10 Modern World History

Mr. Bedar

**Imperialism in Africa: Congo Case Study**

**Timeline:**

Middle Ages: Kongo Empire = strong unified state controls much of Kongo basin. Slavery part of Kongo culture (war captives, criminals, debtors).

1480s: Portuguese explorers arrive, set up ties w/ king

16th-17th Cent.: Euro merchants engage in slave trade (Kongo intermediaries)

1870s: Henry Stanley explores Congo River

1879: King Leopold commissions Stanley to establish king’s authority in Congo basin; Stanley gets local clan chiefs to sign treaties turning over their lands & labor of their people to Leopold

1884: Berlin Conference recognizes Leo’s claim; pretext of ending slavery and doing more scientific exploration

1885: “Congo Free State,” Leo as king. Congo = bigger territory than England, France, Germany, Spain, & Italy combined! 450 treaties w/ Congo chiefs (no idea what they were signing in exchange for cloth, trinkets, alcohol, other cheap goods)

1908: Belgian state annexes Congo (no longer private colony of king)

**The Tragic Effects:**

* Wives and children held as hostages until men returned with their quota of rubber.
* Resisters killed by machine-gun fire. Many were beheaded or had their hands cut off.
* King’s Officer: “To gather rubber in the district some must cut off hands, noses, and ears.” Those not gunned down or mutilated worked as slaves to maximize the rubber harvest.
* With the men doing forced labor and the women held hostage, the native social structure was destroyed.
* No one free to hunt game or grow crops, so starvation resulted and with it disease spread.
* Death toll:
* British diplomat Roger Casement’s 1904 report estimated 3 million for just 12 of the 20 year history of Leopold’s regime.
* Investigative reporter and author Peter Forbath estimated at least 5 million deaths
* Adam Hochschild estimated 10 million
* Encyclopedia Britannica gives a total population decline of 8 million to 30 million.