



**Chinua Achebe** is one of the most well-known contemporary writers from Africa. Born on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 1930 and died on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 2013.

Achebe's first novel, ***Things Fall Apart*** (1958), deals with the clash of cultures and the violent transitions in life and values brought about by the onset of British colonialism in Nigeria at the end of the nineteenth century.

**Activity: Take out a sheet of paper and draw a map of Africa to the best of your ability. Include:**

- **Countries**
- **Cities**
- **Geographical features (oceans, deserts, mountains, etc.)**

# The Point?

- One of the main themes running through *Things Fall Apart* -- and all of Achebe's work -- is that all knowledge is specific and culturally situated.
- What does your map of Africa tell you about your knowledge of the culture we're about to encounter in this book?

# Africa





# British Colonialism

- In the 1850s, European countries divided up all the land in Africa – the land England acquired became its African colonies.
- In the 1850s, local control.
- England and other colonial powers like France and Germany divided Africa into 50 countries.

- They superimposed brand new boundaries over the 1,000 indigenous cultures and regions of Africa.
- The new countries lacked reason, and divided some groups of people who lived peacefully together, while merging other groups who didn't get along.

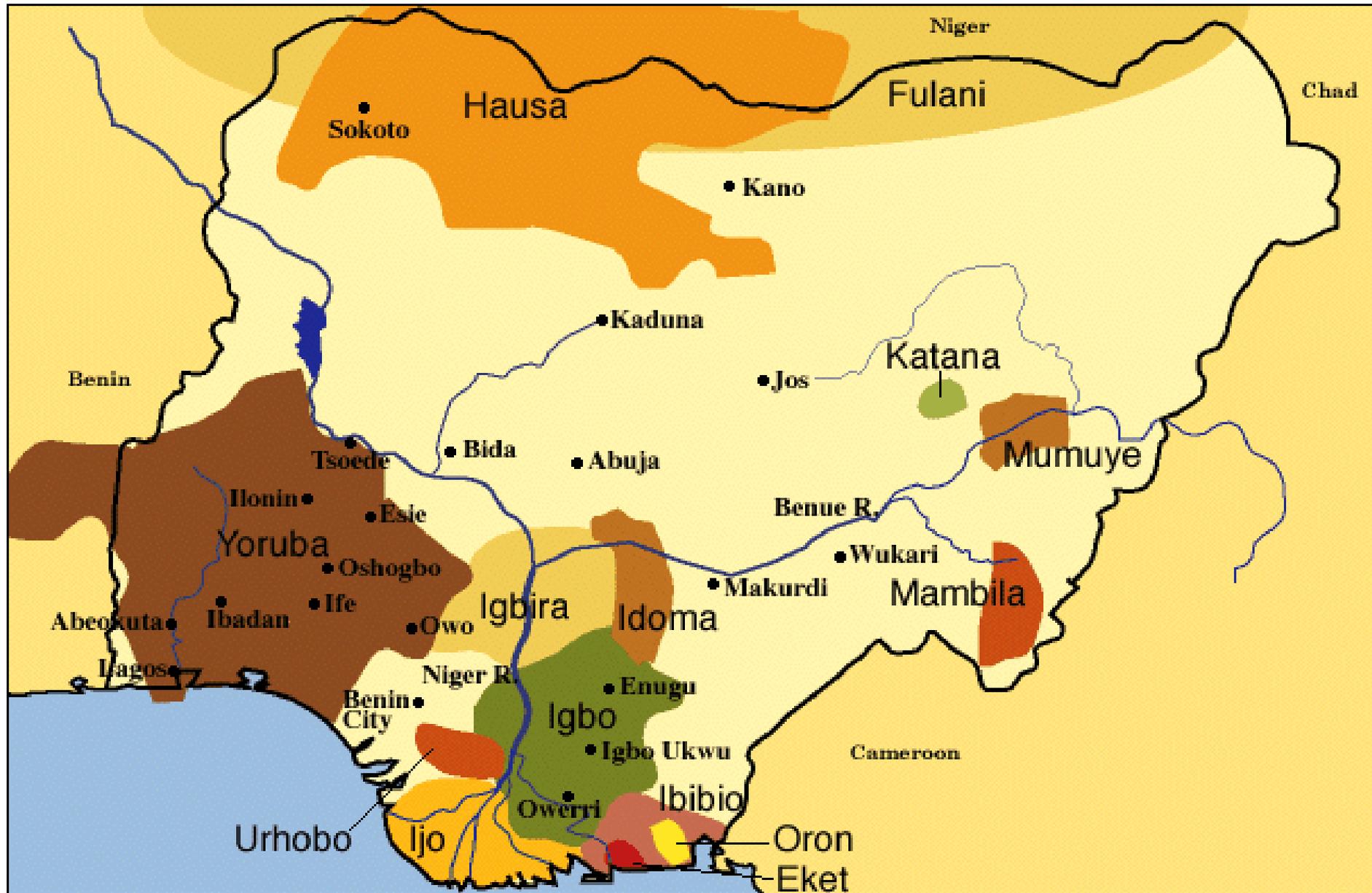
- *What types of problems do you think this would create for both England and Africans?*

“Let me first make one general point that is fundamental and essential to the appreciation of African issues by Americans. Africans are people in the same way that Americans, Europeans, Asians, and others are people. Africans are not some strange beings with unpronounceable names and impenetrable minds. Although the action of *Things Fall Apart* takes place in a setting with which most Americans are unfamiliar, the characters are normal people and their events are real human events.”

Chinua Achebe

# Chinua Achebe

- Chinua Achebe was born in Nigeria in 1930. He was raised in the large village of Ogidi, one of the first centers of Anglican missionary work in Eastern Nigeria.
- He is a graduate of University College, Ibadan.
- From 1972 to 1976, and again in 1987 to 1988, Mr. Achebe was a Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and also for one year at the University of Connecticut, Storrs.



- Mr. Achebe has published novels, short stories, essays, and children's books.
- He was cited in the *London Sunday Times* as one of the 1,000 "Makers of the Twentieth Century," for defining "a modern African literature that was truly African" and thereby making "a major contribution to world literature."

# What made Achebe's African literature truly African?

- ***Things Fall Apart*** combines Western linguistic forms and literary traditions with Igbo (or Ibo) words and phrases, proverbs, fables, tales, and other elements of African oral and communal storytelling traditions.
- This helps record and preserve African oral traditions as well as to overcome the colonialist language and culture.

# The End of Colonialism

- Between 1885 and 1914 Britain took nearly **30% of Africa's population** under its control, compared to 15% for France, 9% for Germany, 7% for Belgium and 1% for Italy.
- Nigeria alone contributed 15 million subjects, more than in the whole of French West Africa or the entire German colonial empire.

- After WWII, England's sway and power over its colonies around the world was weakened.
- England's empire in Africa ended quickly, often leaving the newly-independent states ill-equipped to deal with the challenges of governing themselves.
- Nigeria won independence in 1960, and many other African nations followed shortly thereafter. (Question # 8)

# *Things Fall Apart*

- Published in 1958, just before Nigerian independence, the novel recounts the life of the village hero Okonkwo and describes the arrival of white missionaries in Nigeria and its impact on traditional Igbo society during the late 1800s.

# *Things Fall Apart* Conflicts

## Generational:

Okonkwo vs. Unoka

Okonkwo vs. Nwoye

## Cultural

Ibo vs. Western

Tradition vs. Christianity

Assimilation vs. purity

## Gender

Okonkwo vs. his wives

## Inner

Okonkwo vs. himself

# FOCUS

While reading this novel we will look for examples of traditions within Igbo culture and analyze the values those traditions represent.

We will also focus on how the Igbo people react to people from outside their culture and how the outside culture integrate with the Igbo people.

Finally, we will focus on the impact outside culture has on the Igbo people