The Pre-Colonial Empires of Central and South Africa

Kongo, Luba, Great Zimbabwe, Mutapa
Case Study: Kongo Kingdom

- Founded in 14\textsuperscript{th} century in w. central Africa
- Kingdom divided into 6 parts each with a governor
  - Similar to government used by Alexander the Great
Decline of the Kongo

- 1482 – first Portuguese explorer
- Portuguese worked to weaken and control empire from inside
  - Controlled kings
  - Slave Trade
While Europeans often claimed that the African peoples “needed” their help, how does the Kongo Kingdom help demonstrate otherwise?
Governmental Case Study: Luba

- 1585-1889
- Located in Central Africa
- Developed government similar to European and Japanese Feudalism
Luba’s Government

Very strong government

- Mulopwe – King
- Bamfumus – nobles
- Balopwe – Clan Kings
- Mbudye – Historians/”men of Memory”
Decline of Luba

- Raiding by slavers brought division and mis-trust between Luba and kingdoms on the coast.
- Area eventually fully taken over by Belgium in 19th century.
Luba Central Question

How does Luba’s societal structure dispel the European myth of Africa as full of lawlessness?
Case Study: Great Zimbabwe

- 1100-1400 C.E.
- Center of Kingdom of Zimbabwe
- “Zimbabwe” = Stone House (Shona)
- Famous for making large walled city, with stone houses
- Built up trade network with continent (Kilwa) and beyond (China)
The Walls of Great Zimbabwe
Great Zimbabwe Ruins
The Fall of Great Zimbabwe

- Decline in Trade
- Political Instability
- Famine
- Drought
Zimbabwe Central Question

How does the example of Zimbabwe help demonstrate the sophistication of African societies?
The Mutapa Kingdom

- 1430-1760
- Built up as successor of Zimbabwe empire
- Located in Southern Africa around Zambezi river
- Built up as trading empire
  - Connections to Muslim traders of east coast
Culture of Mutapa

- Belief in spirits and cult of royal ancestors
- “Mhondoros” – maintained shrines, passed on oral histories
- “Chibadi” – men dressed as women (considered an honor)
Decline of the Mutapa

- Portuguese traders and missionaries influence begins around mid 16th century
- Empire declined and was absorbed by Butwa empire, then Portuguese
Mutapa Central Question

How might the ideas of Ethnocentrism help explain why the Europeans may have mis-interpreted Mutapa culture?