

# BBC Bitesize GCSE History – The British Empire

## Episode 6 – British colonialism in Africa

**Announcer:** BBC Sounds, music, radio, podcasts.

**Katie:** I'm Katie Charlwood, a history podcaster.

**Datshiane:** And I'm Datshiane Navanayagam, and this is BBC Bitesize GCSE History.

**Katie:** This is the sixth episode in an eight-part series on the British Empire.

**Datshiane:** In this episode, we're going to look at British colonisation in Africa.

**Katie:** This episode will include some serious topics. We recognise that these subjects can be distressing and may be difficult to hear. Please take care of your emotional wellbeing and feel free to pause or step away if needed, or speak to someone you trust.

**Datshiane:** Let's start with the reasons why Europeans began to increase their control and interest in Africa. Katie, where, what and why?

**Katie:** Okay, so, up until the 1800s, European countries' interest in West Africa was mostly centred on the capture and enslavement of people whom they took to America to work on plantations. We looked at this in a previous episode if you need a reminder. By the 1860s, industrialisation in Europe was progressing fast, as well as the movement of goods back to Europe that were the driver of colonisation in Africa.

**Datshiane:** In 1876, King Leopold of Belgium set up the International African Association to research inland Africa.

**Katie:** And they discovered that the continent had plentiful natural resources, including gold, diamonds, rubber, copper and ivory, which were highly valuable to European industries.

**Datshiane:** Remember, the Industrial Revolution in Europe was happening from the 1860s, and this increased the demand for these resources, as well as new markets to sell European goods.

**Katie:** And Britain was by far the world's leading power for industry and trade, but the other European countries and America were becoming serious rivals. Explorers brought back African gold, diamonds and ivory as well as cash crops such as rubber, coffee and timber.

**Datshiane:** Seeing these natural resources meant that the European countries saw Africa as an opportunity to get even richer, and so they competed to colonise as much of Africa as possible. It also meant that they wanted to secure strategic territories to protect their resources and trade routes along the way.

**Katie:** And they felt that this was justified by ideas like Social Darwinism, which argued that European civilisations were more advanced and as such, had the right to dominate others.

**Datshiane:** The colonisers used the idea of a "civilising mission". This is where Europeans felt it was their duty to bring Western civilisation and Christianity to Africa, where it wasn't widespread.

**Katie:** Even though the continent already had systems of government, religions and a rich cultural heritage of its own.

**Datshiane:** This is the period when the European countries tried to grab as much of Africa as they could, and it's known as 'The Scramble for Africa'. It was formalised at the Berlin Conference of 1884 to 1885, where European powers divided Africa amongst themselves without consulting any African leaders. Let's head back in time to our time-travelling reporter Kitty who is there, and then with their report.

**Kitty:** Delegates from major European powers – Britain, France, Portugal, Belgium and Germany – have gathered under one roof to carve up Africa, and yet there is not a single representative of an African kingdom. With the recent opening of the Suez Canal, Britain is eager to expand its influence, eyeing the rich resources of the continent. I caught German Chancellor Bismarck's opening speech earlier when he said, 'My fellow Europeans, Turks and Americans, welcome to Berlin. For the next three months we will be discussing our claims in Africa, particularly Congo, which has been claimed by France, Portugal and Belgium. Please remember Doctor Livingstone's three Cs. We go to Africa seeking to spread Commerce, Christianity and Civilisation. We must ensure that the Arab slave trade of Africans comes to an end. We also must ensure that trade must be free. The riches of Africa must benefit all Europeans equally.' The mood is one of competition, but the delegates are desperate to avoid outright war over territory. The agreed-upon rule: a nation must have soldiers on the ground to stake a claim. This is leading to an intense free-for-all; a scramble for Africa, where the map is being redrawn almost overnight. I can see representatives huddled together, exchanging heated words while envisioning the vast empires they will build. This conference feels like a game of chess, but with real lives at stake. This is Kitty reporting for Bitesize History. Back to the studio.

**Datshiane:** Thanks, Kitty. Now, you might want to pause and take some notes here of the areas that Britain took in Africa. They took sixteen huge areas of land, or colonies, in the scramble for Africa. In West Africa, Britain colonised what is today Nigeria, which was rich in palm oil and cocoa. British rule imposed indirect governance, using local rulers to enforce British laws. This was deliberate because it made British rule and control much easier.

**Katie:** Also in West Africa, Ghana, then called the Gold Coast, also became a British colony after a series of military conflicts and treaties. In East Africa in Kenya, British settlers took over vast amounts of fertile land for coffee and tea plantations, displacing local populations, as well as taking control of Uganda and Tanzania.

**Datshiane:** In North Africa, Britain established control over Egypt, mainly to secure the Suez Canal, which was vital for trade and military movement.

**Katie:** And Britain also gained control over Sudan in the 1890s, after defeating the Mahdist forces.

**Datshiane:** In Central Africa, Malawi and Zambia, which was then called Northern Rhodesia, also became British colonies.

**Katie:** And in Southern Africa they took control of Southern Rhodesia, now called Zimbabwe. And alongside the Dutch, Britain colonised South Africa. A useful way of remembering the outcome and impact of the Berlin Conference are through the letters P-E-S, PES. P is the "political impact" because artificial borders were created, often leading to future conflicts. E is for "economic impact" because the exploitation of African resources for European benefit, with little regard for local economies. And S is for "social impact" that saw the introduction of European education, religion and culture, often at the expense of African traditions of indigenous cultures and languages.

**Datshiane:** In fact, by 1900, Britain had claimed 32% of African land. And as a result, nationalist resistance against British colonisation soon emerged.

**Katie:** This included armed resistance such as in Kenya where resistance to colonisation was met with harsh repression. This led to movements like the Mau Mau Uprising in the 1950s.

**Datshiane:** And non-violent mass mobilisations and strikes such as those in Ghana. Kwame Nkrumah had been a prominent activist against colonial rule in the Gold Coast. He organised strikes, boycotts and peaceful demonstrations, which got widespread public support, and he encouraged Ghanaians to refuse to pay taxes and comply with colonial laws.

**Katie:** This campaign had huge public support and demonstrated the determination of the Ghanaian people for self-rule, and they gained independence in 1957. And the mid-20th century saw a rise in global anti-colonial pressure from organisations such as the United Nations.

**Datshiane:** In the other episodes, we have looked at the colonisation in North America and India, and in this episode we've looked at Africa. You might want to consider how these were similar or different. Grab your pen, pencil or digital method of note taking as Katie gives us a three-letter hint to help us remember this one.

**Katie:** So, I have E-C-R, which you could think of as \*European Colonisers Repelled.\* E is for 'economic exploitation.' All regions were exploited for their natural resources and labour. C is 'cultural imposition.' European powers imposed their culture, language and religion on the colonised people. 'R is resistance and rebellion.' Colonised peoples in all regions resisted European control, leading to various uprisings and independence movements.

**Datshiane:** Okay Katie, but let's just go into ECR a bit more for the three areas, to see the similarities.

**Katie:** So, when we talk about exploitation of their natural resources, we see, for example, in America it was land used for growing sugar, tobacco and cotton and using enslaved people. In India it was taking the spices, the tea, the iron and cotton and taxing the people and paying them low wages. And in Africa it was gold, rubber and diamonds, and again paying very little for the people doing the work.

**Datshiane:** And for C, culturally, in each region we saw the imposing of European languages, as well as Christianity, especially in Africa, at the expense of local culture and practices.

**Katie:** In terms of R, for resistance and rebellion, in India there had been a violent rebellion in 1857, which led to many changes and eventual independence. In Africa, different countries resisted in differing ways. We mentioned armed resistance in Kenya, and non-violent protests in Ghana, then called the Gold Coast.

**Datshiane:** The division of Africa with arbitrary borders has led to many conflicts along ethnic lines. Even though the countries in Africa are now independent, many remain relatively poorer because of the precious raw materials which were stripped by colonising European countries.

**Katie:** And the continuation of the trade agreements and loans which colonisation did not always end, favouring European traders rather than African producers. Okay, time for a quick test. Three questions, five seconds. Write your answers down. Okay? Here goes.

**Datshiane:** What were the primary natural resources that European powers sought in Africa during the colonisation period?

**Katie:** Those would be gold, diamonds, rubber and ivory.

**Datshiane:** Very good. What was the significance of the Berlin Conference?

**Katie:** It led to the partitioning of the continent among the European powers, without regard for indigenous cultures and boundaries.

**Datshiane:** Last one. What is the name given to this period of African colonisation by European nations?

**Katie:** The Scramble for Africa.

**Datshiane:** Well done if you got all three right. There's no prizes but there's lots of praise from us. In the next episode, we'll be looking at the British Empire and the experience and impact of the world wars. Thanks for listening.