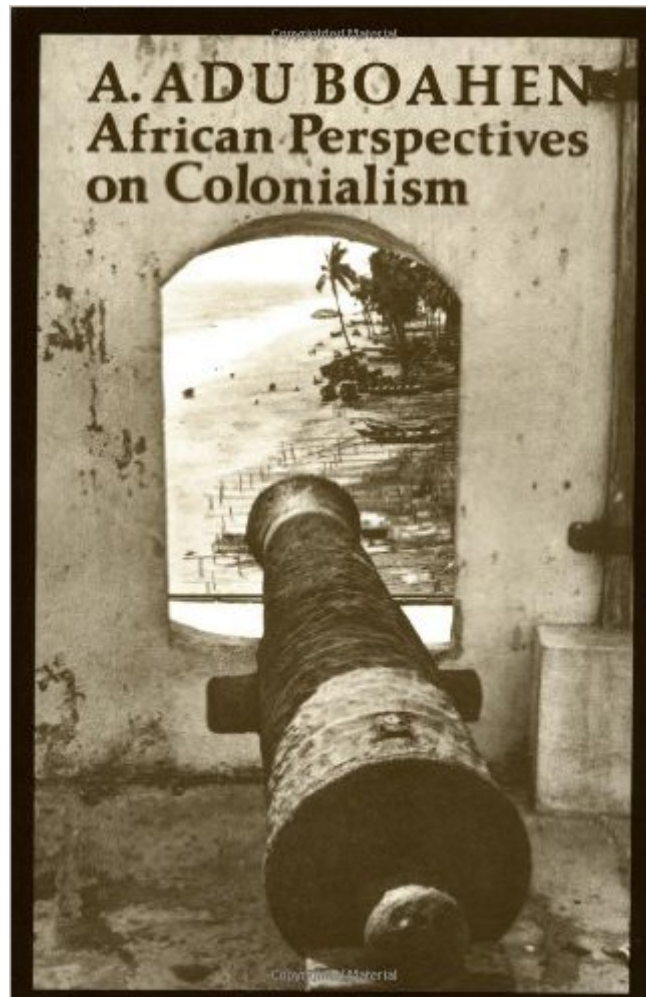


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# African Perspectives On Colonialism (The Johns Hopkins Symposia In Comparative History)



## Synopsis

This history deals with the twenty-year period between 1880 and 1900, when virtually all of Africa was seized and occupied by the Imperial Powers of Europe. Eurocentric points of view have dominated the study of this era, but in this book, one of Africa's leading historians reinterprets the colonial experiences from the perspective of the colonized.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The title of the book "African Perspectives" reflects exactly the content. The author, A. Adu Boahen further presents these perspectives in a balanced manner absent overbearing bitterness or spite common to colonial era studies. The author begins with the status of Africa in the last quarter of the 19th century and follows through to the first years of African independence. I can recap a few of the author's main points by posing a historical counterfactual. What would Africa have looked like without the shackles of colonialism? As Boahen explains there were many independent and growing kingdoms, at least two of them with large armies prior to the colonial era. Swahili (written with the Arabic script at the time) was expanding through its trade influence and so were Hausa and Arabic. Many African communities could depend on their own indigenously produced products to include cloths and other necessities. Seeing the end of the slave trade, many African communities were again growing rapidly in number and potential capital. But this space of progress was modified greatly as the colonial powers drew political borders irrespective of African kingdom, ethnicity or

language. The "rules" placed on the Conference of Berlin, the series of meetings by strictly westerners as to the division of Africa's land, were as follows: 1. All claims to territory had to be announced 2. Claims had to be proven by occupation if even minimal presence 3. A treaty with African leaders was sufficient proof of "occupation" 4. Coastal claims were sufficient to claim inland parts to an extent 5. Freedom of movement for all on the Congo and Niger rivers. The absence of conflict between the European powers translated to a largely peaceful "scramble" for Africa, that is, in the case of non-African lives. A few African kingdoms were tricked in to signing treaties with ambiguous language, or in the case of Menelik of Ethiopia, duped by overt language differences in the Amharic to Italian translation of the same treaty. As opposed to widespread belief, there were many African quarters that revolted against colonial rule. Some groups took to arms while others fashioned clubs and political organizations aptly appealing through diplomatic channels and processes with all due respect to the colonial ruler, for much needed reforms. No reforms came as a result of these peaceful appeals. So while anti-colonial movements were interested largely in reforms first off, they transitioned to outright independence post WWII. Having sat through dozens of college and graduate level lectures on the colonial era in Africa, I have been surprised to read contradictory impressions of specifically, the missionary missions. This book for one, and "King Leopold's Ghost" off the top of my head both had high praise for Christian missionaries. The former mentions the importance of missionary schools spreading western education and the latter described the missionaries as one of the few voices for human rights in the Congo. Interestingly enough, despite the selfish ambitions of the "Christian" nations in imperialism, the African converts were able to extract the gospel message and separate it from the horrible hypocrisy of its origin. Boahen mentions a few other positives of colonialism in addition to the spread of western education and a common language. The colonial cash crops could translate into an economic strategy post-independence, while the colonizers also developed limited infrastructure to include water sanitation, hospitals and limited transportation. On the other hand, the biggest criticism, and rightly so, of any and all colonial efforts was the biased and horribly inadequate investment into Africa's infrastructure. Socially, the era of colonialism encouraged merit over birth right which in turn would encourage development. However, many of these "positive" outcomes had a negative side affect, not to mention that what is "positive" to a West African may not be perceived as such by someone from North Africa. Indeed, it was in parts of North Africa that anti-colonial movements were strongest, the bitterness running deepest and therefore, so did and does the post-colonial analysis. A western liberal education may also not fit as a "positive" element of colonialism in light of a more conservative Muslim society, not to mention the clash of religious teachings. Despite the

short read, the book has a wealth of insight. The author packed each very readable chapter with tangible and interesting perspectives. Great supplement to one's colonial study of Africa.

great book on African history, as the book is titled African perspectives, this book is great because it is written from the viewpoint and opinion of an African prof. Great for any one wanting to learn modern African history.

One of the rare books on colonial history from the African point of view. This point of view is not given the place it needs to have in the writing of history.

A different outlook on European colonization in Africa told by the colonized. I found it very interesting

Very informative, just how I like my books

If you want to learn about a brief unbiased history of Africa, this is the book to read. Great book!

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