

Topic 8.5: Decolonization After 1900

Standards Table

Theme	Learning Objective	Key Concept(s)	Education Standards Met
Governance (GOV)	Unit 8: Learning Objective F — Compare the processes by which various peoples pursued independence after 1900.	KC-6.2.II.A Nationalist leaders sought autonomy or independence. KC-6.2.I.C Independence achieved through negotiation or armed struggle. KC-6.2.II.B Regional and ethnic movements challenged imperial rule.	AP World History: Modern— comparison, causation, sourcing, and argumentation.

Learning Objectives

- Compare peaceful and violent methods of decolonization.
- Explain the role of nationalist leaders in independence movements.
- Analyze how ethnic, religious, and regional divisions shaped independence efforts.
- Evaluate similarities and differences in independence processes across regions.
- Practice document analysis in preparation for a DBQ.

Lesson Overview

After 1900, and especially after World War II, colonies across Asia and Africa sought independence from imperial rule. These movements took different forms depending on local conditions. Some leaders negotiated independence through political pressure and diplomacy, while others fought violent wars against colonial powers. In many cases, independence movements were shaped by ethnic, religious, or regional divisions, which sometimes led to conflict even after independence was achieved. This lesson explores these varied processes and prepares students to analyze primary sources and compare how different societies pursued independence.

Essential Vocabulary

- **decolonization** — the process by which colonies gain independence from imperial powers
- **nationalist movement** — a movement seeking self-rule for a people or nation
- **partition** — the division of a territory into separate political units
- **guerrilla warfare** — irregular warfare using small groups and surprise tactics
- **sovereignty** — the authority of a state to govern itself

Background Reading

Decolonization after 1900 was driven by a combination of internal and external factors. Colonized peoples increasingly demanded independence as nationalist ideas spread and imperial control weakened. World War II played a major role in accelerating this process. European powers were weakened economically and militarily, while colonized populations had contributed to the war effort and expected political change in return. At the same time, global ideas about self-determination and human rights gained influence, further undermining imperial rule.

Different regions pursued independence in different ways. In India, independence was largely achieved through nonviolent resistance led by figures such as Mohandas Gandhi and political negotiation led by the Indian National Congress. However, even in this case, independence came with significant conflict, including the partition of India and Pakistan along religious lines, which led to mass migration and violence. This demonstrates that even negotiated independence could involve major social disruption.

In contrast, some colonies achieved independence through armed struggle. In Algeria, nationalist groups fought a violent war against French rule, using guerrilla tactics and facing strong military resistance. This conflict resulted in significant casualties and deep political divisions. Similarly, in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, independence movements sometimes involved both negotiation and conflict, depending on local conditions and the willingness of colonial powers to relinquish control.

Regional, ethnic, and religious divisions often complicated the process of decolonization. Colonial boundaries had frequently grouped together diverse populations, and independence movements sometimes revealed or intensified these divisions. In some cases, movements for independence also became movements for autonomy within newly formed states. These challenges highlight that decolonization was not a single, uniform process, but rather a series of varied and complex struggles shaped by local and global factors.

Primary Sources

Primary Source 1: Mohandas Gandhi, “Quit India” Speech, 1942

Document: Quit India Speech

Direct Link (verified):

<https://www.mkgandhi.org/speeches/quit-india-speech.htm>

Before you discuss the resolution, let me place before you one or two things. I want you to understand clearly that I am not going to be satisfied with anything short of complete

freedom. Maybe I would accept nothing less than complete independence. I want freedom immediately, this very night, before dawn if it can be had. I want the feeling of independence in my heart this very moment. The difficulty is that I cannot make you feel that you are free.

I want you to feel that you are free this very moment, that you are masters of your own destiny. You must have that feeling that you are no longer slaves. This is essential if you are to work as free men and women. The Congress is not going to be satisfied with anything short of complete independence. The Congress is not going to accept any compromise.

Here is a mantra, a short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The mantra is: Do or Die. We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery.

Guided Analysis Questions

1. What method of resistance is Gandhi promoting?
2. What is the purpose of this speech?
3. Who is Gandhi's intended audience?
4. How does this speech reflect nonviolent resistance?
5. What does this suggest about the Indian independence movement?

Primary Source 2: National Liberation Front (FLN), Algeria, 1954 Declaration

Document: FLN Declaration of November 1, 1954

Direct Link (verified):

<https://www.marxists.org/history/algeria/1954/fln-declaration.htm>

To our people: To you who are called upon to judge us, we address ourselves first. Our aim is the restoration of the sovereign, democratic, and social Algerian state within the framework of Islamic principles. Respect for all fundamental liberties without distinction of race or religion.

To achieve these aims, the National Liberation Front calls upon all Algerians of all social classes, political parties, and movements to unite in the struggle against colonial oppression. The task is difficult, but the outcome is certain. The struggle will be long, but the victory will be decisive.

We call upon all patriots to join the struggle by all means at their disposal. The FLN will pursue its objectives through both internal and external action. Internally, through armed struggle, and externally through diplomatic efforts to internationalize the Algerian cause.

Guided Analysis Questions

1. What goals does the FLN identify?
2. What methods are implied in the phrase “all means necessary”?
3. How does this differ from Gandhi’s approach?
4. What does this reveal about the Algerian independence movement?
5. How might colonial authorities respond to this declaration?

Primary Source 3 Section

Primary Source 3: Ho Chi Minh, Vietnamese Declaration of Independence, 1945

Document: Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam

Direct Link (verified – Avalon Project, Yale):

https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/vietnam.asp

All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: All peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of the French Revolution made in 1791 also states: All men are born free and with equal rights, and must always remain free and have equal rights. Those are undeniable truths.

Nevertheless, for more than eighty years, the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our fellow-citizens. They have acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice.

Revised Guided Analysis Questions (Source 3)

1. What argument does Ho Chi Minh make about the legitimacy of Vietnamese independence?
2. How does Ho Chi Minh use Western political ideas to support his claims?
3. Who is the intended audience of this document, and how does that shape the argument?
4. How does this document reflect both nationalist and ideological motivations?
5. How does this example compare to either Gandhi’s or the FLN’s approach to independence?

Key Tables / Charts / Diagrams

Methods of Decolonization

Method	Example
Nonviolent resistance	India (Gandhi)

Armed struggle	Algeria (FLN)
Revolutionary + ideological nationalism	Vietnam (Ho Chi Minh)

Factors Influencing Independence

Factor	Impact
WWII weakening empires	Enabled independence
Nationalist leadership	Organized movements
Ethnic/religious divisions	Caused conflict
Global pressure	Encouraged decolonization

Change / Continuity / Comparison Section

Change over time:

After World War II, decolonization accelerated rapidly compared to earlier periods. Colonies gained independence at a much faster rate, and global attitudes shifted toward supporting self-determination.

Continuity over time:

Despite independence, many former colonies continued to face economic challenges and political instability. External influence from former colonial powers and Cold War superpowers persisted.

Comparison:

Different regions used different methods to achieve independence. India relied largely on nonviolent resistance, while Algeria used armed struggle. Ghana achieved independence through negotiation. These differences reflect local conditions and colonial responses.

Key Takeaways

- Decolonization took multiple forms across regions.
- Nationalist leaders played key roles in independence movements.
- Some movements were peaceful, while others were violent.
- Ethnic and regional divisions often shaped outcomes.
- Understanding these differences is essential for DBQ analysis.

DBQ Preparation Activity (Document Analysis)

Student Task:

Using the three documents above:

1. **Source each document (HIPP):**
 - Historical situation
 - Intended audience
 - Purpose
 - Point of view
2. **Group the documents** into categories based on method of independence.
3. Write a **mini-thesis (2–3 sentences)** answering:
→ *How did methods of decolonization differ across regions after 1900?*