ponents of Pan-Africanism, anticolonialism, and nationalism also emerged. In the Arab Middle East, where nationalist aspirations after World War I were dashed by the mandate system and the continuation of the British protectorate in Egypt, opponents of Anglo-French political control worked for the independence of Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria.

While nationalism in colonial areas was directed against foreign rule, in those parts of Asia and Latin America where states were independent but nonetheless subservient to U.S. and European interests, it focused on overcoming economic dependency and political weakness. In Turkey this meant a sharp break from its past and implementation of an aggressive program of secularization and modernization under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the father of modern Turkey. In China it resulted in a struggle to rebuild the country and end foreign interference in the face of warlordism, civil war between Nationalists and Communists, and the Japanese invasions of Manchuria in 1931 and China itself in 1937. In Latin America it inspired leaders to pursue new plans for economic development after the Great Depression of the 1930s eroded world demand for the region's agricultural and mineral products. Such efforts intensified political struggles between entrenched elites and populist leaders who promised the masses social reforms.

When World War II ended in 1945, many Western leaders thought they could return to the world they had dominated before the war. In the immediate postwar years, the Dutch, French, and British all used force to maintain their empires but soon realized the futility of their efforts. Asian and African demands for independence proved irresistible, something for which developments in the first half of the twentieth century were largely responsible.

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**African Society and Identity under Colonial Rule**

Compared with the experience of India, the unfolding of colonialism in Africa resembles watching a film shown at high speed. Europeans arrived in force at the end of the nineteenth century, and after overcoming resistance and deciding among themselves who controlled what, they gave serious thought to the policies
that would determine the future of their new acquisitions. Not long after these issues had been resolved, World War II was fought, and independence movements swept through Africa. In 1957, when the Gold Coast, a British colony, became the independent nation of Ghana, it sparked a chain of events that resulted in the establishment of dozens of new independent states within a decade and a half.

So brief was Africa's colonial experience, and so rapid was the Europeans' exit, that nationalism in Africa never became the broad popular movement that evolved in India during its long struggle against British rule. Furthermore, African nationalist movements were impeded by the indifference of chiefs, farmers, and petty traders who benefited from European rule, the paucity of Africans with formal education and political experience, the gap between educated city-dwellers and the rural masses, and rivalries among linguistic and ethnic groups. Nevertheless, Africans in the interwar years found ways to express their opposition to colonial rule. They demonstrated against labor conscription, new taxes, and government-mandated land confiscations. They organized political associations, published journals, wrote books and newspaper editorials, joined independent African Christian churches, attended international meetings, and sent representatives to European capitals to state their grievances. Despite many obstacles, voices of African nationalism multiplied before World War II, and a growing audience listened to what they had to say.

The results of colonialism in Africa went well beyond politics and the birth of nationalism. Colonialism also fostered population growth, encouraged urbanization, undermined traditional religions, altered gender relationships, introduced new sports and pastimes, and changed how people dressed and what languages they spoke. Most important, it forced Africans to consider new ways of looking at themselves and their place in the world. Inevitably many features of old Africa — traditional names, music, art, marriage customs, and systems of inheritance — were weakened or lost. Whether such changes were beneficial or harmful for Africa is still debated among Africans today. There was less debate among Africans who actually lived under colonialism. They, with few exceptions, found their colonial experience unsettling, dispiriting, and demeaning.

The Literature of Hope and Oppression

98 James Aggrey, PARABLE OF THE EAGLE,
Léon G. Damas, LIMBO,
Léopold Sédar Senghor, PRAYER FOR PEACE,
and David Diop, VULTURES

Africans found colonialism dispiriting and repugnant because so much of it was predicated on the assumption of black inferiority. Colonialism's message, stated or unstated, was that Africans were incapable of governing themselves, or at least incapable of governing themselves effectively; nor were they capable of managing a
modern economy or even creating a viable culture and social order. For all these tasks they needed Europeans, who justified their authority by asserting their moral and intellectual superiority. Furthermore, Africans were told that in order to succeed under colonialism — to become clerks or civil servants in the colonial administration or to become "assimilated" (an *évolué*, or "evolved one") in French Africa — they would have to shed their African identity and adopt the ideas, views, work habits, dress, and customs of Europeans. This was the price Africans would have to pay to overcome their backwardness.

When organized African nationalist movements finally began to take shape after World War II, many African political leaders denounced the corrosive effect of colonialism on African tradition and on the Africans' sense of identity. Well before then, however, African poets, novelists, and short story writers, as well as black authors living outside of Africa, had explored these issues with great power and insight. These authors were for the most part European educated, wrote mainly in English or French, and brought to their work a familiarity with contemporary European literary trends. Their themes and emotions, however, centered on what it meant to be black after centuries of enslavement and years of colonial rule. Many French-language writers came to be identified with the Paris-centered literary movement known as *Négritude*, which, beginning in the 1930s, affirmed the worth of African tradition, emphasized the spiritual unity of black people everywhere, and explored black people's unique historical experience. English-speaking writers tended to focus less on the commonalities of blacks' oppression and more on ways colonialism affected specific groups and individuals. Both groups expressed pride in Africa's spiritual, physical, and cultural heritage and mourned the wounds inflicted on it by slavery, colonialism, underdevelopment, and prejudice.

Four selections, each offering a different African perspective on the experience of colonialism, follow. "Parable of the Eagle" was written by James Aggrey, who was born in 1875 in the Gold Coast, a British colony. Educated in a Protestant mission school and a convert to Christianity, at age twenty-three he traveled to the United States to study for the ministry. He remained in the United States for twenty years, studying economics and agriculture, speaking out against racial prejudice, and working among poor African Americans in South Carolina. He returned to Africa in 1918 and died in 1927.

The author of the second work, "Limbo," is Léon G. Damas, one of several black writers of the 1930s and 1940s who was born outside of Africa but who nonetheless identified with Africa and wrote eloquently about the damage caused by colonialism. Born in 1912 in French Guyana, a colony in South America, Damas was educated on Martinique, a French Caribbean island, before beginning studies at the University of Paris. At Paris, Damas, with fellow students Léopold Senghor from Senegal and Aimé Césaire from Martinique, founded the literary journal *L'étudiant noir (The Black Student)*, which many see as the beginning of the Négritude movement. Damas's poem "Limbo" was one of thirty-one poems published in the anthology *Pigments* in 1937. According to Christian tradition, *Limbo* refers to the abode of souls who are barred from Heaven because they have been unbaptized, hence a place of neglect and oblivion. After World War II, in which Damas
fought for the French, he worked for the United Nations in Africa and then emigrated to the United States, where he taught black literature at Federal City University and Howard University in Washington, D.C.

The second poem, "Prayer for Peace," is the work of Léopold Sédar Senghor, the most famous French-speaking poet of Africa. Born in Senegal, Senghor was raised Catholic and educated in Catholic schools. At age twenty-two he went to Paris, where he studied and taught literature and helped inspire the Négritude movement. After World War II, in which he fought for France and was taken prisoner by the Germans, he entered politics and was elected to the French Chamber of Deputies. When Senegal became an independent state in 1960, he was elected president, an office he held until he retired in 1981. His "Prayer for Peace" was the concluding poem of his collection Hosties Noires, which can be translated either as Black Victims or Black Hosts. It is set in January 1945, after France had been liberated and the final defeat of the Nazis was imminent. In the poem he enumerates the sins of colonialism but combines his condemnation with a plea for forgiveness and universal brotherhood. It is a powerful expression of the poet's ambivalence toward France, both the oppressor of Africa and a beacon of enlightenment.

The final poem, "Vultures," is by David Diop, who flourished as a poet at the end of the colonial period. Born in France to a Senegalese father and a Cameroonian mother, in his twenties he left medical school to study literature and write poetry. Acclaimed in French-speaking Africa for his denunciations of colonialism, he moved to Senegal in 1958 after French rule ended. He died in 1960 in a plane crash. "Vultures" was published in 1956 in the anthology Coups de Pilon, or Hammer Blows.

**QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS**

1. What specific features of colonialism does each author condemn? How are their views of colonialism similar? How are they different?
2. How do the four authors view Africans and African culture? In what ways do they find positive value in African practices and traditions?
3. What specific criticisms do the authors make of European values and characteristics? In what ways do they believe that African ways are superior to those of Europe?
4. To what degree do the four works offer a message of hope for Africa?

James Aggrey,
Parable of the Eagle

A certain man went through a forest seeking any bird of interest he might find. He caught a young eagle, brought it home and put it among his fowls and ducks and turkeys, and gave it chickens' food to eat even though it was an eagle, the king of birds.

Five years later a naturalist came to see him and, after passing through his garden, said: "That bird is an eagle, not a chicken."
“Yes,” said its owner, “but I have trained it to be a chicken. It is no longer an eagle, it is a chicken, even though it measures fifteen feet from tip to tip of its wings.”

“No,” said the naturalist, “it is an eagle still: it has the heart of an eagle, and I will make it soar high up to the heavens.”

“No,” said the owner, “it is a chicken, and it will never fly.”

They agreed to test it. The naturalist picked up the eagle, held it up, and said with great intensity: “Eagle, thou art an eagle; thou dost belong to the sky and not to this earth; stretch forth thy wings and fly.”

The eagle turned this way and that, and then, looking down, saw the chickens eating their food, and down he jumped.

The owner said: “I told you it was a chicken.”

“No,” said the naturalist, “it is an eagle. Give it another chance tomorrow.”

So the next day he took it to the top of the house and said: “Eagle, thou art an eagle; stretch forth thy wings and fly.” But again the eagle, seeing the chickens feeding, jumped down and fed with them.

Then the owner said: “I told you it was a chicken.”

“No,” asserted the naturalist, “it is an eagle, and it still has the heart of an eagle; only give it one more chance, and I will make it fly tomorrow.”

The next morning he rose early and took the eagle outside the city, away from the houses, to the foot of a high mountain. The sun was just rising, gilding the top of the mountain with gold, and every crag was glistening in the joy of that beautiful morning.

He picked up the eagle and said to it: “Eagle, thou art an eagle; thou dost belong to the sky and not to this earth; stretch forth thy wings and fly!”

The eagle looked around and trembled as if new life were coming to it; but it did not fly. The naturalist then made it look straight at the sun. Suddenly it stretched out its wings and, with the screech of an eagle, it mounted higher and higher and never returned. It was an eagle, though it had been kept and tamed as a chicken!

My people of Africa, we were created in the image of God, but men have made us think that we are chickens, and we still think we are; but we are eagles. Stretch forth your wings and fly! Don’t be content with the food of chickens!

Léon G. Damas, Limbo

... Give me back my black dolls. I want to play with them,
Play the ordinary games that come naturally to me,
Stay in the shadow of their rules,
Feel myself, what I was yesterday,
Without complexity.
Yesterday, when I was torn up by the roots.

Will they ever know the rancor eating at my heart,
My mistrustful eye open too late?
They have stolen the space that was mine
The customs, the days of my life
The singing, the rhythm, the strain,
The path, the water, the hut
The earth, gray, smoky
And wisdom, the words, the palavers,
The ancients.
And the beat, the hands, the beating of the hands
And the stamping of feet on the ground.

Give them back to me, my black dolls,
My black dolls,
Black dolls
Black.

1 Long, rambling, and informal discussions.