

## **Lesson 1: The Era of “Legitimate Trade” and Colonial Empires**

### **1. Video Lesson**

### **2. Competencies**

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

- Explain the essence of the “Legitimate Trade”
- Discuss the infrastructure and ideology of the new imperialism
- Describe the motives behind the European partition of Africa

### **3. Brainstorming Questions**

- Why did the Europeans want to colonize Africa?
- How could the European colonizers manage to easily defeat the African people and establish colonial states in Africa?
- Why did Great Britain and France manage to establish big colonial empires while others, like Italy and Germany, were unable to have an adequate number of colonial states in Africa?

### **5. Lesson Presentation**

#### **A. The Birth and Expansion of the ‘Legitimate Trade’**

For three centuries, the “Illegitimate Trade” in humans had dominated the commercial activities in the West African coastal areas. After the Industrial Revolution, the European colonial powers, particularly the British, took measures that first weakened and gradually abolished not only the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade but also the slave trade in general. The Europeans introduced a new trade in West Africa which they called the “Legitimate Trade” in which the principal commodities were no more human beings or African slaves. These commodities for export included items like gum, groundnuts, and palm. By the middle of the 19th century, palm oil became West Africa’s major export item.

However, the imported European clothes thoroughly weakened the development of the African indigenous craft industry. The imported firearms too, had a negative impact. In contrary to this the European merchants, who were involved in the “Legitimate Trade” in West Africa, had succeeded in controlling not only the export trade but also the internal trade in West Africa as well. The European traders maximized their profits as they served as intermediaries between the African merchants and the European traders. This increased commercial competition between the European merchants led to the European competition which eventually culminated in the ‘Scramble for Africa’ in the 1870’s and 1880’s to control sources of raw materials and markets.

## **B. The Infrastructure and the Ideology of New Imperialism**

Following the rapid economic development that came as a result of adopting the economic policy of free trade, a serious financial crisis affected the western states in the early 1870s. In order to withstand the economic crisis and protect their economic interest, European states began to take measures. For instance, in the 1870s and the 1880s, the two major European colonial powers, Great Britain and France partitioned the western part of the African continent into their spheres of influence. The Berlin Conference of 1884/85 enabled European powers to divide Africa among themselves. That led to the physical occupation of territories in Africa which means the intensification the colonial conquest.

The period of the New Imperialism differs from the earlier period in the sense that the Europeans came to Africa with a very developed technology.

Moreover, the Europeans also lacked appropriate means of communication to control Africa particularly the interior parts of Africa. At the early days of colonization, tsetse fly and mosquito had almost prevented the Europeans from entering the African interior. Eventually, the European colonizers managed to penetrate deep into the African interior with relative ease; thanks to technological advancement including the invention of better river boats, steam ship, better rifles, and the discovery of medicine to combat malaria.

To sum up European came to Africa mainly to exploit African resource, to use African resource as a source of raw material their manufactured goods and to use African as market place for their manufactured goods.

## **C. The Partition of Africa, Motives and Processes**

The partition of Africa began with slow territorial acquisition through the early 1880's and was followed by a competitive rush to claim African lands after the Berlin Conference (1884–1885). Because of her position as an industrial nation in the world, Britain dominated Africa's external trade until the second half of the 19th century. She produced industrial goods and exported them to Africa using her largest merchant navy. This provided her with an opportunity to establish trading stations and occupy bases and coastal colonies on the continent. As their home markets became saturated, these powers turned to Africa to sell their manufactured goods. As a result "protectionism" was encouraged more than "free trade". This in turn increased the desire of the new industrial powers.

In 1884, Bismarck declared a German protectorate over three African territories, namely Togoland, Cameroon and Southwest Africa (present day Namibia). He then invited the major European powers to Berlin. The stated goals of the conference were to be the settlement of Congo claims between Britain, France, and Portugal and the Anglo-French rivalries along the Niger River. European powers recognized that rules were needed for controlling African territories, especially for seizures that held the potential for European conflict. By the time the conference ended (February 25, 1885), King Leopold of Belgium had secured ownership of the Congo Free State, and the conference recognized Leopold's so-called "International Association" as the legitimate authority in the Congo basin. In return, the Belgian king agreed to allow European traders and missionaries free access to the area.

Based on the Berlin negotiations, Leopold proclaimed his own personal kingdom, the 'Congo Free State', in 1885. France got acceptance of its claims to the French-Congo; Portugal lost most of its Congo claims; and European powers recognized Germany's new protectorates. The European nations declared free trade along the Congo Basin and free navigation on the Niger River. The European colonial powers also consolidated their rule in the areas they already occupied and set out rules to occupy additional new territories. Nevertheless, the most significant of these rules or General Act of Berlin was Article 36. It stated that colonial powers were obligated to notify each other when they claimed African territory. Furthermore, subsequent "effective occupation" of the claimed area was necessary for the claim to remain valid.