

# The Legacy of Imperialism

By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, most colonies were actually costing their mother countries more money than they were making from having them. It had been extremely costly for many nations to protect their colonies during the devastating war. As these nations gradually granted independence to the African nations, the problems in Africa had just begun.

## Genocide

Genocide is the systematic murder of an ethnic group by another group in control of a government. When the Europeans created their colonies, they did not take into account the different ethnic groups that they were putting together in one colony. While the Europeans were present and in control, they kept these groups from fighting against one another. Once they left, it was up to the people living in that country to fight for control of the country.

One of the most famous genocides took place in Rwanda during 1994. Known as the Rwandan genocide, the majority group, known as the Hutus, began to murder the Tutsis. In



*Large fields with unmarked graves like this one are scattered throughout Rwanda. Often there was too many people for anyone to identify bodies. Since many people fled the country, some family members may believe their loved ones are dead, even though they are not.*

just 100 days, the Hutus murdered somewhere between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people opposed to their rule. Several wars have been fought in neighboring countries due to this genocide. Many Hutus and Tutsis are still refugees in the region due to not having a safe place to live within their own country.

Another example of genocide occurred in Sudan beginning in 2003. At this time, two groups of Sudanese citizens took up arms against the government, accusing the government of unfair treatment against the country's non-Arab population. The government responded by beginning to murder thousands of people who were identified as being non-Arab. The president of Sudan was indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity due to his support of the genocide. Despite working toward cease-fires, the United Nations and the various ethnic groups fighting within Sudan have been unable to end the violence within the country.



*Dates of Independence for various African nations.*

## Political Instability

As the European countries began to give independence to their African and Asian colonies, many of those colonies were not prepared to rule their own nation. Especially in French colonies, there were no people living in the colony with the experience necessary to run a nation. This was because the French style of direct rule didn't allow indigenous people any place in their governments. This led to governments being established that were unable to write good laws or effectively manage the resources of a nation. Often, this would then lead to civil unrest as citizens demanded a government that was more competent in administrating their nation. If the government officials were unwilling to step down, a civil war would begin within the country.

The other reason why instability exists in many African nations is the fact that the countries really don't have a similar cultural identity. Groups with similar cultures are called ethnic groups. What joins people together in a country is a shared value system and purpose. In America, values like equal treatment before the law, equal opportunity, and rewarding hard work with success are ideas that most of us share. During the imperial reign of the Europeans, most colonies forced ethnic groups with very different beliefs, values, and sometimes even blood feud's together in one colony. As long as the Europeans stayed there, these groups could not fight one another, because the Europeans didn't allow it. Once these



*Child soldiers, forced to fight against the government forces and commit acts of atrocity by the leadership of each gang.*



colonies gained independence, often the fighting began right away between different ethnic groups. This has created a situation in many African nations today where power struggles between different ethnic groups occur in an on-going fight. In order to finance their fighting, these groups, which are often like large gangs, steal from the people or force people into slavery to find things like diamonds, which they can then sell on the black market to buy their guns and ammunition. In most cases, the government soldiers are barely better than the gangs of people they are fighting, so literally a situation

comes up where it can be almost impossible to pick a side worthy of supporting.

### Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Why did the Europeans leaving African colonies create so many problems?
2. How do rebel groups pay for the resources to fight against their governments?
3. Explain the political cartoon above.

Write about it.

Since conflict or "blood" diamonds are illegal, they are often sold much cheaper than legitimate diamonds. Would you rather pay \$400 for a diamond that probably is ok, but has a 10% chance of being found by a slave, or pay \$750 for a diamond that you know has a 100% chance of not being found by a slave.