

Decolonization, Development, and the Making of Kenya, 1945-1980: A New African Nation

Kenya's journey to independence from British colonial rule was a complex and challenging process. It involved a protracted struggle by the Kenyan people, led by the Kenya African National Union (KANU) and its leader, Jomo Kenyatta. This article examines the process of decolonization and development in Kenya from 1945 to 1980, focusing on the role of KANU and Kenyatta.



Seeing Like a Citizen: Decolonization, Development, and the Making of Kenya, 1945–1980 (New African Histories) by Kara Moskowitz

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The Rise of African Nationalism

The roots of African nationalism in Kenya can be traced back to the early 20th century. The imposition of colonial rule by the British had a profound impact on Kenyan society, leading to the loss of land, the disruption of traditional ways of life, and the exploitation of labor. These conditions

fostered a growing sense of resentment and resistance among the Kenyan people.

In the 1920s and 1930s, a number of African political organizations were formed, including the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) and the Kavirondo Taxpayers Welfare Association (KTWA). These organizations played a key role in mobilizing the Kenyan people and raising awareness of their grievances.

After the Second World War, the pace of African nationalism accelerated. The war had exposed the weaknesses of European colonialism and inspired a wave of anti-colonial movements across Africa. In Kenya, the KCA and the KTWA merged to form the Kenya African Union (KAU). KAU was led by Jomo Kenyatta, a charismatic and influential leader who quickly became the symbol of Kenyan nationalism.

The Mau Mau Uprising

In 1952, the Kenyan people took up arms against British colonial rule in the Mau Mau Uprising. The uprising was led by the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA), a militant group that sought to drive the British out of Kenya and establish an independent African state.

The British responded to the Mau Mau Uprising with a brutal campaign of repression. Thousands of Kenyans were arrested, detained, and tortured. The British also implemented a policy of collective punishment, which resulted in the destruction of homes and villages and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.

The Mau Mau Uprising was ultimately defeated in 1956. However, it had a profound impact on the course of Kenyan history. The uprising demonstrated the determination of the Kenyan people to achieve independence and it helped to raise international awareness of the plight of the Kenyan people.

The Path to Independence

After the Mau Mau Uprising, the British government began to reconsider its policy of colonial rule in Kenya. In 1960, Kenya was granted internal self-government. Two years later, in 1963, Kenya became a fully independent nation.

Jomo Kenyatta became the first president of independent Kenya. He led the country for the next 15 years, during which time he oversaw the development of a new political system, the establishment of a national economy, and the expansion of social services.

The Kenyatta Era

The Kenyatta era was a period of significant progress and development for Kenya. The country experienced rapid economic growth and the standard of living for the majority of Kenyans improved. Kenyatta also played a key role in the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and he became a leading advocate for African unity and cooperation.

However, the Kenyatta era was also marked by authoritarianism and corruption. Kenyatta's government suppressed political dissent and he amassed a vast personal fortune. This led to growing discontent among the Kenyan people, which eventually culminated in the 1980 coup that brought an end to Kenyatta's rule.

The process of decolonization and development in Kenya was a complex and challenging one. It involved a protracted struggle by the Kenyan people, led by KANU and Jomo Kenyatta. The Mau Mau Uprising was a key turning point in the struggle for independence and it helped to raise international awareness of the plight of the Kenyan people. After independence, Kenya experienced a period of rapid economic growth and development. However, the Kenyatta era was also marked by authoritarianism and corruption. This led to growing discontent among the Kenyan people, which eventually culminated in the 1980 coup that brought an end to Kenyatta's rule.

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