“First inhabited by Pygmies, Congo was later settled by Bantu groups that also occupied parts of present-day Angola (PE&RS, March 2001), Gabon (PE&RS, September 1998), and Democratic Republic of the Congo (PE&RS, June 2005), forming the basis for ethnic affinities and rivalries among those states. Several Bantu kingdoms – notably those of the Congo, the Loango, and the Teke – built trade links leading into the Congo River basin. The first European contacts came in the late 15th century, and commercial relationships were quickly established with the kingdoms – trading for slaves captured in the interior. The coastal area was a major source for the transatlantic slave trade, and when that commerce ended in the early 19th century, the power of the Bantu kingdoms eroded. The area came under French sovereignty in the 1880s. Pierre Savorgnon de Brazza, a French empire builder, competed with agents of Belgian King Leopold’s International Congo Association (later Zaire) for control of the Congo River basin. Between 1882 and 1891, treaties were secured with all the main local rulers on the river’s right bank, placing their lands under French protection. In 1908, France organized French Equatorial Africa (AEF), compris-