

Villegas, Harry. *Cuba and Angola: The War for Freedom*. Atlanta, GA: Pathfinder Press, 2017.

In recent years there has been an outpouring of scholarship on the role Cuba has played in revolutionary struggles in Africa. Pioneering work by scholars in Cuban archives, particularly by Piero Gleijeses, has revealed new dimensions of the internationalist efforts of leftist movements during the Cold War. Cuba's unique position as a bastion of communism off the coast of the United States and its willingness to send its fairly powerful military across the Atlantic meant that sons and daughters of the Cuban Revolution fought across the African continent for almost twenty years. From 1975 to 1991, when the Cold War ended, Cubans aided fellow anti-imperialists. Responding to what they viewed as imperialistic aggression by US-backed governments, Cuban soldiers and doctors went to multiple African countries, including Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Angola, to fight alongside revolutionary groups, successfully turning the tide in many of these conflicts.

As the title suggests, *Cuba and Angola: The War for Freedom* is about Cuban efforts to aid the Angolan government. Angola achieved its independence from its colonial ruler Portugal in 1974, when the Portuguese government was overthrown in a popular uprising, the Carnation Revolution. Practically overnight, Portugal's African colonies found themselves freed of colonial control. Angola, however, was in the unenviable position of being close to South Africa. The apartheid regime in Pretoria, fearful of the implications of a free African state on its figurative doorstep and desiring more territory and power, launched a concerted invasion of Angola with its ally, Zaire, in October 1975, beginning a conflict that would last until 1991. *Cuba and Angola* is the account of these war-torn years by one of the main Cuban military leaders, Harry Villegas, who was a central figure in the Cuban defense of Angola.

In the months after the invasion, 36,000 Cuban volunteers, including soldiers, doctors, and electricians, flooded into Angola to stymie the South African invasion. What followed was a decade of intermittent, but vicious, warfare between Cuban and Angolan forces and South African invaders. Tens of thousands of Angolan soldiers and civilians were killed, and over 2,000 Cuban volunteers perished as the conflict dragged on. In 1987, South Africa, increasingly desperate as apartheid's hold began to crumble, launched a large-scale assault, hoping to crush the Angolan forces once and for all. The Cuban-backed

Angolan military persevered, and in 1988 in the village of Cuito Cuanavale, they halted the apartheid regime's momentum, throwing the South African forces back. The defeat of the South African invasion had wide-ranging effects: it hastened the downfall of the apartheid government as the illusion of white South African military dominance was broken and led directly to the freedom of Namibia from colonial control.

Villegas served as a regimental commander and later, during the 1980s, as the main liaison between Cuban forces in Angola and those back in Havana. Mary-Alice Waters has extensively interviewed Villegas, affectionately known around the world as "Pombo" (a Swahili nickname gifted to him by Che Guevara), and these interviews constitute the bulk of the book. In addition to co-editing *Cuba and Angola*, Waters is the president of the publishing company that released the book. She compiled and edited seven years of recorded interviews with Villegas for this book. However, *Cuba and Angola* is a surprisingly slim volume. The main text, which is almost entirely transcripts of interviews with Villegas, is only sixty-six pages long. The rest of the book has a great number of pictures, maps, and bibliographic and chronological resources that provide a wealth of context for the struggles being described.

On the whole, though, and perhaps somewhat ironically, *Cuba and Angola* is not meant to be a revolutionary book. Villegas does not provide stunning new testimony about the decisions between Castro and the Angolan government, nor does he radically alter the established narrative of Cuba's internationalist efforts in Africa. He does, however, provide a healthy nuance to this story, replete with interesting details and diplomatic minutiae that will no doubt prove useful to scholars who specialize in Cuban-African relations and the Cold War.

The interviews are highly readable and given the brevity of the book, it would not be surprising to find it on a list of upper-level undergraduate classes in history or political science. Educators should be cautious, however, as Villegas's disdain for the United States is evident throughout his narrative. Waters's editing has done little to change this, which is perfectly understandable, as it is central to Villegas's character and revolutionary zeal. Students, however, may have trouble understanding the language used to describe the United States and its allies without some context about Villegas's (and Waters's) biases. Still, these are minor concerns. In *Cuba and Angola*, an old-guard revolutionary offers a

wonderfully candid look at Cuba's international efforts to resist apartheid and imperialism.

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Wade, Peter. *Degrees of Mixture, Degrees of Freedom: Genomics, Multiculturalism, and Race in Latin America*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.

Peter Wade brings together case studies in genomics and multiculturalism in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico to look at how these nations drew ideas about genetic mixture into the larger struggle between democracy and inequality. Wade argues that scientific research on and public debates about genomic data in these Latin American nations became another way to discuss, use, and act on issues related to ethnic terminology and racial mixing because of their importance in underpinning *mestizaje* discourses from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Discussions of Amerindian, African, and European contributions to nation building and nationalism shrouded the ways the ruling elite used genetics and science to support racial and ethnic categories that marginalized indigenous groups and people of color. At the same time, this *mestizaje* rhetoric celebrated these nations' commitments to democracy. This process was made possible by scientists' use of social racial categories to debunk the validity of race even as they pointed to the idealized mixed type or mestizo.

Wade brings together the literature on scientific racism, nation building, and racial mixing in this study of *mestizaje* in contemporary times. In some ways, *Degrees of Mixture* builds on *Mestizo Genomics*, edited by Wade, Carlos López Beltrán, Eduardo Restrepo, and Ricardo Ventura Santos, which focused on the study of genomes and their use in society. Wade's monograph takes this perspective one step further by historicizing and situating those who developed genomics in the region within an older tradition of the science of legitimizing *mestizaje* discourses that sought to uplift diverse Latin American nations in response to European and North American critiques of the region's diversity. *Degrees of Mixture* highlights how the use of idealized pure racial and ethnic categories of genomics and science in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico allowed for

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