Paraphrasing Practice Assignment
THE USURPATION AND ITS AFTERMATH

They are always likely to remain so. For this reason any detailed discussion of the often contradictory reasons advanced for his rebellion is largely inconclusive. Polydore Vergil claimed that Buckingham quarrelled with Richard over the king's refusal to grant him the second moiety of the Bohun earldom of Hereford, but this notion was rejected by Sir Thomas More as politically implausible. In any event, Buckingham's demand had not been refused, for on 13 July 1483 Richard solemnly promised that, so soon as parliament met, he would forthwith procure an act to reverse the arrangement made in parliament by Henry V, which had vested that king's share of the Bohun inheritance in the House of Lancaster as a private heritage. Meanwhile, the duke was to be allowed to take all the revenues from the king's portion as from the previous Easter. This pledge was made in letters issued under the king's signet. What more could Richard have done? Gairdner's view that in some way he defaulted on his promise because these signet letters were never reissued under the Great Seal and therefore not enrolled on the Patent Roll means nothing in the context of Richard's administrative practice, for he used his signet extensively instead of the Great Seal but with the same force and effect, and there are hundreds of acts under the signet in Harleian MS 433 which certainly took effect but never passed the Great Seal.

Perhaps Buckingham really hoped to win the throne for himself, using Henry Tudor as a pawn in the game. Polydore Vergil dismissed as unreliable the common rumour that he had encouraged Richard to usurp the throne by means of so many mischievous deeds in the hope that the subsequent wave of reaction against a ruler 'being hated both of God and man' would sweep the duke himself into power. Buckingham seems to have been both a grasping and ambitious man. He had a claim of his own to the royal title. Through his mother, Margaret, daughter of Edmund Beaufort, duke of Somerset (d. 1455), Buckingham's claim was inferior to that of Henry Tudor, who was descended from Edmund's elder brother, John duke of Somerset (d. 1444), although both had a common ancestor in John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster. If, however, any doubts remained about the ability of any descendant of John of Gaunt's bastard children

28 PV, 192-4; More, 90.
29 Cf. Gairdner, 105-6.
30 PV, 195. For the most recent discussion of the view that Buckingham's ultimate ambition was the throne itself, see G. Rawcliffe, The Staffords, Earls of Stafford and Dukes of Buckingham, 29 ff.
It is possible that Buckingham was using others for his own purposes. Rumors at the time said that the Duke of Buckingham wanted to make Richard hated so that he himself could claim the crown. Buckingham himself had some right to the kingship.¹

Unlike Britain, France, Portugal and later Italy and Germany, what King Leopold fashioned in the heart of Africa, the so-called Congo Free State, did not belong to the “mother country.” Rather it was his personal plantation, more than 75 times as large as Belgium. The saga of Leopold’s Congo is truly the saga of “The King Incorporated” to use the title of Neal Ascherson’s informative book (Ascherson, 1964). A constitutional monarch in Belgium itself, Leopold’s royal rule in the African fiefdom in which he never set foot, was absolute. In the spirit of Louis XIV’s assertion, “L’état, c’est moi,” Leopold was the independent state of the Congo. Cloaked in the deceptive garb of anti-slavery altruism, he won international recognition, which he then utilized for crude exploitation and selfish profiteering. Even by the chauvinist, racist, ruthless standards of European imperialism, what occurred in the Congo was bloody and barbaric.

Leopold’s personal enrichment came at an exorbitant price to the indigenous population. To harvest ivory and, more importantly, rubber, required conscription of the “natives.” In the process all manner of hideous acts were committed. Rubber quotas were assigned, and if the output was too low, villages would be burned and Africans shot. Others were flogged or mutilated—the chopping off of hands was by no means uncommon. Women were kidnapped and held as hostages. In a true reign of terror, vast stretches of land were de-populated by murder and by the flight of terrified natives. Massacres were not rare. As was the case with the Nazi-sponsored Holocaust, slave labor led to many deaths, as did deliberate starvation and disease. In addition, the Congolese birth rate dropped precipitously. Precise mortality statistics are difficult to come by, but historians estimate the death toll to have been six to eight million, perhaps even ten million. In the opinion of a post-World War I Belgian scholar Jan Vansina, the Congolese population was reduced by 50% over a 40-year period beginning in 1880. Adam Hochschild has written that in 1924 ten million people were estimated to be living in the Congo (Hochschild, 1999, p 233). Who can doubt that the white man’s burden in the Congo was borne by the black man? Who can deny that the civilizing mission in the Congo was uncivilized to the core?

Members of King Leopold’s military, the Force Publique, furnished details of the carnage in their diaries. Exposes in the Belgian press, the writing of the Polish born novelist Joseph Conrad, and accounts of travelers such as Ewart Grogan, all shed light on the appalling maltreatment of the pitiable Congolese populace. Recounting his epic trek from the Cape to Cairo at the turn of the century, Grogan depicted the horrendous conditions to which he was an eyewitness. The Congo had been transformed into a “howling wilderness.” Natives lived in constant terror; chaos reigned supreme. Grogan was not known for his sympathy for the Africans. Nevertheless, he did not hesitate to condemn “the whole State as a vampire growth, intended to suck the country dry and to provide a happy hunting-ground for a pack of unprincipled outcasts and untutored scoundrels” (Grogan and Sharp, 1902, pp 231–232).

Protestant missionaries, for the most part American and British, were among the first to discover and to turn the spotlight of international attention on the malevolent events in the Congo. Viewing the atrocities up close were two
Leopold became rich from exploiting the native people. Natives were forced to harvest fixed amounts of ivory and rubber. If they did not meet the quotas they could be killed and their homes destroyed.²