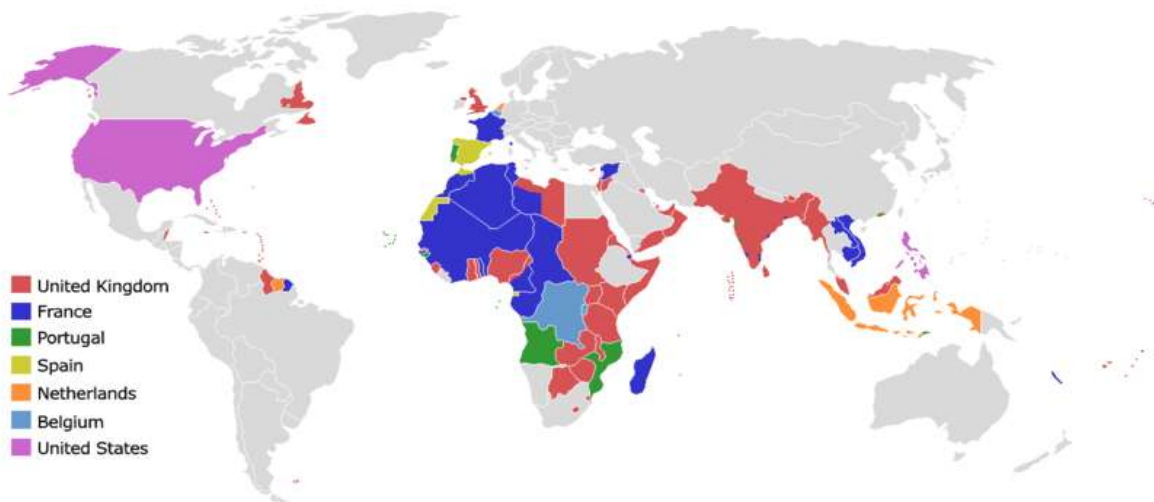


### African Opposition to Colonialism

World War II (1939-1945) had a major impact on Africa. Some important battles were waged in North Africa. Many Africans from British and French colonies were recruited to fight for the Allies in Europe, Asia, and North Africa. When recruiting African soldiers, the colonizing nations emphasized that soldiers would be helping to protect the world against the evils of fascism and Nazism. At the end of the war, the important question on the minds of Africans, particularly the returning soldiers, was “Why should I give my life to keep America and Europe free, when I am not free in my own country?” Most Africans would not consider life as colonial subjects to be that different from life under Nazism or fascism.

Returning soldiers and other Africans were aware of the promise made by the *Atlantic Charter*, which stated the principles guiding the Allied war effort, according to Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt in 1941. The third paragraph of the Charter states that the Allies “respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they will wish to see sovereign rights of self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.” Africans claimed this to be a commitment also to the peoples of Africa and a call to end colonial rule.

The map below shows the colonies of many of the imperial nations in 1945 and the colonial borders at that time.



**Caption: Colonization - 1945**

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**Opposition to colonialism during this era took many forms.**

***Demands for opportunity and inclusion:*** Many Africans at this time accepted the reality of colonial rule, but they did not accept the harsh discrimination and the lack of opportunity central to the colonial experience. Opposition to these aspects of colonialism was particularly strong among educated Africans, who believe that “all humans are created equal.” Discriminatory colonial policies and practice restricted economic opportunities and participation in the political process. During this period, educated Africans formed organizations to promote their interest in an end to discriminatory policies and for an increase in opportunities. However, these organizations had limited membership and they did not make radical demands for the end of colonial rule. The South African National Congress and the West African National Congress (Nigeria/Ghana) are examples of elite African organizations.

***Religious opposition:*** A number of the early anti-colonial uprisings were led by religious leaders. The Chimurenga (Zimbabwe) and Maji-Maji (Tanganyika) uprisings were led by African priests strongly opposed to colonial rule. The tradition of religious opposition to colonialism continued throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, unlike the earlier acts of religious resistance, the new opposition was led by African Christians that took the teachings on equality and fairness very seriously. These values were not practiced by colonial regimes. By the 1920s, some African Christian leaders were forming their own churches, sometimes called African Independent Churches. These churches were formed in southern, eastern, central, and western Africa and provided a strong voice for justice. One of many examples is the Kimbanguist Christian Church formed in the Congo by Simon Kimbangu in the 1920s. In spite of his imprisonment for many years by the Belgians, his church grew rapidly. When the Congo gained independence in 1960, the church membership exceeded one million.

***Economic opposition:*** During this time period, economic opposition was often not well organized. Nevertheless, there were attempts in the 1920s and 1930s by mine workers in southern Africa and port workers in the west and east to organize into unions. While important, these activities had little impact on the majority of African peoples. There were less organized, but more widespread, efforts of African farmers to resist colonial demands on both their lands and their labor.

***Mass protests:*** There were few mass protests during the interwar era. One that had great impact, however, was the Aba Women’s War in southeastern Nigeria in 1929. Igbo market women, upset with a number of colonial policies that threatened their economic and social position, staged a series of protests. The largest of these protests involved 10,000 women who covered their faces with blue paint and carried fern-covered sticks. These women destroyed a number of colonial buildings before soldiers stopped the protest. More than 50 women were killed. These women are still considered national heroes in contemporary Nigeria.