

Discussion: Adam Hochschild,  
*King Leopold's Ghost*

Professor Lavender  
23 March 2005

Memory of Congo.  
The Colonial Era

Temporary Exhibit, "Memory of Congo. The Colonial Era"  
(4 February 2005 - 9 October 2005), The Royal Museum  
for Central Africa (RMCA), Belgium.

Enter the exhibit: <http://www.congo2005.be/>

Museum Website: <http://www.africamuseum.be/>

Adam Hochschild, *King  
Leopold's Ghost*

Discussion Question:

What is the point of imperialism and colonialism? Why  
did countries find it so important to do?

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Discussion Question:

Why does Hochschild start this book about modern  
imperialism with stories about a King from the 16th  
century? Who was King Affonso I? Why should we find  
him interesting?

Adam Hochschild, *King  
Leopold's Ghost*

Discussion Question:

Why were Europeans so fascinated by the Congo River  
and its surroundings? Why were the Europeans so slow to  
actually map the Congo region?

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Discussion Question:

What were the reasons for King Leopold's initial interest  
in Africa? How did this interest change over time?

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Discussion Question:

What drew the average European to go to places like the Congo? What made them think they could leave their "bourgeois morality back in Europe?" (p. 138)

Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*

Discussion Question:

In what sense did imperialism represent a "liberation" for King Leopold from the ordinary headaches and concerns of rulership?

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Discussion Question:

Who was Henry M. Stanley? Why did he go to Africa? What did he hope to accomplish? To what qualities and characteristics should we attribute his "success" as an explorer?

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Discussion Question:

How did Leopold and Stanley use modern marketing techniques to manipulate the truth?

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Discussion Question:

How was the King of such a small country able to gain so much wealth and power?

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Discussion Question:

How did the Belgians succeed in maintaining their brutal rule over such a vast area and large population?

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Discussion Question:

How does a person psychologically justify that level of brutality? How can greed so overtake morality and humanity?

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Discussion Question:

Why did the European powers (and the United States) support Leopold's aspirations in the Congo? How do you explain the outcome of the International African Association meetings?

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Discussion Question:

Why did the ivory trade in the Congo become so brutal and exploitative – even by the standards of white colonial rule? What economic, social, and/or cultural factors influenced the character of this particular “commerce?”

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Discussion Question:

If people around the world knew what was going on, why didn't they act to stop it? Why didn't more powerful nations do anything to stop it?

Why did European businessmen, workers, soldiers, and missionaries allow this repressive system to continue?

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Discussion Question:

Weren't other countries doing similar things in their own colonies and territories? If so, how did they eventually justify attacking Leopold over them?

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Discussion Question:

What are your thoughts on how other imperial nations, such as Great Britain, France, Germany, and the US, responded to the atrocities? Could/should they have done more?

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Discussion Question:

Why is the Holocaust more "infamous" than the Congo atrocities? Why weren't the Force Publique put on trial for war crimes or crimes against humanity like the Nazis were?

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Discussion Question:

Can capitalism and the drive for profits coexist with social responsibility?

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Discussion Question:

How do these events still have an impact upon today's Africa? Are there problems there (and in the rest of the post-colonial world) that are the result of colonial brutality?