8

Colonized and Colonizers

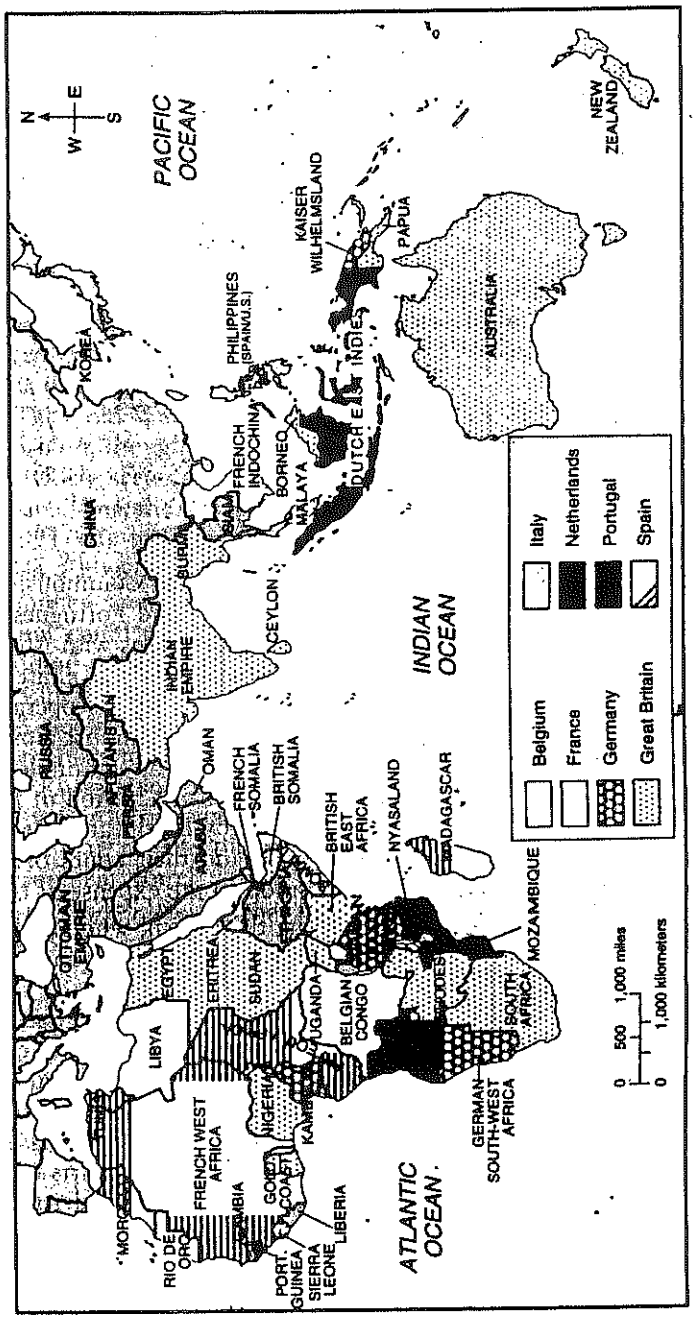
Europeans in Africa and Asia, 1850–1930

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The first stage of European colonialism, beginning with Columbus, was a period in which Europeans — led by the Spanish and Portuguese — settled in the Western Hemisphere and created plantations with African labor. From 1492 to 1776, European settlement in Asia was limited to a few coastal port cities where merchants and missionaries operated. The second stage — the years between 1776, when Britain lost most of its American colonies, and 1880, when the European scramble for African territory began — has sometimes been called a period of *free-trade imperialism.* This term refers to the desire by European countries in general and by Britain in particular to expand their zones of free-trade. It also refers to a widespread opposition to the expense of colonization, a conviction held especially among the British, who garnered all of the advantages of political empire without the costs of occupation and outright ownership.

The British used to say that their second global empire was created in the nineteenth century "in a fit of absentmindedness." But colonial policy in Britain and the rest of Europe was more planned and continuous than that schema might suggest. British control of India (including Burma) increased throughout the nineteenth century, as did British control of South Africa, Australia, the Pacific, and parts of the Americas. At the same time, France, having lost most of India to the British, began building an empire that included parts of North Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific.

This new age of colonialism, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, reached a fever pitch with the partition of Africa at the end of the century. The period spawned renewed settlement and massive population transfers,



Map 22.1 European Colonialism in Africa and Asia, 1880–1914.

with most European migrants settling in the older colonies of the Americas (as well as in South Africa and Australia), where indigenous populations had been reduced. Even where settlement remained light, however, Europeans took political control of large areas of the Earth's surface (see Map 8.1).

In the first reading in this chapter, a historian offers a brief history of this second stage of European colonialism and describes what the renewed era of colonization meant, both for the colonizers and the colonized. Subsequent readings examine aspects of colonial society — in British Burma, French Africa, and the Spanish Philippines.

42

JURGEN OSTERHAMMEL

From *Colonialism*

In this selection, modern historian Jurgen Osterhammel provides us with an overview of European colonialism. In the first part, "Colonial Epochs," the author discusses ways in which European colonialism changed from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. In the second section, "Colonial Societies," he discusses the special character of the colonial social order throughout this period.

Jurgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism*, trans. Shelly Frisch (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1997), 32–34, 86–89.

How, according to Osterhammel, did colonialism change between 1760 and 1930? How were these changes reflected in the evolution of "colonial society"?

Thinking Historically

Unlike philosophy, which tends to deal with general principles, history studies specific details. Yet as this general overview of colonialism shows, history can include summaries of long-term change and generalizations about different parts of the world over entire centuries as well as specific names and dates. What sort of generalizations are made in this excerpt?

History, like fiction, is a form of storytelling. Fictional storytelling tends to be far more specific than history, usually documenting minutes or hours in the amount of space that it takes many historians to cover years and Osterhammel to cover centuries. Does this selection tell you a story in any sense, or is it too general to do that?

Colonial Epochs

The most important colonial advance of the period [1760–1830] was the extension of the British position in *India*. The British East India Company (EIC) originally conducted trade from port cities. Later on, it becomes increasingly involved in Indian domestic politics, which were determined by the antagonisms of regional powers in the declining phase of the Mughal empire. Unlike the Spanish in Central America, the British in India at first pursued no plans to conquer and certainly no plans to proselytize. They were far from possessing military advantages over the Indian states until about the middle of the century. In Bengal, where British trade interests were increasingly concentrated, a mutually advantageous agreement was reached with the regional prince, the Nabob. Only when a collapse of this "collaboration" was brought about by a concatenation of causes did the idea of territorial rule originate. In 1755, Robert Clive, the future conqueror of Bengal, expressed a hitherto unthinkable idea: "We must indeed become the Nabobs ourselves." From then on the British pursued a strategy of subjugation within a polycentric Indian state system, interrupted repeatedly by phases of deadlock and consolidation. Until the end of the colonial period in 1947, hundreds of seemingly autonomous principalities continued to exist, but after 1818 the British could consider themselves the "paramount power" on the subcontinent.

The East India Company continued to play its double role as business enterprise and state organization. Under constant supervision of the government in London it accompanied the military expansion of its sphere of power with the gradual establishment of colonial structures,

which, in rough schematic terms, passed through a characteristic sequences of steps: (1) securing an effective trade monopoly, (2) securing military dominance and disarmament of any subjugated indigenous powers, (3) achieving a tax collection system, (4) stabilizing government by comprehensive legal regulations and the establishment of a bureaucratic administration, and (5) intervening in the indigenous society for purposes of social and humanitarian reform. This fifth stage was reached in the early 1830s. Not only did the age of European rule over highly civilized Asian societies begin in India, but India also became the prototype of an exploitation colony without settlers, a model for British expansion in other parts of Asia and Africa.

The period between 1830 and 1880 was certainly not a calm interlude in the history of European expansion. Only the Caribbean, once so rich, became a "forgotten derelict corner of the world." In an age of "free trade imperialism," China, Japan, Siam (Thailand) and, to a greater extent than was previously the case, the Ottoman Empire as well as Egypt, now de facto independent from it, were forced to open their economies. Sovereignty limitations characteristic of "informal empires" were imposed on them. Latin America, which was *no longer* colonial, and West Africa, which was rid of the slave trade but *not yet* colonized, were integrated into the world economy more closely than ever. On Java, the major island of the Netherlands East Indies, direct colonial intervention in the utilization of land began after 1830; the outer Indonesian islands were gradually subjugated in the period to follow. Foreign encroachment on continental Southeast Asia began after about 1820. First the lowlands near the coast fell into foreign hands: in 1852–1853 Lower Burma, and in 1857 Cochin China. By 1870, the later colonial borders could be distinguished clearly. During the entire period, the Tsarist Empire advanced in the Caucasus and Central Asia with military force, and shortly thereafter in the Far East with somewhat more diplomatic means, thereby intensifying the so-called "Great Game," a sustained cold war between the two Asiatic Great Powers Russia and Great Britain.

Despite these continuities of European world conquest and of ties between classic European diplomacy and "high imperialism," there is something to be said for marking a new epoch around 1870–1880. Most of the reasons can be found in the broader imperialist environment of colonialism, that is, in the structural changes of the world economy and international system. In terms of *colonial* history, the chief development over the last two decades of the nineteenth century was the European occupation of Africa, a singularly condensed expropriation of an entire continent termed the "partition of Africa." On the eve of this process, only South Africa and Algeria had been regions of European colonization, South Africa since 1652 and Algeria since 1830. Elsewhere the Portuguese (Angola, Mozambique), French (Senegal), and British (Sierra Leone, Lagos) made their presence felt in a more limited way. After all, by 1870 over 270,000 white people were already living in Algeria and about 245,000 in South Africa (including the two Boer Republics). The further expansion of these early cores of colonization was also an impetus for the occupation of Africa in the last quarter of the century. The discovery of diamond deposits in 1867 and of gold in 1886 unleashed a development that changed South Africa into a capitalist center of growth and a magnet for international capital. At the same time, it strengthened white supremacy. In Algeria the same result was achieved simultaneously under almost purely agrarian conditions by extensive land transfers from the Arabs to a rapidly growing settlement population.

The actual "partition" of Africa in the years between the occupation of Tunis by the French in 1881 and of Egypt by the British in 1882 on the one hand and the Boer War of the years 1899–1902 on the other was initially a somewhat symbolic process. With treaties *amongst themselves,* the European Great Powers committed themselves to mutual recognition of colonies, protectorates, and spheres of influence. "Paper partition" was only slowly and incompletely transformed into effective occupation, "partition on the ground." However, the borders that were drawn endured with the later establishment of independent African national states. For Africans, the so-called partition of their continent often meant the brutal disruption of bonds and established ways of life. However, partition could also result in the exact opposite: "a ruthless act of political amalgamation, whereby something of the order of ten thousand units was reduced to a mere forty." Particularly in Islamic North Africa (Egypt, Morocco, Tunesia, and Algeria) as well as in parts of Asia (Vietnam, Korea, and Burma), colonialism encountered fairly complex proto-nation-states. Colonial rule in these countries was considered even less legitimate than elsewhere.

European Industrialism and Imperialism: Impact on Environment, Labor Systems and Global Trade*

The rise of Europe in the years after 1500, from being a backward area of the world to dominate the rest of the globe not only drastically affected a whole range of ecosystems but also reshaped the relationship between different regions. Before the 16th century different areas of the world had evolved to a large extent in isolation. Although societies encountered the same basic problem of finding a balance between population, food production and damage to the environment, their interaction was very limited. In the period after 1500 European expansion triggered a process of gradual integration of the different parts of the world into a single system and created a world economy. That system was dominated by European states and the areas where extensive white settlement took place. The tropical colonies and those without substantial European settlement remained in a subordinate position.

By the 19th century industrialism and western imperialism intensified the process of using the tropical colonies for resources. Europe's demand for raw materials increased and the colonies provided an ideal source of supply. A system of developed and underdeveloped states or independent and dependent states developed. The dependent countries became major producers of crops and raw materials rather than manufacturers of industrial products. Even after these countries achieved political independence, these states found it very difficult to escape from this economic system. Today these states are often referred to as Third World.

The creation of the Third World was a complex process that took many centuries, but important features can be identified in the first decades of European expansion. When the Spanish and Portuguese began to expand to the islands in the Atlantic, they cleared the forest for plantation agriculture. They introduced pigs, cattle and rabbits which caused irreparable damage to the ecosystem of the islands. The new colonies were exploited for the benefit of the home economy—in the main they produced crops that could not be grown at home. The export crops took up much of the best land and largely displaced traditional subsistence agriculture. The crops were grown on plantations owned and controlled by Europeans rather than on small farms run by local peasants. The cultivation relied on European investments and large amounts of cheap labor, often times slaves. The continued growth of single crop agriculture reduced soil fertility and the susceptibility to pests because of the lack of diversity. This system was used by the Europeans as they expanded across the Atlantic into the Americas.

A look at the British colony of Kenya in East Africa will help illustrate what developed. The economy and society of Kenya was completely transformed by the British between 1895 and the 1920's.

Britain took the position that a colony should contribute to the overall development of the empire and produce commodities that Britain required. As white settlers moved to Kenya the best land was allocated to them. The settled Africans and the pastoral tribes were removed from the land given to the white even though as last as 1930 two thirds of the land was still not in use for agriculture. The main crops were coffee, sisal and maize. The large plantations run by the Europeans used cheap local labor. Recruitment of the labor was a problem. A variety of measures were adopted to make sure that Africans needed to work to earn money and did not remain as subsistence farmers. Both a hut and a poll tax, which had to be paid in cash, were introduced. Import duties were raise on imported goods. All Africans were required to carry passes which could only be obtained if they had a job. By 1930 the transformation of a traditional African economy into one controlled by the whites and integrated into the international economy was largely complete.

Although the economies of virtually every European colony and many nominally independent countries in Latin America were drastically altered to provide the products that Europe and increasingly the U.S. required, the pace and nature of change varied from area to area. In Asia until the 19th century there were few plantations and most crops for export were grown by peasants. Then the Suez Canal opened, steamships developed, and new industrial methods developed increasing the demand for rubber and vegetable oils. To meet this, new plantations were established. They depended on imported labor—Tamils for Ceylon's tea plantations and Malaya's rubber estates, Biharis for Assam, India's main tea growing area and Chinese for Sumatra's rubber plantations.

The first crop grown for Europe that transformed the environment, economies and societies of the rest of the world was sugar. Sugar grown in the Caribbean soon exhausted the soil and depended on thousands of slaves imported from Africa. The second crop that became important in the Americas was tobacco. It was the mainstay of Virginia and Maryland and was even used as local currency. The problem was that it exhausted the soil very quickly, in three or four years, and so the frontier of the states moved steadily westwards. Cotton grew further south and west of the tobacco regions. It depended on extensive slave labor for its cultivation and harvest. Five major tribes of Indians were forcibly removed from their land and put on a reservation in Oklahoma, so more cotton could be grown. Like sugar and tobacco, continuous cotton cultivation rapidly exhausts the soil and in the first half of the 19th century cotton growing was spreading westwards. 800,000 slaves were moved into the regions.

The development of plantations and the domination of the economies of Asia by the production of cash crops began in the 19th century. Here three major crops were involved—tea, rice and rubber. As tea drinking grew in popularity in Britain so did the cultivation of tea.

Tea plantations were established on the hills of Assam by clearing the forests. Tea cultivation moved into south India and Ceylon in 1870's. Harvesting the crop was very labor intensive, needing about forty people per acre per day. Many Tamil from India were taken to Ceylon, where they are now the main minority population. In the 20th century, the Tamil were favored by the British. The conflict between the Tamil and the native Sri Lankans led to a bitter civil war in the 1980's. Women were also employed by the British to pick the tea. This changed the social structure of families in the area. Rice was grown by peasants mainly for their own use or sale in local markets. The British though began growing rice for export in Burma during the 1860's. It had devastating social consequences on the Burmese peasants. The peasants couldn't compete with the corporate plantations and other landlords with access to financing. They soon became landless laborers or poverty-stricken sharecroppers permanently in debt. Like the British, the French began to produce rice for export in Indochina. They also had large estates worked by sharecroppers, kept in a position of quasi-serfs and tied to land by permanent debt. The rubber trade was small in the early 19th century. Most of the rubber was gathered in the Amazon region from wild trees. But the demand for rubber jumped considerably after the discovery of a vulcanization process which made rubber lighter, more flexible and less affected by heat and cold. The British took seeds of rubber trees to experimental plantations in Malaya so they could develop their own source of rubber. The Dutch also developed rubber plantations on Sumatra in the early 20th century. Again when there was not enough local labor, the British transferred Indian Tamil to Malaya to do the work. The Brazilian trade couldn't keep up with the plantation cultivation of rubber, so they soon dropped out of the market. The Firestone corporation of the United States got the Liberian government to granted them a concession of 1 million acres of land at a price of .04 cents an acre so they could develop their own rubber plantations. But the development of plantations and cash crops for export were a comparatively late development in Africa.

The two most important crops grown in Africa—coffee and cocoa—were originally grown elsewhere. Most of the coffee was grown in Brazil by slave and then European immigrant labor. But Britain wanted to secure its own supply of coffee, so they began to cultivate it in their East African colonies such as Kenya and Uganda. The plantations were worked with African labor, often provided as forced labor by the authorities. Cocoa was introduced into West Africa by the British to provide a useful export revenue for what until then had been relatively unproductive colonies. From the 1880's cocoa production received strong official backing plus support from British companies such as Cadbury who wanted to secure their own reliable supplies. They employed natives as seasonal laborers in some areas as sharecroppers on the foreign owned cocoa plantations.

Two major plantation crops were dependent on technological innovations. The industrial revolution brought a demand for palm oil and refrigeration made it possible to develop overseas shipping of bananas. Palm oil was used as lubricant and as an ingredient in soap. The British developed the palm oil business in West Africa. By 1900 West African exports to Britain increased fifty times that of 1800 but most of the production came after 1920. Bananas were grown in Central America using Indian labor. The crop required cropping throughout the year. Only a few companies could provide the necessary financing. By the turn of century, United Fruit Company dominated the banana business and cleared rain forests to build plantations. They also controlled railroads, production, transportation, shipping and marketing of bananas. Contractors supplied the necessary laborers, who were housed in company barracks, paid a small wage and given notes to exchange for goods at inflated prices in the UFC company store. The economies of many of the Central American republics were highly dependent of this one export and UFC wielded enormous influence in the region.

By the early 20th century, Europe and increasingly the United States, had brought about a major transformation in the economies and societies of what is now known as the Third World. Countries which had be largely self-sufficient in food and grew crops for local markets became part of the world economy dominated by white industrialists and imperialists. The third world countries do not control trade in the commodities they produce because multinational companies dominate processing and manufacturing. The Europeans saw the rest of the world not only as a supplies of foods and fibers, but also as a source of timber, minerals and other raw materials. By the early 19th century, Britain had almost completely destroyed the teak forests of India's Malabar coast. By 1852 the massive forest of the Irrawaddy delta in lower Burma had been cleared. By the 1850's there was also severe depletion of the forests of the western Himalayas. After the U.S. annexed the Philippines, the Bureau of Forestry was set up for commercial logging. At that time 80% of the virgin forests were still in existence. By 1980, only one third remained. In the Ivory Coast the 30 million acres of rainforests have been reduced to about 10 million acres. Mining exploitation has also been an important factor in the creation of the Third World. In Africa the Europeans mined copper in the Congo, gold and diamonds from Rhodesia and South Africa. Not only do these mining operations damage the environment, but they upset the traditional African economy and social systems. In Liberia, four huge open cast stripe mines stripped away vast quantities of top soil and rock creating huge pits and canyons. The colonials introduced poll and hut taxes that had to be paid in cash, forcing Africans to work in the mines. The native mineworkers were housed in squalid barracks, separated from their families and often working hundreds of miles away from home. The overwhelming majority

of all the ores are used elsewhere. Mining is in the hands of multinational corporations and most the profit leaves the country. Europe's demands were not just for metals, but for other ores as well. Guano was minded off islands in Chile as an organic fertilizer using Chinese indentured laborers working in dreadful conditions. Phosphate deposits in the Pacific islands of Nauru and Ocean were discovered in the early 20th century. To get to the phosphate, the vegetation was cleared and about 50 feet of top soil was stripped off leaving an uninhabitable wasteland of jagged pinnacles on which nothing would grow. By the 1980's Ocean Island had been destroyed by the mining and the deposits exhausted. The islanders had lost their home and had received only small compensation for their loss.

Achievement of political independence in the Third World has not brought economic independence. Economies remain tied to the global system created by the industrialized world. The consequences of the unbalanced development had profound effects for both the industrialized world and the Third World. Political and economic control of a large part of the world's resources enabled the industrialized world to live beyond the constraints of its immediate resource base. Much of the price of that achievement was paid by the population of the Third World in the form of exploitation, poverty and human suffering.

*This reading is a condensed version of Clive Ponting's "Creating the Third World." From A Green History of the World the Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations, Penguin Books, 1991.

89 A JUSTIFICATION OF BRITISH COLONIALISM IN AFRICA

In the early 1900s, when their activities in Africa and the Far East came under attack, a number of European powers defended their colonial policies. In his book The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa, *Lord Frederick Lugard, a veteran colonial administrator and the first British governor-general of Nigeria, summed up major arguments of the imperial powers. In the excerpt below, Lugard explains the nature of the "dual mandate." As you read the excerpt, ask yourself whether you agree with Lugard's point of view.*

These products [food supplies and raw materials] lay wasted and ungarnered in Africa because the natives did not know their value. Millions of tons of oil-nuts, for instance, grew wild without the labour of man, and lay rotting in the forests. Who can deny the right of the hungry people of Europe to utilise the wasted bounties of nature, or that the task of developing these resources was, as Mr. [Joseph] Chamberlain expressed it, a "trust for civilisation" and for the benefit of mankind? Europe benefited by the wonderful increase in the amenities of life for the mass of her people which followed the opening up of Africa at the end of the nineteenth century. Africa benefited by the influx of manufactured goods, and the substitution of law and order for the methods of barbarism.

Thus Europe was impelled to the development of Africa primarily by the necessities of her people, and not by the greed of the capitalist. Keen competition assured the maximum prices to the producer. It is only when monopolies are granted that it can be argued that profits are restricted to the few, and British policy has long been averse to monopolies in every form. The brains, the research, the capital, and the enterprise of the merchant, the miner, and the planter have discovered and utilised the surplus products of Africa. The profits have been divided among the shareholders representing all classes of the people, and no small share of them has gone to the native African merchant and the middleman as well as the producer. It is true to say that "a vast area of activity has been opened up to the British workman, in which he shares with the capitalist the profits of the development of tropical resources."

In accepting responsibility for the control of these new lands, England obeyed the tradition of her race. British Africa was acquired not by groups of financiers, nor yet . . . by the efforts of her statesmen, but in spite of them. It was the instinct of the British democracy which compelled us to take our share. . . . Even if it were true . . . that we could do as lucrative a trade in the tropical possessions of other nations, there can be no doubt that the verdict of the British people has been emphatic that we will not ask the foreigner to open markets for our use, or leave him the responsibility and its reward. . . .

Let it be admitted at the outset that European brains, capital, and energy have not been, and never will be, expended in developing the resources of Africa from motives of pure philanthropy; that Europe is in Africa for the mutual benefit of her own industrial classes, and of the native races in their progress to a higher plane; that the benefit can be made reciprocal, and that it is the aim and desire of civilised administration to fulfill this dual mandate.

By railways and roads, by reclamation of swamps and irrigation of deserts, and by a system of fair trade and competition, we have added to the prosperity and wealth of these lands, and checked famine and disease. We have put an end to the awful misery of the slave-trade and inter-tribal war, to human sacrifice and the ordeals of the witch-doctor. Where these things survive they are severely suppressed. We are endeavouring to teach the native races to conduct their own affairs with justice and humanity, and to educate them alike in letters and in industry. . . .

As Roman imperialism laid the foundations of modern civilisation, and led the wild barbarians of these islands [Great Britain] along the path of progress, so in Africa to-day we are repaying the debt, and bringing to the dark places of earth, the abode of barbarism and cruelty, the torch of culture and progress, while ministering to the material needs of our own civilisation. In this task the nations of Europe have pledged themselves to co-operation by a solemn covenant. Towards the common goal each will advance by the methods most consonant with its national genius. British methods have not perhaps in all cases produced ideal results, but I am profoundly convinced that there can be no question but that British rule has promoted the happiness and welfare of the primitive races. Let those who question it examine the results impartially. If there is unrest, and a desire for independence, as in India and Egypt, it is because we have taught the value of liberty and freedom, which for centuries these peoples had not known. Their very discontent is a measure of their progress.

We hold these countries because it is the genius of our race to colonise, to trade, and to govern. The task in which England is engaged in the tropics . . . has become part of her tradition, and she has ever given of her best in the cause of liberty and civilisation. There will always be those who cry aloud that the task is being badly done, that it does not need doing, that we can get more profit by leaving others to do it, that it brings evil to subject races and breeds profiteers at home. These were not the principles which prompted our forefathers, and secured for us the place we hold in the world to-day in trust for those who shall come after us.

READING REVIEW

1. Why, according to Lugard, was Europe "impelled to the development of Africa"?
2. What was Europe's dual mandate in Africa?
3. Do you agree or disagree with Lugard's justification of colonialism? Why or why not?

"With the View of Bettering the Condition of Our Country . . ."

73 ▾ *Royal Niger Company, STANDARD TREATY*

The following document illustrates the process by which large parts of Africa succumbed to European rule. The Royal Niger Company was commissioned by Queen Victoria in 1886 to administer and direct economic development in the potentially valuable region of the Niger River delta and its hinterland. With France as a potential competitor the company's representatives had to move quickly, so they drew up a standard treaty to be used throughout the region during the late 1880s. One needed only to fill in the blanks.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. **By accepting this treaty what were the tribal chieftains giving up?**
2. **What benefits were the tribes to receive?**
3. **What does use of the standard treaty imply about English attitudes toward the Africans?**

We, the undersigned Chiefs of ——, with the view to the bettering of the condition of our country and people, do this day cede to the Royal Niger Company, for ever, the whole of our territory extending from ——.

We also give to the said Royal Niger Company full power to settle all native disputes arising from any cause whatever, and we pledge ourselves not to enter into any war with other tribes without the sanction of the said Royal Niger Company.

We understand that the said Royal Niger Company have full power to mine, farm, and build in any portion of our country.

We bind ourselves not to have any intercourse with any strangers or foreigners except through the said Royal Niger Company.

In consideration of the foregoing, the said Royal Niger Company (Chartered and Limited) bind themselves not to interfere with any of the native laws or customs of the country, consistently with the maintenance of order and good government.

The said Royal Niger Company agree to pay native owners of land a reasonable amount for any portion they may require.

The said Royal Niger Company bind themselves to protect the said Chiefs from the attacks of any neighboring aggressive tribes.

The said Royal Niger Company also agree to pay the said Chiefs —— measures native value.

We, the undersigned witnesses, do hereby solemnly declare that the —— Chiefs whose names are placed opposite their respective crosses have in our presence affixed their crosses of their own free will and consent, and that the said —— has in our presence affixed his signature.

Done in triplicate at ——, this —— day of ——, 188——.

Declaration by interpreter I, ——, of ——, do hereby solemnly declare that I am well acquainted with the language of the —— country, and that on the —— day of ——, 188——, I truly and faithfully explained the above Agreement to all the Chiefs present, and that they understood its meaning.

The Fate of the Ndebele

75 ▾ *Ndansi Kumalo, HIS STORY*

If one seeks proof of the remarkable changes in the human condition over the past two centuries, consider the fate of the Ndebele (pronounced en-duh-bee'-lee) people of Africa and the life of one of their sons, Ndansi Kumalo. In the early nineteenth century the Ndebele were pastoralists living in the southeastern corner of Africa just north of the Tugela River. In the 1820s they fled in terror from the warriors of Shaka, chief of the Zulu, another group of pastoralists that suddenly embarked on a campaign of conquest, plunder, and destruction in much of southern Africa. The Ndebele moved to the Transvaal but ten years later were forced off their land by Boer *trekkers*, Dutch pioneers from the south who were seeking grazing land for their cattle. The Ndebele ended up in an area to the north of the Limpopo River that is part of modern Zimbabwe. Despite their years of flight, they were able to subdue other groups in the region and establish a sizable kingdom with a population of 100,000.

But the Ndebele could not escape danger, which came this time from the British, who, under the famous imperialist Cecil Rhodes, were anxious to exploit the region's mineral wealth. In 1888 the Ndebele chieftain Lobengula signed an agreement with Rhodes that gave Rhodes's South Africa Company mining rights in exchange for one thousand rifles and a monthly stipend of one hundred pounds. Friction grew, especially after European settlers began establishing farmsteads around 1890, and war broke out in 1893. The Ndebele were defeated, and they were defeated again when they rose up against the British in 1897. The Ndebele then made one last journey, to the vast but arid reservation their new masters provided.

One of the Ndebele who made this journey was Ndansi Kumalo. Born in the late 1870s, he was raised as a warrior to protect Ndebele land and raid neighbors for wives and cattle. He fought the British in the 1890s and took up farming after the Ndebele's defeat. In 1932 he caught the eye of a British filmmaker who was in Southern Rhodesia to make a film, *Rhodes of Africa*, on the life of Cecil Rhodes. He was recruited to play the part of Lobengula, the chief of the Ndebele when they fought Rhodes and the British in the 1890s. To complete the film he traveled to England, where he saw the king, saw the sights of London, and took his first plane flight. While there he also related his life story to the English Africanist Margery Perham, whose transcription of it serves as the basis for the following excerpt. His most moving experience was being "treated . . . as an equal" by an English farm family that entertained him for dinner. *Rhodes of Africa* was a modest success, and after it opened, Ndansi Kumalo returned to Africa, where he presumably rejoined his large family and never lacked for tales to tell.

In the following excerpt he describes events of the 1890s.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. Who was to blame for the outbreak of hostilities between the Ndebele and the British in 1893?
2. How did conditions after the war lead to the 1897 rebellion?
3. The condition of the Ndebele rapidly deteriorated after the rebellion was suppressed. Why?
4. Aside from raising revenue, what might the British have hoped to achieve by imposing, then raising, taxes on the Ndebele?

5. What economic changes did the Ndebele experience as a result of their subjection to the Europeans?
6. Do you agree with Ndansi Kumalo that the arrival of Europeans was a mixed blessing?

We were terribly upset and very angry at the coming of the white men, for Lobengula . . . was under her . . . [The Queen's] protection and it was quite unjustified that white men should come with force into our country.[1] . . . Lobengula had no war in his heart: he had always protected the white men and been good to them. If he had meant war, would he have sent our regiments far away to the north at this moment? As far as I know the trouble began in this way. Gandani, a chief who was sent out, reported that some of the Mashona[2] had taken the king's cattle; some regiments were detailed to follow and recover them. They followed the Mashona to Ziminto's people. Gandani had strict instructions not to molest the white people established in certain parts and to confine himself to the people who had taken the cattle. The commander was given a letter which he had to produce to the Europeans and tell them what the object of the party was. But the members of the party were restless and went without reporting to the white people and killed a lot of Mashonas. The pioneers were very angry and said, "You have trespassed into our part." They went with the letter, but only after they had killed some people, and the white men said, "You have done wrong, you should have brought the letter first and then we should have given you permission to follow the cattle." The commander received orders from the white people to get out, and up to a certain point which he could not possibly reach in the time allowed. A force followed them up and they defended themselves. When the pioneers turned out there was a fight at Shangani and at Bembezi. . . .

The next news was that the white people had entered Bulawayo; the King's kraal[3] had been burnt down and the King had fled. Of the cattle very few were recovered; most fell into the hands of the white people. Only a very small portion were found and brought to Shangani where the King was, and we went there to give him any assistance we could. . . . Three of our leaders mounted their horses and followed up the King and he wanted to know where his cattle were; they said they had fallen into the hands of the whites, only a few were left. He said, "Go back and bring them along." But they did not go back again; the white forces had occupied Bulawayo and they went into the Matoppos. Then the white people came to where we were living and sent word round that all chiefs and warriors should go into Bulawayo and discuss peace, for the King had gone and they wanted to make peace. . . . The white people said, "Now that your King has deserted you, we occupy your country. Do you submit to us?" What could we do? "If you are sincere, come back and bring in all your arms, guns, and spears." We did so. . . .

So we surrendered to the white people and were told to go back to our homes and live our usual lives and attend to our crops. But the white men sent native police who did abominable things; they were cruel and assaulted a lot of our people and helped themselves to our cattle and goats. These policemen were not our

[1] In the agreement Lobengula signed with Rhodes in 1888 the British government (Her Majesty's government) guaranteed there would be no English settlers on Ndebele land and no diminution of Lobengula's authority. Lobengula's concessions angered many of his warriors, who began to press for war against the Europeans.

[2] Pastoralists whom the Ndebele had subjugated.

[3] The stockade where the king lived.

own people; anybody was made a policeman. We were treated like slaves. They came and were overbearing and we were ordered to carry their clothes and bundles. They interfered with our wives and our daughters and molested them. In fact, the treatment we received was intolerable. We thought it best to fight and die rather than bear it. How the rebellion started I do not know; there was no organization, it was like a fire that suddenly flames up. We had been flogged by native police and then they rubbed salt water in the wounds. There was much bitterness because so many of our cattle were branded and taken away from us; we had no property, nothing we could call our own. We said, "It is no good living under such conditions; death would be better — let us fight." Our King gone, we had submitted to the white people and they ill-treated us until we became desperate and tried to make an end of it all. We knew that we had very little chance because their weapons were so much superior to ours. But we meant to fight to the last, feeling that even if we could not beat them we might at least kill a few of them and so have some sort of revenge.

I fought in the rebellion. We used to look out for valleys where the white men were likely to approach. We took cover behind rocks and trees and tried to ambush them. We were forced by the nature of our weapons not to expose ourselves. I had a gun, a breech-loader. They — the white men — fought us with big guns and Maxims[4] and rifles.

I remember a fight in the Matoppos when we charged the white men. There were some hundreds of us; the white men also were as many. We charged them at close quarters: we thought we had a good chance to kill them but the Maxims were too much for us. We drove them off at the first charge, but they returned and formed up again. We made a second charge, but they were too strong for us. I cannot say how many white people were killed, but we think it was quite a lot. . . . Many of our people were killed in this fight: I saw four of my cousins shot. One was shot in the jaw and the whole of his face was blown away — like this — and he died. One was hit between the eyes; another here, in the shoulder; another had part of his ear shot off. We made many charges but each time we were beaten off, until at last the white men packed up and retreated. But for the Maxims, it would have been different. . . .

So peace was made. Many of our people had been killed, and now we began to die of starvation; and then came the rinderpest[5] and the cattle that were still left to us perished. We could not help thinking that all these dreadful things were brought by the white people. We struggled, and the Government helped us with grain; and by degrees we managed to get crops and pulled through. Our cattle were practically wiped out, but a few were left and from them we slowly bred up our herds again. We were offered work in the mines and farms to earn money and so were able to buy back some cattle. At first, of course, we were not used to going out to work, but advice was given that the chief should advise the young people to go out to work, and gradually they went. At first we received a good price for our cattle and sheep and goats. Then the tax came. It was 10s.[6] a year. Soon the Government said, "That is too little, you must contribute more; you must pay £1." We did so. Then those who took more than one wife were taxed; 10s. for each additional wife. The tax is heavy, but that is not all. We are also taxed for our dogs; 5s. for a dog. Then we were told we were living on private land; the owners wanted rent in addition to the Government tax; some 10s. some £1, some £2 a year. . . .

Would I like to have the old days back? Well, the white men have brought some good things. For a start, they brought us European

[4]Invented by the American-born engineer Henry S. Maxim, the Maxim gun was an early machine gun.

[5]An acute infectious disease of cattle.

[6]s. = shilling, one twentieth of a pound.

implements — plows; we can buy European clothes, which are an advance. The Government has arranged for education and through that, when our children grow up, they may rise in status. We want them to be educated and civilized and make better citizens. Even in our own time there were troubles, there was much fighting and many innocent people were killed. It is infinitely better to have peace instead of war, and our treatment generally by the officials is better than it was at first. But, under the white people, we still have our troubles. Economic conditions are telling on us very severely. We are on land where the rainfall is scanty, and things will not grow well. In our own time we could pick our own country, but now all the best land has been taken by the white people. We get hardly any price for our cattle; we find it hard to meet our money obligations. If we have crops to spare we get very little for them; we find it difficult to make ends meet and wages are very low. When I view the position, I see that our rainfall has diminished, we have suffered drought and have poor crops and we do not see any hope of improvement, but all the same our taxes do not diminish. We see no prosperous days ahead of us. There is one thing we think an injustice. When we have plenty of grain the prices are very low, but the moment we are short of grain and we have to buy from Europeans at once the price is high. If when we have hard times and find it difficult to meet our obligations some of these burdens were taken off us it would gladden our hearts. As it is, if we do raise anything, it is never our own: all, or most of it, goes back in taxation. We can never save any money. If we could, we could help ourselves: we could build ourselves better houses; we could buy modern means of traveling about, a cart, or donkeys or mules.

As to my own life, I have had twelve wives altogether, five died and seven are alive. I have twenty-six children alive, five have died. Of my sons five are married and are all at work farming; three young children go to school. I hope the younger children will all go to school. I think it is a good thing to go to school.

There are five schools in our district. Quite a number of people are Christians, but I am too old to change my ways. In our religion we believe that when anybody dies the spirit remains and we often make offerings to the spirits to keep them good-tempered. But now the making of offerings is dying out rapidly, for every member of the family should be present, but the children are Christians and refuse to come, so the spirit-worship is dying out. A good many of our children go to the mines in the Union, for the wages are better there. Unfortunately a large number do not come back at all. And some send money to their people — others do not. Some men have even deserted their families, their wives, and children. If they cannot go by train they walk long distances.