

The Belgian Congo

Stations

Belgians in the Congo

I do not want to risk...losing a fine chance to secure for ourselves a slice of this magnificent African cake.”--Leopold II

- ❑ 1908
 - ❑ Belgium gained control of Congo (Congo Free State) from King Leopold II
 - ❑ Leopold was infamous for the cruelty of his rule in the Congo
- ❑ Congo Free State (today's Democratic Republic of Congo)
 - ❑ 80 times the size of Belgium
 - ❑ Source of uranium

King Leopold II of Belgium

- ❑ Took over land in central Africa (it was his own personal property)
- ❑ Berlin Conference (1885)
 - ❑ Leopold's control over Congo Free State recognized by major powers
 - ❑ Henry Stanley (explorer) gets treaties for Leopold
 - ❑ Leopold's assurances that he would end slavery
 - ❑ Leopold's promise that the Congo would remain a free trade area.
- ❑ Belgian Congo (1908)
 - ❑ Leopold criticized for the cruelty of his rule in the Congo
 - ❑ Leopold forced to sell Congo Free State to Belgian government
 - ❑ Renamed Belgian Congo
 - ❑ Diamonds, foodstuffs, gold, ivory, rubber

King Leopold II of Belgium

- ❑ Thus the territory of today's Democratic Republic of the Congo, some two million square kilometers, was made essentially the property of Léopold II
- ❑ Leopold drove slave traders out and portrayed it as humanitarian act.
 - ❑ Reality: he did it to gain control of region.
 - ❑ Leopold paid his 'agents' in the Congo a percentage of profits, encouraging them to make the trade more and more profitable.
 - ❑ Also authorized the use of as much force as was deemed necessary.

The Role of Henry Stanley

- ❑ Leopold sent the famous explorer of Africa, Henry Morton Stanley, to negotiate treaties with the natives.
- ❑ **King Leopold II** of Belgium commissioned Stanley to help him obtain land in the Congo.
- ❑ Native chiefs were offered trinkets or cloth if they would place an X on a document in foreign tongue.
- ❑ Signing these treaties with local chiefs gave Leopold II control over these lands. Stanley signed treaties with 450+ native chiefs
- ❑ As a result, Leopold gained rule of these lands given up by the chiefs
- ❑ In 1885, after the Berlin Conference, Leopold was given personal rule over the newly declared Congo Free State
- ❑ Leopold had what he wanted because other European powers recognized his hold over Congo

Example Treaty:

Chiefs of Ngombi & Mafela, in return for *"one piece of cloth per month to each of the undersigned chiefs, besides present of cloth in hand,"* they promised to *"freely of their own accord, for themselves and their heirs and successors for ever...give up to the said Association the sovereignty and all sovereign and governing rights to all their territories...and 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....All roads and waterways running through this country, the right of collecting tolls on the same, and all game, fishing, mining and forest rights, are to be the absolute property of the said Association."*

--Treaty handing over land to Leopold II

Rubber & Abuse

- ❑ Colony not profitable in first few years.
 - ❑ Soon the idea of free trade was abandoned; natives could only trade with Leopold's representatives, with 50% of profits going to Leopold himself.
 - ❑ Profit required cheap labor (gathering rubber is very labor intensive).
- ❑ Agents 'encouraged' young men to work by holding their wives and children captive until each man's quota was met. (Women and children were often punished with amputation when men did not meet quotas.)
- ❑ Many who resisted were killed on the spot.
- ❑ Others were beaten with whips made from dried hippo hide with sharp edges.
 - ❑ 100 lashes resulted in death

Rubber & Abuse

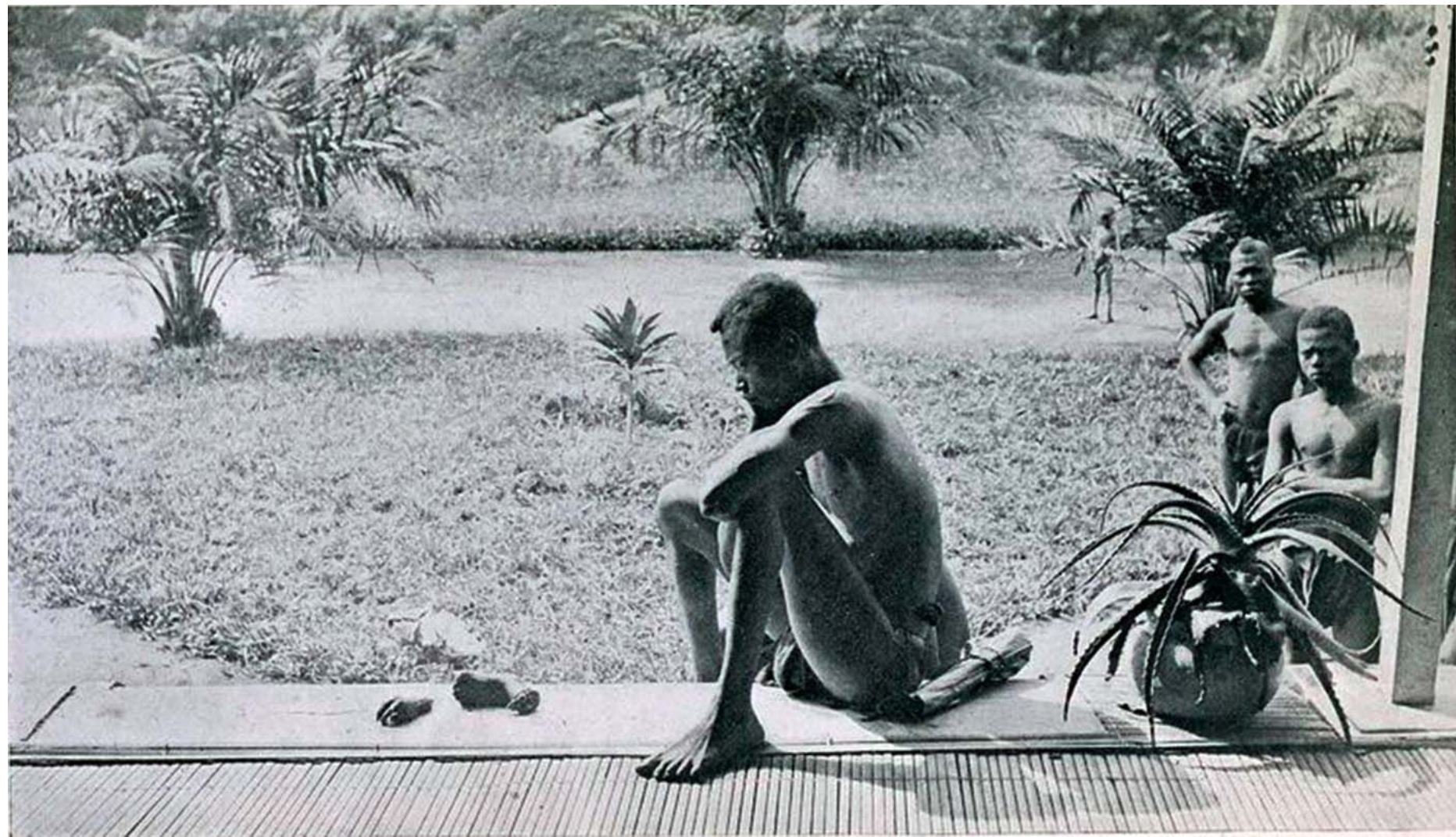


Women kept hostage to force their husbands to go and gather rubber. Rubber was harvested by climbing the rubber tree, tapping into it and letting the sap run all over the slave's body, where it would congeal. Later he would peel the rubber off his body, taking any body hair with it. Rubber harvesters were given impossible quotas to fill each month. In addition to enduring the hardships of gathering rubber in the jungle, many of them were killed by wild animals.



"The station chief selects the victims....Trembling, haggard, they lie face down on the ground...two of their companions, sometimes four, seize them by the feet and hands, and remove their cotton drawers....Each time that the torturer lifts up the chicotte, a reddish stripe appears on the skin of the pitiful victims, who, however firmly held, gasp in frightful contortions....At the first blows the unhappy victims let out horrible cries which soon become faint groans....In a refinement of evil, some officers, and I've witnessed this, demand that when the sufferer gets up, panting, he must graciously give the military salute."

-- Stanislas Lefranc, Belgian prosecutor



5-8 MILLION Victims - about 50% of the population

It is blood-curdling to see them (the soldiers) returning with the hands of the slain, and to find the hands of young children amongst the bigger ones evidencing their bravery...The rubber from this district has cost hundreds of lives, and the scenes I have witnessed, while unable to help the oppressed, have been almost enough to make me wish I were dead... This rubber traffic is steeped in blood, and if the natives were to rise and sweep every white person on the Upper Congo into eternity, there would still be left a fearful balance to their credit.

-- Belgian Official



Results of the Abuse

- ❑ Because of the terrible abuse and death, revolt broke out. Leopold sent troops into villages to exterminate the young men.
- ❑ To make sure bullets weren't wasted, soldiers were expected to return with the severed right hands of those they killed.
- ❑ Soldiers who couldn't meet quotas or spent bullets hunting would cut hands off of living women and children.
- ❑ Soldiers received payment for hands and "proved" that supervisors were not "wasting" bullets on game hunting
- ❑