

OPENING STATEMENT

AFRICA

Africa began as a “Dark Continent” as it was unknown to most people around the world until the Age of Exploration beginning in the 16th century opened the continent up to Europe. Soon, explorers from Europe began to invade this continent and turn it into a political game piece. During the Berlin Conference in 1884-85, the representatives of various European countries such as Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the Ottoman Empire divided Africa amongst themselves with little or no regard to what the Africans themselves thought or wanted.

The discovery of diamonds and gold in South Africa as well as other natural and mineral resources of the continent attracted the Europeans for more economic gain. However, there were also ideological and religious reasons to move into all areas of Africa. Christianity was spread through missionary work, while schools and hospitals were built to help with serious health problems.

Unfortunately, the natives did not like this invasion of Europeans. Numerous tribal leaders reacted through rebellion and warfare against Europeans. Figures such as Shaka, a leader of the southern African Zulus in 1816, created a large centralized state and utilized regimented warriors with strong organization and military skills to combat domination by the Europeans. However after his death, his successors were unable to maintain the lands that the Zulus had gained, and the land became part of the British Empire in 1887. Another unsuccessful attempt to resist occurred in German East Africa in 1905. During the Maji Maji rebellion, warriors believed the use of “magic water” would protect them from the bullets of German guns. The result was the death of 26,000 natives. Thousands more died of famine in the years that followed the resistance. Other examples of resistance met the same fate due to superior European weaponry. By 1914, only Liberia and Ethiopia remained free from European control (p. 688). One of the few times that rebellion from the Africans succeeded occurred under the rule of the Emperor of Ethiopia, Menelik II. Menelik declared war against the Italians and won their independence after winning the Battle of Adowa. They later were invaded by the Fascist dictator Mussolini at the start of World War II and defeated.

CLOSING STATEMENT

AFRICA

Today, Africa is still a major source for the world’s gold and diamonds as well as other natural resources. They still export their goods globally in an attempt to compete in the international market. Unfortunately, many conflicts of the past are still present. For example, weak economies and famine exist because of the growth of one or two cash crops to export as opposed to the growing of crops necessary to support local need. Additionally, civil war is still a big problem in Africa. Political division and tribal conflicts have resulted in civil wars across the continent. Innocent people have been the victims of this. Much of this tribal conflict has occurred because Europeans merged rival tribes together within the same boundary, paying no regard to the history of claims and conflicts of these tribes. As the Africans began to achieve independence after WWII, these old rivalries have intensified as they fight for territory shared by both during the days of imperialism. A second effect deals with the areas such as South Africa that was permanently settled by Europeans (Boers). For centuries Europeans controlled the country of South Africa setting up strict segregation known as apartheid. In 1959, 75% of the population of South Africa was black, but only 13% of the land was reserved them. Racial prejudice was rampant. Led by Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela, control of the country eventually shifted to the natives after a twenty-year plus struggle.

On top of that, Africa is overrun with diseases such as AIDS. Due to the poor economic conditions and instability in the political situation, there is insufficient health care to combat the spread of these devastating diseases. Attempts by the world to help with this have often been ineffective due to the political instability of the region.

OPENING STATEMENT

MIDDLE EAST

The Middle East has suffered from persistent invasion by multiple imperialistic countries during the 19th and 20th centuries. Before this time, this area had been part of the Ottoman Turkish Empire. However, with the advent of the Industrial Revolution and development of world trade routes, the competition for this area called the “Crossroads of the World” intensified. Egypt allowed the construction of the Suez Canal, financed by the French and built with Egyptian labor in 1869. However, when Egypt was unable to pay the European bankers, control and occupation of Egypt reverted to the British in 1882. The canal, called the “Lifeline of the Empire” saved 2 weeks and 4000 miles in international trade routes. The competition in this area was further heightened with the discovery of the world’s largest remaining deposits of oil. The major European countries, Russia, and the United States have all been involved intensely in the geopolitical struggles of this area. Prior isolation and harsh environmental conditions in this area had prevented it from modernizing. As Western influences began to infiltrate the area, a conflict arose when these influences clashed with the fundamental Islamic customs in place for centuries. Most Middle Eastern areas did not appreciate being influenced and controlled by the West. One example of resistance of Western influence in the area occurred when the Ayatollah Khomeini, a fundamental Islamic religious leader of Iran (formerly Persia) led a revolt to topple the western sponsored government in 1979. This led to poor or strained relations with many Islamic countries in the area and most of the Western world, including the United States.

CLOSING STATEMENT

MIDDLE EAST

The present state of the Middle East is quite varied. Economically, the region maintains a great deal of influence in the world markets due to the fact that 2/3 of the world’s oil is located in this area. However, much of the wealth generated by the oil is in the hands of a few in the region. Living conditions for many in the area continue to be primitive when compared to world standards. Oil has been used as an economic weapon with the Western nations, dependant on its use for continued growth in their economies. Additionally, harsh feelings towards the West remain for a variety of reasons. Much of this conflict stems from the culture clash of the “liberal” West and the “fundamentalist” Islamic culture. In many instances the only way these countries have been able to compete with the superior military strength of the West is through the use of terrorism. However, the most evident impact of nationalism and imperialism can be seen in the ongoing conflict between the Palestinians and Israel. At the end of WWII, the United Nations (led by the West) returned Jewish control to their homeland in an attempt to repay them for the horrors of the Holocaust. Israel was carved from the land of Palestine, held in Islamic hands since the 7th century. The result has been a continuous series of wars for the last fifty years. This conflict continues to threaten world peace.

OPENING STATEMENT INDIA

India, also called the “Jewel of the British Empire,” was the premier colony of Great Britain because of its location and economic benefits. The location, right in the middle of the eastern hemisphere, made for easy access to other countries and continents such as Africa and the Far East. India also provided economic bonuses with cash crops such as cotton, tea, indigo, jute, coffee, and opium, which could be traded to other parts of the world resulting in large profits for the English. Even though the English greatly benefited from India’s products and location, the natives did not share the same enthusiasm for English imperialism. The English army brought their families into India to live and they dominated the social class structure of the country, subjugating the Indians to becoming their servants. Furthermore there was a lack of respect for the established culture and Hindu and Muslim religious beliefs of the country. One example of this was the Sepoy Rebellion in 1857, where the British showed complete disregard and understanding of the Hindu and Muslim religions’ dietary restrictions against beef and pork. Rumors spread that the British were using beef and pork fat to seal the cartridges used in English rifles. To use, the end of the cartridge would have to be bitten off, thus violating the religious beliefs of both Hindus and Muslims. Violence broke out, spreading to all areas of India. This showed the Indians wanted to no longer be treated as second-class citizens in their own country.

CLOSING STATEMENT INDIA

Today India struggles to compete in the modern world due to population problems, conflicts with Muslim Pakistan, and economic survival. They eventually won their independence from the British led by the nonviolent movement of Mohandas K. Gandhi. He led peaceful strikes and boycotts, which eventually began to hurt the British economy more than the benefits of staying could provide. He gave political speeches spreading the theme of Indian unity in hopes of uniting Hindus and Muslims in peaceful co-existence in a new Indian nation. However, when the British left, two nations were created, one for Hindus and one for Muslims (Pakistan). With Gandhi’s assassination, that dream of co-existence died; and boundary disputes between Hindus and Muslims have dominated the area. Because of the nuclear capability of both nations, world peace has also been in jeopardy due to this conflict. India’s economic condition revolves around the fact they produce much of the world’s cotton. However, due to the health and social problems created by the ever-growing population, instability in the government, and pockets of extreme poverty, they remain a third world country.

OPENING STATEMENT

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Southeast Asia is a region of the world that has been dramatically shaped by foreign colonization. After the Dutch East India Company's colonization of most of the Indonesian islands early in the 19th century, other European countries were drawn to the rich deposits of rubber, tin, and oil in the area. Geographically, the location became vital for military bases to provide protection for world trade routes. As the European countries and the United States imposed their more efficient governments over the conquered lands, conditions with health, education, and sanitation greatly improved. Spurred by growth in the economy, a mass immigration of prospective workers from diverse nationalities created a cultural and religious melting pot. However, this cultural mixing sometimes created a conflict between immigrants and the colonists. A good example of this is when the French sent Christian missionaries into the area in the 1840's. When the natives resisted conversion by killing several missionaries, the French took over the area totally. Economically, the French then began to export a great deal of rice, which was the major cash crop of the area. When the consumption of rice by the natives decreased due to the exportation, the natives began to seriously resent the occupation.

CLOSING STATEMENT

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Today this area of the world has suffered years of warfare due primarily to the effects of imperialism and the rise of nationalism. Instability increased as one area after another attempted to gain independence. This made the area ripe for the spread of communism. After the French left Indochina in the 1950's, the United States became involved in two conflicts in the area (Vietnam and Korea) in the attempt to contain the spread of communism. Political instability continues to threaten the area, as the elements of democracy have never been present. This makes the area ripe for one totalitarian government after another. There are some areas, commonly called the "Four Tigers," that have experienced economic growth in the years following WWII. These "Four Tigers", South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong have become trading leaders fueled by the continued growth of trade with the West.

OPENING STATEMENT

LATIN AMERICA

Starting from Columbus' expedition to the Americas in the late 15th century, the region of Latin America was extensively colonized by Western powers. These imperialistic countries first included Spain, Portugal, France, and Britain, and later the United States. The primary reason for colonization was economic in nature. The Europeans wanted the abundant raw resources of the region. The cash crops and precious metals of Latin America fueled industrialization for the mother countries. Natives were used as slave labor in many cases. Additionally, the religion of Christianity led many to the area. The region resented these imperialistic advances. Natives proved to be an ineffective labor force due to resistance and death from exposure to European disease. This caused the introduction of slave labor from Africa to maintain the economic production needed. Finally in the early 19th century, fueled by the spirit of independence from the United States, many Latin American countries won their independence. Examples of this include the revolt of the natives of Haiti in 1805; revolution in Mexico against the Spanish in 1821, inspired by Father Hidalgo; revolutions in South America in the 1820's led by Bolivar in Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador and San Martin in Argentina, Chile, and Peru. Much of the success of these revolutions was due to the effects of the Napoleonic Wars on much of Europe and the support of the United States and Great Britain who had not lost their influence in the area, even though they had few colonies in Latin America.

CLOSING STATEMENT

LATIN AMERICA

Latin America still plays the same role today as it did during the Age of Imperialism. The region is still one of the top agricultural exporters, supplying raw materials needed by the major industrial powers. Latin America is also valuable from a geographical perspective due to the Panama Canal built under the supervision of the United States in the early 20th century. Political instability continues to be a problem in the region, with some of the governments being headed by a military dictatorship or corrupt democracy. One serious economic problem that has led to the instability in the region is the lack of a middle class. Much of the wealth is in the hands of a few. This has resulted in serious poverty in many areas, and is seen as a continuation of the aristocratic social class structure in place when the Spanish were in control of the area. Imperialism has also caused political instability in the region; in part due to the fact the imperialists did not foster elements of democracy or any local self-rule. Thus when feelings of nationalism were raised on the island of Cuba in an attempt to resist outside control and influence, the island fell to the communist regime of Fidel Castro. Another effect has been the rise of the drug traffic through sophisticated cartels in several countries. This has been hard to eradicate because of the tremendous profits being made by a few who have been able to avoid being stopped by inefficient and ineffective or corrupt governments.

OPENING STATEMENT

CHINA

China has always been a draw to the Europeans because of the economic benefits of trading with this ancient power. During the Age of Imperialism, most major powers including the United States exerted spheres of influence in all parts of the country. The United States had demanded an Open Door Policy so that all countries could trade with their portion of China. Britain was especially interested in dominating the economic markets and potential trade of China. In one instance the British found tremendous profits in the sale of opium as a way to off set the imbalance of trade created by their huge importation of tea from China. This resulted in an ever-increasing portion of the Chinese population becoming addicted to the drug. When pleas by the Chinese government to the British to stop the sale of opium to their citizens went unanswered, the Chinese government eventually resisted in what is known as the Opium War of 1839. The Chinese navy was no match for the British and was quickly defeated. This resulted in the valuable port of Hong Kong being taken over completely by the British.

CLOSING STATEMENT

CHINA

Today, although now recognized by the United States and other countries, mainland China remains the largest communist power in the world. This was accomplished after the communists were able to gain control of China in a fight with the western sponsored regime in the years following WWII. Efforts to regain Taiwan, where the ones who opposed the communist regime settled, have kept the area tense. Additionally, British control of the port of Hong Kong recently came to an end; and this valuable port reverted back to the control of the Chinese. This has pointed out the wide economic differences of a capitalist and communist economic system. Internal conflicts over the denial of human rights, which was pointed out in the 1989 Tiananmen Square, protest by students wanting more democracy in China, illustrates the continued internal conflicts between democratic and communist rule. Finally the population problem and the communist government's restriction of allowing only one child per family continue to meet with opposition both internally and with world opinion.

OPENING STATEMENT

JAPAN

Since the beginning of the 17th century, Japan had isolated themselves from the rest of the world. Industrialization was unheard of as they were content as they were, a strict militaristic society governed by the local shoguns who kept the peace. This was altered in 1853. The Japanese got their first view of the modern world when the United States arrived on their shores. Soon the Treaty of Kanagawa was signed opening Japan to trade with the rest of the world. It also signaled the beginning of the industrialization of Japan. However, in order to compete with the rest of the world, they quickly realized that they must begin to colonize in order to get the resources not available to them on their mountainous island. This resulted in their aggression into Korea, China, and eventually into a war with Russia in 1905 over Port Arthur in Manchuria, which they won.

CLOSING STATEMENT

JAPAN

The desire to become an imperial power eventually led Japan to join with Germany and Italy in WWII. Following their defeat, Japan has had to overcome several problems. An obvious one was the rebuilding after the destruction of the war both politically and economically. They struggled to recover from the loss to change and become powerful in a different way. In recent years, they have become an economic powerhouse, leading the world in many areas of the technologies of the modern world. Japan's economy has grown 10% each year from 1955 to 1970 (p. 946) allowing it to become one of the world's most powerful economic nations. They have turned from being a militaristic power to becoming an economic one. However, they have slipped recently as the economic downturn present in the United States today actually hit Japan and the eastern hemisphere first.