

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 189

“1919 - Africa I”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

There is not a Negro from the coast of Africa who does not... possess a degree of magnanimity which the soul of his sordid master is too often scarce capable of conceiving. Fortune never exerted more cruelly her empire over mankind, than when she subjected those nations of heroes to the refuse of the jails of Europe, to wretches who possess the virtues neither of the countries which they come from, nor of those which they go to, and whose levity, brutality, and baseness, so justly expose them to the contempt of the vanquished.

Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 189. 1919: Africa, part one.

Today is the fourteenth episode in our 1919 World Tour, and I want to take this episode to consider the continent of Africa. We have talked about Africa before; particularly, South Africa during the Boer War, King Leopold and the Congo, the German colonies during the Great War, French intervention in Morocco and Tunisia, and the Italian wars in Ethiopia and Libya.

You might accuse this podcast of only taking an interest in Africa when European soldiers turn up there. That's a fair observation and fairly typical of Western histories, although I did try to spend some time discussing the histories and cultures of each of those places before the Europeans turned up, so you have to give me that much. But today I want to talk about Africa as a whole and its place in the world in 1919.

To begin with, “Africa” is a European construct. The ancient Greeks and Romans divided their Mediterranean-centered world into Europe, Africa, and Asia, and the Western mind has persisted in dividing up the Earth's largest landmass into these three more-or-less arbitrary regions. When

the rest of the world was finally mapped many centuries later, this ancient framework persisted, and cartographers added to it other arbitrary designations—America, Australia, Antarctica—and called these “continents,” though that word has no fixed definition other than, “one of the seven land masses I point to when I use the word ‘continent.’” By the way, this is called an “ostensive” definition.

I would submit to you that the name “Europe” is the most meaningful of the three landmass names used by the ancients, because the people who live in Europe, while they may be divided into many different tribes or ethnic groups, do share a great deal of common history and a number of important cultural commonalities. The European peoples have been trading with each other and making war on each other for thousands of years. Christianity is the dominant religion everywhere in Europe and almost all European languages have common roots. These cultural connections have facilitated the exchange of ideas and innovations throughout European history, and have produced a European consciousness. Europeans think of themselves as Europeans and see something of themselves in other Europeans in a way that they don’t in people from other continents.

Contrast this with Asia, the world’s largest continent and home to a majority of the human race. You find a much greater linguistic and cultural diversity spread over this wider landmass, a continent of vast distances and formidable geographical obstacles that impede communication and trade, and consequently, you do not find there an Asian consciousness analogous to the European consciousness, one that would unite Kurds and Cambodians, Manchurians and Malay, Sinhalese and Siberians. I’m often struck by the fact that the very word “Asia” is in many Asian languages a loan word, borrowed from French or English. There are no Asian words for “Asian” because “Asian” is a European concept.

Africa represents an in-between case. In our time, in the 21st century, there *is* an African consciousness that crosses ethnic and national lines in Africa, but this is a more recent development that arose in reaction to the continent’s unhappy history. A Pan-African Association was founded in 1897 and the first Pan-African Conference was held in London in 1900. It included delegates from the United States, Haiti, the United Kingdom, and the West Indies in addition to delegates from Africa, as one of the goals of the conference was to cultivate mutual support and a sense of kinship among peoples of African descent, wherever they lived. W.E.B. DuBois was one of the delegates.

In 1920, a Pan-African flag was adopted. It consisted of three horizontal stripes, which from top to bottom were red, black, and green. This flag is still in common use in our time as a Pan-African symbol.

Africa is the second-largest continent on Earth. We get the name *Africa* from the Romans, though its origin is obscure. It may have been the name of a community of people living on the Mediterranean coast. When the Romans used the word *Africa*, they meant the southern shore of

the Mediterranean Sea, west of the Nile. But south of that coastline lay an enormous desert. We call it the Sahara. The ancients tended to assume the desert extended all the way to the southern coast of Africa, wherever that might be, though there is some evidence of Roman trade contacts reaching as far south as what is in our time Senegal, Niger, and Chad.

The Sahara marks an important cultural divide in Africa. The peoples along the Mediterranean coast have strong historical and cultural links to Europe and the Middle East. Sub-Saharan Africa is a whole other story, and for our purposes, I'm going to limit today's discussion to Sub-Saharan Africa, and save northern Africa for future episodes.

The Sahara region is believed to oscillate between desert and savanna over the 41,000-year period of the precession of the Earth's axis. There is evidence of human settlement in the Sahara during the end of its most recent savanna phase, including rock paintings and carvings that depict hippos, antelopes, giraffes, crocodiles, and cattle in places that are desert today. The savanna phase is thought to have ended about 6,000 BC, and the desert may turn green again in another 15,000 years or so.

It took until the year 1498 for Europeans to circumnavigate Africa and discover at last how big it really is and confirm that there is indeed a large and inhabited portion of the continent south of the desert. For the next 300 years, Europeans treated Africa mostly as an obstacle they needed to work around in order to get to the good stuff in Asia. Europeans established outposts along the African coast to aid passing ships. As you already know, the Dutch began settling the southern tip of the continent, where the land and the climate were most congenial to European farming methods.

Trade between Europe and Africa gradually developed and grew over this period. Because the Turks and the Arabs dominated trade with Africa from Morocco to Zanzibar, the Europeans built their trade along the other African coasts, especially West Africa, the part of the continent closest to Europe but south of the Sahara, and where there was no Arab presence. Here Europeans traded with Africans, and the names the sailors bestowed upon different sections of the West African coastline amount to a catalog of the available trade goods: The Grain Coast. The Ivory Coast. The Gold Coast.

And the Slave Coast.

Slaves were Africa's principal export during this period. Africans took European trade goods in exchange, preferring textiles, liquor, ironware and especially firearms and shackles, which were useful in rounding up more slaves. Europeans did not capture their own slaves; they paid coastal Africans to do it for them. Parties of coastal slavers went into the interior to take slaves from other ethnic groups. Many inland communities lived in perpetual fear of these slave raids. Others accommodated them by gathering their own slaves for resale. Some communities used the slavers as a convenient way to get rid of thieves and other undesirables.

Slavery was commonplace in African cultures, including the buying and selling of slaves. Arabs had been buying African slaves on the east coast for centuries, and slave caravans had trekked across the expanse of the Sahara to deliver their human cargo to Algiers or Tunis. European slave trade was different, though. At its peak, the demand for slaves was far higher in West Africa than had ever been seen before anywhere on the continent, and while the Arabs paid a premium for women slaves, the Europeans were primarily interested in men, and took so many that the resulting manpower shortage crippled local economies.

What did Europeans want with so many African slaves? Among Africans, it was widely believed that the voracious European appetite for African flesh was literal; that Europeans bought Africans for their dinner tables. This is an ironic counterpoint to the widespread and mostly bogus Victorian-era fascination over cannibalism among Africans. There are multiple accounts of newly purchased African slaves expressing relief upon learning they were not to be eaten after all.

But they were packed tightly into ships and carried across the Atlantic on long sea voyages under conditions that would today draw any shipmaster who dared impose them on livestock a harsh penalty. It has been estimated that for every 100 Africans captured by slavers, only about 65 made it to the coast, and only about 50 arrived alive in the New World. Besides the horrors aboard the ships, the long sea voyage was disorienting and frightening to the Africans, many of whom had never seen the ocean before. But they must have deduced they were traveling far from home and that there was no prospect of returning.

By the year 1800, there were about four million people of African ancestry living in the New World. About half of these lived in Brazil, and about a million more each in the Spanish Empire and in the United States. We can thus speak of an African diaspora. If there was any mystery about why the Europeans preferred male slaves, it was resolved when the slaves were put to work. Some were used in mining, but most to produce and harvest valuable cash crops, principally cotton, tobacco, coffee, and sugar cane, for European markets. All of these crops were prized in Europe, but none could be grown there. So they were produced in the warmer climates of the New World on large plantations that amounted to industrialized agriculture powered by slave labor, a system similar to the ancient Roman *latifunda* and dedicated to producing the largest possible harvests for the largest possible profits. The fact that the farmworkers didn't get paid for their labor certainly helped enhance the bottom line.

Why were Africans, of all the world's peoples, singled out for modern industrialized slavery? For one thing, there were African dealers in the ports and at the trading posts with slaves ready to sell. Beyond that, slave owners and traders of the time believed, or at least professed to believe, that Africans were stronger, had more endurance, were more docile and obedient, and were resistant to heat and disease, more so than, say, Native Americans, who often died in large numbers when forced to do similar work. In modern times, we attribute this to the fact that the indigenous Americans had no natural resistance to Old World diseases, which the Africans did

have. As for that whole “docile” thing, I imagine it might have had something to do with the fact that their homes were thousands of miles away across a wide ocean and the Africans were fully aware of this, as opposed to indigenous Americans who had more tempting opportunities to slip away and hightail it back home.

Theologically, Christian and Muslim slave traders alike justified African slavery by reference to Jewish Scripture. In a bizarre coda to the famous story of Noah in chapter nine of Genesis, right after the flood recedes and everyone leaves the Ark, Noah immediately plants a vineyard, makes wine, and gets falling-down drunk because priorities. But Noah gets so drunk he passes out naked and is seen in this naked drunken state by his son Ham. And so, argued these theologians, Ham is cursed to be servant to his brothers, and since Ham is taken to be the ancestor of all African people, then all Africans remain under this ancient curse and are therefore divinely ordained to serve those of other races.

In fact, Scripture never even says that Ham is cursed—it says his son Canaan is cursed, which makes even less sense, cause what did Canaan even do?—nor does it say that all Africans are descendants of Ham or that all descendants of Ham are cursed. But other than that, the logic is impeccable.

By 1800, public opinion began turning against slavery and the slave trade, notably in Britain. During the same period that the Atlantic slave trade was flourishing, and it must be said, Britain was capturing an increasing share of this trade for itself, domestically British society was moving toward an ever greater respect for the rights of the individual. This period saw the Reformation in England and in Scotland, and the English Civil War, during which Colonel Thomas Rainsborough famously declared, “The poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as the greatest he.” A hundred years later, the patriotic song “Rule, Britannia!” would proclaim that “Britons never will be slaves.”

This was also the age when the Industrial Revolution was getting off the ground, not to mention the American Revolution, and it was also the heyday of Adam Smith, the founder of economics. Smith believed that slavery could never compete with paid labor, because paid workers had a much greater incentive to work with enterprise and diligence. And in any case, Smith found slavery profoundly immoral, as he expressed in the passage I quoted at the top of the episode. These changing attitudes led to Britain outlawing the trans-Atlantic slave trade in 1807. The United States followed suit in 1808. In 1815, at the Congress of Vienna, Britain persuaded the other participants also to outlaw the slave trade. Britain outlawed slavery altogether in 1833, France in 1848, the United States in 1865, and Brazil in 1888. The British also pushed for an end to the Arab slave trade in East Africa and Zanzibar, which I covered in episode 105.

This was a long and frustrating process. Nations would officially agree to end the trade in slaves, but then look the other way as the black market in slaves continued unabated. Spain, Portugal, Zanzibar, and the Ottoman Empire were the worst offenders in this regard. The Royal Navy

patrolled the African coasts and its crews received a £5 bounty for every slave they freed. Some 150,000 slaves were liberated this way, and some British sailors became very wealthy. Many of these liberated slaves were sent to Sierra Leone, a British Crown Colony in West Africa established as a haven for liberated slaves.

[music: “Kumasi Groove”]

But apart from trading for slaves and ivory and a few other commodities, Europeans maintained only a modest presence in Africa even as late as the early 19th century. Europeans rarely ventured into the interior of Africa, and these lands and their peoples remained a mystery to them. There were a few reasons for this. One was disease. Europeans who braved the African interior frequently fell ill from malaria, cholera, yellow fever, dysentery, or trypanosomiasis, also known as “sleeping sickness.” Africa is famously home to many species of animal that are dangerous to humans, such as rhinoceroses, lions, crocodiles, hippopotami, elephants, and venomous snakes. And the native Africans were often hostile to outsiders. No doubt a long history of slavers attacking your communities and carrying off your children to an unknown fate can make you and your neighbors a little twitchy. And it isn’t as if African peoples didn’t fight wars among themselves; they certainly did.

Europeans never enjoyed the same success in settling Africa that they had in the New World or in Australia, South Africa being the notable exception. Besides all the reasons I just mentioned that made Africa inhospitable, European-style agriculture didn’t succeed in Africa the way it did in the Americas or Australia. Horses, the Europeans’ go-to power source for farm work and for transportation, can’t survive the climate in many places. And the African natives were more numerous and harder to push aside. They had been armed with weapons given them in exchange for slaves, remember.

This situation began to change by the mid-19th century. At the same time public opinion in Europe was turning decisively against African slavery, new technologies were developing that would make Africa more accessible to Europeans. Quinine to treat malaria, steam-powered river boats, and modern rifles and machine guns that gave Europeans a decisive edge over the older muzzle-loaded weapons the Africans wielded. As Europeans began to probe into the African interior, their accounts were published in books, magazines, and newspapers, which were the developing mass media of the time. For the benefit of you young people, think of them as the BuzzFeed and YouTube of the 19th century. This is also when you begin to find the phrases “the dark continent” and “Darkest Africa.” Both phrases appear to have been coined by our old friend, the journalist Henry Morton Stanley, he of “Dr. Livingstone, I presume,” and also accomplice to the mass murders overseen by King Leopold. See episodes 19 and 20.

What did people mean by “the dark continent”? In the most literal sense, they meant “dark” as in mysterious, unexplored, not yet brought to light. Metaphorically, well, most of what the Western public knew about the interior of Africa came from explorer-journalists like Stanley who

ventured into the African interior and then wrote up what they found for newspapers and magazines. The term “clickbait” had not yet been coined in the 19th century, but journalists of the time would certainly have understood the concept, which is why their tales of mysterious Africa tended to be romanticized to the point of lurid. They painted a picture of thick jungles, where dangerous animals and hostile natives lurked behind every tree. Where savagery was the norm, and the only law was the law of the jungle, a phrase popularized by Rudyard Kipling in *The Jungle Book*, published in 1894, though probably not coined by him. A primitive land where people lived in Stone Age conditions, where violence was endemic, women left their breasts uncovered, and cannibalism was a part of everyday life.

Ah, yes. The cannibalism thing. It has been said that the Victorians were far more interested in talking about African cannibalism than any Africans were in practicing it. I’ve already noted that as late as my own childhood in the 1960s, we often found in our comics and cartoons the trope of primitive Africans who live in straw huts and wear grass or leaves for clothing, yet somehow always manage to have a huge iron cauldron (despite no other evidence of metalworking), available to cook any Western character who might happen by. Even as recently as the 2018 film *Black Panther*, M’Baku warns Agent Ross, “I will feed you to my children,” and Ross appears to take the threat quite seriously until M’Baku laughs at him and says, “I’m kidding. We are vegetarians.” So even today in the 21st century, audiences must be aware of this trope, or else that joke wouldn’t land.

But I digress. The metaphorical meaning of phrases like “dark continent” is that Africa is a place lacking in enlightenment, primitive, savage, bloodthirsty. Which raises in the Western mind two questions. Why is this so, and what is to be done about it?

Western civilization of this era regarded itself as the apex of human accomplishment. This did not mean that they saw no value in other civilizations. The accomplishments of, for example, China or India or the Ottoman Empire were certainly admired in the West, but the prevailing opinion was that these other cultures had reached a certain level of development and then stagnated. Only the West was continuing to learn and advance.

Within this framework, Africa was notable for not having produced even one of these so-called “lesser” civilizations. Africa appeared mired in the Neolithic era, a place where nothing had changed and nothing had been accomplished in ten thousand years. Africa, in short, had no history. So fixed was this image of Africa in Western minds than even when Westerners stumbled across archeological evidence to the contrary, the ruins of Great Zimbabwe for example, they speculated that these must have been built by Arabs or ancient Phoenicians or even King Solomon.

In truth, Africa certainly did have history. Many kingdoms and empires rose and fell over the centuries, and in between, they made war on their neighbors. Not much different from European history, when you get right down to it. The most recent great African kingdom was the Zulu,

who rose to prominence in the early 19th century under the leadership of Shaka, who has been called the African Napoleon, and aptly so, since his reign saw the Zulu terrorizing their neighbors contemporaneously with the French under the reign of Napoleon, the European Shaka, terrorizing *their* neighbors.

More enlightened Western historians allowed that Africa had a history, but since Africans did not have written records, that history was lost, since written records are the foundation of Western historiography. In more recent times, African historians have been able to tease out stories of Africa's past from oral histories, along with modern archeology and genetics, tools unavailable to early twentieth-century Western historians.

In our time, the early 21st century, historical research is uncovering the role of disease in creating the European image of a primitive Africa, a story that parallels the story in the Americas. In the Americas, as Europeans landed and pushed into the interior, they brought with them Old World diseases to which the indigenous peoples of the New World had no resistance. Diseases like smallpox and measles. These caused widespread death and a rapid population drop just before the Europeans themselves arrived. When they did turn up, they saw under-populated lands with a primitive economy and assumed the New World had always looked like this, not realizing what they were seeing was the aftermath of a disaster.

Something similar occurred in late-19th-century Africa. Here it was not a human disease like smallpox or measles, both of which were already endemic in Africa as they were in Europe and Asia. No, it was the cattle disease rinderpest. European and Asian cattle had a natural resistance to rinderpest, but when Europeans began bringing their own cattle to Africa, the rinderpest devastated the native African cattle, which had no resistance. An estimated 80-90% of all cattle in tropical Africa died in a matter of years. African cultures that depended on cattle ranching from Sudan to South Africa collapsed, impoverishing the Africans and opening the way for German and British and South African conquest and settlement. The Europeans saw destitute native Africans scrabbling away at subsistence agriculture and again assumed Africa had always looked like this, not understanding that these people were the survivors of a catastrophe.

Even worse, the disappearance of the cattle led to grazing lands quickly becoming overgrown by lush jungle, which created the perfect breeding ground for the tsetse fly which in turn led to an epidemic of the disease carried by the tsetse fly, trypanosomiasis, or sleeping sickness. Africa has still not recovered from the sleeping sickness, which kills a hundred thousand a year even in our time. Ironically, European administrators took these overgrown cattle pastures to be virgin jungle and designated them national forests, barring the native Africans from them, blissfully unaware that these Africans' parents and grandparents had pastured their cattle there.

Such misconceptions helped color the image of Africa as a land mired in the Stone Age, which led Westerners to ponder the reason for this presumed state of affairs. Two schools of thought emerged. The first drew on Charles Darwin's recently developed theory of evolution to argue

that race is destiny. Europeans were the most accomplished of the human species because they were tougher and smarter than anybody else. Africans, by contrast, were the least evolved; their lack of accomplishment proved they were closer to other primates and thus simply incapable of building a civilization. Asian peoples fell somewhere in between these extremes. Also, the pseudoscience of phrenology was in its heyday at this time. That's the idea that the abilities and talents of a human being are related to the size and shape of that person's brain, and conversely, that study of a person's skull allows the phrenologist to accurately predict that person's skills. Phrenology was regarded by many as a pseudoscience even at the time, but there were others who put it to use to claim that African brains demonstrably lacked the abilities required to build a civilization. They made adequate manual laborers, perhaps, but could never organize or lead a society. There was ample evidence even at the time that this wasn't true and that Africans could be just as creative or inventive or ingenious as anyone else, but people see what they want to see, you know?

The second and slightly more enlightened explanation was that Africans were being held back by the harsh circumstances of life in Africa—the wild animals, the jungle, the diseases—coupled with ignorance and a propensity among Africans to embrace superstition instead of reason.

In contrast to the first explanation, what we might call the biological explanation, which simply says “this is how it is” and provides no guidance on what to do about it, the second explanation, ignorance and superstition, readily suggests a solution: education and Christianity.

No matter what Westerners might believe about the abilities of Africans, every one of Christianity's many forms and denominations officially teaches that God values the soul of an African as highly as the soul of a European. The ability of many Western Christians to believe this and yet not believe it at the same time is a perpetual source of amazement to me, but there it is. Still, there were plenty of 19th-century Christians who *did* believe it. Also, the English-speaking world of the 19th century was seeing the rise of evangelically oriented nonconformist Christian movements, like John Wesley's Methodists and John Nelson Darby's Plymouth Brethren, just to name two. These movements did their best work among the poor, the neglected, the oppressed, and the needy. They practiced a face-to-face, one-on-one form of evangelism that celebrated each and every individual conversion as a victory. When John Wesley was criticized for preaching outside his parish, he famously retorted “the world is my parish.” It wasn't much of a leap from there to the evangelization of Africans.

[music: “Kumasi Groove”]

In the year 1800, there were virtually no native African Christians, apart from Africa's two indigenous churches, the Coptic Church in Egypt and its cousin, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Most other Africans were either Muslim or practiced folk religions. By the year 1900, there were millions of Christians in Africa.

Missionaries risked their lives traveling to Africa, and many died there. The work was slow at first, and many missionaries were frustrated by the small numbers of converts. This was because conversion to Christianity was a big step for Africans. The missionaries required that their converts not participate in many of the rituals that were part of daily life in Africa. No more ritual dancing, no more invocation or appeasement of spirits, no more witchcraft, no more polygamy, no more male or female circumcision. It was a lot to ask.

Many missionaries were also physicians, like Dr. David Livingstone, and the introduction of Western medicine was a powerful argument in favor of welcoming the missionaries. Later, as African converts learned Christian theology and became preachers themselves, the numbers of conversions grew. African preachers more easily communicated with and persuaded their fellow Africans. Missionaries advocated for Africans and raised money for work in Africa. They sometimes got involved in local African politics—we've already seen examples of that in this podcast. Sometimes missionaries of different denominations took different sides in local African disputes.

Missionaries helped develop writing systems for African languages, so that Africans could be taught Scripture in their native speech. Regrettably, missionaries didn't work in the other direction; they didn't record and translate the oral traditions of Africans for a Western audience and a valuable cultural opportunity was lost. Missionaries hoped that Christianity would bring Africans together. I don't know why they thought that; it hasn't shown any notable ability to bring Europeans together. It didn't in Africa, either. Different African churches embraced different theological positions, sometimes developing native African theologies from their own interpretations of Scripture.

Conversion to Christianity was one prong of the Western strategy to uplift Africa. The other prong was to develop trade, in order to bring Africa into the community of nations. And when I say "develop trade," I mean, "conquer."

The period from 1870 to the beginning of the Great War, the Belle Époque, was a period of rapid economic growth and booming international trade. It was the Second Industrial Revolution, as you well know if you've been listening to this podcast from the beginning. Raw materials and agricultural products from around the world flowed into Europe and North America, and these industrialized nations exported in turn the products of their factories. To the business and political leaders of the Western world, to civilize Africa meant to bring the continent into the world trade network. Africa already exported ivory and spices, and later rubber. The interior of the continent was unexplored, but could be assumed to contain mineral riches. There were markets for all these commodities in the West, and Africans represented potential customers for Western manufactured goods.

But order had to be imposed. And so, as modern technologies at last made it possible for European soldiers to invade and conquer, this led to the so-called Scramble for Africa, when the

continent was parceled out among the European powers following the Berlin Conference in 1884, all of which we have discussed before. You'll recall there was an emphasis on trade at the conference, and King Leopold secured his claim to a vast area of the Congo basin by promising free trade.

Wherever Europeans established control over the native populations, they encouraged the development of an export economy, usually meaning large-scale industrial farming of crops for export to Europe. Africans resisted this departure from their traditional small-farm subsistence agriculture, but their new European overlords persuaded them to adopt the new methods. This "persuasion" often involved liberal use of the lash. Colonial officials and European settlers in Africa tended to be the most enthusiastic proponents of such methods; they justified them on the grounds that Africans were by nature a casual and lazy people who lacked proper European values of industry and hard work and therefore needed "motivation."

You might well be wondering, what is the difference between enslaving Africans and shipping them across the Atlantic to labor in plantations for the benefit of European slaveholders and physically forcing Africans to labor in plantations in Africa, where they might be paid a pittance but most of the profits still go to the landowner, who is some European who just arrived a few years ago? Well, some Europeans were asking this very same question, especially liberals and socialists, and the missionaries who were on the scene and witnessing all this and reporting it to their missionary societies back home.

Again, if you think back to our episodes on King Leopold's Congo Free State, you recognize this pattern. The Congo Free State was the worst and most heartless exploitation of Africans, but similar exploitation was going on across the continent. It was a difference of degree, not of kind.

But there were other, more positive developments. European colonial officials in Africa applied the same methods they had used elsewhere to administer the colonies. This included recruiting native Africans to serve as soldiers and police to enforce colonial administration. Africans had a reputation as fierce warriors, and when European officers recruited native units, they encouraged this martial spirit and appealed to African warrior traditions. African soldiers learned how to use European military hardware. African NCOs learned how to give orders and command soldiers.

The Europeans also needed to recruit native officials to administer the colonies, which required a system of education. The first schools in Africa were founded by the missionaries; over time, European governments either subsidized the missionary schools or established their own secular schools. By the early twentieth century, hundreds of thousands of African children were attending thousands of schools across the continent. They were learning to read and write and do math, as well as studying modern medicine and hygiene. And geography. They were learning what Africa was, who Africans were, and the nature of the relationship between Africa and the rest of the world.

This new generation of educated Africans tended to take their teachers and the missionaries at their word when the Europeans told them their goal was to civilize Africans, that is, to make them like Europeans. Well, aren't we like Europeans now? This was a sensitive question. The paradox of African colonialism was that the Europeans most resistant to accepting Africans as equals were the very settlers and soldiers and colonial officials who actually lived in Africa and had the closest contact with native Africans. Instead of asking "Why is Africa so backward?" it might be more instructive to reframe the question as "What is it about Africa that turns otherwise decent Europeans into bloodthirsty savages?"

In 1901, a British Army officer in Nigeria ordered a dozen African men flogged for the crime of going on strike for better pay. These Africans were educated English-speaking Anglican churchgoing carpenters who represented everything Europeans claimed they wanted Africans to become. This British officer was even more appalled when his victims banded together afterward and hired an African barrister to file a legal action against him for assault in a British court, but hey, you can't get any more civilized than that, right? Naturally, the British officer was able to escape prosecution, because civilization is all well and good, but let's not get crazy here.

Incidents like this were taking place all across Africa in the early twentieth century, calling attention to the stark dichotomy between what the European colonial masters said they wanted from the Africans, and how they actually treated them.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Paul for his donation, and thank you, Peter, for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons help make it all happen, for themselves and for everyone, so if you have a few bucks and would like to help out, visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com, and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

While you're there, you can leave a comment and let me know what you thought about today's show. I also post playlists of the music used on the podcast, along with composer credits and other information, so if you hear a piece of music you'd like to know more about, that's the place to look. Most of the music I use is free and downloadable, and you'll also find links to sites where you can download it, if you like.

And I hope you'll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we conclude our discussion of Africa by examining recent events in Ethiopia and taking a look at the system of mandates under which Germany's African colonies will be governed henceforth. That's next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. I mentioned the Pan-African flag, and its color scheme of red, black, and green. I also mentioned the 2018 film *Black Panther*. I would be remiss if I did not also point out that if you've seen the film, you know that the title character usually dresses in black, even when he's not in his superhero costume. You also would know that two of his closest associates, Okoye and Nakia, typically dress in red and green, respectively. There are two scenes

in the film, at two different locations, when the three of them walk down a street together, T'Challa in the middle, with Okoye on his right and Nakia on his left. They're wearing different clothes, but each time, the color scheme they present to the audience is red, black, green.

I'm pretty sure that's not a coincidence.

[music: Closing Theme]