

positive effects

negative effects

vocabulary words

How Did Colonialism Affect Kenya?

Introduction

What happens to people's lives when their country is a colony of another country? This was an important question to Americans in the eighteenth century when they were ruled by Great Britain, and it is an important question today when countries find themselves controlled by more powerful outsiders. By looking at Kenya's experience as a colony of Great Britain, you can get an idea of what being colonized meant both to the people being controlled and to those who control them.

Colonialism occurs when one nation takes control of another. By 1800 Europeans had colonized about 55% of the earth's surface; in 1878, 67%; and by 1914 about 85%. Colonialism directly affected the great majority of the earth's population for well over a century, and the effects remained even after colonial rulers gave up control.

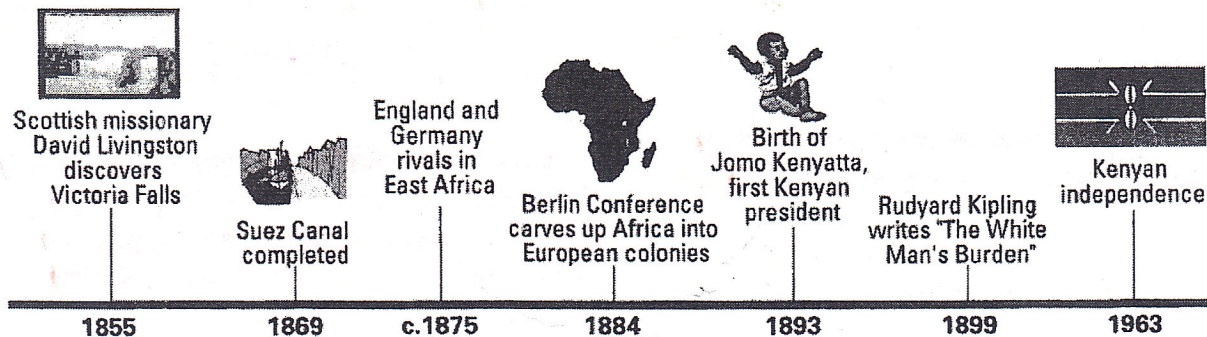
Historians disagree on what those effects were. In one respected history of England by Walter Hall and Robert Albion, we read that "... On its good side this rule of the white minority meant order, efficiency, discipline, and comparative peace." But another historian, Basil Davidson, writes: "What the central consequence of colonial rule proved to be was not the modern reconstruction of Africa, but the far-reaching dismantlement and ruin of the societies and structures which the invaders had found." Our documents will tell you what Africans, as well, thought about their country being a colony.

Though each colonized country was different in some ways, there are some things that seemed to happen in them all. The study of Kenya's history as a colony will help you see how colonialism works and thus understand an important part of the human story.

The Scramble for Africa

The story begins in the nineteenth century. As strange as it seems, the African nation of Kenya was created by Europeans. Its boundaries were drawn about four thousand miles to the northwest in Berlin, Germany. Representatives of fourteen European nations met in 1884 and 1885 to carve up the African continent. No Africans attended the **Berlin Conference**. All of Africa was placed under European control except Liberia and Ethiopia. Seven countries were given the right to "own" a particular territory. This takeover left most Africans under European rule for the next eighty years. Enslavement of Africans by Europeans ended after the agreement made at Berlin, but **indigenous** Africans soon found themselves controlled by outsiders in different ways.

Great Britain already had colonies around the world when the Berlin Conference met. They bragged that "the sun never sets on the British Empire." What Britain wanted from Africa were raw materials such as wool, copper, and tin to supply their factories; cash crops such as tea, coffee, and cocoa to fill their cups; and diamonds and gold to decorate themselves. In addition, they wanted new markets in which to



sell their products. What they felt they gave to Africans was the Christian religion, a "superior" form of government, and what they considered a more developed civilization.

The People of Kenya

The territory that became the British colony of Kenya contained within its borders at least twenty-seven ethnic groups with different cultures. It did not begin like England and Spain, for example, where most of the people shared the same language and culture. All Africans did not feel the same way about the British settlers. Those who made their living from farming were angry because their land was being taken from them. On the other hand, groups who did not get along with their neighbors often wanted the help of the powerful British against their enemies.

Government of the Kenya Colony

Before World War I, Kenya was ruled from Britain by a legislative council. This group was helped by Kenyan headmen, or chiefs, who had some control over local government. Appointed by the British, these African leaders acted as both rulers of a local area and go-betweens with the British. Sometimes this person had the respect of his people – a true "headman." In many cases the chief was not a real chief among his people and was thought of as a puppet of the colonial rulers. During World War I thousands

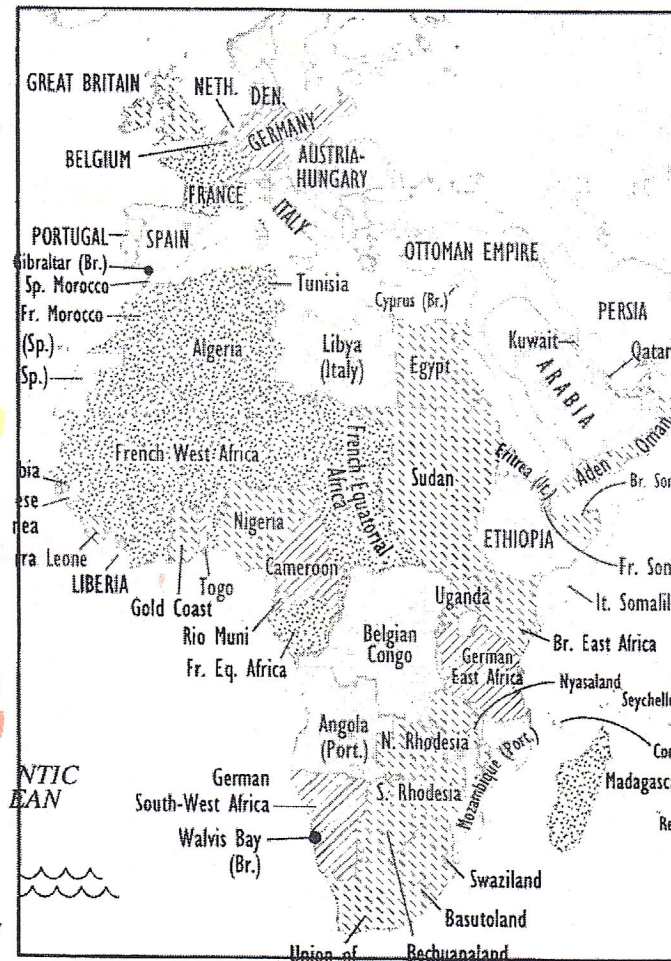
of Africans served the British government in World War I, mostly as "carriers" rather than soldiers, but they still suffered around 50,000 casualties.

After the war, Kenya became harder to rule. Led by Harry Thuku, a clerk in the Treasury, African Kenyans began to organize and protest British practices. First, there was the "kipande" – a pass carried in a small metal container

which usually hung from the owner's neck on a piece of string. Not carried by whites, the pass reminded Africans that they were considered second class citizens. Then there was the "hut tax," an annual payment made by each African household. The British felt that the Africans benefited from roads and schools that were built, so it seemed logical that they should help pay for them. This tax was raised shortly after the war at a time when wages were being cut. Added to these problems was the hardship brought on by a terrible

influenza epidemic in 1919 and the constant loss of African lands to Europeans. Adding to the tension, Thuku was "detained" by the government for nine years.

Because of protests by Africans, in 1923 the British said that in the future, African needs would come before white settlers' desires. In 1925 "local native councils" were created to



Colonial Africa, 1914

give Africans a part in the rule of Kenya. To some people this seemed to be a step toward self-rule for Africans, but others saw it as a way to use more educated Africans to keep protesting Africans under control. Thuku's followers wanted to get their lands back and have more development in Kenya.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the British government returned to the policy of supporting the white settler farmers. More African farmers lost their land and either became "squatters" or moved to the cities. At this time a new leader appeared, Jomo Kenyatta. Born Kamau Ngengi, Kenyatta started out as an employee of the Nairobi Water Department and later spent years in London arguing for change in Kenya.

World War II slowed the movement for change in Kenya, but it also set forces in motion that would eventually lead to the end of British rule. Africans served Britain again but this time as armed soldiers. Many fought outside of Kenya in India. These soldiers witnessed Europeans fighting and killing one another and no longer stood in awe of European power. When they learned that the war was being fought to preserve liberty and democracy around the world, they could not help but question life in Kenya under colonial rule.

The "Emergency" and Independence

After the war Kenyans directly challenged the idea that Kenya should remain "white man's country." The Kenya African Union (KAU) was formed and Kenyatta became its president. The Union demanded that settlers' lands be returned to Africans. A group of anti-colonial Africans called the **Mau Mau** went further. They wanted a total break from the British colonial system. Although Kenyatta denied the charge, the British believed that he was also the head of the Mau Mau organization. He was arrested on October 29, 1952, and a violent rebellion against British rule began, led by the Mau Mau

fighters. The British called it "The Emergency." They saw it as a threat to both British rule and the survival of white people in Kenya.

The four-year struggle for Kenya's independence was a bloody one. The British said that the Mau Maus were savage and primitive fighters who attacked innocent people on their farms and in their homes. For their part the British used harsh measures to defeat the mainly Kikuyu Mau Mau and the other ethnic groups who joined them. The Kenyans saw themselves as freedom fighters seeking independence from unfair colonial rule. To them violence was necessary. The struggle was also a civil war. The Mau Mau considered Africans who benefited from and supported British rule to be part of the enemy.

Though the British won the war, their government, in 1958, gave up the idea of Kenya as a "white man's country" and began preparing for African majority rule. The cost of crushing rebellion was more than any benefit they could have gotten out of the colony. In 1960 Africans were given a majority on the Legislative Council, and elections were held in February, 1961. Jomo Kenyatta's party won with the slogan Uhuru na Kenyatta – "Independence with Kenyatta" – and Kenyatta was released from jail. By 1963 colonial rule ended, and Jomo Kenyatta became the president of an independent Kenya.

The Question

What happened to the lives of both the African Kenyans and the Europeans who colonized their land during the colonial era? The answer to that question will help the student of history understand other situations, both past and present, in which one nation attempts to dominate the life of another. Read through the documents that follow. Organize them into analytical categories and develop an answer to the question: *How did colonialism affect Kenya?*