

## CONTACT IN THE CONGO

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Henry Stanley was an English explorer of the Congo in the 1870s. Here is an incident he wrote about in his diary.

About 8:00 A.M. we saw a marketplace where there were many small canoes. The natives got into them and circled around us. We stayed still for a long time, but they became bolder and began to throw their wooden spears. We shot our guns a few times, which made them leave. Drums then awakened the whole country, and horns blew deafening blasts. Some canoes boldly followed us.

At 2:00 P.M. we came into a very large stream. There we saw a great fleet of canoes in the middle of the stream. The canoe men, standing up, gave a loud shout when they saw us and blew their horns louder than ever. Looking upstream, we saw a sight that sent the blood tingling through every nerve and fiber of our bodies; a fleet of gigantic canoes bearing down on us, which were bigger in size and numbers than anything we had seen. . . . There were 54 of them. A monster canoe led the way, with two rows of paddlers standing up, 40 men on a side, their bodies bending and swaying like a barbarous chorus driving down toward us. . . . The crashing sound of large drums, a hundred blasts from ivory horns and a thrilling chant from 2,000 human throats did not help to calm our nerves.

We had no time to pray. As the first canoe came rushing down, I turned to take a last look at our people and said to them: "Boys, be firm as iron; wait until you see your first spear and then take good aim. Don't all fire at once. Keep aiming until you are sure of your man. Don't think of running away because only your guns can save you."

The monster canoe aimed straight for my boat, as though it would run us down; but when it was 50 yards away, it swerved to the side. When it was nearly opposite us, the warriors threw their spears. . . . Every sound was soon lost in the ripping, crackling gunfire. . . . We were angry now. It was a murderous world and we felt for the first time that we hated the filthy people who lived in it. We followed them upstream until we saw their villages. We made straight for the riverbanks and fought in the village streets. We hunted them in the woods until we finally stopped.

The King of the Congo at the time was Mojimba. Here is his version of the same event, as related to a Catholic missionary who wrote it down.

When we heard that the man with white skin was traveling down the river, we were open-mouthed with surprise. We stood still. All night long the drums told the strange news – a man with white skin. That man, we said to ourselves, has a white skin. He must have gotten that from the river kingdom. He is one of our brothers who was drowned in the river. All life comes from the water, and in the water he has found life. Now he is coming back to us. He is coming home.

We will prepare a feast, I ordered. We will go to meet our brother and bring him into the village with rejoicing. We put on our ceremonial dress. We got the great canoes. We listened for the gong which would tell us that our brother had arrived on the river. Now he enters the river. We swept forward, my canoe leading, the others following, with songs of joy and dancing, to meet the first white men our eyes had ever seen – and to honor him.

But as we came near his canoe there were loud sounds: bang . . . bang . . . and firesticks spit bits of iron at us. We were frightened. Our mouths hung wide open and we could not shut them. Things such as we had never seen, never heard of, never dreamed of . . . they were the work of evil spirits.

Several of my men plunged into the water. What for? Did they fly to safety? No, for others fell down also in the canoes. Some screamed terribly, others were silent. They were dead, and blood flowed from little holes in their bodies. "War," I yelled. "That is war. Go back." The canoes sped back to our village with all the strength we could give to our arms.

That was not a brother. That was the worst enemy our country had ever seen. And still those bangs went on. . . . Flying pieces of iron whistled around us and fell into the water with a hissing sound. Our brothers kept on falling. We flew into our village, but they came after us. We fled into the forest and threw ourselves on the ground. When we returned that evening our eyes saw frightful things: our brothers, dead . . . , the river full of dead bodies.

Now tell me: has the white man treated us fairly? Oh, do not speak to me of him. You call us wicked men, but you white men are much more wicked. You think because you have guns you can take away our land and our belongings. You have sickness in your heads, for that is not justice.

**READ THE DOCUMENT – "CONTACT IN THE CONGO" THEN ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.**

1. WHO WAS HENRY STANLEY? \_\_\_\_\_  
WHERE WAS HE FROM? \_\_\_\_\_
2. WHAT WEAPONS DID STANLEY'S MEN HAVE? \_\_\_\_\_  
WHAT TYPE OF WEAPONS DID THE AFRICAN'S HAVE? \_\_\_\_\_
3. NAME THE PLACE THIS DOCUMENT IS TALKING ABOUT?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. DID THIS BATTLE START ON WATER OR LAND? \_\_\_\_\_
5. DEFINE A PRIMARY OR AN ORIGINAL SOURCE. (USE A DICTIONARY IF NEEDED)
6. WOULD THIS DOCUMENT QUALIFY AS AN ORIGINAL SOURCE? \_\_\_\_\_  
DISCUSS YOUR ANSWER \_\_\_\_\_
7. WHAT DID KING MOJIMBA THINK ABOUT THE WHITE MEN? \_\_\_\_\_
8. WHAT DID THE AFRICANS STATE THEY WERE TRYING TO DO FOR THE WHITES? \_\_\_\_\_
9. WHAT WAS A FIRESTICK? \_\_\_\_\_
10. AFTER READING BOTH STORIES ABOUT THIS CLASH WHAT SIDE DO YOU BELIEVE? \_\_\_\_\_  
DISCUSS YOUR ANSWER \_\_\_\_\_  
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