forces invaded Algeria in 1830, they ended the Ottoman Empire's three hundred year rule of the region. Although Algerians were pleased to be freed from Ottoman rule, they did not submit to another foreign power willingly. Algerian militants fought against the French for decades. Parts of Algeria, for example, the remote mountain regions and Sahara Desert in the south, did not come under French control until the twentieth century.

Algerian resistance was often linked to religion, with Islam playing an important role in organizing opposition. Islam also allowed Algerians to assert an identity and cultural pride outside of the colonial system. As a result, French repression of Algerian uprisings also aimed to limit the influence of Islam. For example, after a rebellion in 1871, the colonial authorities not only confiscated the land of those involved, but also passed decrees to label Arabic a foreign language, limit pilgrimages to Mecca, and monitor Islamic schools.

In the 1920s and 1930s, a number of Algerian nationalist groups formed in Algeria and France. By the mid-1940s, many Algerians were calling for independence by force if necessary. On May 8, 1945—the official date of the end of World War II in Europe—nationalist groups staged demonstrations across Algeria in order to draw attention to the link between the end of fascism and their desire to end colonialism. In the town of Sétif, the demonstrations turned into a violent revolt, and Algerians murdered more than one hundred settlers. The French response was swift and brutal. The colonial army and settler vigilante groups killed thousands of Algerians in return. It was clear that France was not budging from its position on Algeria's colonial status. The brutality of France's response drove many more Algerians to join the nationalist cause, and to see violence as the only way to win independence.

### ***What were the human costs of the Algerian War?***

In 1954, France lost a nine-year war against nation-

alists in Indochina (present-day Vietnam), and also faced uprisings in Tunisia and Morocco. This convinced Algerian nationalists that France could finally be challenged and defeated.

Led by the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), Algerians began one of the longest and most violent decolonization struggles of the twentieth century to gain their independence from France. The Algerian War, which began in 1954, pitted Algerian militants against the French army, white settlers, and Algerians recruited by the French.

The war dragged on for eight long years, with brutal violence on both sides. Although France granted independence to Tunisia and Morocco in 1956, it was not willing to give up Algeria. Conflict took place not only in Algeria, but also in France, particularly in Paris where many Algerians lived.

Algerian nationalists aimed to create a climate of fear and insecurity by targeting the European settler population in Algeria with bombs and other acts of terrorism. The most infamous conflict of the war raged from 1956



In 1956, the French government sent paratroopers into Algiers. The crackdown by paratroopers was brutal; entire neighborhoods of Algerian Muslims were taken in for interrogation or imprisonment. Paratroopers were known for using torture to extract information. This photograph shows French paratroopers standing guard near a crowd of FLN supporters.

French President Charles De Gaulle and the Six-Year War, National Security Council, Central Intelligence Agency, National Archives, 1960. Still image from video.



to 1957 in Algiers, Algeria's capital city. It began as a series of FLN attacks on city police and settler targets. The French military responded with mass torture, executions, and imprisonment. By the late 1950s, two million Algerians had been placed in detention camps, an effort by the French to isolate the FLN. The war took a devastating toll, with as many as one million Algerian casualties and tens of thousands of settlers and French soldiers dead.

### ***When did Algerians gain independence?***

The French were militarily successful, but their methods came under sharp international criticism. By the end of the 1950s, it was clear that France had lost the war for public opinion. In March 1962, the French government negotiated a ceasefire with the FLN.

Continued violence between settler groups and the FLN resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands more in the months after the ceasefire. Algeria gained its independence on July 3, 1962. Divisions in the FLN led to more violence in July and August. After elections in September, Ahmed Ben Bella became the first president of Algeria.



Algerians working for the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) carried out targeted bombings in public spaces popular among French settlers in the capital city of Algiers. This led to increased security by the French military and police. In this photograph, a French military officer is using a metal detector on an Algerian woman to check for explosives or other weapons.

French President Charles De Gaulle and the Six-Year War, National Security Council, Central Intelligence Agency, National Archives, 1960. Still image from video.

## From the Historical Record

**Overview:** *French policy aimed to assimilate Algerians into French society by pressuring them to speak French, follow French customs, and gradually participate in government and society as French citizens. But Algerians could only gain French citizenship if they agreed to disavow Islamic civil law, which governs matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. By 1936, out of a population of more than 4.5 million, only 2,500 Muslim Algerians had chosen to become citizens. The adoption of French culture meant losing aspects of Algerian culture. By 1954, some Algerian Muslims could no longer speak Arabic, and most could not read or write in Arabic. Although French leaders continued to claim Algeria as a part of France until 1960, many Algerians worked hard to protect or regain aspects of their culture that had come under attack from French colonialism.*

*The following sources express French and Algerian perspectives on assimilation. The sources are from a variety of French and Algerian scholars as well as political and religious leaders.*

### French Perspectives

**Background:** *During much of the colonial period, French leaders viewed their own culture as superior and believed that one of the goals of colonialism should be to spread French culture to France's colonial territories. Although leaders in France tried to ease some of their citizenship requirements for Algerians in the twentieth century, settlers in Algeria blocked any attempts to give more rights to Muslim Algerians.*

*Gabriel Hanotaux, French government official and historian, in his book L'Énergie française, 1902*

“Let me be clearly understood: this is not only a matter of a vast number of conquests; it is not even a matter of the increase of public and private wealth. It is a question of extending overseas to regions only yesterday barbarian the principles of a civilization of

which one of the oldest nations of the world has the right to be proud. It is a question of creating near us and far away from us so many new Frances; it is a question of protecting our language, our customs, our ideas, the French and Latin glory, in face of furious competition from other races, all marching along the same routes.”

*The Sénatus-Consulte (senate decree) of 14 July 1865 under France's Emperor Napoléon III*

“Art. 1. The Muslim native is French; nevertheless he shall continue to be governed under Muslim law....”

“He may, on application, be granted the rights of French citizenship; in this case, he shall be governed under the civil and political laws of France.”

*Governor-General of Algeria Jacques Soustelle, at the Algiers Assembly in February 1955*

“France is at home here...or rather, Algeria and all her inhabitants form an integral part of France, one and indivisible. All must know, here and elsewhere, that France will not leave Algeria any more than she will leave Provence and Brittany [two provinces in mainland France]. Whatever happens, the destiny of Algeria is French.”

*Max Lejeune, French Minister for the Armed Forces, March 15, 1956*

“We want the men in Algeria to be more free, more fraternal, more equal, that is to say more French. We must guarantee their political liberties and their social emancipation in the face of a few thousand rebels inspired by unemployment, the absence of hope, religious fanaticism, and not least the fit of nationalists who aspire to an unrealizable independence.”

*Emperor Napoléon III in a letter to Aimable Péligier, governor-general of Algeria, 1863*

“[W]e have not come to Algeria to oppress and exploit them, but to bring them the benefits of civilization....”

A. Arnaud and H. Méray, *Les Colonies françaises, organisation administrative, judiciaire, politique et financière, 1900*

“Assimilation, by giving the colonies institutions analogous to those of metropolitan France, little by little removes the distances which separate the diverse parts of French territory and finally realizes their intimate union....”

*French Prime Minister Léon Blum and Government Minister Maurice Violette’s proposal to give Muslims in Algeria the right to vote (the bill was never debated in the French Parliament because of strong opposition by Algerian settlers and their allies), December 30, 1936*

“[E]xperience has shown that it was impossible to continue treating as subjects without essential political rights French natives of Algeria who have fully assimilated French thought but who for family or religious reasons cannot give up their personal status. Algerian natives are French. It would be unjust to refuse henceforth the exercise of political rights to those among them who are the most cultured and who have furnished important guarantees of loyalty....

“But it seems impossible to invest all natives immediately with political rights. The massive majority are still far from desirous of using these rights and do not yet show themselves capable of doing so.... [C]ertain (hostile) influences would not fail to profit from the inexperience of this mass by overwhelming it with propaganda....

“[T]o our way of thinking, the right of suffrage [right to vote] is a reward either for services rendered or for intellectual achievement.”

## Algerian Perspectives

**Background:** *For most Algerians, French efforts to replace Algerian culture with French culture limited their opportunities in colonial society. For example, an Algerian who did not speak French could not hold certain jobs or communicate with French officials and settlers. The promotion of French culture created a divided society, with Algerians as second-class citizens. Educated Algerians who spoke French often had mixed feelings about French*

*culture. While many strongly opposed the restrictions of colonialism, they also appreciated French political ideas of liberty and human rights.*

*Sheikh Abdul-hamid Ben Badis, founder of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema, April 1936*

“[The Muslim Algerian nation]...has its culture, its traditions and its characteristics, good or bad like every other nation of the earth. And...we state that this Algerian nation is not France, cannot be France, and does not wish to be France.”

*Manifesto of 10 February, 1943 by Ferhat Abbas and colleagues, presented to Algeria’s Governor-General Marcel Peyrouton*

“Today the representatives of this Algeria, responding to the unanimous desire of their peoples, cannot escape the overriding duty of posing the problem of their future.

“So doing, they do not intend to disavow the French and Western culture that they have received, which remains dear to them. It is, on the contrary, by assimilating the moral and spiritual riches of Metropolitan France and the tradition of liberty of the French people that they find the strength and justification for their present action....

“[T]he Algerian people, in its desire for peace and liberty, raises its voice to denounce the colonial rule imposed on it, to recall its earlier protests and reclaim its rights to life....

“One need only examine the process of the colonization in Algeria to realize how the policy of assimilation, applied automatically to some and refused systematically to others, has reduced the Islamic society to the most complete servitude.

“[C]olonization...demands the simultaneous existence of two societies, one oppressing the other....

“There lies the deep and brutal drama to which colonization has given birth. The identification and formation of a single people under the ‘same paternal government’ has failed.... The European and Muslim blocs remain distinct from each other without

a common spirit. The one is strong in its privileges and social position; the other is threatened by the demographic problem of its creation and by the place in the sun that it claims and has been denied....”

*Recollections of Ahmed Ben Bella, first president of Algeria, 1964*

“I think I was fourteen when, at my *école primaire supérieure* [high school], an incident occurred which made a deep impression on me. One of my teachers...was French and an excellent teacher when he did not bore us with long digressions on the religions of the world.... Faith in his own religion made him believe that all others were bad and despicable.

“One day during school, he did not hesitate to go for his Moslem pupils, launching a violent attack on Islam. ‘Your prophet Mohammed,’ he shouted at the end of this diatribe, ‘was nothing but an imposter!’

“I stood up, pale with anger. ‘Sir,’ I told him, ‘it’s all very well for you to say that to children. We are too young and ignorant to argue with you, but you must understand that to us our religion is sacred. No, no, it is wrong of you to speak like this.’

“Of course...[the teacher]...blew up. It was terrible. I was punished, dismissed from the class, and even threatened with expulsion.... And it was a double scandal, as I well knew. Firstly, for a pupil to tick off a teacher was bad enough. But for a ‘native’ to stand up to a European made me a thousand times more guilty.”

*Recollections of Ahmed Ben Bella, first president of Algeria, 1964*

“It is very noticeable that, when the colonial learns a foreign language, he more or less adopts the mental attitudes which that language represents. If he still possesses and utilizes his own language, his experience will be enriched by this process. But if his thoughts are no longer inspired by his own language, and have to be conveyed in the speech of the conqueror, then it is clear that there is a real estrangement from his native tongue....

“Algerians such as myself who do not accept this estrangement from the Arabic language, nevertheless notice it in the deep disquiet which they experience when they try to give expression to their ideas in French, while at the same time they ‘feel’ in Arabic. A state of perpetual divorce is thus established in us, between the head and the heart, between the intellect and the emotions.”

## Kenya: Who had the right to land in Kenya and why?

*In this case study, you will explore the colonial practice of claiming African lands for white settlers. As you read, consider why the British instituted these land policies, and their effects on the lives of Africans in Kenya. For example, how did land confiscation limit the ways in which Africans could participate in the colonial economy? Why was this significant? In what other ways did land policies affect Africans?*

Kenya borders the Indian Ocean in East Africa. Mombasa, a Kenyan port city, was a key location in Indian Ocean trade for centuries. The coastal region had strong links with the Middle East and Asia, and the eastern slave trade devastated many communities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

### **How did Kenya become a British colony?**

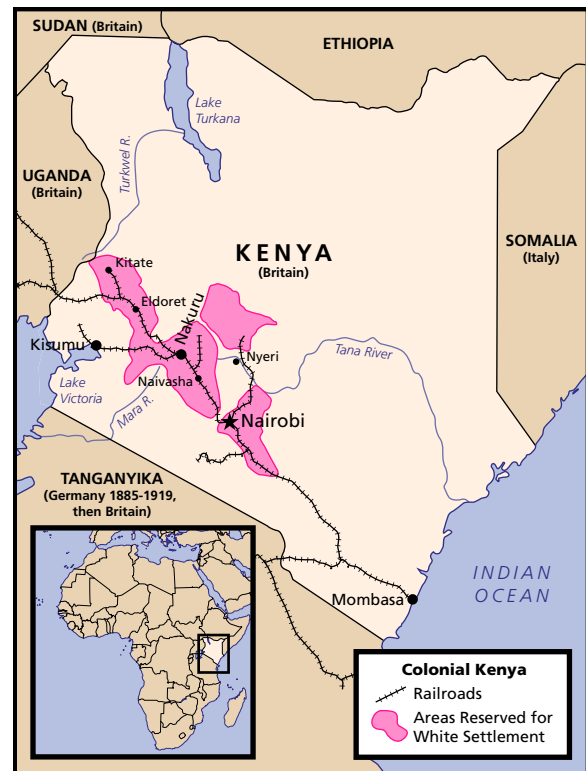
Kenya was under British control for sixty-eight years, but only became an official British colony in 1920. Initially, Britain was far more interested in what is today Uganda. In 1895, British officials created the East African Protectorate in the region separating Uganda from the coast—territory that is now the country of Kenya. They focused on building a railroad through Kenya to connect Uganda with the Indian Ocean for trade. When the railroad was completed in 1901, British authorities encouraged Europeans to live in Kenya as a way of generating demand for railroad travel.

The colonial economy in Kenya was based primarily on the production of cash crops such as tea and coffee for export. European settlers built homes and large plantations in Kenya's highlands—a temperate region in central Kenya with some of the most fertile land in all of East Africa.

### **What was life like in the colony?**

The region's role as a “settler colony” (a colony where large numbers of Europeans came to live and make their fortunes) shaped Africans' experiences of colonialism. In addition, there was a sizable population of Indians that settled in Kenya, many of them recruited by the British from their colony in India to build the railroad.

The colonial government passed laws that gave settlers special privileges and eliminated competition from Africans and Indians. For



example, laws prohibited African and Indian farmers from growing tea and coffee, and reserved much of the land in the highlands for Europeans. Laws also segregated housing, public bathrooms, hotels, restaurants, and other facilities. Discrimination created a society where political and economic privileges were based on race, with Europeans getting the most and Africans getting the least. European settlers would dominate Kenya's economy and government until the 1950s.

The British governed by indirect rule, which meant that they had local African leaders enforce colonial authority. Colonial policies—which levied heavy taxes and confiscated much of Kenya's most fertile lands—gave Africans little choice but to work for European settlers. Many became farm laborers on European plantations.



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-matpc-17617.

African farm laborers cut sisal on a plantation in Kenya in the 1930s. (Sisal is a plant that produces a stiff fiber used in rope and twine.) Because colonial land policies reserved large parts of the countryside for European farmers, many African farmers in Kenya became wage laborers on European plantations.

Access to land became an increasingly thorny issue as the colonial period progressed. In 1903, less than 600 European settlers had claimed 2,000 hectares (about 7.7 square miles) of land in the highlands. By 1938, the extent of land under European control had jumped to more than 2 million hectares (more than 7,700 square miles). But only 14 percent of this land was used for farming or ranching. The remaining 86 percent was controlled by European investors and lay unused. At the same time, the British government relocated many African groups to “reserves” in order to open land for European settlement. These reserves often lacked adequate water supplies, and were too small to support the people and livestock that lived there.

### ***How did people in Kenya resist colonialism?***

Initially, many African groups in Kenya violently resisted British colonialism. In particular, groups fought against British ef-

orts to levy taxes, conscript African men to be porters for the military, and force African communities off their lands. The British led a series of military campaigns to crush African resistance, and parts of the colony were under military control until the 1920s.

Africans began to form political organizations in the 1920s. African leaders lobbied the colonial government to improve conditions for Africans, and protested against tax increases and wage cuts. Land remained a central issue as Africans feared that, at any time, they could be removed from their homes to make way for the settler economy. African political groups were organized along ethnic lines, and most Africans did not see themselves as “Kenyan.”

African political organization made little headway, and African discontent began to boil over after World War II. In the early 1950s, a revolt began among the Kikuyu—Kenya’s largest ethnic group. Frustrated with colonial

inequalities and the inadequacy of land in the overcrowded reserves, some Kikuyu took aim at the colonial system and other Africans who were seen as colonial supporters. This uprising, which became known as the Mau Mau revolt, lasted for seven years.

Brutality was widespread on both sides. Mau Mau fighters often assassinated government supporters by setting them on fire. In some cases, fighters targeted the family members of Kikuyu who were loyal to the government, including women and children. The British government began punishing entire villages for the assassination of government supporters, sometimes burning whole villages to the ground. British intelligence officers rounded up Mau Mau suspects and tortured them for information. (In 2013, the British government agreed to pay compensation to more than five thousand people tortured during this period.) The Home Guard, a military force made up of Kikuyus loyal to the government, became notorious for raping and abusing villagers in the areas it patrolled.

As many as eleven thousand Africans were killed in the revolt, including more than one thousand executed by colonial officials for crimes including “consorting with” Mau Mau supporters. The government detained more than a hundred thousand Kikuyu, and many remained in detention long after the revolt was over.

### ***How did Kenyans gain their independence?***

The British were successful in ending the conflict, but it was clear that things could not return to the way they were before the Mau Mau revolt. Despite fierce opposition from Kenya’s European settlers, British officials acknowledged in 1960 that the time for independence had come.

British and Kenyan leaders participated in a series of negotiations about independence for the next three years. British officials worked to gain the support of moderate Africans in order to ensure that Kenya would maintain a close relationship with Britain after the transition to independence. For example, the British government purchased land in the highlands to redistribute to African farmers and offered to buy the land of any settler who wished to leave Kenya after independence. While British officials initially pushed for a political settlement that would guarantee European and Indian representation in Kenya’s new government, this provision was dropped in the final agreement. Kenya gained its independence on December 12, 1963, with Jomo Kenyatta as its first prime minister.

## From the Historical Record

**Overview:** *Land was a controversial issue during the colonial period in Kenya, and a major source of African frustration. The British claimed that European control of Kenya's land was necessary for the economic development of the colony. In fact, agricultural production actually increased after Kenya gained its independence. The sources below express British and African perspectives on the issue of land. The British sources are from government reports in 1951 and 1960. The Kenyan sources are from speeches and memoirs of African leaders and Mau Mau participants in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.*

### British Perspectives

**Background:** *The British argued that their top priority was to bring civilization and development to their colonial subjects in Kenya. They believed that British culture was inherently superior to African cultures. British leaders claimed that they knew best how to improve life in the colony, and used this to justify their claim to African lands.*

*F.D. Corfield, commissioner of the Kenyan colonial government, in "Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau," presented to the British Parliament, May 1960*

"For much of the 19th century Britain was doubtful whether it wanted an empire, but from 1885...imperialism became a creed, based on the perfectly legitimate belief that the British had a duty and an obligation to bring peace and civilization to Africa...."

"But slavery, disease and poverty could not be overcome until the country had been opened up, and to this end the Uganda railway was built. Although the long-term potentialities were there, the railway was at that time completely uneconomic, and Sir Charles Eliot [first commissioner for British East Africa], foreseeing a future where European farming would open up the vast empty spaces of fertile country and bring that economic prosperity and civilization which was essential if the disease-ridden and poverty-stricken tribes of East Africa were to advance, impressed upon the British Government the importance of encouraging European immigration...."

*F.D. Corfield, commissioner of the Kenyan colonial government, in "Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau," presented to the British Parliament, May 1960*

**Note:** *In 1932-33, British officials appointed a commission to investigate the land problem in Kenya.*

"[T]he commission's hope that its fair dealing would engender a better spirit proved illusory. Land had already become a political issue, but it did not become a burning issue until the return of Jomo Kenyatta [an anticolonial nationalist leader] to Kenya at the end of 1946. In the intervening years the old balance of nature had gone; the increasing population in the reserves had led to an ever-increasing pressure on the land, and Jomo Kenyatta and his associates saw all too clearly that the exploitation of land hunger was a sure way of furthering their own ends of uniting the Kikuyu against the Government in general, and the settled European farmers in particular. The juxtaposition of a crowded Kikuyu reserve and the more spacious settled areas of the White Highlands made this all too easy. The claims on the White Highlands became more insistent and were supported by statements made in public speeches which bore no relation to the truth. The Kikuyu agricultural labourers on the farm were asked—

"Why continue to work for a pittance on land which is yours by right and was stolen from you by those for whom you are now working?"

"The fact that much of the overcrowding in the reserves was the direct result of the spread of the civilizing influence of the Europeans, and the failure of the Kikuyu to adapt his agricultural methods to the needs of the land, was ignored...."



*Kenyan Governor Philip Mitchell, in Despatch No. 193 on Land and Population in East Africa, 1951*

“I now turn to the answer which is often given to the problem of local congestion on the land in Kenya, namely, to enlarge the size of the tribal lands by adding more land for cultivation by traditional methods under traditional systems of tenure. I hope to show that this supposed solution is illusory and would in practice be disastrous.... The land must, on no account, be simply thrown open for congestion and destruction by ignorant peasants following their ancestral agricultural practices and tenure....

“The failure of tribal agriculture to meet the needs of an expanding population is indeed the general experience. The cause of the failure lies in the inability of traditional African peasant agriculture to do more than maintain the population at an unsatisfactory subsistence level....

“[There is an argument]...that ‘Africa belongs to the African’ and that every African... is entitled as of right to own a bit of Africa, if necessary at the expense of people of other races, many of whom are at least as African—if generations of colonization mean anything—as the so-called ‘native’ races.... [T]he impossibility of reconciling the provision of land for all, in a rapidly expanding society, with the maintenance of a tolerable standard of living... [should]...be apparent....”

## Kenyan Perspectives

**Background:** *For Africans in Kenya, the issue of land was a simple one—as the original inhabitants of the region, they should have the sole right to lands in Kenya. African ties to the land were not only economic but also cultural, with sacred sites and familial gravesites in lands that were claimed by European settlers. Land was a top concern for most Africans in Kenya during the colonial period. The desire for African political representation in the colonial legislature was often linked to the legislature’s ability to repeal colonial land policies.*

*Jomo Kenyatta, nationalist leader, July 26, 1952*

“God said this is our land. Land which we are to flourish as a people. We are not worried that other races are here with us in our country, but we insist that we are the leaders here, and what we want we insist we get. We want our cattle to get fat on our land so that our children grow up in prosperity; we do not want that fat removed to feed others.... I think the Europeans here realize in their heart of hearts that our grievance is true.”

*Achieng Oneko, nationalist leader, July 26, 1952*

“The Europeans came here as our guests. This invitation has turned out to be false. They went for land and have established themselves in Kenya in such numbers that we suffered... We do not want to be led. We want our own African Government and we will get it soon. We want the country to begin with peace between us, the Government and the European, but that peace can only come if we get justice.”

*Excerpt from a letter from Mau Mau leaders to the colonial legislative council, 1954*

“We are fighting for our lands—the Kenya Highlands which was stolen from the Africans by the Crown through the Orders in Council 1915 of the Crown Lands Ordinance which evicted Africans from their lands at present occupied by the settlers or reserved for their future generations while landless Africans are starving of hunger or surviving on the same land as the cheap laborers to the settlers who were granted that land by the Crown.

“Before we come out of the forest, the British Government must grant Kenya full independence under the African leadership, and also hand over all the alienated lands to Kenya African Government which will redistribute the lands to its citizens.

“It we do not get land and freedom now, we will continue to fight till the Government yields or the last drop of blood of our last fighter is spilt.”

*Joseph Mwangi Kariuku, detained for seven years under suspicion of Mau Mau involvement, in his memoir Mau Mau Detainee, 1964*

“It is not really surprising that the movement should have started first among the Kikuyu. They more than any other tribe felt the despair brought by pressing economic poverty; they more than any other tribe by their proximity to...Nairobi [capital of Kenya] were subject to urban pressures and the great increase in understanding and frustration brought by education; they more than any other tribe daily saw the lands that had been taken from them producing rich fruits for Europeans.”

*Karari Njama, Mau Mau participant, in his memoir Mau Mau from Within, 1966*

“It was 26 July 1952 and I sat in the Nyeri Showgrounds packed in with a crowd of over 30,000 people. The Kenya African Union was holding a rally and it was presided over by Jomo Kenyatta. He talked first of LAND. In the Kikuyu country, nearly half of the people are

landless and have an earnest desire to acquire land so that they can have something to live on. Kenyatta pointed out that there was a lot of land lying idly in the country and only the wild game enjoy that, while Africans are starving of hunger. The White Highland, he went on, together with the forest reserves which were under the Government control, were taken from the Africans unjustly. This forced me to turn my eyes toward the Aberdare Forest. I could clearly see Karari’s Hill, almost in the middle of Aberdare Forest. The hill that bears my grandfather’s name and whom I am named after. Surely that is my land by inheritance and only the wild game which my grandfather used to trap enjoy that very fertile land....

“The Africans had not agreed that this land was to be used by white men alone.... He (Kenyatta) asked the crowd to show by hands that they wanted more land. Each person raised both his hands. And when he asked those who did not want land to show their hands, nobody raised.”