

are not widely shared. While the elites live in time rather than space, forging a single international culture through e-mail and jet travel, the much larger cohort of “locals” remains trapped in the obsolete territorial culture, stuck in the cold reality of decaying communities and jobs that disappear virtually overnight, leaving them worse off than they were before. For the majority, even in the world’s most advanced countries, Bauman argues, there is nothing liberating about the Internet and the instant flow of information. Cyberspace, he says, “keeps the globals in the sieve and washes out the locals.”

But for all the disparities in affluence, opportunity, and satisfaction, the globals and the locals have one thing in common: neither has any real security in their new environment. Work in the global economy may pay well, but employment is more precarious than ever, the author warns, and so are the privileges of global membership that successful careers seem to promise. “After all,” Bauman asserts, “most jobs are temporary, shares may go down as well as up, skills keep

being devalued and superseded by new and improved skills. . . . There are so many banana skins on the road, and so many sharp curbs on which one can stumble.”

There is a term that describes all that we are losing, Bauman says: the German word *sicherheit*, a concept that signifies safety, security, and certainty—all three mixed together and all at the same time. Life after geography, in Bauman’s view, is life without *sicherheit*, and it is a life that millions all over the world, elites and masses alike, find profoundly unsettling.

This book will convince few who are not in sympathy with its ideas at the outset. To those who reflexively celebrate the expansion of personal choice and individual freedom, it will seem bewildering and overwrought. But anyone prepared to move beyond the seductiveness of libertarian ideology—anyone willing simply to look around and see the scars of global economic change on the streets of an ordinary city—will find *Globalization* as eloquent a summation of the problem as they are likely to encounter anywhere.

—Alan Ehrenhalt

History

KING LEOPOLD’S GHOST: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa.

By Adam Hochschild. Houghton
Mifflin. 384 pp. \$26

Ever hear of the Congo Holocaust? Neither had journalist and *Mother Jones* cofounder Adam Hochschild, despite years of writing about human rights and a visit to central Africa. Tantalized by a footnote referring to millions of lives lost to slave labor around the turn of the century, Hochschild delved deeper. He soon realized that he had in fact encountered the story before—in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. In *King Leopold’s Ghost*, Hochschild draws on memoirs, missionary accounts, government records, and the testimony of Africans themselves to unearth the long-forgotten facts behind Conrad’s fiction.

The tale begins with Europe’s scramble for Africa. Frustrated by his “small country, small people,” King Leopold II of Belgium desperately searched for a colony to call his own. He tried to buy Fiji; he offered to take the Philippines off Spain’s hands. With the help of the British explorer Henry Morton Stanley, he

finally settled on the Congo—a virtually unknown area larger than England, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy combined. By 1884, Leopold had established the Congo Free State as his personal property.

A master of spin and a genius at manipulation, King Leopold played on the European public’s desire to combat the “Arab” slave trade and civilize the region’s inhabitants. Lauded as a humanitarian, the king in reality presided as self-appointed “proprietor” over a colony characterized by slave labor, severed hands, kidnapping, and mass murder. Between 1890 and 1910, his quest for ivory and rubber cost the lives of half of the region’s 20 million inhabitants and brought him more than \$1 billion (in today’s dollars).

Although the king remains a shadowy villain, Hochschild vividly brings to life the activists whose battle against Leopold dominates the book’s second half. At the heart of the effort to expose his abuses are the journalist and Congo Reform Association founder E. D. Morel and the atrocity investigator Roger Casement, the colony’s first British consul. Also of great interest are two African Ameri-

cans—the journalist George Washington Williams and the missionary William Shepherd—whose impassioned activism helped launch the 20th century’s first international human rights campaign. By focusing on characters such as these, Hochschild manages to transform what might have been dry history into a page turner.

“Did the Congo reformers . . . save millions of lives?” Hochschild asks. “It would be a fitting climax to our story if this were so, for a splendid movement deserves splendid results.” But that wasn’t exactly the case. Although reports of atrocities dropped off after the king was forced to sell his colony to the Belgian government in 1908, the reduction resulted primarily from such changes as the shift from wild to cultivated rubber. And forced labor, hostage taking, and beatings with the infamous hippopotamus-skin whip called the *chicotte* continued until World War II. Still, Hochschild argues, the movement succeeded in making Leopold’s atrocities part of the historical record and in keeping alive the “human capacity for outrage.”

—Rebecca A. Clay

ATHENS:
*A Portrait of the City in
Its Golden Age.*

By Christian Meier. Trans. by Robert
and Rita Kimber. Metropolitan.
640 pp. \$37.50

The great 19th-century historian Jacob Burckhardt no doubt had it right: “Conditions in Periclean Athens were such that no sensible and peaceful person of our day would want to live under them.” But Burckhardt’s judgment has not kept us from endlessly revisiting the Athens of the fifth century B.C. in our minds. We recognize how much poorer we would be without the ancient Athenians’ intellectual, cultural, and political legacy, the brilliance of which remains undimmed by the darker aspects of the era—the city’s ceaseless belligerence, the limits to enfranchisement (only men could be citizens), the slavery.

The Greek city-states, petty and contentious and cruel, were in seemingly continuous conflict with one another. The mystery, the wonder, is that in this shifting, rocky soil there took root the beginnings of Western democracy. Meier, a professor of ancient history at the University of Munich, sorts out the strands of this astonishing development with clarity and intelligence. He makes it possible for the con-

temporary reader to return with new confidence to the dense pages of Herodotus and Thucydides and to feel again the lasting power of those formidable first histories.

The notable figures of golden age Athens who crowd Meier’s pages—the for-better-and-for-worse politicians, the vexing sophists and philosophers, the poet-dramatists who interpreted the world for their audiences, the architects and sculptors who dressed the city in physical glory—are all participants in the monumental development that is the author’s principal concern: the progression of Athenian political institutions toward democracy.

Through a process for which the historical documentation is incomplete, there occurred a radical transformation of political thought in Athens at the close of the sixth century B.C. and on into the fifth. The Athenians took control of their destiny and gradually came to identify themselves with the polis and the interests of the polis. The citizens *were* the city. Athenian democracy grew in accordance with two fundamental principles: first, all decisions were to be made as openly as possible on the basis of public discussion; second, as many citizens as possible were to take part in the political process and hold office.

Meier frames his narrative with two great encounters at sea. In 480 B.C., the Athenians abandoned their city and took to ships for a battle near the island of Salamis with the invading forces of the Persian king Xerxes. The Athenians defeated the Persians and saved Greece, and the stage was set for Athens’s subsequent domination as a naval power in the Aegean. In 416, during the long war with its military rival Sparta, Athens sent a fleet to the island of Sicily to conquer the city of Syracuse. It was a mad enterprise, and the Athenians awoke too late from delusion to defeat and humiliation far from home. Though Athens continued to fight Sparta for another 10 years, until losing the naval battle of Aegospotami in 404, the Sicilian expedition was an emblematic disaster.

The rise and fall of the Athenian empire—in the decades between Salamis and Syracuse—is in the grand tradition of cautionary tales. Meier does not labor to draw lessons about the perils of unrestrained striving for power, but they are everywhere apparent. The city could no longer function democratically once it succumbed to the temptation of irresponsible policies. Not all fifth-century politicians were Pericles, and, in the end, the