

CHAPTER 22**Critical Thinking Activity****West and Central Africa****Imperialism in Africa**

Beginning in 1870, many nations became involved in a new kind of empire building called imperialism—the practice of establishing colonies to control raw materials and markets. Imperialism differed from the colonization of the 1500s and 1600s mainly in that the colonies established after 1870 were both more heavily populated and more thoroughly dominated.

The imperialism that began in North Africa in the early 1800s overwhelmed the entire African continent by the latter part of the century. Taking advantage of rivalries and divisions within African societies, the Europeans often found local allies to help them. Almost all of Africa was divided up among European nations in the last quarter of the 1800s. European law and administration, business, and culture penetrated the interior of Africa more gradually, profoundly changing African institutions and African society.

West Africa had been a major center of the slave trade. First the Portuguese and the Dutch, and later the British and the French, had established trading posts along the coast. When most European countries abolished the slave trade in the early 1800s, these former slaving centers turned to other types of commerce. They traded in palm oil, hides and feathers, ivory, rubber, and other natural products. With the end of the slave trade, more systematic development of the interior also began to take place.

By pushing into the interior, European countries sought to link their coastal possessions. In the “bulge” of western Africa, the French pushed inland, and by 1900 France had claimed a vast area called French West Africa. The French seaports provided outlets for the products of this region.

The British competed with the French throughout West Africa. They too sought to connect their coastal settlements and expand into the interior. They were opposed in their push inland by African merchants who competed with British traders, and in northern Nigeria by African Muslim states. British military forces crushed all African resistance.

The rapid expansion of European influence in West Africa was paralleled by events in Central and East Africa. In the vast area drained by the Zaire (Congo) River, King Leopold II of Belgium, acting as a private citizen, carved out a personal empire. Forming a corporation, Leopold sold concessions to speculators who shared his interest in a fast profit. Their exploitation of the Congo’s supply of natural rubber became an international scandal. Whole regions were set aside as monopolies, and Africans were ruthlessly uprooted from their homes and forced to collect rubber. Large areas of rubber trees and vines were carelessly destroyed without any replanting for the future. Finally, as a result of international criticism of conditions there, falling rubber prices, and dwindling rubber supplies in the

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Congo, Leopold transferred his private colony to the Belgian government in 1908. Now study the table then answer the questions that follow.

Imperialism in Africa 1914	
Country	Colonial Holdings
France	Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, French West Africa, Dahomey, Senegal, French Guiana, Ivory Coast, French Equatorial Africa, Madagascar, French Somaliland
Great Britain	Egypt, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, British Somaliland, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, Nigeria, British East Africa, Uganda, Rhodesia, Bechuanaland, Nyasaland, Transvaal, Natal, Cape Colony
Italy	Libya, Eritrea, Italian Somaliland
Belgium	Belgian Congo
Germany	Togo, Cameroons, German East Africa, German Southwest Africa
Portugal	Angola, Mozambique
Spain	Río de Oro, Río Muni
Independent	Liberia, Ethiopia

1. Which European country possessed the most colonies? Which possessed the least?

2. What was the purpose of imperialism for the European countries?

3. Why did African nations have difficulty repelling the Europeans?

4. Using classroom research sources, find out the costs of imperialism for Africans. Were there any benefits? What were they?
