**The Scramble for Africa - Case study in genocide - The Belgian Congo**

One of the most significant consequences of the 1885 Berlin conference was the decision allow for the creation of the Congo Free State, a personal fiefdom of the Belgian king Leopold II.

A decade earlier, Leopold had hosted an international geographic conference to promote a 'humanitarian' exploration of the Congo basin in order to support anti-slavery and to encourage the 'civilisation of the region'.

Leopold had long since decided that his personal reputation and status of Belgium depended upon acquiring significant colonies somewhere in the world.  In 1879, Leopold employed Henry Morton Stanley ('Dr. Livingstone I presume') to explore  and claim the region of the Congo for the Belgian crown. In the meantime, Leopold set about secretly negotiating with the great powers of Europe and the USA, lobbying for their support through a mixture of financial incentives and empty philanthropic promises for a programme of African 'civilisation'. ​

The Berlin conference of 1884-5 was to be a triumph for Leopold's colonial ambitions and his diplomacy. What happened next is the subject of a brilliant piece of 'journalistic' history writing by Adam Hochschild,  '[**King Leopold's Ghost**](https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0330441981?tag=internatios0f-21)'. ​

Leopold's reign provided him with a vast personal fortune derived from rubber, ivory and minerals, which he used to build palaces and grand monuments in Brussels and other Belgian towns.

Until fairly recently, his reputation amongst Belgians was still relatively positive, he is known as the 'builder king'. Until recently, when I first taught in Brussels in 2009, the city's [**African Museum**](https://www.africamuseum.be/en?gclid=Cj0KCQjwmpb0BRCBARIsAG7y4zZfcQuGZa4WQrn61m6GT27sfOw8JKEPaaVqc-WWj0g8kXUN1civl7EaAhnAEALw_wcB) was still largely a *celebration* of Belgium's colonial past. (see this [**NY Times article**](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/08/arts/design/africa-museum-belgium.html)).  Adam Hochschild's book has done much to upset that, the following short film extract is a useful summary of some of his main conclusions. And perhaps most importantly as we have already seen, the [**events of 2020**](https://www.internationalschoolhistory.com/case-study---1532---battle-of-cajamarca.html) have changed things forever.

Activities using the video:

1. How did Leopold persuade the great powers to give him control over the Congo?

2. Explain why the population for Congo was halved from 20 million to about 10 million in the period 1880 to 1920.

3. What were human zoos and why was Leopold forced to give up his control over the Congo?