Lines Across Lives

How colonial decisions reshaped African communities

MWH.C.5.3.C "Describe the outcomes of the Berlin Conference and the impact of superimposed boundaries on Africa's Indigenous populations."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two outcomes of the Berlin Conference, circle two effects on Indigenous people, and number the two examples of boundaries made later. Use your marks to connect European decisions with their effects on African communities.

Who Drew the Lines?

1. At the Berlin Conference of 1884 to 1885, representatives of European powers met to settle disputes over claims in Africa. No African representatives were invited. The delegates set rules: a new claim on Africa's coast had to be reported to other European governments and supported by real authority on the ground. They also endorsed free trade in the Congo Basin and navigation on the Congo and Niger Rivers. European governments recognized King Leopold II's control of the Congo Free State. The conference did not draw every colonial border; conquest and later agreements shaped many of them.

2. Those agreements helped European powers expand their control. The Congo Free State became Leopold's personal possession, where his agents later used violence and forced labor to extract rubber. Elsewhere, Europeans signed treaties and drew boundaries to divide territory among themselves. Such superimposed boundaries followed colonial claims rather than the lands and travel routes of Indigenous communities. For example, later British and German colonial borders divided Maasai grazing lands in what are now Kenya and Tanzania. Maasai families who moved herds between seasonal pastures could face new rules about where they could travel or graze.

3. A line could also place communities with different languages and political traditions under one colonial administration. British-ruled Nigeria, formed through later colonial decisions, included Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and many other peoples. Colonial officials made decisions over taxes and political power without giving these communities equal control. After independence, leaders had to govern within borders inherited from colonial rule, and disputes over representation and resources sometimes sharpened existing divisions. Still, Indigenous Africans did not all respond alike: some resisted colonial rule, while others negotiated, adapted, or built ties across borders. A boundary could limit choices without erasing a community's identity.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the conference's rule for coastal claims support European expansion in Africa?

2. What did European governments recognize in the Congo, and what was one later effect on its people?

3. How did a later colonial boundary affect Maasai communities?

4. How did later colonial decisions shape Nigeria, and what challenge remained after independence?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

In four or five sentences, describe a fictional farming community whose fields and market fall under different colonial rulers after a new boundary is set. Identify one Berlin Conference outcome, state that the boundary was drawn later, and explain two plausible effects on the community.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two outcomes of the Berlin Conference, circle two effects on Indigenous people, and number the two examples of boundaries made later. Use your marks to connect European decisions with their effects on African communities. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the conference's rule for coastal claims support European expansion in Africa?	**It told European governments to report new coastal claims to one another and establish authority on the ground, giving them a process for asserting control.**
2	What did European governments recognize in the Congo, and what was one later effect on its people?	**They recognized Leopold II's control of the Congo Free State. His agents later used violence and forced labor to extract rubber.**
3	How did a later colonial boundary affect Maasai communities?	**British and German colonial borders divided Maasai grazing lands. Families moving herds between seasonal pastures could face restrictions on travel or grazing.**
4	How did later colonial decisions shape Nigeria, and what challenge remained after independence?	**They placed many peoples under one colonial administration. After independence, leaders governed within inherited borders, where disputes over representation and resources could sharpen divisions.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the Berlin Conference, European delegates agreed that coastal claims needed notice to other powers and governing authority on the ground. Later, colonial officials drew a boundary between our community's fields and the market where we sold crops. Farmers now needed permission to cross to the market, so some harvests spoiled before they could be sold. Separate colonial taxes on each side also reduced what families earned. Our community continued to share news and trade when possible, despite the new restrictions.

Accept other accurate conference outcomes and plausible effects of a later boundary. Responses should not claim that the conference itself drew the community's boundary.