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King Leopold's Ghost: Methods used to subdue the Africans

In Adam Hochschild's book, King Leopold's Ghost he depicts the brutal reality of what was the Congo. From the rise of King Leopold II and his firing desire to own his own wealth making colony that gave him ultimate power and at what lengths he would go to achieve his dream. In order for Leopold to get what he wanted he had to subdue the Africans in their own territory. This was done through slavery that already existed in Africa, Stanley's expeditions, and through torture.

Slavery existed in Africa before Europeans showed up, but it was more flexible than the system Europeans established. In Africa, slaves could often earn or be granted their freedom over generations. Slaves were also allowed to intermarry with free people. Slavery in Africa could be vicious, on special occasions, such as the ratification of a treaty between chiefdoms, slaves were sacrificed. The slow death of an abandoned slave with broken bones symbolized the fate of anyone who violated the treaty. Slaves were also sacrificed to give a dead chief's soul some company on its journey into the next world. The fact that any kind of slavery already existed in Africa made it easier to subdue the Africans because when Europeans came in wanting to buy endless shiploads of slaves, African chiefs had them and were all too willing to sell. When chiefs were willing to sell their slaves this increased the market for African slaves. The slaves were put to work by the millions in Brazil's mines and on its coffee plantations, along with the Caribbean

island where other European powers began using the land to grow sugar which required more slaves, leading to more chiefs selling slaves. Soon European men that set out to be masons or teachers in the Congo were overpowered by slave fever and began to make money by herding convoys of chained Africans to the coast and selling them. These events created a new era of the slave trade that was catastrophic to Africa.

Leopold II used Henry Morton Stanley to build the basis of the new Congo. Stanley's exploration for Leopold II revealed that Africa's inhabitants had no military threat, and Stanley's three dozen battles showed the people's spears and arrows were no match for the white man's new breech-loading Snider rifles. He also discovered that there wasn't a single all-powerful state that had to be taken over in the Congo. There were several large kingdoms, but they had been weakened by slave-hunting raids throughout the centuries leaving many Congo basin populations small in number. There were also more than two hundred different ethnic groups speaking more than four hundred different languages and dialects revealing that conquest wouldn't be hard to manage because all the Africans were not united. All these situations in the Congo that Stanley discovered made subduing the Africans a lot easier. Stanley also had a bad temper and he was a harsh taskmaster he states "The best punishment is that of irons because without wounding, disfiguring, or torturing the body, it inflicts shame and discomfort." In Order to build the roads that were necessary for the new trade in the Congo manual labor was required. This labor was found in neighboring villages or kingdoms, men were traded for clothes, beads, or small tokens. Other times they were just taken and enslaved without warning in the middle of the night.

Soldiers used torture to subdue Africans. Torture included cutting off hands, beating Africans, and kidnapping wives and children. Soldiers had to kill a certain amount of Africans to

meet their quotas, they proved the deaths by cutting off the dead's right hand. In some situations, soldiers cut off the hands of live Africans to claim them as dead. When fathers did not want to obey by getting rubber or if they did not find enough rubber soldiers cut off the hands and or feet of their children. African children and adults were stripped naked and beat when it was felt necessary, for them to behave as seen fit from the white man. Their bodies would be left bloody and beaten. Children were no exception to this they were beaten and tortured just as badly as adult Africans, no sympathy was given. Wives and children were taken and held hostage in chains by guards in order to force husbands to go into the rain forest to gather wild rubber. Indigenous leaders were also often forced to supply their people as rubber slaves or be held hostage or even killed. In other cases African leaders were held hostage until their people could gather enough rubber, then they were set free if they made it out alive.

In conclusion, one can see at the dreadful means king Leopold was willing to go and let his soldiers go in order to rule the Congo. Lives were not spared in this deadly fight for the Congo, lives were taken for “fun” by some officers. Europeans were able to subdue the Africans because slavery already existed in Africa before Stanley arrived, Stanley’s explorations for King Leopold provided vital knowledge about Africa revealing that conquest would not be all that difficult to pursue, and they were also able to subdue the Africans through tortures means such as, cutting off hands, beating them, and holding some as hostages.

Works Cited

Hochschild, Adam. *King Leopold's Ghost: a story of greed, terror and heroism in colonial Africa*. Pan, 2012.