

King Leopold II & the American Syndicate's Chase for Capital in Congo

A Thesis in History and Anthropology

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor in Arts With  
Specialized Honors in History

May 2025

Drew University

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## Acknowledgments

This thesis has been supported and made possible by so many wonderful people. Firstly, I'd like to thank my committee who, each time I showed up and knocked on the door of their offices, always welcomed me with a smile. Dr. James Carter, Dr. Allan Dawson, and Dr. Jesse Mann, I have learned so much from picking your brains. Thank you for all the guidance, books, and edits. I have valued all the ideas, conversations, and constructive criticism to the highest degree. Thank you.

To my parents. The value of education and learning you instilled in me from a young age has already gotten me this far. And I'm sure it's going to take me to even more places. Thank you for always supporting me.

To my thesis cohort: Jocelyn, Julia, and the honorary Katie. I hold our time together so near and dear to my heart. The accountability and support system we built together is so very special. This thesis would definitely not be completed without our "Thesis Thursdays" and all the "25's." Thank you.

I'd also like to thank everyone who contributed to the Gilbert House "sitcom." I never saw this community coming my way. I will always look back on Gilbert times with fondness.

Another thank you to my other professors who encouraged and guided me throughout my time at Drew. Dr. Angie Calder, Dr. Maria Masucci, and Dr. Marc Boglioli, without your advice I do not think I would have completed this thesis, let alone thought about writing one. Thank you.

And finally my friends and peers who listened to my highs and lows. Maddy, Jocelyn, Julia, Katie, Azra, Lindsay, and Jecilyn: you all endured a lot of breakdowns and general anxiety about this thesis. I appreciate our friendships so deeply and thank you for being there for me from the bottom of my heart. I couldn't have done it without you.

## **Abstract**

At the turn of the 20th century, King Leopold II of Belgium's private dominion of the Congo Free State stood amid the rise of the new market-oriented global order. Backed by the Second Industrial Revolution, globalization, and colonialism, Leopold and a syndicate of American capitalists laid the groundwork for a resource and labor extracting economy which still remains in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a century later. The forward drive of national purpose, bolstered by formulated ideologies through religious and duty-driven language, sent American business searching overseas. These "men of empire" created a new type of global order that dominated the following century, following the most profitable patterns of production, resource, and labor, the cheapest of which was found in the global "periphery." This turning point as the Congo Free State transitioned into a Belgian colony, shifting from rubber and ivory extraction to mineral wealth, indicates a wider rising hegemony in a new privatized colonialism in the 20th century.

## Introduction

For the Congo's strategic location in the middle of Africa and its fabulous natural endowment of minerals and other resources have since 1884 ensured that it would serve as a theatre for the playing of the economic and strategic interests of outsiders: the colonial powers during the scramble for Africa; the superpowers during the Cold War; and neighboring African states in the post-Cold War era.<sup>1</sup>

In the mid-19th century, the resources and labor of rich West Central Africa in the Congo River basin attracted the interest of the King of the Belgians, Leopold II. The monarch decided to create a private colony with one goal: profit by any means necessary. Leopold's Congo Free State became infamous for its genocidal approach to resource extraction. Out of desperation and selfishness to keep his colony, Leopold used his so-called "Free State" to stir American interests. Together Leopold and a syndicate of American industrialists produced a brief but powerful unique political economy that dominated the 20th century. To understand the "Scramble for Africa" and globalized world Congolese historian Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja described requires an understanding of the landscape and the systems that characterize it.

Before the 19th century "Scramble for Africa," the Congo basin was home to a history of empires, complex trade networks, and alliances. The power and influence obtained through the landscape's abundant resources built empires and complex markets and systems, only possible through the land's orientation along the second longest river on the African continent.<sup>2</sup> The Congo River occupies almost all of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) today, and large portions of neighboring countries. Second only to the Amazon, the Congo River basin drains an area roughly the size of western Europe. The dense system of freshwater tributaries

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<sup>1</sup> Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja. *The Congo From Leopold to Kabila: A People's History* (Zed Books, 2002) 94.

<sup>2</sup> Toby Saunders. "Top 10 Longest Rivers in the World 2024." BBC Science Focus Magazine, January 2, 2024. <https://www.sciencefocus.com/planet-earth/longest-river-in-the-world>.

gives life to surrounding forests, supporting billions of people for tens of thousands of years. Running from the Atlantic to deep into the heart of the continent, the Congo River claims the greatest biodiversity in Africa.<sup>3</sup> The resources derived from such diversity and waterway accessibility contribute much to the identity of those who live in the Congo River basin.

To understand the history of the peoples who have inhabited the river basin,—especially pre-European contact and pre-”Scramble for Africa”—historians have relied upon many different avenues of information, especially oral history and the archaeological record.<sup>4</sup> A lack of written history led to a longstanding lack of awareness and understanding of central Africa by the “western”<sup>5</sup> world. In the recent decades modern western studies began to acknowledge the complexities of the land and its peoples. Historian Robert Harms<sup>6</sup> summarized the Congo River basin as “an area of great cultural diversity. Its four main ecological zones—river, swamp, forest, and savanna—foster very different types of economic activity, and therefore very different ways of life.”<sup>7</sup> Harms continued that despite being a third of the size of the continental United States, the central basin possessed “two unifying elements shared by the diverse peoples of the area”: an “abundance of water,” and a “close linguistic relationship.”<sup>8</sup> Into the 19th and 20th centuries, such unifying elements provided the foundation that attracted European colonialism, and eventually the violence and exploitation that followed. Before European contact, peoples of the

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<sup>3</sup> Ian J. Harrison, Randall Brummett, Melanie L. J. Stiassny. “The Congo River Basin,” (The Wetland Book, 2016) 7.

<sup>4</sup> Post-contact and subsequent conversion to Christianity in some areas also provide history of later years.

<sup>5</sup> The definition of what “western civilization” is and when and where it exists varies. In this analysis, “western civilization” established itself in western Europe, and took significant root during the Enlightenment. The American capitalist ideology grows out of this tradition.

<sup>6</sup> Harms completed his studies under the direction of the esteemed Jan Vansina. A Belgian anthropologist, Vansina is credited as a pioneering authority in Central African studies.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Harms, *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow* (Yale University Press, 1981), 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 15-17.

Congo River basin did not abide by modern national or colonial boundaries, instead operating in their unique systems and cultures. In the 13th century, Bantu speaking peoples from the west moved into the Congo basin, gradually displacing existing populations.<sup>9</sup> Their establishment of a more sedentary lifestyle with increasingly agricultural subsistence strategies provided avenues for wealth and empire building throughout West Central Africa.

The coastal Kongo Kingdom, from which the Congo River got its name, existed as the contact point between Europeans arriving on the coast and the peoples of the interior river basin. Of the outward looking Europeans in search of colonies, the Portuguese arrived first along the Gulf of Guinea coast. In 1483, in search of more gold,<sup>10</sup> Portugal's crown commissioned Captain Diogo Cão to sail further south. Doing so, he came into contact with the Kingdom of Kongo.<sup>11</sup> Following a taking of hostages and a language and religion education, Kongo's ruler converted to Christianity. When Alfonso I came to power, he sought economic and political possibilities and found the best way to do so meant aligning with Portugal by further embracing Christianity. The alliance of the Kongo Kingdom with Portugal—already the byway through which the Portuguese reached the central Congo basin—did what Alfonso hoped through the 1500s. The slave trade kept Portugal at Kongo's door through the following centuries. Although missionaries ventured into the Congo basin past Kongo's borders along the Congo river, Europe remained largely ignorant of especially any of the political and economic complexities of off-river communities and empires. Into the 17th century, the host of new market opportunities further south along the Gold Coast brought more than just the Portuguese. The Dutch entered the fray

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<sup>9</sup> Sandra Beleza et al., "The Genetic Legacy of Western Bantu Migrations," *Human Genetics* 117 (2005): 367.

<sup>10</sup> John Thornton, *A History of West Central Africa to 1850* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 38.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 38-39.

while internal politics sowed seeds of conflict and civil war in the Kongo Kingdom.<sup>12</sup> The rest of the Congo basin also dealt with changing economies and politics adjacent to Europe's lucrative slave trade and material exports. The diversity in the river basin's landscapes produced varied economic goods, many of which were exported to Europe. The rich land fed by the Congo river also produced a textile belt, fostering additional commerce.

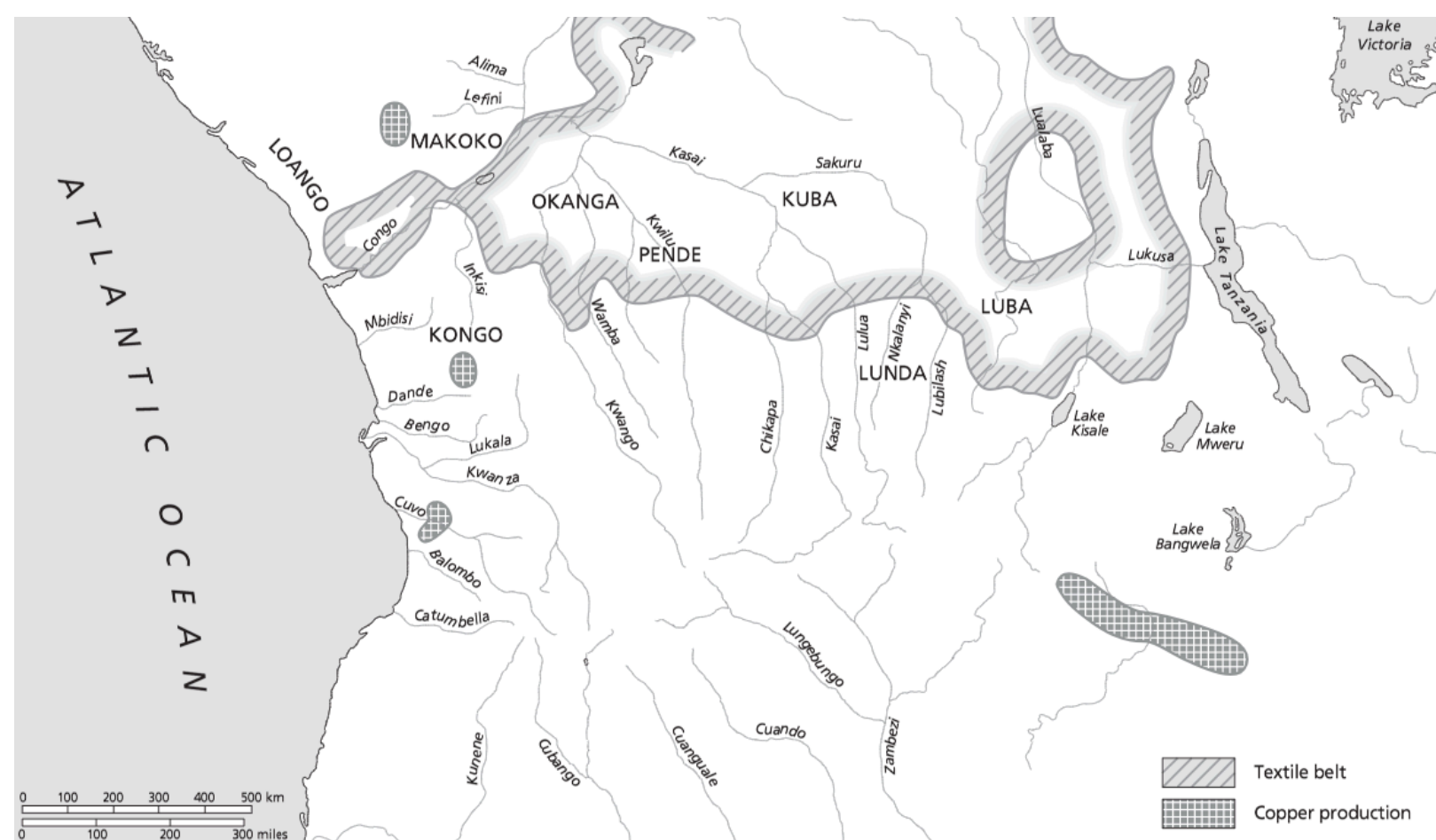


Figure 1. John Thornton, *A History of West Central Africa to 1850* (2020), “Figure 2. Economic Centers,” VIII.

Historian John Thornton described how in this textile belt, in the heart of the rich and fertile Congo basin, populations grew denser.<sup>13</sup> In the west, opposite of the Kongo Kingdom, existed a

<sup>12</sup> Thornton. *A History of West Central Africa to 1850*, 162.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 218.



second great power, the Lunda empire. Centered on the core of minerals reserves in central Africa, Lunda rapidly expanded throughout the southwest river basin. At the empire's height in the 18th century, Thornton described how Lunda facilitated commerce across the continent, in active "contact with both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean, becoming, in effect, the heart of Central Africa."<sup>14</sup> Thornton highlighted that "in African history only the medieval empires of Mali and Songhai controlled a larger area, although [Lunda's] population probably did not exceed a million souls."<sup>15</sup> Denser population concentrations remained in specific urban centers and along riverine and coastal communities. Smaller empires, kingdoms, and cultures dotted the Congo basin between the Atlantic coast and the Great Lakes region, consistently in competition and conflict with Kongo and Lunda through the early 19th century.

While political disputes and power attempts took place in various kingdoms and empires, one constant remained. Traders and merchants held the central power. Such commercial groups held together the ties of European markets to West Central Africa and beyond—capitalizing upon the Kongo Kingdom's first embrace of Christianity. The existing empires and riverine societies crafted complex commercial systems tied to the European marketplace by way of the core of central Africa: the Congo River. Harms emphasized, the "traders of the upper river enjoyed a strong bargaining position," claiming the upper hand at navigating their existing trade routes—routes Europeans had limited knowledge of nor experience navigating.

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<sup>14</sup> Thornton. *A History of West Central Africa to 1850*, 218.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 312.



Figure 2. Encyclopedia Britannica (2010), “Congo River basin and its drainage network.”

Not only do waterfalls and rapids mark the river system—most especially on the Lower Congo downstream of Kinshasa and along the upper tributaries in the eastern Great Lakes region, but the waterways divided into what Harms calls spheres of influence, “different trading alliances monopolizing commerce along different stretches.”<sup>16</sup> Unequipped, uneducated, and often

<sup>16</sup> Harms, *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow*, 74.

ignorant to the intricacies of West Central African territories and landscape, Europeans opted to remain external and coastal to take advantage of the existing communication and trade networks throughout the Congo River basin. Not until the mid-19th century did this change.

Although there existed movement of material goods like textiles, produce, and firearms, enslaved peoples and ivory were the prized commodities linking West Central Africa to the international European market. As the demand grew through the centuries, the commercial competition in the Congo River basin led many small fishing communities to also value the transport of enslaved Africans to the coast.<sup>17</sup> Traders, the experts in river navigation and transport, benefited the most from the increase in demand and economic activity. Often successful traders gained political power, resulting in the monopolizing of Harms' "spheres of influence."<sup>18</sup> A small number of individuals benefited the most from the internationally linked trade along the coasts. The Congo River basin connected the opposite coasts of the African continent and became increasingly valuable for expediting trade, and then, of course, profits.

Arriving on the Gold Coast with intentions of obtaining cheaper labor and resources, Europeans relied more and more heavily upon the continuous rise in West Central African commerce. Without the free labor guaranteed from those enslaved, Europe could not export raw materials produced from their colonies, let alone sustain their overseas colonies. Free labor provided the raw materials that made possible the western Industrial Revolutions in the 19th century. Thornton identified the mid-19th century as a "signal turning point for West Central Africa."<sup>19</sup> Contending with revolutions and reforms at home, Europe sought a consistent and stable avenue of revenue. Starting with the arrival of the Portuguese in the 14th century, Europe

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<sup>17</sup> Harms, *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow*, 70.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>19</sup> Thornton, *A History of West Central Africa to 1850*, 351.

drew West Central Africa into the evolving global economy, moving away from the mercantilist model to an increasingly imperial and investment-oriented economy.

The market and economic logic that pushed industrialists overseas for cheaper labor and raw materials, produced adjacent supporting ideas. The western world shaped the continent of Africa into its ideal “frontier,”<sup>20</sup> to conduct imperial projects in which they could enact their will. Politicians and industrialists hitched a ride along the most effective ideology or belief: religion, spread through missionization. The economic opportunities the Congo River basin presented could not keep the “west” away. Anthropologist Igor Kopytoff coined Africa as a “frontier continent,” in his aptly named book, *The African Frontier*. He identified Africa as the “stage for many population movements of many kinds and dimensions,” ranging from pre-contact Bantu and local movements to the systemic colonial and post-colonial era dramatic and forceful migrations.<sup>21</sup> Although Kopytoff studied the cultural history of Africa, this “frontier” history also informs economic and political changes.

Economic and cultural changes escalated during the 19th century during the Second Industrial Revolution. Europe’s gaze locked in on the African continent—no one was more interested than the King of the Belgians, Leopold II. Like the rest of Europe and the western world, backed by the Second Industrial Revolution, globalization, and a history of colonialism, Leopold took advantage of the Scramble for Africa to codify his claim on West Central Africa. In 1885, the king established his Congo Free State. Meanwhile across the Atlantic, the forward drive of national purpose, bolstered by formulated ideologies through religious and duty-driven language, sent American business searching overseas. Leopold took advantage and engaged their

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<sup>20</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” July 12, 1893. (Marine Corps University, Full Text), 2.

<sup>21</sup> Igor Kopytoff, *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African* (Indiana University Press, 1989), 7.

interests in his reign of terror and exploitation of his Congo Free State. The king and a syndicate of American capitalists laid the groundwork for a resource and labor extracting economy which still remains in the Democratic Republic of the Congo a century later. Together, the American “men of empire” and the similarly-minded Leopold, contributed to the creation of a new type of global order that dominated the following century. This global order followed the most profitable patterns of production, resources, and labor—the cheapest found in the global “periphery.”<sup>22</sup> In 1906, at the turning point of the Congo Free State transition into a Belgian colony, shifting from rubber and ivory extraction to mineral wealth, indicated a wider rising hegemony in a new privatized colonialism in the 20th century.

Chapter 1 looks at Leopold’s growing interest and inevitable arrival in the Congo River basin. Leopold and his agents crafted an exploitative system with one goal: profit. The king established a private colony for his personal gain, named the Congo Free State. Free in nothing but name, Leopold’s colonial policies prompted the “Red Rubber”<sup>23</sup> genocide. Chapter 2 crosses the Atlantic Ocean to deal with the budding economic power of the United States amid the Second Industrial Revolution. Amid the tumult of Gilded Age America, searching for a market solution, embraced a new rhetoric-filled imperial project. Chapter 3 details the brief privatized colonial model Leopold shaped by welcoming the American syndicate into the Congo River basin. American industrialists made key investments in the Congo as Leopold began to lose his grip on his property. Such investments laid the bedrock for foreign mineral and labor exploitation in Congo well into the 21st century.

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<sup>22</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, “The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16, no. 4 (1974): 387-415.

<sup>23</sup> E.D. Morel, *Red Rubber: The Story of the Rubber Slave Trade Which Flourished on the Congo for Twenty Years, 1890-1910* (National Labor Press, 1919), accessed, April 2024.

## Chapter 1: Leopold's Congo

### Early Interest in Africa

In 1865, Leopold II succeeded his father to become the second monarch of Belgium. The authority and power of the King of the Belgians allowed Leopold to pursue an ambitious agenda for his reign, both personally and for his young nation. Quite literally stuck between the grandeur of France and the rising German empire, Leopold hoped to gain both capital and prestige to compete with his neighbors. These goals in addition to the monarch's early interest in geography and trade eventually led him to an obsession with acquiring a colony.<sup>24</sup> Leopold embarked on travels across Europe and the Mediterranean, gaining the basic knowledge of what a colonial venture entailed.<sup>25</sup>

First he needed land. By the mid-19th century, the land options available remained limited, especially outside the existing European cross-continental empires. From his travels and readings, Leopold realized his only options remained far-flung, uncharted, and foreign territories. The king lacked the knowledge to start a colony in an unfamiliar place, let alone any idea of how to navigate the land and native peoples, what resources to best capitalize on, or how to even do so. Such daunting tasks led to Leopold's many attempts to purchase an existing colony from another nation.<sup>26</sup> Following some consideration of islands in Asia and the Pacific, as well as attempts to purchase existing European colonies, Leopold decided to hop on the Africa bandwagon. Throughout his diligent search, the king faced resistance and criticism from those within his own nation who believed a colony too risky and expensive. Such criticism made

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<sup>24</sup> Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (First Mariner Books, 1998), 36-37.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 41.

sense. The heavy cost of colony-building burdened governments who sought out cheap labor to bolster their nation's industry, more so than ever during the Second Industrial Revolution.<sup>27</sup> In the mid-19th century, only limited quantities of foreign investment entered new colonies, as the cost frequently outpaced any profit.<sup>28</sup> Despite his own government advising against, Leopold took on the high cost of financing a colony, which he could afford from personal investments in the Suez Canal and a hefty inheritance.<sup>29</sup>

Leopold was not alone in his interest in colonial expansion. Later historians recognized the late 19th century as a period of intense western imperialist ambition towards colonization around the world, and most notably the African continent. Leopold took part in the infamous Scramble for Africa within what John Hobson described as the "New Imperialism."<sup>30</sup> In his 1902 treatise, Hobson described the evolving practices of the well-established imperialist process at the turn into the 20th century as a "new" version of imperialism. Increasing commercial privatization encouraged and boosted by the Second Industrial Revolution, led to a more complex and intensified model of the old European mercantilist model of colonialism.

Although European trade and exploitation of Africa existed for centuries already, during the late 19th century Second Industrial Revolution expansion reached new heights.<sup>31</sup> Europe already established and utilized existing lines of trade and commerce further inland to remain mostly along eastern and western coastlines and limit financial burden. As a result central Africa,

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<sup>27</sup> Joel Mokyr, Robert Strotz. "The Second Industrial Revolution, 1870-1914" (Northwestern University, 1998), 2.

<sup>28</sup> Michael A. Rutz, *King Leopold's Congo and the "Scramble for Africa" A Short History with Documents*. (Hackett Publishing Company, 2018), 4.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: The White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876 to 1912*, (Avon Books, 1991), 14.

<sup>30</sup> J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York: J. Pott & Company, 1902), 39.

<sup>31</sup> Rutz, *King Leopold's Congo*, 2.

south of the Sahara, remained a mythical mysterious land, filled with the promise of danger and heroic exploration for most of Europe and North America. Literate subjects of western society developed a fascination with this exotic continent from the big wave of globalization characterizing the previous centuries. Central African “jungles”<sup>32</sup> became the hot spot for explorers—funded by investors with colonial agendas in search of exploitable land. One of these many daring explorers was Henry Morton Stanley, who achieved international acclaim embarking on a rescue mission in 1871 to save a missing missionary and physician, David Livingstone.<sup>33</sup> After reading about Stanley’s sensationalized success,<sup>34</sup> more importantly his transcontinental African journey, Leopold identified the explorer as the man he needed to enact his colonial vision.

## **Inventions**

Due to the all-consuming fascination with the primitive and exotic “other”<sup>35</sup> by those with the means to cultivate such (mostly wealthy white men, and some white women), King Leopold needed to be cautious in beginning his selfish endeavor. This general obsession juxtaposed to the popularized colonization of both land and people, pushed a paternalistic superiority complex. “Primitiveness” characterized Europe’s view of non-white and thus dubbed “uncivilized” peoples. Dehumanizing racist ideology evolved in the late 19th century, from the original colonial narrative of the blatant inhumanity and inferiority of the colonized. The

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<sup>32</sup> In media and literature, the trope of the wild, savage, and adventure-filled African jungle persisted. This contributed to a racist singularization of the African continent and the peoples that live there.

<sup>33</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 60.

<sup>34</sup> Stanley’s rescue of Livingstone became memorialized in the 1939 Hollywood film *Stanley and Livingstone*, starring Spencer Tracy as the daring Stanley.

<sup>35</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*. (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), Introduction.



definition of “civilization”<sup>36</sup> included a justification of mostly violent and brutal colonization tactics. However, some white people began to realize those who may not look or act like them could be given a chance to be “civilized,” and be assimilated into the larger European and American society—from this idea emerged the infamous “white man’s burden,” immortalized in Rudyard Kipling’s poem of the same name.<sup>37</sup> Backed by missionization, the established white superiority argument exhibited itself through an applied definition of “civilization.”<sup>38</sup> This rhetoric took center stage in the narrative of colonization approaching the 20th century. Juxtaposed with the capitalist push for economic growth that emphasized Africa as an important industrial tool in the colonial system, “civilization” created a solid 19th century justification of imperialism.

Meanwhile, a proper international celebrity, Stanley hoped to secure British funding for another expedition with his goal to “flash a torch of light” in the “Dark [African] Continent.”<sup>39</sup> To the “civilized,” western world, Africa symbolized a “dark,” untamed, and godless land. Despite its continued use in several European colonies, the enslavement of and against other peoples grew unpopular and was viewed more negatively closer to the turn of the 20th century the more widespread “civilization” became.<sup>40</sup> A solution to this hypocrisy emerged through missionization and exploration, bringing God and “civilization” to Africa in order to circumvent

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<sup>36</sup> Contemporaries of this 19th and 20th century period used “civilization” and “civilized” with racist connotations. For this reason my use of “civilization” in this thesis will be in quotations to reflect its problematic history.

<sup>37</sup> Rudyard Kipling. “The White Man’s Burden.” (Kipling Society, 1899), [https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems\\_burden.htm](https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poem/poems_burden.htm).

<sup>38</sup> The rhetoric of and belief in “civilization” remains throughout the 20th and into the 21st century. This canon is later applied to the narrative of “development” in a “post-colonial” world.

<sup>39</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 27, 57, 59.

<sup>40</sup> The UK and U.S. introduced laws prohibiting the slave trade, including the Slave Trade Act of 1807 and the Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves of 1808, respectively. “An Act of March 2, 1807, to Prohibit the Importation of Slaves,” (General Records of the United States Government). “An Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 25th March 1807,” (Electronic Scholarly Publishing).

rising criticism of the brutal image of slavery. Another solution manifested in the selected war against the “Arab slave trade”<sup>41</sup> in eastern Africa. Leopold aimed to piggyback the war in order to further his claim on his selected colonial target: the Congo basin.<sup>42</sup> With Stanley in addition to this powerful rhetoric, Leopold had free “reign.” Adam Hochschild, author of *King Leopold’s Ghost*, summarized the monarch’s solution.

[Leopold] had learned from his many attempts to buy a colony that none was for sale; he would have to conquer it. Doing this openly, however, was certain to upset both the Belgian people and the major powers of Europe. If he was to seize anything in Africa, he could do so only if he convinced everyone that his interest was purely altruistic.<sup>43</sup>

In order to effectively present an altruistic and humanitarian guise, Leopold arranged the first of what would become a thick web of organizations and companies. In 1876, Leopold hosted a geographical conference that established the *Association Internationale Africaine* (AIA), or the International African Association.<sup>44</sup> At this conference the king invited the most notable geographers, explorers, and businessmen from across all of Europe, to Brussels. Hochschild described how “between sumptuous banquets, those attending the conference pulled out their maps and marked points in the blank space of central Africa for such ‘hospitable, scientific, and pacification bases.’”<sup>45</sup> Leopold charmed the international committee with philanthropic rhetoric,

<sup>41</sup> The “Arab slave trade” refers to a general tradition European merchants and governments co-opted for their colonial goals throughout the eastern African continent. Now amid “civilization” rhetoric, the Arab slave trade needed to be destroyed.

<sup>42</sup> Marouf Hasian. “Critical Intercultural Communication, Remembrances of George Washington Williams, and the Rediscovery of Léopold II’s “Crimes Against Humanity,”” *The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication*. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 314.

<sup>43</sup> Adam Hochschild. *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 46.

<sup>44</sup> Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja. *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People’s History*, 15. Hochschild. *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 45.

<sup>45</sup> *Leopold’s speech to the Geographical Conference*: reprinted in P.A. Roeykens, *Léopold II et la Conférence géographique de Bruxelles (1876)* Brussels: Académie Royale des Sciences Coloniales, 1956), 197-199, quoted by Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 45.

who voted the King of the Belgians Chairman and leader of the Association and its respective national chapters.<sup>46</sup> After this resounding success and first step to realizing his colony, Leopold directed his sights next on snatching up Stanley.

To do so Leopold recruited Henry Shelton Sanford, an American who continued to live in Brussels following his station as American minister to Belgium.<sup>47</sup> The king employed one of his strongest weapons—a monarch’s flattery and favor—upon Sanford. Successfully flattered, Sanford made the introduction between explorer and king. Leopold had a job offer for Stanley: to fund the explorer on another expedition to the African continent, this time under Leopold's direction. In 1879, Stanley began his five-year contract with instructions to set up the basic infrastructure that would make possible the future colonial Congo Free State, and the exploitation and incredible violence which followed in the next decades.<sup>48</sup> To bolster the humanitarian guise, Leopold intended to gild his true intentions in central Africa. In November of 1878, the king formed the *Comité d'études du Haut-Congo* (The Upper Congo Study Committee), ahead of Stanley’s departure back to the Congo River basin the following year.<sup>49</sup> In reality a financial syndicate, the Committee consisted of international stockholders including Dutch and English businessmen with resumés in ventures like the Imperial British East Africa Company. Belgian stockholders also participated, serving as Leopold’s financial proxy. Leopold, of course, served as the publicly altruistic president of the Committee.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 46. Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 15.

<sup>47</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 62.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>49</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 15-16.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. Hochschild. *King Leopold's Ghost*, 64.

Under the backing and name of the purely scientific Committee, Stanley returned back to West Central Africa along with a large, organized expedition in early 1879.<sup>51</sup> The explorer set up stations and posts along the Congo River and its tributaries “from Boma to Kisangani,” at Leopold’s direction.<sup>52</sup> These infrastructure projects established a significant route through which the king’s agents operated in the next decades. Congolese scholar Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja described how in places where the Congo River was not navigable, Stanley and the expedition team “used dynamite to build a road through rocky mountain ranges in Lower Congo.”<sup>53</sup> The vast lands and people of the Congo basin, reliant upon the Congo river and its tributaries, faced immense violence from Stanley through his expeditions before and during his tenure under Leopold’s direction. Many peoples along the Congo River escaped north into French territory.<sup>54</sup> Hochschild explains how Leopold attempted to mitigate any suspicion of the true colonial nature of Stanley and the Committee’s “civilizing” and “scientific” mission in central Africa, and to deter any other European empires sniffing around the potential jackpot. Leopold planted a “clause in the Committee’s charter that explicitly prohibited it from pursuing political [or colonial] ends.”<sup>55</sup> But within the end of the year, the Committee quietly dissolved and a new organization took its place. The *Association Internationale du Congo* (AIC or International Association of the Congo) represented a body eerily similar to the original International African Association (AIA) established three years prior.<sup>56</sup> Leopold created this new AIC what

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<sup>51</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 16.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 16. Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, 65.

<sup>53</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 16.

<sup>54</sup> Harms, *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow*, 226-227.

<sup>55</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 65.

<sup>56</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 16.

Nzongola-Ntalaja called a “wholly Belgian operation,”<sup>57</sup> once again under the king’s control. But unlike the old Committee, Leopold did not limit the AIC’s activities to non-political, i.e., colonial matters.

Leopold’s African ambitions required territory, land often under the control of local leaders and groups. Out of all the tasks assigned to Stanley, the most important entailed maintaining the conventional imperialistic definition of “civilized” law-abiding action. Historian, Micheal A. Rutz wrote of how to do so, Stanley “[acquired] treaties with African chiefs acknowledging the association’s sovereignty over their territories.”<sup>58</sup> In his own book about his daring African expeditions, Stanley published one of the signed treaties.

The chiefs of Ngombi and Mafela recognise that it is highly desirable that the “Association Internationale Africaine” should, for the advancement of civilization and trade, be firmly established in their country. They therefore now, freely of their own accord, for themselves and their heirs and successors for ever, do give up to the said Association the sovereignty and all sovereign and governing rights to all their territories. They also promise to assist the said Association in its work of governing and civilising this country, and to use their influence with all the other inhabitants, with whose unanimous approval they make this treaty, to secure obedience to all laws made by the said Association, to assist by labour or otherwise, any works, improvements, or expeditions which the said Association shall cause at any time to be carried out in any part of these territories.<sup>59</sup>

The Chiefs of Ngombi and Mafela, Tonki and Mampuya respectively, recorded agreements are marked by an “X.” The circumstances under which Tonki and Mampuya “signed” the treaties are unrepresented. The treaty quoted above goes beyond any sort of fairness and true collaboration—both Tonki and Mampuya pledged “for themselves and their heirs and successors

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<sup>57</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 16.

<sup>58</sup> Rutz, *King Leopold’s Congo*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> Henry Morton Stanley, *The Congo and the Founding of Its Free State: A Story of Work and Exploration*, vol. II (New York, 1885), 195-196.

for ever” to give over their territory to the Association, i.e., to Stanley and Leopold’s regime. Stanley’s violent and murderous track record during his expeditions points to the answer that the explorer very much coerced these chiefs into “signing” a document they very likely did not understand.<sup>60</sup> To Leopold the means Stanley took did not matter—it did not matter what happened on the ground, as long as the European powers recognized and respected the king’s legitimate and autonomous claim over the Congo.

In the same treaty Stanley sourced in his book, there lies evidence of Leopold’s guiding instructions to create a “one united territory, to be henceforth known as the *New Confederacy*.”<sup>61</sup> Leopold envisioned a “confederation of free negro republics black tribes whose president would live in Europe and rule under the guidance of the Belgian king.”<sup>62</sup> Hochschild pointed out how this “illusion [echoed] the idea of a union of states, [which] was [especially] likely to appeal to an American audience.”<sup>63</sup> Leopold’s attempt for a colony in Africa competed with and skirted the territory of other powerful European nations. For Leopold, a supportive American audience potentially held power to sway their government—and the rest of the western world—to back the Belgian king when the monarch decided to put his African agenda in writing. The “signatures” Stanley collected, presenting a liberal and modern policy, bolstered the well established tradition and justification of missionization and civilization. Parallel to Stanley’s expeditions and the early inklings of a confederation of states, the establishment of mission stations along the Congo River characterized most of Euro-American activity in West Central Africa.

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<sup>60</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 50. Of the many accounts of Stanley’s violence, explorer and writer Richard Burton commented about his peer: “Stanley ‘shoots negroes as if they were monkeys’”.

<sup>61</sup> Stanley, *The Congo and the Founding of Its Free State*, 197.

<sup>62</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 67.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

## Two Fronts

By codifying the land under western terms as a nicely tucked blanket layer over this tangled web of syndicates and treaties, the King of the Belgians now had the ability to present his colonial project on the world stage. Leopold instructed Sanford to remain in the United States to lobby for the king's "philanthropic" project in the Congo River basin. Leopold understood the tense European colonial competition he faced in Africa. He believed the United States an important ally in his economic interests—economic interests gilded in philanthropy. Hochschild dramatized how in Washington, Sanford "passed around documents that thoroughly jumbled" the various associations and committees Leopold's name apposed.<sup>64</sup> As early as 1879, Sanford echoed Leopold's positive humanitarian rhetoric, along with the American's own personal capitalist "vision of ultimately great commercial opportunities for Americans in the Congo."<sup>65</sup> Sanford kept in contact with Secretary of State William M. Evarts to communicate that United States interests in central Africa hinged upon his Belgian connections. His efforts made significant headway, resulting in the US Navy Department sending a cruiser to the Congo to report on Sanford's insistence of a Portuguese threat to so-called "American rights there."<sup>66</sup> Sanford maintained political pressure on the US State Department and even made lobbies towards the New York Chamber of Commerce. With Leopold in his ear, Sanford recognized the economic importance that later led to the critical role of the United States' future participation in this private Leopoldian venture.

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<sup>64</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 81.

<sup>65</sup> Lysle E. Meyer, "Henry S. Sanford and the Congo: A Reassessment." *African Historical Studies* 4, no. 1 (Boston University African Studies Center, 1971), 26.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

While Leopold moved under the radar on two fronts, slowly infiltrating the United States and the Congo basin, the other European powers did not let up their incursions and very public interest in Africa for potential colonies. These rising interests and imperial tensions culminated in Berlin on November 15, 1884.<sup>67</sup> Hosted by Germany, representatives of the European powers plus the United States, gathered to discuss the “freedom of commerce” in central Africa.<sup>68</sup>

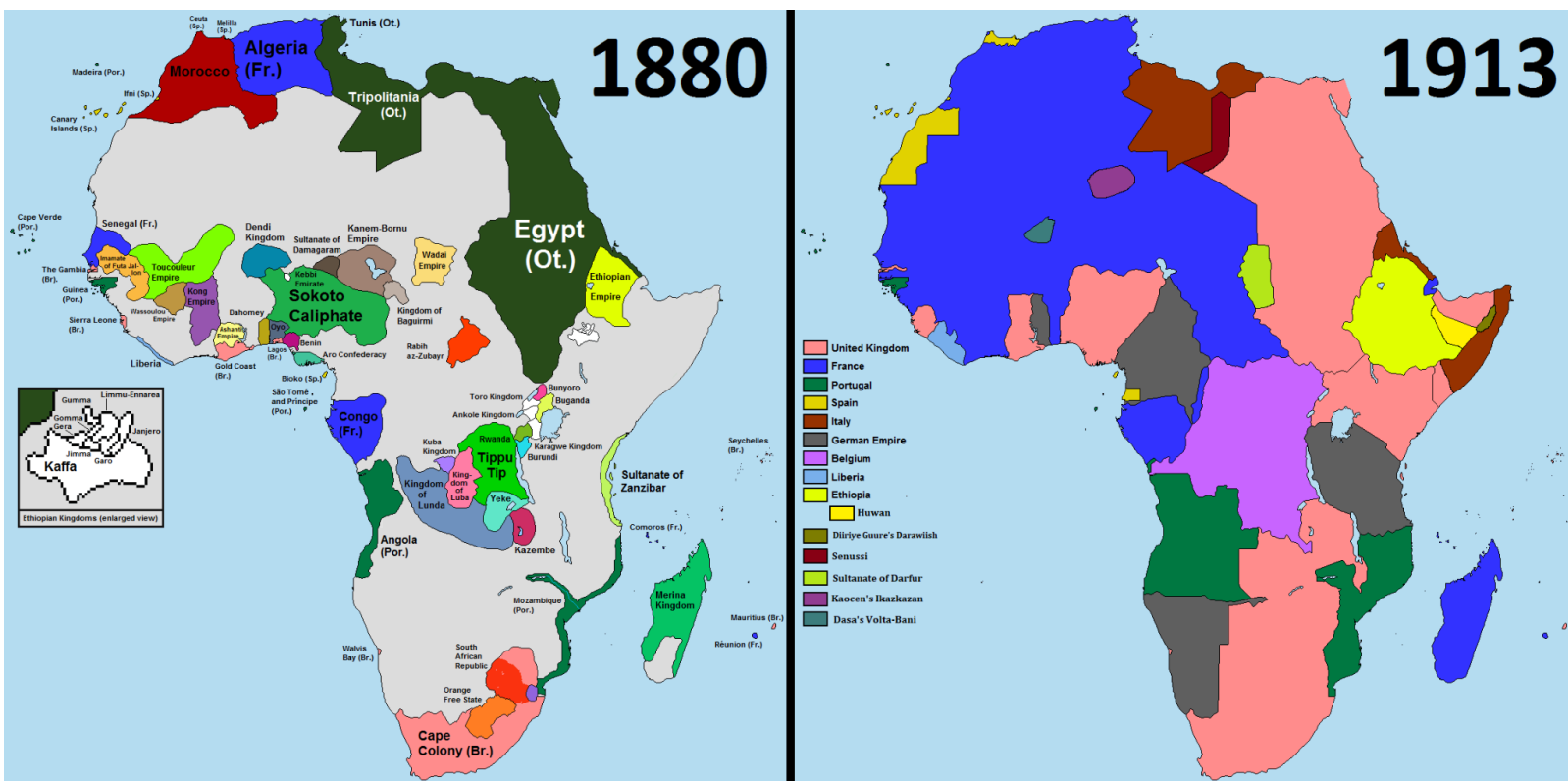


Figure 3. Qazaq2007's QBAM map from [alternatethistory.com](http://alternatethistory.com). Various sources used. “Scramble for Africa, 1880-1913.”

A discussion of “freedom of commerce,” a metaphor for who controlled what, existed as an attempt to prevent all out war for territory in Africa. In the late 19th century, blatant colonialism began to contradict the “civilization” narrative. Resorting to savage and barbaric war over

<sup>67</sup> Daniel, De Leon, “The Conference at Berlin on the West-African Question,” *Political Science Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1886): 127.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.



territory did not bode well for the public image of the imperial powers, and so the Berlin Conference provided a “civilized” solution. Before this embeddedness of “civilization”—a new form of superiority that ushered in the New Imperialism—and new technologies that sustained a modern system of communication, such precautions were much less necessary. Now Leopold and the rest of Europe (and the United States) needed to couch their actions and rhetoric in terms more pertinent.

Prior to the Berlin Conference, Leopold made every effort to bolster his claim on the Congo. With the help of Sanford, Secretary of State Frederick T. Frelinghuysen marked his seal of an official declaration of acknowledgment of Leopold’s claims in central Africa:

Government of the United States announces its sympathy with and approval of the humane and benevolent purposes of the International Association of the Congo, administering, as it does, the interests of the Free States there established, and will order the officers of the United States, both on land and sea, to recognize the flag of the International African Association as the flag of a friendly Government.<sup>69</sup>

Frelinghuysen used the names of two different Leopoldian organizations in the very same sentence. The scientific and philanthropic flurry of jargon worked. Following this address the Secretary of State also made plans to send American delegates to the Berlin Conference. Hearing from Sanford the commercial benefits of American national association with Leopold’s project, the budding economic power became the first nation to acknowledge Leopold in the Congo in an official capacity.

One of the main topics discussed in Berlin regarded an important concern for Europe, namely the Arab slave trade. The Arab world symbolized a major threat to the Christianized “civilization” Europe promised to bring to the “Dark Continent,” so it did not matter if Europe

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<sup>69</sup> Frederick T. Frelinghuysen. April 22, 1884. “Declaration by the International Association of the Congo.” *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, Transmitted to Congress, With the Annual Message of the President, December 8, 1885*, no. 224, (Office of the Historian).

benefited from forms of forced labor in their own capacity. Sharing “civilization” and saving souls entailed whatever means necessary. White Europe aimed to enter central Africa to protect the natives who were unable to protect themselves from invading Arab society. The powers met at Berlin in order to drive out the Arab slave masters and assert their “civilized” and “benevolent” intentions as the new protectors. Leopold, already an expert in this altruistic ruse, made rounds expressing interest in being the sole savior of the Congo basin. His lobbying included continued efforts on the other side of the Atlantic. On December 1, 1884, while the Conference was still in session, President Arthur emphasized his commitment to Leopold’s claim.

I recognized the flag of the International Association of the Kongo as that of a friendly government, avoiding in so doing any prejudgment of conflicting territorial claims in that region... The importance of the rich prospective trade of the Kongo Valley has led to the general conviction that it should be open to all nations upon equal terms. At an international conference for the consideration of this subject called by the Emperor of Germany, and now in session at Berlin, delegates are in attendance on behalf of the United States.<sup>70</sup>

The other nations at the Conference who valued the easier and familiar African coastline over the uncharted and more expensive African interior, welcomed Leopold’s big ambitions and pockets. For the United States especially, the positives of the monarch’s venture far outweighed any downsides, if any. Leopold offered to do all the heavy-lifting and risk-taking for the other nations, who only sought to profit from potential commercial opportunities.

Regardless of how expensive and daunting West Central Africa stood, why did the rest of Europe let this upstart Belgian king take such a large and potentially profitable piece of land under their watch? Nzongola-Ntalaja contests the traditional view of the Conference—not as the

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<sup>70</sup> Chester A. Arthur. December 1, 1884. “Fourth Annual Message.” *The American Presidency Project*, (UC Santa Barbara), <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/fourth-annual-message-12>.

culmination of the Scramble for Africa, an idea often circulated. He identified the infamous Berlin Conference as the “partition on paper,” while the real Scramble for Africa exhibited itself in the years that followed, what Nzongola-Ntalaja calls the “partition on the ground.”<sup>71</sup> At the Berlin Conference, Europe (and the new addition of the United States) created the terms by which imperial colonial infiltration in Africa abided. Belgian historian Guy Vanthemsche summarized the most critical point. “One of these terms stipulated that the so-called Conventional Congo basin was and would remain an area of free trade and free navigation. No right of entry could be levied there; everybody would be able to trade freely and on equal footing.”<sup>72</sup> The powers gave Leopold the go-ahead for the king’s dream dominion in the Congo, letting the king take the burden of payment as ruler. On paper Leopold could be sovereign, but on the ground it was every man for himself. In the Berlin Act, signed on February 26, 1885, Leopold obtained his Congo accepting applause for his civilizing philanthropy. The rest of Europe left the table assuming they would be granted market and access privileges. Leopold took almost a decade of precautionary measures before publicizing his interests at the Berlin Conference. The monarch knew he needed to beat the other powers to the punch, barely waiting until the ink dried. In May of 1885, Leopold named his acquisition under the required liberal pretense with the title “Congo Free State.”

Unlike the brutal, evil image depicted of Leopold in the 21st century, in the mid 19th century to the public he portrayed the perfect image of a thoughtful benefactor and progressive imperialist kind enough to invest his own time and money in the “civilizing” African mission.<sup>73</sup> Even in his *Autobiography*, W.E.B. Du Bois believed Leopold’s new State would bring about the

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<sup>71</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 18.

<sup>72</sup> Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885-1980*, 21.

<sup>73</sup> Hasian, “Critical Intercultural Communication, Remembrances of George Washington Williams, and the Rediscovery of Léopold II’s “Crimes Against Humanity”,” 314.

“[advancement] of civilization and the benevolent tutelage of barbarians,” especially opposed to “the slave trade and liquor.”<sup>74</sup> There existed hope for a new market and new opportunities. Little did Europe and the United States know the true nature of the king’s already violent regime, meanwhile content to pursue their own agendas.

### **The Congo “Free State”**

Every colonial project has a formula: accessible land, abundant resources, a labor force, government, and military enforcement to enact the regime’s will—combined and executed properly meant a profitable colonial venture.

Having secured the land, next on the agenda was a governing body that the regime would operate under. Despite Leopold’s established claim on the Congo basin in writing, the clause of free trade in the region created an obstacle—an obstacle Leopold anticipated. According to the Berlin Conference and the Berlin Act, “effective occupation was the empirical test for legitimate claims to a colonial territory.”<sup>75</sup> Although Leopold held the formal humanitarian claim, any European power had the opportunity to invade the king’s territory. With this in mind, Leopold and Stanley intensified their efforts, utilizing the existing bases and stations along the Congo River and throughout the basin to officially declare occupation. While Stanley worked on the ground in the river basin, back in Belgium Leopold filled in the gaps in the definition of his Congo Free State. Because the State belonged to the king specifically, not the country of Belgium, Leopold formed an “international” body to govern his property. Scholars in the 19th century, like Jesse Siddall Reeves, identified the familiar model.

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<sup>74</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *The Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois : A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century*, (New York : International Publishers, 1991), 143.

<sup>75</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 18.

The Congo Free State, as it was established, took the character of an absolute monarchy and of an autocratic government. The King-Sovereign personifies the State and the government. In its last analysis, all legislation emanates from him, and from him come all the powers of government... If complete independence and sovereignty were accorded the Congo Free State, the relations between its ministers and those of Belgium would be only those of international law.

The local government in the Congo Valley was organized by a decree of March 26, 1886, in which were outlined the powers of the Administrator-General on the Congo... In July 1886, two new bodies were instituted, one, the Local Executive Committee... and the other, the Local consultative Committee, was charged with the examination of all measures of general interest... The latter was given larger powers, and in authority resembles the governor of an ordinary English crown colony.<sup>76</sup>

Leopold established this initial structure from existing colonial models as a means to control and enforce his sovereignty. In word only was this structure truly international and removed from Belgian interests. Belgian officials and officers dominated the Congo Free State government. Any foreign interference, Leopold worked to oust from the get-go.

Government: check. Land and an initial governing body necessitated a military and labor force to occupy. Given the fact that people of the river basin lived in the territory the king claimed did not share the same economic system, and their lands were being coerced and stolen out of their possession, Leopold needed an incentive to obtain their labor capability. The native population of the Congo basin presented an opportunity to take advantage of an age-old want: cheap, or better yet, *free* labor. How could Leopold's regime harness this untapped labor force? Nzongola-Ntalaja expressed how following Stanley's suggestion, Leopold "[collaborated] with the Swahili-Arabs, as the latter provided the CFS with 'freed slaves' as laborers and soldiers in exchange for money."<sup>77</sup> Through these slave traders, Leopold established his military presence in

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<sup>76</sup> Jesse Siddall Reeves, *The International Beginnings of the Congo Free State*. (Johns Hopkins Press, 1894), 78-79.

<sup>77</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 21.

his Congo Free State, infamously known as the *Force Publique*. By the early twentieth century, this private military force “consisted of roughly 19,000 African soldiers.”<sup>78</sup> The power structure of the *Force Publique* relied upon imported Belgian officers to oversee the soldiers—soldiers who were often taken from their homes and lives to be thrown into the Leopoldian system quickly overtaking the lower Congo River. Officially the *Force Publique* existed to end the Arab slave trade, while many of the soldiers themselves were slaves.<sup>79</sup> Belgian officers and overseers often enforced their orders through violence or the threat of violence. Testimony from John and Johan, two former soldiers in the *Force Publique*, spoke of how their white Belgian overseers “let them do whatever they like, they rape, murder and steal everything of the inhabitants, and if the chief or villagers object they are often shot dead on the spot.”<sup>80</sup> The *Force Publique* existed as many armed groups do, often unchecked and prone to violence.

Military and labor force: check. Now with a capable enforcement to an ample labor force, Leopold simply needed to direct the target. What resources had the most value and were profitable for western markets? In 1888, the invention of the inflatable rubber tire created a demand for natural rubber.<sup>81</sup> Leopold capitalized on this new market, identifying rubber as the top commodity he could profit off—rubber vines abundant in the forests of the Congo basin. Stanley, who made the most contact with existing trade networks and local authority along the Congo River, notably the notorious and powerful slave trader Tippu Tip,<sup>82</sup> reported back to

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<sup>78</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 22.

<sup>79</sup> Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885-1980*, 22.

<sup>80</sup> “John and Johan, Statement to a British Consular Official, March 19, 1903,” *E.D. Morel Collection* (Archives of the London School of Economics), cited by Kevin Grant, *The Congo Free State and the New Imperialism* (Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2017), 55.

<sup>81</sup> Rutz, *King Leopold’s Congo*, 12.

<sup>82</sup> *Maisha ya Hamed bin Muhammed el Murjebi yaani TIPPU TIP Kwa maneno yake mwenyewe*, historical introduction by Alison Smith, translated by W. H. Whiteley, Supplement to the *East African Swahili Committee Journals* No. 28/2, July 1958 and No. 29/1, January 1959, pp. 109, 111–13, quoted by Michael A. Rutz, *King*

Leopold the potential of ivory as another profitable commodity. Ivory used in European ornate pieces and instruments, proved to be a consistent secondary means of income.<sup>83</sup>

Resources: check. By 1890, Leopold arranged all the machine cogs and all he needed to do was keep the fire, i.e., the money going. The bones of the system in place, Leopold began creating companies to fund and manage the different avenues and areas of exploitation. Leopold first tapped his Belgian contacts for any interest in investing in his venture. The king aimed to gain financial investment and the guise of free international trade, while at the same time keep majority control over his new State. By reaching out to Belgium businessman Albert Thys, Leopold pursued the best avenue to do just that. With Thys' help Leopold collected what Belgian financiers he could convince to contribute to this expensive venture. The year following the Berlin Conference and the establishment of the Congo Free State, the *Compagnie du Congo pour le commerce et L'industrie* (CCCI) formed—the first Belgian private business in the Congo.<sup>84</sup> Later founding many subsidiaries and active throughout the 20th century, the CCCI became what Nzongola-Ntalaja called the “the dean of Congo trusts.”<sup>85</sup> Further financial constructions added to a growing collection of Leopold's puppets in the Congo, creating a complex series of relationships in which Leopold believed he acted as the puppetmaster. Vanthemsche highlighted “between 1886 and 1896, just thirteen ‘Congolese’ companies had been founded in Belgium. Five more firms were established in 1897, sixteen in the year after that, and no fewer than

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*Leopold's Congo and the “Scramble for Africa”: A short History with Documents*, Document 1, p. 25-28. In 1887, Tippu Tip was appointed governor of the eastern Congo, specifically the Stanley Falls district. He served as such until 1892,” Rutz, Chronology.

<sup>83</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 159.

<sup>84</sup> Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885-1980*, 148.

<sup>85</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History*, 30.

twenty-eight in 1899.”<sup>86</sup> Leopold did include some foreign capital in his initial private concessions but in all of the king’s enterprises, he made sure to keep a majority stake. If not himself, Leopold put emphasis on Belgian investors holding his interest in proxy. Only the foreign capital of companies Leopold had a stake in, did he let have a foothold in his Congo—the monarch needed to keep up appearances on the global stage.

By the late-1890s, Leopold bought out most foreign shares in the growing conglomerates operating in his Congo Free State. The multitude of companies expanded their interests in various avenues of colony-building.<sup>87</sup> In the early years of the Congo Free State, the focus remained on true infrastructure, with the intention of resource extraction, most notably the construction of the Lower Congo railroad.<sup>88</sup> Stanley had secured the Congo River for Leopold but emerging British interest in southern Africa and subsequent gold fever required the king to expand his thorough occupation to the southern Congo basin and the Katanga region.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885-1980*, 148-149.

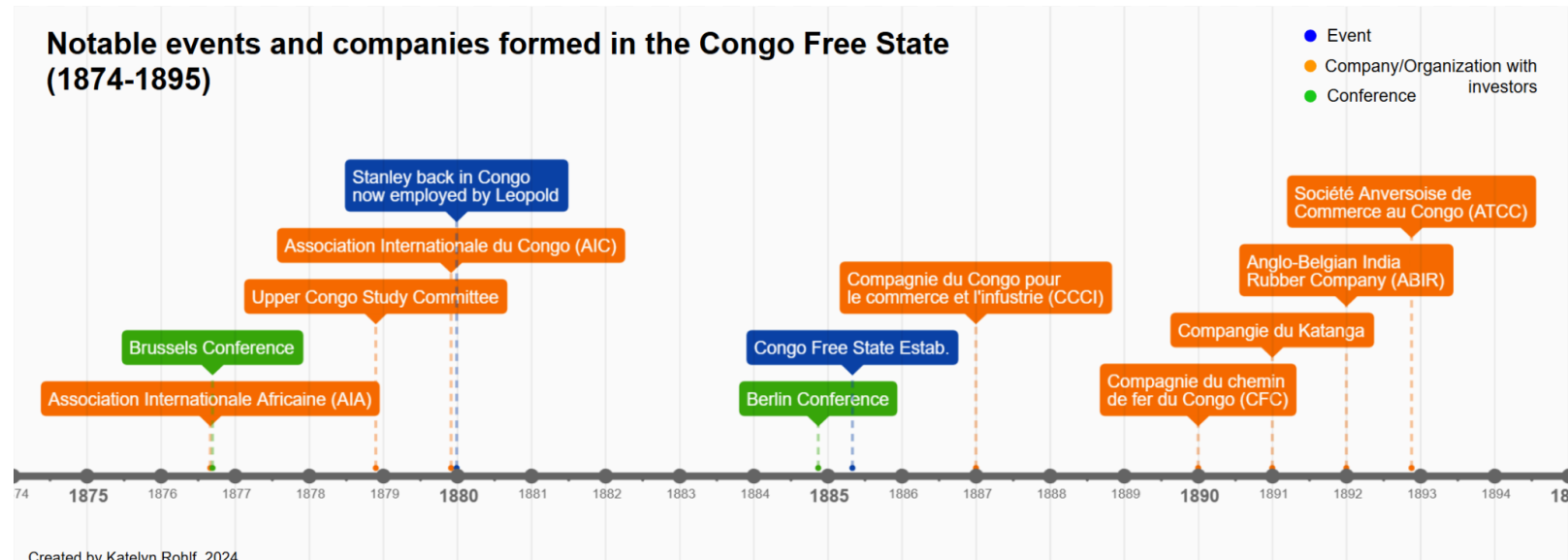
<sup>87</sup> The CCCI “[was] created to promote industry, commerce, agriculture, finance and public works.” Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People’s History*, 30. Most notably, this goal of development manifested in building the Lower Congo Railway.

<sup>88</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 30.

<sup>89</sup> In the coming decades, the Katanga region panned out to be one of the most profitable regions in the Congo basin, rich in mineral reserves.



## Notable events and companies formed in the Congo Free State (1874-1895)



Leopold made use of the land he and Stanley occupied and coerced from local leaders to create a new phenomenon: “vacant lands”. In 1891 Leopold’s regime defined “vacant lands”<sup>90</sup> as any territory without human settlement or crops under cultivation, even though these territories often served as hunting or agricultural land.<sup>91</sup> These “vacant lands” existed in the public domain and under the sovereign’s control, i.e., under Leopold’s ownership. Journalist and author E.D. Morel described how much of the Congo Free State with “a stroke of the pen”<sup>92</sup> was declared public domain or “private domain of state,”<sup>93</sup> placing a significant amount of land under the king’s control. Any scientific or humanitarian goals did not exist. The seizure of “vacant lands” formed the core of what became known as the Leopoldian *système domanial* or domain system.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Leopold’s “vacant lands” tap into the Doctrine of Discovery utilized by European colonizers. Under this doctrine, any land could be declared “*terra nullius*,” Latin for vacant land or no man’s land, if it was not occupied by Christians. If “vacant,” meant the land open to claim. Commission of Canada. *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation* (Library and Archives Canada, 2015), 18.

<sup>91</sup> Grant, *The Congo Free State and the New Imperialism*, 13.

<sup>92</sup> E.D. Morel. *The Congo Slave State. A Protest against the New African Slavery ; And an Appeal To the Public of Great Britain, of the United States, and the Continent of Europe.* (John Richardson & Sons, 1903), 12.

<sup>93</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 22.

<sup>94</sup> Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885-1980*, 22.

This domain system and the invented “vacant lands” instructed that any natural resources found belonged to the Congo Free State, and Leopold had every right to hand out or refuse concessions and ownership as he saw fit. The monopolization of “vacant lands” took land away from Leopold’s financial collaborators who anticipated they could have obtained much of the territory he declared for himself. What the monarch lobbied and promoted, his Congo as a “Free State,” never existed in practice. Part of the domainal system, a taxation decree emerged. For the regions that could not be declared “vacant,”<sup>95</sup> and remained home to local communities, a relative tax enforced payment from the respective leaders. “The system [was] calculated to legitimise every form of plunder and injustice.”<sup>96</sup> In conjunction with taxation, locals—subject to forced slave labor to harvest rubber and ivory—were forbidden to collect any resources for their own capital. In combination with Leopold’s corporate monopolization of most land in the Congo basin, the Congo “Free State” ceased to be so in any sense.

Now that the exploitative apparatus was in place, King Leopold quickly set out to profit off the land, stripping the region (80 times the size of his home country, Belgium) of its resources.<sup>97</sup> While basin peoples were forced into this system of exploitation, resistance to Leopold’s regime existed both internally and externally. Soldiers of the *Force Publique* crushed rebellions led by local leaders while simultaneously engaging in mutinies of their own against their white Belgian officers.<sup>98</sup> In 1891 the Congo Free State instituted law outlining rubber

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<sup>95</sup> With Stanley, Leopold already occupied much of the eastern Lower Congo region. The majority of declared vacant lands remained in the western side of the Congo basin.

<sup>96</sup> F. Cattier. *Droit et Administration de l’Etat Indépendant du Congo* (1898), quoted in E.D. Morel. *The Congo Slave State. A Protest against the New African Slavery ; And an Appeal To the Public of Great Britain, of the United States, and the Continent of Europe*, 12.

<sup>97</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People’s History*, 20.

<sup>98</sup> Rutz, *King Leopold’s Congo and the “Scramble for Africa,”* 9. “The Belgian Officials hanged the soldiers for their bad behavior. They hanged so many that this created a vengeance to such an extent that all soldiers formed a ring under the headman, at that time the sergeant called Yankoffu; with the object to kill all officers at the different stations on and near the Lake Tanganyika,” “John and Johan, Statement to a British Consular Official, March 19,

quotas, requiring a “supply [of] labor, rubber, and ivory to Leopold’s agents.”<sup>99</sup> Belgian overseers adopted the infamous practice of requiring a severed hand or foot as proof of necessary violence to prevent the waste of cartridges. This led to *Force Publique* soldiers, who often used their given arms for hunting, to mutilate both those who had not met their rubber quota, as well as innocent civilians. The incredible violence exhibited at the direction of Leopold supported by financiers and global powers reached horrific levels. With any written record lost or non-existent, Hochschild utilized the estimate of Belgian anthropologist, Jan Vansima, who completed ethnography in the Congo: during Leopold’s tenure and the years of transition into a colony, the Congo’s population was cut by half, at the least.<sup>100</sup> Parallel to estimates of the population, Hochschild estimates the conservative death toll of Congolese at Leopold’s hands to total at 10 million. Nzongola-Ntalaja importantly noted how “the harsh exploitation of the Congolese population was not merely a consequence of Leopold’s greed; it was a consequences [sic.], an essential and specific feature of this unusual ‘private’ style of colonization.”<sup>101</sup> All financial interest, exhibited through resource and labor-based colonial exploitation, participated alongside a brutal genocidal system.

While Leopold and his financiers plundered the Congo, a slow trickle of reports of the violence and exploitation against the peoples of the river basin made their way to Europe and the United States. The activist forces of George Washington Williams, Joseph Conrad, Roger

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1903,” *E.D. Morel Collection* (Archives of the London School of Economics), cited by Kevin Grant, *The Congo Free State and the New Imperialism*.

<sup>99</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 22.

<sup>100</sup> Jan Vansima, Daniel Vangroenweghe, *Rood Rubber: Leopold II En Zijn Kongo*, (Elsevier 1985) Preface. Quoted by Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 233.

<sup>101</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 23. More on “vacant lands” from Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885-1980*, 22, and Rutz, *King Leopold’s Congo and the “Scramble for Africa,”* 12.

Casement, and E. D. Morel were among the first to write and publish their findings, attracting what attention they could to the human rights crisis. In 1904, Morel gathered together the most notable figures and activists across Europe and America to form the Congo Reform Association. Figures like Dr. William Morrison and Alice Seeley Harris with her husband John Harris, part of the American chapter of the Congo Reform Association, traveled the nation with their spoken testimony of the atrocities they witnessed and photographed. Prominent authors such as Arthur Conan Doyle and Mark Twain also contributed with published writings. Over the next years the Congo Reform Association, through speeches, pamphlets, and other writings, gathered mass public support across Europe and the United States against the genocide sanctioned by King Leopold. By late 1904, enough public pressure had formed that the king could no longer ignore it and was forced to call a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the accusations made against his Congo Free State.<sup>102</sup> Leopold's personal Commission returned, unsurprisingly, with minimal evidence. The Congo Reform Association issued their own research the following year, aimed at providing a "concise and readable form" of their evidence to circumvent Leopold's evasion of the clear incrimination of the Congo Free State.<sup>103</sup> The Congo Reform Association's efforts made an important difference. In 1908 King Leopold faced global pressure and Belgium forced their king to give up his Congo Free State.

However, in the years leading up to Leopold's abdication of the Congo Free State, as he desperately struggled to cling to his dream, Leopold turned to his first ally: the United States. The Belgian monarch identified the growing ambitions of American financiers, such as Guggenheim, Rockefeller, and Morgan. Accompanied by rhetoric of "civilization" and the

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<sup>102</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 250. Congo Reform Association, *Evidence laid before the Congo Commission of Inquiry*, (Drew University Methodist Archives, 1905).

<sup>103</sup> Congo Reform Association, *Evidence laid before the Congo Commission of Inquiry*..

Scramble for Africa, together Leopold and the soon-to-be American syndicate's aligned interests contributed to the unique and modern form of imperialism, defining the future of the Congo.

## Chapter 2: The American Frontier

As pressure mounted on him and his colonial project, Leopold grew increasingly desperate. Unlike the personal monopoly policy he carefully crafted over the previous decades, in the early years of the 20th century, the king actively sought out investment from American business and financiers—financiers of such note they still are household names in the 21st century. Why did Leopold put such high value on American industry specifically?

### Industrial Revolution

The decades leading to the 20th century in America crafted a phenomenon in the nation's economic sector. The American version of the First and Second Industrial Revolution looked a little different than in Europe. The second half of the 19th century in the United States, studied as the Reconstruction period, entailed national systemic shifts. After the American Civil War ended in 1865, the most immediate and visible changes took place in the American South. But when studying the wider scope of political and economic history, Reconstruction contributed to American economic and foreign policy. This turbulent and revolutionary period directly made possible the scope and impact of the 20th century global shift in the United States and the connected global economy.

The First Industrial Revolution at the turn into the 19th century hurled the young United States into an industrial complex the commerce sector rushed to bolster, and further for their own profit. To support the new economy made possible by the recent boom of inventions and in industries, the United States fell into a model continuously studied—what sociologist and economic historian Immanuel Wallerstein developed as the “world-system.”<sup>104</sup> He divided up the

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<sup>104</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Duke University Press, 2004), 17.

world into areas defined as “core” juxtaposed to areas defined as “periphery.” The economically based relationship between core and periphery still splits up the colonial world that remains in the 21st century. Wallerstein defined the “core” as mostly powerful European entities who exploit the resources and labor of the periphery, and the periphery” defined as the less “developed”<sup>105</sup> countries whose role is demoted to production and hard labor. The core-periphery relationship can be identified between countries, as well as within countries.<sup>106</sup> Historian of business, Alfred D. Chandler Jr., detailed how “in the decade and a half before the Civil War, as the availability of coal and the introduction of coal-using technologies brought fundamental changes in the processes of production [and] the railroad and the telegraph were also beginning to transform the processes of distribution.”<sup>107</sup> The old plantation South, with free labor from slavery, exported raw materials (most famously cotton) to the North. The North processed these materials and distributed the finished goods. These commercial processes between the North and South paralleled the growth of the newly established railroad industry. In response to the needs of railroad financing, the New York financial district inserted itself into the processes of receiving and distribution—the space by which the core-periphery, North-South interacted. Chandler claimed that “by the outbreak of the Civil War, the New York financial district... had become one of the largest and most sophisticated capital markets in the world.”<sup>108</sup> The railroad industry sustained the most profitable business in many different sectors, including lumber, steel,

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<sup>105</sup> I invoke James Ferguson’s critique of “development” as a description of periphery areas which he argues are kept in a state of “underdevelopment” to continue exploitation by the core. James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine* (University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

<sup>106</sup> Within the United States in the first half of the 20th century, the North and South existed much like a core and periphery, akin to the urban-hinterland model in William Cronon’s *Nature’s Metropolis*. William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1991).

<sup>107</sup> Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Belknap Press, 1997), 77.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

and coal—not to mention the business of transportation. Families like the Vanderbilts, Carnegies, Rockefellers, and others, got their financial boost during the height of the railroad.

The existence of the railroad paved the way for a modern economy capable of a level of production and distribution never seen before. The mid-19th century also saw a threat to the elevated levels of progress and industry, in the form of the American Civil War. The Civil War decimated the North-South core-periphery arrangement that contributed to the recent economic booms. The shaky First Industrial Revolution economy fell apart. The existing economic instability that followed the Panic of 1837 stressed the system further. Post-Civil War the shift in the power structure of the internal North-South core-periphery American industrial model became more prominent. Slavery no longer providing a consistent free means of labor, American historian, Walter LaFeber, described how “the Civil War marked the transference of power from the planters to industrialists and financiers.”<sup>109</sup> In *The New Empire* LaFeber followed this up with an emphasis of legislation passed like the Homestead Act and high tariffs. Howard Zinn also noted this shift when he quoted Morton Horwitz’s summary.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the legal system had been reshaped to the advantage of men of commerce and industry at the expense of farmers, workers, consumers, and other less powerful groups within the society... it actively promoted a legal distribution of wealth against the weakest groups in society.<sup>110</sup>

The obliteration of the slave labor force for the entire nation—alongside the entire national production apparatus that exported to both the north and overseas markets—impacted the North-South core-periphery system, manifesting in post-war economic turmoil.

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<sup>109</sup> Walter LaFeber. *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Cornell University Press, 1963), 7.

<sup>110</sup> Morton J. Horwitz, *The Transformation of American Law, 1780–1860* (Harvard University Press, 1977), 253. Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States* (HarpersCollins Publishers, 1980), 239-240.



Stuck in between the First and Second Industrial Revolutions—the bookends to the 19th century—and the economic collapses that characterized these periods of rapid growth, the end of the Civil War signaled a shift in rising American economic hegemony. In *Standing at Armageddon*, Nell Irvin Painter identified these periods as “pendulum swings.” The industrialization that characterized this century created great cities and new inventions but “also intensified the swings between fat times and lean.”<sup>111</sup> What Painter called “lean times” occurred regularly: “1873-1879, 1882-1885, 1883-1897”—excluding periods in the early 20th century.<sup>112</sup> The strikes and violence that accompanied the “lean times” culminated in what Painter called “the bloody eighties,” especially in the Great Upheaval of 1886.<sup>113</sup> At each swing of the pendulum, the increasingly industrialized economy grabbed more and more capital from the “lean” side of the pendulum. Fewer and fewer individuals monopolized industries at the expense of citizens. Andrew Carnegie’s “Carnegie Steel Company” introduced one of the most famous examples of such monopolization through both horizontal and vertical integration. These pressures, in addition to the immense number of European and Asian immigrants arriving in the United States during the late 19th century, contributed to the economic turmoil. LaFeber described the depressions: “It was truly twenty years of boom hidden in twenty years of crisis.”<sup>114</sup> Painter identified how the consistent economic turmoil “[multiplied] the numbers of middle-class people living among the poor,” and made clear the need to “redouble the search for

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<sup>111</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), x-xi.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, xxivvv.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>114</sup> LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898*, 9.

remedies.”<sup>115</sup> Amid intense economic pressures, how could the United States keep the general population content and able to work, without sacrificing the big bucks of their industrial giants?

### **The Frontier**

The American industrial machine needed a solution to the threatening spasms upon its shaky engine. The position of American industry still depended much upon foreign markets, none more than the agricultural sector.<sup>116</sup> LaFeber highlighted how not only did this dependence increase post-Civil War, but “with each panic and depression the American business community displayed a reintensified interest in foreign markets.”<sup>117</sup> His conclusions coincided with more conversations of an American frontier.

The United States, from the revolutionary period, consistently draws upon the imagery and ideology of the American frontier. The “American Frontier” concept originally represented a literal physical colonization of the continent from east to west, but eventually developed into a rhetoric much more familiar to the average American of the 21st century. The so-called patriotic ideals of America we know today—progress, expansion, “civilization,” freedom—grew from rhetoric originally based upon literal colonization. This rhetoric was then applied to business practices, more commonly identified by the name capitalism. The industrial revolutions of the 19th century pushed capitalism to the forefront of business practice in the western world, no more so than in the United States. Unlike Europe, the United States’ obsession with capitalism, the frontier, and the expansion of markets developed from a unique passion.<sup>118</sup> With the goal of

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<sup>115</sup> Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919*, 109.

<sup>116</sup> LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898*, 9.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>118</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Volume II, (The Henry Reeve Text Revised by Francis Bowen, 1945).

joining Europe on the western global stage, the United States crafted a special economic character. So what differentiated the American people from Europe? The answer for Fredrick Jackson Turner was the frontier.

On July 12, 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner (a young Associate Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin) delivered his thesis at the American Historical Association Conference in Chicago. Titled “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” the essay, often shorthand as “The Frontier Thesis,” became an essential element for understanding the American peoples’ relationship to the west and is commonly featured in American history textbooks. Turner linked the idea of being an American to the land, and in turn the frontier. Not only did he establish this binary relationship but Turner claimed the “frontier [as] the line of most rapid and effective Americanization.”<sup>119</sup> Boiled down, Turner’s thesis and the process of “Americanization” can be summed up formulaically: *European colonist + American wilderness/frontier = a true American*. The European colonist arrived to American shores and by greeting, and ultimately taming, the savage wilderness with his “civilization”, transformed both the land and himself.<sup>120</sup> This transformative experience reliant upon the land—the American frontier—produced a true American, different from the original European settler. According to Turner, to become a true American necessitated a “continuous touch [with] primitive society,” which “furnish[es] the forces dominating American character.”<sup>121</sup> He opened up his speech claiming that “American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier.”<sup>122</sup> The search for a remedy and solution to such upheaval and turmoil turned back to

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<sup>119</sup> Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” July 12, 1893, 2.

<sup>120</sup> I use the pronoun “he/him” to refer to the American colonist, due to the reality that cis-gendered men were the primary enactors of the “civilizing” of the American continent.

<sup>121</sup> Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” 1.

<sup>122</sup> Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” 1.

what had consistently defined the United States. Although this process of “Americanization” differed from the European ideal of “civilization,” the American frontier produced a tested and victorious version of “civilization.” Being American created an arguably superior individual, perpetuating the idea of American exceptionalism. Now having endured the Industrial Revolution and tumultuous economic crisis, Turner applied this model to contemporary industrialized society rapidly approaching the 20th century.

Before long the frontier created a demand for merchants. As it retreated from the coast it became less and less possible for England to bring her supplies directly to the consumer's wharfs and carry away staple crops, and staple crops began to give way to diversified agriculture for a time. The effect of this phase of the frontier action upon the northern section is perceived when we realize how the advance of the frontier aroused seaboard cities like Boston, New York, and Baltimore, to engage in rivalry for what Washington called ‘the extensive and valuable trade of a rising empire.’

The legislation which most developed the powers of the national government, and played the largest part in its activity, was conditioned on the frontier.

So long as free land exists, the opportunity for a competency exists, and economic power secures political power.<sup>123</sup>

Turner provided the solution to all the economic problems the United States faced: a continued frontier, i.e., “free land.” If the United States secured a new frontier, the economy promised assured guaranteed security for the nation as a whole. The violence and instability would be quelled and industry would be able to operate in the given interests of businessmen all the while with minimal uproar from the public.

Not only was the very identity of America at stake, but the economic dependence of the financial market upon the idea of an American frontier posed a serious threat. Regardless of the validity of this argument and solution, the most ambitious businessmen abided by Turner’s

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<sup>123</sup> Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” 11.

advice more than ever into the 20th century. Fueled by the presumed superiority of Americanization, the increasingly limited free land and frontier on the continental United States, and surplus of supporting ideologies, American business took initiative to find new markets. By the time Turner presented his thesis in 1893, conversations surrounding market-based solutions already circulated throughout the late 19th century. Early actions to find a market beyond the continental United States manifested in the Pacific and East Asia. Growing economic and industrial power in the United States gave the nation confidence to broach the shores of China and Japan. But the European-claimed African continent was another matter. The United States did not dare impede on European claims in Africa. Historian Paul McStallworth highlighted how before reaching its' economic superiority in the 20th century, the United States feared "entangling political relations."<sup>124</sup> Instead American business and industry first looked west and south before thinking to cross the Atlantic.

Throughout all these overseas changes, the American people were left in the dark. Regardless of the advancements made during the industrial revolution, the common American experience relied upon limited communications technologies. This resulted in a largely unengaged public in politics, specifically foreign policy. What historians later identified as imperialism, this interest in venturing overseas for labor and resources for the literate public of the late 19th century sounded much like the imperial ambitions of the United States' historic enemy: the British. In their recent history the British invaded American soil and burnt down the White House—the epitome of the republic and democracy. The average American remained unaware of the big picture planning of the imperial project, and needed a foolproof explanation for such similarities. Mirroring the philanthropic language of "civilization" that followed in

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<sup>124</sup> Paul McStallworth, *The United States and the Congo Question, 1884-1914*, (Ohio State University, 1954), 182.

Leopold's wake an ocean away, an Americanized version of the imperialist rhetoric shaped into the public-facing rationale for American imperial market-driving goals.

Albert Beveridge's "March of the Flag" speech in 1898 is a useful formulation and explanation in favor of imperialism in rhetoric for the average American. The address demonstrated the tools utilized by white, male imperialists to get the general public on board with their foreign goals. The common tropes of "white man's burden," sharing democracy and freedom, and the idea of Americans as 'God's chosen people', worked together to create a convincing rationale for the imperial project (a rationale so powerful, it continues to linger in the 21st century). These tropes also distracted from what Morton Horwitz's "men of commerce and industry" truly valued: the economic and market opportunities imperialism provided. At the dawn of Albert Beveridge's tenure as an Indiana Senator, he delivered his infamous address along his campaign trail during an Indiana Republican Meeting.

Therefore, in this campaign, the question is larger than a party question. It is an American question. It is a world question. Shall the American people continue their march toward the commercial supremacy of the world?

The American people cannot use a dishonest medium of exchange; it is ours to set the world its example of right and honor. We cannot fly from our world duties; it is ours to execute the purpose of a fate that has driven us to be greater than our small intentions. We cannot retreat from any soil where Providence has unfurled our banner; it is ours to save that soil for Liberty and Civilization.<sup>125</sup>

Horwitz's "men of commerce and industry" received a promotion. The existence of imperial ambitions and goals defined these figures as the "men of empire," ready to carry the flag across land and ocean to bring "civilization" to the world. The new markets and the subsequent wealth for industrialists attained alongside the "white man's burden" just happened to be a bonus.

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<sup>125</sup> Albert J. Beveridge, "March of the Flag," September 16, 1898 (Fordham University, Full Text).

In the late 19th century, the United States established its foreign policy tied to the nation's frontier identity. But those in power hesitated to replicate the exact same imperial formula that characterized other empires and their colonies. The turn into a new century, the era of Hobson's New Imperialism, introduced an informal version of empire. While the formal blatant colonization of resource and labor rich areas was not digestible to the anti-colonial literate American public, American businessmen and "men of empire" began a privatized informal empire—compared to the common national colonies. The goal of "enlarging the American marketplace," historian Emily S. Rosenberg identified, became the vehicle through which American business asserted its power and influence, i.e., imperial ambitions.<sup>126</sup> Rosenberg summarized that "as traders cultivated markets, they also developed a rationale for overseas expansion and for the benevolent impact of their goods."<sup>127</sup> Beveridge and Turner each contributed to this rationale, bolstered by ideas of white supremacy, civilization, and religion. Although some voices rose up against the New Imperialism, they couldn't overpower "Manifest Destiny" nor the unrelenting "March of the Flag."<sup>128</sup> Regardless of the name (New Imperialism, informal empire, privatized colonialism), American business made substantial incursions and investments in overseas projects including China, Cuba, and the Philippines. The "men of empire" found success building the United States imperial presence through their economic power. Expressing the growing importance of business throughout the prior decades of

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<sup>126</sup> Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945*, (Hill and Wang, 1982), 22.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Amid the Spanish-American War and Philippine-American War, an anti-imperialist movement emerged in response to these expansion successes. The American Anti-Imperialist League formally formed on June 15, 1898 against United States annexation of the Philippines. Many notable figures including Mark Twain, Andrew Carnegie, and George S. Boutwell were active members of the League. Like their opposition, the Anti-Imperialist League also used "civilizing" and racist language to further their goals. Brian Hurd "Delayed Success: The Redefined Anti-Imperialist Movement of 1898-1900," *Historical Perspectives: Santa Clara University Undergraduate Journal of History, Series II* (2005): Vol. 10 , Article 11.

depression, in 1898 Congress created a U.S. Industrial Commission.<sup>129</sup> The Commission came in response to growing intentions by the National Association of Manufacturers to form a Department of Commerce and Industry, which would include a Department of Labor.<sup>130</sup> The now existing Department of Commerce cites that between 1850 and 1900 the national wealth increased from \$5 billion to \$88 billion, of which 20 percent remained in the hands of less than 4 thousand men.<sup>131</sup> These numbers reported a higher value on manufactured products than agricultural products. This shift in industry indicated the capital hop overseas in search of cheaper options to feed the growing industrial machine of the United States.<sup>132</sup> The economic power of industry dictated politics, especially when it came to foreign policy.

## Rubber & Markets

Rosenberg highlighted how the “governmental encouragement of private connections, especially economic ones” also influenced the expansionist debate in the late 19th century. Such connections included both exports and investments as early as the 1880s. Economist Rémy Herrera highlighted the mining and sugar sectors, specifically the Spanish American Company—partially controlled by Rockefeller’s Standard Oil. “In 1895, six centrales (mills) were owned by North Americans” in Latin America.<sup>133</sup> As the United States started to make such investments overseas, even engaging itself in war against the Spanish, King Leopold spotted

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<sup>129</sup> Helen Bowers and United States Department of Commerce, *From Lighthouses to Laserbeams: A History of the U.S. Department of Commerce* (U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of the Secretary, 1995), 6.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> James Ferguson, “Seeing Like an Oil Company: Space, Security, and Global Capital in Neoliberal Africa,” *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 3 (2005): 380.

<sup>133</sup> Rémy Herrera, “When the Names of the Emperors Were Morgan and Rockefeller . . . : Prerevolutionary Cuba’s Dependency with Regard to U.S. High Finance,” *International Journal of Political Economy* 34, no. 4 (2004): 30.



their foreign ambition to use for his own gain. But in fact, it was not Leopold who took the first step to engage the Americans in this second round of lobbying. Early in the Congo Free State's history, when many European private interests attempted to penetrate Leopold's monopoly, American business attempted the same.

Leopold was not the only one in the rubber trade. Multiple American rubber businesses cropped up approaching the turn of the century. In 1892, Charles Flint, who negotiated the consolidation of several rubber manufacturers, successfully organized the United States Rubber Company—the first rubber trust in the United States.<sup>134</sup> Rubber already supported several industries but most notably, the growing production and demand for automobiles and as a result, tires. The increasing American dependence upon rubber emerging from the Second Industrial Revolution, led to a rising call for rubber acquisition by politicians and businessmen. In 1898, the year the United States acquired the tropical territories Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines following their war with Spain, the U.S. Department of Agriculture began mobilizing to profit from the newly acquired resources. Mark Finlay, who authored *Growing American Rubber*, cited President William McKinley's "call for rubber cultivation in the new U.S. territories."<sup>135</sup> In 1902, Rhode Island Senator and Republican party leader, Nelson Aldrich employed chemist William Appleton Lawrence to develop a rubber extraction process from the popular Mexican guayule plant.<sup>136</sup> A year later Lawrence assigned his new patent for the "Lawrence process" to Aldrich's

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<sup>134</sup> Charles R. Flint, "Memories of an Active Life: Men, and Ships, and Sealing Wax" (G. P. Putman's Sons, 1923), 298.

<sup>135</sup> Mark R. Finlay, *Growing American Rubber: Strategic Plants and the Politics of National Security* (Rutgers University Press, 2009), 9. Before his presidential tenure, Congressman McKinley served Akron, Ohio, the center of the American rubber industry.

<sup>136</sup> Aldrich's son, newspaper publisher Edward B. Aldrich, joined his father on this venture. Mark R. Finlay, *Growing American Rubber: Strategic Plants and the Politics of National Security*, 24.

International Rubber Company—soon the Continental Rubber Company.<sup>137</sup> During the Gilded Age, ties between politics and business reached new highs in American history.

Although rubber remained a concern for the United States' economy, the larger search for commercial wealth stayed front and center. Leopold's Congo Free State represented attractive opportunities for American industry. As early as 1887, the New York newspaper *The Sun*, reported the potential launching of American vessels, anticipating the "Free State" market Leopold promised. "It is very likely that by the first of March the first steamer of the only American company on the upper Congo will be launched and ready for business."<sup>138</sup> Although *The Sun* did not specify the company nor the industry, this piece established the United States, with other foreign entities, very early interest in the Congo's potential as a new market. Notably, American business and "men of empire" were not the only ones to tune into Leopold's African exploits. The American Colonization Society—originally founded in 1815 with a novel proposal to take advantage of the "Dark Continent"—sought the Congo Free State with a different type of market in mind. Still believing Leopold's "civilizing" and philanthropic mission in central Africa, American missionaries interpreted the king's actions as divine intervention to encourage "a Christian mission to drive slavery, slave hunting, the rum traffic and cannibalism from the Congo Free State."<sup>139</sup> Paul McStallworth's summary of this contemporary opinion highlights the transformative vision for the "Free State," all the while a very different transformation took place at Leopold's exclusive direction. Conjoining the missionizing and commercializing goals in a sick and convoluted proposal, the American Colonization Society pushed for what Stallworth

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<sup>137</sup> Lawrence worked with his chemist daughter, Clara, to develop their "pebble-mill" Lawrence process. Ibid. William Appleton Lawrence, et al, 1903. Process of Refining Crude Rubber. Patent No. 741,260. Application filed March 19, 1902. Patented October 13, 1903.

<sup>138</sup> "Our Steamers On The Congo." *The Sun* (New York), February 28, 1887.

<sup>139</sup> McStallworth, *The United States and the Congo Question, 1884-1914*, 181.

called a “peaceful introduction of industry and commerce,” all the while with a mouth to Congress’ ear.<sup>140</sup> To do so, meant sending Black American citizens to the Congo. For the white elite of the United States this killed two birds with one stone. Ideally, Black Americans could bring civilization with them and take up the missionization call to “devote their lives to raising the standard of living of their brothers in Africa.”<sup>141</sup> And perhaps more importantly for the American Colonization Society, get rid of the former enslaved. For the Society this not only presented great commercial opportunities but also a solution to the overarching domestic problem of the very existence of Black Americans.<sup>142</sup>

American economies and politics kept a finger on the pulse of Leopold’s central African business throughout the existence of the Congo Free State, despite the king’s quick monopolization of this purchase. American industry stayed along the sideline, waiting and hoping to be let in the game by Leopold—their early acknowledgement of Leopold’s claim must certainly have elevated their chances. This Gilded Age American imperialist ambition established the bedrock from which the United States rose to world hegemony into the 20th century. The Spanish-American War gave the US its first colonial territories and the young nation itched for more. These interests met the King of the Belgians’ desperation to hold on to his colony.

When the king first quickly monopolized his new purchase post-Berlin Conference, American capitalist’s hopes of a new market were quickly dashed. But years later now broke and attacked from all sides, Leopold looked back to the United States with the goal of taking

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<sup>140</sup> McStallworth, *The United States and the Congo Question, 1884-1914*, 183.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> American Colonization Society. “The African Repository” Vol. LXVII No.2 (American Colonization Society Quarterly, 1891), 38-39.

advantage of what hopes remained. Leopold already achieved success lobbying the United States pre-Berlin Conference when the United States became the first nation to acknowledge his claim on the Congo.<sup>143</sup> If he swayed the developing nation once, why could he not do it again?

Leopold's decision to target American policy reveals an important fact Leopold understood about the United States nationally: the role of American private interest intertwined with the American government. This relationship existed quite openly, incredibly visible especially during the height of the Gilded Age. The average American worker could infer the influence of private interests on their lives as greater than their own government leadership, evident in the increasing labor movements and union building during this era. The big names like Rockefeller, Carnegie, Guggenheim, Morgan, and more, held significant political power by way of their economic prowess and influence. Despite the United States not yet at its peak global hegemony and without huge political power, during the Gilded Age the nation had a strong and increasingly international economy. Leopold identified American economics weighty, and felt concerned enough to mitigate any United States involvement in the plunging political affairs in his Congo Free State. The King of the Belgians saw the United States either as the biggest threat, or as the nation with the greatest influence to prevent the Congo Free State from slipping from his grasp.

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<sup>143</sup> Adam Hochschild, "The King's Lobbyists." *The American Scholar* 67, no. 3 (1998): 39–51.

## Chapter 3: A New Open Market

### Reform?

Congo Reformers, anti-imperialists, and other parties who opposed Leopold's regime went about ousting the king in different ways. Different parties desired different goals in the Congo basin. Some believed only Leopold needed to go, and then the violence would cease. Others believed in self-determination for the peoples living in the Congo Free State, while others aimed for the complete annihilation of European imperialism in the Congo. Those who opposed imperialism entirely remained few and far between.

Marouf Hasian, called George Washington Williams a “Cassandra-like figure who tried desperately to warn Americans” and the rest of the world about the atrocities Leopold committed in the Congo Basin.<sup>144</sup> The first significant voice to speak out against Leopold's regime, Williams is often credited with forming key arguments later replicated by Congo Reform movements in the early 20th century. A soldier, Baptist minister, politician, journalist, and lawyer, in 1884 Williams served as an representative of the American Presbyterian Congo Mission, when he met with Leopold to discuss economic and infrastructural “development” in the Congo Basin.<sup>145</sup> In 1890, during a missionary visit to the Congo Free State he found the reality very different from what the king promised. In response, Williams penned his “Open Letter” to Leopold, creating the first public comprehensive systemic critique of the Congo Free State.

I had never been able to conceive of Europeans establishing a government in a tropical country without building a hospital...

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<sup>144</sup> Marouf Hasian, “Critical Intercultural Communication, Remembrances of George Washington Williams, and the Rediscovery of LLéopold II's ‘Crimes Against Humanity’” *The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication* (Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 313.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, 316.

Instead of the natives of the Congo ‘adopting the fostering care’ of your Majesty’s Government, they everywhere complain that their land has been taken from them by force; that the Government is cruel and arbitrary, and declare that they neither love nor respect the Government and its flag...

Your Majesty’s Government has never spent one franc for educational purposes, nor instituted any practical system of industrialism. Indeed the most unpractical measures have been adopted against the natives in nearly every respect; and in the capital of your Majesty’s Government are very largely imported... These recruits are transported under circumstances more cruel than cattle in European countries.<sup>146</sup>

Williams lifted the curtain on Leopold’s ruse for all the world to see. Due to the accuracy of Williams’ claims, Leopold and his agents responded strategically to counter “each and every one of his major arguments.”<sup>147</sup> Such arguments dealt blows to the very institution and system Leopold crafted, raising questions of imperialism and colonialism by attempting to provide voices for those communities in the Congo Basin subject to Leopold’s whim.<sup>148</sup> Williams died just a year after penning his letter, unable to continue the fight.<sup>149</sup> But he lit the fuse.

Williams’ work inspired several independent actors to take up the pen. In 1899, Joseph Conrad published his novella *Heart of Darkness*, based on Conrad’s experiences throughout the Congo Free State. In 1900, British journalist E. D. Morel took up the mantle and became the face of the campaign against the Congo atrocities. Before Morel officially rallied the troops to create the world-famous Congo Reform Association, he compiled the existing facts into a 1903

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<sup>146</sup> George Washington Williams, “Open Letter to His Serene Majesty Leopold II, King of the Belgians and Sovereign of the Independent State of Congo, by Colonel the Honorable Geo. W. Williams, of the United States of America,” (July 18, 1890).

<sup>147</sup> Hasian, “Critical Intercultural Communication, Remembrances of George Washington Williams, and the Rediscovery of Léopold II’s ‘Crimes Against Humanity,’” 322.

<sup>148</sup> “Although some of [Williams’] other letters focused on the need for American involvement in the Congo, this particular text was not calling for joint ventureship with Léopold, and it did not appear to be an unqualified defense of American expansionism. This attack on the Belgian monarch could also be viewed as anti-imperialist critique of all types of old and new colonial development plans.” Ibid, 321.

<sup>149</sup> Stanley also died in 1890.

pamphlet titled “The Congo Slave State.” In this work, Morel established the foundation from which his reform association would build upon in the following years.<sup>150</sup> Morel crafted an argument to garner the most sympathy and action from the American and European public. Throughout details of the Leopold’s systemic exploitative regime, Morel tapped into the established tropes of “civilization” and duty to assert that the American and European had a responsibility to aid the “inhabitants” of the Congo Free State.<sup>151</sup>

Morel first presented his argument through commercial and quid pro quo logic, pleading to an American audience to sway their government to intervene and stop Leopold’s crimes. Morel claimed the American government possessed “a peculiar and very special responsibility in the matter,” for two reasons.<sup>152</sup> Before the Berlin Conference, the United States was the first to recognise the official status of Leopold’s claim on the Congo. Although American delegates later attended the Conference, the United States government did not ratify the Berlin and Brussels Acts. The U.S. had a history of interference and—as Morel pointed out—the responsibility to involve themselves in this international situation. He continued to highlight the importance of the Congo Free State’s trade policy, recognizing how the “supply of the products yielded by Equatorial Africa [sustained] European industrialism.”<sup>153</sup> Morel presented such rationale up front, later utilizing established “civilizing” and racist constructs to entice the duty-driven western public. 19th century western liberalism, characterized by democracy and liberty, already

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<sup>150</sup> Morel’s foundation in addition to Williams’ critical observations contributes greatly to understanding the atrocities in the Congo Free State, due to unrecorded and destroyed accounts from indigenous communities in the Congo basin.

<sup>151</sup> E. D. Morel, “The Congo Slave State” (John Richardson & Sons, 1903), 13. Drew University Methodist Archives.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 13.

altered the western public's perceptions of colonialism. This shift away from pure inhumanity imposed upon non-white peoples in the colonial periphery, introduced nuance to the tale of non-whiteness. Morel exhibited this shift when describing the peoples subject to Leopold's exploitation, essentializing all the "inhabitants [as] natural traders, born as it were with the instinct of trade in their veins."<sup>154</sup> Morel linked the "inhabitants" to a custom the literate public of the western world could relate to and understand: commercial trade. Morel's argument relied upon the application of commercial value to the peoples of the Congo basin outside of their physical labor capacity. To infringe upon the right of trade and commercial opportunities went against not only the Berlin Act and promise of "free trade" in the region, but also predominantly the values of capitalism and the right to commercial freedom. This infringement of any trade rights in Congo—from local rights to the large European power—constituted for Morel one of the most important crimes by Leopold.

### **Leopold's Agents**

In the first years of the 20th century—with Williams' fuse and Morel's leadership—the Congo Reform Association created a base of public pressure. Alongside the dwindling of the king's deep pockets and the unsustainable exploitative practices in the Congo Free State, Leopold realised he created a big problem. The Belgian Parliament only allowed the king to obtain the Congo Free State because Leopold promised that his private colony would not be a financial burden on the nation. In the first years, he kept that promise. But further and further in debt to the monopoly of his own making, Leopold eventually took on loans from Belgium.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Morel, "The Congo Slave State," 13.

<sup>155</sup> Makulo Akambo, *La vie de Disasi Makulo: Ancien esclave de Tippu Tip et catéchiste de Grenfell* (Kinshasa: Editions Saint Paul Afrique, 1983), pp. 20–24, 30–32. Rutz, *Leopold's Congo and the "Scramble for Africa,"* 47.



With this financial burden on top of the existing public and political pressure, Leopold faced both internal and external threats to his property. Beginning to search for solutions, the king began inquiries into potential mineral wealth in the Congo Free State.<sup>156</sup> But before such interests panned out, Leopold made the decision to throw his cards in with those who first supported his venture—and most importantly, those with the most economic and political potential. Leopold reignited his American agenda and called upon new agents to help enact his will across the Atlantic.

Adam Hochschild and Jonathan Broida each highlighted an American agent who worked for Leopold in his second effort to lobby the United States. In Hochschild's "The King's Lobbyists," he detailed the entirety of Leopold's "squadron of additional lobbyists" but emphasized Colonel Henry I. Kowalsky as a figure who made a particular impact.<sup>157</sup> After a time of hosting banquets and gifting photographs of the Congo basin to an unenthused President Theodore Roosevelt, Kowalsky's habit of provoking enemies created too many problems for Leopold.<sup>158</sup> Leopold soon devised a plan to quietly let Kowalsky off the payroll—afraid to cut total ties because his hire knew too much. In response, Kowalsky "apparently sold [to Hearst's *New York American*] his complete Congo correspondence."<sup>159</sup> On December 10, 1906, the story broke of the Congo scandal, only bolstering the Congo Reform Association's claims against Leopold. Broida spoke of another, James Gustavus Whiteley, as Leopold's "Lost Agent," in

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<sup>156</sup> McStallworth, *The United States and the Congo Question, 1884-1914*, 254-255. McStallworth names Thomas Walsh, an American mine owner to be in "business relations with Leopold."

<sup>157</sup> Hochschild, "The King's Lobbyists," 39–51.

<sup>158</sup> Kowalsky had a habit of getting into fights and provoking enemies. Hochschild. "The King's Lobbyists," 49.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 50.

reference to his more discrete approach working “covertly to promote [the king] in the U.S.”<sup>160</sup>

In 1903 Whiteley published a work praising Leopold’s work in the Congo Free State, after which Leopold invited him to Brussels. From then on Whiteley returned to the States and continued under Leopold’s direction.

Once again exhibiting his pathos expertise, Leopold played what Hochschild called “the role of the victimized Catholic.”<sup>161</sup> The king tapped his representatives in Rome who convinced the Vatican all the bad press on Leopold was the doing of Protestant missionaries. Missionaries, the front lines of any colonial venture, provided the “God and duty” excuse for imperial goals—with God came “civilization.” According to Hochschild, through the Vatican, James Cardinal Gibbons (Archbishop of Baltimore) became Leopold’s “point man.”<sup>162</sup> Critically, Gibbons also happened to be “card-playing intimate” with both Senator Aldrich—owner of the Lawrence patent and who historian Jerome Sternstein highlighted as the “chairman of the tariff-making Finance Committee,”—and the unmistakable J. Pierpont Morgan.<sup>163</sup> Leopold deepened his American connections, conducting various meetings through his agents. Journalist Harvey O’Connor and Sternstein agreed, that, prior to his betrayal in late 1906, Kowalsky informed Leopold to contact the financier Thomas Fortune Ryan earlier that same year.<sup>164</sup> Adam Hochschild asserted that Whiteley contacted Senator Nelson W. Aldrich first in 1905.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Jonathan Broida, “James Gustavus Whiteley: The Lost Agent of King Leopold II,” *History: A Journal of Student Research*, n. 1 (December 2016), S.U.N.Y.: 35.

<sup>161</sup> Hochschild. *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 244.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.* Jerome L. Sternstein, “King Leopold II, Senator Nelson W. Aldrich, and the Strange Beginnings of American Economic Penetration of the Congo,” *African Historical Studies* 2, no. 2 (1969): 193.

<sup>164</sup> Harvey O’Connor, *The Guggenheims: The Making of an American Dynasty* (Crown Publishers Inc, 1937), 182. Sternstein, “King Leopold II, Senator Nelson W. Aldrich, and the Strange Beginnings of American Economic Penetration of the Congo,” 196-197.

<sup>165</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 243.

Together, Ryan and Aldrich already formed the Continental Rubber Company in 1901, which by 1905 sought to utilize the new and innovative Lawrence process of rubber extraction on available markets. McStallworth described how “under the patent control of Rockefeller, the [Lawrence] method was calculated to aid immeasurably in reducing the cost of rubber.”<sup>166</sup> The Continental Rubber Company existed as a subsidiary of the United States Rubber Company. Ryan and Senator Aldrich, in addition to Daniel Guggenheim and John D. Rockefeller Jr., were among those most prominently associated with the Continental Rubber Company.<sup>167</sup>

In the summer of 1906, Thomas Ryan accepted Leopold’s invitation to Brussels during the American’s European vacation. Sternstein described how “there, following some lengthy and at times stormy meetings between Ryan and the King,” Ryan left Brussels with concessions which allowed for the formation of two companies, the American Congo Company and the International Forestry and Mining Company (more commonly known as Forminière).<sup>168</sup> Soon after Ryan returned home, American newspapers began to get wind of what he left with. In September of 1906, the *New York Tribune* published an article titled “Big Rubber Deal On,” in which they reported on Ryan's meetings with Leopold. The article named Ryan's existing Continental Rubber Company which included the names of Senator Aldrich and John D. Rockefeller Jr., who were said to be among his associates.

Although no direct affiliation between the United States Rubber Company and the Continental Rubber Company has ever been publicly announced, it seems to Wall Street by no means improbable that the interests dominant in and friendly to these two

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<sup>166</sup> McStallworth, *The United States and the Congo Question, 1884-1914*, 256.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Sternstein. “King Leopold II, Senator Nelson W. Aldrich, and the Strange Beginnings of American Economic Penetration of the Congo,” 197.

corporations may be planning to control the vast rubber territory of the Congo Free States.<sup>169</sup>

*The New York Tribune's* piece emphasized the clarity to which Americans, those in tune to political affairs, understood the privatization of the Congo Free State. This “Big Rubber Deal” marked the significant point in which Leopold’s original private colonialism truly reached American shores, the powerhouse of the free market. The privatization of the Congo Free State further solidified with the addition of the American syndicate.

The formal concession signed in November of 1906 gave Forminière rights to prospect in the entirety of the public domain Leopold had acquired through his système domanial. Ryan joined forces with Daniel Guggenheim in the American Congo Company, through which the Guggenheim Exploration Company (also known as Guggenex) gained access to the Congo Free State mineral wealth. The concession for the American Congo Company included exclusive rubber rights for 60 years, in an area in the Congo the size of Connecticut.<sup>170</sup> Ryan also kept in touch with Aldrich in what became the Ryan-Aldrich Continental Rubber Company.

McStallworth reported how just a month later, in December of 1906, the Inter-Continental Rubber Company “consolidated the Rockefeller and Guggenheim-Ryan rubber interests in this country and in Africa”—not limited to rubber but also included minerals, steamship and railroad lines.<sup>171</sup> Throughout the many trusts formed and concessions awarded, Leopold still made sure he kept significant shares. McStallworth continued to describe how Ryan, with his syndicate, soon also “[gained] minority interests by purchase in the Anglo-Belgian-India Rubber Company and

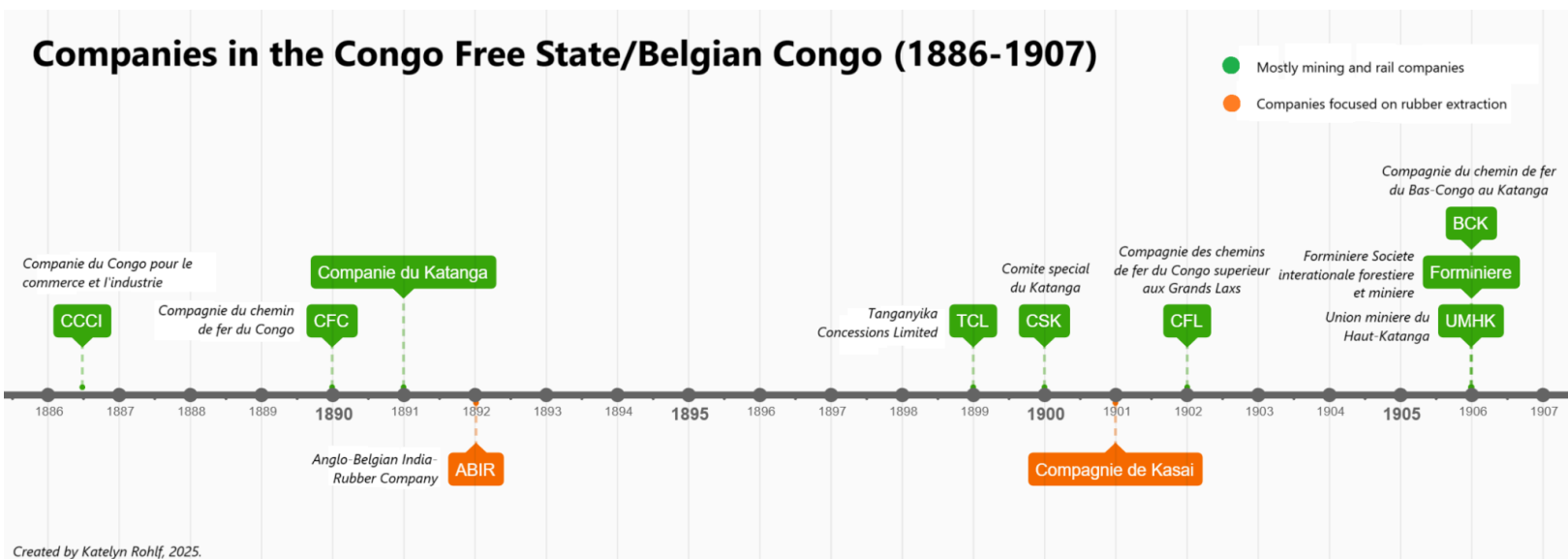
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<sup>169</sup> “Big Rubber Deal On.” *New York Tribune*, September 14, 1906, 9.

<sup>170</sup> McStallworth, *The United States and the Congo Question, 1884-1914*, 261.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid*, 269.

the Katanga Company.”<sup>172</sup> These two companies stripped the Congo Free State of its resources through its people in the State’s early years, turning over their profit to Leopold and the other minority shareholders. In addition to the creation of American business in the Congo, Leopold facilitated the forming and consolidating of more companies.



To members of the Congo Reform Association, these dealings demonstrated a blatant attempt by Leopold to sway the United States interest through their government’s strong ties with American big business.<sup>173</sup> They were correct. Another one of Leopold’s many agents in America, Henry Wellington Wack, advised the king to “create an American vested interest in the Congo which will render the yelping of the English agitators and Belgian Socialists futile.”<sup>174</sup> This clear association between business and governments had imperial and national implications. When

<sup>172</sup> McStallworth, *The United States and the Congo Question, 1884-1914*, 269.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 264.

<sup>174</sup> Dean Clay, *The Congo Reform Association and the beginning of Transnational Humanitarianism, 1904-1913* (John Moores University, 2019), 179.

Leopold first obtained the Congo Free State, the Belgian government accepted it. Years later now under incredible political scrutiny and internal political agitation, their monarch—the representation of their nation on the world stage—created a worrying situation. Back in 1885 when Belgium gave Leopold approval to move forward with his interests in the Congo Basin, the Belgian government abided by the assurance that the Congo Free State would have little toll on the nation. Now at the height of public pressure, Belgium felt great impact amid massive public outcry over their king's actions.

### **Concessions & Capital**

At the close of 1906, following Ryan and Leopold's summer dealings, the American syndicate received significant concessions in the Congo Free State. The syndicate moved in quickly, knowing that the time to deal with Leopold dwindled. Public pressure continued to mount regardless of Leopold's efforts to elevate blame on himself. The plans the king made to take advantage of American business for his personal long term gain crumbled. The king originally saw a two-part opportunity by inviting American interests to join his venture amid the global negative publicity. The generous concessions gifted to American financiers intended to cause the United States government to take action and perform damage control to protect their prized business interests. Leopold hoped the involvement of the growing American economic and political power would support his claim on the Congo Free State. Importantly, the king had precedent to be confident in this prediction of the United States' government.<sup>175</sup> Only a few years prior, the American public rose up in outrage against the Spanish in Cuba. Similar Americanized colonial tropes of "civilization" and duty in conjunction with vested American economic interests resulted in the Spanish-American War. Although he made an educated guess, Leopold

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<sup>175</sup> McStallworth, *The United States and the Congo Question, 1884-1914*, 264.

missed the reality through which Gilded Age American industry saw the world; America's "frontier" recognized no limit. Leopold succeeded in utilizing countless pawns in Europe and America to help facilitate his bidding in the Congo. Now that he allowed American industry in, the tables turned and Leopold became a pawn in the great American chase for capital on the "frontier."

While private interests operated behind the scenes, the U.S. State Department—with Elihu Root—and President Theodore Roosevelt appointed Clarence Rice Slocum "to be the first American official representative in the Congo country."<sup>176</sup> *The New York Times* reported this "newly created post" in June of 1906 in an article titled "American Agent for Congo."<sup>177</sup> That same summer Leopold pursued Ryan to invest in his Congo Free State. Slocum's selection upset the Congo Reform Association, which attempted to appoint a Consul General who aligned with their agenda. The Congo Reform Association, with Morel, most likely understood the political component of this new market. *The New York Times* specified that King Leopold's administration approved the United States' nomination in Slocum, "else [Leopold] could not secure an exequator."<sup>178</sup> The United States Congress also valued Slocum's new position. McStallworth made note of Congress' eye on "the abundance of [the Congo's] natural resources."<sup>179</sup> Echoing a similar sentiment to Turner's "Frontier Thesis," Congress commented on the nation's trade outlook in 1906, stating "there was not an article of foreign trade either in imports or exports in which the United States could not profitably participate if we sought activity in a direct

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<sup>176</sup> "American Agent for Congo" *The New York Times*, June 24, 1906, 4.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> McStallworth, *The United States and the Congo Question, 1884-1914*, 252.

manner.”<sup>180</sup> The United States government invested in the Congo on an official basis with their newly appointed Consul General.

Slocum did not last long, succumbing to illness just a few months after accepting the position. The position was not filled until the following summer of 1907 by James A. Smith. During this period between Consuls, American business first infiltrated the Congo. Smith arrived in Boma to countless letters from US companies looking for overseas markets to sell their products. Products ranged from Charles Hess Company’s “Sanitary Bath Room Fixtures,” to “The Sun Vapor” street lights.<sup>181</sup> Ironically, the New York-Broadway Rubber Tire Company also sent Smith a letter with their interest to sell to a new market.<sup>182</sup> Such evidence of an American reach for foreign markets “by permissions of the State Department,” signaled the ties that made up this political economy.<sup>183</sup>

Meanwhile, Leopold’s system of rubber extraction that attracted investors reached its limit. Leopold had exhausted his own money as well as his Belgian loans. His terrorizing methods were some of the most extreme and unsustainable upon the land and the people. The American rubber business which just arrived in the Congo basin, discovered the reality of Leopold’s project. They realised Leopold’s Congo—although rich—could not follow through on its rubber promise. The Americans armed with the Lawrence method had the upper hand to search for the most “usable enclaves.”<sup>184</sup> The next source for rubber changed continents. The

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<sup>180</sup> McStallworth, *The United States and the Congo Question, 1884-1914*, 252.

<sup>181</sup> Charles Hess Co. to Clarence Rice Slocum, May 15, 1907. Sun Vapor Street Light Co. to Clarence Rice Slocum, May 11, 1907. U.S. Department of State, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Consular Posts (Boma, Belgian Congo, Vol. 4).

<sup>182</sup> New York Broadway Rubber Tire Company to J. A. Smith, December 13, 1907. U.S. Department of State, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Consular Posts (Boma, Belgian Congo, Vol. 4).

<sup>183</sup> Cycle and Automobile Trade Journal to Mr. Clarence Slocum, U.S. Consul, April 17, 1907. U.S. Department of State, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Consular Posts (Boma, Belgian Congo, Vol. 4).

<sup>184</sup> Ferguson, “Seeing Like an Oil Company: Space, Security, and Global Capital in Neoliberal Africa,” 380.



American syndicate that organized around Ryan's link with Leopold next created the Continental-Mexican Rubber Company, which later became the Intercontinental Rubber Company. The University of Arizona reported that "in 1910, roughly half of the imported natural rubber to the United States was extracted from guayule plants in Mexico."<sup>185</sup> The American syndicate found capital elsewhere, so what remained of its Congo investments?

In 1907, a year in at his new post, James A. Smith sent a comprehensive report titled "Mineral Wealth of the Kongo" to the Assistant Secretary of State. The "American Consular Service Report" provided results from promising preliminary mineral investigations in Katanga—what was the southeast quadrant of the Congo Free State. Smith announced important news to the State department.

A competent American mining engineer who visited these mines expressed the opinion, so it is stated, that it was possible to produce a ton of copper in the Katanga at a lower cost than in any other mines he had examined, and added "I do not hesitate to say that, so far as concerns the quality and quantity, the mines of Katanga have a capacity of production equal to all the American mines put together."<sup>186</sup>

It seemed American private investments would pay off. Although rubber moved away and closer to home, Leopold's concessions to Americans looked more than profitable for both the U.S. government and private business. Leopold's plan to harness American economic power for his agenda never came to fruition.

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<sup>185</sup> C. Kiela, "History of Guayule" (University of Arizona, SBAR Fact Sheet, 2018).  
<https://guayule.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/2023-05/Guayule%20History%20Fact%20Sheet%20Final.pdf>.

<sup>186</sup> James A. Smith. "American Consular Service Report" (July 19, 1907) U.S. Department of State, Records of Foreign Service Posts, Consular Posts (Boma, Belgian Congo, Vol. 4).

## Belgian Solution

The small, closing window for American business to get into the Congo before Leopold was forced out created a sense of urgency for both the king and most especially for American industry who needed to make a quick decision. Despite how much Leopold worked to hold on to his property, in 1906, the sun already began to set on his investment. Not if, but when the Congo Free State would be removed from Leopold's ownership, the primed monopolized market he set up faced an unknown fate. The Congo Free State had two feasible options for its fate post-Leopold: the land and market could be turned over to another nation or split up between private and national parties. Annexation by a government entity meant only nationally-owned companies of that nation would have rights to the land and resources. Whomever Leopold turned over the Congo Free State to, would very likely be unwilling to open back up the offer of concessions the king had made and American business would lose the chance to profit from this market. The speed at which American business entered the Congo Free State was warranted. The Congo Reform Association efforts paid off. Their public pressure necessitated Leopold's crimes be dealt with. Not if, but when, the Congo Free State left Leopold's ownership, what was to happen to the primed monopolized market he set up?

This dilemma of the Congo's fate manifested in an international public issue, accurately dubbed "The Congo Question."<sup>187</sup> The Congo Question harkened back to one of the imperial conquests that shaped the world, the "Scramble for Africa." If the Congo Free State was to be removed from Leopold, the western powers assumed and concluded not only would the peoples of the river basin be unable to lead themselves but more importantly, and more likely, a western power vacuum would follow. The industrialized colonial world essentialized the necessity for the

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<sup>187</sup> "Memorial Concerning the Congo Question to the Congress of the United States of America" (1906). National Archives, U.S. Department of State, Papers of Nelson Aldrich, Container 35-36, Reel No. 24, Page 506.

output of materials the Congo Free State provided. Throughout the discussions of various solutions, *The Washington Times* reported on British recommendations to split up the Congo Free State among various powers under which Great Britain promised “free trade and good treatment of the natives.”<sup>188</sup> This use of the Congo Free State as a political buffer state exhibited the continued naturalized colonialist sentiment, defining foreign authority as the only option in the Congo river basin. The new British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, discussed the situation in his memoir of British foreign policy regarding the “Congo Question.” Entering office at the peak of Leopold’s public disapproval in 1905, Grey acknowledged his and his peers’ “detestation of the system and its crimes,” but continued to explain that any direct action from any other nation than Belgium within the boundaries of the Congo Free State would risk a European scramble for control of the territory.<sup>189</sup> For the western powers, control of the land simply could not return to the people that lived there. The western world relied upon the exploitation of both the land and human labor. If power was handed back to the people, the risk lay in possible loss of significant resources to the industrial complex in both Europe and North America. The thought of liberating any African land from complete foreign influence was deemed unfeasible as the existing capitalist climate demanded there be a power grab. Grey admitted any such action would be “politically unwise” and “the transfer of the Congo to Belgium would therefore be a real and effective solution.”<sup>190</sup> The west solved “The Congo Question” with “The Belgian Solution.”

This “Belgian Solution” appeased all parties—of course except for those exploited. In November of 1908, “The Belgian Solution” was realized. Against Leopold’s will, the Belgian government enacted the official transfer of property. To the American syndicate, this change of

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<sup>188</sup> “Dr. Guinness, English Missionary, Tells of Cruelty and Crime” *The Washington Times*, December 16, 1906.

<sup>189</sup> Edward Grey, *Twenty-five years, 1892-1916* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1925), 196.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

authority had little impact. According to the terms promised by Leopold, Belgium would adhere to the existing concessions the king negotiated with foreign investors. The syndicate used Leopold as a gateway to a new market, and did so just in time. A month after the annexation, Leopold's agent Whiteley still worked in the United States to aid Leopold's claim. The king still clinged to the fleeting hope of Belgium returning the Congo Free State. Whiteley emphasized to *The Evening Post* of American vested interest in the Congo. He used the examples of the International Forestry and Mining Company (Forminière), pointing out "America financial men have 50 percent" shares, as well as an "almost wholly American [business in] the American Congo Company."<sup>191</sup> This reminder of who the United States supposedly owed their loyalty to, worked to no avail. And despite Whiteley's assurance to *The Evening Post* that Leopold remained in good health and had a good many years left of fight to get his property back, Leopold died that very following year, his Congo now completely in the hands of the Belgian government.

Meanwhile the American syndicate continued to make use of its concessions. In July of 1909, *The Sun* reported an update on the Congo. In the article titled "The Latest News From the Congo," the United States Secretary of State, Philander Chase Knox, discussed the annexation of the Congo and the concessions system that persisted through the transition into a Belgian colony. Knox questioned Belgium's continued commitment to Leopold's concession agreements with American private interests. *The Sun* reported on assurances "given by the Belgian Government of its intention not to lose sight of the Congo State's international obligations, but it is submitted that not all those obligations can survive the annexation of the State to Belgium."<sup>192</sup> Such

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<sup>191</sup> "Congo State As Colony." *The Evening Post* (New York), December 17, 1908, 5.

<sup>192</sup> "The Latest News From the Congo." *The Sun* (New York), July 28, 1909, 5.

obligations emphasize the importance of the entrance window the American syndicate slipped through during the last years of the Congo Free State. The syndicate got in quick and secured their claim before the Belgian government could step in and question the legitimacy and stability of their concessions. Acquiring early access and the most significant concessions out of foreign entities in the Congo Basin, provided a brief window in the privatized colonial model that came to dominate the 20th century.

## Conclusion

The immense efforts Leopold made to enforce a closed market all to himself early on in his colonial venture, had been for naught. The king's selfish private interests, at home and abroad, became the very thing that gave way to the need to open up the Congo basin. Following the annexation of his property, despite never setting foot in the private colony, Leopold set ablaze the building that housed Congo Free State related documents, stating "I will give them my Congo, but they have no right to know what I did there."<sup>193</sup> Leopold spent decades building a network of agents to lobby some of the most influential men in the western world. He fought tooth and nail to create a profiting system from his Congo, and once established, refused to let it go. This selfishness exhibited by this private Leopoldian model led the king to resort to allowing other private interests access to his playground. In the desperate last years of the Congo Free State, the American syndicate outlasted the King of the Belgians and received the better end of the bargain.

In November of 1908, the Belgian Solution actualized, and against Leopold's will the Belgian government enacted the official transfer of property. Belgium first needed to fix Leopold's mess. At the very least, Belgium needed to maintain the appearance of ending the human rights crisis the Congo Reform Association and western public insisted upon. To do so, the country began the undertaking of "reforming" their new colony. Vanthemsche claimed that, following annexation, Belgian authorities "abolished the système domanial and re-introduced free enterprise and trade," meeting the criteria of the original Berlin Conference decades prior.<sup>194</sup> Yet Vanthemche maintained that, although the horrific Leopoldian regime was disrupted, "forced

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<sup>193</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, 294.

<sup>194</sup> Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885-1980*, 28.

labor did not actually disappear” in the Congo.<sup>195</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja made a similar point that “when Belgium took over the running of the Congo in 1908, the Belgian government had to operate on the basis of what had already been established economically and administratively since 1885.” The processes and systems Leopold and the other private actors established in the Congo Free State could not be easily removed. Leopold’s genocidal extraction system existed as the foundation of any profit made—no system, no profit. The brutal private practices put in place by Leopold made possible the very establishment of the Belgian colonial system.

Belgium’s version of a civilizing-mission in the Congo merely shifted the type of exploitation practices, to the extent it did so at all, by choosing to continue the popular colonial model. Belgium allowed national and foreign private entities—including the American syndicate—to continue operation and strip the land of its resources to sustain the continuously modernizing world, all the while maintaining appearances. Ultimately, the transformation of the Congo Free State into a Belgian colony, coupled with the public dethroning of Leopold as sovereign of the State, was only a formality. Historian Crawford Young identified the established trinity of power in the Belgian Congo that replaced Leopold’s dictatorship.

It is traditional to analyze the colonial power structure in the Belgian Congo in terms of a trinity composed of the administration, Church, and large enterprises. It is important to recognize that not only was this triple alliance a virtually seamless web but each component, in its area of activity, was without peer in tropical Africa in the magnitude of its impact.<sup>196</sup>

This “triple alliance” constituted the authoritative colonial structure throughout the existence of the Belgian Congo. Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja also emphasized how Belgium’s “state rule, when it was finally established at the local level, did not differ significantly from company rule.”<sup>197</sup> In

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<sup>195</sup> Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885-1980*, 28.

<sup>196</sup> Crawford Young, *Politics in Congo: Decolonization and Independence* (Princeton University Press, 1965), 10.

<sup>197</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 34.

fact, political scientist Edouard Bustin claimed that “the Belgian parliament made no effort to assert its control over the newly acquired colony. It was usually content to accept the yearly report... and to vote the budget without much caviling.”<sup>198</sup> The colonial administration, including many agents Leopold employed for his personal colony, instituted a series of local decrees throughout the new Belgian colony. Those left after the “Red Rubber” genocide, excluding escapees and those murdered, still lived under their pre-colonial societal structures, many under the authority of local leaders. Nzongola-Ntalaja called the “traditional chief” the “intermediary” between the local peoples and the colonial authorities.<sup>199</sup> The Belgian colonial decrees throughout the next decades “succeeded in progressively transforming the chiefs into subaltern functionaries of the colonial administration,” whose jobs were to ensure their “administrative units” met their “collective obligations to the state.”<sup>200</sup> This structure of the Belgian Congo operated through the first half of the 20th century, much like Leopold’s Congo Free State. The top down political system ensured the colonial state held relative governance power through the next 50 years.

Parallel to the enforcement of the colonial administration, religious missions increased their intensity. In fact, missions shaped an important pillar of the colonial authority. Not only did many Catholic missionaries also operate as “useful” state functionaries, but Catholic authorities willingly bolstered the Belgian colonial elite.<sup>201</sup> Monsignor Roelens, one of the leading Catholic authorities in the 1930s, doubled down on the Church’s ties with the Belgian colonial

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<sup>198</sup> Edouard Bustin. “The Congo,” *Responses to Diversity: the Congo, Dahomey, the Cameroun Federal Republic, the Rhodesias and Nyasaland [and] South Africa* (Cornell University Press, 1963), 31.

<sup>199</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 35.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Young, *Politics in Congo*, 14.



administration. Roelens stated “that only the Christian-Catholic religion, based on authority, is capable of changing native mentality, of giving to our African a clear and intimate consciousness of their duties, of inspiring in them respect for authority and a spirit of loyalty toward Belgium.”<sup>202</sup> Aggressive Belgian colonial governance, since Leopold’s time, utilized religious affiliations and “civilizing” missions to maintain their rule so far from home. The “civilizing” mission of bringing God to the “dark continent” continued past Leopold’s tenure and well into the 20th century.<sup>203</sup>

Throughout the administrative changes and religious missions in West Central Africa, movements of resistance dotted the colonial regime. Outside of several mutinies by members of the *Force Publique* and by local leaders against the Congo Free State, the colonial Belgian administration prompted significant resistance, led by renowned individuals. Nzongola-Ntalaja first recognized Simon Kimbangu. Kimbangu preached a gospel of liberation against all forms of oppression, especially celebrating “racial pride [and] self-reliance.”<sup>204</sup> The threat of unity inspired by his Pan-Africanist inspired message necessitated a quick shutdown by “the colonial trinity.”<sup>205</sup> Despite his short tenure outside of a cell, Kimbangu gathered a large following, soon molding into Kimbanguism Church.<sup>206</sup> Throughout the first half of the 20th century, peasant and workers revolts also rose up against the continued system of forced labor. Nzongola-Ntalaja summarized how “refusal to conform to colonial economic, political and cultural measures took

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<sup>202</sup> Louis Franck, *Le Congo Belge* (Brussels: La Renaissance du Livre, 1930), I, 311; II, 208-09. Cited by Young, *Politics in Congo*, 14.

<sup>203</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 27, 57, 59

<sup>204</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 49.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. Young, *Politics in Congo*, 10.

<sup>206</sup> The familiar message of ‘Africa for Africans’ had a large, widespread appeal.

different forms, from passive resistance to armed rebellion.”<sup>207</sup> Growing urbanization and increased pressures on workers to support the war effort in the early 1940s culminated in the late 1950s when the Congolese independence struggle rallied around Patrice Lumumba. United by an anti-colonial and anti-European goal, a majority nationalist Congolese society formed a cross-class alliance against Belgium. In 1959, Belgium decided to grant Congo its independence.<sup>208</sup>

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) began with a rough start. Following Lumumba’s murder, Congo—a pawn in the larger Cold War tensions—faced a crisis of decolonization. Belgium’s failed transfer of power alongside UN and U.S. interventions, replaced the largely radical national movement with more moderate and pliable leaders. The nation emerged from several internal conflicts with Joseph Mobutu at the helm. From 1965 to 1997, under the promise of peace and stability with backing from both Belgium and Washington, Mobutu’s strongman dictatorship reigned. From opposition to Mobutu’s regime’s intimidation and repression emerged a national struggle for a multiparty democracy.<sup>209</sup> Upon Mobutu’s abandonment of his own country, the DRC remained in what Nzongola-Ntalaja called a “state of decay.”<sup>210</sup> Rebel leader Laurant Kabila rose to power with the backing of neighboring Rwanda and Uganda amid increasing conflict in the Great Lakes region.

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<sup>207</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 52.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 53-54. Emizet Francois Kisangani. *Historical Dictionary of the Democratic Republic of the Congo* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016), 10.

<sup>209</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 171.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 215.



Figure 4. Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja *The Congo From Leopold to Kabila: A People's History*, "Democratic Republic of the Congo."

As with the rest of Congo's colonial history, the intense regional conflict emanated from outsiders—often western powers who most valued the Congo basin's resources, notably mineral wealth. President Kabila, followed by his son, and most recently Felix Tshisekedi, have gradually gained more popular support fighting political corruption. But one characteristic

remains the same throughout their presidencies, a constant throughout the 20th century: a high value on foreign investments in the mining sectors.<sup>211</sup>

Rather than national colonial interests, Leopold and the American syndicate's private colonial ambitions shaped the initial construction of the Congo Free State as a machine to provide the western world's resources. Nzongola-Ntalaja highlighted that "Belgium was too small and too weak to stand up to the hegemonic interests, particularly in the mining sector."<sup>212</sup> Both Nzongola-Ntalaja and Guy Vanthemsche emphasize how the genocide and horrors perpetuated by this model of exploitation is a direct result of the privatized conquest Leopold led. Vanthemsche especially emphasized how both "foreign and transnational Belgian capital" would be grossly underestimated in the "development of the colony."<sup>213</sup> In Hochschild's best-seller *King Leopold's Ghost*, he brought to the general public the previously forgotten, and quite literally burned, knowledge of Leopold and the Congo Free State, with the goal of bringing the Congo's colonial past back into the light. Emphasized in the book title, Hochschild centers the blame of the atrocities around Leopold himself and a handful of his agents, with a focus on the Congo Reform Association who became the champions of the narrative. Hochschild talks of "The Great Forgetting" of Belgium and Leopold's colonial past, where he ironically forgets the large scale of foreign capital in the Congo.<sup>214</sup> Hochschild's introduction of Leopold and the Congo Free State to much of the world lacked attention to a significant part of the story, the part with arguably the most lasting influence.

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<sup>211</sup> Siddharth Kara, *Cobalt Red: How the Blood of the Congo Powers our Lives* (St. Martin's Press, 2023), 43-44.

<sup>212</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 258.

<sup>213</sup> Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885-1980*, 150.

<sup>214</sup> Hochschild. *King Leopold's Ghost*, 292.

The companies and corporations established by Leopold and the American syndicate continued an exploitation far beyond the existence of and genocide in the Congo Free State. Private interests extend national boundaries and thus have much more flexibility to sustain themselves. Siddharth Kara recognized Congo's transnational role in *Cobalt Red*, titling his fourth chapter "Colony to the World." From rubber to uranium and diamonds, and now cobalt in the 21st century, the Congo basin—none more so than the southeast Katanga region—has supplied the world with its rich resources.<sup>215</sup> Private entities birthed the exploitation model in the Congo, still in operation today. Congolese scholar Kayembe Mbombo Irénée highlighted how this violent model with "its roots in... Leopoldian colonial policies" is currently reliant upon forced and child labor, with no resemblance to any human rights standards.<sup>216</sup> Today, Congo is home to the bottom of the supply chain, hosting foreign mining companies from around the world. Vanthemsche highlighted The eve of the Congo Free State's annexation to Belgium birthed a new wave of transnational investment in West Central Africa. Vanthemsche spoke of how the private interests partaking in Leopold's colonial model "led to other initiatives, including many undertaken elsewhere in the world. Private groups that became active in the Congo also developed an interest in other regions of Africa and indeed in other continents as well."<sup>217</sup> Leopold's attempt to use the existing American political economy resulted in a much different outcome than what he had hoped. His legacy produced the first private colony and one of the first centered on investment capital. This modern model paved the way for future foreign investments in the DRC through the 20th and 21st centuries.

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<sup>215</sup> Cobalt is an "essential component to almost every... rechargeable battery made today." Kara *Cobalt Red*, 2.

<sup>216</sup> Mbombo Kayembe, *King Leopold II Syndrome in Congo* (Independently published, 2019), 51. Kara, *Cobalt Red*, 5.

<sup>217</sup> Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885-1980*, 150.

The private colonialism practices begun under King Leopold II and embedded by the American syndicate gave rise to the greater exploitative colonial and post-colonial history of the Congo and its people. Unafraid to enact the most profitable and most destructive system of colonial extraction, Leopold engaged the immense American industrial force, who sought fruitful overseas markets. Out of financial motives by those in power did cultural rhetoric reinforce the rising theme of the 20th century: profitable markets. Leopold and the American syndicate's brief collaboration of aligned profit goals contributed to the specific model of industry seen in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Without Leopold's established apparatus of exploitation, the western dominated global economy may not have emerged in the same way. The modern industrial complex of the west necessitates intensive extraction through cheap labor to sustain itself. Through first contact of Europe in West Central Africa, economies and trade forcefully transitioned from local spheres of influence to large networks of transnational and private interests, dominating the 21st century.

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