

**Blood Diamonds and the Rise of the Diamond Empire**

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## Introduction

For hundreds of years, the diamond industry has held society in its grasp, promising us that diamonds are valuable because they are rare. Considered one of the world's most precious stones, diamonds are symbols of love, promise, and purity; yet their history is marred by secrecy, blood, and violence. They have fueled rebel wars and taken the lives of thousands; however, little attention had been brought to these tragedies until the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the Kimberley Process, a certification scheme created to ensure that diamonds coming from West African areas, such as Sierra Leone and Liberia, were "conflict-free." In addition, one of the most successful advertising campaigns has stemmed from the diamond industry, creating the belief that "A diamond is forever."

The biggest player in the modern diamond industry has been De Beers Consolidated Mines, Ltd., the creators of the "A diamond is forever" marketing campaign. It is arguable that this company, founded by Cecil Rhodes, not only revolutionized the diamond industry, but introduced a new consumer perspective towards the gem which has lasted to this day. Rhodes took an extremely strategic approach to De Beers, resulting in the complete control of diamonds, including "the supply, the price and the myth." ("The Diamond Empire") While this newly functioning industry can be considered triumphant, there was also tragedy in the form of blood diamonds. Also known as conflict diamonds, they caused years of violent conflict in West Africa. This discord attracted global attention that sparked the establishment of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS), and while it has reduced the amount of blood diamonds on the market, is not as effective as originally planned. Though diamonds are small, they have

had a tremendous impact on the global diamond industry, the modern idea of love, and the portrayal of diamonds in the media.

### **The Discovery of Diamonds in South Africa**

As fifteen year-old Erasmus Jacobs ventured the south bank of the Orange River, he came across a shiny rock, inadvertently sparking the biggest diamond market in history, and picked it up for his little sister, who collected interesting rocks and stones. One day, while the children were playing in the courtyard, the glittering object was spotted by a local politician. Suspecting it was a diamond, he took it and passed it on to a peddler, who then sold it to a government mineralogist, when it was identified as a 21.25 carat diamond. (Campbell 102) Though it was revolutionary, Jacobs' discovery did not exactly catalyze diamond mining efforts in South Africa. The idea of diamond mining there was completely foreign, as it was thought impossible to find diamonds anywhere other than in India and Brazil. As a result of this, people did not try to look for diamonds in Africa, at least until the 1870s.

### **Cecil Rhodes and the Founding of De Beers Consolidated Mines, Ltd.**

“Similar in many ways to the California Gold Rush, the South African diamond rush lured hundreds, then thousands of prospectors to South Africa's scrappy farmland, usually men and families with few other viable opportunities who were enticed by the dream of instant wealth that, for many, turned out not to be dreams at all.” (Campbell 103) Just like many others, one young, ambitious opportunist traveled to Africa with hopes of striking it big. However, unlike those others, he was successful— he took the industry by storm and built himself an empire.

Though only eighteen at the time, Cecil Rhodes went on to rewire the entire diamond industry, which built modern society's norm that diamonds are symbols of eternal love. (De Beers)

Originally from Hertfordshire, England, Rhodes traveled to Cape Town in 1871. His mining efforts began in what is now one of the most prosperous diamond mining sites in the world, the De Beers Mine, which has yielded many of the world's most valuable diamonds. The mine was originally purchased by Johannes and Diedrich De Beer, but Rhodes "...quickly realized that there was a lot of wealth in the South African soil to go around, too much in fact. He was smart enough to know that if all the claims that were producing good finds continued to do so, it wouldn't be long before there were too many diamonds in circulation, hurting everyone by dragging down prices... By controlling the land, he could control the production. And by controlling the production, he could ensure that there were just enough diamonds on the market, thereby keeping prices high and stable." (Campbell 105) In 1888, he founded De Beers Consolidated Mines, Ltd., which is sometimes known as the diamond "cartel" or "syndicate", for it did not only control the distribution of diamonds, but also the production, availability, and as a result, the price. However, the surge of euphoria the South African diamond rush caused quickly faded when politics was brought into the situation.

### **The Revolutionary United Front War**

In the midst of a war driven by diamonds, people living in Sierra Leone experienced what the rest of the world was blind to. In 1992, twenty-seven year old Captain Valentine Strasser staged a coup to overthrow Sierra Leonean president Joseph Momoh, which initiated the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) War; a war over natural resources that lasted from

1991-2002. After the revolt, Strasser promised to hold democratic elections, and when he failed to do so, more conflict arose. (French) However, Foday Sankoh, the leader of the Revolutionary United Front political party, had also planned to overthrow Momoh; Strasser succeeded first, and though the RUF's main goal was to revoke Momoh's position, Sankoh continued his fight for power. He invaded Sierra Leone, and while Strasser's government was able to manage the country's dire economic situations, it was poorly prepared when it came to fighting off the guerilla-trained RUF rebels, considering its military origin. (Campbell 71) At that point, he desperately gathered any willing recruits to the Sierra Leonean army to help fight. Members of the high class also joined as a method of retaliation against Strasser because he took away some of their privileges. Though the army was now larger, the caveat was minimal security within it, which rebels took advantage of, infiltrating the army by disguising themselves as Sierra Leonean soldiers.

The RUF was originally a force intended to defend the common man, bringing the fledgling government to a multiparty one with more democratic ideals. For them, it seemed that the only way to gain attention from the government was to take control of the country's main source of income; the diamond mines. However, their efforts quickly turned to violence for the organization's leaders' own benefit, raiding diamond mines and mutilating locals, rather than earning their support. (French) All of the violence was used as "evidence" against the government in attempts to prove its inability to protect its people. And with ninety percent of Sierra Leone's diamond mines under RUF control, the legitimate government was robbed of resources that could have been used to help the people. If its leaders had taken advantage of their diamond gift by piloting a tactical approach to controlling the use of the resource, diamonds

could have furthered the success of Sierra Leone as a nation in the future, rather than destroying it. One of the RUF's most infamous maneuvers was Operation Clean Sweep, a 1996 amputation campaign. (Briggs) Civilians' limbs were ruthlessly hacked off by rebels, who were usually "illiterate and drugged" (Campbell *xv*) teenagers. One victim, Ismael Dalramy, recalls that "The powerful-looking rebel wore no shirt,... only black jeans, a black scarf wrapped around his bare skull, and mirrored plastic sunglasses. He twirled the ax in in his hands. The first victim was dragged forward and forced to kneel before a stump. As the man screamed, he severed first one limb, then the next. Those lined up behind him went hysterical, their wails of terror nearly drowning out the wet crunch of of the ax's blade meeting flesh and bone." (Campbell *xvi-xvii*)

People were coerced into mining diamonds for the RUF, which was all part of their ploy to denounce the government. (Briggs) Then, the diamonds were smuggled across borders and traded for weapons— gunrunning. For this, the RUF relied heavily on Liberian president Charles Taylor, who is known to have abundant involvement with Foday Sankoh and blood diamonds. (Robin) Taylor's close friend, Talal El Ndine, a Lebanese businessman, distributed guns to the RUF and Liberian smugglers, and then sold the diamonds to merchants in Belgium. (Campbell 63-65) Sierra Leone's unstable nature made other nations reluctant to associate themselves with such a place, (Robin) which resulted in a lack of surveillance over the jungly landscape. The environment was a major asset in the process of gunrunning because aircrafts transporting war arms were able to go undetected, creating a virtually flawless procedure for the rebels. Furthermore, there were also other groups that contributed to the constant chaos in Sierra Leone, including ECOMOG and the Kamajor warriors. Those peripheral organizations contributed to the unfortunate reality that Sierra Leone was only at war with itself.

Interestingly enough, people outside of Africa were generally oblivious to the RUF war and its connection to diamonds. However, when people found out about it, various human rights organizations spoke out, thus creating a higher level of pressure to address conflict diamonds, both for nations involved, as well as companies with relating publicity concerns. (Cauvin)

### **The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme: How Triumphant is it?**

The biggest step taken towards addressing blood diamonds has been the establishment of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS), which was a result of human rights concerns related to diamond mining in West Africa. (Kimberley Process) Initiated in 2003, the KPCS is a certification process used to ensure that diamonds coming from areas with rebels are “conflict free,” meaning that they come from mines that treat workers fairly, and that their profits will not be used to fund rebel wars, such as the RUF War. The fifty-four participants of the process, representing eighty nations, include countries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and diamond-related businesses. Each exported diamond undergoes a process, which eventually gains it a Kimberley Certificate; “a forgery resistant document with a particular format which identifies a shipment of rough diamonds as being in compliance with the requirements of the Certification Scheme.” (Kimberley Process) The certificates accompanying legitimate diamonds also allow people to trace the diamond back to its origin. (Melik) In order for the process to be successful, participating countries must have adequate internal controls over their diamond market in order to stop blood diamonds from entering legitimate trade channels, which has caused problems due to a lack of jurisdiction and oversight. Though it was a step in the right direction, the KPCS has been criticized for the abundance of present loopholes. The process

strives to certify that the origin of “clean” diamonds are from sources which are free of conflict, and to “curb the trade in ‘conflict diamonds’, which results in human rights abuse.”

(Shaik-Peremanov 1)

The problem with this is that the KPCS was not made to eliminate blood diamonds entirely, failing to target the root of the problem. “In an age of supply-chain transparency, when a \$4 latte can come with an explanation of where the coffee was grown and how, even luxury goods like diamonds are under pressure to prove that they can be sustainable. The Kimberley Process has gone some of the way, yet a truly fair-trade system would not only ban diamonds mined in conflict areas but also allow conscientious consumers to buy diamonds that could improve the working and living conditions of artisanal miners... But the hard truth is that years after the term blood diamond breached the public consciousness, there is almost no way to know for sure that you’re buying a diamond without blood on it.” (Baker 64) This lack of structure originates from the fact the KPCS is a set of “soft law” rules, meaning that it is not a binding treaty. (Cullen 61) Ian Simile, an officer who set up the Kimberley Process has resigned from his position, as “[he] could no longer, in good faith, contribute to pretence that failure is success... Thousands had been killed, raped, injured and enslaved in Zimbabwe, and the Kimberley Process had no way to call those conflict diamonds because there were no rebels.”

### **A Diamond is Forever**

Known as one of the most successful advertising campaigns in history, ‘A diamond is forever’ redefined romance entirely, and the effects have lasted to this day, making it the truly triumphant aspect of the reinvented diamond industry. The campaign began in 1948 and was an



excellent example of how advertising affects culture. Frances Gerety, a copyright agent, coined the phrase which was then featured on all of De Beers' ads. (De Beers) With a marketing plan in place, the next challenge was to create demand for the precious stones. De Beers used the physical characteristics of the stones to build the campaign; they are virtually indestructible and pure, traits that are easily comparable to the ideal love. (De Beers; Campbell) Also, the simple fact that diamonds take millions of years to form, creating the eternal aspect of 'A diamond is forever'. (Flynn; De Beers) This campaign and its longevity has earned De Beers the indirect credit of inventing the diamond engagement ring, a coveted item for women all over the world. However, this illusion would have never been successful if consumers knew the dark truth concealed by a diamond's beauty. "So like all deception, the person who's deceived plays a part in the deception, as well as the deceiver. It's not a one-person act. It's two people, the deceiver and the deceived, acting in collaboration." ("The Diamond Empire")

## **Conclusion**

As a whole, the diamond industry is a hoax, which started with the deceit of society in the early 1900s, and ideas of the value of diamonds, both sentimental and economical, that were passed down through generations. Today, it is certain that many still believe the same things; after all, giving diamond engagement rings and gifts to one's significant other is a very timeless and meaningful gesture. However, many are unaware of the dark path of diamonds, from amputation to the altar.

Everything changed for the diamond industry in 1866, when Erasmus Jacobs found a diamond on the bank of Cape Town's Orange River. His discovery led up to the founding of De

De Beers Consolidated Mines, Ltd. in 1888, the company that created the connection between love and diamonds, and invented the diamond engagement ring. Starting in the mid 1900s, diamond mining was a booming industry in South Africa, but its success was poorly funneled, as diamonds' profits were used to fund rebel wars against legitimate governments. The intensely violent RUF war attracted global attention surrounding human rights concerns around blood diamonds, influencing the creation of the flawed Kimberley Process in 2003.

Ever since diamonds were first discovered in Africa, the diamond industry and its surroundings went through major changes, some for the better, and some very much not. Through all of the tragedy, a very successful diamond industry has risen, and though it may be better guarded against conflict diamonds, there is still much improvement needed, in the Kimberley Process and otherwise.

## *Annotated Bibliography*

### Primary Sources

Cauvin, Henri E. "Plan Backed to End Diamond Trade That Fuels War." *The New York Times*, 30 Nov. 2001, [www.nytimes.com/2001/11/30/world/plan-backed-to-end-diamond-trade-that-fuels-war.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/30/world/plan-backed-to-end-diamond-trade-that-fuels-war.html). Accessed 22 Jan. 2019.

This article gives an early perspective of the Kimberley Process and its effectiveness in its early stages. It also gives a brief overview of the people who would be affected by the new plan, and how it was set to work. Finally, it addresses the increase in pressure to use the Kimberley Process to confront the concerns of human rights that came with diamond mining in conflict ridden areas.

DeBeers Love Scene Advertisement. *National Museum of American History Archives Center*, 1955. Accessed 24 Jan. 2019. Advertisement.

This advertisement was one of the many which held a place in the De Beers Consolidated Mines, Ltd. campaign, "A Diamond is Forever," which has been called one of the most successful advertising campaigns in history. It features a painting by Pierre Ino, which highlights the romantic symbolism of diamonds.

"The Diamond Empire." Directed by Gavin MacFadyen, produced by Laurie Flynn. *FRONTLINE*, narrated by Will Lyman, season 12, episode 9, Public Broadcasting Service, 1 Feb. 1994. *PBS.org*, [www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/programs/transcripts/1209.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/programs/transcripts/1209.html). Accessed 23 Jan. 2019. Transcript.

This documentary transcript provides insightful information about the De Beers "A Diamond is Forever" campaign, its effect on modern thought at the time, and the De Beers diamond "cartel," as well as its firm grip on the diamond industry.

French, Howard W. "Bandit Rebels Ravage Sierra Leone." *The New York Times* [New York, NY], National ed., 17 Feb. 1995, p. 10. *The New York Times*, [www.nytimes.com/1995/02/17/world/bandit-rebels-ravage-sierra-leone.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1995/02/17/world/bandit-rebels-ravage-sierra-leone.html). Accessed 22 Jan. 2019.

This New York Times article gives an American perspective on the brutal Revolutionary United Front (RUF) War, which was occurring in West Africa at the time. There are descriptions of the frequent guerilla warfare and the violent scenes that unfolded; however, there is no

mention of diamond mining, as there was little attention on blood diamonds in America at the time the article was published.

"2003 KPCS Core Document." *Kimberley Process*, Jan. 2003. Accessed 24 Jan. 2019.

This document gives the reader a very distinct idea about how the Kimberley Process functioned in 2003, when it was originally put to use. As it is the official Core Document, the rules are very clear, which also makes it relatively easy to identify the “loopholes” that were seen in the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS).

White, Robin, producer. "Charles Taylor's Blood Diamonds." *Talkabout Africa*, episode 411, BBC, 16 Aug. 2000, [www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03jsbcw](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03jsbcw). Accessed 14 Jan. 2019.

This radio program gives a depiction of the West African political figures during the RUF War, as well as informs the listener of the specific political issues with blood diamonds.

## **Secondary Sources**

Baker, Aryn. "Dirty Diamonds." *Dirty Diamonds*, special issue of *Time*, vol. 186, 7 Sept. 2015, pp. 62-69. *EBSCOhost*, [0-web.b.ebscohost.com.aspen.ald.lib.co.us/ehpl/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=6&sid=83964e30-45b2-4e04-9742-3a175fe9d5c6%40pdc-v-sessmgr03](http://0-web.b.ebscohost.com.aspen.ald.lib.co.us/ehpl/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=6&sid=83964e30-45b2-4e04-9742-3a175fe9d5c6%40pdc-v-sessmgr03). Accessed 24 Jan. 2019.

This periodical discusses issues of both conflict diamonds and the Kimberley Process. It brings up the interesting main idea that, if consumers stop buying diamonds, people in war-torn African regions will still suffer, as those economies are heavily dependent on the diamond trade. Additionally, the piece also features striking images of diamonds mines and the people who are affected by those mines.

Briggs, Nicholas S. "Conflict Diamonds in West Africa." *Stanford University*, 5 Dec. 2003, [web.stanford.edu/class/e297a/Conflict%20diamonds%20in%20West%20Africa.htm](http://web.stanford.edu/class/e297a/Conflict%20diamonds%20in%20West%20Africa.htm). Accessed 10 Dec. 2018.

This website summarized the diamond trade in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Angola, which was a great resource for initial research. It made it easy to understand the problem overall, as well as the people and places involved.

Campbell, Greg. *Blood Diamonds: Tracing the Deadly Path of the World's Most Precious Stones*. 2nd ed., New York, NY, Basic Books, 2012.

Extremely detailed and insightful, this book is about a Coloradan journalist's journey through Sierra Leone's diamond-rich regions. Covering conflict diamonds' path from mine to engagement ring, gunrunning, the RUF war, and the De Beers "A diamond is forever" campaign, it is a very helpful resource with plenty of research material.

Cullen, Holly. "Is There a Future for the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme for Conflict Diamonds?" *Macquarie Law Journal*, vol. 12, 1 Jan. 2013, pp. 61-79. *EBSCOhost*, 0-web.b.ebscohost.com.aspen.ald.lib.co.us/ehpl/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=83964e30-45b2-4e04-9742-3a175fe9d5c6%40pdc-v-sessmgr03. Accessed 10 Jan. 2019.

Ten years after the Kimberley Process was put into effect, this report gives a legal overview of it, as well as reviews some of the disadvantages of the plan.

Melik, James. "Diamonds: Does the Kimberley Process work?" *BBC News*, BBC, 28 June 2010, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/10307046](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10307046).

Melik's article provides opinions on why the KPCS does and does not work, and also provides expert opinions for both sides of the argument. This was helpful when determining how well the Kimberley Process works to prevent the entrance of blood diamonds into legitimate markets.

Shaik-Peremanov, N. "Ten Years On, the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme and Zimbabwe's Marange and 'Conflict Diamonds': Lessons to Be Learnt." *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, vol. 17, 1 Apr. 2014, pp. 328-66. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.4314/pelj.v17i1.08. Accessed 10 Jan. 2019.

This report analyzes the effectiveness of the Kimberley Process from a legal perspective, ten years after it was originally initiated in 2003.