King Leopold's Ghost Study Guide

King Leopold's Ghost by Adam Hochschild

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Leopold II, King of the Belgians, privately controlled and owned the Congo Free State from 1885 to 1908. In 1908, the area was annexed by Belgium as a colony known as the Belgian Congo. Leopold used his personal control to strip the county of vast amounts of wealth, largely in the form of ivory and rubber. These labor-intensive industries were serviced by slave labor, and the local peoples were forced to work through various means, including torture, imprisonment, maiming and terror. Christian missionaries and a handful of human rights organizers internationally publicized these atrocities. Slowly, various nations, including Great Britain and the United States of America, began to object to Leopold's tyranny with the result that the country's administration was transferred to Belgium. Little changed inside the country, however, until the ivory and rubber were exhausted.

European interest in the African continent can be traced back to the late 1400s, when a European explorer sailed the west coast and discovered the Congo River. By the 1860s, most African coastal regions were claimed as colonies of European powers, but the vast interior of the continent remained unknown to Europeans. Henry Morton Stanley, a complicated man and renowned explorer, ventured through much of that unknown during a descent of the Congo River. Leopold II, King of the Belgians, was fascinated with obtaining a colony and focused upon claiming the interior of Africa—the only unclaimed sizable geographic area. Moving within the European political paradigm existing in the early 1880s, Leopold gained international concessions and recognition for his personal claim to the Congo Free State.

His rule of the vast region was based on tyranny and terror. Under his direction, Stanley again visited the area and extracted favorable treaties from numerous local leaders. A road and, eventually, a rail line were developed from the coast to Leopoldville (present Kinshasa). A series of militarized outposts were established along the length of the Congo River, and imported paddle wheelers commenced regular river service. Native peoples were forced to gather ivory and transport it for export. Beginning c. 1890, rubber—originally manufactured from coagulated sap—became economically significant in international trade. The Congo was rich is rubber-producing vines, and Leopold transitioned his exploitative focus from dwindling ivory supplies to the burgeoning rubber market. Rubber harvesting is labor-intensive and slavery, exploitation and the reign of terror continued and even increased.

Meanwhile, early missionaries and human rights advocates began to circulate news of the widespread atrocities committed in the Congo under the official blessing of Leopold's administration. Women and children were imprisoned as hostages to force husbands and fathers to work. Flogging, starvation and torture were routine. Murder was common—tribes resisting enslavement were wiped out; administration officials expected to receive back a severed human hand for every bullet issued. Rape and sexual slavery were rampant. Workers failing to secure assigned quotas of rubber were routinely mutilated or tortured. Administration officials so completely dehumanized local peoples that at least one decorated his flower garden with a border of severed human

heads. News of these atrocities brought slow, but powerful, international condemnation of Leopold's administration leading, eventually, to his assignment of the country to Belgian administration.

In 1908, Belgium annexed the Congo as a colony and proclaimed a general sea-change in administrative policy. Actual change, however, was nearly imperceptible. The era of World War I shifted attention from atrocities in Africa to European trench warfare. In the post-war era, the global demand for reform was largely forgotten. However, commercial rubber tree farming had become firmly established and the collection of wild rubber became commercially insignificant, just as ivory supplies had been exhausted years earlier. Because of this, the slave labor industries of the Congo diminished in importance and atrocities became far less frequent. Finally, in 1960, the Congo gained independence.

Prologue, and Chapters 1, 2, and 3

Prologue, and Chapters 1, 2, and 3 Summary and Analysis

Leopold II, King of the Belgians, privately controlled and owned the Congo Free State from 1885 to 1908. In 1908, the area was annexed by Belgium as a colony known as the Belgian Congo. Leopold used his personal control to strip the county of vast amounts of wealth, largely in the form of ivory and rubber. These labor-intensive industries were serviced by slave labor, and the local peoples were forced to work through various means, including torture, imprisonment, maiming and terror. Christian missionaries and a handful of human rights organizers internationally publicized these atrocities. Slowly, various nations, including Great Britain and the United States of America, began to object to Leopold's tyranny with the result that the country's administration was transferred to Belgium. Little changed inside the country, however, until the ivory and rubber were exhausted.

Europeans held many bizarre and fanciful theories regarding Africa through the end of the fifteenth century. In the 1480s, Portuguese explorer Diogo Cão sailed along the west coast of Africa, becoming the first European to discover the mouth of the Congo River. Additional European exploration of the African west coast rapidly ensued. Aided by pre-existing African slave practices, the Portuguese developed an extensive practice of trafficking in human slaves, which persisted for hundreds of years. African slaves were captured by other African peoples and transported overland to coastal towns, where they were embarked on Portuguese vessels, chained, baptized as Catholics and then transported to the New World, where they endured forced labor in mines and crop fields. The African slave trade via the Atlantic Ocean route peaked in the late eighteenth century but persisted for many additional decades. By the 1860s, most of the coastal areas of Africa were claimed as colonies by various European powers, leaving only the vast Central African interior largely unexplored, and unclaimed, by Europeans.

Henry Morton Stanley was born in 1841, as John Rowlands. Born in Denbigh, Wales, Stanley was the bastard son of Betsy Parry. He lived with various relatives for several years until eventually being sent to St. Asaph Union Workhouse for the poor. There for several years, he thrived in school but was subjected to various abuses by older boys. He took passage as a crewman aboard a ship to the United States of America at age 18, where he deserted. He met and was briefly employed by a wealthy trader named Stanley and later adopted the man's name—Stanley's claim that the older man had adopted him are apparently spurious. During the American Civil War, Stanley enlisted with the Confederate Army but was taken prisoner. He was paroled to enlist in the Union Army and promptly deserted. He then briefly joined the Union Navy and again deserted. Stanley spent the next few years as an unremarkable journalist traveling through the American West. Stanley eventually entered into a relationship with publisher James Gordon Bennett and embarked on an adventure to locate and "rescue" the then-lost Dr.

David Livingstone. Stanley located Livingstone in 1871, and the two men jointly explored additional regions in Africa. In 1874, Stanley returned to Africa and, leaving from Zanzibar, traversed the continent along the length of the Congo River. Over half of his party died, including every European besides Stanley, but the expedition was successful in charting the Congo River and exploring Central Africa. The first European to explore these regions, Stanley became a celebrity in England. Stanley never missed an opportunity of self-promotion, and his autobiographical details vary tremendously with established facts. For many years, he pretended to be a native-born American, for example, and his autobiographical presentation of his early life was nearly entirely fabricated. The text suggests that Stanley's sexuality was a source of bewilderment to the man, and he appears to have had a great fear of sexual intimacy with women.

Leopold II was King of the Belgians. The second, but oldest surviving, son of Leopold I, he was born in 1835, and gained the throne in 1865. He was the brother of Empress Carlota of Mexico and the cousin of Queen Victoria. Described as pencil thin and possessing a large nose, Leopold II demonstrated an early fascination with trade and financial power—Queen Victoria felt he was rather eccentric. From the first days of his rule, he felt that the new nation of Belgium needed colonial possessions to effectively compete with other European states. From 1865 to c. 1885, Leopold II unsuccessfully attempted to gain colonial possessions by purchase or subterfuge—the political mood in Belgium and Europe prevented outright seizure by force. The catastrophic failure of his sister and her husband rule Mexico further demonstrated the futility of attempting the colonization of established nations. He finally came to realize that virtually all the world was either established or already colonized, except for the vast Central African region. He therefore embarked on a plan to gain The Congo as a colonial possession and orchestrated international agreements to establish foreign rule for the betterment of the native peoples. Popular opinion preventing him from obvious colonization, Leopold II approached colonization of the Congo with the eye of a long-term strategist. Having gained general European consensus that a series of "protective" European outposts should be established through Central Africa, Leopold II next enticed Stanley—the only European to have traversed the area—to join him in Belgium. Note that Chapter 1 begins "Part I - Walking into Fire," the first major division to the text that extends to the end of Chapter 11.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 Summary and Analysis

Wooed by Leopold, Stanley agreed to enter into business dealings with the king. As Leopold's personal representative, Stanley returned to Africa and proceeded along the Congo River, establishing bases and concluding treaties between local chiefs. The treaties exchanged brightly-colored cloth for all mineral, animal and wealth rights; for the labor of the tribesmen, and for basic sovereignty over the chief's lands. The treaties were written in European languages and not explained to the African chiefs—though they granted Leopold everything in exchange for virtually nothing. Leopold adroitly maneuvered Stanley by equal parts remuneration and public praise. Stanley also began the process of collecting and transporting ivory—in the form of elephant tusks—from the interior to the coast. Ivory was in great demand throughout Europe, where it was used to make piano keys, billiard balls, false teeth, handles of all kinds, brooches and figurines. In Europe, Leopold established and dissolved a series of international organizations, which ostensibly looked out after Africa's interests. In reality, they provided a temporary philanthropic smokescreen to obscure Leopold's colonization efforts. For example, while publicly claiming that Stanley was establishing a series of free cities and federated states ruled by local chiefs, Leopold wrote to Stanley "There is no question of granting the slightest political power to negroes. That would be absurd. The white men, heads of the stations, retain all the powers" (p. 67).

Stanley was tireless in his exertions. For five years he worked relentlessly, his employees treated harshly. One sick employee, a few weeks before death, compared Stanley to a blacksmith, sarcastically noting that he, the sick man, was himself the tool being relentlessly hammered until irreparable. Stanley cleared a trail and then built a road from the coast to the top of the Congo River falls, some 220 miles in length. He established a series of outposts along the river and began fortifying them. He secured scores of signed treaties and stockpiled ivory. He largely ignored the local culture and artwork, however—to Stanley, the local peoples were simply available labor. When any became unruly, he did not hesitate to start shooting. Stanley's amazing capacity to unerringly select inept underlings insured that local governance was corrupt and inefficient. Further, many Europeans died of disease. The underpinnings of genocide were being constructed.

Having staked out a gigantic colony in Central Africa, Leopold next moved to have his claim recognized by foreign powers. In the mad scramble to partition Africa, this was no easy task. His efforts were somewhat eased by the fact that most European colonizers focused nearly exclusively on Africa's coastal areas because they were immediately accessible. Leopold's colony featured only a narrow coastal band around the Congo River estuary waters and from thence extended inward, ballooning out to consume all Central Africa. Leopold selected and groomed several emissaries to influence foreign powers and gain recognition for his colony. He sent Henry Shelton Sanford, formerly the American ambassador to Belgium, back to America. Sanford, an inept businessman but

a consummate lobbyist, engaged the forgettable President Chester A. Arthur and his administration in a series of engagements c. 1883, which sung the praises of Leopold's vision. Eventually, Arthur, strangely believing The Congo would form a vast market for American trade, recognized Leopold's claim to the colony of The Congo. He was supported by an unlikely bedfellow—Senator John Tyler Morgan of Alabama, who wanted to recognize Leopold's claim so that many newly-freed black American slaves could be forcibly repatriated to Africa.

Leopold likewise sent Arthur Stevens to Paris. Stevens argued that Belgian control of The Congo would be a suitable counterbalance to the British Empire's growing African influence. Leopold also granted France droit de préférence over the Congo, ensuring that should he lose the colony, France could gain it. Bolstered by paid editorials in French newspapers, the French government quickly agreed to recognize Leopold's claim to the Congo. Leopold also sent Gerson Bleichröder to Germany. Bismarck proved a tough nut to crack, easily seeing through Leopold's rhetoric and holding out for German interests in the vast region. In response, an international 1884-85 Berlin Conference was held where, in essence, Africa was partitioned among the European powers. Typical of the era, not a single African attended the conference. Stanley, one of the only men present to have actually stepped foot in Africa, represented Leopold at the conference and by its conclusion, Leopold's status as the de facto sovereign of the colony of the Congo was assured. By royal decree of May 29, 1885, the fifty-year-old king declared his new, privately-controlled country, the Congo Free State.

Stanley returned to Africa and continued his work and then drifted around Europe and America for a few years. Leopold's venture consumed vast funds, and he quickly exhausted his personal fortune and soon exceeded his creditor's patience. Spinning his international credibility into domestic politics, he arranged to procure a vast loan from Belgium in exchange for deeding the Congo to Belgium upon his death. Leopold's agents in the Congo quickly established dominance by the use of the then-new breech-loading, repeating rifles and machine guns. Medical advances allowed Europeans to survive most African diseases, and several steamboats were put into service on the Congo River, above the cataracts near the coast. Many of the men who had helped establish Leopold's colony quickly became disillusioned by the actual administration of it; they did not find philanthropic advances, but brutal exploitation. Meanwhile, Leopold sent Stanley on a circuitous route to rescue Emin Pasha, another famous European—a mission aimed more at fame than results. Stanley's bizarre route took so long to traverse that upon his arrival his assistance was no longer needed.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 Summary and Analysis

George Washington Williams was a minister and historian. A veteran of the American Civil War, he subsequently traveled to Mexico and enlisted in the armed forces, participating in the overthrow of Emperor Maximilian. He was commissioned a lieutenant but later received the honorary title of colonel; he thereafter affected the rank. Additionally, he claimed to have an advanced collegiate degree and usually presented himself as if he were on some type of secret appointment for a powerful political figure. None of this was true. Williams abandoned a wife and children and then traveled to Europe, visiting Belgium to learn more of the Congo. He hoped to visit the Congo and arrange voluntarily to repatriate freed American slaves as motivated workers. Leopold attempted to dissuade Williams from visiting the Congo, but by 1890 Williams had toured the country—he was then forty years old. Outraged at the many atrocities he witnessed, he wrote a series of letters, which were republished as pamphlets and subsequently enjoyed wide circulation in newspapers. The letters condemned Leopold's administration of the Congo and enumerated various atrocities including slavery, sexual slavery, torture and widespread murder. Leopold responded by discrediting Williams—easy to do as many of William's credentials were fabricated. Leaving the Congo, Williams traveled to Egypt, where he contracted tuberculosis; he died within a few months and was buried in an unmarked grave in England. While all of Williams' observations were essentially valid, Williams' letters had little immediate impact because they were not supported by additional reports of atrocities and because Leopold moved aggressively to discredit Williams. The text refers to Williams as the "first heretic," informing the title of Chapter 7.

Leopold moved quickly to establish a firm hold on his new colony and to extend that hold wherever possible. While claiming to suppress slavery; in fact, he greatly expanded the practice. In 1888, he established the Force Publique, a combination guerrilla army, corporate police force and army of occupation. It was divided into small garrisons composed of several dozen black soldiers and led by one or two white officers. To prevent desertion, most soldiers were billeted several hundred miles from their homes. Leopold ensured that soldiers in an area were of a different cultural unit than the subjects in the area; this yielded a natural antipathy and helped the Force Publique serve as an unsympathetic force. For several years, numerous local mutinies occurred and were put down with extreme force. Many tens of thousands were sold into slavery, impressed into slavery or simply murdered. One writer estimates that as many as fifty thousand slaves were employed in constant portage from Leopoldville to the Stanley Pool. The text presents several scarce eyewitness accounts of brutality throughout the period. Murder, rape, torture, slavery and maiming were all common practices, and Leopold's administration ruled by terror. The dominant goal during this period was the collection and export of ivory. Leopold instituted an ivory payment system, which favored outright theft from native owners. Additionally, he used any pretext to seize land. The Congo service attracted mostly younger, white bachelors. They quickly became

inured to the horrors of the Congo and most readily adapted to enslavement—many kept harems of African women. The author suggests that the Congo during this period was the inspiration for Rudyard Kipling's quote "Where there aren't no Ten Commandments, an' a man can raise a thirst" (p. 138).

Konrad Korzeniowski, born in Poland, is better known to the world as Joseph Conrad, the novelist. As a young man he looked at maps of Africa, devoid of detail, and desired to visit the unknown place. He spent his youth in France, involved in petty troubles and then spent over a decade as a ship's officer in the British merchant marine. Fluent in English, he spoke with a heavy Polish accent. In 1890, he secured a job as a riverboat officer, running a paddle wheeler on the Congo River. Arriving in the Congo, he made the portage to Leopoldville and then spent six months in country, traveling about two thousand miles on the Congo River and making one downriver passage as commander of a paddle wheeler. Conrad quickly determined that the Congo was untenable for a man of conscience. In addition, he fell sick from malaria and dysentery so then returned to England. Several years later he published Heart of Darkness, probably the most widely-printed short novel in English. In the novel, the protagonist Marlow travels up an unnamed river in Africa to transport ivory shipments. At his final destination, he meets the ailing Kurtz, a fanatical madman, who is revered as a brutal king by the locals. Kurtz attempts the downriver trip but dies en route. The novel is filled with references to atrocities and the wickedness of man. Although modern schools traditionally interpret the novel as allegorical of original sin; in fact, it was strongly based in fact. In many ways, the novel is autobiographical. The author presents several parallels between the novel and Conrad's journal of his African travels. The author suggests that Conrad would have had many real-life models upon which to base Kurtz. For example, Georges Antoine Klein, a French agent and ivory collector, died aboard Conrad's ship. Major Edmund Barttelot, one of Stanley's military leaders, had actually gone insane, and began biting, whipping and killing people. Another, Arthur Hodister, was famed for his harem of African women. However, Captain Léon Rom of the Force Publique, is probably the actual man upon whom Conrad based Kurtz. Rom decorated his flower garden with a border of severed human heads, murdered countess Africans and kept women as chattel. He dabbled in painting and was an amateur writer; his writings exhibit the same sort of virulently racist megalomania demonstrated by Kurtz. Finally, Conrad likely met Rom personally and certainly heard of him by reputation. Chapter 9, Meeting Mr. Kurtz, is interesting from a literary standpoint but is also shocking in the depiction of Rom, an utterly depraved individual.

Note the inclusion of the tiger in the song presented on page 139 of the text; surely this animal is singularly out of place in verse purportedly representative of African peoples' songs. As the text is presenting a translated account, presumably the native word was mistranslated as tiger instead of lion.

Chapters 10 and 11

Chapters 10 and 11 Summary and Analysis

Stanley spent 1890 in England, beset with various sicknesses, and married Dorothy Tennant, an eccentric, high-society painter. Popular legend holds that the marriage was never consummated. Stanley subsequently gave up adventuring and spent his time being famous. He traveled the world and gave lectures, offered opinions and accepted honors. Stanley's retirement from active exploration was a boon to Leopold, who no longer had to actively manage the man.

William Henry Sheppard was an African-American Presbyterian Missionary and the first black missionary in the Congo. He traveled to Africa in 1892, and spent the next two decades in the Congo Free State, where he was known among the native peoples as Mundéle Ndom, which roughly translates as "the black white man." Though technically not in charge of the Presbyterian Mission—it was headed by a white man—Sheppard's proactive approach and boundless energy made him the de facto leader. Sheppard developed a great fondness for the Congo. Sheppard traveled through the Congo and explored widely, being the first non-native to visit the Kuba capital. His wide travels exposed him to the many developing atrocities in the Congo, and he wrote letters to international contacts, complaining of the growing abuses.

In c. 1890, rubber became an important commodity, being used in tires, wire shielding and other commercial applications. This proved a great boon to Leopold, for the Congo's ivory supply began to dwindle about the same time that rubber demand grew. The Congo was rich in wild vines of the genus Landolphia. Coagulated sap from the vines formed the basis of natural rubber. Leopold's administration thus demanded the native peoples gather rubber. To gather the sap, the vines must be tapped or cut; cutting the vines is the easiest way to get the say, but as it kills the plant outright, it was forbidden by Leopold's administration. The natives traveled for weeks into heavily-forested areas, climbed high into trees to harvest the vines and then hauled heavy loads of rubber back to collection points. The typical practice was to seize the women and children of a village and hold them hostage until the men of the village delivered a specified quota of rubber. If the men took too long, the hostages starved to death; if the men were too efficient, the quota was raised. Villages refusing to cooperate were subjected to murderous raids and other outrages. Individual men failing to meet their quotas often had a hand severed as punishment. As the rubber trade grew, wholesale slavery spread throughout the Congo. The roads and the railroad in Congo were completed and improved through slave labor.

While atrocities were perpetrated in the Congo, Leopold moved in Europe to promote his image as a kindly humanitarian. He delivered speeches, arranged conferences and paid bribes for favorable media coverage. He also manipulated his accounting to make it appear as though the Congo were barely profitable. He also became enormously wealthy off the ivory and rubber trade and embarked on a lifelong career of building vast

structures and private palaces. As Leopold proclaimed himself a benevolent leader, slavery and atrocities continued to abound in the Congo. Sheppard and other missionaries continued to write letters but did not manage to attract much international attention. In response to the occasional criticism, Leopold formed sham commissions of investigation. In 1897, the World's Fair was held in Brussels, and Leopold put on a lavish display about the Congo—it suggested the distant nation was a paradise.

Elder Dempster, a British shipping firm, held exclusive contracts with Leopold to transport freight between Belgium and the Congo. E. D. Morel, an unknown young man, secured a job as a clerk with Elder Dempster and thereby gained access to shipping manifests for freight between Belgium and the Congo. For months he observed loading and unloading procedures in Belgium and compared what he saw with the shipping manifests he reviewed. He quickly realized that nearly the only thing exported to the Congo were firearms and ammunition; whereas, a steady stream of ivory, rubber and other precious goods arrived from the Congo. The trade was obviously supremely unbalanced, and Morel rather quickly deduced that the only explanation was widespread slavery. Chapter 11 concludes Part I of the text; this implies that Morel's epiphany was the fulcrum over which the fate of the Congo pivoted.

Chapters 12, 13, and 14

Chapters 12, 13, and 14 Summary and Analysis

Note that Chapter 13 begins "Part II - A King at Bay," the second major division of the text that extends to the end of Chapter 19. To this point, the text has established background and provided biographical and geographical information. The remainder of the text deals with, essentially, the fight against Leopold's human rights abuses and his struggle to retain total control. This fight positioned Leopold against E. D. Morel, a young and unknown man of little experience—a situation which informs the title of Chapter 12. Morel began publishing articles in 1900. By 1902, he resigned, under pressure, from Elder Dempster and in 1903, he established the West African Mail, an illustrated weekly newspaper. Additional minor biographical data are offered for Morel. His media attack concerned Leopold, and Morel was pressured by his boss and then unsuccessfully bribed with a considerable amount of money. After quitting his job, Morel devoted himself full-time to the crusade against atrocities in the Congo and Africa. His efforts were tireless and his organizational abilities were formidable. Morel became the center of humanitarian publishing, and numerous other individuals regularly communicated with him.

Largely due to Morel's efforts, in 1903, the British Parliament passed a resolution protesting atrocities in the Congo. The government decided to send a representative to make an official tour of the Congo, and they selected Roger Casement. In his youth Casement was an Irish nationalist, though he worked in Africa for commercial concerns and, later, in the British consular services. He had spent some time in the Congo without making much comment on various atrocities before being commissioned, in 1903, to conduct an investigation throughout the Congo of alleged widespread atrocities and human rights abuses. Casement's voyage through the Congo was thorough, and the man proved very observant and incorruptible. In 1904, he produced what would eventually be known as the Casement Report, a damning document detailing abuses in the Congo. When the report was made public, Casement joined with Morel and others in demanding action. Leopold initially dismissed the report as fiction but later attacked the report systematically.

Over the next few years, Morel continued his unrelenting attack on Leopold's administration's tactics. The effort was vast and brought in scores of individuals who supported Morel and contributed to his publications. One such man was Hezekiah Andrew Shanu, born and educated in present-day Nigeria. In 1884 he began working for Leopold's regime, recruiting soldiers from Nigeria to serve in the Force Publique. He subsequently moved to Boma, Congo, with his wife and extended family members. Shanu left state service in 1893, going into business for himself and operating a general store. During an 1894 trip to Belgium, Shanu received various public honors, with particular notice taken of his apparently flawless French. Shanu dabbled in photography and published several images. Sometime c. 1903, however, Shanu became entirely disillusioned with Leopold's regime—the nature of the situation is unknown. From that

point forward, he began a constant, but secret, communication with Morel, providing various damning documents and critical commentary. Nearly everything provided by Shanu was reprinted by Morel. By early 1905, however, the Belgian press exposed Shanu as Morel's accomplice. Shanu, a British subject, was largely immune to official reprimands. Instead, he was unofficially but entirely shunned in the Congo and his business collapsed. Shanu committed suicide in 1905.

Circa 1900, the sixty-five year old Leopold met a teenage prostitute on one of his European voyages; her name was probably Caroline, though even that detail is uncertain. Leopold procured Caroline's services and retained her as his mistress. She accompanied him back to Belgium, and was in turn accompanied by her pimp, who hung about in the shadows. As the years went by, Leopold doted more and more on Caroline and his brazen fascination and sexual adventures with the young girl was infamous and caused his reputation to suffer greatly in Belgium. He spared no expense in dressing her and housing her in private mansions. Caroline receives an undue focus in the text—while the prurient episode is fascinating, it has little to do with Leopold's involvement in the Congo. It does paint him with broad character flaws, but sexual interest in very young women is hardly more damning than the murder of millions.

Chapters 15, 16, and 17

Chapters 15, 16, and 17 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 15, titled "A Reckoning," attempts to tally the death toll associated with colonialism in the Congo during the administration of Leopold and the subsequent years—from 1880 to 1920. Deaths from several sources are discussed, including: murder, both individual murders and massacres; starvation, exhaustion and exposure; disease, primarily smallpox and sleeping sickness, and a plummeting birth rate, attributed to social causes such as slavery, sexual slavery, imprisonment and psychological terror. Several published studies and unpublished expert opinions are cited, and the author suggests that most such studies conclude that during the period indicated, the population of the Congo was reduced by about fifty percent. The first comprehensive census of the Congo, performed in 1924, put the national population at about 10 million. This yields a final estimated death toll of about 10 million people. Yet, this was not genocide per se—instead it was a systematic process of brutality and terror designed to exploit the natural resources of the Congo via the means of forced labor. The chapter contains a fair amount of graphic descriptions of murder, torture and humiliating sexual abuse.

The accumulated atrocities driving the deaths of some 10 million people were publicized by Morel and others. Leopold responded to these critics aggressively and in several ways. He paid lavish bribes to suppress information or subvert the truth; he made regular payments to politicians, inspectors, editors and journalists. He routinely purchased newspaper space for carefully-written articles. He purchased outright several magazines and newspapers to fully control their content, and he published dozens of books detailing the splendors of his rule in the Congo. Leopold retained dozens of agents on his payroll; their job was to agitate against Morel and promote Leopold's interests and image as a philanthropic humanist. Usually an excellent judge of character, Leopold made one serious mistake by hiring Colonel Henry I. Kowalsky. Kowalsky was a blustery lawyer of some skill and wide popular appeal. He was also unreliable. When Leopold determined he had made a mistake, he fired Kowalsky. Kowalsky subsequently turned over to Morel a mass of damning documentation, which showed bribes paid to judges, journalists, politicians, and editors and similar materials. Morel republished these papers.

Leopold received constant pressure on the international political front, as well. This official pressure largely resulted from the Casement Report and so Leopold decided to produce his own report. He founded an official Commission of Inquiry and staffed it with three cronies. The commission traveled to the Congo and spent months examining the situation there. In the process, the commission took 370 official depositions detailing murder, slavery, sexual slavery and torture. Leopold, expecting a whitewashed production, was hugely disappointed when the official Commission of Inquiry Report essentially validated all of Casement's findings and agreed almost entirely with Morel's voluminous publications. Realizing he could not suppress the report, Leopold instead

suppressed the source material and diminished the report's impact by issuing a summary before the report was published. The summary bore little resemblance to the report, but it was widely published. However, the tide had finally turned.

Leopold, in his seventies, retained Caroline as his young mistress, which causes much outrage in Belgium. He was also a hypochondriac and a germophobe. As the international outcry mounted, Leopold eventually determined the situation to be untenable. He entered into negotiations to sell the Congo to Belgium. Using his considerable influence, Leopold secured very favorable terms for the sell, and, finally, the Congo formally changed hands. Now administered by the Belgian Parliament, the Congo was renamed. However, little actually changed in the Congo. Much of Chapter 17 is devoted to biographical summaries of various individuals. Sheppard was tried for libel for the publication of atrocities. Though not convicted, he was not fully exonerated and he finally returned to America somewhat in disgrace for conducting sexual liaisons with several local women. Casement traveled to Peru and documented abuses against the natives there, before again taking up the cause of Irish independence. Arthur Conan Doyle, Mark Twain and others joined with Morel to demand full rehabilitation in the Congo. Morel's activities continued unabated through the change in administration. Leopold finally fell ill and, shortly before his death, married Caroline. He died fully estranged from his daughters and left behind a vast web of financial complexities. Caroline married her pimp only a few weeks after Leopold's death.

Chapters 18 and 19

Chapters 18 and 19 Summary and Analysis

Leopold's web of financial arrangements took several decades to fully sort out. After the transfer of administration, conditions in the Congo remained largely unchanged for several years. Morel and others kept up a constant media attack on atrocities, however, and over the next decade conditions slowly improved. As rubber tree plantations began to produce around the world, the demand for wild rubber dropped until it became unprofitable to harvest, even by slave labor—this probably had as much to do with improving conditions in the Congo as anything else.

The chapter provides additional biographical details about some individuals mentioned in the text. Kowalsky died early in life; Alice Harris and her husband organized a center for human rights, which has persisted until the present. Sheppard spoke with Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois. For the cause of Ireland, Casement traveled to Germany during World War I and attempted to secure German assistance for Irish independence. Returning to Ireland, he was arrested and convicted of treason. After serving time in Pentonville Prison, he was executed by hanging. Morel espoused pacifist principles during World War I and was arrested under an obscure law that forbade exporting anti-war materials to neutral countries. He served a six-month sentence in Pentonville Prison and, after his release, entered politics.

Chapter 19 concludes Part II of the text; the Chapter documents how in the years following World War II most people forgot about the Congo atrocities, and history books were re-written to exclude the episode. Today, virtually no one knows of the first, vast international human rights campaign to stop atrocities of nearly genocidal proportion. One historian has attempted to change that—Jules Marchal, born c. 1925 in Belgium. In 1948 Marchal worked in the Congo. He remained working in the Congo until c. 1968, thus living in the Congo during the last years of Belgian colonial rule and the first years of independence. In c. 1970 Marchal began working for the Belgian Foreign Ministry and in the early 1970s he was the Ambassador to several African nations. During that time he read by chance an article on the Congo, which had a footnote indicating that during Leopold's reign the country had suffered some ten million deaths. Marchal was flabbergasted, and initially assumed the article was in error. Like most Belgians of his era, he had viewed Leopold's distant colony as a model of humanitarian intervention. Marchal began to investigate and quickly discovered the international media outcry, largely organized by Morel. In 1975, Marchal returned to Brussels and continued to serve in the Foreign Ministry. In Brussels, he attempted to gain access to the Commission of Inquiry testimony documents archive but was denied. Marchal then turned to international documents and amassed a great deal of information about Belgian colonialism in the Congo. He published several books about the era of colonialism in the Congo. He ultimately gained access to the Commission of Inquiry testimony documents and published a book summarizing them. The text ends with a

brief recounting of the Congo's independence movement and a very general overview of current conditions in the Congo.

Characters

Leopold II King of the Belgians

Leopold II (1835 - 1909), was King of the Belgians; in the text and in this summary, he is referred to as "Leopold." The second, but oldest surviving, son of Leopold I, he succeeded to the throne in 1865. He was the brother of Empress Carlota of Mexico and cousin of Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom. Described as pencil thin and possessing a large nose, Leopold demonstrated an early fascination with trade and power. He was particularly interested in wealth derived from trade, an overt trait unusual in royalty during the period. From the first days of his rule, he felt that the new nation of Belgium needed colonial possessions to effectively compete with other European states. From 1865, Leopold unsuccessfully attempted to gain colonial possessions by purchase or subterfuge—the political mood in Belgium and Europe preventing outright seizure by force. The catastrophic failure of his sister and her husband to rule Mexico further demonstrated the futility of attempting the colonization of established nations. He finally came to realize that virtually all the world was either established or already colonized, except for the vast Central African region.

He therefore embarked on a plan to gain The Congo as a colonial possession and orchestrated international agreements to establish foreign rule for the betterment of the native peoples. Leopold used a variety of approaches to ensure access to The Congo; in general, he subtly positioned his interest as philanthropic and sold a unique vision to each national competitor. For example, he suggested anti-slavery issues to England, free trade to the USA, a balance against the British Empire to France and scientific investigation to Germany. He attempted to secure the Vatican's support by suggesting the spread of Catholicism into the region. Leopold's self-promotion was thus said to be "all things to all people" (p. 131). He coupled his political maneuvering with purchased newspaper editorials, lavishly entertained scientists, politicians and bureaucrats and sought always to secure the friendship of influential men. His single-minded determination paid off when nations began to realize his personal sovereignty over The Congo. His advertising was so completely successful that even as atrocities were being committed throughout The Congo, he was being internationally hailed as a great humanitarian and philanthropist.

Leopold's family life was strained. His parents had maintained a loveless marriage, and his own marriage was nearly estranged. His only male child died in infancy, and he was uninterested in his daughters—going so far as to attempt to change Belgian law to prevent them from inheriting his estates. He kept a large number of mistresses and at one point was involved in an international scandal of human trafficking involving underage English girls possessed of guaranteed virginity. While he cultivated a public face as a benign sovereign and kindly philanthropist; in actuality, he was ruthless and motivated by boundless greed for power and wealth. This is made obvious, for example, by the fact that The Congo was not established as a Belgian colony, but as the personal

colony of the King. The text includes two photographs of Leopold; a third appears on the cover jacket; and a few critical, contempory caricatures of Leopold are reproduced.

Sir Henry Morton Stanley

Sir Henry Morton Stanley (1841 - 1904) was a Welsh explorer and journalist, famous for several expeditions to Africa. He is probably most remembered for the successful search for Dr. David Livingstone, culminating in the famous utterance "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" Born John Rowlands in Denbigh, Wales, Stanley was the bastard son of Betsy Parry. He lived with various relatives for several years until eventually being sent to St. Asaph Union Workhouse for the poor. There for several years, he thrived in school but was subjected to various abuses by older boys. He took passage as a crewman aboard a ship to the United States of America at age 18, where he deserted. He met and was briefly employed by a wealthy trader named Stanley and later adopted the man's name—Stanley's claim that the older man had adopted him are apparently spurious.

During the American Civil War Stanley enlisted with the Confederate Army but was taken prisoner. He enlisted in the Union Army to secure parole from prison but promptly deserted. He then briefly joined the Union Navy and again deserted. Stanley spent the next few years as an unremarkable journalist traveling through the American West. Stanley eventually entered into a relationship with publisher James Gordon Bennett and embarked on an adventure to locate and "rescue" the then-lost Dr. David Livingstone. Stanley located Livingstone in 1871, and the two men jointly explored additional regions in Africa. In 1874, Stanley returned to Africa and, leaving from Zanzibar, traversed the continent along the length of the Congo River. Over half of his party died, including every European except Stanley, but the expedition was successful in charting the Congo River and exploring Central Africa. In 1876, Stanley was recruited by Belgian King Leopold II to travel to Africa and negotiate treaties and concessions with tribal leaders of the Central African region not claimed by any other power as a colony. In The Congo, Stanley was known as Bula Matadi, or "Breaker of Rocks"—presumably because of his sledgehammers and dynamite used to carve a railroad through the mountains. After getting married in 1890, Stanley spent much of his latter life defending his reputation against charges of callous violence and brutality to African natives. He also entered politics briefly and frequently toured the world as a celebrity.

Stanley never missed an opportunity of self-promotion and his autobiographical details vary tremendously with established fact. For many years, he pretended to be a native-born American, for example, and his autobiographical presentation of his early life was nearly entirely fabricated. Stanley's accounts of his African expeditions are often inflammatory, couched in heroic terms, and never fail to position Stanley as a great hero and conqueror. Nevertheless, he enjoyed great popularity during his lifetime and is today remembered as one of the most famous explorers of all time. While his accomplishments were indeed great, they were accompanied by brutality and great damage to native populations. The text includes a photograph of Stanley.

Henry Shelton Sanford, Arthur Stevens, and Gerson Bleichröd

The three men were all employed by Leopold in the period leading up the official international recognition of the Congo as a colony. Leopold selected them for their influence in, respectively, America, France and Germany. Each man successfully maneuvered through political circles to secure recognition of Leopold's claim on the Congo. Henry Shelton Sanford (1823 - 1891) is by far the most-developed of the three. A wealthy man, he pursued many businesses with an almost comical ineptness. At one time the American ambassador to Belgium, he remained in Belgium after his appointment expired. There, he was groomed by Leopold and then sent back to America, where he successfully lobbied President Arthur and others on Leopold's behalf. Stevens performed similar functions, using different methodologies, in France. Bleichröder lobbied Bismarck in Germany and, as Bismarck's personal banker, had considerable influence—which helped to establish the 1884-85 Berlin Conference. Sanford, at least, was quite idealistic and once Leopold's colony was firmly established, he rapidly became disillusioned with the venture. The activities of the three men indicated are generally confined to Chapters 5 and 6 of the text; only Sanford receives any biographical treatment. The text includes a photograph of Sanford.

George Washington Williams

George Washington Williams (1849 - 1891) was a minister and historian. A veteran of the American Civil War, he subsequently traveled to Mexico and enlisted in the armed forces, participating in the overthrow of Emperor Maximilian. He was commissioned a lieutenant but later received the honorary title of colonel—he thereafter affected the rank. Additionally, he claimed to have an advanced collegiate degree and usually presented himself as if he were on some type of secret appointment for a powerful political figure. None of this was true. Williams abandoned a wife and children and then traveled to Europe. He hoped to visit the Congo and arrange voluntarily to repatriate freed American slaves as motivated workers. Leopold attempted to dissuade Williams from visiting the Congo, but by 1890, Williams had toured the country—he was then forty years old. Outraged at the many atrocities he witnessed, he wrote a series of letters, which were republished as pamphlets and enjoyed wide circulation in newspapers. The letters condemned Leopold's administration of the Congo and enumerated various atrocities including slavery, sexual slavery, torture and widespread murder. Leopold responded by discrediting Williams—easy to do as much of William's credentials were fabricated. Williams was perhaps the first person to use the phrase "crimes against humanity" in his correspondence from the Congo. Leaving the Congo, he traveled to Egypt, where he contracted tuberculosis; he died within a few months and was buried in an unmarked grave in England. The first human rights crusader to visit the Congo, all of Williams' critical observations were essentially borne out by later observers. Williams' activities are the primary subject of Chapter 7. The text includes a reproduction of an engraving depicting Williams.

Joseph Conrad

Joseph Conrad (1857 - 1924) was born Konrad Korzeniowski. Polish by birth, he grew up in Paris where he was involved in various petty criminal activities. He then spent over a decade in the British merchant marine, learning English and seamanship, and becoming an officer. Conrad, looking for work, was offered a job in the Congo as the officer of a paddle wheeler navigating the Congo River. Having an interest in the heart of Africa since a child, Conrad accepted the position. He arrived in the Congo in 1889, and became captain of a steamboat, traveling about two thousand miles by river in about six months. The atrocities he witnessed changed his outlook and, ultimately, resulted in his most famous work Heart of Darkness, which includes many autobiographical elements. Disgusted with the brutalities of Leopold's administration, and sickened with malaria and dysentery, Conrad left the Congo and returned to Europe.

The text states that Marlow, the protagonist in Heart of Darkness, is based upon Conrad—a typical interpretation. The text then argues that the book is largely accurate in its portrayal of the Congo and should not be mistakenly interpreted as allegorical. The author suggests several potential models upon which the novel's Kurtz could be based, Léon Rom as the most likely candidate. Like Kurtz, Rom was a man who dabbled in science, painting and writing. Both possessed grandiose ideas and espoused virulent racism. Finally, Rom decorated his flower garden with severed human heads—as did the fictional Kurtz. The text includes a photograph of Conrad and two photographs of Rom.

William Henry Sheppard

William Henry Sheppard (1865 - 1927) was an early African-American Presbyterian Missionary and the first black missionary in the Congo. He traveled to Africa in 1892, spending the next two decades in the Congo Free State, where he was known among the native peoples as Mundéle Ndom, which roughly translates as "the black white man." Though technically not in charge of the Presbyterian Mission—it was headed by a white man—Sheppard's proactive approach and boundless energy made him the de facto leader. Sheppard developed a great fondness for the Congo and felt very at ease there. He was one of the first to report on widespread atrocities committed in the Congo, particularly against the Kuba people. Sheppard's reputation was attacked by Leopold's agents and his reports were, initially, not widely regarded. The text includes a photograph of Sheppard.

Edmund Dene (E.D.) Morel

E. D. Morel (1873 - 1924) was a British journalist, author of fifteen books and countless articles, and human rights activist, who led a campaign against African slavery with a special focus on atrocities perpetrated in the Congo. He founded, and was the editor and major contributor, the West African Mail, a periodical focusing on African human

rights issues. During World War I, Morel espoused pacifism and served a six month term in Pentonville Prison for exporting anti-war material to a neutral country. Morel later entered politics, defeating Winston Churchill in his successful 1922 bid as a Labour candidate. Re-elected in 1924, Morel served little of his second term before succumbing to a heart attack.

The text considers Morel's involvement in human rights activities focused on the Congo. Morel secured a job as a clerk with Elder Dempster, an English shipping firm, and thereby gained access to shipping manifests for freight between Belgium and the Congo. He realized that nearly the only thing imported to the Congo were firearms and ammunition, whereas a steady stream of ivory and other precious goods left the Congo. The trade was obviously supremely unbalanced, and Morel rather quickly deduced that the only explanation was widespread slavery. Morel began publishing articles in 1900. By 1902 he resigned his position under pressure from Elder Dempster and in 1903 he founded the West African Mail, an illustrated weekly. Largely because of Morel's publications, public opinion in Great Britain demanded an official response to allegations of atrocities. In 1904 Roger Casement's official government report substantiated virtually all of Morel's claims. The two men quickly became friends; Casement referred to Morel as "Dear Bulldog."

Morel later founded the Congo Reform Association and developed friendships with such notables as Joseph Conrad, Anatole France, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Mark Twain. Finally, in 1905, Leopold succumbed to public pressure and launched his own Commission of Inquiry, which—surprisingly—concluded that Morel and Casement were essentially correct. Continued international pressure, largely reported by Morel, led to the annexation of the Congo as a Belgian colony. The text notes Morel's single-minded determination to expose atrocities in the Congo and comments on his peculiar obsession, having no identifiable reason to pursue a decades-long task nearly devoid of remuneration. Morel is presented as an unwavering champion of human rights and is easily one of the most sympathetic persons portrayed in the book.

Roger David Casement

Roger David Casement (1864 - 1916) was a British consul, an Irish patriot, and a revolutionary. In his youth Casement was an Irish nationalist, though he worked in Africa for commercial concerns and, later, in the British consular services. He had spent some time in the Congo without making much comment on various atrocities before being commissioned, in 1903, to conduct an investigation throughout the Congo of alleged widespread atrocities and human rights abuses. In 1904 he produced what would eventually be known as the Casement Report, a damning document detailing abuses in the Congo. When the report was made public, Casement joined with Morel and others in demanding action. Leopold initially dismissed the report as fiction, later attacked the report systematically, and finally in 1905 launched his own commission to generate a similar report—one which would presumably be more favorable to his rule. The second report entirely validated Casement's observations.

Casement and Morel shared similar world-views and became lifelong friends; Morel referred to Casement as "Dear Tiger." Casement, however, retained his consular job and subsequently traveled to Peru where he documented abuses against the Putumayo Indians. He resigned from the consular service in 1912 and began agitating for Irish independence. In World War I he attempted to arrange for German aid for Irish independence, traveling to Germany and then returning to Ireland via submarine. Arrested on the coast, he was found with damning evidence and sent to prison and, eventually, was hung for treason. Several prominent friends, including Arthur Conan Doyle and George Bernard Shaw, pleaded for clemency.

The text presents Casement as an incorruptible and idealistic man of tireless activity and mechanical efficiency. Casement was also homosexual, at a time which such behavior was socially condemned. Contrary to his usual cautious nature, Casement kept a diary of his homosexual encounters—the diary was publicized during his imprisonment and undoubtedly caused many supporters to abandon his cause. Casement is presented as an unwavering champion of human rights and is one of the most sympathetic persons portrayed in the book.

Hezekiah Andrew Shanu

Hezekiah Andrew Shanu (1858 - 1905) was born and educated in present-day Nigeria. In 1884 he began working for Leopold's regime, recruiting soldiers from Nigeria to serve in the Force Publique. He subsequently moved to Boma, Congo, with his wife and extended family members. Shanu left state service in 1893, going into business for himself and operating a general store. During an 1894 trip to Belgium, Shanu received various public honors, with particular notice taken of his apparently flawless French. Shanu dabbled in photography and published several images. Sometime c. 1903, however, Shanu became entirely disillusioned with Leopold's regime—the nature of the situation is unknown. From that point forward, he began a constant but secret communication with Morel, providing various damning documents and critical commentary. Nearly everything provided by Shanu was printed by Morel. By early 1905, however, the Belgian press exposed Shanu as Morel's accomplice. Shanu, a British subject, was largely immune to official reprimands. Instead, he was unofficially but entirely shunned in the Congo and his business collapsed. Shanu committed suicide in 1905.

Jules Marchal

Jules Marchal was born c. 1925 in Belgium. His native language was Dutch, but he is also fluent in French and English. He married Paula, probably c. 1947, and they have remained married through the book's publication in 1998. In 1948 Marchal worked in the Congo, apparently for Belgian commercial interests. He remained working in the Congo until c. 1968, thus living in the Congo during the last years of Belgian colonial rule and the first years of independence. In c. 1970 Marchal began working for the Belgian Foreign Ministry, and in the early 1970s he was the Ambassador to several African

nations. During that time he read by chance an article on the Congo which had a footnote indicating that during Leopold's reign the country had suffered some ten million deaths. Marchal was flabbergasted, and initially assumed the article was in error. Like most Belgians of his era, he had viewed Leopold's distant colony as a model of humanitarian intervention. Marchal began to investigate and quickly discovered the international media outcry, largely organized by Morel, against atrocities in the Congo during Leopold's reign.

Marchal is described in the text as careful and methodical, and this surely is so. In 1975 he returned to Brussels and continued to serve in the Foreign Ministry. In Brussels, he attempted to gain access to the Commission of Inquiry testimony documents archive but was denied. Marchal then turned to international documents and amassed a great deal of information about Belgian colonialism in the Congo. He has published several books, including, in 1996, the French-language two-volume L'Etat Libre du Congo: Paradis Perdu. L'Histoire du Congo 1876 - 1900 and the French-language two-volume E. D. Morel contre Leopold II: L'Histoire du Congo 1900-1910. He ultimately gained access to the Commission of Inquiry testimony documents and published a book summarizing them. Marchal is credited as being one of the seminal sources for the text, and is noted as a historian of exacting standards and scrupulous honesty. It should be noted that Marchal and Hochschild have co-authored at least one book.

Objects/Places

The Congo

The Congo is a country on the African Continent, today known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1997 - present); formerly known as Republic of Zaire (1971 - 1997); Democratic Republic of the Congo (1965 - 1971); Republic of the Congo, colloquially Congo-Léopoldville (1960 - 1964); Belgian Congo (1908 - 1960); and The Congo Free State, or État Indépendant du Congo (1885 - 1908). The Congo is the third largest African country by geographic area. The Congo gained independence from Belgium in 1964. A map of the Congo is included at the front of the book.

The Congo River

The Congo River (known as the Zaire River from 1971 to 1997) is the largest river in West Central Africa, and, at nearly 3,000 miles in length, the second longest river in Africa. The source and oceanic exit of the river are both south of the equator, though for much of its length the river runs above the equator, the flow circumscribing a counter-clockwise arc. Because of the river's course on either side of the equator, it receives water in roughly proportional amounts during each hemisphere's rainy-dry season cycle, giving it a consistent discharge volume throughout the year. The final 220 miles of the Congo River has a very rapid descent, forming a line of nearly continuous cataracts and yielding an extremely turbulent flow. The barrier to navigation posed significant difficulty to early exploration attempts. The mouth of the river was found in 1482 by Portuguese Diogo Cão. In 1816, James Kingston Tuckey led a British expedition a few hundred miles upriver. Henry Morton Stanley was the first European to navigate the river's entire length (1874 - 1877). A map of the Congo River is included at the front of the book.

The Berlin Conference

The Berlin Conference, held in 1884-85, regulated European colonization and trade in Africa. Its outcome generally partitioned Africa into zones for colonization and recognized existing claims upon various regions. In addition, it regulated trade practices in the African region. The Berlin Conference confirmed the Congo as the private property of the Congo Society—a shell organization largely owned by Leopold. Typical of the European hubris of the period, no African peoples were represented at the conference. The post-conference African land grab by European nations is generally known as the "Scramble for Africa"'

Williams' Open Letter and a Report upon the Congo-State

During his visit to the Congo in 1890, George Washington Williams was outraged at the widespread atrocities he witnessed, labeling them as crimes against humanity. During his tour he wrote his Open Letter and addressed it to Leopold. The letter sharply criticized Leopold's administration and noted that the Congo was governed by trickery and tyranny; that seizure of property, fraud, and widespread imprisonment were freely practiced; and that torture, slavery, sexual slavery, and murder were not only tolerated but often sponsored by the government. The Open Letter was published as a pamphlet, probably by the Dutch company Niewe Afrikaansche Handels Vennootschap—angry at Leopold for refusing various trade deals. The Open Letter was subsequently widely reprinted in newspapers throughout Europe and North America. Williams subsequently wrote a longer letter or report, and addressed it to President Harrison. The Open Letter and subsequent report were the first openly critical observations of Leopold's administration of the Congo and, as events would prove out, were essentially correct in detail.

Chicotte

A chicotte was a "whip of raw, sun-dried hippopotamus hide, cut into a long, ragged, corkscrew strip." It was usually applied to the victim's bare buttocks and removed skin and flesh at every stroke, leaving scars. It was routinely fatal at about one hundred strokes. The chicotte was the most widely used instrument of terror during Leopold's administration. The text includes a photograph of a chicotte being applied to a bound victim.

Force Publique

A force composed of African mercenaries and European leaders, the Force Publique was a formally organized army founded in 1888. It was simultaneously a guerrilla force, an army of occupation and a corporate labor police force. The force was divided into small, nearly autonomous, garrisons. Each garrison usually consisted of one or two white officers and several dozen black soldiers. By 1900 there were 183 such garrisons, and by 1909 there were 313. The Force Publique was, obviously, at the center of many atrocities.

Rubber

Natural rubber is an elastic polymer that occurs in the sap of some plants, notably the rubber tree and certain vines growing throughout the Congo. Rubber became commercially important c. 1890 when it was first used for manufacturing tires. The Congo was the source of much of the world's rubber through c. 1905 when

commercially farmed rubber trees began to satisfy international demand. Eventually, synthetic rubbers largely replaced natural rubber. Harvesting rubber from vines, as was done in the Congo, is a labor-intensive and dangerous procedure which led Leopold's administration to use various forms of terror to force native peoples to work.

Elder Dempster

Elder Dempster was a British shipping company, which operated from c. 1852 as the African Steamship Company. In 1899, Elder Dempster was formally founded and subsequently persisted until 1932 when it was reorganized as Elder Dempster Lines. The company operated many ships and lines focused on the west coast of Africa. The company held exclusive shipping contracts for the Congo and profited greatly from the arrangement. Morel was an employee of Elder Dempster when, by studying shipping manifests, he realized that slave labor was being extensively utilized in the Congo.

The Casement Report

The Casement Report, published in 1904, was written by Roger Casement and detailed abuses in the Congo. From c. 1895 through 1903 various reports of atrocities in the Congo circulated through the international press, resulting in British public opinion that change must occur in the Congo's management. In response to this, the British government sent Casement to the Congo, where he spent several months conducting research and making observations. The formal result was the forty-page Casement Report which substantiated claims made by others that various atrocities were widespread and routinely practiced. The Casement Report was directly responsible for the later Commission of Inquiry Report and, ultimately, helped lead to reform in the Congo.

The Commission of Inquiry Report

Faced with increasing international outrage over atrocities perpetrated in the Congo, the Belgian Parliament, spurred on by Emile Vandervelde and others, demanded Leopold set up an independent Belgian Commission of Inquiry to investigate conditions in the Congo. The commission, formed by three men sympathetic to Leopold, traveled to the Congo in 1904 and spent several months taking 370 depositions. The commission released The Commission of Inquiry Report in November, 1905. In essence, it corroborated the Casement Report. The Commission of Inquiry Report led to the annexation of the Congo by Belgium as a colony and, ultimately, helped lead to reform.

Themes

Colonialism

The basic theme of the text is the process of colonialism, the extension of one nation's sovereignty over a territory beyond its borders. The specific instance of colonialism most-closely examined in the text is Leopold's establishment of an administrative dependency in the Congo, causing its native peoples to be directly ruled by a distant and absentee administration. Leopold's structure was a system of direct political and economic intervention in the Congo, which was made possible without significant military force by the fragmented nature of the traditional tribal structures in place at the time of Leopold's colonization. Thus, relatively few Europeans were able to use superior weapons and technologies to coerce hostilities between traditionally-disparate tribes. This fostered a condition of political instability, which was exploited by Leopold's administration go gain total control over the vast region of the Congo.

The text broadens the specific example by noting that nearly all Europeans of the time period—including even the human rights activist E. D. morel—held beliefs and attitudes which legitimized and promoted colonialism. Most Europeans thought that a paternalistic and benign colonial power improved distant conditions by Christianizing natives and bringing the blessings of technologies to so-called heathen peoples. Obviously, part of this thought process entailed viewing the white, European, races as being superior to non-European, indigenous races. Aside from the Congo example, the text briefly alludes to numerous other colonial systems, making colonialism the dominant theme of the book.

Manipulation of the Media

The book suggests that Leopold was a master of media manipulation. While his administration was busy plundering the Congo and committing routine acts of murder, slavery and rape, Leopold was promoting himself as a paragon of humanitarianism. Most European and American people of the time felt that colonialism was not only justified but uplifting to native peoples. Leopold used this sentiment to position himself in the public eye as a concerned ruler of a distant colony. Through his media outlets, he claimed to bring the benefits of medicine, technology and Christianity to so-called heathen peoples. By this method, Leopold was hailed as a great champion of humanitarianism during the period of the worst abuses in the Congo. The book chronicles a series of actual methods used by Leopold to manipulate the media to his own ends. Probably the most significant method was also the most obvious—Leopold spent vast sums of money to purchase favorable media coverage, to bribe editors to assume a particular editorial stance or to financially crush those who could not be purchased. He established newspapers, controlled circulation and published books. He purchased controlling interests in established newspapers, journals and publishing houses. He hired propaganda experts, sent employees on lecture tours and hosted

lavish conventions where humanitarian goals were discussed. All this contributed to Leopold's control of the media.

On the other hand, Leopold's adversaries also used the media—but in a different way. Morel established his own illustrated weekly newspaper, which served as an unofficial clearinghouse for stories about Congo and African atrocities. Whereas Leopold spent vast sums of money, Morel spent vast amounts of time. His willingness to oppose Leopold made him the natural recipient of any anti-Leopold news, and Morel routinely received information deliberately leaked from Congo. Finally, official governmental reports were largely beyond Leopold's direct control. Thus, the Casement Report and the Commission of Inquiry Report both had profound impacts on the media portrayal of Leopold's colony. That the colony was eventually annexed by Belgium is adequate testimony to the power of media manipulation, an obvious secondary theme in the text.

Individuals Can Make a Difference

Leopold was a powerful king of a European nation, and his personal wealth was vast. He ruled a giant colony with the willing assistance of many accomplices. All involved realized great profits from the ruthless exploitation of the Congo. The vast international power structure would appear to be beyond the reach of any single man; similar paradigms exist throughout history to the present. And yet, as the text illustrates, one man can make a difference. Morel enters the text as a shipping clerk for a company profiting from Leopold's administration. With access to shipping manifests, Morel quickly realizes a vast trade imbalance exists between Belgium and the Congo, and correctly surmises that the only possible explanation is the widespread practice of slavery in the distant African colony. Motivated by unknown reasons, Morel then quits his job and begins a decades-long pursuit of justice against Leopold's administration. The text styles Morel's stance toward Leopold as "David and Goliath" (p. 185). And, just as in the Biblical story, the puny David triumphs over the might Goliath. After a relentless pursuit of justice, Morel eventually sees the ownership and administration of the Congo transferred from Leopold to the Belgian Parliament, and he then sees a gradual but steady decrease of atrocities. The text suggests that in the history of the Congo's early colonization, Morel was the hero—the singular man who indeed made a difference.

This theme is bolstered by the appearance of other, similar, men and women who championed human rights and demanded change. They include George Washington Williams, Joseph Conrad, Roger Casement, Hezekiah Shanu, William Sheppard, Arthur Conan Doyle, Mark Twain, and Alice Harris. All these people, and others, are discussed in the text, and all of them stood up for their beliefs and made a difference in the world.

Style

Perspective

The author, Adam Hochschild, was born in New York in 1942. He briefly worked for an anti-government newspaper in South Africa during his college years and subsequently worked as a civil rights advocate during his mid 20s. During the late 1960s and early 1970s he worked as a journalist. He has published six books, a few of which deal with colonialism or tyranny. He has published articles in the New Yorker, Harper's Magazine, The New York Review of Books, and other national magazines. He has taught writing at the University of California, Berkeley. King Leopold's Ghost won the Duff Cooper Prize in Britain, the Gold Medal from the California Book Awards, and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. The book has been criticized as being excessively politically correct.

The author became interested in the topic of colonization of the Congo while reading a book which quoted Mark Twain in a footnote. This initial spark of curiosity led to further investigation into the era considered in the text and, ultimately, led to the writing of the book. This personal interest, along with the author's expertise in writing, makes him highly qualified to write on the topic at hand. The author's examination of the "first major international atrocity scandal in the age of the telegraph and the camera" (p. 4) is intended to refresh the public knowledge and rekindle the public debate over colonialism, brutality, and tyranny. Written in an engaging and accessible style, the book has been successful in meeting these objectives.

Tone

The tone of the text is serious and objective. The author seeks to establish the text's theses through factual information derived from various sources. Extensive notes and bibliographic entries bolster the theses and allow interested readers to pursue individual topics in additional materials. This transparent style allows the readers to ascertain the facts, analyze the arguments, and come to their own conclusions. The serious but accessible tone, coupled with Hochschild's obvious subject mastery, allows the book to be engaging and intelligible.

As Hochschild admits, the text contains very little original material and is nearly wholly derived from other published accounts. What sets the book apart from previous studies is the nature of presentation and the scope considered. Traditional viewpoints are upended—Leopold is considered a brutal tyrant, and Stanley is presented as his rather dim-witted and largely inadvertent accomplice in the wholesale rape of a country for profit. In the void left by these two men, true heroes emerge—men led Morel and Casement who proclaimed the truth at personal cost; men like Sheppard and Shanu who devoted years of their lives to bettering conditions insofar as they could. Needless to say, such an upending of traditional views is highly controversial and objectionable to

many. Nevertheless, the author's meticulously documented sources and exceptional synthesis of disparate facts ensures that the material is not only credible, but validated.

Structure

The 366-page text is divided into two named and enumerated parts; it also includes an introduction, a lengthy prologue, extensive Notes, an extensive Bibliography, and a comprehensive index. The two parts are, in turn, divided into named and enumerated chapters. Part I includes Chapters 1 through 11, and Part II includes Chapters 12 through 19. Material is presented in a chronological manner familiar to any student of history. Deviations from the basic chronological presentation are obvious and clearly identified. The material is generally presented from the third-person point of view, though occasional portions are presented in the first-person, plural, giving the text an intimate and familiar tone not often found in material of this sort. For example, regarding the truthfulness of some fine points of Stanley's writing the text states "We will never know..." (p. 52). The material is generally presented in the past tense, though occasional portions are presented in the present-tense, giving the text an immediate feel and an anxious tone. For example, Stanley's historic trans-Africa trek is presented as: "No European explorer has ever gone downstream beyond this point..." (p. 52). On occasion, the text proposes rhetorical questions as a construction device, for example "And who was the 'technical adviser' to the American delegation, even as he remained on Leopold's payroll? Henry Morgan Stanley" (p. 85). The text is well-written and many critical passages are obviously crafted with skill. Sentences and paragraphs are balanced and accessible, and the pacing of the text is enjoyable and appropriate. The book includes thirty-one photographs or images on sixteen photographic plates, bound between pages 116 and 117. Several of the images are quite disturbing, showing enslavement, acts of torture, maimed humans, and severed hands and feet.

Quotes

"One of the more revealing episodes Stanley describes or invents took place soon after he arrived in New Orleans, when he was sharing a bed in a boarding house with Dick Heaton, another young man who had come over from Liverpool as a deckhand. 'He was so modest he would not retire by candle-light, and...when he got into bed he lay on the verge of it, far removed from contact with me. When I rose in the morning I found that he was not undressed.' One day Stanley awoke and, looking at Dick Heaton asleep at his side, was 'amazed to see what I took to be two tumours on his breast...I sat up...and cried out...'I know! I know! Dick, you are a girl.'" That evening Dick, who by then had confessed to being Alice, was gone. 'She was never seen, or heard of, by me again; but I have hoped ever since that Fate was as propitious to her, as I think it was wise, in separating two young and simple creatures who might have been led, through excess of sentiment, into folly.'" (p. 25)

"Leopold's letters and memos, forever badgering someone about acquiring a colony, seem to be in the voice of a person so starved for love as a child and now filled with an obsessive desire for an emotional substitute, the way someone becomes embroiled in an endless dispute with a brother or sister over an inheritance, or with a neighbor over a property boundary. The urge for more can become insatiable, and its apparent fulfillment seems only to exacerbate that early sense of deprivation and to stimulate the need to acquire still more.
During the nineteenth-century European drive for possessions in Africa and Asia, people justified colonialism in various ways, claiming that it Christianized the heathen or civilized the savage races or brought everyone the miraculous benefits of free trade. Now, with Africa, a new rationalization had emerged: smashing the 'Arab' slave trade. At this early stage of his career, however, the future Leopold II did not try to cloak his ambitions with such rhetoric. For him, colonies existed for one purpose: to make him and his country rich. 'Belgium doesn't exploit the world,' he complained to one of his advisers. 'It's a taste we have got to make her learn.'" (p. 38)

"The town of Boma lay on the Congo River's north shore, about fifty miles in from the Atlantic Ocean. Besides its African inhabitants, sixteen whites lived there, most of them Portuguese—rough, hardbitten men used to wielding the whip and the gun—who ran a few small trading posts. Like Europeans for several centuries before them, these traders had never trekked inland through the forbidding jumble of rocks lining the great river on the tumultuous 220 miles of intermittent rapids that carried it down to sea level.
On August 5, 1877, an hour after sunset, four bedraggled black men walked out of the bush at Boma. They had come from a village some two days' walk inland and were carrying a letter addressed 'To any Gentleman who speaks English at Embomma.
Dear Sir:
I have arrived at this place from Zanzibar with 115 souls, men, women, and children. We are now in a state of imminent starvation...but if your supplies arrive in time, I may be able to reach Embomma within four days...better than all would [be] ten or fifteen man-loads of rice or grain...The supplies must arrive within two days, or I may have a fearful

time of it among the dying...Yours sincerely, H. M. Stanley, Commanding Anglo-American Expedition for Exploration of Africa.'" (p. 47)

"Of the people who lived in the Congo basin, Europeans still knew little. When not drawing a bead on them through his gun sights, Stanley had been interested in them mainly as a source of supplies, people with whom he could trade trinkets or cloth for food. But he had made two important discoveries about the area's inhabitants. One was that they were no military threat: his nearly three dozen battles showed their spears and arrows and decrepit muskets to be no match for his new, breech-loading Snider rifles. His other discovery was that, along the crucial transportation artery of the Congo River, there was no single all-powerful state that had to be subdued. Further exploring along the river's tributaries would find several large kingdoms, but centuries of slave-hunting raids from both the east and west African coasts had severely weakened most of them. Many of the peoples of the Congo basin were small in population. As the next round of exploration would soon show, there were more than two hundred different ethnic groups speaking more than four hundred languages and dialects. With the potential opposition so fragmented, conquest would be relatively easy." (p. 62)

"Most Belgians had paid little attention to their king's flurry of African diplomacy, but once it was over they began to realize, with surprise, that his new colony was bigger than England, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy combined. It was one thirteenth of the African continent, more than seventy-six times the size of Belgium itself.
To make clear the distinction between his two roles, the King of the Belgians at first considered calling himself 'Emperor of the Congo;' he also toyed with the idea of outfitting loyal chiefs with uniforms modeled on those of the famous red-clad Beefeaters at the Tower of London. Then he decided to be merely the Congo's 'King-Sovereign.' In later years, Leopold several times referred to himself—more accurately, for his main interest in the territory was in extracting every possible penny of wealth—as the Congo's 'proprietor.' His power as king-sovereign of the colony was shared in no way with the Belgian government, whose Cabinet ministers were as surprised as anyone when they opened their newspapers to find that the Congo had promulgated a new law or signed a new international treaty." (p. 87)

"As he prepared to develop the enormous colony, he found a number of tools at his disposal that had not been available to empire builders of earlier times. The tools were crucial, for they would soon allow a few thousand white men working for the king to dominate some twenty million Africans.
To begin with, there was weaponry. The primitive muzzle-loaders which were the best arms that most Congolese could obtain were little better than the muskets of George Washington's army. Starting in the late 1860s, however, Europeans could rely on breech-loading rifles, which had just shown their deadly power on the battlefields of the American Civil War. These shot much farther and more accurately, and, instead of needing loose gunpowder, which was useless in the rain, they used quick-loading waterproof brass cartridges.
An even more decisive advance quickly followed: the repeating rifle, which could fire a

dozen or more shots without being reloaded. Soon after came the machine gun. As the poet Hilaire Belloc wrote: 'Whatever happens, we have got The Maxim Gun, and they have not.'
Another tool that allowed Europeans to seize virtually all of tropical Africa in the two decades that followed the Berlin Conference was medical knowledge. Midcentury explorers had blamed malaria on everything from 'marshy exhalations' to sleeping in the moonlight, but, whatever its cause, they learned that quinine was a useful defense. Around the turn of the century malaria and hematuria became better understood; researchers also mastered yellow fever and other diseases, and the awesomely high death rate for Europeans in the African tropics began to drop." (pp. 89-90)

"Leopold's claim that his new state was providing wise government and public services was a fraud. There were no schools and no hospitals except for a few sheds 'not fit to be occupied by a horse.' Virtually none of the colony's officials knew any African language. 'The Courts of your Majesty's Government are abortive, unjust, partial and delinquent.' (Here, as elsewhere, Williams provided a vivid example: a white servant of the governor-general went unpunished for stealing wine while black servants were falsely accused and beaten.)
White traders and state officials were kidnapping African women and using them as concubines.
White officers were shooting villagers, sometimes to capture their women, sometimes to intimidate the survivors into working as forced laborers, and sometimes for sport. 'Two Belgian Army officers saw, from the deck of their steamer, a native in a canoe some distance away...The officers made a wager of £5 that they could hit the native with their rifles. Three shots were fired and the native fell dead, pierced through the head.'
Instead of Leopold's being the noble antislavery crusader he portrayed himself as, 'Your Majesty's Government is engaged in the slave-trade, wholesale and retail. It buys and sells and steals slaves. Your Majesty's Government gives £3 per head for able-bodied slaves for military service...The labour force at the stations of your Majesty's Government in the Upper River is composed of slaves of all ages and both sexes.'" (pp. 110-111)

"However laden it is with Victorian racism, Heart of Darkness remains the greatest portrait in fiction of Europeans in the Scramble for Africa. When Marlow says goodbye to his aunt before heading to his new job, 'she talked about "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways,' till, upon my word, she made me quite uncomfortable. I ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit.' Conrad's white men go about their rape of the continent in the belief that they are uplifting the natives, bringing civilization, serving 'the noble cause.'
All these illusions are embodied in the character of Kurtz. He is both a murderous head collector and an intellectual, 'an emissary of...science and progress.' He is a painter, the creator of 'a small sketch in oils' of a woman carrying a torch that Marlow finds at the Central Station. And he is a poet and journalist, the author of, among other works, a seventeen-page report—'vibrating with eloquence...a beautiful piece of writing'—to the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. At the end of the report,

filled with lofty sentiments, Kurtz scrawls in a shaky hand, 'Exterminate all the brutes!' In Kurtz's intellectual pretensions, Conrad caught one telling feature of the white penetration of the Congo, where conquest by pen and ink so often confirmed the conquest by rifle and machine gun. Ever since Stanley shot his way down the Congo River and then promptly wrote a two-volume best-seller, ivory collectors, soldiers, and explorers had tried to imitate him—in books, and in thousands of articles for the geographical society journals and magazines about colonial exploration that were as popular in the late nineteenth century as the National Geographic is in the United States today. It was as if the act of putting Africa on paper were the ultimate proof of the superiority of European civilization. This aspect of Kurtz is yet another reason to suspect that, in creating him, Conrad was partly inspired by Léon Rom. Rom, we saw, was a budding entomologist. He was also a painter; when not collecting butterflies or human heads, he did portraits and landscapes, of which five survive in a Belgian museum today. Most interesting of all, he was a writer." (pp. 147-148)

"The state and the companies generally paid villages for their rubber with a piece of cloth, beads, a few spoonfuls of salt, or a knife. These cost next to nothing, and the knives were essential tools for gathering more rubber. On at least one occasion, a chief who forced his people to gather rubber was paid in human beings. A legal dispute between two white officials near Stanley Falls put the following exchange on record in 1901. The witness being questioned was Liamba, chief of a village named Malinda:
Question: Did M. Hottiaux [a company official] ever give you living women or children?
Answer: Yes, he gave me six women and two men.
Question: What for?
Answer: In payment for rubber which I brought into the station, telling me I could eat them, or kill them, or use them as slaves—as I liked." (p. 164)

"Later in life E. D. Morel was to become good friends with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes. But the young Morel made a deduction more far-reaching than anything accomplished by Holmes. From what he saw at the wharf in Antwerp, and from studying his company's records in Liverpool, he deduced the existence—on another continent, thousands of miles away—of slavery.
'These figures told their own story.... Forced labour of a terrible and continuous kind could alone explain such unheard-of profits...forced labour in which the Congo Government was the immediate beneficiary; forced labour directed by the closest associates of the King himself.... I was giddy and appalled at the cumulative significance of my discoveries. It must be bad enough to stumble upon a murder. I had stumbled upon a secret society of murderers with a King for a croniman.'
With this brilliant flash of recognition by an obscure shipping-company official, King Leopold II acquired his most formidable enemy." (pp. 180-181)

"Again and again Casement describes hands being cut off corpses. Sometimes it wasn't the hands. His report quotes one witness:
'The white men told their soldiers: "'You only kill women; you cannot kill men.'" So then

the soldiers when they killed us (here P.P. who was answering stopped and hesitated, and then pointing to the private parts of my bulldog—it was lying asleep at my feet) then they cut off those things and took them to the white men, who said: "'It is true, you have killed men.'"
Despite the restrained tone and careful documentation, the report's accounts of sliced-off hands and penises was far more graphic and forceful than the British government had expected. The Foreign Office, already uneasy, began getting urgent requests to delay publication from Sir Constantine Phipps, the fervently pro-Leopold British minister to Brussels. Phipps, a conceited man of limited intelligence, couldn't believe 'that Belgians, members of a cultivated people amongst whom I had lived, could, under even a tropical sky, have perpetrated acts of refined cruelty.' The only reason the companies used 'sentries,' he explained to the foreign secretary, was to protect the rubber harvesters during their work. 'Please manage to prevent issue of report by Casement until after 10th instant, date on which I must unavoidably encounter King of the Belgians,' Phipps telegraphed. 'The publication will inevitably put me in an awkward position at court.'" (pp. 203-204)

"At the turn of the century, the Élysée-Palace Hotel, near the Arc de Triomphe, was among the most elegant in Paris. One day a guest happened to notice a young woman, also staying at the hotel, whose name, like other details of her past, remains in question: it was Caroline, or perhaps Blanche, Delacroix, or perhaps Lacroix. Although still a teenager, Caroline was the mistress of Antoine-Emmanuel Durrieux, a former officer in the French Army. He attempted to support them both by betting on horse races. When his betting luck ran low, it appears, Durrieux also acted as Caroline's pimp. Their lodgings at the Élysée-Palace were a useful base for these operations, but they frequently left bills unpaid. An unexpected solution to these troubles appeared when a woman approached Caroline at the hotel and said, 'Madame, I am sent to you by a gentleman who has noticed you. He is a very high personage but his exalted position obliges me to withhold his name.'" (p. 221)

"An official Belgian government commission in 1919 estimated that from the time Stanley began laying the foundation of Leopold's state, the population of the territory had 'been reduced by half.' Major Charles C. Liebrechts, a top executive of the Congo state administration for most of its existence, arrived at the same estimate in 1920. The most authoritative judgment today comes from Jan Vansina, professor emeritus of history and anthropology at the University of Wisconsin and perhaps the greatest living ethnographer of Congo basin peoples. He bases his calculations on 'innumerable local sources from different areas: priests noticing their flocks were shrinking, oral traditions, genealogies, and much more.' His estimate is the same: between 1880 and 1920, the population of the Congo was cut 'by at least a half.'
Half of what? Only in the 1920s were the first attempts made at a territory-wide census. In 1924 the population was reckoned at ten million, a figure confirmed by later counts. This would mean, according to the estimates, that during the Leopold period and its immediate aftermath the population of the territory dropped by approximately ten million people." (p. 233)

"Witness Ekuku, paramount chief of Boiéka: 'I knew Jungi well. He died about two months ago from the whipping he received. I saw him hit and I saw him die. It was about three or four meters from the white man's veranda, at the spot I showed you, between the two cactuses. They stretched him out on the ground. The white man Ekotolongo [Molle] held his head, while Nkoi [Ablay], standing at his feet, hit him with a cane. Three canes were broken during the execution. Finally Nkoi kicked Jungi several times and told him to get up. When he didn't move, Ekate said to the white man, 'This man is dead. You've killed him....' The white man replied, 'I don't give a damn. The judges are white men like me.'...Jungi was buried the next day....Jungi was an old man but he had been healthy.'
Witness Mingo of Mampoko: 'While I was working at brick-making at Mampoko, twice the sentries Nkusu Lomboto and Itokwa, to punish me, pulled up my skirt and put clay in my vagina, which made me suffer greatly. The white man Likwama [a company agent named Henri Spelier] saw me with clay in my vagina. He said nothing more than, 'If you die working for me, they'll throw you in the river.'" (pp. 254-255)

"The Congo reform movement at its best not only helped to shape and strengthen this set of beliefs; it went beyond them. Human rights groups today usually deal with results—a man in jail, a woman in servitude, a child without medicine. E. D. Morel talked, as well, about causes: above all, the theft of African land and labor that made possible Leopold's whole system of exploitation. It was this radicalism, in the best and deepest sense of the word, that underlay the passion of the leading Congo reformers and that led Morel and Casement, after their battle for justice in the Congo, to Pentonville Prison. The larger tradition of which they are a part goes back to the French Revolution and beyond; it draws on the example of men and women who fought against enormous odds for their freedom, from the slave revolts of the Americas to the half-century of resistance that brought Nelson Mandela to power in South Africa. During its decade on the world stage, the Congo reform movement was a vital link in that chain, and there is no tradition more honorable. At the time of the Congo controversy a hundred years ago, the idea of full human rights, political social, and economic, was a profound threat to the established order of most countries on earth. It still is today." (p. 306)

Topics for Discussion

The cover image of the American edition shows a photograph of Leopold superimposed on a photograph of two mutilated boys. Leopold is depicted in a typical bust portrait, though his clothing runs into the background leaving the appearance of a floating head. Discuss how this image supports the title of the book and echoes the severed heads of African victims such as those adorning the flower garden of Léon Rom.

Sir Henry Morton Stanley is generally portrayed as a nearly superhuman man, unafraid and stalwart, and possessed of a steely nerve, iron constitution, and grim determination. The text suggests he was irrationally afraid of sexual intimacy with women, cruelly sadistic, and fairly dim-witted. Discuss the processes which lead historians to different conclusions about cultural icons.

The book suggests that Leopold was unusually interested in business from an early age, and that he was uneasy about ruling a nation which he considered inferior in most regards as compared to other European nations. These deficiencies are positioned alongside his rather cheerless upbringing, his dysfunctional family, his loveless marriage, his insane sister, and his estranged wife and daughters. The book also mentions Leopold's disagreeable penchant for sexual encounters with underage girls. All of these character flaws flow into the man who subsequently seized and brutally extracted wealth from a distant colony. Do you feel the book fairly portrays Leopold? Discuss.

The brutal and dehumanizing conditions existing in the Congo caused it to be referred to as a place "where there aren't no Ten Commandments". Given this reputation, what sort of European people do you expect would desire to obtain employment in the distant colony?

The book refers to rubber as "the wood that weeps." While this is literally true during rubber harvesting, how might this description be interpreted as an allegory for the process of collecting wild rubber?

Chapter 12 is titled "David and Goliath" and describes the interplay between E. D. Morel and Leopold. In the book, who is symbolically represented by David? Who by Goliath? Do you think the comparison is appropriate?

Leopold's administration ruled the Congo with terror. Slavery, sexual slavery, torture, maiming, and murder were all commonplace events. Most historians place the death toll during a few decades at about 50%; had Leopold's reign continued unabated the Congo might have become unpopulated. This is obviously a particularly poor way to administer a colony, yet it was accepted during the period. Why do you think these atrocities continued for so long?

Chapter 19, titled "The Great Forgetting," details the steady process of rewriting history such that, by the post-World War II era, the history of the atrocities in the Congo was nearly entirely forgotten. Why do you think many people would prefer to forget unpleasant or atrocious facts about history?