Scramble for Africa

Anti-Slave Trade Legislation
In the 1400s, the Portuguese established a number of trading outposts along the coastline of Africa. Later in the 1600s, the Dutch established the Cape Town settlement on the southwestern tip of Africa. Many of these early settlements were the starting point of the African Slave Trade that enslaved and forcibly sent many Africans overseas.

By the 1800s, many European nations had passed laws banning the slave trade.

However, the illegal slave trade continued well throughout the 1800s.

Scramble For Africa
In the 1870s, the Belgian King Leopold sent emissaries to establish trade with native Africans in the Congo. This single act began a flurry of imperialistic activity as the other nations of Europe, including: France, Great Britain, Germany, Spain, Germany, Italy, and Portugal.

Berlin Conference
To avoid conflict with one another in Africa, European leaders met in Berlin, Germany. With little regard or representation for native Africans, the European powers set about carving up Africa according to the following guidelines:

1. Any sovereign power which wanted to claim any territory should inform the other powers “in order to ... make good any claim of their own.”
2. Any such annexation should be validated by effective occupation.
3. Treaties with African rulers were to be considered a valid title to sovereignty.

By 1900, the only areas of Africa remaining independent were Liberia and Ethiopia.

Zulu Resistance
In the 1830s descendents of the original Dutch settlers, now called Boers, migrated into the interior of South Africa and began to engage in conflicts with the Zulu. These battles with the Boer settlers continued well into the late 1800s, but never truly threatened Zulu sovereignty.

The Zulu were a south African tribe that placed an emphasis on military organization and skill, as established by their legendary leader Shaka Zulu. Under Shaka’s rule, the Zulu broadened their land claims throughout southern Africa.

Eventually, the Zulu came into the conflict with the British army as they expanded their control over southern Africa and invaded the homeland of the Zulu.
Despite early victories, the Zulu were eventually defeated by the technology and vast resources at the command of the British troops. Soon, all of southern Africa would come under British control.

Cecil Rhodes and the Boer War

Cecil Rhodes was instrumental in assuring British dominance of southern Africa. He founded the De Beers Mining Company, eventually controlling 90% of the world’s diamond production. After becoming prime minister of the Cape Colony (now South Africa) in 1890, he used his influence to strengthen British control over the region.

His master plan was to establish a Cape to Cairo railroad line that would link British colonial interests in Africa between Egypt and the Cape Colony in southern Africa. The Boers, however, provided heavy and eventually armed resistance to this proposal. After authorizing an aggressive invasion of the Boer Republic of Transvaal which ended poorly, Rhodes was removed from office. However, the seeds of the Boer War had been sown.

Great Britain decided to annex the Boer republics, and with Boer resistance came the Boer War (1899-1902). By all accounts the fighting was vicious, with the Boers employing guerilla tactics and the British eventually using 450,000 troops to achieve victory.

In 1910, the various British colonies in southern Africa were united as the Union of South Africa, eventually becoming the nation of South Africa after WWII.

Tribalism

Because European nation carved Africa up with no regard for traditional tribal boundaries, Africa still suffers from tribalism. Modern African nations often contain several different tribes that harbor ill feelings towards one another. Therefore, inter-tribal conflict is a common in Africa often leading to civil wars and power struggles within national governments.