

Primary Source:

The Gold Coast Leader,

August 8, 1914

Introduction

At the outbreak of World War I, the Gold Coast Colony (now the independent country of Ghana) was under British colonial rule. Western-style, English-language schooling had been available in the Gold Coast colony for some decades, and literate professional Africans followed papers like *The Gold Coast Leader*. The paper was established in June 1902 and edited by prominent members of the African intelligentsia.

The editorial below was published on August 8, 1914. In it, the author - representing the view of those who ran the paper - reflects on what the outbreak of war between Austria-Hungary and Serbia might mean for people in the Gold Coast Colony, should England enter the war against Germany. England declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914. Thus, by the time readers encountered this piece, what the author speculated had already come to pass.

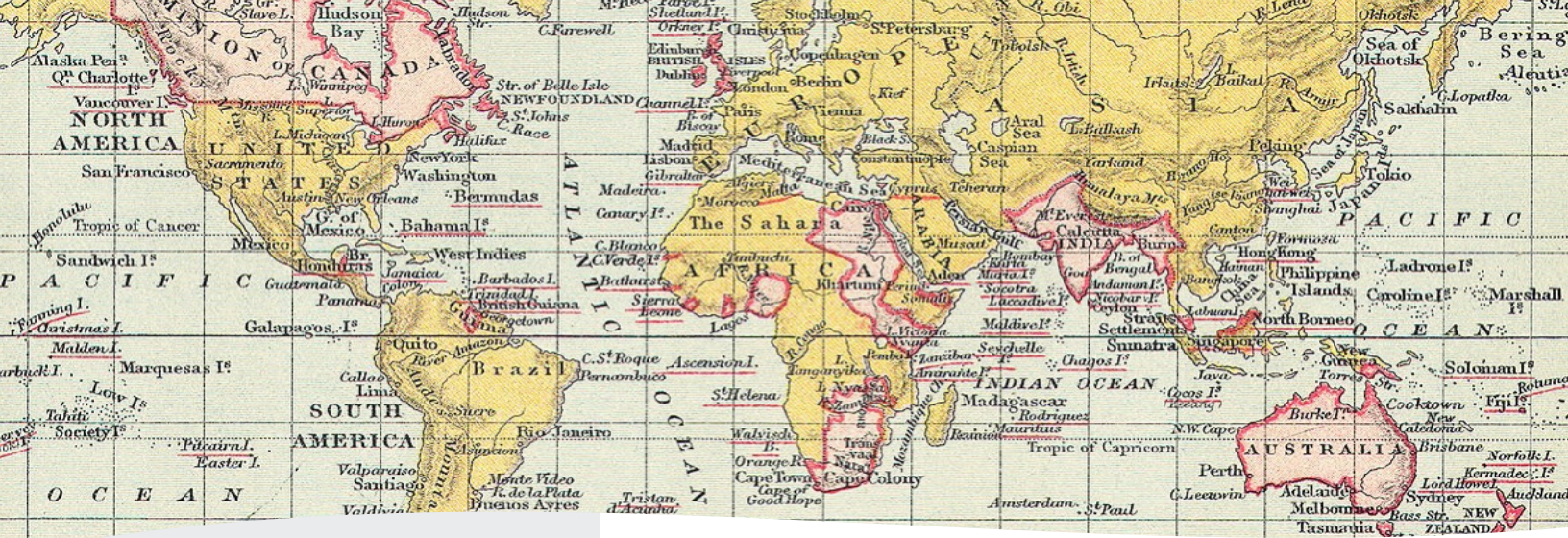
The article is available for you below, as a typed transcript with annotations.



PRIMARY SOURCE

INTRODUCTION

THE GOLD COAST LEADER,
AUGUST 8, 1914



Map of the British Empire in red, 1907

**The Gold Coast Leader
Cape Coast
August 8, 1914**

WAR IN EUROPE

The war cloud has burst over Europe. For 30 years and more the nations of Europe have been arming for war, but diplomacy has hitherto been able to prevent any threatened disaster. The resources of European diplomacy seem now exhausted. About a year ago there was a conflagration, but the good sense of the chancelleries of Europe was able to confine it within the bounds of the Balkan States, Greece, and Turkey. But now the danger so long feared has broken out. Some of the most powerful nations of Europe are now in the grips of war, and at any moment the whole of Europe may be ablaze with a war the like of which, from the deadliness and precision of the weapons to be employed, if not for the number of troops that will engage in it, the world has never seen.

A few weeks ago Archduke Ferdinand of Austria and his wife were assassinated in the streets of Sarajevo and that crime has precipitated war between Austria and Servia. Arising from that quarrel Germany, Austria, and France were soon involved in war. As we have said before, all Europe may soon be ablaze and before this article is published it is very likely if England and Italy and the other nations of Europe will have been drawn in. This is not the time to speculate on the course and fortunes of the war. But this we may say that no event, in our opinion, has brought it more closely to man's intelligence than this war that almost the whole world depends, in some material or the other, on Europe.



Map of the Gold Coast, 1896

If England is drawn into the war there is no doubt that the wishes and hopes of her West African subjects are that she emerges from it triumphant and victorious. We doubt not that the qualities of good English admirals and generals like Drake, Blake, Nelson, Marlborough and Wellington* displayed in the days of old will be repeated in sons of England at the present day.



Empire Day, British Gold Coast Colony (Ghana), 1912

It is true that we are subject races, that we labour under great disadvantages under the present condition of government of subject races in the British Empire. England has faults and does us wrong in many things, but she has been the source of the little light we have seen and known, and with all her faults we love her still, and we would not exchange her for any other European master.

Just as if to make us realise that, that small as we are, we are not of some count in the British Empire. It is not unlikely that naval battles between England and Germany, should the two go to war against one another, may take place off our coast as happened between English and Dutch in the seventeenth century when the two nations fought for the supremacy of the sea. In that eventuality the movements of troops from Coomassie** and England's difficulties in Europe will place the defence of our country in a precarious position, and there are natives all over the Colony who are brooding over this aspect of the question and are thinking thoughts. What if by any mischance a European foreign power like Germany were to effect an entrance or landing in the Colony in a crisis as at the present moment when almost all the European powers are engaged in war in their own country. With such an arrangement of affairs which will make a thing like that possible we are not satisfied.

We have lived long enough under the British to be trusted and be encouraged to take a genuine interest in the defence of our fatherland. We would fight for our country and keep her for England too, if she is hard-pressed somewhere else and a full complement of her troops cannot be detached for the defence of our country. But we do not relish the idea of fighting as mercenaries with no soul or heart in the thing and for monetary reward only. The position must be considered, and the events at present going on in Europe may bring out one good result for us.



Children Bathing in Surf, Gold Coast Colony, 1910

* These are names of English military and naval leaders famous for their military victories in conflicts spanning the 16th and early 19th Centuries.

** "Coomassie" is an older spelling of the name of the main city of the Gold Coast Colony (now Ghana). It is now rendered as "Kumasi."

Image Citations:

Page 1:

Gerald C. Dudgeon, "The agricultural and forest products of British West Africa," 1922, Public Domain,

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_agricultural_and_forest_products_of_British_West_Africa_\(1922\)_17945019825.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_agricultural_and_forest_products_of_British_West_Africa_(1922)_17945019825.jpg)

Page 2:

The World in 1907 (British possessions are coloured in red), Public Domain,

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British_Empire_in_1907.jpg

Map from 1896 of the British Gold Coast Colony, 1898, Public Domain,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gold_Coast_Map_1896.jpg

Page 3:

Group portrait at official gathering, Empire Day, Ghana, 1912, International mission Photography Archive, University of Southern California Library,

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