

E. Decolonization (1957-)

1. Following the world wars, where Germany lost all its colonies, and France and Britain found themselves in control of most of Africa, the people of Africa began to push for independence.
2. Ghana, in West Africa, became the first independent African country in 1957, where the tutelary imperialism of Britain was relatively successful. 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.
3. In other places, independence was only given after a violent war, such as between the “Mau Mau” rebels and British rulers.
4. The French tried to achieve the “Francization” of Africa, but they were also rejected in wars of independence.
5. 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.
6. Tragically, most of these countries were very unstable. Patrice Lumumba, the first president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was assassinated after one year in office by tribal enemies. Nigeria had six major military coups against democratically elected leaders because there were three main tribal groups 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.



Kwame Nkrumah, first
President of Ghana

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. When the Dutch discovered diamonds and gold in the new areas, the British decided to take them over as well during the “Scramble for Africa.”

5. The British defeated the Afrikaners in a series of wars and South Africa 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. The problem was that the way of life created by the Afrikaners was called “apartheid” (a system of racial separation, with the white people 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.
9. In 1994, De Klerk and Mandel received the Nobel Peace Prize jointly. Decolonization was complete.



Nelson Mandela
(1918–2013)



Frederik Willem de Klerk
(1936–2021)