

‘The Rubber Coils’

KS3 History-Lesson 2 of 4

Enquiry: How do we uncover the lived experience of those ruled by Empire in Africa?

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Life in the Belgian Congo

The Belgian King Leopold II famously described Africa as ‘this magnificent cake’. This disturbing phrase captures the reality of **imperial** attitudes toward the colonised. The phrase implies that Africa and Africans, were something to be consumed for the pleasure of Europeans. Indeed Congolese peoples were mercilessly enslaved and murdered in the pursuit of valuable rubber in the region. Source A in the lesson (HISy9u3L2) gives you an insight into this experience.



Source A

From our country each village had to take 20 loads of rubber. These loads were big...we had to take these loads in 4 times a month...We got no pay. Wild beasts-the leopards-killed some of us...we begged the white man to leave us alone, saying we could get no more rubber, the the white men and their soldiers said: Go. You are only beasts yourselves...We tried, always going further into the forest , and when we failed...the soldiers came to our towns and killed us.

A Congolese witness testifies to Roger Casement, a British government employee, sent to investigate conditions in the Belgian colony of the Congo, 1903

Martin Meredith, Fortunes of Africa, 2014



The Anglo Zulu Wars

During the late 19th Century the British expanded the amount of land they controlled in South Africa. As the British did this, they deprived African **chieftains** of their lands. The British army could achieve this expansion by using contemporary **firearms**, which far outstripped the indigenous soldiers capacity for warfare. The Zulu's were one such people, they attempted both to live peacefully with the British and eventually to resist them. Eventually, their lands were taken and their chieftain's **deposed**. Source B in this lesson offers you an insight into the mind of a Zulu King facing this threat.



Source B

I hear of troops arriving in Natal, that they are coming to attack the Zulus, and to seize me; in what have I done wrong that I should be seized like an 'Umtakata' (wrongdoer)? The English are my fathers, I do not wish to quarrel with them, but to live as I have always done at peace and with them.

Zulu King Cetshwayo writes to British protests about attempts to further colonise regions of South Africa, 1878

Martin Meredith, Fortunes of Africa, 2014



Glossary

Imperial: Relating to empire, an imperial attitude is one that would be held by a colonist.

Chieftain's: A term typically used to describe the leaders of different African peoples.

Firearms: Guns, rifles, machines guns or revolvers.

Deposed: Removed from a position of power.



Comprehension Questions

1. What valuable commodity were Congolese peoples exploited for under Belgian rule?
2. Which African people did King Cetshwayo lead?
3. Identify one feature of Source A which a historian must be aware of when using it to uncover the experience of colonialism?
4. Identify one feature of Source B which a historian must be aware of when using it to uncover the experience of colonialism?
5. What can we uncover from the two sources studied in this lesson, about the experiences of living under colonialism?

Sentence starter: One experience we can uncover from these sources is...

