

Lesson 2: African Resistance against Colonial Expansion

1. Video Lesson

2. Competencies

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

sympathize with the sacrifices that the Africans made to achieve political independence

3. Brainstorming Question

What was the contribution of Samori Toure in the fight against colonialism?

5. Lesson Presentation

A. African Initiatives and Responses to Colonialism

The Africans attempted to resist the European colonizers as much as they could. The colonial powers employed different methods to colonize Africa such as fake treaties and the use of force. The Africans, on the other hand, reacted to the colonial aggression in two ways. The African reaction to colonial rule included both peaceful and violent methods. The African resistance had a clear ideological basis, that is, the resistance was an attempt to safeguard their sovereignty.

Samori Toure of Mandinka

By the year 1867, Samori became a commander of a relatively strong army having his base at a place called Sanankoro in the highlands of Guinea. Samori Toure worked hard to create a well-trained and properly armed army that could help to build a strong and stable empire. In order to strengthen his army, Samori used to import firearms via Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone since 1876. His military power enabled him to control the gold mine district known as Bure. The areas that were parts of the empire created by Samori Toure included the present-day territories of Sierra Leone, Cot d' Ivoire and Burkina Faso. The French attempt to expand in West Africa in the late 1870s, brought them to direct conflict with Samori Touri. Samori Toure strongly resisted the colonial rule of France in West Africa until the French defeated and captured him in 1898. Eventually, on 29 September 1898 Samori Touri surrendered to the French and was exiled to Gabon and died on 2 June 1990 in captivity.

The Ashanti

The Ashanti Empire was a pre-colonial West African state that emerged in the 17th century in what is today Ghana. From 1790 until 1896, the Ashanti Empire was in a continuous state of war. These wars led to the acquisition of more slaves for trade. The constant warfare also weakened the Empire against the British, who eventually became their main enemy. Between 1823 and 1873, the Ashanti Empire resisted British advance on their territory. In 1874, however, British forces successfully invaded the Empire and briefly captured Kumasi. The Ashanti

rebelled against British rule and the Empire was again conquered in 1897. After another uprising in 1900, the British overthrew and exiled the Asante, annexed the Empire into their Gold Coast colony in 1902.

Urabi Pasha's Rebellion in Egypt

Ahmed Urabi, or Urabi Pasha, was an officer in the Egyptian army. Urabi participated in an 1879 mutiny that developed into the Urabi revolt against the administration of Khedive Tewfik, which was under the influence of an Anglo-French dual rule. This revolt, also known as the Urabi revolt, was primarily inspired by his desire for social justice for the Egyptians based on equal standing before the law. With the support of the peasants as well, he launched a broader effort to try to free Egypt and Sudan from foreign control and to end the absolutist regime of the Khedive Ismael Pasha.

The Mahadist Movement in the Sudan

In 1881, Muhammad Ahmad organized a revolt, declaring that he was the expected Islamic savior, or Mahdi, and it was from this name that the Sudanese religious revivalist and anti-colonial movement was named the Mahadist movement. On August 12, 1881, Al-Mahdi won his first victory over the colonial forces at the battle of Aba. Again in November 1883, the Mahaddists won another victory over the Anglo-Egyptian army in Kordofan Province. Subsequently, in 1885, Al-Mahdi's forces captured Khartoum and killed Charles Gordon Pasha. Five months later, Muhammad Ahmad passed away. The Mahaddists were also known as the Dervishes (religious beggars) and later as the Ansars (helpers).

The British regarded the successive victories of the Mahaddists as a threat and wanted to avenge the death of Charles Gordon. In 1896, the Anglo-Egyptian army, under the command of General Kitchner, advanced into the Sudan. Two years later, in 1898, this army inflicted a final defeat upon the Mahadist forces at the battle of Omdurman. Sudan was occupied by the combined forces of Britain and Egypt. Following this, the British set up what they called the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium. Lord Kitchner was appointed as the first Governor-General of the Sudan.

The Maji-Maji Rebellion

In East Africa, the most serious challenge for the Germans was the widespread resistance of the people of Tanganyika. This rebellion broke out in the southern part of the colony, in the hinterland of Kilwa, in July 1905. It began in the Matumbi hills, following the imposition of heavy taxes and the use of forced labor in the cotton growing farma for export. The revolt spread rapidly throughout the region, with attacks on all foreigners: missionaries, administrators, and their Swahili/Arab clerks. The Maji-Maji revolt demonstrated the possibility of broader African anti-colonial nationalism. The sacrifice of the thousands of Tanzanians who died in the Maji-Maji revolt was important in inspiring the later generation of nationalists who brought their country to independence in the early 1960's.

To sum up, the attempts made by the Africans to stop the European powers from colonizing their countries were not successful. It was partly because the African resistances against the European invaders were not well-organized. The Europeans had also a marked superiority in military training and quality of firearms. Sometimes the Europeans were able to mobilize the Africans against fellow Africans who were determined to fight them.