

## Decolonization and the Rise of Afro-Asian Independence

**Introduction:** European dominance in politics, economics, and culture forced all ancient civilizations to reappraise their beliefs, institutions, and traditions. They had to make decisions about what to preserve from their own cultures and what to borrow from the Europeans. Even as European domination peaked at the end of the 19th century forces were building that would end the dominance. Within colonial empires a sense of solidarity was emerging among Western-educated middle class groups who created political parties to arouse mass nationalist sentiments. Most Asian and African nationalists, except in settler colonies, relied on peaceful measures advocating principles based on a blend of their rulers' democratic traditions and indigenous beliefs. The European dependence upon the indigenous elite in their administrations made them very vulnerable to such challenges. The European global wars of the 20th century and the Great Depression helped to erode the colonial order. The resulting social and economic disruptions assisted nationalist leaders to build a mass base for resistance. The Western European colonial world disintegrated within a few decades after World War II.

**Indian National Congress:** The party that led India to independence, the Indian National Congress formed in 1885, grew out of regional urban political associations. It had British support as a means of learning the opinions of educated Indians. The organization was loyal to their rulers; it lacked a mass base or firm organization and was most interested in elite-related issues. The members reacted to British racist attitudes. As time passed Indians developed a common identity that had not previously existed among India's many diverse peoples.

**The Rise of Militant Nationalism.** A united nationalist movement was hindered by the differing concerns of Hindus and Muslims. Leaders such as B.G. Tilak ignored the split and asserted that nationalism should be built on appeals to the Hindu majority. He broke with moderates by demanding boycotts of British goods, and threatening violence if independence was not granted. Tilak was the first leader with a mass following, but it was limited to Bombay and its region. His use of reactionary Hindu ideas alienated Muslims, moderate Hindus, and other religious groups. Tilak was imprisoned by the British. Another early nationalist threat came from Hindus pushing violent overthrow of the raj; they committed terrorist acts in Bengal. The British crushed them by World War I. The failure of the two movements strengthened the more moderate Congress politicians who advocated a peaceful path to independence. The British cooperated through the Moreley-Minto reforms of 1909 that expanded opportunities for Indians to elect and serve on local and national councils.

**India: Gandhi and the Nationalist Struggle.** India had loyally supported Britain with men and resources during World War I. But, as the war dragged on, Indian casualties mounted while economic conditions in India hurt all sectors of the population. Inflation and famines raged as war production increased upper-class profits. Moderate politicians after the war were frustrated by Britain's refusal to honor promises of a steady move to self-government. The Montague- reforms of 1919 had increased powers of Indian legislators at national levels and placed aspects of provincial administration under Indian direction. But the Rowlatt Act of 1919 offset the reforms by restricting key civil rights. The localized protest present during and after the war provided the base for Gandhi's nationalist campaign. Gandhi combined knowledge of the British with the attributes of an Indian holy man and thus was able to win followers among all classes. He stressed nonviolent, but aggressive, protest tactics ( or truth force) to weaken British control without provoking reprisal.

**The Rise of Communalism and the Beginnings of Political Fragmentation.** Gandhi was too much of a Hindu leader to win the support of all Indians. Muslims always had been suspicious of the Hindu-dominated Congress party; in 1906 they founded their own Muslim League. Although small in numbers until the 1940s it was a dangerous threat to a unified national movement. Gandhi tried without success to bring the Muslim and other minorities into the nationalist mainstream. Gandhi nonetheless was the central figure in the nationalist struggle. The campaign against the Rowlatt Act demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of his tactics. It was impossible over time to control the participants in mass disobedience movements. Violence led to police reprisals. Gandhi reacted by calling off the anti-Rowlatt campaign. He and other nationalists were arrested and imprisoned. The nationalist movement slowed but did not disappear. Local protests continued and harsh British repression, along with the effects of the Great Depression, revived civil disobedience campaigns by the 1930s. Gandhi led the dramatic Salt March in 1931. The British finally bowed by passing the Government of India Act in 1935. The British kept control of the central administration but turned over provincial governments to Indians chosen by an expanded electorate. The nationalists took office in 1937 and civil disobedience quieted.

**The Winning of Independence in South and Southeast Asia.** The Indian National Congress refused to support the British war effort unless independence was promised after the conflict. The British did not agree to the terms and mass civil disobedience campaigns called the Quit India movement occurred in 1942. Dissidents, including Gandhi, were arrested; only the Muslims and Communists supported Britain. The war caused hardship in India through inflation and famine. When a Labour government came to power in Britain in 1945 independence in the near future was conceded. The divided Indians were unable to work out a compromise between Hindu desires for one nation under majority rule and Muslim wishes for a separate state. When communal rioting spread, the British agreed to the creation of two independent nations, India and Pakistan, in 1947. Hundreds of thousands of people then perished as Hindus, Muslims, and other groups attacked each other. Millions fled from one region to another. Gandhi's assassination in 1948 by a Hindu fanatic added to the malaise. Other parts of the Indian empire, Sri Lanka (Ceylon) and Myanmar (Burma), peacefully received independence shortly after. Other empires were already then decolonizing. The United States after the war quickly granted independence to the Philippines. The Dutch fought against nationalists in Indonesia until losing in 1949. The French did the same in Indochina.

### **Egyptian and Independence in the Islamic World**

**Egypt and the Rise of Nationalism in the Middle East.** Egyptian nationalism predated the British occupation. The unsuccessful rising of Ahmad Orabi in 1882 had aimed at liberating Egypt from its unpopular rulers and their European associates. The British put down the movement and continued the dynasty in power under their control. British High Commissioner Lord Cromer. His reforms mostly benefited the small middle and elite classes and foreign merchants. Rural landlords (*ayan*) also were significant gainers at the expense of the mass rural population. Resistance to the system grew among urban business and professional families. Unlike India, journalists and not lawyers were predominant. During the 1890s several nationalist political parties formed, all without a mass base. The British often utilized harsh techniques against protesters. The extent of the hostility of the mass of the population to the

British was demonstrated in the Dinshawi Incident of 1906. A small clash, with limited fatalities, demonstrated British racial arrogance and undermined support for their presence in Egypt. By 1913 the British recognized the rising nationalism by granting a constitution and an indirectly elected parliament.

**The Middle East: Betrayal and the Growth of Arab Nationalism.** France and Britain did not honor the promises about Arab independence made during World War I. They occupied the former Turkish lands as League of Nations mandates. Further Arab anger came from conflicting British promises to Arabs and Jews concerning Palestine. A pledge to the Jews fed aspirations for a return to the Holy Land; 19th-century pogroms had convinced some Jews that acceptance in Europe was impossible. Zionist organizations formed to promote a Jewish state. Theodore Hertz of the World Zionist Organization was indifferent to the presence of Palestine's Arab inhabitants. Arab opposition to Jewish emigration led the British to restrict the pledges made to the Zionists, but did not stem them from building up their local position. Nothing was done by the British to encourage the development of a strong Palestinian leadership able to promote its own interests..

**Revolt in Egypt, 1919.** Egypt had been made a British protectorate in 1914. Martial law was declared when World War I began to ensure protection of the Suez Canal. The many troops stationed in Egypt drained local food supplies, while forced labor and inflation made conditions of mass life even harsher. When a delegation of Egyptian leaders was refused permission to present their case for self-determination to the conference at Versailles, unexpected mass demonstrations erupted. The British repressed the movement but recognized the necessity to listen to Egyptian opinion. The Wafd Party of Sa'd Zaghlul gave a unified nationalist base for Egyptian demands. After negotiations the British agreed to a gradual move to independence beginning in 1922 and ending with withdrawal from the Suez Canal zone in 1936. The khedival regime remained and Britain kept the power to reoccupy Egypt if it was threatened by a foreign power. Egyptian political parties after 1922 did little to increase the welfare of the majority of the population. Politicians used their positions to enrich themselves while they quarreled about control of the government. The utter social bankruptcy of the regime prepared the way for revolution in 1952 under Gamal Abdul Nasser.

## **African Independence**

**The Beginnings of the Liberation Struggle in Africa.** Most Western-educated Africans remained loyal to their colonial rulers during World War I. Along with traditional African rulers they gained local authority as the Europeans drew upon their lands for men and resources. The war disrupted colonial life because of reaction to recruitment of soldiers and laborers and interruption of export crops. The failure of Europeans after the war to keep promises of further reform and the effects of the Great Depression contributed to unrest. Western-educated politicians began to organize during the 1920s; some were influenced by Afro-American leaders, such as Marcus Garvey or W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Pan-Africanist movement. By the mid-1920s nationalist leaders from the British and French colonies were on separate paths. French subjects focused on Paris and the Négritude movement formed by such writers as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Léon Damas. Africans, except in settler colonies, had greater opportunities to organize politically. They were allowed representation in advisory councils and developed the beginnings of true political parties. By the 1930s new and vigorous leaders came forward and made the first efforts to gain a mass following.

**The Liberation of Nonsettler Africa.** World War II had the same impact in Africa as in other colonial regions. The British and French were forced to reverse policies to allow some industrial development which spurred rural migration to the cities. One path to independence was followed in colonies without a European settler population. In the British Gold Coast (later Ghana) Kwame Nkrumah established the Convention Peoples Party (CPP) and gained support from urban and rural peoples. He introduced a new style of politics, using mass rallies, boycotts, and strikes. Nkrumah gained concessions from the British through winning elections and secured independence for Ghana in 1957. Most other British nonsettler colonies gained independence through peaceful means by the mid-1960s. The French took a roughly similar line with most of their territories. Moderate African leaders who were willing to retain ties to France dominated the nationalist process in West Africa. By 1960 all were free. The Belgians experienced more difficulties in the Congo as they precipitously withdrew before a newly organized nationalist movement. The Portuguese still clung to their colonies.

**Repression and Guerrilla War: The Struggle for the Settler Colonies.** Territories with large European settler populations had a more difficult decolonization experience. Racist settlers blocked the rise of African nationalist movements as they fought to defend their numerous privileges. In Kenya, when peaceful efforts led by Jomo Kenyatta failed, more radical Africans formed the Land Freedom Army and commenced a guerrilla campaign against the British and other Africans. The British defeated the rebel movement, called by them the Mau Mau, and imprisoned Kenyatta and other nonviolent leaders. The British government then turned to negotiation with Africans; Kenya gained independence in 1963 and Kenyatta was the first president. The struggle in Algeria, with more than a million settlers, was much more violent. War began in the 1950s under the direction of the National Liberation Front. The French defeated rebel forces in battle but never fully contained them. Independence came through negotiations in 1962. Most of the settlers then left Algeria.

**The Persistence of White Supremacy in South Africa.** Portugal's colonies, Angola and Mozambique, secured independence after revolutionary struggle in 1975. Southern Rhodesia's (now Zimbabwe) Africans won independence by 1980. In South Africa the large and long resident minority European population held on to control. The Afrikaners lacked a European homeland to retreat to and over the centuries had built up a racist white supremacy ideology. The British had abandoned Africans to Afrikaner racist rule after the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). Afrikaners won internal political control in 1948 and built the racial segregation system known as apartheid which reserved political, social, and economic rights for whites. The brutal Afrikaner police state hampered the growth of African parties.

**Indian National Congress:** political party that grew from regional associations of Western-educated Indians in 1885; dominated by elites; was the principal party throughout the colonial period and after independence.

**B.G. Tilak:** first populist leader in India; believed that Indian nationalism should be grounded in the Hindu majority.

**Moreley-Minto Reforms (1909):** provided Indians with expanded opportunities to elect and serve on local and national legislative councils.

**Lord Cromer:** British advisor to the Egyptian government; his reform program benefited the elite and foreign merchants, not the mass of Egyptians.

**effendi:** prosperous business and professional urban Egyptian families; generally favored independence.

**Dinshawi incident:** 1906 fracas between British soldiers and Egyptian villagers that resulted in an accidental Egyptian death; Egyptian protest led to harsh repression which stimulated nationalist sentiment.

**Montagu-Chelmsford reforms (1919):** increased national powers of Indian legislators and placed provincial administrations under ministries controlled by Indian-elected legislatures.

**Rowlatt Act (1919):** placed severe restrictions on Indian civil rights; undercut impact of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms.

**M.K. Gandhi:** Western-educated Indian lawyer and nationalist politician with many attributes of an Indian holy man; stressed nonviolent tactics and headed the movement for Indian independence.

**satyagraha:** literally means "truth force"; Gandhi's policy of nonviolent opposition to British rule.

**Muslim League:** founded in 1906 to support demands of the Muslim peoples of India against the Hindu majority; gained separate electorates and legislative seats; divided the Indian nationalist movement.

**Government of India Act (1935):** the British retained control of the central administration and turned over provincial governments to Indians chosen by an expanded electorate.

**mandates:** governments entrusted to victorious European World War I nations over the colonies of the defeated powers.

**Zionism:** Eastern European movement of the 1860s and 1870s that argued that Jews return to their Holy Land; eventually identified with settlement in Palestine.

**Leon Pinsker:** European Zionist who believed that Jewish acceptance in Christian nations was impossible; argued for a return to the Jewish Holy Land.

**Theodor Hertzl:** Austrian Zionist; formed World Zionist Organization in 1897; was indifferent to Arabs and promoted Jewish immigration into Palestine to form a Jewish state.

**Wafd Party:** Egyptian nationalist party founded after World War I; led by Sa'd Zaghlul; participated in the negotiations that led to limited Egyptian independence in 1922.

**W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey:** Afro-American leaders with major impact on rising African nationalists.

**Négritude:** literary movement among Afro-Americans and Africans; sought to combat unfavorable stereotypes of African culture and to celebrate African achievements; influenced early African nationalist movements.

**Léopold S. Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Léon Damas:** African and Afro-African Négritude movement writers.

**Atlantic Charter (1941):** British-American agreement; included a provision that recognized the right of all people to choose their form of government.

**Muhammad Ali Jinnah:** Muslim Indian nationalist; leader of the Muslim League; worked for a separate Muslim state; first president of Pakistan.

**Kwame Nkrumah:** African nationalist responsible for forming the Convention Peoples Party in Ghana; leader of the 1st black African state to independence (1957).

**Land Freedom Army:** African revolutionary movement for reform of Kenyan colonial system; began a conflict in 1952; called the Mau Mau by the British.

**Jomo Kenyatta:** leader of Kenyan African Union, a nonviolent nationalist party; became first president of independent Kenya in 1962.

**National Liberation Front (FLN):** Algerian nationalist movement that launched a guerrilla war during the 1950s; gained independence for Algeria in 1962.

**Afrikaner National Party:** became the majority in the all-white South African legislature in 1948; worked to form the rigid system of racial segregation called apartheid.