

# How europe underdeveloped africa

Government, Colonialism



Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, (Washington, D. C.: Howard University Press, 1982). Walter Rodney is the author of many pieces focusing on African studies, one of his most influential being *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Rodney was born in Guyana, South America in 1942 where only thirty-eight years later he was assassinated by the Guyana government. Fortunately, Rodney was a bright and driven individual who left behind a great deal of valuable studies. He spent the bulk of his life traveling and was known around the world as an activist and scholar. Rodney studied mostly in Jamaica and London but also spent time as a significant activist in the Black Power movement through the Caribbean and North America. Rodney was the author of many books, which explored various areas of Africa but mostly pertaining to Africa's history, economy, wars, and government. Exposing controversial topics was common work for Rodney. In efforts to help the people of Guyana and other parts of Africa, he worked to uncover the corrupt ways of the government. According to close friends Rodney was aware of the dangers of his work and choice to move back to Guyana but he made a commitment to the liberation and development of his people. Since his death Rodney has continually been remembered through his works and the numerous awards given on his behalf. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* explores several avenues of how Africa was underdeveloped because of Europeans. Rodney aims to present a clear and truthful explanation as to why Africa is less successful than most of the world. Chapter one explains underdevelopment as being an unequal comparison in the social and economic development of countries. To fully understand the following chapters it is necessary to have a clear grasp that

Africa was developing but due to restrictions and exploitation from Europe, Africa became underdeveloped in comparison to other countries. From there Rodney explains the history of Africa and the times during the 15th century when Africa's economy was rapidly growing. He also includes the contribution Africa made to help Europe during the pre-colonial era. Rodney then proposes his main argument that the slave trade and exploitation of Africa by the European powers were the main contributors to Africa's underdevelopment. The thesis of this book is that Africa first and foremost holds great responsibility for their development but Europe is who actively exploited Africa in order to prosper from their underdevelopment. Africa has been based on an imperialist system, which is an unequal economic, cultural, and territorial relationship. The imperialist system contributed to the economic hindrance by making it challenging for Africa to produce resources for their continent and by draining the wealth. The economic and power issues present within Africa made it easier for European capitalists to exploit Africa. Capitalists thrive off of ownership and production for profit. Europeans saw Africa as a naive society, thus they took an opportunity to control leadership and the production of goods for a profit through their capitalist background. Accomplices within Africa, Europe and the United States partook in the exploitation and therefore the underdevelopment of Africa. The most significant and brutal contribution of Europe to Africa's underdevelopment was the slave trade. Europeans came into Africa and destroyed the culture and communities that were home to African peoples. They took the people, whom were working hard to build Africa, to use for their own good. Many features of European society and economy can be contributed to the slave

trade such as shipping, insurance, capitalist agriculture, technology, manufacturing, and trans-national economic links in Europe. Europeans used Africans to help build their economy and eventually build America. As Europe used the slave trade to grow and become a more prosperous country, across the water Africa was falling apart. The slave trade destroyed Africa's economic and social system. The most immediate effect was the drastic decline in the African population. A large majority of remaining Africans began to participate in slave hunting as well as gathering other items of trade for the Europeans. The African community was built on family but was abolished through the trade when neighbors, friends, and family sold each other in order to survive. The local agriculture and technologies in Africa were neglected because of the great focus put towards pleasing the Europeans and simply surviving. One of the maximum impacts of the trade and influences from Europeans was the psychological effect it had on Africans. Africans were torn apart as a community and devastated as a race. In order to maintain control of Africans, Europeans suggested that their achievement came from the fact God wanted whites to be successful. Due to cultural and psychological crisis from the abuse of Europeans, Africans and most of the world accept at least part of what Europeans preached. The view that whites are superior causes Africans to doubt themselves, their race, and their country. As a result, Africans were lacking the psychological stamina to overcome the past and find success. The exploitation of Africa grew to a higher degree as Europeans took control of oceanic trade routes. Europeans possessed superior vessels and cannons, which gave them control of the waterways and the control over trade. Africa is naturally a very rich land with

mineral wealth and climate suitable for successful agriculture. Unfortunately the wealth produced was not retained in Africa but used for European benefit. Africa was blind to the international trade taking place between Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Although in order to transport goods, Europeans used African labor and natural resources. The trading relationship between Africa and Europe is one of unequal exchange and exploitation. As time passed and Europe started to help colonize Africa it was portrayed that triumph would equalize. This however was not the case. The colonial government built roads, schools, hospitals, and the like that were supposed to aid the African community. These services were not what the African community needed at this time. The colonial government came in and set Africa up in the manner they deemed appropriate. Africa needed social services and this was no surprise or unknown. Once Europe began to assist Africa, the white community living in Africa received much of the assistance. It was clear that the poor European settlers wanted to enjoy luxuries in Africa and with the aid of social services during colonialism they were able to do so. The amenities provided during this time do not represent the relief that Africans received because the majority was given to the white settlers. Well into the 21st century Europe has tried to depict the supposed assistance that they have provided to Africa as a beacon of equality. Unfortunately, all of that was a facade, doing more harm than good. Walter Rodney was a well-versed writer and activist. Rodney gathered extensive research identifying causes and outcomes of historical uproar that took place in Africa. Rodney also used primary sources from Europeans and African documents. He also used secondary sources from other historians throughout both European and

African history. I have become a huge fan of Walter Rodney after reading this book. The way that he writes and describes history is easily understandable. He includes important and entertaining detail when explaining a situation. His target audience would be scholars and students, but his work would benefit the general public as well. The book is appropriate for both Africans and Americans alike to grasp an understanding of world history. I also found the text to be disturbing by discovering how mankind can deliberately hold each other back in order to be successful. It is terrifying to realize how corrupt the world is. Overall I enjoyed the book, I learned a great deal about European, African, and world history, and would definitely recommend this book in the future.