

Lesson 3: Colonial Administration and the Colonial States

1. Video Lesson

2. Competencies

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

- Identify the difference between the colonial policies of Britain and France;
- Explain the political economy of colonial agriculture, mining and trade; and
- Discuss the political, social and economic impacts of colonialism on Africa.

3. Brainstorming Questions

- How do British and French colonial policies differ from each other?
- Discuss the history of African resistance against colonial rule in any one of the African countries.

5. Lesson Presentation

A. British Colonial Policy

The British followed a colonial administration known as “indirect rule” which was most clearly formulated by Frederick Lugard. “Indirect rule” was believed by the British to be the cheapest and most effective way of administering a vast population stretched over even vaster territories with the minimum of European personnel. But “indirect rule” was far from being a clear-cut system. Its application varied enormously from colony to colony.

The British based their colonial administration upon what they saw as a series of minor but totally separate pre-colonial chiefdoms. To make this a reality, they emphasized differences in dialects and redefined them as totally separate languages. They described customary differences in dress, housing, and religious practices in terms of rigid “tribal” distinctions. Indeed, it has been argued that colonial authorities invented “tribalism.” By insisting on the strength of “tribal” differences and rivalries, colonists made it more difficult for Africans to achieve unity in opposition. The British thus made use of the age-old imperial maxim: “divide and rule.”

B. The French Colonial Policy

The French believed that by teaching the colonial peoples the French language, subjecting them to French law, and giving them French civil and political rights, they could assimilate the people they colonized. Albert Sarraut, Minister of Colonies in 1920–24 and 1932–33, was the individual who laid the foundations for the French colonial policy of administration usually known as “Direct Rule.”

C. Belgian Colonial Rule

Belgian colonial rule in the Congo was based on the idea of a “colonial trinity” in which interests of the state, missionaries and private companies were all considered.

D. Portuguese Colonial Rule

Portuguese colonial rule in Africa, particularly in Angola and Mozambique, included both oppressive and liberal methods. There was no clear landmarked policy to administer the Portuguese colonies in Africa.

E. German Colonial Rule

German colonial rule in Africa from 1884-1914 was an expression of nationalism and moral superiority. The Germans pursued a colonial administrative policy of direct rule like the French to maximally exploit the resources of the people of Tanganyika. The Germans employed direct rule, assigning enough personnel or manpower to administer their colonial possession of Tanganyika.