



Take a look at this picture. Do you know who it is?

Most people haven't heard of him.

But you should have. When you see his face or hear his name you should get as sick in your stomach as when you read about Mussolini or Hitler or see one of their pictures. You see, he killed over 10 million people in the Congo.

His name is [King Leopold II of Belgium](#).

He "owned" the Congo during his reign as the constitutional monarch of Belgium. After several failed colonial attempts in Asia and Africa, he settled on the Congo. He "bought" it and enslaved its people, turning the entire country into his own personal slave plantation. He disguised his business transactions as "philanthropic" and "scientific" efforts under the banner of the *International African Society*. He used their enslaved labor to extract Congolese resources and services. His reign was enforced through work camps, body mutilations, torture, executions, and his own private army.

Most of us aren't taught about him in school. We don't hear about him in the media. He's not part of the widely-repeated narrative of oppression (which includes things like the Holocaust during World War II). He's part of a long history of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, and genocide in Africa that would clash with the social construction of a white supremacist narrative in our schools. It doesn't fit neatly into school curriculums in a capitalist society. Making overtly racist remarks is (sometimes) frowned upon in 'polite' society; but it's quite fine not to talk about genocide in Africa perpetrated by European capitalist monarchs.<sup>1</sup>

Mark Twain wrote a satire about Leopold called “[King Leopold’s Soliloquy; A Defense of His Congo Rule](#)”, where he mocked the King’s defense of his reign of terror, largely through Leopold’s own words. It’s an easy read at 49 pages and Mark Twain is a popular author in American public schools. But like most political authors, we will often read some of their least political writings or read them without learning why the author wrote them in the first place. Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, for example, serves to reinforce American anti-socialist propaganda about how egalitarian societies are doomed to turn into their dystopian opposites. But Orwell was an anti-capitalist revolutionary of a different kind—a supporter of working class democracy from below—and that is never pointed out. We can read about Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, but “[King Leopold’s Soliloquy](#)” isn’t on the reading list. This isn’t by accident. Reading lists are created by boards of education in order to prepare students to follow orders and endure boredom. From the point of view of the Department of Education, Africans have no history.

When we learn about Africa, we learn about a caricatured Egypt, about the HIV epidemic (but never its causes), about the surface level effects of the slave trade, and maybe about South African Apartheid (the effects of which, we are taught, are now long, long over). We also see lots of pictures of starving children on Christian Ministry commercials, we see safaris on animal shows, and we see pictures of deserts in films and movies. But we don’t learn about the Great African War or Leopold’s Reign of Terror during the Congolese Genocide. Nor do we learn about what the United States has done in Iraq and Afghanistan, killing millions of people through bombs, sanctions, disease, and starvation. Body counts are important. And the United States Government doesn’t count Afghan, Iraqi, or Congolese people.

Though the Congolese Genocide isn’t included on Wikipedia’s “Genocides in History” page, it does mention the Congo. What’s now called the Democratic Republic of the Congo is listed in reference to the Second Congo War (also called Africa’s World War and the Great War of Africa), where both sides of the regional conflict hunted down Bambenga people—a regional ethnic group—and enslaved and cannibalized them. Cannibalism and slavery are horrendous evils which must be entered into history for sure, but I couldn’t help thinking whose interests were served when the only mention of the Congo on the page was in reference to regional incidents where a tiny minority of people in Africa were eating each other (completely devoid of the conditions which created the conflict, and the people and institutions who are responsible for those conditions). Stories which support the white supremacist narrative about the subhumanness of people in Africa are allowed to enter the records of history. The white guy who turned the Congo into his own personal part-plantation, part-concentration camp, part-Christian ministry—and killed 10 to 15 million Congolese people in the process—doesn’t make the cut.<sup>2</sup>

You see, when you kill ten million Africans, you aren’t called ‘Hitler’. That is, your name doesn’t come to symbolize the living incarnation of evil. Your name and your picture don’t produce fear, hatred, and sorrow. Your victims aren’t talked about and your name isn’t remembered.

[Leopold](#) was just one of thousands of things that helped construct white supremacy as both an ideological narrative and material reality. I don’t pretend that he was the source of all evil in the Congo. He had generals, and foot soldiers, and managers who did his bidding and enforced his laws. He was at the head of a system. But that doesn’t negate the need to talk about the

individuals who are symbolic of the system. But we don't even get that. And since it isn't talked about, what capitalism did to Africa, all the privileges that rich white people gained from the Congolese genocide, remain hidden. The victims of imperialism are made, like they usually are, invisible.

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For a modern day example of the callousness of Western imperialism, read my post about the famine in Somalia "[20,000 billion dollars for banks, 1 billion for millions of Africans suffering from capitalist famine](#)", also on this website.

*The moral rights of the author have been asserted.*