

A Brief History of Colonization:

Colonization is defined as the subjugation of an area and its people by a foreign state. A territory under colonization will often face exploitation, both of its lands and of its people. Colonies were used for cheap raw materials, free labor, and a market for manufactured goods to be sold at inflated prices. The mother nation reaped great economic benefits from its colonies, while the mother country would force its own language, customs, and cultural values onto their colonies. Commonly the mother nation would disrupt the indigenous population's way of life, in favor of a way of life that better suited the colonizers and their needs.

The first instances of colonization can be traced all the way back to the year 1550 B.C. Powerful states such as Egypt, Greece, and Rome practiced colonization to expand their territorial reach and to increase their military might through forced conscripts. Modern colonization began during a period of time referred to as the Age of Discovery. This period began in the early 15th century when Portuguese explorers sailed out in search of new trade routes outside of Europe. In 1445, Portugal conquered the small coastal town of Ceuta in North Africa. Portugal would continue to build its colonial empire, taking control of more African territories such as Madeira and Cape Verde.

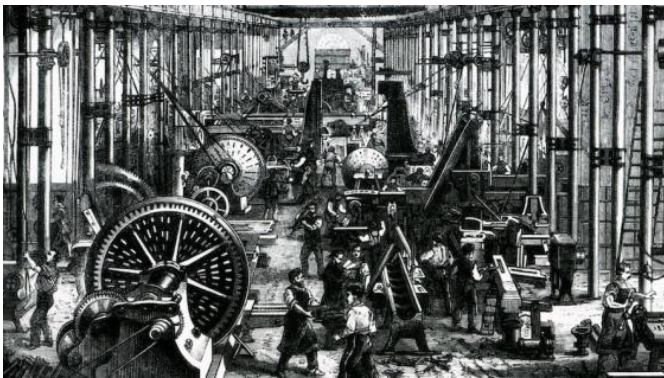
Around the same time that Portugal began building their colonial empire, so did their rival nation Spain. In 1442, Christopher Columbus, an Italian explorer sailing on behalf of Spain, accidentally discovered the New World (a term used to refer to the Western Hemisphere). Columbus unintentionally landed in the Bahamas while searching for a western route to Eastern Asia and India. Soon after this discovery, Spain and Portugal would fight



over the indigenous lands in the Americas and the rest of the New World. Other European powers, such as England, France, Germany, and the Netherlands, would soon join Spain and Portugal in the race for territorial claims in the New World. Often, these European powers would be fighting over lands that Spain and Portugal had already laid claim to.

Due to the abundance of resources and food in the New World, colonies saw rapid development. This quick development, paired with the great distance between the New World and the European powers, led to many of the Western hemisphere colonies gaining their independence in the late-18th and mid-19th centuries. This was the first era of decolonization in the world, and most colonies in the Americas gained their independence. A few colonies gained their independence via relatively peaceful means, but most colonies relied on the use of violent, bloody uprisings and revolutions to gain their freedom. Most notably the Spanish colonies in South America, New France, and Britain's Thirteen Colonies gained their independence from their mother nation during this period.

Despite losing their control of land in the Western Hemisphere, the European powers remained interested in African territories. This interest was caused by the Industrial Revolution



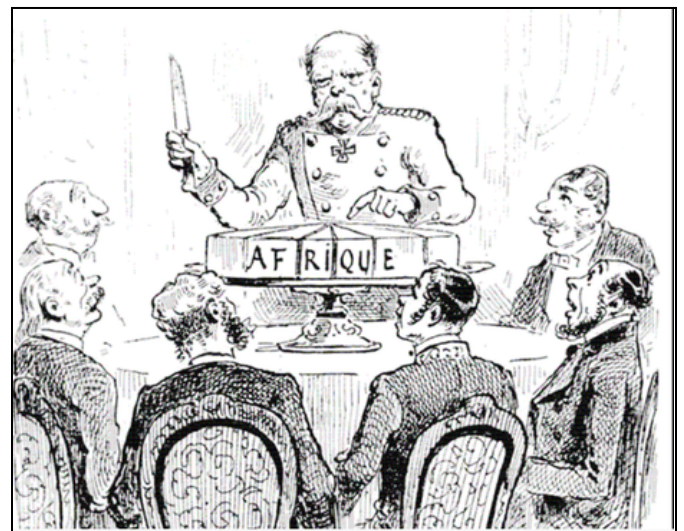
which had spread across Europe in the late-18th and early-19th centuries. The Industrial Revolution was a period of time in which numerous advances in manufacturing were made which made the production of goods easier and quicker. During this period, products that were often created using an individual's

hands were replaced by machines that were much more efficient. The Industrial Revolution allowed for an increase in the production of goods. With this increase in production, there was

now a growing need for raw materials to keep the factories operating. However, it was hard for the European nations to meet this newfound need of materials to maintain their manufacturing. This led to the European nations looking to Africa to make up for this lack of resources. Africa was rich with a vast supply of various materials such rubber, timber, ivory, cotton, coal, palm oil, gold, and diamonds.

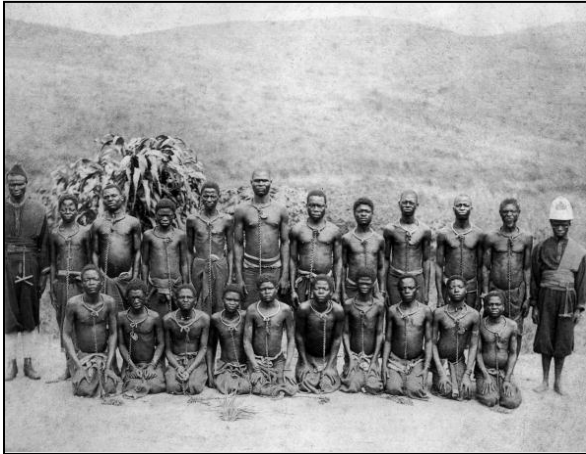
In 1884 to 1885, leaders of fourteen European nations and the United States met to discuss the division of Africa's resources among the Western powers. Prominent nations

attending the conference were the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Italy and Portugal. Noticeably absent at the conference were representatives from African states, whose land was the main subject of the conference. After the conference, the European nations raced to conquer the African continent. By 1914, all states within Africa, with the exception of Ethiopia and



Liberia, were subjugated by a European power. The African states resorted to violence in order to resist the invasion of their lands, but this effort saw little success as the Europeans were technologically more advanced. The weaponry of the Europeans was superior to that of the Africans making it easy to conquer and exploit their lands. This race to colonize Africa has been referred to by historians as the Scramble for Africa.

During the Scramble for Africa, many European governments took direct political control over the territories they colonized. The European states did this in order to shape the economy of the territories they colonized to better suit their needs. Prior to colonization, African economies



were largely focused on the local needs of the community.

European nations changed the African economy to be centered around the exportation of primary materials, and they needed direct control of the nation's political administration to compel the indigenous people to forgo their traditional means of production in favor of the colonizers. For example, traditionally, a farmer in Africa would grow yams or raise cattle in order to supply their

community with food. However, under the direct control of a European power, that farmer would be forced to produce cotton, which would be transported to Europe to be turned into a textile in a factory.

African colonies were also barred from attempting to manufacture their own goods or develop their own industries. Rather African nations were forced to purchase their furnished goods from the European state that was ruling over them. This economic policy would have a long lasting effect on Africa which has led to the continent's underdevelopment that can be seen to this day.

The Major Effects of Colonialism:

After World War II, another era of decolonization was ushered in. Between the years of 1945 to 1960, three dozen states in both Asia and Africa gained autonomy or independence. These states gained their freedoms via different means. Some states gained their independence through non-violent protests and campaigns, while other states relied on bloody revolutions to achieve their freedom.

Although now free from foreign control, the decades of oppression that were inflicted upon these colonies left effects that can still be seen to this day. For example, Africa continues to be one of the most underdeveloped continents in the world, with 70% of the least developed nations residing in the continent. This underdevelopment is due to many factors, the most prominent of which being the type of education administered under colonialism, the lack of transportation across the continent, and the deformation of Africa's economy.

Under colonial rule, education across the continent of Africa increased, however not entirely for the better. The education that Europeans brought to the African indigenous people was mostly based in language and literacy. The Europeans were successful in dropping illiteracy rates, however they did not do so with the intention of bettering the lives of the African people. Rather the reasoning behind this effort was to train the African people to work as interpreters, clerks, produce inspectors, and other occupations that would ease the process of exploitation of Africa. The education of the colonizers commonly had no technological base, and would often make the indigenous population abandon their traditional ways of production. Much of Africa's current lack of development can be credited to their lack of an educational foundation.

Along with bringing more education to Africa, the European colonizers also brought with them improvements to transportations. The Europeans focused significant amounts of energy into developing and modernizing the African internal infrastructure for trade. However, like their improvements in education, the Europeans only enhanced the infrastructure that would make their exports to Europe easier. During the years under colonial rule, Africa saw an increase in railroads and seaports, which were constructed to make it easier to export natural resources out of Africa. Transportation was not built to connect towns or rural areas for efficient communication or development. This has caused an absence of economic integration and

communication between the African states, which has worsened the under development of many African nations today.

As previously stated, the European powers would alter the economies of the African territories they colonized. This was done so the economy would better suit the colonizers' needs and to make the territory more profitable for the European nation. Under colonialism, African economies were based more on the export of natural resources and were encouraged to rely on the importations from Europe to meet their daily needs. European nations purchased these African exports for cheap prices, and then sold their manufactured goods to Africa with inflated costs. This system is a large reason as to why most African states today remain impoverished. Also, due to being encouraged to abandon the production of food in favor of harvesting natural materials meant for export, many African states have come to rely on the importation of food to feed its population. This reliance on importation has led to many African states experiencing famine.

In addition to being reliant on importation to meet their population needs, many African states still rely on European imports for nearly all manufactured goods. As mentioned previously, this is due to nations forbidding their colonies from attempting to manufacture or develop their own industries. This has led to most African states being leagues behind most nations in the world in terms of industrial ability.

Moreover, in many colonies in both Africa and Asia, social hierarchies were established since the colonizers often saw the indigenous people of their colony as sub-human or savages. In a few colonies, these social hierarchies were maintained even after independence was gained. Select groups would fill the position left by their colonizers and would continue to exploit their own people. Perhaps the most notable example of this would be South Africa, a former British

colony. Despite constituting around 90% of the population, the non-whites in South Africa were seen as lesser and were not permitted to partake in government nor were they allowed the right to vote. South Africa was also one of the most segregated states in the world, and the scars of decades of racial segregation and the denial of human rights can still be seen today.

Reparations:

Reparations are the act or process of making amends for wrongdoing directed onto an individual, group, or an entire nation. The United Nation often uses reparations to promote justice by redressing violations of international human rights law or serious violations of international humanitarian law. Reparations are intended to be proportional to the gravity of the violations and the harm that the violations caused. The United Nations requires that a state acts in accordance with its domestic laws and international legal obligations if said state were to violate international human rights law or humanitarian law.

The form in which reparations have been made has varied throughout the year. The type of reparation is dependent on the severity of the violation and the impact that the crime has left on the victim it was inflicted upon. Some ways reparations have been issued are through formal apologies to victims, the establishment of truth and reconciliation commissions, financial compensation to victims on both an individual and state level, and the establishment of social or economic programs which are designed to address issues that emerged as a result of colonial rule.

The two most noteworthy examples of international reparations are the ones levied onto the defeated nations at the end of both World Wars. In 1918, the Allied forces demanded reparations from the Central Powers as compensation for some of their war costs. These harsh

reparations forced upon the Central Powers would become a factor that led to the second world war. After WWII was concluded, reparations were again placed upon the defeated. This time the reparations were more fair. The German government agreed to issue reparations to their neighboring states that suffered damage under their occupation and to individuals who survived the Holocaust.

Various political groups from several different states have made demands for colonial reparations for the decades of oppression that their people experienced under colonial rule. These calls for action are not a new occurrence, in fact, these pleas date all the way back to the early 1960s. Groups such as the Rastafarians of Jamaica, the Maori of New Zealand, National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America, and the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) have made repeated requests for reparations and restorations from European powers for crimes and violations committed during colonialism.

These groups have seen an increase of support recently. This surge in popularity is largely due to the Black Lives Matter Movement in the United States, which saw an extreme boost in prevalence in 2020.

Another factor that has led to these groups gaining more popularity, is the death of Queen Elizabeth II. The death of Britain's queen sparked a period of public mourning and a celebration of her seven decade reign. However, for many



states, especially those from Britain's former colonies, the death of Queen Elizabeth II was a reminder of the nation's colonial past and their violations of human rights.

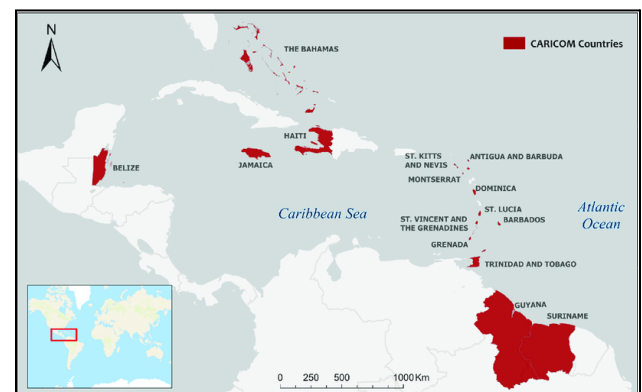
In spite of the decades of efforts and the growing popularity of these movements, little has been done by the former colonial powers in Europe. Many European states have brought into

question the legality of postcolonial reparations. These states argue that colonialism and many actions taken under colonial rule were not specifically illegal at the time of which they were committed or practiced. For that reason, many European states believe that the action of their governments during colonialism should not be judged to the standards of today's legal basis. Moreover, these states argue that too much time has passed since these violations, therefore the governments and the people of these former colonial powers cannot be held accountable for the actions of their state during the colonial era.

Another argument made by these former colonial powers is that many local elite groups within colonies also partook in the act of exploiting their fellow countrymen. These groups may have also violated human rights laws just as the colonial powers did. Often these elite groups continued to violate the human rights of their countrymen long after the colony gained its independence. Due to these elite groups also taking advantage of their own people during colonialism, many former colonial powers do not believe they are responsible for reparations to their former colonies.

Recent Actions:

One of the leading groups calling for reparations, and the one that has taken the most action recently, is the intergovernmental organization of fifteen Caribbean states, the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). Between the 1600s and the 1700s, the British Empire colonized many of the Caribbean Islands. During the nearly two centuries of colonial rule, the Caribbean islands were converted into plantations, which over two million enslaved Africans labored on. Abolition of the slaves came



in the 1830s, but the rule of the British and the plantation economies lasted well into the 20th century.

To this day many states within the Caribbean continue to struggle with poverty and diversifying their economies due to their colonial past. Due to this, CARICOM launched its own Reparations Commission in 2013. This commission has created a ten-point plan for European governments to deliver reparatory justice. This plan has been entitled the “Ten Point Plan for Reparatory Justice.” The plan includes complete debt cancellation, the establishment of literacy programs, rehabilitation programs, cultural institutions, and formal apologies.

Another big call for reconciliation as of late came in 2022 when Prince William and Princess Kate visited Jamaica. This visit to the island was to mark the 60th anniversary of the state’s independence and also the 70th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II coronation. Jamaican leaders used this visit as an opportunity to campaign for justice for the oppression the state had to endure for decades under British colonial rule. Over a hundred Jamaican leaders signed a letter demanding justice and reparations from their former ruler.

Action has also been taken by the United Nations. Recently in the General Assembly, which is one of the main governing bodies of the UN and consists of all UN Member States, there has been much debate and discussion on some of the tragic events that occurred during colonization. Events that were discussed include France and its role in the nations such as Algeria and Rwanda, Belgium’s presence in the Republic of Congo, and Germany’s occupation of Namibia. Along with these debates, the General Assembly has passed various resolutions in favor of reparations from former colonial powers. Regardless of these resolutions, little action has actually been taken since UN resolutions are only considered recommendations and can be easily ignored by states.

United Nations Position:

The United Nation comprises 193 Member States, 80 of which were previously a colony. Due to this large percentage of its demographic consisting of former colonies, the issue of postcolonial reparations is always a pressing one within the UN. The struggle which the UN has faced with this topic is determining if there is a legal basis for reparations that is binding on all of its Member States.

As mentioned prior, the UN has passed a decent number of resolutions which have favored the idea of postcolonial reparations from the former colonial powers. One example of this is the resolution entitled “Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States”. This resolution designates that colonialism has impeded development and that all states which have practiced colonialism are responsible for the restitution and full compensation for the exploitation, depletion, and damage of natural resources in former colonial states.

Another resolution passed in favor of postcolonial reparations and restitution is the “Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations and International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law.” This resolution initiates that there is not a statute of limitations for the bringing of claims of human rights violations to domestic and international courts. Additionally, the resolution assigns responsibility for the issuing of reparations to the state in cases where the original perpetrator of the offenses cannot be prosecuted.

The position mentioned in the previous resolution supports and is directly correlated to the stance on colonialism taken in the resolution on the *Programme of Activities for the Implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent*. This resolution recognizes the connections between the racists and inhumane treatment of groups and individuals

under colonial rule and the continued mistreatment, and denial of basic human rights of people based on race today. Furthermore, the resolution motivates and encourages states to establish ways to redress their past injustices that were committed under colonial rule.

Due to the UN not being able to bind states to the resolutions it passes, since resolutions are only recommendations to Member States, the most action which the international organization has taken has largely been to draw global attention to the topic of postcolonial reparations and restitution. The UN has also opened and mediated dialogues between the Member States]. In addition, the UN has provided states with unbiased expertise and assistance in areas that are relevant to postcolonial reparations.

The task of decolonization is not yet complete, as 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories (NSGTs) remain in the world. These territories are mostly islands and include Pitcairn, French Polynesia, American Samoa, Tokelau, New Caledonia, Guam, Saint Helena, Western Sahara, Gibraltar, Bermuda, Anguilla, Montserrat, United States Virgin Islands, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands, and the Falkland Islands. The UN is dedicated to the task of decolonization and will continue to keep dialogue open between the administering Power, the Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence of Colonial Countries and Peoples, and the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

Restitution of Arts and Artifacts:

Besides the growing demand for postcolonial reparations from European states, the demand for former colonial powers to return arts and artifacts to their original home has also grown in popularity. During colonial rule, many colonial powers filled their museums with beautiful, curious and amazing artifacts and arts from their colonies. These items were

ascertained in various ways. Many of these artifacts and arts were traded for or purchased from the indigenous people of their colony. Items obtained in this fashion were obtained with permission from both the indigenous community and the individual maker of the object. However, many objects were obtained through violence or the threat of violence and without consent from the indigenous community or the individual maker.

In France alone, 90,000 sub-Saharan African cultural artifacts reside in museums. Many of these artifacts were not obtained through ways which were peaceful, nor was consent given from the indigenous communities for these items. A Congolese political activist for cultural restitution, Mwazulu Diyabanza, has described the French museum, Quai Branly, “a museum that contains stolen objects.” Diyabanza and other activists of the Pan-African movement have continued to fight for the restitution of their artifacts and for their heritage to be returned back home.



In the Netherlands, an advisory committee to the Dutch government officially recommended for the Dutch to return looted arts and artifacts to its former colonies, which includes Suriname, Indonesia, and several Caribbean islands. A similar advisory committee assessed the situation in France in 2018 and made the same recommendation to the French government. Lawyer and human rights activist Lilian Gonçalves-Ho Kang You was the leader of the advisory committee in the Netherlands and stated that the Dutch government should formally acknowledge the injustices the state committed in colonies under colonial rule. You also advised that the Netherlands should return any object, without any conditions, if it can be proven that the object was taken without permission and the state of origin requests its return.

Discussion Question:

- Should former colonial powers be obligated to issue reparations to postcolonial states under today's international laws?
- Would reparations effectively atone for crimes committed by colonial powers under colonialism?
- Will reparations effectively aid postcolonial states in the struggles they face today?
- Are there other possible means to effectively address the issues caused by colonialism?
- Where should reparation money come from and where should it go?
- Should states be forced to return arts and artifacts to their country of origin?
If so, how should this be done in an orderly fashion?

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