

# 1 | The Congo Free State, some Background

## 1.1 | Leopold's Conolisation

- Belgian emperor
- Lead first European development efforts into the Congo Basin
- Privatization of Public State allowed direct control
  - Congo Free State was a privately held state under the seat of the Belgian monarch, not the seat of the Belgian government
  - Used the guise of Philanthropy and spreading Christian message + approved by big state governments (US, most European monarchies, etc.)
- Under Europe's transformation to parliament > monarch, Leopold used Congo as a place where he could re-establish his absolute authority

## 1.2 | Forced Labour

"The second holocaust" => Rubber prices increases dramatically, leading Congo rubber to be very valuable

- Held up females in villages and forced men to work to free their wives
- Arm Cutting
  - To show that there was not bullet wasted in the army, the Royal Guard had to show the severed hand of each dead victim to his senior officer. If someone missed, the officer would sometimes cut off someone's hand to compensate.
  - To punish individuals who escaped or did not pour enough rubber, arms were cut off too
- And so, Birth Rates fell and famine ensued

## 1.3 | Effects of colonization

- Protests about the harsh working conditions
- Between 10 and 23 million people died during *Leopold's rule, from 1885 to 1908*.
- Africans lost their right to land ownership anywhere except within their own villages
- Colonial administrators also kidnapped orphaned children from communities and transported them to "child colonies" to work or train as soldiers. Estimates suggest more than 50% died there.
- Villages were burned and leveled to make way for rubber plantations
- Rubber quotas were set impossibly high, the punishment for not meeting requirements was to have hands chopped off.
- Small wars occurred where villages attacked neighboring communities to gather hands in order to escape the rubber quota.
- Constant starvation, war, and disease led to large declines in population
- Millions of Congolese were forced to harvest rubber, build railroads and mine for ore

## 1.4 | **Stats!**

- Population of the Congo state declined from 20 million => 8 million after much widespread brutality in labor forces
- estimates that the forced labor system led to the deaths of 50% of the population