

PAN-AFRICANISM AND THE COLD WAR

Cuba & Angola: Fighting for Africa's Freedom and Our Own. Introduction by Mary-Alice Waters.

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Key Words: Angola, pan-Africanism, politics, sources, teaching editions.

Between 1975 and 1991, the Angolan Revolution served as a seminal battleground of the Cold War. Likewise, as argued by scholars and theorists C.L.R. James and W.E. B. Du Bois, the philosophy of pan-Africanism was among the most influential liberatory agents of the twentieth century. A newly available collection shines a light on this understudied conflict in which the two historical forces, pan-Africanism and the Cold War, collided. *Cuba & Angola: Fighting for Africa's Freedom and Our Own* provides a window into the remarkable partnership shared by revolutionaries in these two seemingly disparate countries. For over a decade and a half, nearly 425,000 Cubans joined with their revolutionary counterparts in Angola to wage war against US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)-backed counter-revolutionary forces. As Mary-Alice Waters writes, this is ‘virtually a “hidden history”’ of which ‘no comprehensive account exists’. As she also notes, ‘only a handful of memoirs’ have been written and ‘none have been translated or published outside Cuba’ (p. 12). Accordingly, *Cuba & Angola* seeks ‘to make a small contribution to filling the void and encouraging those who took part in what Fidel Castro called “Cuba’s greatest internationalist feat ever” to make that history known’ (p. 13).

Culling an array of primary sources – speeches, interviews, photographs, and oral history accounts – Waters’s collection brings into sharp relief the words and remembrances of those who participated in the protracted war. The book is organized into five sections: ‘Defending Angola’s independence and sovereignty’; ‘An unparalleled contribution to African freedom’; ‘The Cuban Revolution was strengthened’; ‘The Cuban Five in Angola – In their own words’; and ‘Operation Carlota’. Each section is populated with the words of participant-observers ranging from leaders such as Fidel Castro and Nelson Mandela, to ‘seasoned frontline officers’ like Armando Choy and Gustavo Chui, to preeminent Latin American author Gabriel García Márquez (p. 13). Part I, for example, contains the text of a speech given by Fidel Castro in December of 1975 in which the Cuban leader underscored the historical and consanguine connections between Cuba and Africa, saying, ‘African blood flows freely through our veins. [Applause] Many of our ancestors came as slaves from Africa to this land. As slaves they struggled a great deal. They fought as members of the Liberating Army of Cuba. We’re brothers and sisters of the people of Africa and we’re ready to fight on their behalf.’ (p. 31) Readers will get a similar pan-African perspective from a speech by the late Nelson Mandela who addressed the subject in a 1991, one year after his release from prison in South Africa. To the crowds who gathered at Matanzas, Cuba, Mandela recalled, ‘It was in prison when I first heard of the massive assistance that the Cuban internationalist forces provided to the people of Angola . . . We in Africa are used to being victims of countries wanting to carve up our territory or subvert our sovereignty. It is unparalleled in African history to have another people rise to the defense of one of us.’ (p. 75)

In addition to the words of Cuban and African leaders, the book brings to light accounts of other participants such as members of the Cuban Five, a ‘paramilitary’ group of Cuban nationals who targeted counter-revolutionaries in the United States and abroad (p. 106). In oral history interviews, these figures recall the conditions on the ground in Angola and elsewhere, providing firsthand accounts of battles and daily life in war zones across the conflict (pp. 107–17). Indeed, one of the strengths of *Cuba & Angola* is that it presents multiple accounts of the same events, yielding historical complexities and continuities that enrich the text. Besides the speeches and interviews, the book contains a glossary of ‘individuals, organizations, and events’ (p. 137) and several maps that will assist readers who are unfamiliar with the subject make sense of the various terms, places, and proper names associated with the war in Angola. As the accounts collected here demonstrate, this protracted conflict represented more than just an anti-colonial struggle in Africa – it served as transnational proxy war between the United States and international communism in the postwar era. Thus, scholars and general readers of twentieth-century African, Afro-Latino, and African American history will find this title a compelling and informative addition to an understudied chapter of the Cold War and its impact on Africa. *Cuba & Angola: Fighting for Africa’s Freedom and Our Own* succeeds in focusing scholarly attention on the Angolan Revolution and the significance of pan-Africanism to the ultimate success of that struggle.

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RAPTOR POETICS

A Dance of Assassins: Performing Early Colonial Hegemony in the Congo.

By Allen F. Roberts.

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Key Words: Congo – Democratic Republic of, colonialism, museums and memorials, oral narratives.

In 1883, an ambitious Belgian officer of King Leopold’s proto-colonial International Africa Association (IAA), Émile Storms established a fortified outpost on the eastern shores of Lake Tanganyika from where he hoped to combat the slave trade and spread his civilization. A year later, he mobilized over a hundred mercenaries to attack an equally ambitious local warlord, Lusinga. Other than a belief that Lusinga defied civilized practices and European authority, Storms offered little justification for his actions. His men attacked Lusinga’s fortress, massacred his fighters, and captured his followers as booty. They gave Lusinga’s head, impaled on a spear, to Storms. Like many other victims of nineteenth-century European violence, the skull was taken back to Europe for study. Lusinga’s sculpted ancestral figurine became Storm’s trophy and, then, treasured *objet d’art*, stored at the Royal Museum for Central Africa at Tervuren, Belgium.