The Scramble for Africa (1880-1914) was a period of rapid colonization of the African continent by European powers. But it wouldn't have happened except for the particular economic, social, and military evolution Europe was going through.

What Caused the Scramble to Happen?
There were several factors which created the impetus for the Scramble for Africa, most of these were to do with events in Europe rather than in Africa.

- **Exploration** -- During the nineteenth century barely a year went by without a European expedition into Africa. The boom in exploration was triggered to a great extent by the creation of the African Association by wealthy Englishmen in 1788 (who wanted someone to 'find' the fabled city of Timbuktu and the course of the Niger River). As the century moved on, the goal of the European explorer changed, and rather than traveling out of pure curiosity they started to record details of markets, goods, and resources for the wealthy philanthropists who financed their trips.

- **Henry Morton Stanley** -- A naturalized American (born in Wales) who of all the explorers of Africa is the one most closely connected to the start of the Scramble for Africa. Stanley is more infamously known for his explorations on behalf of King Leopold II of Belgium. Leopold hired Stanley to obtain treaties with local chieftains along the course of the River Congo with an eye to creating his own colony (Belgium was not in a financial position to fund a colony at that time).

- **Capitalism** -- The end of European trading in slaves left a need for commerce between Europe and Africa. Capitalists may have seen the light over slavery, but they still wanted to exploit the continent - new 'legitimate' trade would be encouraged. Explorers located vast reserves of raw materials, they plotted the course of trade routes, navigated rivers, and identified population centers which could be a market for manufactured goods from Europe. It was a time of plantations and cash crops, dedicating the region's workforce to producing rubber, coffee, sugar, palm oil, timber, etc for Europe. And all the more enticing if a colony could be set up which gave the European nation a monopoly.
What Other Factors Played a Role in the Scramble?

- **Steam Engines and Iron Hulled Boats** -- In 1840 the *Nemesis* arrived at Macao, south China. It changed the face of international relations between Europe and the rest of the world. The *Nemesis* had a shallow draft (five feet), a hull of iron, and two powerful steam engines. It could navigate the non-tidal sections of rivers, allowing access inland, and it was heavily armed. Iron hulled steam powered boats like this made travel and exploration around the coasts and rivers of Africa much easier. This also accelerated the shipment of natural resources back to Europe.

- **Medical Advances** -- Africa, especially the western regions, was known as the 'White Man's Grave' because of the danger of two diseases: malaria and yellow fever. During the eighteenth century only one in ten Europeans sent out to the continent by the Royal African Company survived. Six of the ten would have died in their first year. In 1817 two French scientists, Pierre-Joseph Pelletier and Joseph Bienaimé Caventou, extracted quinine from the bark of the South American cinchona tree. It proved to be the solution to malaria; Europeans could now survive the ravages of the disease in Africa. (Unfortunately yellow fever continued to be a problem - and even today there is no specific treatment for the disease.)

- **Military Innovation** -- at the beginning of the nineteenth century Europe was only marginally ahead of Africa in terms of available weapons as traders had long supplied them to local chiefs and many had stockpiles of guns and gunpowder. But two innovations gave Europe a massive advantage. In the late 1860s percussion caps were being incorporated into cartridges - what previously came as a separate bullet, powder and wadding, was now a single entity, easily transported and relatively weather proof. The second innovation was the breach loading rifle. Older model muskets, held by most Africans, were front loaders, slow to use (maximum of three rounds per minute) and had to be loaded whilst standing. Breach loading guns, in comparison, had between two to four times the rate of fire, and could be loaded even in a prone position. Europeans, with an eye to
colonization and conquest, restricted the sale of the new weaponry to Africa maintaining military superiority.

The Mad Rush Into Africa in the Early 1880s
Within just 20 years the political face of Africa had changed - with only Liberia (a colony run by ex-African-American slaves) and Ethiopia remaining free of European control. The start of the 1880s saw a rapid increase in European nations claiming territory in Africa.

Europeans Set the Rules for Dividing Up the Continent
The Berlin Conference of 1884-85 laid down ground rules for the further partitioning of Africa. Navigation on the Niger and Congo rivers was to be free to all, and to declare a control over a region the European colonizer must show effective occupancy and develop a 'sphere of influence'. The floodgates of European colonization had opened...

Reading Questions:

1.) What is the “Scramble for Africa”?

2.) How did the motives of exploration change leading up to the Scramble for Africa?

3.) Who was Henry Morton Stanley? What did he accomplish?

4.) How did the end of the slave trade and capitalism influence the Scramble for Africa?

5.) What were three “other factors” that gave Europeans an advantage in the Scramble for Africa?