

# Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976: Envisioning Cuba



## Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976 (Envisioning Cuba) by Piero Gleijeses

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The Cuban Revolution, led by Fidel Castro, marked a pivotal moment in world history. It ushered in a new era of Cuban-African relations and significantly impacted the Cold War dynamics. This article explores the complex and multifaceted relationship between Cuba, the United States, and Africa during the crucial period from 1959 to 1976, highlighting the conflicting missions and visions of Havana and Washington.

### **Cuba's Revolutionary Aspirations**

The Cuban Revolution aimed to establish a socialist society in Cuba and support revolutionary movements worldwide. Inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideology, the Cuban government saw Africa as a fertile ground for

revolution and solidarity. Cuba's engagement with Africa was driven by a belief in the common struggle against imperialism and a desire to forge alliances with newly independent nations.

### **Che Guevara: Embodiment of Cuba's African Mission**

Che Guevara, a key figure in the Cuban Revolution, played a central role in forging Cuban-African ties. His extended visit to Africa in 1964-1965 left a significant impact. Guevara witnessed firsthand the struggles and aspirations of African liberation movements and advocated for Cuba's support. He famously declared: "Africa is the future."

### **The Congo Crisis and Cuban Intervention**

The Congo Crisis of 1960-1965 tested Cuba's commitment to African revolutions. Cuban troops were dispatched to the Congo to support the leftist government of Patrice Lumumba against Belgian colonial forces and their allies. The Cuban intervention, though ultimately unsuccessful, demonstrated Cuba's willingness to wade into African conflicts.

### **The Angolan Civil War and the Clash with the US**

The Angolan Civil War (1975-1991) became a major flashpoint between Cuba and the United States. Cuba sent troops and advisors to support the Marxist-aligned MPLA government against rival factions backed by the US and South Africa. The Cuban intervention in Angola marked a significant escalation in Cuban-US tensions.

### **The US Response: Containment and Isolation**

The United States viewed Cuba's involvement in Africa as a threat to its own interests. The US government pursued a policy of containment and

isolation, aimed at preventing Cuba from spreading its revolution beyond its borders. This policy included economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and covert operations.

## **Conflicting Visions: Havana and Washington**

Havana and Washington held contrasting visions for Africa. Cuba saw Africa as a region ripe for revolution and solidarity, while the US sought to maintain its influence and prevent the spread of Soviet and Cuban communism. These conflicting perspectives led to a clash of missions and policies in Africa.

## **The Non-Aligned Movement and Third World Solidarity**

Cuba's engagement with Africa was also shaped by its role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), an international organization of developing countries. Cuba played a prominent role in NAM, advocating for Third World solidarity and opposing neo-colonialism.

## **Consequences and Legacy**

Cuba's involvement in Africa had a profound impact on the continent's history. It provided support for liberation movements, helped to shape post-colonial political developments, and contributed to the growth of Afro-Cuban cultural ties. However, Cuba's interventions also drew criticism and accusations of neo-colonialism.

The period from 1959 to 1976 witnessed a complex and dynamic relationship between Cuba, the United States, and Africa. Cuba's revolutionary aspirations and its engagement with African nations clashed with the containment and isolation policies of the US. Conflicting missions

and visions shaped the course of events in Africa, leaving a lasting legacy on the continent and the global geopolitical landscape.



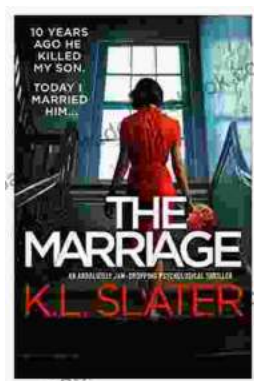
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