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Kind Leopold's Ghost

In King Leopold's Ghost, we are introduced into some of the forethought and motivation for the colonization of Africa. The author, Adam Hochschild, gives the reader some insight of an alternative point of view of the history of Africa by exploring the experiences of many characters. Even though the author uses a non traditional way of presenting the story, his objectives are quite obvious. He portrays the greed, terror and inhumanity behind the events that kept the history of Congo a secret, as well as the heroic strives to give a voice to the silenced Africans.

In the first few chapters, the author introduces two characters. These characters are Henry Morton Stanley, and King Leopold II. By introducing the adolescent periods of these two men, the author allows the reader to enter Stanley and Leopold's psyche. His objective is to explain how their physiological development contributed to their desire to explore and take over Africa.

We first look at Stanley. Even though he considers himself an American, he was born illegitimately in England and was abandoned by his mother. After living with an uncle, he ended up in a Walsh house where he experienced sexual abuses which in lead to additional emotional problems. Stanley took his abuses and used them as a statue for the way to treat Africans. He often took out his anger on his workers on his expeditions by flogging them and sparing them no mercy. To add to his unstable physiological status, every time he became close to a women, she would get tired of waiting, and later she soon find another man. I also believe that Stanley's need to explore and constantly be active was due to his need to run away from his problems and insecurities. One of the

reasons I think Stanley had a strong internal urge to become important because he constantly elaborated on his stories to make them seem more exciting, and he became upset when England ignored his discovery of the Congo. His unimportance to England led to his initial interest in Leopold's offer. He was anxiously striving for approval of the powerful, and Leopold used Stanley's state to his advantage

Leopold on the other hand was born of great stature. He was the first born child, but he was often lazy when it came to schoolwork. The one subject that highly intrigued him was geography. Early in his life he studied economy and was obsessed with calculating the profits of colonization. He knew he would soon become King and was determined to make Belgium a bigger and better power. This physiological state would be his motivation to use any tactic in order to achieve his goal. To his disappointment, he realized no countries were up for sale. His only other option was to colonize on newly explored land. His greed led him to the unexplored Africa. After coming to power he called together many great leaders and expressed his concern for colonizing Africa. He disguised his real reasons for invading the Congo with petty reasons like Christianization and the abolition of the Arab-slave trade.

What I was astonishingly not aware of was the deceit behind which these plans were conceived. Since Stanley was the first person to survive the rough terrain of the Congo, he was quickly hired by Leopold. King Leopold's destructive gluttonous personality was soon reviled. To my surprise, Leopold had a way of persuading almost everyone he came in contact with. Despite what was actually going on in the Congo, Leopold claimed that under the Association of the Congo, posts and hospices were being made for future travelers. He portrayed to the press that his organization was a type of

society like the Red Cross. Many other countries gave him their support thinking that they were promoting philanthropy.

What was actually going on in the Congo is much more heart breaking. Leopold did make treaties with the Chiefs, but did the Chiefs know what was happening? First, they had the issue of a language barrier. Second, in a Traditional African society, land ownership was unconceivable. Third, these societies were not of a violent nature so when they saw an opportunity of friendship with people with highly sophisticated weaponry, I'm sure they were influenced to accept. Under these conditions, the Chiefs signed everything away, including their freedom. The land was now Leopold's and any export was under his control. Still, other foreign powers chose to look away and not investigate.

Although Leopold did the damage, the other powers should also take blame. Each country had its own reason for looking the other way. For the most part, America was supporting Leopold. Americans in the south wanted to send the Blacks back to Africa because they were now free. African Americans wanted to go to a land that was familiar, back to their culture, back to their homeland. Leopold also gained France as an ally. He promised them first pick on the land if Belgium couldn't handle it. France loved the idea of Britain not getting the land. These shameful reasons for bickering over property that wasn't even theirs enlightened me about the moral values people had in the Colonial era.

The Berlin conference was the next biggest step in Leopold gaining the power to have his way with the Congo, which he would ironically call the Congo Free State.

Although this conference would help decide what would become of the African land, no African's were present. This was no surprise to me considering that the Europeans didn't

even consider Africans as natives. I guess in their mindset the land was merely anyone's with free workers already provided.

This book also enlightened me on the mystery of how his men were able to take over the land. To my knowledge so far, Africa is a very diverse continent with many tribes who would surely stand up for themselves. The diversity on the other had aided Leopold instead of the Natives. Each culture had a different language so it was ultimately impossible for tribes to team up against the Leopold's men. Leopold's men also had advanced weaponry and medicines. Medicines were very useful because the white man brought new diseases like yellow fever and malaria. This, among other things, led to depopulation of Africans. Eventually, the Africans started rebellions and fought back, but many casualties were made for only little progress. Leopold encouraged the killing of Africans, and men of the army were praised for bringing back the limbs of the men they killed. Africa now had a violent mindset instead of a peaceful one.

The first mission on Leopold's agenda was to build roads for transport. This system was mainly to help the export of the territory's riches. During this time Leopold was burning up his inheritance and needed additional funding. Some of the tactics he used for collecting money from foreign powers was promising free trade. Another tactic was organizing bogus missions like the Pasha Relief Expedition, which was led by Stanley, one of Africa's most notorious barbarians. Stanley was known for his mass killing of Africans. Stanley and his army would storm into villages and mistreat, torture, and kill anyone he liked. He and his force were trigger-happy barbarians and would kill anyone for food or treasures.

Leopold's greed eventually stumbled upon the rubber trade which led to the most shocking and horrific treatment of Africans in history. Even though we only have a small inclination of what actually happened in the Congo, it would not have been possible without the courageous efforts of George Washington Williams. He paved the way with The Open Letter to show the reality of the occurrences in the Free Congo. Even though he died shortly after publishing the occurrences and the discovery did nothing for him, a greater triumph later emerged. Later, other men like Conrad, Shephard, and Morel were so horrified by their findings in Africa that they made many publications in order to illustrate the rape of the Congo.

Williams was the first to shed light on Leopold's one man rule. With the land that Leopold did not need, he gave to other independent companies. The land was now controlled with the one-track-minds of entrepreneurs. This led to some of the most unspeakable accounts of treatment of Africans. To Europeans, the Congo was a place where the white man could make up his own rules. He had all the power and no one to answer to. It was the European dream; life without the ten commandments. Leopold and his men were a secret society of murderers with a King as a conman.

Even though Morel exposed King Leopold through real accounts of African families tortured by Leopold's rubber industry, Leopold was able to counter attack the accusers. First, he paid news papers to write good reviews of his activities in the Congo. Then, he made it illegal to directly accuse any of his companies of wrongdoings. While most of other powers were captivated by his cover-up tactics, his homeland did not support his plans in the Congo. Missionaries also hated Leopold because they saw the inhumanities themselves.

While Morel was gaining support from London, he created the Congo Reform Association and remained faithful to it for the rest of his life. Like many other exposures of King Leopold, he made continuous efforts to change the Congo. Most of these exposures realized the need of reform when they witnessed the effects of the rubber trade first-hand. The effect of the rubber trade on Africans was astonishing. Rubber led to murder, starvation, exhaustion, exposure, diseases, and a plummeting birth rate. Men of Leopold's force would go into villages, hold families at gun-point until the men would come back with their quota of rubber. They would also take slaves if they liked and paid the Chief next to nothing for the men.

King Leopold's works were first massively published on December 10, 1906 but he soon died of cancer. One would think that his line of terror would cease at his death, but his ghost continually added terror to the Congo. The property was given to Belgium under King Albert I whom tried to reverse Leopold's system, but the Africans still didn't get what they rightfully deserved. Instead of forcing the Africans to work, the Belgium government put a head tax into action. This to me was just another version of forced labor. What the Africans really needed was their land back, and the opportunity to rebuild what they had lost. Now it would be impossible to replace the materials, money, land, culture, and population that King Leopold heartlessly stole from them.

To add to the lack of effort to give reparations to Africans, the history of what actually happened seemed to disappear. This was astonishing to me because I didn't realize that a person had the power to erase history. Since the Belgium people were so ashamed of what their King did, they chose to ignore it. Leopold burned most of the evidence against him before he died. Even the history books that were used in African

schools praised King Leopold for trying to aid Africans in development. The true accounts of what actually happened could be freely read until 1980. This to me is unacceptable.

I can't help but imagine how long Leopold's tactics would have prevailed if people like Williams, Casement, Morel, and Shepard did not stand up for the rights of the Africans. These men weren't only brave for standing up for the silenced Africans, but they also had to face an intimidating King. This all led to the truth that we can now teach our Children, and African History can be revealed. Even though this book only talked about the Congo, the horrible treatment of Africans was all over Africa, especially in the bordering countries.

Not only did this book help me to realize how the foreign power came to claim a land that wasn't theirs, but it also made me realize the effects of Colonization. To me the major effect was the depopulation and deculturization. First, the Europeans killed the Africans, then enslaved them, and then denied that it actually happened. One can imagine what kind of psychological problems this made on the mindset of Africans. With foreign companies in their native land, taking over their resources, Africa became dependent on western ways. This in turn makes it almost impossible to reverse the destructions the Europeans brought.

Ali Mazrui suggests that we repay the Africans with Capital transfer, Skill transfer, and power-transfer. I agree that Africans deserve something for the European inhumanity but I think some of these ideas are impractical. While I agree with power-transfer, I disagree with Skill transfer. Although it sounds nice, it would only make Africans more dependent on a western way of life. With Capital transfer, Africans would

boost one economy while hurting another (not necessarily ours). I do agree with power-transfer, mostly more global power and recognition.

In conclusion, this book was full of new realizations, and it helped me connect all the loose ends from our Class. It also introduced me to some African History Heroes as well as the names behind the evil works. Most of all, by exploring this book and recognizing the capabilities of a single human being, I realize how important it is to have moral values and humanity. The most we can do now as a people is to come together and promise not to repeat our past.