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Gerard, Emmanuel, and Bruce Kuklick. 2015. DEATH IN THE CONGO: MURDERING PATRICE LUMUMBA. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 296 pp. $29.95 (cloth).

In 1961, the assassination of Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba and two of his political associates, Joseph Okito and Maurice Mpolo, jolted African politics in general and Pan-Africanism in particular, as dedicated African leaders like presidents Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), Sekou Toure (Guinea), and Modibo Keita (Mali), and several other radical Pan-Africanists cried foul. In Death in the Congo: Murdering Patrice Lumumba, Emmanuel Gerard, professor of history at the University of Leuven, and Bruce Kuklick, professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania, have brilliantly and usefully provided fresh details about how Lumumba, Okito, and Mpolo died. The book offers revealing photographs of Lumumba with others, including President Joseph Mobutu of Zaire.

Careful research and presentation of the facts by Gerard and Kuklick show how, as the publishers underscore in their publicity release, the circumstances of the assassination have absorbed scholars and anxious readers for more than half a century. In a four-page introduction, the authors note that six months after the independence of the Belgian Congo (now DRC), “on February 13, officials in Katanga announced [Lumumba’s] death, but with a story so fishy that almost no one believed it” (p. 1). The Soviet Union seized the assassination as an opportunity to “blame the imperial powers and [ask] that the United States...