

Africa's rich human geography

By National Geographic Society, adapted by Newsela staff on 09.15.17

Word Count **841**

Level **590L**



Samburu County, Kenya. Photo by: Edward Harris/Africa Progress Panel/Flickr.

Africa is a huge continent. It is larger than Europe, North or South America. It is home to many different countries and hundreds of different groups of people.

Cultural Groups

One group of people are the Maasai. They were some of the first people to live in the east of Africa.

Today, the Maasai are starting to live in cities. But this is not part of their old tradition.

Even today, some Maasai are always on the move. They look for plains of fresh grass for their animals. To survive, they use the meat, blood and milk of the cows they bring with them.

The Maasai are famous for their bright red robes. Young Maasai men are known as moran, or "warriors."



The Tuareg are also people who move from place to place. They live in the north and west of Africa. They have learned to survive in the dry and hot Sahara desert.

The Tuareg wear head wraps, called cheches. This protects them from the Saharan sun. They wear light gowns called bubus, which keep away heat and sand.

Tuaregs wear blue-colored bubus when they are around women or strangers. This is why they are often called the "blue men of the Sahara."

Another people are the Bambuti. The Bambuti are actually made of four groups in the center of Africa. These are the Sua, Aka, Efe and Mbuti.

The Bambuti have lived in the same areas for 4,500 years. It is possible they came from the first people in Africa.

These are just some of the groups that live in this large continent.

The Birthplace Of Humans

Africa is where the story of all human beings started. Humans first appeared there and then spread to the rest of the world.

This was the first big migration in Africa. It happened tens of thousands of years ago. A migration is when people move from one place to another.

Two other migrations also shaped Africa. The Bantu Migration was a huge migration of people across Africa. It began about 2,000 years ago, and lasted for 1,500 years.

The people who moved were known as the Bantu. They were advanced for the time. They knew how to grow crops and make metal tools and weapons.

The other big migration in Africa was caused by the slave trade. From 600 to 200 years ago, people from Europe captured many Africans. They took millions of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean.

In North and South America, the Europeans sold Africans as slaves. Slaves were forced to work for no pay. They had to do whatever their masters told them.

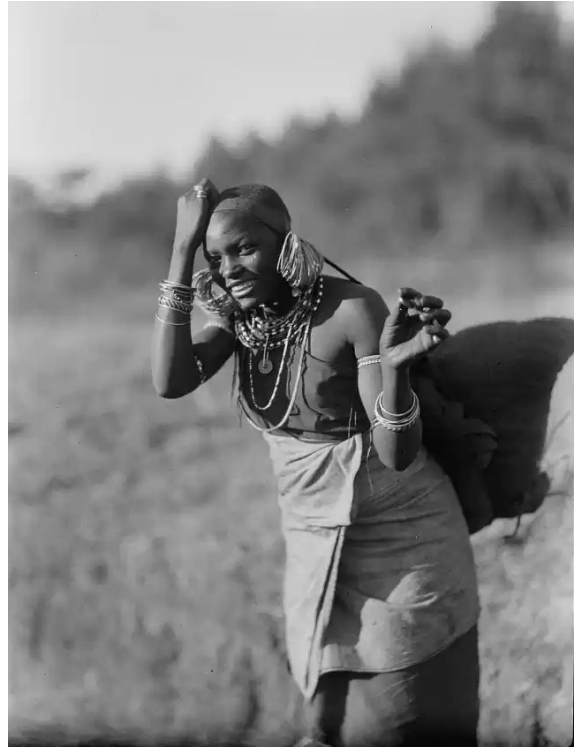
The Great West African Kingdoms

The slave trade was very bad for Africa. Millions of Africans died because of it. But before the slave trade, Africa had a long history of kings and empires.

West Africa had three great kingdoms. They started around 1,200 years ago.

The first one was the Kingdom of Ghana. This kingdom became rich through its gold trade.

Merchants from Ghana reached the rest of Africa and parts of Europe. Ghanaian kings controlled West Africa for about 400 years.



The Kingdom of Mali came next. It continued the gold trade. It also started trading more salt and copper.

Mali had important schools and libraries. People from all over the world went there to study Islam. This is one of the main religions in the world, along with Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism.



After Mali, the Songhai took over. They made the kingdom even larger. They had more trade and spread Islam even more.

The Colonial Period And Africa Today

In time, Africa was taken over by the Europeans. About 200 years ago, European countries began to divide up Africa however they wanted.

Old African kingdoms were split apart. Different African peoples were forced to live together. These peoples had different languages and ways of life. Soon, many began fighting each other.

Africans started freeing themselves 50 years ago. They became independent countries. Still, there are many problems in Africa today.



For example, many parts of Africa are very poor. Many people do not have enough food or medicine.

One big problem is global warming. Gases from cars and factories are heating up the planet. This makes it hard for people in Africa to survive.

Many groups in Africa are forced to move from their homes. When they move, they are called refugees.

But there is hope. Countries around the world are trying to work together. Maybe they can solve these very hard problems.

Quiz

1 Read the section "Cultural Groups."

Select the paragraph from the section that explains the traditional Maasai way of life.

2 Read the paragraph from the section "The Great West African Kingdoms."

Mali had important schools and libraries. People from all over the world went there to study Islam. This is one of the main religions in the world, along with Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism.

Which question is answered in this paragraph?

- (A) What kinds of things were traded by merchants in Mali?
- (B) What was the first great kingdom in West Africa?
- (C) Why did the kingdom of Ghana become rich?
- (D) Why did Mali become a center of learning in Africa?

3 Which section of the article gives information about the movement of people in Africa?

- (A) "Cultural Groups"
- (B) "The Birthplace Of Humans"
- (C) "The Great West African Kingdoms"
- (D) "The Colonial Period And Africa Today"

4 What information will you find in the section "The Colonial Period And Africa Today"?

- (A) a description of the different nations that conquered Africa
- (B) a description of the ways in which countries are working together to help Africa
- (C) an explanation of why the West African kingdoms were defeated by Europeans
- (D) an explanation of the history and impact of the period when Europeans took over Africa