

CHAPTER  
**18**

Section 3

GEOGRAPHY APPLICATION: MOVEMENT

# The Congo Gains Independence

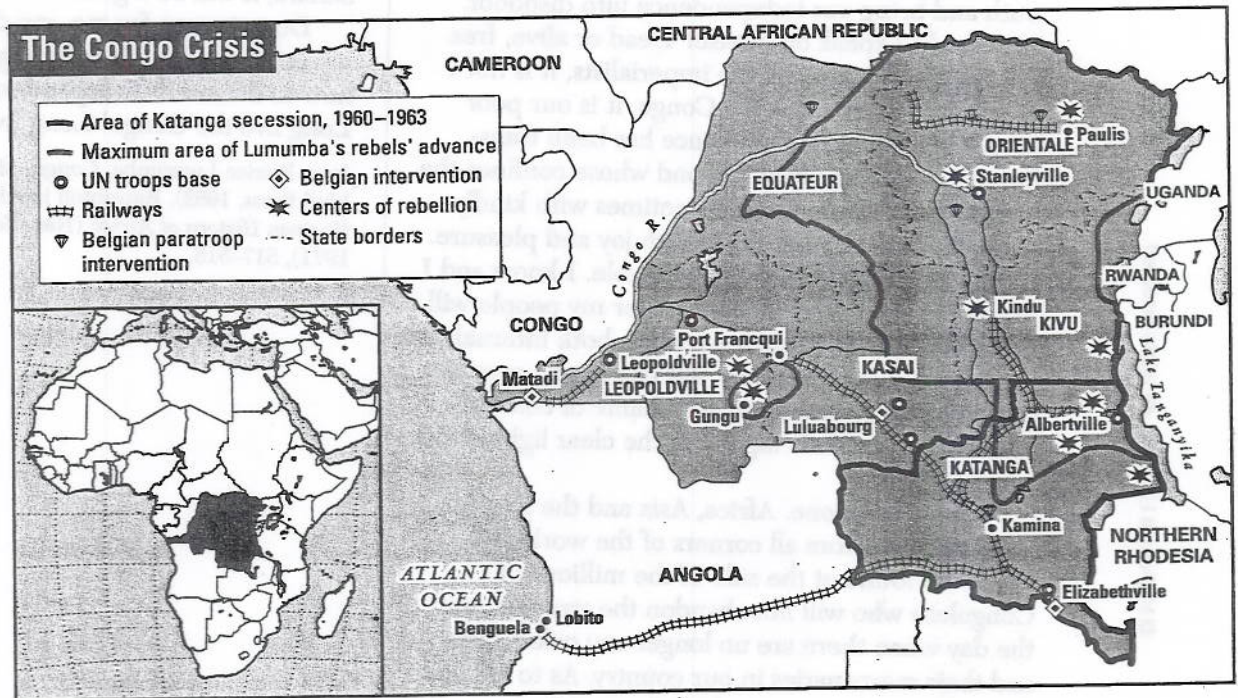
*Directions: Read the paragraphs below and study the map carefully. Then answer the questions that follow.*

In 1878, King Leopold II of Belgium formed the International Congo Association from territory in the middle of Africa. He wanted to profit from the natural resources there. Upon Leopold's death in 1909, the Belgian government inherited the territory and renamed it the Belgian Congo. Belgium continued to exploit the labor of the Congolese people through the next 45 years.

By the late 1950s, Belgian rule had created a western-educated middle class in the Congo. This educated class became nationalistic and sought the country's independence. In 1959, nationalist sentiment erupted in a revolt against the Belgian rulers. The Belgian government panicked and quickly granted independence in 1960. In the first general election in the Congo, no party gained a majority. However, a compromise was reached in which two opposing leaders, Joseph Kasavubu and Patrice Lumumba, agreed to share power.

Following this election, more revolts broke out against the Belgians, who still controlled the army. In July of 1960, the wealthy province of Katanga even broke away from the rest of the country. Belgian paratroopers went in to restore order and protect Belgian citizens.

Later in 1960, Kasavubu had gained enough power to dismiss Lumumba, who was later assassinated. As a result, Lumumba's supporters started a rival government. Civil war followed between Kasavubu and Lumumba's supporters. Kasavubu asked the United Nations to send soldiers to help. In 1961, the rival groups reached a compromise that united the country except for the Katanga province, which later re-joined the Congo in 1964. The country was torn by more internal strife until 1965, when Joseph Désiré Mobutu, an army leader, took control and formed a dictatorial government that lasted for 32 years.



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## PRIMARY SOURCE

## Farewell Without Tears

### Letter from Patrice Lumumba

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*Patrice Lumumba rose from his job as a postal clerk to become the leader of the nationalist movement in the Belgian Congo during the 1950s. He was the first elected prime minister of the independent Republic of Congo. He wrote the following letter to his wife in January 1961, shortly before his assassination. According to his letter, how did he view colonial rule and independence for his country?*

I am writing these words not knowing whether they will reach you, when they will reach you, and whether I shall still be alive when you read them. All through my struggle for the independence of my country, I have never doubted for a single instant the final triumph of the sacred cause to which my companions and I have devoted all our lives. But what we wished for our country, its right to an honorable life, to unstained dignity, to independence without restrictions, was never desired by the Belgian imperialists and their Western allies, who found direct and indirect support, both deliberate and unintentional, amongst certain high officials of the United Nations, that organization in which we placed all our trust when we called on its assistance.

They have corrupted some of our compatriots and bribed others. They have helped to distort the truth and bring our independence into dishonor. How could I speak otherwise? Dead or alive, free or in prison by order of the imperialists, it is not I myself who count. It is the Congo, it is our poor people for whom independence has been transformed into a cage from beyond whose confines the outside world looks on us, sometimes with kindly sympathy, but at other times with joy and pleasure. But my faith will remain unshakeable. I know and I feel in my heart that sooner or later my people will rid themselves of all their enemies, both internal and external, and that they will rise as one man to say No to the degradation and shame of colonialism, and regain their dignity in the clear light of the sun.

We are not alone. Africa, Asia and the free liberated people from all corners of the world will always be found at the side of the millions of Congolese who will not abandon the struggle until the day when there are no longer any colonialists and their mercenaries in our country. As to my children, whom I leave and whom I may never see

again, I should like them to be told that it is for them, as it is for every Congolese, to accomplish the sacred task of reconstructing our independence and our sovereignty: for without dignity there is no liberty, without justice there is no dignity, and without independence there are no free men.

Neither brutality, not cruelty nor torture will ever bring me to ask for mercy, for I prefer to die with my head unbowed, my faith unshakeable and with profound trust in the destiny of my country, rather than live under subjection and disregarding sacred principles. History will one day have its say, but it will not be the history that is taught in Brussels, Paris, Washington or in the United Nations, but the history which will be taught in the countries freed from imperialism and its puppets. Africa will write her own history, and to the north and south of the Sahara, it will be a glorious and dignified history.

Do not weep for me, my dear wife. I know that my country, which is suffering so much, will know how to defend its independence and its liberty. Long live the Congo! Long live Africa!

*from Patrice Lumumba, Congo, My Country (London: Pall Mall Press, 1962). Reprinted in Alvin M. Josephy, ed., The Horizon History of Africa (New York: American Heritage, 1971), 517-518.*