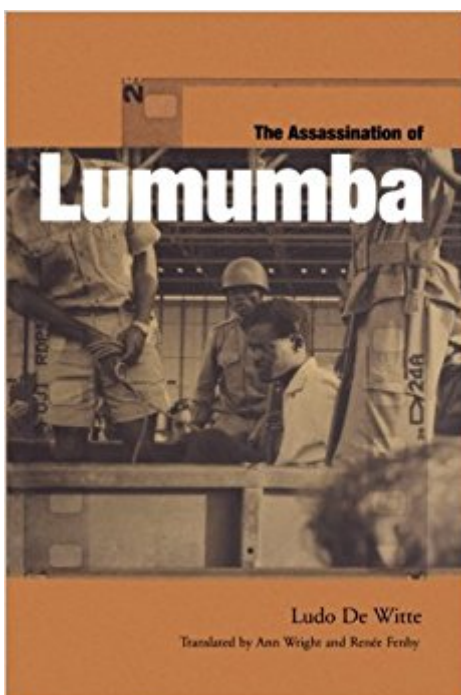


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The Assassination Of Lumumba



Synopsis

Patrice Lumumba, first prime minister of the Republic of Congo and a pioneer of African unity, was murdered on 17 January 1961. Democratically elected to lead the Mouvement National Congolais, the party he founded in 1958, Lumumba was at the centre of the country's growing popular defiance of the colonial rule of oppression imposed by Belgium. When, in June 1960, independence was finally won, his unscheduled speech at the official ceremonies in Kinshasa received a standing ovation and made him a hero to millions. Always a threat to those who sought to maintain a covert imperialist hand over the country, however, he became within months the victim of an insidious plot and was arrested and subsequently tortured and executed. This book unravels the appalling mass of lies, hypocrisy and betrayals that have surrounded accounts of the assassination since its perpetration. Making use of a huge array of official sources as well as personal testimony from many of those in the Congo at the time, Ludo De Witte reveals a network of complicity ranging from the Belgian government to the CIA. Chilling official memos which detail the liquidation and threats to national interests are analysed alongside macabre tales of the destruction of evidence, putting Patrice Lumumba's personal strength and his dignified quest for African unity in stark contrast with one of the murkiest episodes in twentieth-century politics.

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Customer Reviews

In January 1961, seven months after Congo won independence from Belgium, the country's first elected head of state, Patrice Lumumba, was killed in the secessionist province of Katanga because

of fears that he would ally himself with Russia and nationalize Belgian corporate interests in Congo. Using U.N. and Belgian foreign ministry archives, De Witte, a sociologist whose book, when published in Belgium, led to an official inquiry into the assassination, offers evidence that the Belgian government was directly involved in Lumumba's transfer to Katanga a copper-rich state under Belgian control and in his execution. De Witte points, for instance, to an October 1960 telegram, signed by the Belgian Minister of African Affairs, that called for the "elimination of Lumumba." The African leader was, De Witte shows, tortured and executed under Belgian supervision. Lumumba's body was exhumed twice and finally dismembered and dissolved in sulfuric acid by a Belgian police commissioner, who wrote an account of his involvement and later bragged on Belgian TV that he had kept two of Lumumba's teeth. According to De Witte, the U.N., under Dag Hammarskjöld, which also wanted to keep the Congo under Western control, denied Lumumba the protection that would have saved his life. While the book lacks an analysis of who Lumumba was and what made the West fear his independence so much, and while it often reads like a dissertation, the revelations about Belgium's attempts (with U.N. complicity) to control its former colony offer a pointed dissection of how the Cold War was played out by proxy.

(July)Forecast: A biopic, Lumumba, will open in New York on June 27 and in L.A. on July 20, with national release to follow. Publicity surrounding the film, plus a focusing of American attention on Africa by several recent books, may help generate sales. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“De Witte has assembled a staggering amount of detail to support his allegations of direct government participation in Lumumba's murder.” •Washington Post Book World
“De Witte has performed an important service in establishing the facts of Lumumba's last days and Belgium's responsibility for what happened.” •New York Review of Books
“De Witte writes without stylish frills or narrative tricks, but this is a vivid and utterly compelling account of a nation strangled at birth by the West.” •Ronan Bennett, Los Angeles Times
“De Witte's book, politically passionate as it is, is an unignorable effort to bring the West face to face with its culpability in this entire sad and sanguinary tale.” •Richard Bernstein, New York Times
“One Belgian author has triumphed over decades of official obfuscation: Belgium did collude in Patrice Lumumba's assassination ... It raises questions about Western policy in Africa that will reverberate for decades to come.” •Michela Wrong, Financial Times
“One should never underestimate the ruthlessness of British gentlemen cradling

endangered shares. **•Neal Ascherson, London Review of Books** “Thoroughly researched, passionately written, deeply disturbing.” **•Kirkus Reviews** (starred review) “Whilst the battle for control over the resources of the Congo (now DR Congo) continues today this important book restores Congolese history and saves it from the official version peddled by those directly implicated in the affair.” **•New Internationalist**

Mr De Witte's excellent work on the Belgium-backed assassination of Lumumba provides, in my opinion, the definitive accounting of that event. For that reason, any student of African geopolitics, as well as those who study assassination and political murders, will find this an excellent addition to their libraries. Lumumba is often described as the hero of Congolese independence and his murder by political rivals (backed Belgium and, to a lesser extent, the United States) was an undeniable tragedy with regard to bringing both independence and democracy to the Congo, for generations that followed.

For readers interested in the facts about Patrice Lumumba's murder, this translated book is a very valuable source of new information. In addition to giving a detailed narrative of what happened, it backs up that narrative with numerous illuminating quotations from now-unclassified documents, recorded interviews and writings of persons involved in the murder. As a writer and analyst, the main author is thorough, meticulous, and accurate. The main takeaways from the book, for me, was first that Belgian officers and diplomats were integrally involved in the capture and murder of Lumumba, even to the point of leading and being members of the firing squad that killed him. The second was the participation of high UN officials in actions that led to Lumumba's murder. On an interpretive level, the book is interesting because, like the book *Overthrow*, it shows how the post-colonial nations' actions against politicians such as Lumumba were motivated by antipopulism more than ethnic communism. The main downside of the book is that the first author is not conversant with the documentary record in English, especially that arising in the US or from US nationals working abroad. It's important to read it in the light of the Church Report, which you can access online through a link in Wikipedia or through the U.S. Congress website, and Raoul Peck's two films on the assassination. Other lesser problems with it are that it is very difficult to read if one is not a researcher very interested in the subject and not as fully illustrated with photographs as it could have been, in my opinion.

A must see about the price of Democracy and Colonialism!

Good history about a little known event.

Finally some honest answers as to what happened to Patrice Lumumba. An excellent commentary on neo-colonialism in the Congo.

From the moment that Patrice Lumumba gave an unscheduled speech telling the Belgian monarch and the world the simple truth that everyone knew (including Mark Twain and Joseph Conrad) about the real history of the Belgian Congo, he was a marked man. How could you trust someone who tells the truth about colonialism to protect imperialist economic interests? The book is by Ludo De Witte, whose research forced the Belgian Parliament to investigate the government's role in the murder. The US had a plan to assassinate Lumumba also, but the Belgians and their lackeys got to him first. Lumumba made a big mistake by calling for UN assistance, since the UN troops are just imperialist troops with blue helmets. This assassination held back the whole freedom struggle in Southern Africa for 20 years, since the totally pro-imperialist government led by Joseph Mobutu (who renamed the country Zaïre and himself Mobutu Sese Seko to give himself African nationalist cover) aided the Portuguese colonists and the apartheid regime in South Africa in fighting against the independence movements. It really is that simple, but for those who want the details, this is definitely the book. Be sure to see *Patrice Lumumba (Special Edition)*. Among other things, I suggest reading: *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976*; *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976-1991 (New Cold War History)*; *The Coming Revolution in South Africa (New International no. 5)*; *The Struggle Is My Life*; *Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution 1983-87*; *Capitalism and the Transformation of Africa*.

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