The wealth of Africa
Kenya

Students’ worksheets

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KENYA

1895 – Britain forms East African Protectorate
1901 – Mombasa to Lake Victoria railway completed
1904 – Treaty with Masai
1920 – Kenya declared a colony
1944 – Kenyan African Union (KAU) formed
1952–1959 – Mau Mau uprising
1963 – Kenya becomes independent

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Front cover image: Wooden carving of a soldier, Kenya, about 1960s, British Museum.
SHEET 1: COULD THE BRITISH HELP KENYA SUPPORT ITSELF?

Britain did not view its colonies as dependencies which it would have to support. Its aim was that they should be able to stand on their own feet and support themselves. At first sight, Kenya did not look a promising prospect. See how Britain tried to kick-start its economy.

Source 1
In 1902–3 a survey confirmed that minerals of any consequence did not exist... In the main, therefore, it was evident that the development of an export trade would have to depend on agricultural production.
Harlow 1965: 211

Source 2
In 1900–1901 the revenue was £64,275 and the expenditure £193,438. In 1906–1907 (when the railway figures were included for the first time) revenues were £461,362 and expenditure £616,088.
Encyclopaedia Britannica 1911

Source 3
The railway’s objective was Uganda. But its construction also made possible the economic development of Kenya. The costs of porter transport were such that so far no item except ivory had been or could have been exported from any part of Kenya other than the narrow coastal belt.
Harlow 1965: 210

Source 6
At present, the chief item in the receipts from licences and taxes is the hut tax, derived from a small annual payment of two or three rupees per hut by natives. This tax causes no hardship, and cannot be considered excessive if one considers how great and direct are the advantages which natives have derived from our rule and the abolition of the slave trade...
At present the taxation of Europeans is extremely light, though some of the forms which it takes, such as game licences, cause irritation and complaint... [but] there is no income tax, house tax, or land tax.
A former Governor of Kenya describes the tax collection, Eliot 1905: 190–191

Source 7
If, however, we include Uganda in East Africa, we may legitimately look forward to a large native market in the future, as the population on the western side of the lake is numerous, intelligent, and anxious to adopt European inventions. In the house of one of the Regents at Kampala I saw electric bells.
A former Governor of Kenya describes the possibilities for trade with East Africa, Eliot 1905: 225

Questions
1. How rich was Kenya in natural resources (see source 1)?
2. What other means of raising money were there?
3. How might building a railway help?
4. How successful was the colony by 1911 (see source 2)?
SHEET 2: HOW SUCCESSFUL WAS THE SETTLEMENT OF THE HIGHLANDS?

It soon became clear to the British that the major resource of the colony was its land. To exploit this it had to persuade farmers to come and settle. The most agreeable area, at least in terms of climate, seemed to be the Highlands. Try to judge how successful this policy was.

Source 1
From 1902, Britain’s commissioner Sir Charles Eliot drew in European farmers by generous grants of land around Nairobi and along the railway line to the west with little thought to African land rights or needs. This led to the creation of the ‘White Highlands’, where only Europeans could legally farm.
Shillington 2005: 746

Source 2
The East African highlands were not really as suited to wheat growing or to sheep farming as they at first appeared. They might be cool but they were, nevertheless, equatorial, and, in the absence of a winter, insects and viruses throve.
Harlow 1965: 218

Source 4
Ironically, the arrival of white settlers did little immediately to solve the Protectorate’s budget deficits... The improved revenues were mostly the result of increased African production for export via the Uganda railway. European settler-generated exports accounted for the bulk of those of the protectorate only after World War I.
Shillington 2005: 746

Source 5
The highland district affords a brisk atmosphere by day, and cool, if not cold, nights, and speaking generally, is very healthy, the white children born and brought up here being particularly healthy-looking. There are at present [in 1907] 1,813 whites resident in the country, of whom 264 are Government officials.
British Medical Journal 1907: 234

Source 7
The lack of farm workers was an early cause of trouble to the settlers, while the labour regulations led, during 1907–1908, to considerable friction between the colonists and the government.
Encyclopaedia Britannica 1911

Source 8
By the close of 1905 considerably over a million acres of land had been leased or sold by the Protectorate authorities – about half of it for grazing purposes.
Encyclopaedia Britannica 1911

Questions
1. Why were the Highlands chosen for settlement?
2. How successful was this policy?
3. What future problems might this policy have caused?
SHEET 3: HOW WELL DID THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT COPE WITH THE WHITE SETTLERS?

Having encouraged settlers to move to Kenya, the British soon found more difficulties in managing them than in governing the Africans. Many settlers were greedy for land and disrespectful of the rights of African people, and the British often found themselves having to protect African people against the demands of the settlers.

**Source 1**
By 1912 the settlers were demanding a reduction of the native land reserves because more Africans would then be obliged to earn their living by paid labour. Against this demand, however, the Government stood firm.
Harlow 1965: 230

**Source 3**
In 1908 the Liberal Government declared that forced labour could not be tolerated within the British Empire and ruled that conscription for private employers must cease.
Harlow 1965: 231

**Source 4**
The settlers’ demands for labourers dovetailed exactly with the administration’s desire for a cash revenue; by encouraging Africans to work for wages for the settlers, the Administration could ensure that they had the opportunity to earn sufficient cash with which to pay their taxes.
Harlow 1965: 52

**Source 5**
The settlers maintained that as the government had encouraged them to settle it had also undertaken the obligation to provide them with labour.
Margery Perham (a British academic), quoted in Huxley 1944: 76

**Source 6**
[In 1908] The Governor held a conference with some 150 plain-spoken settlers who recommended the whip – some admitted using it – and Pass Laws to discipline the natives, besides taxation to force them to work.
Harlow 1965: 279

**Source 7**
These settlers have consistently controlled the policy of the local government and that government has just as consistently treated the native population with injustice, bigotry, and unrestrained racial greed.
Huxley 1944: 16

**Questions**

1. What did the settlers want from African people?
2. How well did the settlers behave?
3. How far did the British Government stand up for the rights of African people?
SHEET 4: HOW FAR DID THE BRITISH RESPECT MASAI RIGHTS?

One of the most delicate of British problems was how to deal with the warlike Masai. They were semi-nomadic, which made them hard to contain. Also they grazed their cattle on the Highlands, on land the settlers wanted.

Source 1
Your Lordship has opened this Protectorate to white immigration and colonisation... There can be no doubt that the Masai and many other tribes must go under. It is a prospect which I view with a clear conscience... [Masaidom] is a beastly, bloody system founded on raiding and immorality.

Commissioner Eliot writes to the Foreign Secretary in 1904, quoted in Harlow 1965: 270–271

Source 3
By the Masai Agreement of 1904, the Masai agreed to move into two reserves... for ‘so long as the Masai as a race should exist’... As early as 1908 the idea began for the removal of the northern Masai to a single extended southern reserve south of the railway. This operation was eventually accomplished by 1913.

Harlow 1965: 36

Source 4
Of the 12,000 square miles of European settled land, 7,000 consisted of old Masai grazing grounds, evacuated under agreements between 1904 and 1913.

Morgan 1963: 146

Source 5
The one people who might seriously have frustrated British ambitions in the interior were the Masai. No-one, however, realised this better than the British, who therefore, during the early years of their occupation (when the number of troops at their disposal was extremely limited) and more especially while the Uganda railway was being built, were generally most careful to avoid any conflict with them.

Harlow 1965: 12

Source 7
In dealing with the Masai the policy of the Kenya Government has been to persuade them to settle down gradually and adopt a certain measure of civilisation. It was realised 25 years ago that leaving them to themselves with their old military and social organisation untouched was fraught with grave danger for the prosperity of the tribe as well as for the public peace.

Hollis 1943: 122

Questions
1. How did the British solve the ‘problem’ of the Masai?
2. What was the British attitude towards the Masai?
3. To what extent was the British behaviour towards the Masai ‘civilised’?
SHEET 5: HOW WELL DID INDIRECT RULE WORK IN KENYA?

The British wanted to adopt a policy of indirect rule (ruling through local African chiefs) which seemed to be working well in Nigeria. However, they found that in Kenya society did not run along the same lines. They tried to create their own chiefs, overseen by a tiny number of British officials.

Source 1
In the East African Protectorate [Kenya] there was virtually no existing political authorities... So, the major task was to try and create a political order which might be looked at by Africans as having legitimate authority over them.
Harlow 1965: 41–42

Source 2
These so-called chiefs, especially in Kikuyu, were often little but detribalised riff-raff who had made themselves useful to early officers but who enjoyed no confidence among their own people. In some areas the situation was almost ludicrous: among the Galla, for example, as late as 1925 two of the four headmen were not even Galla, but former Galla slaves.
Harlow 1965: 350

Source 3
From the beginning the British administration was hindered by the inferior quality of many of the earliest British colonial administrators... Most had little education, and at least one was on record as being illiterate. This lack of preparation for their posts in the colonial administration, coupled with the effective power these officials held over large numbers of Africans, caused many British administrators in this early period to behave like ‘little emperors’.
Pickens 2004: 59

Source 6
British administrators used to wander from time to time collecting hut taxes. There was, however, very little money around; and in the early years district officials never properly counted the huts to form the basis of their tax assessment. They satisfied themselves instead with a bulk collection of goats, sheep and cattle, which the local population seems to have paid as a kind of ‘protection money’ to make the British go away... To call this a ‘tax collection’ was pretentious in the extreme.
Harlow 1965: 40

Source 7
Kitvi District was about two-thirds the size of England. The local population was sparse and scattered; they gave no respect to any central authority which the British might have controlled; and in the early years there were rarely more than three British officials stationed amongst them.
Harlow 1965: 39

Questions
1. What problems faced the British in ruling Kenya?
2. How well did they deal with them?
3. What do sources 4 and 5 reveal about the way Britain ruled Kenya?
The Mau Mau rebellion (1952–1959) turned into a major uprising against British rule, yet its purpose was never clear. However, the Kikuyu, who formed the core of the fighters, had enough reasons to be unhappy with British rule, as these sources show.

Source 1
An even more serious rift took place in 1929 when [missionaries] attempted to prohibit the traditional Kikuyu practice of circumcising girls prior to marriage... The Kikuyu, like many other African societies, made female circumcision a requirement for marriage and for full participation in the traditional world of women.
Edgerton 1990: 40

Source 3
The Kikuyus alone lost over 500,000 acres, for which they received not one penny of compensation. Since the end of the Second World War, 16,000 square miles – the most fertile parts of Kenya – have passed into the hands of two thousand European settlers and 50,000 square miles of inferior waterless country have been reserved for five and a half million Africans.
Padmore 1953: 358

Source 4
The problem was that by the late 1930s the industrial and commercial sectors in Kenya could not absorb all those Kikuyu who were by various means being pressed off the land. Hence a major rural rebellion could be undertaken by land-hungry Kikuyu peasants.
Stichter 1975: 263

Source 5
Nairobi offered the hope of jobs, but there were too few of those and too many competitors. There was also too little housing. Perhaps 20,000 slept outdoors wherever they could find partial shelter from Nairobi’s cold nights.
Edgerton 1990: 23

Source 6
Africans were not privileged to have a jury trial. They were tried by a magistrate advised by tribal elders representing the accused’s tribe. Where the Kikuyu were concerned, these elders represented the interests of wealthy and pro-British Kikuyu.
Edgerton 1990: 35

Source 7
Between 1939 and 1953, while wages rose only slightly, the price of maize meal rose between 600 and 800 per cent.
Edgerton 1990: 23

Task
Make a list of all the complaints that the Kikuyu might have against the British. Try to decide which of these might have been the most important.
SHEET 7: WHO WERE THE MAU MAU?

One of the big problems for the British in dealing with the Mau Mau revolt was knowing exactly who was involved, or indeed what Mau Mau was. It seemed clear that it was mainly a Kikuyu movement, and there were suspicions that Jomo Kenyatta, the political leader of the Kikuyu, was one of the people behind it, but this was hard to prove.

Source 1
Most whites feared and loathed Kenyatta. Settlers blamed him for stirring up squatters. He also had charisma. His campaign tours in early 1952 had everywhere been followed by, and must therefore have sparked, spates of Mau Mau oaths and murder. He had got Kikuyu to boycott bottled beer.
Lonsdale 1990: 403–404

Source 2
These [young] men said that Kenyatta wanted us to get hot. Because he spoke in strong political language these people interpreted it that he wanted more action and not just talking. This was not really Kenyatta’s intention as we, the older people, understood it.
An older Kenyan, quoted in Tamarkin 1976: 124

Source 3
Broadly speaking, Kenya’s Kikuyu workers supported the rebellion. The Kikuyu unskilled manual workers actively participated, while the skilled ones were more likely to provide ‘passive’ support.
Stichter 1975: 260

Source 4
Most of Mau Mau’s leaders had come from among the squatter population. Much of their bitterness and hatred towards the Europeans and their readiness to resort to violence must have stemmed from their past experience as squatters.
Tamarkin 1976: 129

Source 5
British administrators, who were impressed and sometimes intimidated by Kenyatta’s hypnotic personality and his magnetism, could not imagine that anyone other than he was in charge of the movement.
Edgerton 1990: 49

Source 6
We are determined to have independence in peace, and we shall not allow hooligans to rule Kenya. We must have no hatred towards one another. Mau Mau was a disease which has been eradicated, and must never be remembered again.
President Kenyatta, quoted in Sabar-Friedman 1995: 104

Questions

1. What sort of people might have been Mau Mau?
2. Why might the British accuse Kenyatta of being the leader of the rebellion?
SHEET 8: DID THE BRITISH OVERREACT TO THE MAU MAU?

Recently published books have shown how strongly the British reacted to the threat posed by the Mau Mau uprising. What was it about Mau Mau that caused such fear, and to what extent did the British react too harshly?

**Source 1**
Seven candidates were bound together by goats’ small intestines on the shoulders and feet. The middle finger was pricked and the blood smeared on the throat of a male goat. A piece of the goat meat was bitten off and swallowed after each vow. This, together with the licking of blood from each others’ fingers, made those undergoing the ritual ‘blood brothers’. The formula ‘and if I fail may this oath kill me’ was repeated after each vow.

The oath-taking ceremony, described in Green 1990: 77

**Source 3**
Two of the first settlers murdered were doctors, known for giving free treatment to squatter families; the six-year old son of one of them was also killed; the press pictured his bloodstained bed, with chamber pot and clockwork train-set on the floor.

Lonsdale 1990: 407

**Source 4**
Victims might be chopped to bits, partly for security’s sake; all gang members had to join in and share the guilt. They might also remove a corpse’s accusing eyes, for Kikuyu, after all, were profoundly superstitious.

Mau Mau treatment of victims, described in Lonsdale 1990: 398

**Source 5**
We were taken to a camp where we were screened. We were asked whether we had taken the oath, and those who denied having taken it were beaten badly until they were forced to confess or at least gave them some information. Many died from the beatings...

Ndiritu Kibirare describes treatment by British forces, in Elkins 2005: 65

**Source 7**
At the end of 1953, the British were faced with the serious problem of the concealment of terrorists and supply of food to them... so, in the first instance, the inhabitants of those areas were made to build and live in concentrated villages. This first step had to be taken speedily, to the disadvantage of usual health measures.

A British official explains the policy of ‘concentrated villages’, in Elkins 2005: 240

**Source 8**
We had not been given any warning beforehand that our houses were going to be burned... During the move I got separated from my children, and I could not trace them... I cried the whole night knowing that my children were gone.

Ruth Ndewa describes the effects of the forced move to ‘concentrated villages’, in Elkins 2005: 238–240

Questions

1. What was it about the Mau Mau that might have upset the British (sources 1–4)?
2. How did the British react to the Mau Mau (sources 5–8)?
SHEET 9: THE CHANGING FACE OF NAIROBI

Source 1
The African population of Nairobi grew from 12,000 in 1921 to over 70,000 in 1947.
Harlow 1965: 345

Source 2
In 1963, the population of Nairobi, based on the 1959 population census, stood at 350,000 people – growing at an unprecedented rate of over 7% per annum to the current total of over 3.2 million people.
City of Nairobi

Questions

1. How much has Nairobi changed in 100 years?
2. Who was responsible for this change?
3. Nairobi didn’t exist in 1900, but by 2006 it was one of the most prosperous and advanced cities in Africa. Does this mean that British rule was good for Kenya?
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