

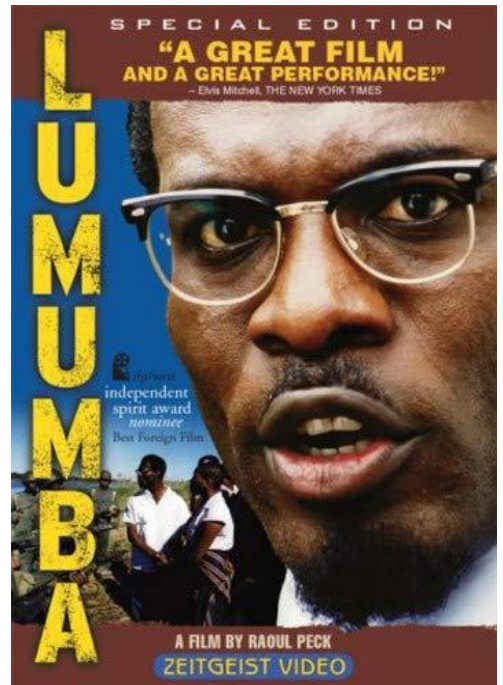
Class Notes for the Film *Lumumba*

Folks:

These brief notes prepared for you on the film *Lumumba* should go some way in assisting you to both appreciate and comprehend the film better. This film is about the first democratically elected prime minister of a country in Africa, called the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and his murder because he stood in the way of external forces, such as the United States (aided and abetted by internal forces), that wanted to continue looting the natural resources of his country. The consequences of that awful deed, it should be pointed out, continues to reverberate to this day in that country and the surrounding countries.

Please understand that these notes are not meant to be a substitute for seeing the film. **Note:** the section titled *glossary*, below, must be read in conjunction with the main glossary, the *course glossary* (available through the *online materials for course assignments* page) or via this link:

<http://bit.ly/courseglossary>.



1. Viewing Audio-Visual Material in this Course

Whenever you are asked to view audio-visual material in this course (whether in class or outside class—as homework) it is extremely important that you consider this material as an extension of class lectures (and not some diversion to “spice” up the class). Therefore, please be aware that such material may also be included on tests. However, unless specifically indicated to the contrary, you

will be allowed to consult any handwritten notes (repeat: handwritten notes only) you may have on such material during the test.

2. Director/Credits/Format of the Film

Visit the website www.imdb.com and do a search for the film to access this information. (When you bring up the relevant page for the film make sure you scroll down the entire page, as well as explore some of the links on the left side of the page.)

3. Dramatis Personae

Kasavubu, Joseph: As one would expect, the Democratic Republic of the Congo inherited from the Belgians a parliamentary political system; that is a system in which the head of state (usually a ceremonial titular position and in this instance known as the president) is not the head of government (in this instance referred to as the prime minister). Joseph Kasavubu was the head of state, that is, he was the president of the Congo at the time of independence and would remain in this position until the Mobutu-led military coup in 1965. Like Tshombe, Kasavubu came from a major ethnic grouping, in this case the *Bakongo*, and like Tshombe was an important member of the emergent Congolese elite that had come to develop a cozy compradorial relationship with their Belgian colonial oppressors. Again, like Tshombe, he also took the path to political prominence by initially heading the politico-cultural association of his ethnic group, the Alliance des Ba-Kongo (or *Abako*). His relationship with Lumumba was an uneasy one, viewing him as a radical upstart bent on unnecessarily upsetting his patrons, the Belgians. It is not surprising, therefore, that when push came to shove he sided with Lumumba's enemies and ordered his arrest and by implication his eventual murder.

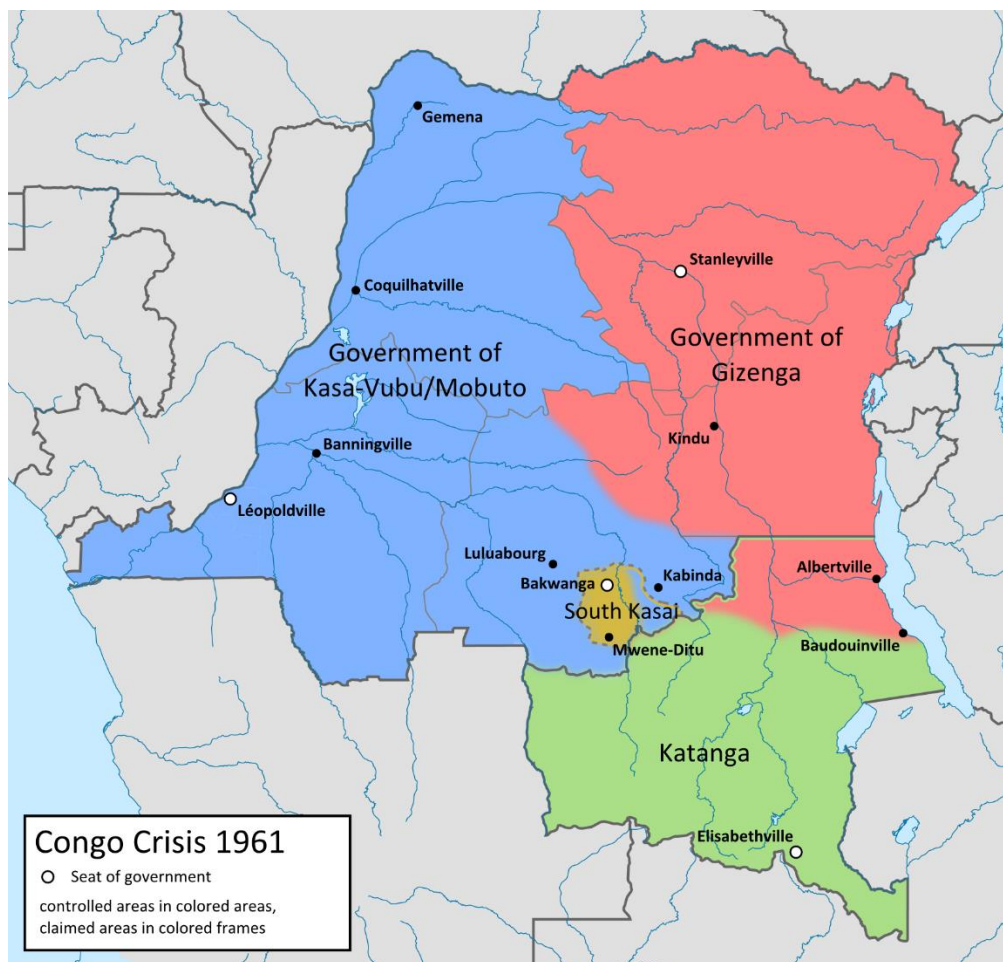
Lumumba, Patrice Emery: He was the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the former colony of Belgium, and like such other radical luminaries as Malcolm-X and Che Guevara, he would come to attain global prominence through martyrdom. Patrice Lumumba assumed office following his party's (the MNC, Mouvement National Congolais) resounding electoral victory in the first ever national elections held in the run-up to political independence on June 30, 1960. Tragically, however, he was murdered in January 1961 (in the secessionist province of Katanga, as we see in the film), shortly after being driven from office—which he had occupied for only a few months (June-September 1960)—as a predictable outcome of unbridled and racist Belgian skullduggery, aided and abetted by the United States against the backdrop of an escalating Cold War,¹ coupled with internal Congolese ethnic rivalry fueled by greed and political

¹ In fact, President Eisenhower had already issued an order to assassinate him at a National Security Council meeting on August 18, 1960. The CIA's Sidney Gottlieb duly prepared a cobra snake venom for administration to Lumumba, but in the end it was not necessary to use it. Other means evolved in the course of events. (For more on the U.S. intervention in Zaire see Kalb 1982; and Weissman 1974, 1978.)

ambition on the part of his opponents. Patrice Lumumba was first and foremost a *nationalist* through ideological conviction, as well as structural demographic location in the sense that as a member of a small ethnic group (compared to that of his rivals) it was in his objective interest to seek a united Congo in which no single ethnicity would dominate. His ethnicity was *Batetela*, and his journey to political prominence involved, among other things, trade union activities and, later, the formation of the first nation-wide nationalist political party, the MNC. Guys, a “What-If” historiographical question: Would the chaotic and violence-prone Democratic Republic of the Congo be different today had Prime Minister Lumumba not been deposed and murdered? Given the current general state of Africa as it continues to grapple with historically determined Western neo-imperialist intrigue—now increasingly being leavened by a resurgent Chinese presence on the continent—on one hand, and on the other an ethnically-riven and corrupt greed-driven African elite (for the most part—some isolated exceptions here and there only confirming the rule), the answer is probably not, even if he personally had remained a person of integrity and a true pan-Africanist patriot.

Mobutu, Joseph Désiré: A brutal kleptocratic dictator who began his more than three decades political career by first overthrowing Lumumba, followed by Kasavubu, and who would later rename himself as *Mobutu Sese Seko Koko Ngbendu Wa Za Banga*, was a neo-colonial comprador par excellence. Most ironically, his initiation into politics began with his befriending Lumumba and joining the MNC while Mobutu was still a member of the Belgian colonial militia,

the *Force Publique*. His appointment by Prime Minister Lumumba to the position of secretary of state for national defense, following independence, marked the beginning of his journey toward an opportunism of the vilest kind; it would seal Lumumba's fate. In a CIA-supported coup, Mobutu, who had already shown his true sadistic colors by means of massacres of civilians in Katanga, deposed the Lumumba government on September 14, 1960. Five years later, in a second CIA-supported coup, Mobutu, who by now had



established his reputation as an ambitious pro-Western opportunist, would become the head of state. (The governments of Cyrille Adoula and later Moïse Tshombé in the intervening period had failed to live up to U.S. expectations.) Undoubtedly, for the West Mobutu was a godsend—but then, throughout the history of Africa and other PQD regions, people like him, willing to sell their country into bondage for the price of Western trinkets and a few pieces of gold and silver, have always abounded. Hence from 1965 until Mobutu's eventual political demise in 1997 at the hands of Congolese rebels led by one Laurent Désiré Kabila in May 1997, U.S. policy toward this thug "[had] consisted of an unswerving support for Mobutu, his corrupt, arbitrary, and dictatorial rule notwithstanding. The support was based on at least three premises: (1) that a vast and multiethnic country like Zaire needed a strong man whose iron rule would help maintain stability and thereby safeguard Western interests; (2) that the United States ought to support its loyal friends, regardless of their behavior; and (3) that Zaire under a pro-Western government [could] play a gendarme role in the region as a whole" (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1985: 233).

Tshombé, Moïse: A highly ambitious and corrupt politician and from a relatively wealthy family background (in terms of the Congolese of the period), developed an early dislike for Patrice Lumumba in whom he saw not only a dangerous political rival but, to add insult to injury, one seeking to rise above his station, both ethnically and in terms of class (Lumumba came from a poor and rural background). Tshombé's ethnicity was *Balunda*, that is he was a member of a large and powerful ethnic group (the *Lunda*) that in the pre-colonial period had held considerable sway over a large region that included what became Katanga province following the colonization of the Congo by the Belgians. True to form, his ascendancy to political prominence was via the leadership of the conservative Lunda dominated ethnic political party *Conakat* (Confédération des Associations Tribales du Katanga). Not surprisingly, with political independence on the horizon, Conakat found in the Belgian mining monopoly that operated in the mineral-rich Katanga, *Union Minière du Haut Katanga*, a powerful ally. Sensing that a united Congo under the leadership of a strongly nationalist Lumumba-led government would not allow it free reign to continue exploiting Congo's mineral resources with impunity, this mining monopoly felt that it could best protect its predatory interests by means of a neo-colonialist device: engineer the secession of Katanga and then install a puppet regime under the leadership of Tshombé. (Although Conakat had participated in the national elections—despite Tshombé's efforts (among that of others) to bring about a loose federally structured Congo instead of a strong unitary state during the negotiations for independence— it had managed to capture, quite tellingly, less than ten percent of the seats in the new Congolese Parliament.) As we see in the film, taking advantage of a chaotic situation provoked by an army mutiny just two weeks after independence, Katanga did secede in July, with Tshombé and his cronies at the helm and the Belgians, supported by a force of white mercenaries, bringing up the rear guard. It would take some three years, and the assistance of a United Nations force to defeat Tshombé's troops, before Katanga was brought back into the fold. Interestingly, Tshombé, after he had fled to Spain, would be invited the following year (1964) by President Kasavubu to come back and head the Congo as prime minister, but only to be dismissed the next year for, among other things, plotting against Kasavubu. Tshombé went into exile in Spain for a second time. Two years later, however

(in 1967), upon rumors that he was planning to return to the Congo, he was kidnapped and flown to Algeria where he died of a heart attack (on June 29, 1969) while under house arrest.

4. Places

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): This huge country that forms the geographic context for the film, and which occupies most of the Congo River basin and is home to the second largest rainforest on the planet, began its journey toward an ignominious European colonial enterprise



as, initially, a personal fiefdom of Belgium's King Leopold II after the region was brought to his attention by Henry Morton Stanley.² The King's hold on the region was formalized at the infamous Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884-85 where Africa was literally carved up among a group of competing European powers—with the blessing of United States (itself preoccupied with its own colonial enterprise by way of the westward expansion into the remaining Native American lands), as a finishing touch—with the naming of this new colony as the Congo Free State (the word free in the name signified free to be exploited by any Western investor). Following a slowly escalating worldwide publicity, undertaken over a number of years by concerned journalists and the like,³ of the massive

human rights violations that characterized the economic exploitation of the region (unusual in extent and level of barbarity even for its day, epitomized by systematic killings, kidnappings, mutilations, torture, and so on, of the Congolese, all in the name of profit⁴) the Congo Free State

² Guys, the DRC should not be confused with the neighboring country called the Republic of the Congo (sometimes referred to as Congo-Brazzaville, with Brazzaville being its capital city).

³ The opening shot in this effort was fired by George Washington Williams (an African American U.S. Civil War veteran, lawyer, and politician among other things) who visited the Congo in 1890 and was horrified at the level of barbarity perpetrated by the Belgians that he found there.

⁴ A particularly heinous device perpetrated on the Congolese was the chopping off of hands, including those of children! Those of you who are into literature may wish to note that the horrendous nature of the colonial regime that the rapacious representatives of King Leopold II created in the Congo serves as the factual background for the story in the novella *Heart of Darkness* by the Polish-born English novelist Joseph Conrad. Interestingly, Francis Ford Coppola's Academy Award winning Vietnam War film, *Apocalypse Now*, was inspired by Conrad's novella.

was sold by the King Leopold II to the Belgian state—thereby becoming a formal Belgian colony in 1908, and now renamed simply as the Belgian Congo.⁵ (When Mobutu took over the country he renamed it *Zaire*, and following his departure, the country was again renamed, this time as the Democratic Republic of the Congo.)

Independence came to the Belgian Congo on June 30, 1960 quickly and unexpectedly in that the Belgians had neither planned for it nor were the Congolese ready for it. Perhaps, not surprisingly, the country would quickly fragment and descend into a civil war as different groups within this huge and ethnically highly diverse country jockeyed for power (aided and abetted by various external players, including foreign commercial interests, the Belgians themselves, the United States, the former Soviet Union, and so on).⁶ Political instability would last for almost five years culminating in a military coup on November 25, 1965 that would bring to power a corrupt, kleptocratic, and blood-soaked dictatorship—led by the strongman Colonel Joseph Mobutu (who would later, in 1970, rename the country *Zaire* and himself as Mobutu Sese Seko) and externally supported by, among others, the United States. His despotic rule would last until 1997, when as a result of another civil war that would consume the lives of thousands upon thousands of civilians in demonic massacres, a new regime would come to power under the leadership of Laurent-Desire Kabila, while Zaire would be renamed Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁷

Katanga: This was and remains to this day a mineral-rich province where most of the DRC's copper, cobalt, uranium, zinc, cadmium, silver, gold, etc., is mined. The province, which was renamed Shaba province during Mobutu's reign, is bounded by Lake Tanganyika in the east, Zambia in the south, and Angola in the west. The dominant ethnicity in the province is Lunda and it is on the basis of this demographic fact that Moise Tshombe sought to build his political and economic fortunes.

Léopoldville (today known as *Kinshasa*): Then, as today, the capital city of the DRC.

⁵ Folks, just in case you feel tempted to mark out the Belgians as somehow unique in their uncivilized and barbarous behavior toward the Congolese (who, remember, had never done anything to Belgium and its peoples to merit an invasion of their country), do not forget what the Spanish, the Portuguese, the French, the British, and the U.S. did to the Native American peoples of the Americas (including, of course, this country).

⁶ Even the United Nations refused to protect the legitimate and democratically elected government of Patrice Lumumba, despite the intervention of its forces in the emerging political chaos. Given that the United Nations was then headed by a man who was largely sympathetic to U.S. Cold War interests, Dag Hammarskjöld, this outcome was perhaps not surprising.

⁷ As of now, the civil war (characterized by much brutality, savagery, mass rape of women and girls, child soldiers, kidnappings, unprovoked attacks on civilians, warlordism, etc.) has yet to end, and to make matters worse, at one point it had drawn into it armed forces from the neighboring countries of Angola, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Ironically, the United Nations forces are also, once more, involved in the DRC as peace-keepers.

Stanleyville (today known as *Kisangani*): Located in the heart of the DRC on the farthest navigable point of the Congo River more than a thousand miles inland from the river's mouth on the Atlantic Ocean, the city was the hometown of Patrice Lumumba.

Élisabethville (today known as *Lubumbashi*): The capital of Katanga province, then as today, it was the seat of Tshombe's secessionist government. It is the second largest city in the DRC, with the first being Kinshasa and the third, Kisangani.

Zaire: See Democratic Republic of the Congo.

5. Glossary

Knowing the following terms is absolutely essential for a full comprehension of this film.

Colonialism: See the main [course glossary](#).

Comprador: See the main [course glossary](#).

Nationalist: See the main [course glossary](#).

Ne imperialism: See the main [course glossary](#).

6. The Belgian Colonies (a brief historical overview)

In Zaire (now called the Democratic Republic of the Congo) the United States, under the umbrella of the United Nations, which at the time was headed by a man who was largely sympathetic to U.S. Cold War interests, Dag Hammarskjold, had intervened on the side of the Belgians and one Moïse Tshombe, who together were in the process of dismembering Zaire by organizing the secession of the mineral rich province of Katanga. The government of Patrice Lumumba, who the West (especially the United States) came to detest because it was perceived as anti-Western (and therefore ipso facto pro-Soviet), in order to save the country from this externally mediated fragmentation called upon the Soviets for assistance. The United States conveniently interpreted this action as a vindication that the Lumumba government was simply a communist front. It would mark the beginning of the end of the Lumumba government and Zairean independence.

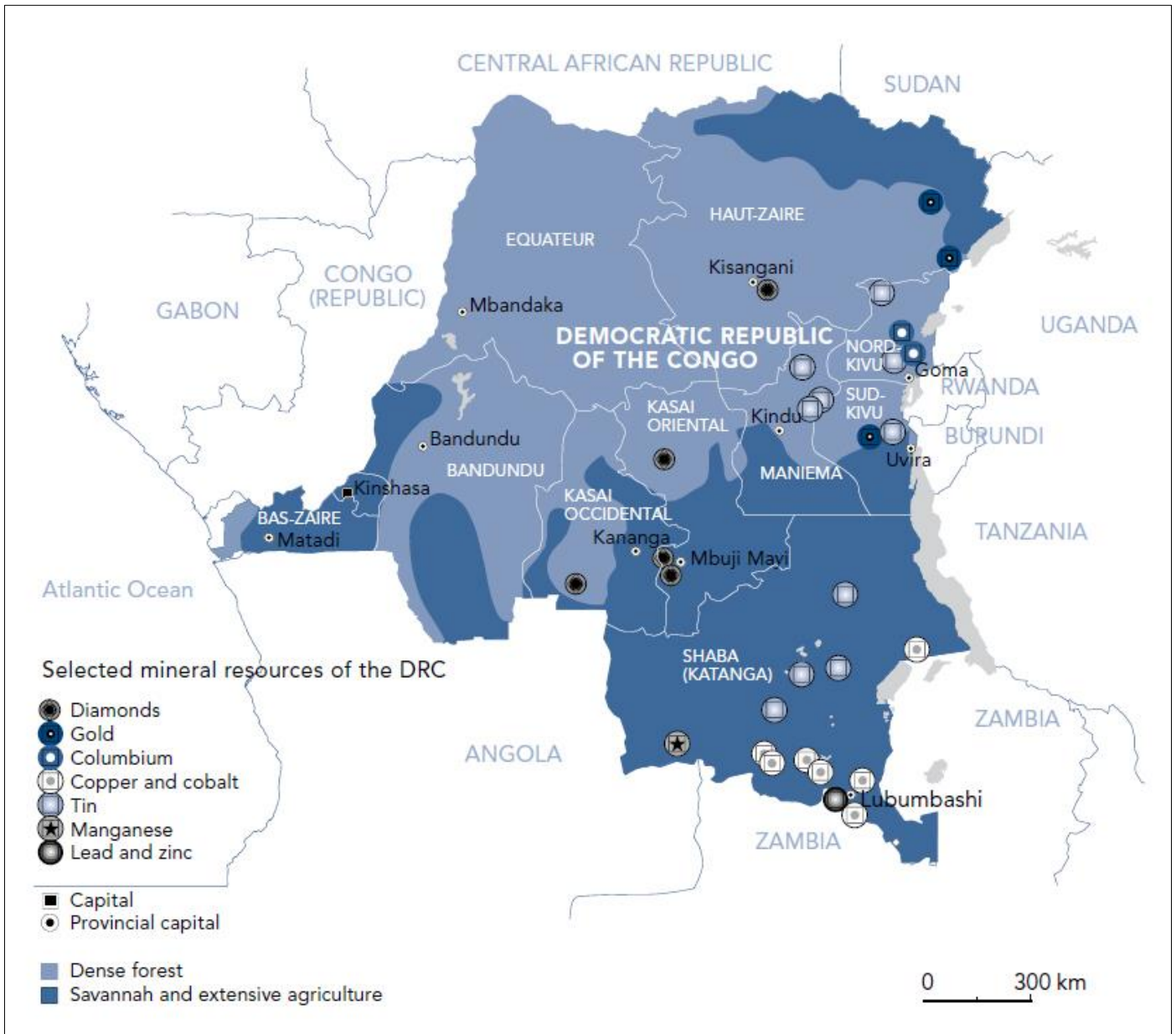
In a CIA-supported coup, Joseph-Desire Mobutu (who would later rename himself as Mobutu Sese-Seko), the chief of staff of the Congolese National Army who had already shown his true sadistic colors via massacres of civilians in Katanga, deposed the Lumumba government on September 14, 1960. Five years later, in a second CIA supported coup, Mobutu, who by now had established his reputation as an ambitious pro-Western opportunist, would become the head of state. (The governments of Cyrille Adoula and later Moïse Tshombe in the intervening period had

failed to live up to U.S. expectations.) In the meantime, on January 17, 1961, Lumumba, now imprisoned, was murdered by his captors while being transferred to Elizabethville from Thysville—aided and abetted by the West, particularly the United States. In fact, President Eisenhower had already issued an order to assassinate him at a National Security Council meeting on August 18, 1960. The CIA's Sidney Gottlieb duly prepared a cobra venom for administration to Lumumba, but in the end it was not necessary to use it. Other means evolved in the course of events. (For more on the U.S. intervention in Zaire see Kalb 1982; and Weissman 1974, 1978.) Undoubtedly, for the West (and the apartheid government too), Mobutu was a godsend—but then, throughout the history of Africa and other PQD regions, people like him, willing to sell their country into bondage for the price of Western trinkets and a few pieces of gold and silver, have always abounded. Thus since 1965 until Mobutu's eventual demise at the hands of rebels, U.S. policy "[had] consisted of an unswerving support for Mobutu, his corrupt, arbitrary, and dictatorial rule notwithstanding. The support was based on at least three premises: (1) that a vast and multiethnic country like Zaire need[ed] a strong man whose iron rule would help maintain stability and thereby safeguard Western interests; (2) that the United States ought to support its loyal friends, regardless of their behavior; and (3) that Zaire under a pro-Western government [could] play a gendarme role in the region as a whole" (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1985: 233).

It is this type of government capable of meeting these kinds of objectives that the United States and the apartheid government had wished to see installed in both Angola and Rhodesia (and one may add even Mozambique). It did not matter that such a government would consist virtually of a gang of thugs (armed and supported by the United States and its allies); inflicting terror on their people to keep them subservient, while systematically looting the national treasury. To take the example of Zaire itself, and here it is important to emphasize that Zaire was not alone in this, its human rights record was awfully abysmal. Arbitrary arrests, torture, murder, and mutilation of opponents or simply suspected opponents was rampant under Mobutu. As for corruption, the following example provided by Young (1985: 221) is graphically indicative. He describes: "Mobutu spent at least \$2 million in 1982 taking an entourage of ninety-three, many of them close relatives in mourning for recently deceased senior kinsman (and vintage embezzler) Litho Maboti, to Disney World in Florida, aboard a chartered aircraft."⁸

The transformation in 1908 of the Congo Free State from a personal fiefdom of Belgium's King Leopold II, following an international outcry against the horrors perpetrated by his agents on the Congolese people, to a Belgian colony (renamed Belgian Congo) would, for the most part, be simply one more marker on a horrendously blood-soaked and nightmarish long journey for most of the Congolese, *which to this day—unbelievable it may appear—continues!* In other words, no matter how you cut it, when viewed across more than a century of history *up to the present*, the continuing agony of the Congolese is a product of both racism (whites against blacks) and ethnicism (blacks against blacks) at the root of which has been barbarous greed—aided and

⁸ For more on the politics and history of Zaire see International Crisis Group (2005), Kelly (1993), Hochschild (1998), and Nzongola-Ntalaja (1988). The documentary film *King Leopold's Ghost* (<http://www.kingleopoldsghost.com/>) is also worth seeing.



abetted by foreign multinational corporations, based in both Western countries and Asian countries, and, in recent times, foreign *African* governments as well.

A question for you: since Africa does not manufacture most of the modern weaponry that is being used in African armed conflicts, who supplies the weapons? And why?



Against the background of armed conflict, children, who should be in school, are being forced to mine for precious minerals because of poverty and armed duress (involving warlords). These minerals eventually find their way into manufactured products (e.g. cell phones) sold across the world, including here in the U.S. In other words, these children are victims of racism, ethnicism and capitalist greed, in which consumers like you are also playing a huge part.

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