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## CHAPTER TWO

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# GLOBAL CAPITALISM AND IMPERIALISM



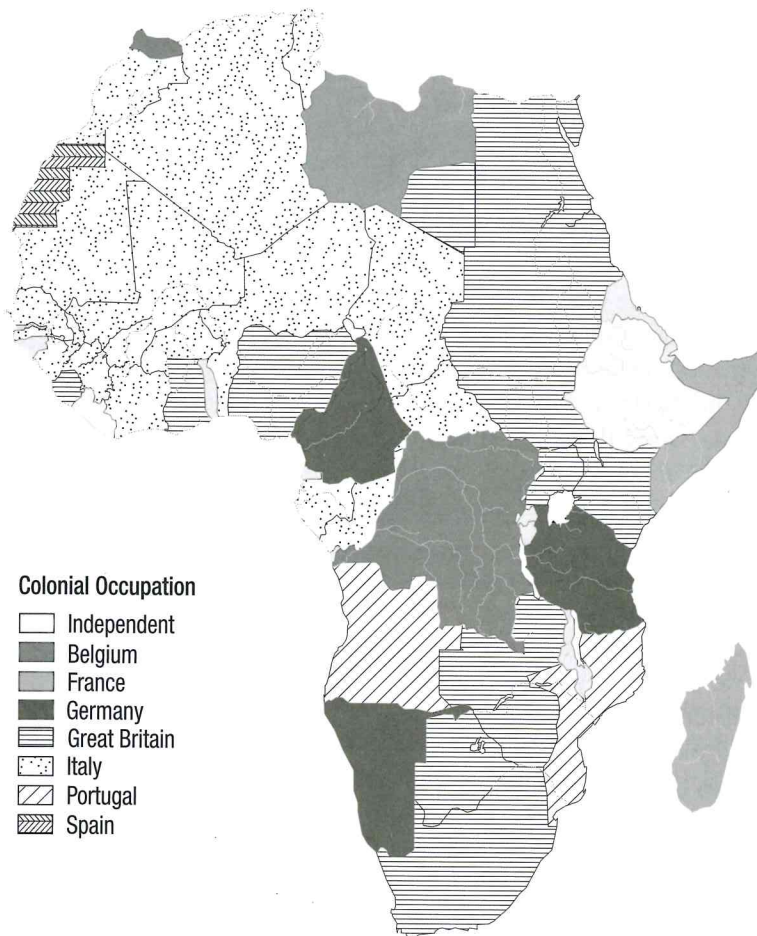
In the early part of the twentieth century the British Empire ruled over some 400 million people. This was by far the greatest proportion of the almost 80 per cent of the world that found itself under direct or indirect colonial control. However, France, Germany, Portugal, Belgium, the Ottoman Turks, and Japan also dominated substantial territories. Additionally, the United States had asserted, through the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary, its right to influence political and economic developments throughout the Americas. This 'informal' influence would lay the foundations for American neo-colonialism in Central and South America throughout the twentieth century.

While colonial policies and the degree of control varied widely among imperial nations, the effects on the colonized peoples tended to be similar. Throughout the colonial world the local populations became second- and even third-class citizens in their own countries; western educational, legal, and judicial systems were often imposed; and, in many of the European-controlled areas, land was reserved for white settlement. Repression and violence occurred in differing degrees in regions under imperial control, though the Belgian Congo, where the citizens lived under a draconian system of terror, experienced the most sustained abuses. Under neo-colonialism the overt mechanisms of control were absent but the restrictions inherent in the production of cash crops grown for export, left the indigenous populations impoverished and politically powerless.

Around the world resistance to the attitudes and consequences of colonial control was quick to form. In India, members of the Indian National Congress condemned the economic and social consequences of colonial control. Writers such as W.E.B. Du Bois drew attention to the fate of the black population around the world, calling for a co-operative effort to achieve liberation, and Vladimir Lenin denounced imperialism as the last gasp of global capitalism.

This chapter considers the causes and consequences of global imperialism. Adam Hochschild offers a perspective on colonialism in the Belgian Congo. Jules

Ferry and the Earl of Cromer defend the need for colonial control over foreign territory. B.G. Tilak offers a persuasive argument against British rule in India and proposes the boycott as an effective weapon in the fight to regain indigenous control. The documents on the Amritsar Massacre and Winston Churchill's wartime speech show just how determined the British were to maintain their hold on 'the jewel in the crown'. Turning to neo-colonialism, Brazilian historian Caio Prado Júnior explains the vulnerability of the cash-crop economies of South America. Lenin's assessment of imperialism as 'the highest stage of capitalism' offers an important explanation for the rapid rise of the colonial empires of the late nineteenth century. W.E.B. Du Bois points to the emerging Pan-African movement as the key to freedom for the black peoples of the world.



Africa at the height of colonial control. Note the vast size of the territories controlled by France and Great Britain.

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## ADAM HOCHSCHILD

Adam Hochschild has written on a wide variety of topics, including Stalin's legacy in the Soviet Union and the apartheid era in South Africa, as well as contributing pieces to *The New Yorker*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *The Nation*. Born in 1942, Hochschild—a New York native—teaches writing at the Graduate School of Journalism at the

University of California, Berkeley. The following excerpt from *King Leopold's Ghost* discusses the terror system established in Leopold's Belgian Congo in order to maintain control at little cost to the Europeans. It also touches upon the rationale invoked by many of the European administrators in the Congo around the turn of the twentieth century.



### KING LEOPOLD'S GHOST

Stanislas Lefranc, a devout Catholic and monarchist, was a Belgian prosecutor who had come to the Congo to work as a magistrate. Early one Sunday morning in Leopoldville,<sup>1</sup> he heard the sound of many children screaming desperately.

On tracing the howls to their source, Lefranc found 'some thirty urchins, of whom several were seven or eight years old, lined up and waiting their turn, watching, terrified, their companions being flogged. Most of the urchins, in a paroxysm of grief . . . kicked so frightfully that the soldiers ordered to hold them by the hands and feet had to lift them off the ground. . . . 25 times the whip slashed down on each of the children.' The evening before, Lefranc learned, several children had laughed in the presence of a white man, who then ordered that all the servant boys in town be given fifty lashes. The second installment of twenty-five lashes was due at six o'clock the next morning. Lefranc managed to get these stopped, but was told not to make any more protests that interfered with discipline.

Lefranc was seeing in use a central tool of Leopold's Congo, which in the minds of the territory's people, soon became as closely identified with white rule as the steamboat or the rifle. It was the *chicotte*—a whip of raw, sun-dried hippopotamus hide, cut into a long sharp-edged corkscrew strip.

Usually the *chicotte* was applied to the victim's bare buttocks. Its blows would leave permanent scars; more than twenty-five strokes could mean unconsciousness; and a hundred or more—not an uncommon punishment—were often fatal.

Lefranc was to see many more *chicotte* beatings, although his descriptions of them, in pamphlets and newspaper articles he published in Belgium, provoked little reaction.

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.

The open horror Lefranc expressed succeeded only in earning him a reputation as an oddball or troublemaker. He 'shows an astonishing ignorance of things which he ought to know because of his

work. A mediocre agent,' the acting governor general wrote in a personnel evaluation. In an attempt to quiet his complaints, Lefranc wrote, officials ordered that executions at his post be carried out in a new location instead of next to his house.

Except for Lefranc, few Europeans working for the regime left records of their shock at the sight of officially sanctioned terror. The white men who passed through the territory as military officers, steamboat captains, or state or concession company officials generally accepted the use of the *chicotte* as unthinkingly as hundreds of thousands of other men in uniform would accept their assignments, a half-century later, to staff the Nazi and Soviet concentration camps. 'Monsters exist,' wrote Primo Levi of his experience at Auschwitz. 'But they are too few in number to be truly dangerous. More dangerous are . . . the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions.' . . .

Although some whites in the Congo enjoyed wielding the *chicotte*, most put a . . . symbolic distance between themselves and the dreaded instrument. 'At first I . . . took upon myself the responsibility of meting out punishment to those whose conduct during the previous day seemed to warrant such treatment,' recalled Raoul de Premorel, who worked for a company operating in the Kasai River basin. 'Soon . . . I found it desirable to assign the execution of sentences to others under my direction. The best plan seemed to be to have each *capita* [African foreman] administer the punishment for his own gang.'

And so the bulk of *chicotte* blows were inflicted by Africans on the bodies of other Africans. This,

for the conquerors, served a further purpose. It created a class of foremen from among the conquered. . . . Just as terrorizing people is part of conquest, so is forcing someone else to administer the terror.

Finally, when terror is the unquestioned order of the day, wielding it efficiently is regarded as a manly virtue, the way soldiers value calmness in battle. This is the ultimate in 'becoming used to it'. Here, for instance, a station chief named Georges Bricusse describes in his diary a hanging he ordered in 1895 of a man who had stolen a rifle:

The gallows is set up. The rope is attached, too high. They lift up the nigger and put the noose around him. The rope twists for a few moments, then *crack*, the man is wiggling on the ground. A shot in the back of the neck and the game is up. It didn't make the least impression on me this time!! And to think that the first time I saw the *chicotte* administered, I was pale with fright. Africa has some use after all. I could now walk into fire as if to a wedding.

#### Note

1. Leopoldville was the capital of the Belgian Congo, named in a tribute to the Belgian King.

#### Study Question

1. Why was popular opposition to the atrocities committed in the Congo so ineffective in bringing about any change in the conditions?

Jules Ferry (1832–1903) was the Provisional President of the Third Republic established in 1870. He was also Minister of Education (1879–81, 1885–86) and Foreign Affairs (1880–81, 1883–86). He was a free, secular, and a barred member of the Académie Française.



Contract labourer and its resource Division (LC-USZ62-10867)