Colonialism Essay, Research Paper

By 1875 European possessions in Africa consisted of some forts and trading posts along the coast and a few tiny colonies. Between 1880 and 1910, however, Africa was divided up among the Europeans. For the next 50 years decisions affecting Africa and its people were made not in Africa, but in London, Paris, Lisbon and other European capitals. France acquired a huge empire in North and West Africa. Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Mali and other areas in West Africa came under French rule. Britain’s colonies were scattered throughout the continent. Although the French controlled the most territory, Britain ruled the greatest number of people. Gambia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, Nigeria, South Africa, Rhodesia, Uganda, Kenya, Egypt, the Sudan and others were taken over Eritrea, a large part of Somaliland and Libya. Southwest Africa, Tanganyika, Togoland and Cameroon were ruled by Germany until Germany’s defeat in World War I. By 1914 there were two independent countries left in Africa-Liberia and Ethiopia. And even Ethiopia was taken over by Italy in 1935. (Italy controlled Ethiopia until 1942 when the British drove the Italians out.)

European rule came to Africa in many different ways. Sometimes a European trading company made agreements with Africa chiefs permitting the company to trade and keep order in the area. The traders then put pressure on their government in Europe to take over in order to protect them. In a few cases tribal chiefs voluntarily asked for the protection of one European nation in order to avoid being taken over by another European nation. Sometimes the Africans even asked for European protection against other African tribes.Treaties were signed by the Af~ican chiefs in which they gave the European company or government the right to keep order (govern) and to take over the land and resources in their area. Thousands of treaties were signed by African rulers giving away most of their rights to the Europeans, but the Africans never really understood these treaties and did not realize what they were giving away.

Britain went to the Cape Colony for colonialistic and imperialistic reasons. While they were in South Africa, they made the national language English. They also imposed religion and other beliefs. Thousands of British colonists went to South Africa and imposed many reforms while they were there.

Slavery was one of the many reforms that was not imposed on South Africa. In 1833, slavery was abolished in South Africa. The campaigns to abolish the trade of slaves exposed the abusive nature of slavery and led to the formation of the Britsh Anti-Slavery Society in 1823. Long before that, the thrust for full emancipation of the enslaved Africans began with the successful revolt of the slaves in the French colony of St. Domingue during the French Revolution. A radical commissioner freed all slaves and admitted them to full citizenship, a move ratified the following year by the revolutionary government in Paris, which extended freedom to all French colonies.

The British along the eastern Cape Frontier intruded on Xhosa land, causing several bloody wars. The governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Harry Smith, gained control over the Orange River territory in 1848. His policy of expansion was declined by the British government, however, which recognized by convention with the Boers the independence of the Transvaal territories in 1862 and the Orange free states in 1854. By the late 1850s, the territory beyond the Vaal had joined into the South African Republic. Although attempts to unite the republic and the Orange free states were futile, the two Boer republics maintained a close relationship in succeeding years.

Representative government was granted to the British colony of Natal in 1856. In 1872, the Cape Colony received responsible self government, which meant the government was independent except in foreign and economic affairs. After the discovery of diamonds in 1867 Griqualand West, which was claimed by the South African Republic, Britain renewed its expansionist policy into Boer territory, declaring Basutoland a protecterate in 1868. They also reimposed British rule over the South African Republic in 1877. Two years later a war ended the Zulu threats in Natal. When Africaners successfully took up arms against the British in 1881, South Africa was allowed semi-independence.