In the nineteenth century, a Scotsman named David Livingstone spent more than 30 years exploring Africa. He brought the Congo to the Western world’s attention. At one point he completely lost contact with Europe. An American newspaper, the New York Herald, sent Henry Morton Stanley to look for him. He found him in 1871 on the shore of Lake Tanganyika. Three years later, the Herald and Britain’s Daily Telegraph commissioned Stanley to continue Livingstone’s work (Livingstone had died in 1873). He completed his explorations in 1877 and saw great potential for commerce. He then tried to interest the British government in further exploration and development of this part of Africa. He met with no success, however.

Quick Write

Imagine that you are a member of the British Parliament reading about Henry Morton Stanley’s explorations of Africa. Should your country do anything in response to his discoveries? Why or why not?

Learn About

- the precolonial period of African history
- the colonial period of African history
- the history and impacts of African independence
The Precolonial Period of African History

Westerners sometimes think of African history as beginning with the arrival of Europeans. But as you will read in the following sections, many different peoples were moving across the continent before the colonial powers arrived.

The Early Expansion of Islam in Africa

If you had to name the most populous Arab states today, Egypt would surely top the list. But it has not always been the case. Nor has Egypt always been predominantly Muslim. For several centuries after the beginning of the Christian era, Egypt was a largely Christian country. Historians put an exact date on when that began to change—rapidly.

On 12 December 639 a Muslim named Amr ibn al As crossed from the Sinai Peninsula into Egypt. The prophet Muhammad himself had made him a military commander. And now Amr led an army of 4,000 men on horseback. They carried lances, swords, and bows. Their objective was the fortress of Babylon at the top of the Nile Delta.

An Arab chief from Chad.
Photo by Mathew Clark / © 2007 The Christian Science Monitor
Arabs arrived in Africa on 12 December 639 when a Muslim named Amr ibn al As crossed the Sinai Peninsula into Egypt with an army of 4,000 men on horseback.
Six months later, reinforcements arrived. In July, Amr’s army, by then numbering as many as 12,000 soldiers, faced off on the plains of Heliopolis against the army of the Byzantines, who then ruled Egypt. The Arabs scattered the Byzantines but won no decisive victory. Their enemy regrouped at the fortress. Finally, after a six-month siege, the fortress fell to the Arabs on 9 April 641.

Amr’s men then marched on to Alexandria. It was a fortified city but couldn’t hold out against the Arabs. The governor of the city agreed to surrender. The two sides signed a treaty in November 641.

The next year, the Byzantines tried to retake their city. But history was not on their side. In the end, the Muslim conquerors gave them their usual three choices:

1. Convert to Islam
2. Agree to pay a tax to keep their own religion
3. Face the Muslim armies on the battlefield.

The Byzantines chose No. 2. This conquest was an important turning point in Egyptian history. Over the centuries, it changed Egypt from a mostly Christian to a mostly Muslim country. What’s more, even those who remained Christian or Jewish adopted the Arabic language and culture.

This conquest of Egypt was part of the Arab/Islamic expansion that began after the death of Muhammad. Arab tribes began to move out of the Arabian Peninsula and into other lands, such as Iraq and Syria.

Once established in Egypt, the Arabs spread out across the rest of North Africa. Invaders from other religions and cultures had passed through this part of the world before the Arabs. But none of them had the same deep, long-lasting effect on the region as Islam. The new faith would make its way into all parts of society. It brought new military leaders, scholars, and fervent religious thinkers. These newcomers would largely replace the tribal practices and loyalties.

The cultural changes happened more slowly than the military conquest, however. The nomadic Berbers converted quickly and helped the Arab invaders. But the Christian and Jewish communities remained significant until the twelfth century.

**The Dispersion of Bantu Peoples**

As the Arab peoples spread—along with their Muslim religion—across northern Africa, the Bantu peoples were expanding in regions farther south. *Bantu*, as you read in Lesson 1, is the name of a group of languages spoken in much of sub-Saharan Africa. The word *Bantu* means “people” in many of those languages.
The Bantu peoples started out in what is today Nigeria and Cameroon, in the “notch” of West Africa. They first began to expand significantly about 3,500 years ago, about 1500 BC. This was after they learned to grow bananas and yams.

Another wave of expansion came after they learned how to grow cereal crops and to work iron. The timeline of the events is not clear, but many scholars believe the Bantu peoples learned how to work iron around AD 500. Iron tools made it possible for them to cut down trees to clear land for crops. Their ironworking skills let them make other items that were valuable for trade. Perhaps most important, they could make weapons with iron. This gave the Bantu a military edge as they expanded into new territories.

Scientists suggest that the whole development process of the Bantu went something like this: Growing more food (yams and bananas) led to population increases, and more people living closer together. (Scientists call this “social complexity.” Sometimes it leads to war.) Feeling the pressure of more people, the Bantu would have been eager to find out about new crops they could grow, including cereals. They may have learned about these crops from other peoples, or figured them out on their own. They also learned to raise livestock. This meant they had even more food.

And more food meant more people. That, in turn, would mean more demand both for food and for land to grow it on—and more social complexity. As they mastered cultivation of cereals, the Bantu could adapt to different kinds of terrain.
Meanwhile, as the Bantu peoples continued their work with iron, they had an advantage compared with ironworkers in other places: their trees. Metalworking requires hot fires. Metalworkers use coal today, but in early times they used wood for their fires. African hardwoods burned very hot.

With these advantages, the Bantus expanded naturally into thinly populated non-Bantu areas. Finally they expanded into just about all the ecological niches where they could fit.

Two separate population streams flowed out of the Nigerian/Cameroonian “notch” on the side of Africa. One went down the west side of the continent. The other crossed the Sahel, the edge of the Sahara Desert, and then moved down the east coast. The two met again in the southern part of the Congo, probably about the start of the Christian era. By AD 300 Bantu speakers occupied most of sub-Saharan Africa.

How the Bantu Dispersion Developed Trade and Exchange

The Bantu peoples had two sets of advantages: their agricultural skills, including raising livestock, and their metalworking skills. And because their iron was so good, it was of interest to people as far away as Eurasia. Since they knew how to cultivate a wide range of crops, they were comfortable in a wide range of terrain. They also had common interests with both peoples who were either cereal-crop farmers or pastoralists, who herded livestock.

All this laid the groundwork for the development of long-distance trading networks running between Africa and Eurasia. Copper and salt were two other goods in the Bantu trade mix. Routes running across the Sahara, up the Red Sea, and across the Indian Ocean tied Africa to the peoples of the Mediterranean, the Near East, and even the Indian subcontinent.

Another aspect of trade and exchange in Africa at this point was its connection to the spread of Islam. Islam expanded its reach by the sword up the Nile Valley. But in most of sub-Saharan Africa, this took place mainly through trade. Muslim merchants, rather than soldiers, spread the new faith. Throughout the Sahel and along the East African coast, Muslims traded with those who practiced traditional African religions. The exchanges benefitted both sides. The Muslim communities were often found in dispersed communities along trade routes.

Trade also played a role in still another aspect of the Bantu peoples’ development. It increased their wealth. Merchants brought exotic goods from far away into these communities. These goods were common enough that people knew about them, but not so common that everyone had them. People who could afford to buy these special goods had more prestige than those who did not own them. It was probably very much like what you see at your school, in fact. There’s likely some brand of shoes, jeans, or accessory that you’ve told your parents you “had” to have because you wanted to be like the “cool” kids.
Scientists use the term **social stratification** to refer to this division of a society into layers. This stratification led to the emergence of “big men,” or chiefs, and of polities—organized political units, led by chiefs or kings.

**The Colonial Period of African History**

Colonialism was about money and power. The larger a nation’s empire, the more money and power a nation likely controlled. European empires built up their influence by exploiting the natural resources of foreign lands and the labor of native people. They also gathered great wealth through the slave trade. Let’s focus here on slavery as it relates to Africa.

As European powers competed for position in Africa, slavery was an accepted institution around the world. The slave trade overshadowed other kinds of trade on the West African coast. Moreover, slavery wasn’t just an evil that Europeans imposed on Africans. Many African societies held and traded slaves. Prisoners of war, both men and women, often became slaves. Just as often, however, African slave owners killed the males, but kept the women and children as workers and to bear them more children. This is one reason Africans so readily sold males to the West once the two regions of the world established a slave trade.

However, slavery in Africa was different from the slavery of the New World’s plantations. For one thing, it didn’t involve a dangerous journey across an ocean. What’s more, slaves in Africa often had at least some rights in African communities. Many eventually became part of their masters’ families, with full rights.

**The Slave Trade of Colonial Africa**

The transatlantic—crossing the Atlantic Ocean—slave trade began with the Portuguese in the late fifteenth century. Portuguese navigators first came to the West African coast in an effort to bypass Muslim Morocco. From the West African coast the Portuguese gained access to the gold trade of Africa, and the spice trade, too, via the Indian Ocean. For Africa, though, the real legacy of Portugal’s adventures there was the slave trade.
By 1471 Portuguese ships had reached the Niger Delta. In 1481 emissaries from the king of Portugal visited the court of the oba, or king, of Benin. (This Benin is in modern Nigeria. Don’t confuse it with today’s Republic of Benin. It’s nearby but is a different country.) The two countries had fairly close relations for a time.
The oba’s courtiers even started to speak Portuguese. Gwatto, a port in what today is Nigeria, handled peppers, ivory, and, more and more, slaves. These were what the Africans offered in exchange for coral beads, Indian textiles, and European-made items, such as weapons and tools.

At the end of the sixteenth century, the rising naval power of the Dutch challenged the Portuguese monopoly on West African trade. The French and the English later challenged the Dutch in their turn. Ships of other flags got into the trade, too—Denmark, Sweden, the German state of Brandenburg, and even the North American colonies. But Britain was the dominant slaving power in the eighteenth century.

And so when the British Parliament outlawed the slave trade in 1807, the action had wide repercussions. Technically, what the new legislation did was to forbid ships under British registry to engage in the slave trade. But it was meant to shut down traffic in slaves out of West African ports. Other countries followed Britain’s lead. Attitudes changed slowly, however.

The American Founding Fathers considered banning slavery in the US Constitution. But to keep the support of Southerners, they agreed to let the slave trade continue until 1 January 1808. On that date, the “importation” of slaves from outside the United States became illegal. Slavery itself continued, however.

Meanwhile, Britain went from being the leading slave-trading nation to being the international enforcer of its new ban. To this end, the Royal Navy maintained a major presence off the coast of West Africa. For years, up to a sixth of its fleet was dedicated to fighting the slave trade. The effort to replace the slave trade with other forms of commerce led to Britain’s getting involved in the internal politics of what is today Nigeria. The British government decided to take legal control of the coastal area. This, in turn, led to Britain expanding its colonial presence even further throughout the nineteenth century.

The Development of Partitions and Borders in Colonial Africa

During this period European powers carved up most of Africa into separate spheres of influence. Much of this took place at the Conference of Berlin, from 1884 to 1885. You will notice some patterns coming up again and again:

1. Europeans found coastal areas much easier to reach than Africa's interior
2. Some colonial ventures started out as private businesses, and only later did they come under direct control of a European government
3. As in the Middle East, Europeans did a lot of redrawing of other peoples' maps
4. Many colonies changed hands over time. After Germany's defeat in World War I, its colonies ended up as mandates of the League of Nations.
French Colonies

French West Africa was a federation of eight territories. Many of these have changed their names in the years since:

- Mauritania
- Senegal
- French Sudan (now Mali)
- French Guinea (now Guinea)
- Côte d’Ivoire
- Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso)
- Dahomey (now Benin)
- Niger.

This federation began as a series of coastal trading posts. The French took these over in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Only later during a sort of land rush known as the “Scramble for Africa” in the final decades of the nineteenth century did they move inland in a big way.

The French established French Equatorial Africa in 1910. It consisted of these territories:

- Chad
- Congo (then known as “Middle Congo” or the French Congo)
- Gabon
- The Central African Republic (then known as Ubangi-Shari).

Brazzaville, in Congo, served as this federation’s capital.

France had large colonies in the Arab north, as well. The countries of French North Africa were Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia.
The British were the leading colonizers of Africa. Their holdings in West Africa were:

- Nigeria
- The Gold Coast (later Ghana)
- Sierra Leone
- The Gambia.

**Fast FACT**

People have long kept the two countries named “Congo” straight by identifying them by their capitals. Congo (Kinshasa) is the former Belgian Congo. Congo (Brazzaville) is the former French Congo. From 1971 until 1997, Congo (Kinshasa) was known as Zaire.

**The Belgian Congo**

When Henry Morton Stanley reported on his explorations of Africa, the “Scramble for Africa” was well under way. But Europeans didn’t generally know much about the Congo River basin and weren’t much interested. For the ambitious Belgian king, Leopold II, this was a great opportunity.

He hired Stanley to help him. He also set up an international group of bankers to finance Stanley’s activities on his behalf. Starting at the mouth of the Congo River in 1879, Stanley worked his way upriver. He founded a settlement called Vivi as a capital. Farther upriver, on the south bank of the Congo, he founded a trading station called Leopoldville. Today it’s Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. (The French had already claimed the north bank of the river.) On a later journey, he got local chieftains to sign more than 450 treaties surrendering sovereignty over much of the Congo Basin to Leopold II.

**British Colonies**

The British were the leading colonizers of Africa. Their holdings in West Africa were:
On the continent’s eastern side, the British controlled a swath running from the Mediterranean to the Cape of Good Hope. It ran through:

- Egypt
- Sudan
- Uganda
- Tanganyika and Zanzibar (today’s Tanzania)
- Nyasaland (today’s Malawi)
- Northern and Southern Rhodesia (Zambia and Zimbabwe nowadays)
- Swaziland
- Botswana
- Lesotho
- South Africa.

The British also claimed a territory known as British Somaliland on the Horn of Africa—a peninsula in East Africa that juts into the Arabian Sea. They had numerous island possessions, including the Seychelles, the Maldives, and Mauritius.

Paradoxically, the British got more involved as a colonial power in Africa once they decided to combat slavery. Their diplomats made treaties with kings and chieftains who they hoped would help them stop the trafficking. British missionaries active in the area called for government help as they fought what they saw as “barbarous practices” among native Africans.

On the other hand, up until the middle of the nineteenth century, the British were in no great haste to annex colonies. They tended to see them as a drag on finances. If we can trade with these places, isn’t that all we need? they wondered. Why bother to annex them? That attitude changed, though, once other European powers began to show more interest in Africa.

**South Africa**

In 1652 the Dutch established a colony at the Cape of Good Hope, the southernmost tip of Africa. It was originally meant to be just a supply station for the Dutch East India Company’s ships. But soon the “Boers” (farmers) spread inland. Their large farms displaced the native San and Khoikhoi peoples.

The British took control of the Cape Colony in 1815. Much of South African history is triangular. The rural Dutch (Afrikaners) and the more urban British were often at odds. So were the Boers and the native peoples. And so were the native peoples and the British. Britain and the Boers fought the Boer Wars in 1880–81 and 1899–1902.

The Union of South Africa was created in 1910. It joined the two British-dominated provinces, the Cape and Natal, and the two “Boer republics.” This move gave a big boost to South Africa’s prestige. Its new status as a self-governing “dominion” put it on par with Australia, Canada, and New Zealand within the British Empire.
German Colonies

Vasco da Gama of Portugal reached Tanganyika (today known as Tanzania) in 1498. On his way to India, he explored the East African coast. He claimed it all for Portugal, but the Portuguese never really developed it as a colony.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, though, Europeans did begin to explore the interior of Tanganyika. The German explorer Karl Peters persuaded a group of tribal chiefs to accept German “protection.” Thus Tanganyika became a German colony. The government in Berlin supported the establishment of the German East Africa Company. This was modeled after the British East India Company and other similar entities. (Germany was a little behind other European powers. For centuries it was a collection of little kingdoms and principalities. It had only just become a unified country in 1870.)

In 1891 the German government instituted direct colonial rule—again, in much the way Britain did in India. After German defeat in World War I, the League of Nations mandated Tanganyika to the British.

Namibia was another challenge to European explorers. The Namib Desert kept them away until late in the eighteenth century. In 1878, however, Britain annexed part of this territory to South Africa. German explorers were active there, too, and in 1890 an Anglo-German treaty acknowledged South West Africa, as Namibia was then known, as a German colony. South Africa, then a British colony, occupied it during World War I. After the war, this rule continued under a League of Nations mandate.

The Portuguese reached the coast of Cameroon in the sixteenth century. But there wasn’t much European settlement there until quinine, used to treat malaria, became widely available in the late 1870s. By then, the slave trade was on its way out. In 1884 Germany established a colony it called Kamerun. But after German defeat in World War I, the League of Nations took Kamerun over. Under the League’s mandate, Britain and France ruled different regions.

The History and Impacts of African Independence

African nationalism began to stir almost as soon as the ink was dry on Europeans’ agreements to carve the continent up among themselves. In Tanganyika, for example, German rule brought the native peoples cash crops, roads, and railroads. But the Africans were unhappy under colonial rule. They rebelled in what’s known as the Mahi-Mahi Rebellion of 1905–07. Historians today regard this as one of the first stirrings of Tanzanian nationalism.
The Pursuit of Independence After World War I

Nigeria’s quest for independence makes a good case study. Remember that there was no such place as Nigeria before the British created it. So when Nigerians began to talk about “nationalism,” they generally meant either a regional ethnic identity—Yoruba or Igbo, for instance—or all Africans.

At first, Nigerians cared more about self-government than American-style independence from Britain. Nationalists in the Islamic north tended to be anti-Western. Nationalists in the south, more influenced by European ideas, opposed indirect (colonial) rule. These new Nigerian activists took some of their cues from American-based black leaders such as Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. Du Bois. The nationalists criticized Europeans for failing to appreciate the richness of indigenous cultures. Nigerian clergy often spoke out in favor of political change, too. Their pulpits gave them a forum to criticize colonial rule that few others had.

As the 1920s wore on, several kinds of groups that weren’t obviously political played important roles in the movement for independence. Business and professional associations—such as groups of lawyers or teachers—were one such type. Ethnic and kinship organizations set up to help rural people in the cities were another. A third type was student and youth groups. These attracted people most interested in political change. By 1938 a group called the National Youth Movement was calling for dominion status within the British Empire or Commonwealth of Nations. This would make Nigeria like Canada and Australia.

Nigerians supported the British effort in World War II. They fought against the Italians in Ethiopia as well as in Asia and Europe. For many of them it was a new and broadening experience to have comrades across ethnic and racial lines. But ethnicity and regionalism remained strong forces in Nigerian politics.

After the war, the British saw the need to give up their empire. Two world wars had exhausted Britain and made it more difficult to maintain troops in the colonies. In addition, local peoples, led by leaders like Gandhi in India, were demanding freedom. So the British began to prepare their colonies for independence. And when finally Nigeria had its first “nationwide” political party, it renewed the call for self-government under a democratic constitution. The British finally answered this call. By an act of the British Parliament, Nigeria became an independent country within the Commonwealth on 1 October 1960.

Moves Toward Independence in Other Places

Nigeria’s story shows a pattern seen in other British colonies that gained independence, especially after World War II. At first, the Africans’ goal was not independence, but fuller participation in the existing system. They gained valuable political experience through some sort of legislative council.
South Africans line up in big numbers to vote in parliamentary elections in 2009.

Photo by Scott Baldauf / © 2009 The Christian Science Monitor

Back in 1994 Nelson Mandela became South Africa’s first president elected by people of all races and ethnicities.

And the transitions were generally relatively peaceful. The exceptions were in places with many European settlers—Algeria, a French colony that gained independence in 1962; the Portuguese colonies, which got their independence in the mid-1970s; and Zimbabwe, where a white minority government hung on until 1980.

South Africa is another special case. It gained dominion status in 1910. But its Afrikaner white-minority government and elaborate system of apartheid (a PART height)—racial segregation—made the country a pariah state, an outcast.

Eventually even those white rulers themselves saw that something had to give. “We must adapt or die,” State President P. W. Botha told his people. His successor, F. W. de Klerk, worked with Nelson Mandela, the long-imprisoned hero of the African National Congress, to end apartheid. In 1994 Mandela became South Africa’s first president elected by universal franchise—when everyone gets to vote, particularly when all races and ethnicities get to vote.
Zimbabwe, then known as Rhodesia, likewise had a period of white minority rule, from 1964 to 1980. Britain demanded the white settlers give the black majority a bigger political role. But the settlers refused. Prime Minister Ian Smith’s government issued a “Unilateral Declaration of Independence” from Britain in 1965. Resulting strife led to guerrilla warfare. Eventually the British negotiated a deal for majority rule.

France was the second great colonial power in Africa, after Britain. Like the British at the end of World War II, the French were starting to think about independence for their colonies. Morocco and Tunisia gained their independence in 1956, shortly after their British-ruled neighbors to the east.

More than a dozen other French colonies in Africa became independent as an indirect result of a major French political crisis in the mid-1950s. France’s postwar constitution, the “Fourth Republic,” had led to weak and stalemated government. In addition, France had lost its colonies in Indochina after bitter fighting and was engaged in a costly new war in Algeria. The crisis led to the creation in 1958 of France’s Fifth Republic, complete with a new constitution. This change made the colonies rethink their status, though. The new constitution provided for a French Community, which the African colonies could join as “autonomous republics.” But complete independence was more appealing than mere autonomy, under which France would still be the official ruler. By the end of 1960 more than a dozen French possessions in Africa had become independent.
Portugal, the first European colonial power in Africa, was also the last to leave. And as with Britain and France, independence for colonies came after big changes in the mother country.

In the 1970s guerrillas fought for independence for Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique. Their struggle inspired democratic activists, including military officers, in Portugal. On 25 April 1974, in a nearly bloodless coup back in the mother country, the Carnation Revolution changed Portugal from an authoritarian dictatorship to a democracy. The new leadership was committed to ending the colonial wars. Fairly soon, all three of Portugal’s African colonies became independent states. Afterward, about a million Portuguese citizens were peacefully repatriated—returned to their homeland—to Europe.

About a million Portuguese citizens were peacefully repatriated to Europe after Portugal’s colonies gained independence.

Ships carry freight to and from the Port of Luanda in Angola.
Photo by Robert Harbison / © 1990 The Christian Science Monitor

LESSON 2 ■ The Shadow of Western Colonialism
The Struggle for Power Within African Nations During and After Independence

As you’ve read, there was a pattern for Africans’ achieving independence. Sadly, there has also been a pattern for what happens afterward. African history is full of leaders who have overstayed their welcome. Others have found themselves ousted in coups. Robert Mugabe has been president of Zimbabwe for nearly 30 years at this writing, for instance. This is why Nelson Mandela’s willingness to step down as South Africa’s president in 1999 was so remarkable—like George Washington’s refusing to become the king of the new United States.

In a part of the world used to the hereditary rule—passing down titles, like chief or king, and genes from family member to family member—of tribal chiefs, Western-style rotation in office hasn’t fully caught on. But Africans have had another problem as well: Many of their countries, such as Nigeria, were artificial entities created by the European rulers. They didn’t follow the natural borders or respect the traditional homelands of different ethnic groups.
In some cases, colonial masters played one ethnic group against the other. Their reasons for this often seem absurd today. When the Belgians governed Rwanda, for instance, they favored the Tutsi people. The Tutsis were relatively taller and lighter-skinned than the Hutus, another group. When Africans moved toward independence, though, these artificial countries were what they had to work with.

**Ghana**

In Ghana, for example, Kwame Nkrumah came to power in 1957 as the first prime minister of the first independent African country south of the Sahara. It was an orderly transition. Britain supported it.

Nine years later, though, a group of military officers ousted him in a coup. The plotters called his regime corrupt and abusive. Once he was gone, though, the new leaders still faced many problems. Ethnic and regional divisions remained. So did the challenge of forging a real Ghanaian identity. Under Nkrumah, Ghana seemed to enjoy a spirit of national unity. Once he was gone, people saw that unity as the result of his forceful ways as well as his charisma.

**Uganda**

Uganda is another, even more extreme, example of these same patterns. After an orderly transition, Uganda achieved independence on 9 October 1962. Less than four years later, though, Prime Minister Milton Obote suspended the constitution. He took over all government powers. In September 1967 he introduced a new constitution that gave him even more powers and abolished Uganda’s traditional kingdoms.

Then in 1971 Idi Amin Dada ousted the Obote government in a military coup. Amin was an absolute ruler. His eight-year reign of terror killed at least 100,000 people. It ended in April 1979 when Tanzanian forces backed by Ugandan exiles captured the Ugandan capital. Amin and his remaining forces fled.

**Libya**

Libya has been such a problem for the United States over the years that a few words about it are in order. Libya’s colonial masters early in the twentieth century were the Italians. Like the Germans, they came late to imperialism because they had come late to national unification. Tunisia was the country they really wanted as a colony, but the French got there first.
During World War II, Libyans saw an opportunity for independence. It was likely to come, they thought, if the Allies defeated Italy. And so Libya cooperated with the British war effort in exchange for independence afterward. So it happened. In 1949 Libya became a constitutional monarchy. Ten years later, geologists discovered oil there. Then in 1969 a group of young military officers led by a 27-year-old colonel named Muammar Qaddafi deposed the king in a bloodless coup.

For many years the United States government regarded Libya as a state sponsor of terrorism. US aircraft bombed targets in Libya in 1986 after Libyan agents bombed a nightclub in Berlin, Germany, killing two American service members. The most notable attack blamed on Libya was the 1988 bombing of Pan American Airways Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. It killed all 259 people aboard and 11 on the ground.

More recently, though, Libya has begun to cooperate with the United States and its allies in fighting terrorism. It renounced its programs to develop missiles and weapons of mass destruction, and paid the United States damages for the Pan-Am bombing. The two countries restored diplomatic relations in 2006 and exchanged ambassadors in January 2009.

The political situation that exists in any region is always a result of its history. For Africans, as for Iraqis, Indians, and Pakistanis, that history is complicated by the aftermath of European colonialism. As artificially created countries sprang up where none had been before, that aftermath has often been round after round of dictators, leadership challenges, and ethnic clashes. You’ll read about that in the next lesson.
Lesson 2 Review

Using complete sentences, answer the following questions on a sheet of paper.

1. What major change in North Africa began in 639?
2. What two major advantages did the Bantu peoples have over others in sub-Saharan Africa?
3. How was slavery different in Africa from what it was like in the New World?
4. How did the British role in the slave trade change after 1807?
5. What were the exceptions to a peaceful transition from colonial rule and why?
6. What remarkable thing did Nelson Mandela do in 1999?

Applying Your Learning

7. If you had been an African living under European colonial rule, would you have favored independence? Why or why not?