

## Literature and Civilisation Master Studies in M1

### Module: African Civilisation

### Lecture 1: The Scramble for Africa (1880-1900)

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### THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA (1880-1900)

#### **1. Introduction**

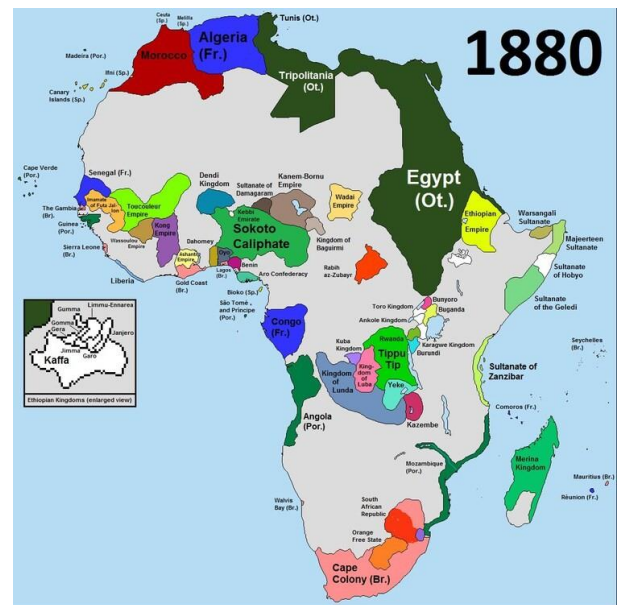
The Scramble for Africa (1880 to 1900) was a period of rapid colonization of the African continent by European powers. But it wouldn't have happened except for the particular economic, social and military evolution Europe was going through.

#### **2. Before The Scramble For Africa: Europeans In Africa Up To The 1880s**

By the beginning of the 1880s, only a small part of Africa was under European rule, and that area was largely restricted to the coast and a short distance inland along major rivers such as the Niger and the Congo.

Britain had Freetown in Sierra Leone, forts along the coast of The Gambia, a presence at Lagos, the Gold Coast protectorate and a fairly major set of colonies in Southern Africa (Cape Colony, Natal and the Transvaal, which it had annexed in 1877). Southern Africa also had the independent Boer Oranje-Vrystaat (Orange Free State).

France had settlements at Dakar and Saint-Louis in Senegal and had penetrated a fair distance up the river Senegal, the Assinie and Grand Bassam regions of Cote d'Ivoire, a protectorate over the coastal region of Dahomey (now Benin), and had begun colonization of Algeria as early as 1830. Portugal had long established bases in Angola (first arriving in 1482, and subsequently retaking the port of Luanda from the Dutch in 1648) and Mozambique (first arriving in 1498, and creating trading posts by 1505). Spain had small enclaves in northwest Africa at Ceuta and Melilla (África Septentrional Española or Spanish North Africa). The Ottoman Turks controlled Egypt, Libya and Tunisia (the strength of Ottoman rule varied greatly).

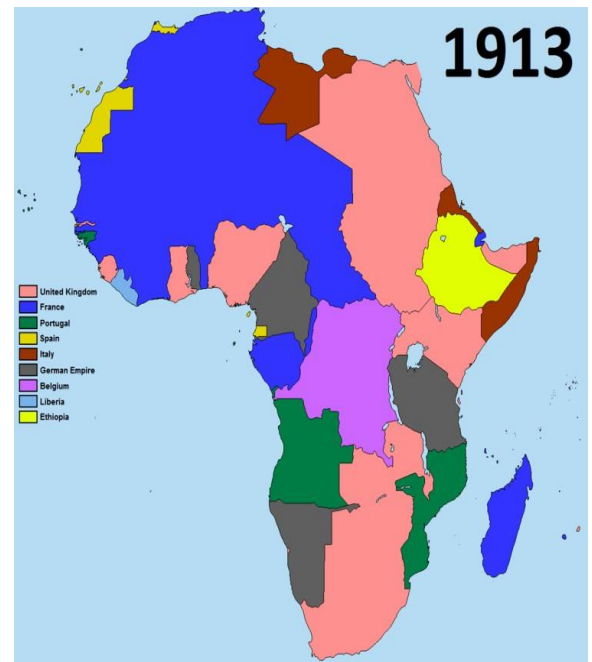


### 3. What Caused The Scramble To Happen?

There were several factors which created the impetus for the Scramble for Africa, most of these were to do with events in Europe rather than in Africa.

**End of the Slave Trade:** Britain had had some success in halting the slave trade around the shores of Africa, but inland the story was different. Muslim traders from north of the Sahara and on the East Coast still traded inland, and many local chiefs were reluctant to give up the use of slaves. Reports of slaving trips and markets were brought back to Europe by various explorers, such as Livingstone, and abolitionists in Britain and Europe were calling for more to be done.

**Exploration:** During the 19th century, barely a year went by without a European expedition into Africa. The boom in exploration was triggered to a great extent by the creation of the African Association by wealthy Englishmen in 1788, who wanted someone to "find" the fabled city of Timbuktu and the course of the Niger River. As the century moved on, the goal of the European explorer changed, and rather than traveling out of pure curiosity they started to record details of markets, goods and resources for the wealthy philanthropists who financed their trips.



**Henry Morton Stanley:** This naturalized American (born in Wales) was the explorer most closely connected to the start of the Scramble for Africa.

Stanley had crossed the continent and located the "missing" Livingstone, but he is more infamously known for his explorations on behalf of King Leopold II of Belgium. Leopold hired Stanley to obtain treaties with local chieftains along the course of the River Congo with an eye to creating his own colony. Belgium was not in a financial position to fund a colony at that time.

Stanley's work triggered a rush of European explorers, such as Carl Peters, to do the same for various European countries.

**Capitalism:** The end of European trading in slaves left a need for commerce between Europe and Africa. Capitalists may have seen the light over slavery, but they still wanted to exploit the continent. New "legitimate" trade would be encouraged. Explorers located vast reserves of raw materials, they plotted the course of trade routes, navigated rivers and identified population centers which could be a market for manufactured goods from Europe. It was a time of plantations and cash crops, dedicating the region's workforce to producing rubber, coffee, sugar, palm oil, timber, etc. for Europe. And all the more enticing if a colony could be set up, which gave the European nation a monopoly.

#### 4. What Other Factors Played A Role In Enabling The Scramble To Happen?

**Steam Engines and Iron-Hulled Boats:** In 1840, the *Nemesis* arrived at Macao, in south China. It changed the face of international relations between Europe and the rest of

the world. The Nemesis had a shallow draft (five feet), a hull of iron and two powerful steam engines. It could navigate the non-tidal sections of rivers, allowing access inland, and it was heavily armed.

Livingstone used a steamer to travel up the Zambezi in 1858, and had the parts transported overland to Lake Nyassa. Steamers also allowed Henry Morton Stanley and Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza to explore the Congo.

**Quinine and Medical Advances:** Africa, especially the western regions, was known as the "White Man's Grave" because of the danger of two diseases: malaria and yellow fever. During the 18th century, only 1 in 10 Europeans sent out to the continent by the Royal African Company survived. Six of the 10 would have died in their first year. In 1817, two French scientists, Pierre- Joseph Pelletier and Joseph Bienaimé Caventou, extracted quinine from the bark of the South American cinchona tree. It proved to be the solution to malaria; Europeans could now survive the ravages of the disease in Africa.

Unfortunately, yellow fever continued to be a problem, and even today there is no specific treatment for the disease.

**Politics:** After the creation of a unified Germany (1871) and Italy (a longer process, but its capital relocated to Rome also in 1871) there was no room left in Europe for expansion. Britain, France and Germany were in an intricate political dance, trying to maintain their dominance, and an empire would secure it. France, which had lost two provinces to Germany in 1870, looked to Africa to gain more territory. Britain looked toward Egypt and the control of the Suez Canal as well as pursuing territory in gold-rich southern Africa. Germany, under the expert management of Chancellor Bismarck, had come late to the idea of overseas colonies, but was now fully convinced of their worth. It would need some mechanism to be put in place to stop overt conflict over the coming land grab.

**Military Innovation:** At the beginning of the 19th century, Europe was only marginally ahead of Africa in terms of available weapons as traders had long supplied them to local chiefs and many had stockpiles of guns and gunpowder. But two innovations gave Europe a massive advantage. In the late 1860s, percussion caps were being incorporated into cartridges. What previously came as a separate bullet, powder and wadding, was now a single entity, easily transported and relatively weather proof. The second innovation was the breech-loading rifle. Older model muskets, held by most Africans, were front loaders, which were slow to use (maximum of three rounds per minute) and had to be loaded whilst standing. Breech-loading guns, in comparison, had between two to

four times the rate of fire, and could be loaded even in a prone position. Europeans, with an eye to colonization and conquest, restricted the sale of the new weaponry to Africa maintaining military superiority.

### **The Mad Rush Into Africa In The Early 1880s**

Within just 20 years, the political face of Africa had changed, with only Liberia (a colony run by former African-American slaves) and Ethiopia remaining free of European control. The start of the 1880s saw a rapid increase in European nations claiming territory in Africa.

In 1880, the region to the north of the river Congo became a French protectorate following a treaty between the King of the Bateke, Makoko, and the explorer Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza. In 1881, Tunisia became a French protectorate and the Transvaal regained its independence. In 1882, Britain occupied Egypt (France pulled out of joint occupation), and Italy began colonization of Eritrea. In 1884, British and French Somaliland were created. In 1884, German South West Africa, Cameroon, German East Africa and Togo were created, with Río de Oro claimed by Spain.

### **Europeans Set The Rules For Dividing Up The Continent**

The Berlin Conference of 1884-85 (and the resultant General Act of the Conference at Berlin) laid down ground rules for the further partitioning of Africa. Navigation on the Niger and Congo rivers was to be free to all, and to declare a protectorate over a region the European colonizer must show effective occupancy and develop a "sphere of influence." The floodgates of European colonization had opened.

## Quiz

- 1 Read the sentence from the section "Capitalism."

*Capitalists may have seen the light over slavery, but they still wanted to exploit the continent.*

Which sentence from the article BEST supports this idea?

- (A) The boom in exploration was triggered to a great extent by the creation of the African Association by wealthy Englishmen in 1788, who wanted someone to "find" the fabled city of Timbuktu and the course of the Niger River.
  - (B) It was a time of plantations and cash crops, dedicating the region's workforce to producing rubber, coffee, sugar, palm oil, timber, etc. for Europe.
  - (C) Germany, under the expert management of Chancellor Bismarck, had come late to the idea of overseas colonies, but was now fully convinced of their worth.
  - (D) Within just 20 years, the political face of Africa had changed, with only Liberia (a colony run by former African-American slaves) and Ethiopia remaining free of European control.
- 2 Is the author of the article suggesting that the Scramble for Africa was a competition between European powers? Which sentence from the article supports your response?
- (A) Yes; The Scramble for Africa (1880 to 1900) was a period of rapid colonization of the African continent by European powers.
  - (B) No; By the beginning of the 1880s, only a small part of Africa was under European rule, and that area was largely restricted to the coast and a short distance inland along major rivers such as the Niger and the Congo.

- (C) Yes; Britain, France and Germany were in an intricate political dance, trying to maintain their dominance, and an empire would secure it.
- (D) No; The Berlin Conference of 1884-85 (and the resultant General Act of the Conference at Berlin) laid down ground rules for the further partitioning of Africa.

3 Which of the following are reasons why European countries colonized territories in Africa?

1. *Africa's abundance of natural resources*
2. *Europe's desire to reinstate the trade in slaves*
3. *Africa's innovations in technology*
4. *European country's efforts to increase their global influence*
5. *the cessation of the European slave trade*

- (A) 1, 4, and 5 only
- (B) 1, 3, and 5 only
- (C) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (D) 2, 3 and 4 only

4 Which of the following ideas did the author develop LEAST in this article about the Scramble for Africa?

- (A) how European explorers arrived and took over territories in Africa
- (B) how European economies benefitted financially from the resources in Africa
- (C) how Africans responded to the invasion of their territories by Europeans
- (D) how African territories were divided among and controlled by European powers

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