

**Occasion:** Autobiography - positivity bias

**Author:** known to have over-exaggerating in previous books, records go exploration; kept a diary during this expeditions through Africa

**Purpose:** insecurity about his background; possible perception of racism/cruelty toward African peoples?

UNDERSTANDING  
history in context

## Unit III - Imperialism

### European Imperialism in Africa

Stanley, Henry Morton. *The Autobiography of Sir Henry Morton Stanley*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911. *Internet Archive*. Web. 8 July 2016.

<https://archive.org/details/autobiographyofs00stanrich>

Henry Morton Stanley (1841-1904) was born John Rowlands in Great Britain but rose to fame as an American citizen in the employ of the king of the Belgians, Leopold II. In 1871, while working as a journalist for the *New York Herald*, Stanley led an expedition to locate Dr. David Livingstone, a popular explorer and missionary who had gone missing in central Africa. Upon reading about Stanley's exploration of the Congo basin, Leopold II became interested in acquiring an empire in Africa, which in turn sparked the interest of other European countries fearful of being left behind in the race to colonize Africa. Stanley's expeditions were brutal even by the standards of other explorers, as this segment from his posthumous autobiography suggests.

**Go deeper:**

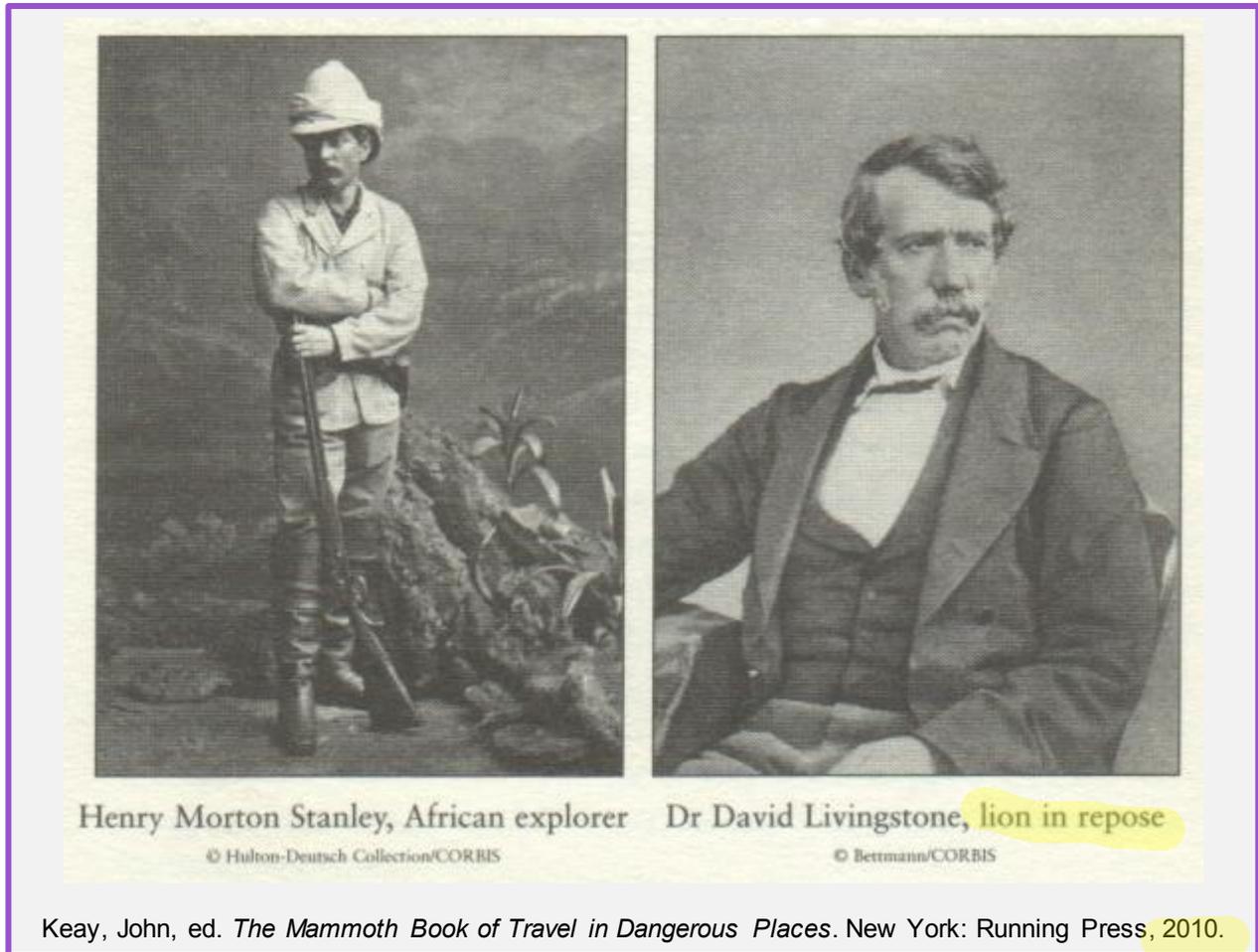
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#### **Sir Henry Morton Stanley, *Autobiography*:**

Some explorers say: "One must not run through the country but give the people time to become acquainted with you, and let their worst fears subside."

Now on the expedition across Africa I had no time to give, either to myself or to them. The river bore my heavy canoes downward: my goods would never have endured the dawdling requirement by the system of teaching every tribe I met who I was. To save myself and my men from certain starvation, I had to rush on and on, right through. But on this expedition, the very necessity of making roads to haul my enormous six-ton wagons gave time for my reputation to travel ahead of me. My name, purpose, and liberal rewards for native help, naturally exaggerated prepared a welcome for me, and

transformed my enemies of the old time into workmen, friendly allies, strong porters, and firm friends. I was greatly forbearing also; but, when a fight was inevitable, through open violence, it was sharp and decisive. Consequently, the natives rapidly learned that though everything was to be gained by friendship with me, wars brought nothing but ruin.



When a young white officer quits England for the first time to lead blacks, he has got to unlearn a great deal. We must have white men in Africa; but the raw white is a great nuisance there during the first year. In the second year, he begins to mend; during the third year, if his nature permits it, he has developed into a superior man, whose intelligence may be of transcendent utility for directing masses of inferior men.

My officers were possessed with the notion that my manner was "hard," because I had not many compliments for them. That is the kind of pap which we may offer

women and boys. Besides, I thought they were superior natures, and required none of that encouragement, which the more childish blacks almost daily received.

## Questions

1. In what ways docs Stanley seek to present himself as a "great" explorer? What factors does he see as decisive in his success?
2. What attitudes docs Stanley display toward the natives he encounters? What arc the benefits of "friendship" for his expedition?

Subject  
Occasion  
Author  
Purpose  
Audience

**Subject:** Defense of Henry Morton Stanley's expeditions through Africa, specifically his lack of interaction with African peoples. The content of the document explains the circumstances which prevented Stanley from fulfilling the quote at the beginning of the text, "One must not run through the county but give the people time to become acquainted with you, and let their worst fears subside." In his autobiography, Stanley highlighted the time constraints on his expedition, the size of his crew and materials, and the challenges presented by the circumstances of the river.

**Occasion:** The above is an excerpt from Stanley's autobiography. Arguably, Stanley was prompted to write this because (1) he rose to fame when his writings about his African expeditions were published and (2) to defend himself against claims of racism and cruelty toward the African people he encountered. The historical context within the document is the drive to colonize the continent of African through the Berlin Conference as well as the impact of imperialism by European nations not only on the colonized people but also on the relationships between the Imperialistic European nations. A reader might assume that his autobiography may have positivity bias as he sought to make a good name for himself and his influence on international relations and the colonized people of Africa.

**Author:** This autobiography was published post-humorously in 1911. The creation of the document, however, was written after his expeditions in African and after receiving feedback from his previous publications. A study of Henry Morton Stanley reveals that he may have a bit of an inferiority complex. Henry Morton Stanley was a journalist, explorer, and confidant of King Leopold II. The letters and diaries he kept during his expeditions reveal that his written work may have exaggerated his actual experiences while on expeditions.

**Purpose:** There is a positivity bias in an autobiographical material because the subject of the autobiography likely will include more positive events from his/her past than negative events. In the case of Henry Morton Stanley, he was defending his interactions with native African peoples during his expeditions in Africa.

**Audience:** Stanley's intended audience was the people who had read his previous publications and made accusations of racism or cruelty. His audience also extends to a more broad group of readers, hoping to extend his fame.

## Questions -

1. Stanley defends his actions while exploring in Africa and takes attention to explain the conditions through which he was required to work. "Now on the expedition across Africa I had no time to give, either to myself or them. The river bore my heavy canoes downward: my goods would never have endured the dawdling requirement by the system of teaching every tribe I met who I was. To save myself and my men from certain starvation, I had to rush on and on, right through. But on this expedition, the very necessity of making roads to haul my enormous six-ton wagons gave time for my reputation to travel ahead of me." Stanley separates himself from other explorers by comparing his experiences against the general quote by "some explorers" he used to introduce his text. By elaborating on the circumstances which determined his experience as an explorer, he essentially claims that the average, or "some," explorer could not have given the people time for their fears to subside because his work as an explorer was too demanding and he was too great of an explorer. He also describes himself as a fierce leader with high expectations.

2. Although a reader might assume that Stanley wrote this autobiography to defend his treatment of natives as described in his previous works, "Through the Dark Continent," "In Darkest Africa," and "How I Found Livingstone," an interpretation of his excerpt from his autobiography reveals that even in a defense, his natural disdain toward the natives he encountered in apparent. Using terms like forbearing, which signifies superiority by having to display unneeded patience, superior, which signifies his dominant positive over the natives, and describing blacks as childish who needed daily compliments to complete work. Stanley describes himself as having a huge influence on the native people. His enemies became his workman to be afforded the opportunity to work with the explorer with the reputation which precedes him. Stanley claims that he determined success or failure for natives by explaining that with friendship everything was gained and with war came nothing but ruin. Adam Hochschild, in his book King Leopold's Ghost, sheds light on the fact that Henry Morton Stanley saw himself as a hero to the natives through his work as an explorer, a confidant to Kind Leopold, and his rise to fame through his publications revealing to the public the circumstances of his expeditions through Africa.