

Africa's rich human geography

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

Africa is the second-largest continent in the world. It contains more countries than any other continent, and has hundreds of different groups of people.

Major Cultural Groups

Three examples of groups in Africa are the Maasai, Tuareg and Bambuti.

Maasai peoples were the first settlers of southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. These are now countries in the east of Africa.

The Maasai are nomadic pastoralists. Nomadic pastoralists are people who keep moving in order to find plains of fresh grass for their animals. The Maasai travel through east Africa and survive off the meat, blood and milk of their cows.

The Maasai are famous for their bright red robes. Young Maasai men between the ages of 15 and 30 are known as moran, or "warriors." Today, some Maasai still move from place to place, but many have started to mix with other groups in the area.



The Tuareg are another pastoralist group in the north and west of Africa. They learned to survive in the Sahara desert. The Tuareg wear head wraps called cheches to protect them from the Saharan sun. They also wear light gowns called bubus, which keep away heat and sand. Tuaregs are often called the "blue men of the Sahara" because they wear blue-colored bubus when they are around women or strangers.

Another people are the Bambuti, which are actually made of four groups in central Africa: the Sua, Aka, Efe and Mbuti. The Bambuti have been living in the same area for 4,500 years. They may be directly related to the first humans that came out of Africa.

The "Cradle Of Humankind"

Africa is sometimes called the "cradle of humankind" because it is the place where humans first appeared. Humans then spread to the rest of the world tens of thousands of years ago.

This was the first big African migration. A migration is when people move from one place to another. Two other big migrations were the Bantu Migration and the African slave trade.

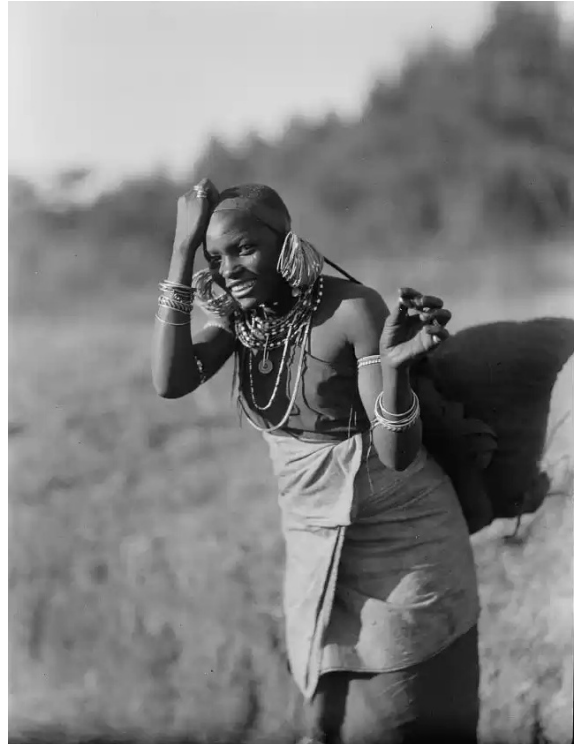
The Large Bantu Migration

The Bantu Migration was a large movement of people across Africa. It began about 2,000 years ago, and lasted for 1,500 years. The Bantu are an ancient people in Africa.

Historians do not know why the Bantu moved away from their homes near the Niger river, in the west of Africa. They first moved through the rain forests of central Africa. Later, they moved to the southern parts of the continent.

The Bantu were an advanced people. They knew how to grow crops and make tools and weapons from metal. They brought these skills to the new areas they visited.

Today, most of the people in Africa are at least partly related to the original Bantu. Many are in the east, center and south of Africa.



The Slave Trade

The third big human migration in Africa was caused by the slave trade.

Between 600 and 200 years ago, more than 15 million Africans were taken across the Atlantic Ocean. People from Europe sold them as slaves in North and South America.

Millions of Africans died in the slave trade. Many died during the forced migration to slave-trading centers. Even more lost their lives during the dangerous trip across the Atlantic Ocean.

Africans suffered greatly during the slave trade. However, the slave trade did spread their influence on the rest of the world. African customs and traditions had a big influence on the cultural life of North and South America. This is especially true for music, food and religion.

The Great West African Kingdoms

Before the slave trade, western Africa was home to three great kingdoms. These kingdoms lasted between 1,200 and 500 years ago.

The first was the Kingdom of Ghana, which became rich through its gold trade. Its merchants reached the rest of Africa and parts of Europe. Ghanaian kings controlled the region for about 400 years.

The Kingdom of Mali then took over the Kingdom of Ghana. It kept up the gold trade, and added more trade of salt and copper. The Kingdom of Mali was very rich and was able to build important learning centers. People from around the world came to these schools and libraries to study the religion of Islam. This is one of the main religions in the world, along with Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism.



Mali was then taken over by the Kingdom of Songhai, which became even larger. The Songhai added more trade routes, new laws and a stronger army. The Songhai kings were Muslim and helped spread Islam.

Colonization And Problems Today

In time, the African kingdoms fell apart. Africa was changed forever when European powers took over the whole continent. About 200 years ago, Europeans began to conquer and divide up Africa.

Europeans took over Africa because of its precious goods. European business owners became rich from trade in diamonds, gold and other natural materials. They forced Africans to work in poor conditions for little or no pay. This was called colonialism.

Colonialism left many problems that still trouble Africa today. The Europeans made new borders that divided old African kingdoms. These new borders forced people from different cultures to live together. Many of them soon started fighting each other.

About 50 years ago, Africans rose up against the Europeans. They were able to free themselves and form the countries we see today.

Still, there are many problems in Africa. For example, many parts of Africa are very poor, and people do not have enough food or medicine.

Another problem is global warming. Gases from cars and factories are heating up the planet, and this is very bad for the environment. In many parts of Africa, and the world, global warming makes it hard to survive. Many groups in Africa are forced to move from their homes. When they move, they are called refugees.

There are many problems, but there is also hope. Countries around the world are trying to work together to face global warming and poverty.



Quiz

- 1 Read the section "Colonization And Problems Today."
Select the paragraph from the section that shows HOW colonization caused conflict in Africa.

- 2 Read the section "The Large Bantu Migration."
Which sentence from the section shows HOW the Bantu migration influenced other regions in Africa?
 - (A) It began about 2,000 years ago, and lasted for 1,500 years.
 - (B) They first moved through the rain forests of central Africa.
 - (C) They brought these skills to the new areas they visited.
 - (D) Today, most of the people in Africa are at least partly related to the original Bantu.

- 3 If this article were organized chronologically, which section would come FIRST?
 - (A) "Major Cultural Groups"
 - (B) "The Cradle Of Humankind"
 - (C) "The Large Bantu Migration"
 - (D) "The Great West African Kingdoms"

- 4 Read the introduction [paragraph 1] and the final section, "Colonization And Problems Today."
Which of the following explains the connection between these two sections?
 - (A) The introduction gives an opinion about Africa, while the conclusion challenges that opinion.
 - (B) The introduction explains the history of Africa, while the conclusion focuses on the history of European nations.
 - (C) The introduction gives facts about Africa, while the conclusion explains the challenges Africa faces today.
 - (D) The introduction explains the rise of kingdoms in Africa, while the conclusion explains how the kingdoms were defeated.