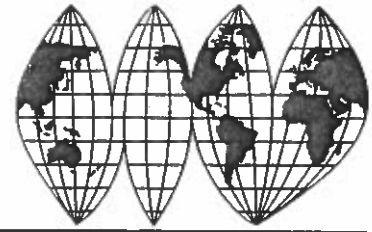


# 29. Africa: The Independent States



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## TEACHER BACKGROUND

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The good news was that independence came in a relatively peaceful process. Starting with Ghana in 1957, most African states gained self-government without revolutionary wars. The exceptions were Algeria and the Portuguese colonies. Since independence, the African states have fought relatively few wars among themselves. Compared to other regions of the world, Africa's borders have been peaceful and stable.

The bad news was and is that the African states have serious internal problems. One of the biggest problems is poverty. Not only are African nations poor, they are getting poorer. From 1974 to 1994, the per capita income in sub-Saharan Africa declined 1.2 percent. As of 1992, Africa was the only continent that did not feed itself. This too may get worse. African soils are often poor, and rainfall is not reliable. So, farming in Africa is often at risk. And the climate may be getting more hostile. The United Nations Conference on Desertification has estimated that 75 million Africans are in danger from spreading deserts. Africans also suffer from lack of even basic education. The literacy rates in some African countries are the lowest on earth: Somalia has 12 percent; Burkina Faso, 13 percent; Niger, 14 percent; Mali, 17 percent; and Mauritania, 17 percent.

Even relatively prosperous African countries have faced problems. Nigeria is the most densely populated sub-Saharan African country. It was a British colony. Colonial borders were drawn in Europe with little reference to African peoples. As a result, Nigeria contains 250 tribal groups. Of these, the three largest dominate. In northern Nigeria, the Hausa Fulani are dominant; the Yorubas are in the southwest; and the

Ibos are in the southeast. Relations among the tribes have not been smooth. In May of 1967, the Ibos declared their region to be the Republic of Biafra. Biafra was the center of Nigeria's oil fields. This started a civil war that lasted until 1970. Since then, the country has been under a variety of dictatorships.

Zaire had a very similar problem. Zaire was formerly the Belgian Congo. The Belgians had intentionally kept their subjects uneducated and unorganized. When independence came in 1960, there was an instant civil war. It was a multisided conflict. One rebel group tried to withdraw Katanga Province from the country. This was motivated partly by tribal differences and partly by desire to control the copper mines in Katanga. The United Nations sent a peace-keeping force that ended the civil war. President Mobutu Sese Seko became dictator and has ruled ever since. He changed the name of both the country and the river that drains it to Zaire.

In some unusual cases, white settlers created problems. Zimbabwe was known as Southern Rhodesia in colonial days. It had a white-run government. Whites were a minority in the colony, but blacks had no vote. As independence approached, it became clear that the British would insist on all citizens, black included, having a vote. In 1965, the white-minority government led by Ian Smith resisted this by declaring independence. The British and the United Nations refused recognition to this white-dominated country. In 1979, Ian Smith gave up, and in 1980, a new majority government was elected. The country changed its name to Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe stayed a parliamen-

tary democracy, and relations between blacks and whites have been excellent.

While the rest of Africa was gaining independence, South Africa was a bastion of resistance. The South African climate is such that Europeans found it pleasant. Dutch farmers had settled there as early as the 1600's. They became Afrikaners. Their only home was Africa, and they dreaded black African rule. In 1948, the Afrikaner-led National Party established a policy of "apartheid." Apartheid is the Afrikaner word for separate development. Under apartheid, there were four races recognized by law: whites, colored, Asians, and Africans. The Africans were further divided into tribes and assigned a homeland. The homelands were 13 percent of the area of South Africa, while the whites controlled 87 percent. Africans who were in white country had to have employment and were required to carry passbooks. Africans lived either in homelands or in townships, which were segregated residential areas near white cities. The fiction was that each culture was developing separately. The fact was that the whites depended heavily on African labor in the mines and factories. The whites received the best jobs, education, and land.

African resistance was put down by force, and the African National Congress was banned. In the 1960's, Africans in the township of Sharpeville protested. The police killed 69 people. There were other uprisings by blacks in 1976 and 1985. These were also put down by force.

Leaders were imprisoned. Nelson Mandela, leader of the African National Congress, spent 27 years in prison and was finally released in 1989. The outside world put pressure on the South African government. The United Nations passed resolutions condemning apartheid. The external pressure built as a series of boycotts. Some were symbolic, such as refusal to allow South Africa in the Olympic Games, while others were more substantive, such as refusal to invest in the country's economy. The cumulative result of the internal and external pressures led to the end of apartheid. South Africa held its first election open to all South Africans regardless of race in April of 1994. To nobody's surprise, Nelson Mandela was elected president. The transition to majority rule was peaceful. President Mandela, like all the leaders in Africa, faced serious problems. But for the first time in the twentieth century, Africans were free to deal with them as they saw fit.