



# **Black Livingstone: A True Tale of Adventure in the Nineteenth-Century Congo**

*Pagan Kennedy*

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Black Livingstone is the first book to chronicle the remarkable life of William Henry Sheppard. As a twenty-four-year-old African American missionary in 1890, Sheppard departed for what was then the Belgian Congo, accompanied by Samuel Lapsley, a white man who had grown up on a plantation and was the son of a prominent Alabama judge. Lapsley died of fever barely a year later, but Sheppard thrived in Africa for three more years before returning to America. Back home, Sheppard was billed as the "Black Livingstone" as he traveled the country, lecturing to packed auditoriums. Black and white, rich and poor alike came to hear his true tales of African adventure. One year later he returned to the Congo, where he witnessed and gathered testimony on the genocide being perpetrated by the Belgian government and the rubber companies, eventually helping to break their hold on the region.

Pagan Kennedy unfolds Sheppard's life and times with a novelist's narrative skill and penetrates the complexity of her subject—a man who found power in the Congo but not in the Church to which he dedicated his life, who fought the persecution of Africans but never of blacks in his own country. Beautifully illustrated with archival photographs, *Black Livingstone* will appeal widely to readers of books on African history such as *King Leopold's Ghost* and *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz*, as well as readers of fiction set in Africa, like Barbara Kingsolver's bestseller, *The Poisonwood Bible*.

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