

3 The scramble for Africa, 1870s–1890s

Early in 1867, a South African teenager name Erasmus Jacobs sat down beneath a tree to rest after fixing a water pipe on the “de Kalk” family farm. A *mooi klip* – “beautiful stone” – caught his eye; he gathered it up, took it home, and gave it to his siblings to play with. After some weeks passed Erasmus and his sisters and brother brought out the stone to use in a game they were playing. A neighbor – the former owner of “de Kalk,” Schalk van Niekerk – arrived and noticed the stone. He took it to the window of the home and scraped the glass with it to see whether it would cut or mark its surface. It cut. Van Niekerk left with the stone and eventually brought it to Dr. William Atherstone, a mineralogist, for examination.

On April 2, 1867, Atherstone wrote to Richard Southey, the chief secretary of the Cape Colony, reporting that he had received a “fine Diamond” from Hope Town, a settlement on the banks of the Orange river to the northeast of Cape Town. “It *cuts* (not scratches) glass easily,” he stated. The following week, the *Colesberg Advertiser* heard the news and published a hastily produced article in time for its weekly print run. “There is a story this morning afoot,” began the piece, about a “stone” apparently valued at £800.¹ The *mooi klip* proved to be a 21-and-a-quarter carat brownish-yellow diamond. Later that year it was exhibited at the World’s Fair in Paris under the soon-to-be world-famous moniker, “the Eureka Diamond.” It set off a diamond rush in South Africa, the impact of which is felt to this very day.

The discovery of diamonds and then gold in South Africa reinforced the centuries-old European belief that Africa was a land of practically limitless wealth that would reward any enterprising European nation that established its presence there. In the late 1870s and early 1880s the various European powers carved out large sections of the African continent that they deemed were their “spheres of influence.” Faced with international competition they had not seen since the end of the eighteenth century, British statesmen and politicians responded in kind, formally annexing vast territories across Africa and placing them under administrative control in order to protect British “interests” from encroachment on the part of other European countries. At an international conference held in Berlin in 1884 and

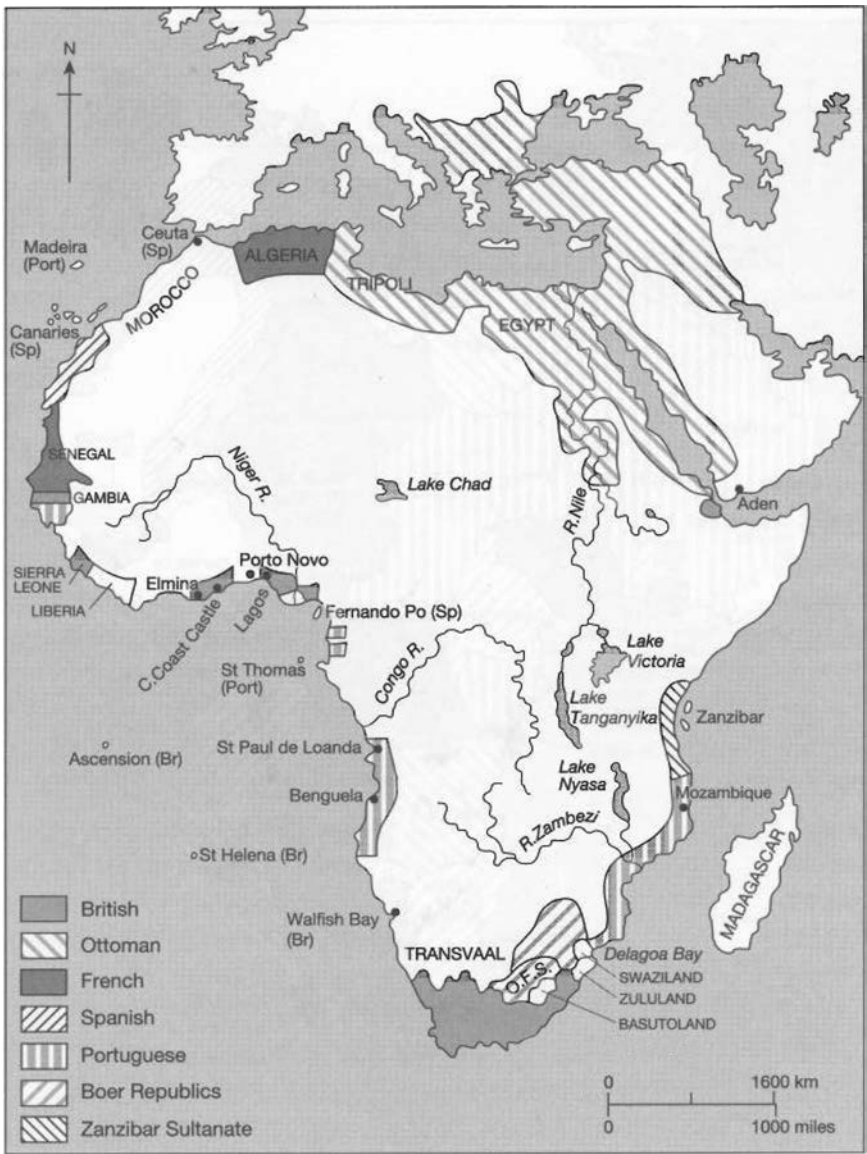
1885 to try to settle conflicts over West Africa, Europeans began the process of recognizing each other's claims to a continent not their own, drawing up maps delineating which power would hold sway where, and establishing the rules to determine how the scramble would take place. This carving up of the "magnificent African cake" continued in a number of later agreements over the next six years, though much of it remained largely confined to paper before World War I, as Africans put up strong resistance against the European presence and the latter did not possess the resources to make good their claims when it came to translating them into actual governance on the ground.

The scramble for Africa took place in a remarkably short period of time. In 1876, Europeans controlled perhaps one-tenth of the African landmass. During the 1880s they claimed five million square miles containing 60 million Africans; by 1900, nine-tenths of Africa had been colonized. On the ground much of the scramble was undertaken by chartered and even private companies, which were granted permission to act as the representatives of European governments, thereby saving taxpayers the costs of empire. This was merely one aspect of a larger imperial impulse – known as "new imperialism" – on the part of the industrialized powers, which by 1900 could boast that fully one-fifth of the land on the globe and one-tenth of the world's population were under their authority. New imperialism had its origins in a number of developments that took place after 1870: widespread industrialization, the unification of Germany and the rise of extra-European nations to great power status, an economic downturn, and the popularization of ideas about race and war that we associate with Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.

Erasmus Jacobs' discovery of the Eureka diamond had monumental repercussions for the lives of Africans in southern Africa. By the 1890s a migrant labor system existed that drew men and women from all over the region to the diamond mines of Kimberley and the gold mines of the Witwatersrand ("The Rand" after 1886). The system caused social pressures and reordering in rural communities as well as in the urban sprawls of Kimberley and Johannesburg, and spurred the formation of a modern sense of "tribe" that we still recognize today. Perhaps most importantly the racialized legislation passed to control black migrant laborers formed the basis for twentieth-century "segregation" and then apartheid in South Africa. Despite these pressures African peoples negotiated the system skillfully. Whether as washermen, prostitutes, beer-brewers, or participants in mine life, workers learned to utilize and shape their situations to create meaningful lives in the midst of a system that was designed to deprive them of this ability.

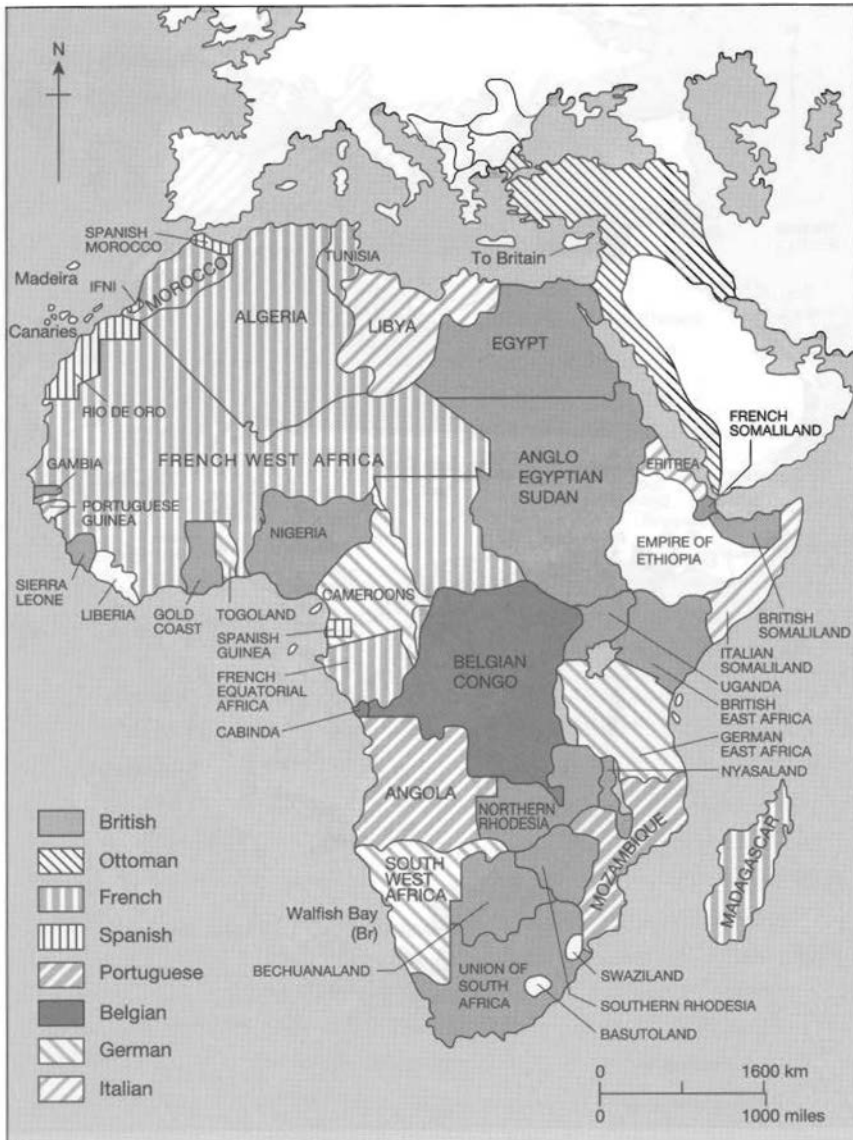
Britain's second industrial revolution, 1870–1914

The first industrial revolution that began in Britain in the 1760s and ran until the 1860s cannot really be considered "revolutionary." It involved



Map 3.1 The European presence in Africa, c. 1870
© *The Scramble for Africa* by M. E. Chamberlain, p. xxxix (Pearson, 2010).

the application of steam power to manufacturing processes, raising output and productivity astronomically in *already existing* industries such as textile production and mining, and it occurred over such a long period that people had time to become accustomed to the changes it wrought. The second industrial revolution in Britain on the other hand was scientific in



Map 3.2 European colonies in Africa, c. 1914

© *The Scramble for Africa* by M. E. Chamberlain, p. xl (Pearson, 2010).

nature. It entailed the creation of entirely *new* products, transforming the way individuals lived their lives in the space of a single generation. Rubber for tires, minerals that made possible the cost-effective development of strong and lightweight metals like steel and aluminum, petroleum products to fuel automobiles – these and countless other discoveries and innovations

introduced westerners to consumer goods that we now take for granted and created an insatiable demand for raw materials.

New technologies appeared in almost every aspect of life. New modes of transportation and conveyancing – bicycles, trams, trolleys, buses, refrigerator ships, automobiles, airplanes, the Panama and Suez canals, and tunnels through the Alps – enabled people and goods to move and be moved quickly from formerly distant parts of the world. New forms of communication – the telephone and telegraph, typewriters, mass newsprint – brought individuals, groups, and nations into almost instant contact with one another, exposing formerly isolated peoples to one another and making the long-distance governance of vast non-European populations by small numbers of Europeans possible in ways it had never been before. New medicines, food stuffs, preservatives, and purification practices improved the health and longevity of the European population, vastly increasing its size despite a falling birth rate among middle- and upper-class families and a tremendous outflow of migration to North America and white colonies of settlement such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Factories and firms became massive in scale and scope, employing thousands of workers who were situated together in huge agglomerations, where they were distant from management but proximate to one another. Cities grew rapidly in terms of numbers and of space, producing vast urban corridors where farm and pasturelands and forests once existed. Electricity provided lighting for homes and streets and brought recorded music into private homes by means of the gramophone, paving the way for the later twentieth-century development of consumer items like radios, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, and other household appliances.

Dramatic developments in chemistry transformed medicine, hygiene, and nutrition, all of which had a marked impact on the longevity and the quality of people's lives. Joseph Lister – after whom Listerine was branded – advocated the use of antiseptics in 1865. New dyes made it possible for scientists to stain bacteria and differentiate them from one another, enabling the development of the fields of microbiology, biochemistry, and bacteriology. Scientists developed antibacterial drugs: Salversan, used to treat venereal disease, appeared in 1909. Vitamins and hormones were discovered in the early twentieth century, and the identification of the mosquito as the carrier of malaria in 1897. Aspirin, the wonder drug, appeared on store shelves in 1899. Anesthesia and the use of antiseptic practices turned medical practice from an iffy proposition at best to a profession that could actually improve peoples' lives. Hospitals were once places where people went to die, largely owing to the rampant infections coursing through them; aseptic and antiseptic methods reduced the dangers considerably.

The new fields of microbiology, biochemistry, and bacteriology provided the knowledge that enabled significant improvements in food production and preservation. Sterilization and pasteurization made preserved foods safer and tastier; they could be produced in bulk now and supplied in large volume to large numbers of people at a reasonable price. Transportation innovations

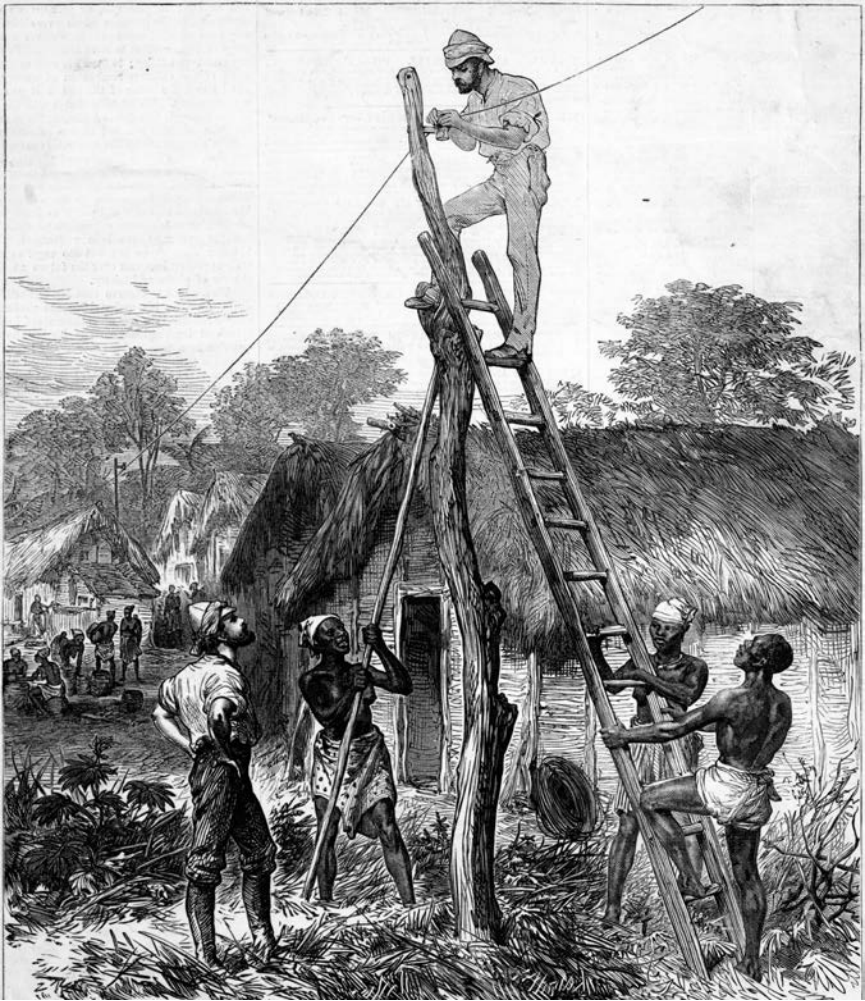


Figure 3.1 Stringing telegraph wire, c. 1874. British imperialism in Africa was built upon the foundation of technological innovation.

© Michael Nicholson/Corbis

improved food supplies as well. Steamships could carry thousands of tons of goods and when refrigerated they could bring fresh beef to Europe from Argentina and Kansas City or fresh mutton from New Zealand. Tunnels bored through the Alps brought fresh fruits and vegetables from the Mediterranean in record time and the cutting of the Suez canal in 1869 markedly reduced the time it took to move goods from Europe to the east and back again. All of these inventions and innovations revolutionized the feeding of industrialized, urbanized populations throughout Europe and the United States, contributing to a vast increase in population growth there and in other parts of the world.

The second industrial revolution dramatically increased the integration of the world. The new industrialism created enormous demand for raw materials that could not be found at home or in other parts of Europe. No part of the world remained unscathed as European, American, and Japanese industrialists sought to supply their factories. The acquisition of nickel from Canada; nitrates from Chile; copper and gold from South Africa and Australia; zinc, tin, and rubber from Malaya and Africa; wheat and other foodstuffs from a variety of areas – all these and much more brought far-flung territories into the world economy, creating a single economy on a global scale and a world market driven by world prices. Tied to one another by economies and finances the countries of the world became interlocked in the space of a single generation.

Economics played an important role in the “new imperialism.” Beginning in 1873 what Europeans perceived to be a depression took hold of the world’s capitalist economies for over two decades. Shrinking markets and falling profits led business leaders to seek new opportunities abroad where they hoped to find new outlets for their goods. European nations and the United States and Japan had become increasingly reliant upon foodstuffs and raw materials obtained from overseas. Fearful that these supplies might be cut off by other powers they determined to obtain colonies whose trade they could control. The depression compelled – and the developments in technology permitted – many European powers and the United States and Japan to embark upon the path of “new imperialism.”

Britain faced competition from Europe and the United States in the geo-strategic as well as economic realms. In 1871 the German states had unified under the leadership of the kingdom of Prussia. Now a large and mighty German empire occupied what had formerly been a vacuum of power in central Europe. International rivalries generated by the recent appearance of a powerful Germany on the continent – and a dynamic America across the Atlantic – reinforced European impulses to expand in Asia and Africa and helped to instill a sharp sense of competition and conflict among the western powers. In cultural and intellectual life the promulgation of Darwinist and Social Darwinist theories of evolution and “racial” deterioration accompanied these developments, legitimizing some initiatives already under way and spurring others into action.

New imperialism prompted a new, more self-consciously imperialist phase of colonial acquisition that Disraeli had suggested was Britain’s destiny if it was to retain its status as a preeminent world power. Placed on the defensive by the rise of the new industrial powers Britons responded with an aggressive display of imperial might designed to counter any notion of economic or military weakness. Poets and writers told of indescribable wealth and unparalleled adventures to be had in the frontier areas of Asia and Africa, and celebrations like that of Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee in 1897 made manifest the power and glory of empire. Politicians, military men, and commercial adventurers extolled the virtues of imperial power for

national health, seeing in empire and imperial rule the means by which Britain was to preserve its international standing. Men like Joseph Chamberlain, Lord Rosebery, Cecil Rhodes, and Lords Curzon and Milner regarded the empire as central to Britain's very survival, and the training ground that would prepare it, Rosebery insisted, "for the keen race of nations."²

Although Britain's population had grown dramatically in the late nineteenth century it was dwarfed by those of the United States and the continental powers, and its birth rate had slowed considerably. Fears of population decline joined concerns about the quality of the British population, especially in light of a growing awareness of the degree and depth of poverty in cities where sanitation was poor and life spans short. For despite the improvement in real wages enjoyed by those who had regular work, poverty levels increased during the 1880s and 1890s and urbanization made this poverty far more visible than it had been when most people lived on the land. Twenty-eight percent of York's population earned incomes insufficient to maintain a household; London's percentage was even higher. Perhaps one-third of all Britons lived below the poverty line. Moreover, infant mortality rates were on the rise. In England and Wales in the 1880s, 142 of every 1000 infants born died within the first year of life; that figure increased to 154 during the 1890s until by 1899 it had reached 163.

The existence of so much poverty, disease, and death in the midst of such plenty demanded explanation. Physicians, scientists, politicians, churchmen, authors, and moralists believed that cities depleted the health and vigor of populations, regarding them as "the graves . . . of our race," as the dean of Canterbury put it in 1887. The *Fortnightly Review* warned its readers of the effects of urban life in its description of the "town type." "The child of the townsman is bred too fine, it is too great an exaggeration of himself, excitable and painfully precocious in its childhood, neurotic, dyspeptic, pale and undersized in its adult state, if it ever reaches it." The conditions of city life, many believed, enervated formerly healthy specimens, demoralizing them and causing physical deterioration. The solution lay in gathering up the remaining "unoccupied" territories of the world and peopling them with Britons. It was through acquisition, possession, and the rule of colonies overseas that Britain's health was to be maintained. "New imperialism" gained momentum from the Social Darwinist theories that saw in competition with the other European powers, the United States, and Japan the means by which to create a robust society of virile men and proper, moral women. As Lord Rosebery, former Liberal prime minister, put it in a letter to *The Times* in 1900, "an empire such as ours requires as its first condition an Imperial Race – a race vigorous and industrious and intrepid. Health of mind and body exalt a nation in the competition of the universe. The survival of the fittest is an absolute truth in the conditions of the modern world."³

For others conflict offered the most effective means of strengthening the citizens of a nation. In the eyes of many who embraced Darwin's notions

of the survival of the fittest – and applied them to the species of human beings – war constituted a positive good, an arena in which men could be hardened and those who were unfit selected out and prevented from procreating, and thus from passing on inferior or degenerate traits to a subsequent generation. Through war the “effeminate” could be weeded out, the manly preserved. “The stimulus of a great patriotic excitement,” wrote one apologist for war and empire,

the determination to endure burdens and make sacrifices, the self-abnegation which will face loss, and suffering, and even death, for the commonweal[th], are bracing tonics to national health, and they counteract the enervating effects of “too much love of living,” too much ease, and luxury, and material prosperity. . . . Strength is not maintained without exercise.⁴

With new imperialism came a new model of masculinity, one characterized by racial superiority over “blacks,” action, and physical force, and one which recognized working men as manly as much by virtue of their “sinew and muscle” as by their temperance, self-reliance, and possession of women in the home. The liberal gentleman of the 1830s and 1840s – morally and spiritually earnest, rational, and convinced of the inherent equality of all men – would not disappear entirely but he was increasingly overshadowed by the new man of body, a figure who would most vividly appear in the guise of the imperial pioneer and hunter. Drawn from the stereotypical images that populated the adventure stories of writers like H. Rider Haggard and G.A. Henty, the quintessential hero countered the image of the narrow-chested, puny, flat-footed tubercular urban male that so haunted the imaginations of politicians, statesmen, military officials, scientists, and physicians. He acted in a natural world free of the contaminations of urban industrial society according to strict rules about class and gender that seemed to be under assault from so many avenues in Britain. Like the white characters in Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* and *Allan Quatermain*, he was honest, independent, self-reliant, and among “the most generous and chivalrous of [his] race.” A gentleman, he demonstrated the qualities of honor, decency, courage, physical strength, and endurance that had enabled Britain to obtain its empire in the first place. Now, if the nation was to hold on to it in the face of international rivalries and urban deterioration, it would have to build up a race of men from all classes schooled in the lessons of the frontier.

The imperial frontier and one of its most cherished activities, hunting, provided the best means short of actual war itself for developing an imperial race. In hunting the frontier man learned how to train for war. He tracked, stalked, and observed the habits of his quarry and he possessed skill in marksmanship. A man of action rather than reflection, he relied on his senses and his wits, lived off the land, endured nature’s dangers, and

ultimately triumphed. Free of women and of the society they inhabited he displayed a virility that “town types” could not possibly possess, a manliness upon which the survival of Britain and the empire depended.

The ability of Europeans to seize control of and rule over the lands of Asia, Africa, South America, and Oceania stemmed in large part from the new technologies in transportation, communications, medicine, and armaments thrown up by mature industrialization. For the first time Europeans had the means of administering millions of people with a relatively small number of officials and soldiers. Railroads and steamships enabled explorers, entrepreneurs, and settlers to open up country that had barred their passage in earlier years. The telegraph kept colonial officials in contact with their subordinates in the “bush” and outlying regions and with their superiors in the metropolitan capitals. New medicines like quinine enabled Europeans to cope with diseases like malaria that had so mightily thinned their ranks. But above all the invention of new modes of firepower made it possible for small numbers of Europeans to impose their will over indigenous peoples armed mostly with ancient muskets, spears, and bows and arrows. The breech-loading rifle, the “repeating” machine gun, the gunboat – these weapons gave Europeans the power to destroy those who resisted their onslaught. As one African put it, “The whites did not seize their enemy as we do by the body, but thundered from afar. Death raged everywhere – like the death vomited forth from the tempest.”⁵ At the battle of Omdurman in 1898, for example, when 40,000 Sudanese soldiers bearing muskets and spears attacked a small force of British troops traveling up the Nile, more than 11,000 Sudanese lost their lives at the hands of machine gunners and artillery officers. Only 48 British and Egyptian soldiers, by contrast, lay dead.

The tools of empire enabled the industrial nations to colonize much of the rest of the world but they were aided in their conquests by a series of weather-related famines that swept across much of what came to be called the “third world” in 1876–1879, 1889–1891, and 1896–1902. Afflicting the entire tropical monsoon belt and northern China and North Africa, these famines were produced by El Niño events – the rapid warming of the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean that reduced the strength of the monsoon rains, bringing drought to broad swathes of the globe. In 1876–1879 drought and famine devastated the populations of Egypt, India, China, Java, the Philippines, New Caledonia, Korea, Brazil, southern Africa, and the Maghreb, killing off perhaps ten million people. The 1889–1891 drought hit India, Korea, Brazil, Russia, Ethiopia, and Sudan; its counterpart in 1896–1902 ravaged virtually all the tropical lands and northern China, bringing epidemics of dysentery, smallpox, malaria, cholera, and bubonic plague in its wake.

Somewhere between 30 and 50 million people died in these crises of mass starvation, which, though they appeared to be “natural,” were in fact tragedies that could have been avoided had state power and world commodity markets not operated to prevent intervention. Certainly the droughts and crop failures were massive in their destruction; some of them, in fact, were

the worst seen in centuries. But in only one instance – Ethiopia in 1889 – was total lack of food the issue. In virtually every other case, grain surpluses existed elsewhere that could have alleviated the famines. The existence of a world market in commodities that encouraged price speculation – and the failure of state governments to intervene to block these deleterious effects – made the difference between who ate and who didn't. For at precisely the time when nations of the west had eliminated famine, the world market wreaked havoc on the colonial world. Where once, under a system of subsistence farming, villages responded to local crises by providing relief to the poor from their extra food stores, now, under commodity agriculture, markets and price speculation governed the movement of food elsewhere, and there was little extra to spare for those in need. The existence of the world market system meant that food ended up circumventing the local populations that actually produced the crops. In a tragic irony, the railroads that were touted as a modern improvement were actually used to take food *out* of the afflicted areas so that it could be sold on the global market.

These deadly famines coincided with some of the most ambitious expansions undertaken by Europeans as they embarked upon their policies of new imperialism. It is difficult to argue with one historian who sees in “each global drought . . . the green light for an imperialist landrush.” The incursions of the British in southern Africa in the 1870s provide one of the most telling examples of this kind of exploitation of distressed peoples. The drought of 1876–1879 dramatically weakened African and Boer peoples, rendering them far more susceptible to British incursions than they might otherwise have been. Moving speedily, the British took the Transvaal from the Boers in 1877; suppressed a rebellion by the Griqua acting in part from drought-related grievances; and turned on the Zulu kingdom, Britain's erstwhile ally against the Boers. Hit hard by drought and famine, Zululand could not hold out for long against the British, who burned their villages, captured their cattle, and destroyed their economic system. Overwhelmed “as much by famine as by firepower,” as this historian puts it, the Zulu surrendered to the British in July 1879.⁶

The scramble for Africa

The scramble for Africa is the subject of countless studies, and historians do not agree on what exactly caused it. No single event, certainly, set off the scramble, which is fitting given the size of the continent and the number of players – African and European – involved. But we can identify four sites involving British interests that contributed to the furious stampede toward colonization: southern Africa, West Africa, Egypt, and East Africa.

By the early 1870s, South Africa consisted of two British colonies, the Cape Colony and Natal; two republics independent of Britain and controlled by the Boers, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal (also known as the South African Republic); and a number of African polities, the most

prominent of which were the Xhosa, Zulu, Pedi, Tswana, Sotho (most living within the British protectorate of Basutoland), Swazi, and Venda. In 1871 diamonds were discovered in the area that became named Kimberley in Griqualand West, which the generally friendly Orange Free State and the generally antagonistic Transvaal claimed for themselves. Faced with this competition from the independent republics, the British seized the territory and annexed it, engendering the enmity of Boers across the entirety of southern Africa and helping to initiate the stirrings of an Afrikaner nationalism that would have profound consequences. The rivalry between the British and Boers intensified as the Transvaal persisted in its efforts to expand its territory to the east, desirous of securing access to the Indian Ocean through a port at Delagoa Bay, held by the Portuguese.

Imperial officials in London were convinced that preventing an independent, powerful Transvaal was crucial for the security of the rest of the British empire, particularly India. The colonial secretary, Lord Carnarvon, who had recently completed the consolidation of the Canadian colonies into a single confederation, believed that British control of the Cape and, by extension, India required the same kind of consolidation of the territories of southern Africa. Boers in the Transvaal felt no inclination to follow along with such a plan but the ill-advised actions of their government gave Carnarvon an opening to advance his initiative. The Transvaal instigated a war against the Pedi, hoping to grab their land, but under the leadership of their chief, Sekhukhune, the Pedi fought back hard and effectively and routed the Boer fighters. Upon hearing of their retreat the colonial secretary immediately petitioned Disraeli for permission to move into the Transvaal. Once granted, Carnarvon appointed Theophilus Shepstone to serve as special commissioner there and secretly ordered him to annex the republic. Fearful of further Pedi attacks, the Transvaal Boers welcomed the presence of British troops but once it became clear that they were there to annex the republic and not simply to protect it, their mood altered abruptly. Too late to prevent the formal annexation of the Transvaal in 1877, Boers registered forceful protest against the action.

Anger against the annexation ranged well beyond the Transvaal. Boers in the Orange Free State were already resentful of the Cape's grab of the diamond mines. Those in the Cape Colony (for not all Boers had trekked off in the 1830s and 1840s and others had migrated into the Cape from the east in later years) feared that their culture would soon be absorbed into that of the British. In the Cape a Dutch Reformed Church minister named Stephanus du Toit embarked upon a project of vitalizing the culture of the Boers – now becoming known as “Afrikaners” – and turning their language – Afrikaans – into one that could be used by all Afrikaners across southern Africa. Du Toit established a newspaper in order to disseminate the language and authored a history of the Afrikaner people that treated them as members of a single nation. His efforts mark the beginnings of a robust cultural and political Afrikaner movement. We will hear much more about this in Chapter 6.

Emboldened by the strength of public support at home for the annexation of the Transvaal, the governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Bartle Frere, determined to expand British territory even further, this time against the Zulu who lived in the lands north of Natal. Under the leadership of Cetshwayo, who had been recognized as king by the representative of the "Great White Queen" over the seas, the Zulu were a powerful warrior society. Their very presence on the borderland of Natal unsettled many Britons. Frere convinced himself that the Zulu had to be "pacified" if British rule were to prevail; moreover, the defeat of the Zulu would force thousands of young men into the Kimberley mines that they had thus far avoided. Frere therefore cooked up an ultimatum demanding that the Zulu disband their armies, reform their system of justice, and permit the presence of a British resident at their capital, Ulundi. When Cetshwayo failed to reply, Frere, without the approval of his superiors in London, ordered an invasion of Zulu lands. He sent 16,000 troops north to defeat this mighty enemy in January 1879 under the leadership of the commander-in-chief of the South African army, Lord Chelmsford, a distinctly incompetent officer who enjoyed the friendship and support of Queen Victoria.

Chelmsford figured on a quick and decisive victory. Instead, the army of 24,000 Zulu divided its forces and drew out two-thirds of the 5000 British troops that were encamped at Isandhlwana. Some 12,000 Zulu set upon the remaining 1760 British and allied African soldiers on January 22. Some Zulu were armed with smooth-bore rifles – effective at a far shorter range than the British Martini-Henry breech-loaders – but their victory was derived from swamping the defenders with constant waves of *assegai* (spear)-wielding warriors who braved efforts to shoot them down before they could reach the British lines. Thousands of Zulu died by rifle fire but thousands more surrounded the British troops and cut them down. It proved an unmitigated disaster. Of the 1760 who had started out that day, only 400 escaped, and 870 Britons and 490 African auxiliaries died. When news of the terrible defeat reached Disraeli in February 1879 he became so depressed that he was forced to take to his bed.

The public reacted with outrage to the news that "spear-wielding savages" had whipped the well-equipped British army. Sentiment against the hapless Lord Chelmsford grew exponentially. By May the outcry against Chelmsford had reached a fever pitch and Disraeli replaced him with General Wolseley, the hero of the Asante expedition of 1873. The prime minister ordered his general to destroy the Zulu state.

Before Wolseley could even reach southern Africa, Chelmsford determined to redeem himself. Ignoring ever more urgent telegrams from Wolseley, he marched 5000 troops onto the Ulundi plain in July with the intention of taking down his nemeses. This time, facing Gatling guns and soldiers with repeating rifles, the Zulu could not prevail. At the end of the day all of them – some 1500 warriors – were killed. Thirteen British soldiers died in the battle. With a British victory in hand Wolseley imprisoned Cetshwayo, divided up Zululand into 13 powerless chieftaincies, called "kinglets," and

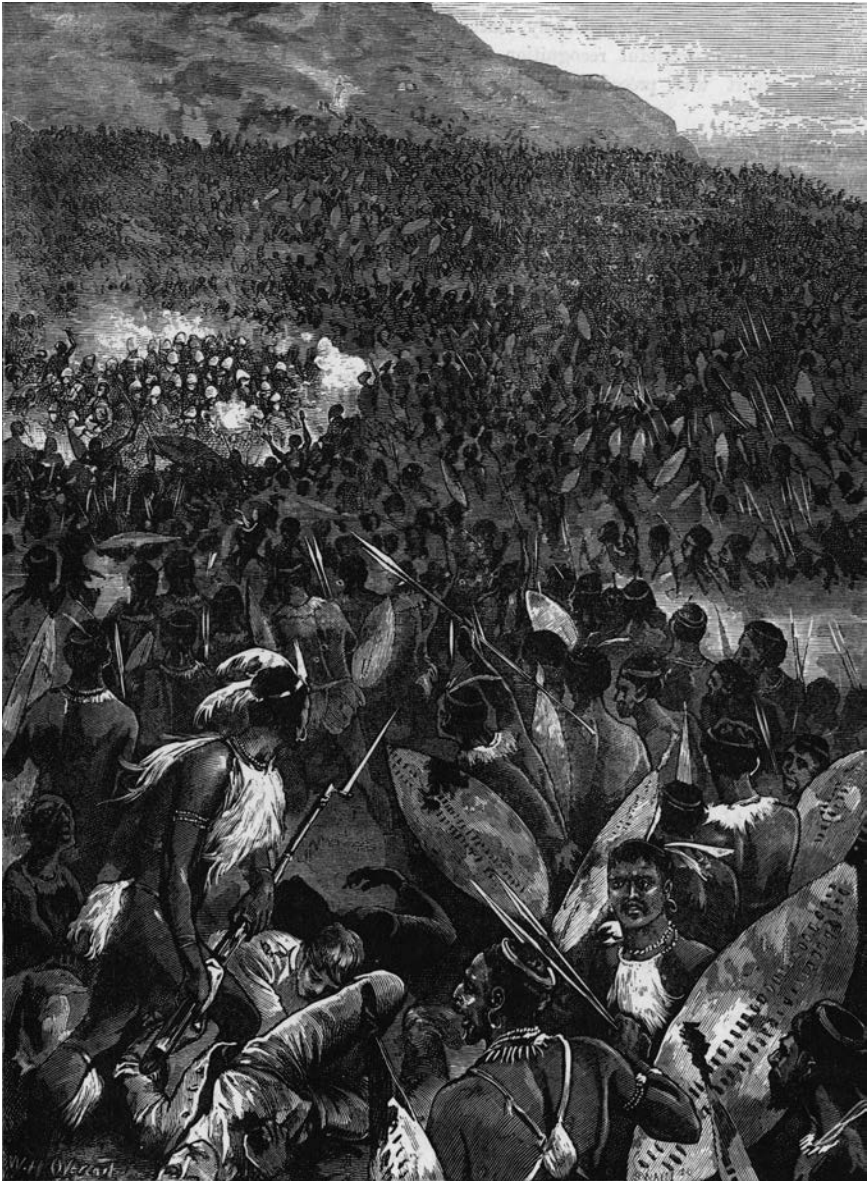


Figure 3.2 The British suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Zulu at Isandhlwana on January 22, 1879

© Universal History Archive/UiG / Bridgeman Images

placed them under British suzerainty. He gave much of the Zulus' land to the Transvaal, over which he now presided as "supreme civil and military authority." Wolseley then turned on the Pedi, determined to crush Sekhukhune's state in the northeast of South Africa. In November 1879 he led a

powerful force against the Pedi capital of Tsate, which fell to British and African troops in a matter of hours. The chief surrendered and was put in prison in Pretoria; his people's lands were confiscated and they were sent to live in scattered and isolated new settlements – reserves – that had little to recommend them. The confiscation of land had a lasting impact on Pedi autonomy (arguably until the present day), and the imposition of heavy taxes (payable in cash, not in kind) forced Pedi men into the diamond mines as laborers. The Pedi war was followed by a series of rolling campaigns against African peoples that culminated in 1897 with the defeat of the Venda.

Threats from the Pedi and the Zulu now eliminated by British force of arms, the Afrikaners of the Transvaal saw their chance. They revolted against British rule in 1880 and declared an independent republic. With an army of perhaps 7000 mounted civilian soldiers, the Afrikaners prepared to defend their republic in what they called their war for independence. The British army fared badly against them, unable to lift the sieges laid to their garrisons by Afrikaner fighters. A relief force suffered numerous defeats, an especially humiliating one at Majuba Hill in 1881 where just 600 Afrikaners – “dressed in civilian corduroy trousers and floppy-brimmed hats,” as one historian described the guerrilla force – surrounded the hill and proceeded to destroy their enemy. Nearly 300 supposedly crack British troops were killed or wounded.⁷

Britons at home could not bear the humiliation suffered by an elite force of Scottish Highlanders at Majuba Hill. The army general staff and Conservative politicians demanded redress for the terrible defeat and the re-establishment of British authority. But Gladstone – who had become prime minister for the second time in 1880 – feared that renewed fighting would only lead Afrikaners in the Orange Free State and the Cape to rise up. He chose instead to settle with the Transvaal rather than continue to try to fight it (in any case, the Pedi defeat had guaranteed the diamond magnates the labor they needed for the immediate future). In 1881 the Transvaal regained its independence as the South African Republic. Convinced that the British would not intervene to stop them, Transvaal settlers called “freebooters” immediately expanded their borders to the east and west, grabbing up the land of various chiefdoms there.

One such seizure took place in the lands just north of the Cape Colony in what would soon become Bechuanaland, today's Botswana. Freebooters set up settlements and named them republics, establishing barriers in the way of what Cape colonists regarded as “the road to the north” into the interior. Missionaries who had established mission stations among and friendly relations with the Tswana people feared that Afrikaners would bring destruction to the area and its inhabitants. More compelling to Cape business interests, trade with the interior amounted to some £250,000 per year, a significant level of income. Even more important to men like diamond magnate Cecil Rhodes and imperialists in Britain, the road to the north constituted the only real possible route from the Cape to the Zambesi region, rumored to

possess fabulous riches. Afrikaners standing in the way of northern and northeastern expansion blocked access to the territories that would help form the Cape-to-Cairo swathe of British possessions, at least as Rhodes and others envisaged it (we will treat Rhodes in greater depth below).

Facing what they considered a hostile government in the Transvaal, the British moved to shore up their position, sending some 4000 troops north in 1884 to expel the freebooters and secure Bechuanaland. Reviving its “forward policy” in response to perceived Transvaal encroachment, Britain commandeered other territory until all of the unannexed coastal and inland areas between the Cape of Good Hope and Delagoa Bay was in its hands. This aggression drove other Europeans to follow their course, setting the stage for the scramble to follow.

The second area of conflict contributing to the scramble involved rivalry between the British and the French in West Africa. In 1879 the French embarked on a program of expansion throughout the region, seeking to consolidate and enlarge their various holdings in Senegal, Ivory Coast, Dahomey, and the territory north of the Congo river. Their actions and ambitions raised alarms among British traders in West Africa, who were already feeling the pinch of the depression that had created a crisis in the legitimate commerce that had supplanted the slave trade. Demand for palm oil in Europe fell considerably after the discovery of petroleum made it possible to utilize other forms of oil for lubrication. Palm kernels also lost a good portion of their market to new sources of fats coming from India, Australia, and Russia. Prices that Europeans could command for palm oil and kernels fell dramatically, cutting deeply into traders’ profits on the West African coast. British traders took steps to reduce competition among themselves and against Africans by amalgamating the four British commercial companies operating in the Niger region. The merger was effected as the United Africa Company in 1879 by an adventurer and former officer in the Royal Engineers, George Goldie, whom we met in Chapter 2.

At just this time two new French trading companies established themselves on the Niger and one went so far as to make a treaty with chiefs in the Bonny region of the Niger Delta. The prospect of French intrusion into an increasingly difficult market heightened British fears, propelling the United Africa Company to seek out its own treaties with local chiefs. These agreements, produced on printed forms in English, appeared to give the company sovereign rights to the territories presided over by the chiefs, who most likely thought they had put their marks on documents establishing trade agreements and friendship. British officials back in London looked at the treaties askance, reluctant to involve the British government in any expansionist schemes. But in 1882 the French government recognized treaties negotiated by a military officer in their employ, Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza, with Chief Makoko on the northern banks of the Congo river. Makoko’s concession of huge tracts of land to the French was followed by the French establishment of a protectorate over Porto Novo, situated just

to the west of Lagos, in 1883. The British Foreign Office felt compelled to respond to these moves, agreeing with Goldie's assessment of the situation. "To keep France back is a national necessity," he urged.⁸

In 1884 the British government responded with two initiatives designed to block French expansion. In the first the foreign secretary directed the British consul at Fernando Po to conduct additional negotiations with chiefs in the Niger region. The resulting treaties, which were translated into local languages and accommodated some of the chiefs' major concerns, established a British protectorate over the area in 1885. In the second British officials entered into an agreement with Portugal, recognizing that country's ancient claims to control the mouth of the Congo river and setting up a commission that would keep the river open to navigation by all countries. This Anglo-Portuguese treaty prompted the German chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, to call the European powers and the United States to an international conference at Berlin, where the rivalries over Africa could be addressed before they blew up into out-and-out warfare.

The delegates to the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 drew up a series of agreements to settle the conflicts over the Congo and Niger river basins. These established freedom of navigation on the two rivers but gave administrative control of the Congo region to King Leopold II of Belgium, who had launched a number of commercial ventures in the area. The treaties that Britain had arranged with Niger chiefs in 1884 gave a reality to its claim to be "*the* Niger power." Delegates accordingly acknowledged British predominance on the lower and middle Niger. Separate agreements between the European countries recognized their various claims to territory in other parts of the continent. One of the most far-reaching consequences of the Berlin Conference concerned how new claims to African lands would be handled: the doctrine of "effective occupation" required countries to establish a genuine presence in territory they wished to annex. In the past it was possible to make ambiguous and imprecise claims on areas that few Europeans ever saw; now, to make good their claims Europeans had to actually put down stakes.

For Britain this condition posed problems. It now had to effect actual rather than theoretical control over the Niger region in the face of the reluctance of the Treasury to provide the money necessary to do so. The costs involved in setting up a government and furnishing a fleet to patrol the Niger river seemed beyond what British taxpayers should be asked to bear, so the government was receptive when Goldie proposed that his company receive a charter to rule the territory. He won the charter in 1886, renamed his firm the Royal Niger Company, and took over the responsibility of ruling what became called the Territories of the Royal Niger Company, lands in the middle portion of what would ultimately become Nigeria.

The third set of incidents that triggered the scramble for Africa took place in Egypt, and in this instance India played a crucial role in Britain's acquisitions of northern African territory. Ever since Britain had obtained shares

in the Suez canal, Egypt had taken on increasing significance in official thinking about empire. The country remained a vassal state of the Ottomans, with the Egyptian *khedive* serving as the Ottoman sultan's viceroy. So long as he maintained his hold on power British authorities were content to remain at a distance. But the finances of the Egyptian state proved so parlous (owing to the ruinous interest rates levied on loans to Egypt by British and French bankers) and the government so corrupt that France and Britain felt they had to step in to protect their considerable financial interests. In response to this foreign intervention an Egyptian army officer, Arabi Pasha, staged a revolt in 1882 designed to rid his country of outsiders. Prime Minister Gladstone determined that the time had come, regrettably, for a full-on imperial intervention.

Gladstone sent an army under Wolseley to invade Egypt. Wolseley's forces quickly defeated Arabi at the battle of Tel-el-Kebir, inflicting enormous casualties on the rebel fighters and blowing Egypt's cultural center – Alexandria – to bits. The British then marched on Cairo, took it over, and raised the Union Jack above the city. Gladstone and his ministers insisted that their actions did not constitute annexation of the country, only a temporary occupation that would end once stability and order was imposed. "Undoubtedly of all things in the world," the prime minister tried to reassure those who believed Britain sought to permanently seize Egypt for itself, "that is the thing which we are not going to do."⁹ The *khedive* remained in power and the sultan retained the title of head of state; but all power rested with the British army and the actual governing of Egypt rested in the hands of British officials. This anomalous situation produced numerous confusions, not least concerning whether Britain had also taken responsibility for ruling Sudan, the land to the south of Egypt that had been an Egyptian dependency for 60 years. British officials in Cairo and at home cared little about the desert country and would have preferred to remain aloof from it. Imperial expansionists, however, insisted that control of Suez required not simply control of Egypt but of Sudan as well. For this was a territory constantly in revolt against Egyptian authority. Led by a charismatic Muslim holy man called the mahdi ("guided one"), Sudanese rebels meant to end rule by the Egyptians who, they believed, paid only the slightest lip service to the precepts of Islam. Before they knew it the British had an armed insurrection on their hands and they responded by sending an Egyptian force headed by British officers south to defend the rule of the *khedive*.

The adventure ended in disaster. Some 50,000 Sudanese soldiers met the 10,000-strong Egyptian army at El Obeid and destroyed it. All of the British officers fell to the mahdi's forces and only a few hundred Egyptian soldiers survived. The mahdi gained control of virtually all Sudan, leaving only a few Egyptian garrisons scattered across the countryside. In the wake of the catastrophe Gladstone resolved to abandon further efforts to maintain Sudan for Egypt, a position that frustrated even his supporters who thought it unworthy of Britain, and he ordered the evacuation of the remaining

Egyptian garrisons. To oversee the evacuation he appointed in 1884 a popular and flamboyant – and utterly unreliable – soldier-adventurer, General Charles Gordon.

Gladstone was perhaps clear in his own mind about the necessity for the evacuation but other prominent people felt differently, including Queen Victoria. Indeed, there were sufficient countervailing influences about that it was possible for Gordon to interpret his mission in virtually any way he wished. With encouragement from a number of imperial expansionists he disobeyed orders from London and decided that rather than evacuating the fort at Khartoum – where he had arrived in February 1884 – he would stand and fight in order to keep the Nile valley in Egyptian and British hands.

In March the mahdi's forces laid siege to Khartoum, cutting the telegraph line to Cairo and leaving Gordon isolated. Gordon was playing a tricky and potentially deadly game. He would not evacuate the Egyptian forces at Khartoum or even leave the city to save himself. It gradually became apparent to Gladstone's government that the mercurial general was in effect blackmailing the government into retaking Sudan by allowing the mahdi to hold him hostage. The British public, for whom Gordon was a hero, a perfect Christian gentleman who had given so much of himself to the British empire, would not stand to see him abandoned in the desert by a heartless, cowardly government. Newspapers across Britain and the rest of the western world, the clergy, the army, and the queen herself demanded that Gladstone send a British force to save this most selfless of men. The cabinet realized that if the government did not comply it would be toppled from office. Against all of his principles Gladstone knew he must act, and in the fall of 1884 requested that parliament grant him £300,000 "to enable operations to be undertaken for the relief of General Gordon, should they become necessary."¹⁰

Wolseley assembled troops in Cairo and after months of painstaking preparation ventured up the Nile. But three days before the expedition force arrived in Khartoum, the mahdi's soldiers attacked the city in the middle of the night, killing the inhabitants and then Gordon himself. In the face of heated public opinion, Gladstone's government ordered a retreat from Khartoum, and Wolseley and his troops returned to Egypt, though as we'll see in the next chapter, Gladstone's view of the wisdom of extricating Britain from Sudanese affairs was not sustained by those who followed him in office. In the meantime the British occupation of Egypt to protect the Suez canal and its subsequent incursions into Sudan provoked other European powers, especially France, to take steps to establish their own spheres of influence in other parts of Africa.

The British presence in East Africa came later than in the west. Further removed from Britain and therefore a more expensive proposition for long-distance trading, British visitors before the late nineteenth century were few and far between, usually restricted to the odd zealous missionary, intrepid traveler, or big game hunter. The spice island of Zanzibar, however, proved

the exception to this general rule, attracting Britons seeking trade in the 1830s and 1840s.

Zanzibar held center stage on the Swahili coast, a 3000-mile-long strip running from Mogadishu to Mozambique. The Swahili coast seemed to the British to be “Arab”: its merchants and rulers wore the long, white robes characteristic of the Arabian peninsula, were devout Muslims, claimed origins in Persia, and built their homes from whitewashed stone in an Islamic style. In actuality “Swahili culture” was a fusion of more than 1000 years of interactions between Indian Ocean traders – many of whom were from Arabia – and black Africans resident at the coast. The coast’s wealth derived from its prominent “big men” serving as middlemen in trade between the East African interior and the Indian Ocean world. Caravans carrying ivory, dye, gums, and slaves traveled for months from the interior to the coast, where Swahili merchants bought their goods to sell to arriving ships at a profit.

Under the Omani sultan Seyyid Said, Zanzibar had become a trading center of wealth and prestige, so much so in fact that Said moved his capital from Muscat in Oman to Zanzibar in 1840, where he sustained himself and his position with a vast fleet. He held total control over Zanzibar and the nearby Pemba as well as a variety of fortified cities on the East African coast. Said invited Indian money-lenders and traders to reside in his cities – always guaranteeing the rights of religious expression to all – and by 1860 more than 5000 had taken up residence there. He earned vast profits from trade. In 1859 his kingdom exported £755,666 in goods (including £146,666 in ivory) and imported close to £1 million worth of products, including £185,232 in cloth from the United States, France, and Britain.¹¹

The British opened diplomatic relations with Zanzibar in 1822, and the sultan permitted a British consul to reside at his court from 1840 onward. British efforts to influence policy in Zanzibar were largely restricted to trying to persuade the reigning sultan to abandon the slave trade, something that had flourished since abolition in West Africa in the early nineteenth century. They met with little success until 1873 when a combination of insecure rulers and a cyclone that destroyed the reigning sultan’s clove plantations forced him to accept a strict British treaty on the control of the slave trade. British officials began training the sultan’s troops and, in concert with the Royal Navy, they acted to cut slave trading.

Chastened by what had happened in Egypt, Gladstone’s government initially refused to entertain any kind of expansionist programs in East Africa. That changed in 1884, however, when a German explorer, Karl Peters, obtained from a number of local chiefs treaty rights to land in what would become Tanganyika. He returned to Berlin with these agreements in early 1885, and on the day after the Berlin Conference that had adjudicated the Niger and Congo conflicts adjourned, the German government announced that it would place those areas gained by Peters under its protection.

The declaration shocked Britain and prompted another round of boundary-making among the Europeans. In two agreements in 1886 and 1890 Britain and Germany divided East Africa between themselves. Britain took what became Kenya and Uganda and Germany annexed the lands south of them, including Mt. Kilimanjaro. Sultan Barghash's territories – the coastal islands and a strip of land on the mainland – were left temporarily intact until 1890 when the British declared Zanzibar and Pemba a British protectorate, giving a formal stamp to their increasingly influential hold over the sultan and finally ringing the death knell for the institution of slave-trading and slavery in East Africa. Drawn into Britain and Germany's wranglings, the sultan had little chance of maintaining his autonomy. He was, as one historian aptly noted, "but a pawn on this wide chessboard, to be sacrificed if necessary."¹²

In conformity with the doctrine of "effective occupation" set up by the Berlin Conference but confronted by the desiderata of colonialism on the cheap, the British government set up a chartered company to act as its agent. The Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC), founded in 1888, took over responsibility for governing a vast tract of land extending westward from the Indian Ocean 600 miles to the lakes region of east-central Africa. We will see its progress in the following chapter.

Cecil Rhodes and the British South Africa Company

Chartered companies established to rule territories claimed by Britain appealed to the government on the grounds of economy. Treasury officials especially worked tirelessly to keep British subjects from having to shell out tax revenues to pay for empire but the Colonial Office also had good reasons for preferring to outsource its administrative and military responsibilities to people already there on the ground. The colonial secretary's obligations to his worldwide empire at the end of the nineteenth century far outran the resources he could mobilize to meet them; chartered companies appeared to be the perfect solution to a variety of problems.

The most ambitious and far-reaching chartered company proved to be the last one set up in Africa, Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company, established in 1889. Rhodes had arrived in southern Africa in 1870 at the age of 17. When diamonds were discovered at Kimberley the next year, he and his partner, Charles Rudd, garnered the contract to provide one of the most important processes of any mining operation, that of pumping water out of the mines. With profits generated from this vital service and a multitude of other wheeling-and-dealing transactions, Rhodes was able to ultimately establish the De Beers Company. Ownership of the firm gave him a near-monopoly on diamonds mined in southern Africa and provided him with a vast fortune and the political influence that went with it. Rhodes became the prime minister of the Cape Colony in 1890, and used his power to advance the interests of his company and of his country.

The discovery of gold on the Witswatersrand of the Transvaal in 1886 increased the likelihood in the minds of many Britons and Afrikaners – not least of them Cecil Rhodes and Paul Kruger, president of the Transvaal – that magnificent riches lay to the north in the lands known vaguely as Zambesia. Tales of great treasures in the area had circulated for decades; Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, published in 1885 to wildly popular acclaim, was only the most recent account of the fantastic wealth that might be acquired by anyone with the courage and the means to journey north. Rhodes determined to be that man. But he faced a number of obstacles.

First, to the north the Ndebele people held the territory of modern-day western Zimbabwe, which the British called Matabeleland. Their chief, Lobengula, was the son of Mzilikazi, who had migrated out of Zululand in the aftermath of the *mfecane* (see Chapter 2) in the earlier part of the century. Lobengula commanded a powerful army comprised of fierce warriors who had extended the chief's influence north and east into Mashonaland and south into parts of Bechuanaland. Lobengula extorted tribute from the Shona and the Tswana as well as a number of other groups in the Zambesia region. He exercised a careful watchfulness over his lands, building military posts along his borders to control the influx of whites and Africans from other areas. He permitted some missionaries to work within Matabeleland and occasionally allowed white hunters to pursue big game. But for the most part Lobengula only rarely allowed visitors into his jurisdiction, or, as he put it, "gave them the road" to Mashonaland to the east.¹³

In 1887 Transvaal president Paul Kruger dispatched two brothers, Pieter and Frederick Grobler, to Lobengula to make a treaty of friendship with the chief. The Groblers returned to Pretoria with what they claimed was Lobengula's approval, prompting Rhodes and other Cape officials to take action in response. They turned to a missionary named John Moffat who was friendly with Lobengula to conduct their own negotiations, and Moffat's influence with the Ndebele chief paid off. At the end of December Lobengula repudiated the Grobler treaty and, hoping to rid himself of Europeans pestering him for concessions, acknowledged that his chiefdom of Matabeleland – and territory he did not possess, much of Mashonaland – fell within Britain's sphere of influence. The chief miscalculated, as it turned out, but in establishing Britain as the effective European presence in Zambesia, Rhodes had ensured that others would be kept out. He had cleared his first hurdle.

The second obstacle would require Rhodes to pull all the political strings he held in Cape Town and London. The British government had no desire to set up another protectorate that would require a great deal of money to administer but yield little in the way of revenue. Rhodes, having seen how chartered companies in West Africa and East Africa promised to resolve that dilemma, proposed to create his own. He lobbied influential newspapermen and politicians in London and gained their support; Cape officials, too, came on board to endorse his project. But before he could get any further he needed to secure a mining concession from Lobengula that would undergird

his proposed charter. Once again Moffat worked his magic with Lobengula, persuading him that granting a single mining concession to Rhodes would eliminate all the other petitioners who sought his permission to set up shop on his lands. Lobengula, in his capacity as “King of Matabeleland, Mashonaland and certain adjoining territories,” signed an agreement on October 30, 1888, to give Rhodes “the complete and exclusive charge over all metals and minerals situated and contained in my kingdoms, principalities and dominions together with full power to do all things that they may deem necessary to win and procure the same and to hold, collect and enjoy the profits and revenues . . . from the said metals and minerals.”¹⁴ In return the chief was to receive a monthly cash payment and a one-time grant of 1000 Martini-Henry breech-loading rifles, plus 100,000 rounds of ammunition. Moreover, Rhodes’ agents promised Lobengula – though the chief failed to get it in writing – that only ten white men would be allowed to dig in Matabeleland and then only under the jurisdiction of Ndebele laws. The chief had been duped and when he realized his mistake he disavowed the agreement that became known as the Rudd Concession.

It was too late. Concession in hand, Rhodes hurried back to London to obtain his company charter. With the support of prominent bankers, businessmen, journalists, and politicians, he succeeded in persuading the colonial secretary, Lord Salisbury, to grant it to him. In October 1889 the queen formally recognized Rhodes’ British South Africa Company as the governing entity of the lands of Zambesia, authorizing it to build an infrastructure of roads, railways, telegraph systems, banking services, and police and charging it with the responsibility of establishing laws and awarding land grants to immigrants. Rhodes rounded up some 200 whites – pioneers, he called them – to invade and occupy Mashonaland. Promising them mining claims and 3000 acres of land each, he supplied the pioneers with uniforms and weapons and primed them with tales of the untold wealth that could be found right near the surface. On June 27, 1890, escorted by 500 military police with artillery and machine guns, the pioneers set out to make good their claims on Lobengula’s lands. They set up headquarters at Fort Salisbury, a base that would become the capital of what was starting to be called Rhodesia.

Africans and the mines

In the face of European domination, both actual and impending, Africans continued to make wide-ranging, complex, and often ambiguous responses. A wealthy sugar-mill owner in southern Africa, marketwoman in Gold Coast, or military leader like the Zulu king Cetshwayo all responded to the new presence in ways that they believed best suited their circumstances. But in southern and southern-central Africa, African autonomies were restricted to an arguably greater degree than anywhere else as a result of the mining industry. The repercussions of this system are felt in the region even today.

The diamond and gold mining industries drew African workers from as far away as contemporary Tanzania into a migrant labor system. The system has had a tremendous impact on Africa's modern history. It helped create modern notions of ethnic identity among the peoples who experienced it; it caused tremendous social dislocation in many communities; and it laid the foundation for the most rigid systems of racial division on the continent, in twentieth-century South Africa, beginning with "segregation" and transforming into apartheid.

South Africa defies the simple categorization that fits the rest of the scramble for Africa. The diamond mines at Kimberley came under British rule only after 1871 with the annexation of Griqualand West, and the gold mines were never part of the British empire: the Witwatersrand was located well within the Afrikaner-ruled Transvaal, though the British occupied much of this territory during the South African War (1899–1902). The important factor in play in South Africa, then, was British capital and influence; actual territorial acquisition was to some degree irrelevant. British capitalists and Afrikaner politicians often clashed over the administration of the territories in which the mines were located and had different ideas about the oversight of the mining operations. They did find common ground on which they could agree, however – restriction of the rights of African laborers directly benefitted both parties.

There was little hint in 1870 that the diamond fields would produce the monstrous conglomerate of De Beers. Production was small-scale; the earliest prospecting was alluvial and took place along the Vaal river. The maximum size claim a digger could own was only 20 square feet. Even when diggers turned to the mines of Dutoitspan, Bultfontein, De Beers, and Kimberley – the latter where the majority of diamonds were discovered – the claims were only 31 feet in size and diggers were restricted to a maximum of two each. This was a genuine "rush": by late 1871 50,000 people had arrived at the mines, 20,000 of them white fortune-seekers from as far afield as Australia and 30,000 of them black. People made and lost fortunes overnight. One man sold a 28-square-foot claim for £900. Soon the cost of claims began to drive out all but the wealthiest prospectors.

We tend to view the South African mining system as one that crushed Africans beneath its machinery but the reality was more complex. Black laborers found their labor in ever-increasing demand and leveraged their position to claim – and receive – ever higher wages (they doubled in 1872 alone). Blacks commonly switched employers if their requirements were not met, causing a headache for the claim owners. Nor was there any restriction on them owning claims beyond those that applied to whites. Thousands of Africans made money by selling food, wood, clothing, or other supplies to the expanding mine towns. Others established themselves as carpenters, stoneworkers, builders, artisans, and publicans.

Over the following several years, however, the mines underwent a transformation that ushered in the era of De Beers. By the mid-1870s life had

become more difficult for the small-scale owners. The price of diamonds dropped, claims increased in price, and the tiny claims often collapsed in on themselves as workers tried to negotiate the system of rickety pulleys and wooden-plank bridges that hung precariously above their claims. Poverty and even starvation increased. In 1876, in an effort to put the system on better footing, the governor of the Cape Colony passed legislation permitting the free trading – and unlimited purchases – of mining claims. Companies trading on the London Stock Exchange took over multiple failed claims and consolidated them, using machines powered by steam to dig deeper and deeper.

As white diggers faced difficulties in the mid-1870s they came to assert that their problems arose from lazy and unreliable black workers, who, in reality, simply refused to work for minimal wages and quickly left poor working situations for other employers. White diggers and company officials pressured the government to restrict the movement of black laborers. Many of their demands became law, although the legislation placed these restrictions on “servants” so as to avoid any suggestion that they might be racially based. Thus a whole system of law effectively based on race came to dominate the running of the mines. “Servants” could be strip searched; they could not own mining claims; they could be whipped up to 50 times if they could not “satisfactorily account” for diamonds found in their possession; they were paid less than white miners or overseers; and they had to carry passes that limited the times and places they could move. These curbs contributed to circumstances in which 8 percent of Africans employed in the mines in the late 1870s died every year.

As large companies came to dominate the landscape they tightened the limitations on Africans. The police began to act at the behest of mine companies. One H. Green at Dutoitspan, for instance, wrote to the governor of Griqualand West asking, “Could not the police put a little gentle pressure on these gentlemen [Africans] to oblige them to enter service?” The governor responded by ordering the police to conduct a series of raids to check employees’ passes.¹⁵

By 1884 racialized legislation reached its peak with the creation of “closed compounds,” the most prominent means through which employers controlled black labor in Kimberley. As one of the most renowned historians of the period states, white miners had finally “created a pervasive ideological equation of black workers with criminals.”¹⁶ The compounds were attached to the diamond mines and black workers could not leave them for the duration of their contracts, which usually lasted six months. Workers went from the mine into the barracks where they lived without ever leaving the company’s control. At home wives and grandparents bore the burden of raising and supporting the children while their menfolk toiled in the mines, enabling the mining companies to skimp on costs by providing only for their male workers. Diseases like smallpox and pneumonia were a constant presence. The white overseers of African workers suffered none of these

depredations. Because of the color of their skin they enjoyed a relaxed style of living in the leafy suburbs.

When gold was discovered on the Rand in 1886 established capitalists like Rhodes – who became known as the “Randlords” – transferred their Kimberley operations some 300 miles to the northeast, turning the small town of Johannesburg into a bustling city. By 1899 mining companies employed 100,000 Africans and produced close to one-third of the world’s gold. Mechanisms for controlling African labor in Kimberley came to the gold mines and a formal color bar was introduced. Black workers could not hope to hold either the same jobs – or receive the same pay – as their white counterparts, who earned eight times more than they did and received subsidized housing.

The type of ore on the Rand in part determined the experience of the workers there. The ore was highly consistent and plentiful and would reward the patient (and wealthy) mining company. But it was extremely low grade: in order to produce an ounce of gold one had to mine three tons of rock at a depth of two miles beneath the surface. Enormous quantities of labor and vast stores of capital were required to mine the precious metal. Moreover, because gold was practically the only commodity on the world market for which there was a fixed price (the “gold standard”), mine owners could not hope for an increase in the price their product could command. Instead they had to do everything they could to lower costs. First and foremost this entailed cutting the price of African labor.



Figure 3.3 African and European miners outside a South African gold mine, 1888
© Bettmann/Corbis

The mines on the Rand voraciously and unceasingly consumed African labor. Nothing could satisfy their demand, it seemed, especially once the requirements of Kimberley were added in. Mine owners recruited African men from throughout southern and even central Africa. Hugh Masekela, one of Africa's most famous jazz musicians, put it best in his 1990s hit *Stimela*, which bears quoting at length here, though the black-and-white of this page are a poor substitute for Masekela's passionate vocals.

There is a train that comes from Namibia and Malawi,
There is a train that comes from Zambia and Zimbabwe,
There is a train that comes from Angola and Mozambique,
From Lesotho, from Botswana, from Swaziland,
From all the hinterlands of southern and central Africa.
This train carries young and old, African men,
Who are conscripted to come and work on contract,
In the golden mineral mines of Johannesburg,
And its surrounding metropoli, sixteen hours or more a day,
For almost no pay.

Africans came to work on the mines for a variety of reasons, and two classes of Europeans played important roles in encouraging their employment. First, labor recruiters traveled far and wide across southern Africa, promising good wages and living conditions in exchange for their labor. The realities of mine life – the venereal disease, starvation wages, and 50-person dorms with stacked concrete bunks – did not enter the conversation. For many chiefs and “big men” across southern Africa, sending “their” young men to the mines brought significant rewards. The recruiters offered generous incentives to chiefs, many of whom implemented an informal “tax” on the meager wages of returning workers.

Missionaries, too, encouraged their charges to undertake mine labor. They viewed wage labor as the sort of activity that “civilized” men did. Wages enabled converts to buy the trappings of respectability: “whiteman's trousers,” neckerchiefs, hats, and ties, and stoves, chairs, tables, and paraffin lamps for their homes. Protestant missionaries saw nothing wrong with the accumulation of capital from hard work. Indeed, they viewed the devotion to work and the discipline it required as qualities that brought people closer to God. Thus missionaries ended up indirectly supporting the colonial system by influencing their followers to go to work for the mines.

But perhaps the most powerful impetus driving Africans into the mines was related to cattle. An extraordinary outbreak of cattle diseases – redwater fever, lung sickness, and rinderpest – assaulted southern Africa during the second half of the nineteenth century. Rinderpest, a viral disease that kills practically every beast it contacts, obliterated more than 90 percent of the cattle in southern Africa during the 1890s. The loss of cattle undermined the basis of political and social organization across the region. For many

communities the status of senior men derived from their ownership of cattle and as the animals died social ordering came under great stress. Cattle permitted the accumulation of “wealth in people”; because cattle were necessary for the payment of bridewealth, their possession enabled older men (and sometimes women) to control younger people and their labor.

Migrant labor and the decrease in the numbers of cattle spurred generational squabbles between young and old. Elders became unwilling to spare the few cattle they had remaining, meaning that young men could not get married, that all-important step into adulthood. In many communities, marriage rates decreased significantly, and many young men came to feel that their passage to adulthood was blocked. Many viewed the mines as a potentially winning lottery ticket: if a man could make his fortune there he could return home and purchase the cattle necessary to become a “big man,” freeing himself from dependence on his male elders. Such a prospect attracted many youth who gawked open-mouthed at men in their twenties who returned from the mines with names like Jack, Tom, Sixpence, or Shilling – names connoting that they had become “men of experience.”¹⁷ But even here the returning migrants’ options were restricted. In chiefdoms surrounding the port of Delagoa Bay – modern day Maputo – older men resisted the pressure to replace brideprice in cattle with brideprice in cash, which would have suited the young men. Where the change *did* occur elders often increased the cash rates beyond the reach of returning migrants.

The experience of migration and mining played an important part in the shaping of ethnic identity across southern Africa. British mine owners and colonial officials assumed that Africans lived in neat, distinct “tribes” and ordered them as such. In the diamond mines in Kimberley, the gold mines of the Rand, and later the copper mines of Zambia, officials housed African peoples based on their perceived “tribe”: Zulu here, Xhosa there, Venda here, Pedi there. Migrants came to learn this new identity as they struggled to survive in the mines. Young men came to consciously view themselves as members of a “tribe” as opposed to an extended family, village, or clan, a situation that provided solace, a way to sustain one’s social life amidst the chaos of the drilling and blasting. The flexibility that characterized “tribe” – where it existed – in precolonial Africa fell by the wayside; it became more difficult for a “Zulu” family to move from Natal to the Highveld and become “Sotho,” discarding one “tribe” for another. Soon, though, African peoples would utilize the power conveyed by the notion of tribe to press against colonial governments across the continent for more political and economic benefits.

Despite the challenges of the all-encompassing mining world African peoples often created vibrant, economically successful lives for themselves. Some survived by simple good business sense: one Zulu guild called the *amaWasha* came to realize that there was money to be made in laundry. Because Johannesburg had no decent water source, municipal ordinances stipulated that washing had to take place on the outskirts of the city so as

to avoid contamination and dirty water build-up. In 1890, the *amaWasha* – laundrymen – took advantage of the difficulties created by the ordinance to establish a monopoly on washing clothes for the gold miners. Middle-aged men from a select number of clans in Zululand traveled together on foot to Johannesburg and set up shop, often with their sons. By 1896 some 1200 *amaWasha* plied their trade in Johannesburg, often enriching property-owning Europeans who leased parcels of land they held along rivers in the area to the laundrymen. Concordia Mining Company, for instance, earned £350 per year from *amaWasha* rents. During the 1890s the *amaWasha* enjoyed extraordinary privileges. They could carry weapons, brew their own beer, and even enjoyed exemption from the pass laws. Ultimately, however, they found themselves squeezed out by French and American steam-powered laundries backed with significant capital and favored by municipal authorities as more “hygienic.” By 1906 the *amaWasha* could no longer compete in the laundry business.

Other Africans turned to occupations in the towns that grew up around the mines. Mining compounds on the Rand could not be “closed” as they were at Kimberley – the sheer logistical challenge would have been mind-boggling. Each weekend the miners emptied out of their underground tunnels and headed for the towns. One observer described the scene as one in which “ancient Nineveh and Babylon have been revived. Johannesburg is their twentieth century prototype. It is a city of unbridled squander and unfathomable squalor.”¹⁸ As in any prospecting rush, boozing and sex occupied the minds and emptied the wallets of men of all colors. Despite the entreaties and lamentations of the missionaries, many African women traveled to the mines to brew beer or work as prostitutes, sometimes earning enough money to buy entire buildings. Close to 1000 European women also traveled to South Africa to take advantage of the various entertainment industries that sprouted in the mining centers.

Sometimes Africans’ abilities to shape social life were more subtle, as one historian has shown with his research on same-sex relationships between men on the Rand’s gold mines. In the absence of women many men took “wives of the mine,” younger men who did chores for them (like cleaning clothes or cooking food) and who acted as sexual partners as well. The rules that governed these relationships were strict and known to all: the relationships were discreet, took place in certain designated areas, and were limited to the mines themselves. This was – as one man recalled – “only friendship on the mines.”¹⁹ Some began their relationships out of boredom, others out of a fear that women in the towns and away from the compounds might rob them, trick them, or give them venereal diseases.

These relationships served to give men control over a variety of aspects of their lives. They precisely mirrored the relationships that men and women had in the rural areas: each partner was meant to act in precisely the same way, conforming to customary ways of interaction. Even the kind of sex they had – the Xhosa called it *hlobongo*, the Zulu *metsha* – was non-penetrative

intercourse, common among young, unmarried couples throughout southern Africa. Men, young and old, thus ordered their unstable lives in ways that replicated their experiences at home. And the marriages served to enable them to become full adults: the money they earned from their “boy-friends” allowed them to go home and marry women. From the perspective of mine owners these relationships posed no problem. On the mines and in the compounds workers could be controlled; away in the towns, at the mercy of prostitutes and other dodgy people, they might drink excessively, spend all their money, and not come back to work.

In 1898 the president of France made a rather extraordinary statement as he reflected on his country’s recent involvement in Africa. “We have behaved like madmen,” he declared.²⁰ For while the scramble for Africa took place for a variety of economic, political, strategic, and social reasons, it also seemed to resemble a bizarre game of one-up-manship as European powers fell over one another to claim chunks of a continent about which they knew very little. Their conquests were made possible by advances in medical, military, transportation, and communication technologies. As we have seen in this chapter, and will see to a greater extent in what follows, Africans responded to European incursions sometimes by force of arms and at other times in more subtle ways as they sought to maintain social and economic order in their communities in the face of drastic changes.

From the perspective of the European powers, their tasks now gained a new level of complexity. They now had to occupy – and “pacify,” in the parlance of the times – huge blank areas on maps of dubious accuracy, all the while spending as little cash as possible.

Notes

- 1 Quoted in Marian Robertson, *Diamond Fever: South African Diamond History 1866–9 from Primary Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 38–40.
- 2 Quoted in *The Liberal Magazine* 10 (1903), 141.
- 3 Quoted in Richard A. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 39 and Bernard Porter, *The Lion’s Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850–1983*, 2nd edn. (London: Longman, 1984), 130.
- 4 Quoted in Porter, *Lion’s Share*, 129.
- 5 Quoted in Lynn Hunt, Thomas R. Martin, Barbara H. Rosenwein, and Bonnie G. Smith, *The Making of the West: Peoples and Cultures*, 4th edn. (Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin’s, 2012), 770.
- 6 Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001), 103.
- 7 Martin Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold, and War: The British, the Boers, and the Making of South Africa* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007), 104.
- 8 Quoted in M.E. Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa* (London: Longman, 1999), 55.

- 9 Quoted in David Levering Lewis, *The Race to Fashoda: European Colonialism and African Resistance in the Scramble for Africa* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), 7.
- 10 Quoted in Jan Morris, *Heaven's Command: An Imperial Progress* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 510.
- 11 Marie de Kiewiet Hemphill, "The British Sphere, 1884–94," in *History of East Africa*, Vol. I, eds. Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 219.
- 12 Quoted in John Flint, "The Wider Background to Partition and Colonial Occupation," in *History of East Africa*, Vol. I, 370.
- 13 Quoted in Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold, and War*, 208.
- 14 Quoted in Meredith, *Diamonds, Gold, and War*, 219.
- 15 Quoted in William Worger, *South Africa's City of Diamonds: Mine Workers and Monopoly Capitalism in Kimberley, 1867–1895* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 122.
- 16 Worger, *City of Diamonds*, 110.
- 17 Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860–1910* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994), 157.
- 18 Quoted in Charles Van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886–1914*, Vol. II: *New Nineveh* (Harlow, UK: Longman, 1982), vi.
- 19 Quoted in T. Dunbar Moodie, "Migrancy and Male Sexuality on the South African Gold Mines," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14 (1988), 232.
- 20 Quoted in Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 45.

Bibliography

- Barraclough, Geoffrey. *An Introduction to Contemporary History*. New York: Basic Books, 1965.
- Chamberlain, M. E. *The Scramble for Africa*. London: Longman, 1999.
- Comaroff, Jean, and John Comaroff. *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 2 vols. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991–97.
- Curtin, Philip, et al. *African History: From Earliest Times to Independence*, 2nd edn. New York: Longman, 1995.
- Davis, Mike. *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*. London: Verso, 2001.
- Flint, John. "The Wider Background to Partition and Colonial Occupation." In *History of East Africa*, Vol. I, edited by Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew, 352–90. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Forman, Ross. "Randy on the Rand: Portuguese African Labor and the Discourse on 'Unnatural Vice' in the Transvaal in the Early Twentieth Century." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11 (2002): 570–609.
- Harries, Patrick. *Work, Culture, and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860–1910*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994.
- Hemphill, Marie de Kiewiet. "The British Sphere, 1884–94." In *History of East Africa*, Vol. I, edited by Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew, 391–432. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Hernon, Ian. *Britain's Forgotten Wars: Colonial Campaigns of the 19th Century*. Stroud, UK: Sutton, 2003.

- Hunt, Lynn, Thomas R. Martin, Barbara H. Rosenwein, and Bonnie G. Smith. *The Making of the West: Peoples and Cultures*, 4th edn. Boston, MA: Bedford St. Martin's, 2012.
- Kent, Susan Kingsley. *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640–1990*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Lewis, David Levering. *The Race to Fashoda: European Colonialism and African Resistance in the Scramble for Africa*. New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987.
- Meredith, Martin. *Diamonds, Gold, and War: The British, the Boers, and the Making of South Africa*. New York: Public Affairs, 2007.
- Moodie, T. Dunbar. "Migrancy and Male Sexuality on the South African Gold Mines." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14 (1988): 228–56.
- Morris, Jan. *Heaven's Command: An Imperial Progress*. London: Faber and Faber, 1973.
- Porch, Douglas. *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Porter, Bernard. *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism, 1850–1983*, 2nd edn. London: Longman, 1984.
- Robertson, Marian. *Diamond Fever: South African Diamond History 1866–9 from Primary Sources*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Rotberg, Robert. *The Founder: Cecil Rhodes and the Pursuit of Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Soloway, Richard A. *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth-Century Britain*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.
- Thompson, Leonard. *A History of South Africa*, 4th edn. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Vail, Leroy, ed. *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- Van Onselen, Charles. *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886–1914*, 2 vols. Harlow, UK: Longman, 1982.
- Worger, William. *South Africa's City of Diamonds: Mine Workers and Monopoly Capitalism in Kimberley, 1867–1895*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987.