

E. Decolonization (1957-)

1. The detribalization process was disrupted by the wars when Africans had to adjust to the new cultures in charge. The French and the British expected to rule their colonies according to a different approach, and, of course, using *their* language, not German!
2. The British model was loosely based on the tutelary imperialism the British empire was using in India. This benevolent despotism was based on the idea that British culture, including representative government and industrialization, was the ideal, and that British colonial rulers had a moral obligation to pass on these values to the people they ruled.
3. The main reasons for the differences between the success of this model in India and its relatively poor outcomes in Africa were that African societies were starting from a more primitive starting point, and British rule began later and did not last as long.
4. In some areas, nonetheless, such as Ghana, which became the first independent African country in 1957, the tutelary approach was relatively successful. Detribalized Ghanans, educated in America and Europe, were adept in participating in a gradual, legal scheme to take control of government for themselves, and the British were willing to let them do it. An election in 1952 was conducted successfully, making Kwame Nkrumah into the first “prime minister” of Ghana, and then after a five year transition period, full independence was granted peacefully, and Nkrumah became president of his country.
5. Where the local population was more diverse, and the people were caught between tribal ways and detribalization, the process was sometimes quite disastrous. A particularly violent case was the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya after WWII, where detribalized Africans created a violent independence movement as an expression of their hatred for colonial rulers. The British responded to the terrorism of the Mau Mau rebels by extreme brutality of their own. It was a shameful episode that led the British to become demoralized about the prospects for tutelary imperialism.
6. The French, for their part, attempted a process of “Francization.” As the name suggests, it means trying to make its African subjects into French citizens, with French values.
7. The failure of Francization stems mainly from the fact that it was tried in *Islamic* Africa as well as Sub-Saharan Africa. Disintegrated Islamic culture was trying to find its footing again after the world wars and did not want to be controlled by Europe. Thus in French Algeria, a war of independence from 1954-62 triggered a wave of rejections of Francization in neighboring Sub-Saharan Africa as well.
8. The peak of the process of “decolonization” (the abandonment of colonial empires) was reached in 1960, which is often called the “Year of Africa.” Seventeen countries in Africa became independent that year alone. Tragically, the artificial nature of these new countries—created as colonies of European powers over an un-integrated tribal patchwork—made most of these countries unstable. Patrice Lumumba, the first president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was assassinated after one year in office by



Kwame Nkrumah, first
President of Ghana

tribal enemies. Nigeria had six major military coups against democratically elected leaders because there were three main tribal groups (and many smaller ones) that hated each other so much that they refused presidents from other tribes. Ethiopia has tribal wars to this day, where different areas demand independence. This pattern holds true for most of Africa.

F. South Africa

1. South Africa is the most unique of the Sub-Saharan countries in its history, because it was settled by Dutch traders in 1652—long before any other African colony. The Dutch lived there continuously for generations, raising families that were no longer European, and began to call themselves “Afrikaners.”
2. The story of early South Africa resembles the story of early America, with small settlements near the *Cape of Good Hope* in relatively peaceful coexistence with local tribes known as the Khoikhoi, but when the British conquered the Dutch in the Napoleonic Wars of Europe, the pattern of life changed.
3. The Dutch wanted independence and moved eastward on the “Great Trek,” like the settlers in America moving into the mid-West and then the prairies. Here they encountered larger, more powerful and warlike tribes, the Xhosas, and especially the Zulus, and were forced to fight wars to claim the land they wanted.
4. Having created two new *countries*—the Orange Free State, and the Transvaal Republic—they discovered diamonds in one and gold in the other. Not surprisingly, the British decided to move into that area as well during the “Scramble for Africa.”
5. The British defeated the Afrikaners (also called “Boers”) by 1902 in the *Anglo-Boer Wars* and South Africa in full became a part of the British Empire.
6. The Afrikaners almost rebelled against the British in the world wars, but their loyalty paid off when the British accepted the idea of decolonization in favor of the Afrikaners becoming the independent rulers of South Africa in 1948.
7. In a sense, therefore, South Africa was the *first* country to be decolonized, but in another sense it was the *last*, because the indigenous Africans (non-Afrikaners) of dark skin were excluded from the government. The new way of life created by the Afrikaners was called “apartheid” (a system of racial separation, with the white minority having all power).
8. Amazingly, protests and pressure from around the world eventually convinced the Afrikaners to create a full democracy, and the black African population led by a charismatic leader named Nelson Mandela accepted a peaceful transfer of power even when they wanted the change more quickly or were tempted to violence.
9. In 1994, power was transferred peacefully, and De Klerk and Mandel received the Nobel Peace Prize jointly. Decolonization was complete.



Nelson Mandela
(1918–2013)



Frederik Willem de Klerk
(1936–2021)