# Colonialism Sparked the HIV/AIDS Pandemic

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A new book implicates colonial practices in the early spread of HIV and argues that HIV would never have become a global pandemic without the mobility, urbanization, medical campaigns and prostitution introduced to central Africa by Europeans, The Washington Post reports. *Tinderbox* is coauthored by Washington Post journalist Craig Timberg and AIDS researcher Daniel Halperin, PhD. It explores several recent genetic discoveries that have enabled scientists to pinpoint where and when HIV-1 group M, the most common strain of HIV that has killed tens of millions, first crossed over to humans from chimpanzees. Scientists traced the crossover event to a dense forest in southeastern Cameroon, between 1884 and 1924, and they maintain that the first human to be infected was probably a hunter butchering chimp bush meat for food.

However, the authors argue that HIV was spread because of the harsh forced-work conditions of colonial commerce—including the practice of making men work as porters carrying ivory and rubber to trading posts along the Sangha and Congo rivers. By creating large urban trading centers like Kinshasa, European colonists had set into motion the social and economic circumstances necessary for HIV to infect thousands and be transported across national boarders. Kinshasa, the authors argue, was a tinderbox, waiting to ignite.

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