

## African Resistance to Colonial Rule

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Tagged as : [afican civilization](#), [african american studies](#), [black heroes](#), [black history events](#)

Date : December 7, 2013

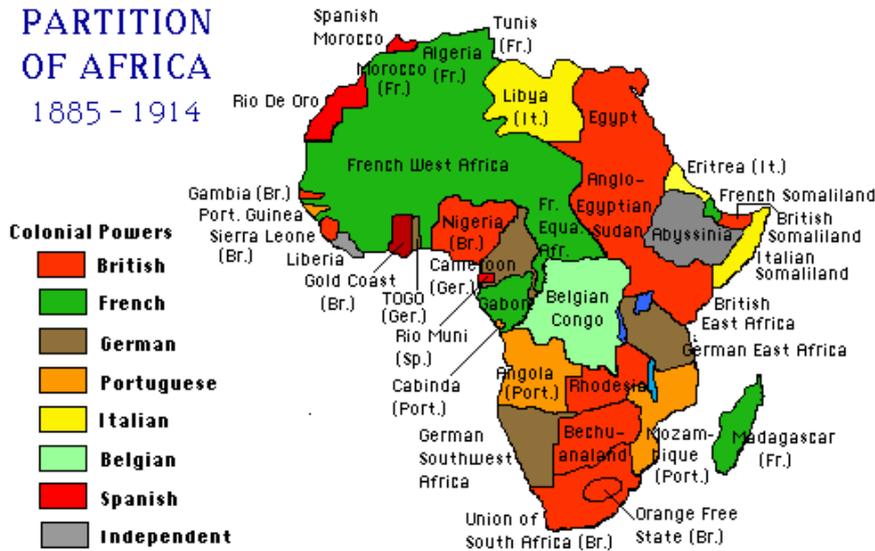


### African Resistance to European Colonialism

While **African resistance to European colonialism** is often thought of in terms of a white and black/European and African power struggle, this presumption underestimates the complex and strategic thinking that Africans commonly employed to address the challenges of European colonial rule. It also neglects the colonial-era power dynamic of which African societies and institutions were essential components.

After the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, at which the most powerful European countries agreed upon rules for laying claim to particular African territories, the British, French, Germans, Italians, Spanish, Belgians, and Portuguese set about formally implementing strategies for the long-term occupation and control of Africa. The conquest had begun decades earlier—and in the case of Angola and South Africa, centuries earlier. But after the Berlin Conference it became more systematic and overt.

**PARTITION  
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1885 - 1914



The success of the European conquest and the nature of African resistance must be seen in light of Western Europe's long history of colonial rule and economic exploitation around the world. In fact, by 1885 Western Europeans had mastered the art of divide, conquer, and rule, honing their skills over four hundred years of imperialism and exploitation in the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific. In addition, the centuries of extremely violent, protracted warfare among themselves, combined with the technological advances of the Industrial Revolution, produced unmatched military might. When, rather late in the period of European colonial expansion, Europeans turned to Africa to satisfy their greed for resources, prestige, and empire, they quickly worked their way into African societies to gain allies and proxies, and to co-opt the conquered kings and chiefs, all to further their exploits. Consequently, the African responses to this process, particularly the ways in which they resisted it, were complex.

[Dr Hakim Adi - The New Scramble for Africa \(part 1 of 3\)](#)

The Multicultural Politic speaks to Hakim Adi from the University of Chichester about The Scramble for Africa in the late 19th century, the colonial period, anti-colonial struggles, the Arab Spring and the recent invasions of Mali and Libya. Adi argues these recent invasions are part of a new scramble for African resources, markets, and geo-political control (see part 2 of 3 below).

**The Complexities of Resistance**

Adding to the complexity was the fact that rapid European imperial expansion in Africa did not necessarily change relationships among African communities. Those in conflict with one another tended to remain in conflict, despite the impending threat from the French, British, Germans, and other powers. There was, moreover, no broadly accepted African identity to unite around during this period. The strongest identities were communal and, to a lesser extent, religious, which begins to explain the presence of African participants in European conquests of other

African societies. During the second half of the nineteenth century, for example, in what is now Ghana, conflict between the Fante and Asante, which predated British designs on the kingdom of Asante, motivated the Fante to join the British against the Asante, who at the time seemed to be their greatest threat.

The complexity of Africans' political relationships among themselves, then, influenced the nature of their resistance to colonial rule. As they resisted European invasions, they confronted both European and African soldiers. That is, they confronted a political hierarchy imposed by Western Europeans that included African proxies. The power was European, but the face of it on the local level was often African. Despite these seeming contradictions, it remains insufficient to speak of African responses to the imposition of colonial rule as a choice between either collaboration or resistance. It was possible to resist colonial rule through collaboration with the colonizers in one instance and in the next to resist European authority. It was also possible to limit European political control through some form of collaboration with European generals or colonial administrators. This is all to suggest that Africans evaluated their circumstances, assessed possible actions and consequences, to make rational responses. Some form of resistance, moreover, remained constant during the period of formal European political dominance. Ethiopia stands alone, however, as the one African society to successfully defend itself against an invading European army and remain free of direct European political domination.



Menelik II, emperor of Ethiopia, led his army to accomplish this unique feat in March 1896, defeating General Oreste Baratieri's Italian army and its Eritrean allies at the Battle of Adwa. Like Menelik II, Samory Touré, who created a large Mandinka empire in West Africa between the 1860s and the 1890s, was an inspiring political and military leader, but in the French he faced a far more capable, tenacious, and experienced adversary than Menelik had in the Italians. Samory's legacy remains controversial, yet he is a significant example of pragmatic resistance for the ways in which he contended with French aggression. He manufactured firearms, relocated his kingdom, and engaged in diplomacy with both the French and the British. Yet as he conquered African territory and engaged in conflicts with African competitors, the French pushed deeper into the West African interior from Senegal, under the direction of Louis

Faidherbe and his Senegalese Tirailleurs—a corps of African soldiers—and the British pushed northward through Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast with a large contingent of Hausa soldiers. Each time the French attacked his territory or the trade routes and goldfields at the heart of his economy, he mounted a series of successful counterattacks, until he was captured by the French, dying in exile in 1900.



Ethiopia's history and political structure fostered a broad-based, unified military response to the Italian invasion. Ethiopians rallied around Menelik II and took pride in the kingdom's glorious history.

These are some of the many examples that defined African resistance to European imperial expansion and colonial rule in Africa; and they in no way exhaust the methods Africans employed to contend with the reality of European colonial rule. They do, however, demonstrate that as Africans confronted European military superiority and political dominance—whether they aligned themselves with Europeans, sought protection, or responded with aggressive military resistance—they were mindful of their social and political environment as they saw it at the time.

They possessed an understanding of their immediate reality, which they took into careful consideration as they attempted to protect their interests and survive in the midst of growing European military aggression and political dominance.

[Source](#)

**From slave labor to armed conflict, the thirst for natural resources has created serious problems for Africa.**

[Dr Hakim Adi - The New Scramble for Africa \(part 2 of 3\)](#)

### [The New Scramble For Africa \(PROMO\)](#)

In January this year France launched a war in Mali, which they claimed would help restore stability to its former colony. But with the western world in a dee...

The continent of Africa has long suffered at the hands of other nations. Europe's major powers battled it out for economic dominance. Today new superpowers such as China seek to feed their voracious appetite for natural resources as their own domestic growth booms. Africa's path of development is seen as a 'paradox of plenty'.

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