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History of Modern Zaire - I

Lead: Zaire was carved from the heart of Africa and began its modern existence as a private reserve of a group of European investors led by King Leopold II of Belgium.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The modern state of Zaire roughly covers the region drained by the Congo River, one of the world's longest, and after the Amazon, discharges the largest amount of fresh water into the ocean. Indigenous peoples are mostly Bantu

speakers but there are still more than 200 languages and dialects spoken in Zaire. European settlement followed the famous journey of H.M. Stanley who crossed the region in search of the elusive missionary, David Livingstone. King Leopold II of Belgium formed an investor group with the intention of exploiting the riches of the area and hired Stanley to establish river outposts and negotiate trading agreements with local leaders in the basin.

In the 1880s Belgium claimed the territory and named it the Congo Free State. Belgium's occupation was noted worldwide for its cruelty to the inhabitants, so much so that Leopold was eventually forced to abdicate his

direct control of the Congo. In 1908 the Belgian government dissolved the Free State and created the Belgian Congo, which among the nations of the world remains as one endowed with abundant natural resources side by side with high levels of poverty and corruption.

Belgium's colonial control over the Congo began to dissolve in the years following World War II and by 1960 the spirit of independence had swept it away. What shape the newly created Congo Republic would take would be determined in the struggle between the followers of Joseph Kasavubu and Patrice Lumumba. Next time: national or regional. Research assistance by David Arthur.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cg.html>

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