

The Scramble for Africa and the Berlin Conference

a. Put in the right order

What effect did this have on the native African population? While Europe their primary goal to be the end of slavery in Africa, their actions resulted in the increase in the women and children slaves. They also claimed to be the "most civilized" but in reality they carried out horrible crimes in their colonies. In particular in King Leopold II's Congo River Basin over 5 million were murdered and hundreds had their hands chopped off.

Overall, the Europeans thought: the more colonies they had, the larger their military would be, making them a more powerful country. In the midst of this scramble to place flags on crucial African lands, disputes popped up over who had the best claim. When this began to disrupt trade and travel, Otto Von Bismarck called together a meeting called The Berlin Conference.

The Industrial Revolution in Europe pushed countries to acquire colonies which could supply raw materials while at the same time become a captured market to sell their manufactured goods. This rush for colonies (a.k.a. The Scramble for Africa) led to the drawing of arbitrary boundary lines, resulting in tragic unintended consequences that are still affecting Africa today.

In 1884, 14 countries (minus anyone from Africa) met in Berlin. The major countries at the conference were: Britain, France, Belgium, and Portugal. These countries gained much of the most strategic pieces of land. The French gained control of northwestern Africa (including Algeria). The British had control of both South Africa and Egypt (which included influence over the Suez Canal). King Leopold II of Belgium gained the Congo (in Central Africa) and the Portuguese established their control of the Western and Eastern edges of Africa.

What was the Scramble for Africa? In the 1800s, European countries were rushing into Africa to plant their flags into the land and claim colonies. Because of Industrialization, Europe wanted Africa's valuable resources. Some of these included: palm oil, cotton, gold, diamonds, and rubber. The control of the Suez canal was also extremely important for countries wishing to trade with India and China.

Europeans also arbitrarily drew boundaries without any regard for the local people groups. It was common for the controlling European power to exploit any existing animosity between people groups in order to keep the population divided and weak. This led to countless disputes, civil wars, and even genocide. You might recall the recent stories of thousands upon thousands murdered in the Sudanese Civil War, in the ongoing conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis, and in the Darfur Massacre.

b. Answer the following questions

1. What did European countries do in Africa?
2. Why did European people want Africa's resources?
3. Which were the most important resources in Africa?
4. Why was the control of Suez canal so important?
5. What did European think about having colonies?
6. Which were the most important countries at Berlin conference?
7. What happened at Berlin conference?
8. What effect did this have on the native African population?
9. What did Europeans do to African people groups in order to maintain their controlling power?

10. Why did the Industrial Revolution in Europe push countries to acquire colonies?