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INTRODUCTION

APPROACH AND RATIONALE

Kongo: A Kingdom Divided is one of over sixty teaching units published by the National Center for History in the Schools that are the fruits of collaborations between history professors and experienced teachers of both United States and World History. The units represent specific issues and dramatic episodes in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of these selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative. By studying a crucial turning point in history, the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected issues and dramatic moments that best bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow's history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from government documents, artifacts, journals, diaries, newspapers, magazines, literature, contemporary photographs, paintings, and other art from the period under study. What we hope to achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to remove the distance that students feel from historical events and to connect them more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of 'being there,' a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian's craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation, and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Within this unit, you will find: Teaching Background Materials, including Unit Overview, Unit Context, Correlation to the National Standards for History, Unit Objectives, and Introduction to *Kongo: A Kingdom Divided*; A Dramatic Moment; and Lesson Plans with Student Resources. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for use by grades 7–11, they can be adapted for other grade levels.

The Teacher Background section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit and with the historical information and context necessary to link the specific Dramatic Moment to the larger historical narrative. You may consult it for your

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own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The Lesson Plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source documents, any handouts or student background materials, and a bibliography.

An unusual feature of this unit, *Kongo: A Kingdom Divided*, is a set of short historical fiction pieces integrated into five of the six lessons. These stories recount the experiences of individuals, some fictional and some modeled on historical figures, who experienced the encounter between Kongo and the Portuguese. Based on careful research into the cultural and historical setting, these selections transport students back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Ernest O'Rourke and Eileen Wood, the teacher-authors of the unit, wrote these creative stories.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.

TEACHER BACKGROUND MATERIALS

I. UNIT OVERVIEW

The story of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, its atrocities and profound consequences, has been told many times. But almost always, the story has been told from a European perspective or that of Africans after their arrival in the Americas. Of what went on in Africa, we have been told little and that has often been simplified to the point of inaccuracy. According to most Western accounts, Europeans came to Africa in search of gold and other trade but soon found the commerce in human lives more profitable. The result was a prolonged and brutal period of systematic depopulation of those parts of Africa within reach of the European and American slavers. While basically true, this simplistic account leaves too many questions unanswered. Why couldn't the people of Africa and their leaders have prevented this tragedy? What was their perspective on the slave trade? What was their role? Was the slave trade a one-sided assault perpetrated on the people of Africa by foreigners with superior military technology? Or was there more to the story?

This case study of the Kingdom of Kongo attempts to answer these questions. By the end of this unit, students will understand that the slave trade was a complex creature, born and sustained by a web of motives – greed, religion, political necessity – all brought on by destabilizing influences resulting from early African contacts with Europe. Ironically, many of these early contacts were, for the most part, well intentioned overtures for the purposes of commerce and conversion, with mutual benefit as the stated objective. But the destabilizing effects of the European presence in African kingdoms resulted in conflicts within those kingdoms. These domestic conflicts, in turn, became the fuel that kept the fires of slavery burning for more than three hundred years.

II. UNIT CONTEXT

This unit is appropriate for use in any study of the history of sub-Saharan Africa. Because it focuses on the African perspective of events surrounding the trans-Atlantic slave trade, it also supports in-depth studies of the slave trade or slavery in general. In addition, study of the Age of Exploration, its causes and consequences, could make use of these materials.

III. CORRELATION TO THE NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS

Kongo: A Kingdom Divided correlates with the *National Standards for History*, Basic Edition (National Center for History in the Schools, UCLA, 1996), **Era 6**, "Global Expansion and Encounter, 1450-1770." Specific standards addressed by the lessons include: **Standard 1A** dealing with the origins and

consequences of European overseas expansion, **1B** on encounters between Europeans and the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa, **4B** on the origins and consequences of the trans-Atlantic African slave trade, and **4C** dealing with patterns of change in Africa in the era of the slave trade. The activities in this unit also touch on **Standard 6**, relating to major global trends from 1450–1770, specifically regarding the extent and limitations of European political power and the growth and spread of Christianity.

IV. UNIT OBJECTIVES

- To understand the opportunities and conflicts created when two very different cultures make contact for the first time.
- To read texts and maps to better understand the physical and cultural geography of a region.
- To read and interpret primary source documents.
- To identify and interpret the historical elements of fictional pieces.
- To use role-playing to simulate the workings of a political system.
- To understand the complexities of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from an African perspective.
- To use information from the unit to construct a short, well-organized essay.

V. HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO *Kongo: A Kingdom Divided*

From 1500 B.C.E., small groups of Bantu-speaking people began migrating south and east from a region south of the Sahara near present-day Cameroon. By 350 B.C.E., Bantu populations were firmly established in the savanna region near the Congo (formerly Zaire) River in what is today northern Angola. There they cultivated the land, raised animals, made iron tools and weapons, and developed a complex social and political system.

The Kingdom of Kongo was formed around 1375. Legend tells of a ruling class who originated in the region around the Congo River, established a political base at Mbanza Kongo, and from this capital added provinces: some joining voluntarily, others through conquest. Those that submitted voluntarily remained under the control of their original rulers. Those conquered were placed under control of family and friends of the all-powerful *mwene kongo* (*manikongo*), or king of Kongo.

At its height, the Kingdom of Kongo stretched from the Congo River in the

north to the Kwanza River in the south and from the Atlantic Ocean to beyond the Nkisi River in the east, covering more than 80,000 square miles of land and containing more than 500,000 inhabitants. Trade based on agricultural production and the mining of iron and copper, the two main economic activities of the region, flourished. Over time, the kingdom grew wealthy through a system of taxation that financed the king's household, army, and government, and by tribute payments made to the king by the governors of each province. This was the civilization that the Europeans found when they landed on the shores of Kongo in the late fifteenth century.

In 1483, a ship from an expedition sent by the Portuguese king João II to find a sea route to Asia arrived at the mouth of the Congo River. Its captain, Portuguese explorer Diogo Cão, immediately sent a delegation to the Kongolese king, who lived several days journey away. Electing to stay close to his ship, Cão awaited their return. On the sandy beach, he planted a *padrão*, or stone pillar, that he had brought with him from Portugal to commemorate his arrival. Then he explored the surrounding area. After weeks of waiting for his men to return, Cão feared for their safety. He seized several Kongolese hostages and sent word to the king that the hostages would be delivered safely back to Kongo on his next voyage if his delegation was returned to him alive and well. He then sailed back to Portugal with his hostages.

Cão returned to the Congo River in 1488, bringing back the hostages and picking up the Portuguese who had in fact been treated as honored guests by the Kongolese during their long stay. This exchange was the beginning of a 500 year relationship between the kingdoms of Portugal and Kongo. Other expeditions soon followed. The Portuguese brought traders, craftsmen, and Christian missionaries to Kongo and close relations

were soon established between the two kingdoms. Nzinga a Nkuwu, the Kongolese king, adopted the Portuguese name,

João I, converted to Christianity in 1491, and helped spread the Catholic religion throughout his state. The Kongolese government was soon reorganized after the Portuguese one and its capital, Mbanza Kongo, renamed São Salvador. After João's death, his son, King Afonso I, looked to the Portuguese for help in dealing with factions within Kongo that were threatening his power. But the Portuguese seemed more interested in growing wealthy, primarily through the business of buying and



Africa
Martin Waldseemüller's
World Map, 1507



selling Africans as slaves. Afonso had to contend with mounting Portuguese pressure to provide more and more slaves for plantations in the New World in exchange for their support. In 1526, Afonso wrote to the king of Portugal to ask him to end the slave trade, indeed all trade. Later that year, he wrote again, repeating many of his complaints about the Portuguese but agreeing to allow the slave trade to continue under a new system of royal supervision. The Portuguese ruler may not have responded directly. In any case, as the transatlantic slave trade grew, so did the tension between the two kingdoms.

When Afonso died, a struggle over succession ensued between his son, Pedro, and his grandson, Diogo. With the help of a powerful *kanda*, or political faction, Diogo was able to succeed his grandfather as king. For nearly a century following Afonso's death, Kongo continued to thrive.

The Portuguese, however, had shifted the focus of their efforts from Kongo to Ndongo (Angola) to the south, detaching this formerly tributary kingdom from Kongo. From that base in 1665, they sent a military force into Kongo, defeating its forces in the Battle of Mbwila and killing King Antonio I and many members of the nobility. The battle also triggered a prolonged civil war between rival *kandas* which had members who claimed the throne. The capital of São Salvador was destroyed, villages abandoned, and hundreds of thousands of prisoners taken and later sold as slaves to Europeans for export to the Americas.

In the midst of these civil wars arose Beatriz Kimpa Vita, a formidable woman who founded a religious movement which taught that Christ was born of an African slave woman and that Kongo was the true Holy Land. She denounced all the rival contenders to the throne and promised to restore the old capital of Mbanza Kongo and rebuild the Kongo state. She predicted a glorious future. The common people, tired of having their crops destroyed, being drafted into armies, fighting and dying for the claims of rival *kandas*, or being sold into slavery and transported away from their country, flocked to the capital, repopulating the old city. Many became followers of Doña Beatriz. The Catholic Church in Kongo, however, denounced her teachings as heresy and demanded that the king silence her. In 1706, King Pedro IV captured Beatriz and had her burned at the stake as a heretic.



Doña Beatriz
Father Bernardo da Gallo, 1710

After this, the kingdom never regained its former power. Though it remained

independent, periods of turmoil grew more frequent. Over the next two hundred years, the kingdom broke up into small independent provinces ruled by local chiefs, many of whom grew wealthy through the slave trade. In 1885, Kongo's territory was incorporated into Portuguese Angola.

VI. LESSONS

1. First Contact
2. The Return
3. A Distant Partner
4. Sanctuary
5. The Kandas
6. Mad Dog