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LUMUMBA: LA MORT DU PROPHETE

Lumumba: Death of a Prophet

Lumumba: Death of a Prophet is the first comprehensive film on one of the legendary figures of modern African history. Like Malcolm X, Patrice Lumumba is remembered less for his long-term achievements than as a shining symbol of the struggle for self-determination. This scholarly reflection on the tragic events of Lumumba's brief twelve month rise and fall is a moving memorial to a man described as a giant, a prophet, a devil, "a mystic of freedom" and "the Elvis Presley of African politics."

Lumumba is a film about remembering; but it is even more a film about forgetting. It is not so much a conventional biography as a study of how Lumumba's legacy has been distorted, even erased, by politicians, the media and time itself. Interviews with European journalists who covered that tumultuous year, 1960, reveal how they consistently pictured Lumumba from a European not an African perspective.

Lumumba takes the form of a meditation on a series of images - photographs and newsreels from that

year and shots of Belgian life today. Filmmaker Raoul Peck also re-examines home movies of his own privileged boyhood in Zaire as the son of a Haitian agricultural expert working for the regime which replaced Lumumba. A film essay in the tradition of *Night and Fog*, *Sans Soleil* and *The Sorrow and the Pity*, Lumumba explores how any image represses the multiple stories surrounding it, how the present captured in photographs is always in a sense the hostage of history's winner.

Europe in 1992 thus figures as prominently in Lumumba as the Congo in 1960, because Europe is the unseen hand behind the camera and the events leading to Lumumba's fall. This is an unfamiliar Europe seen through the eyes of a visitor from the Third World, a world still not allowed its own image of itself. Peck juxtaposes the cold affluence of Brussels at Christmas to Mozart's aria cataloging Don Giovanni's sexual conquests. In another sequence, the camera reveals a Belgian natural history museum as a trophy room of empire.

Peck above all pictures Europe through images of travel, trains, trams, traffic - a guilty present escaping the repressed hopes and

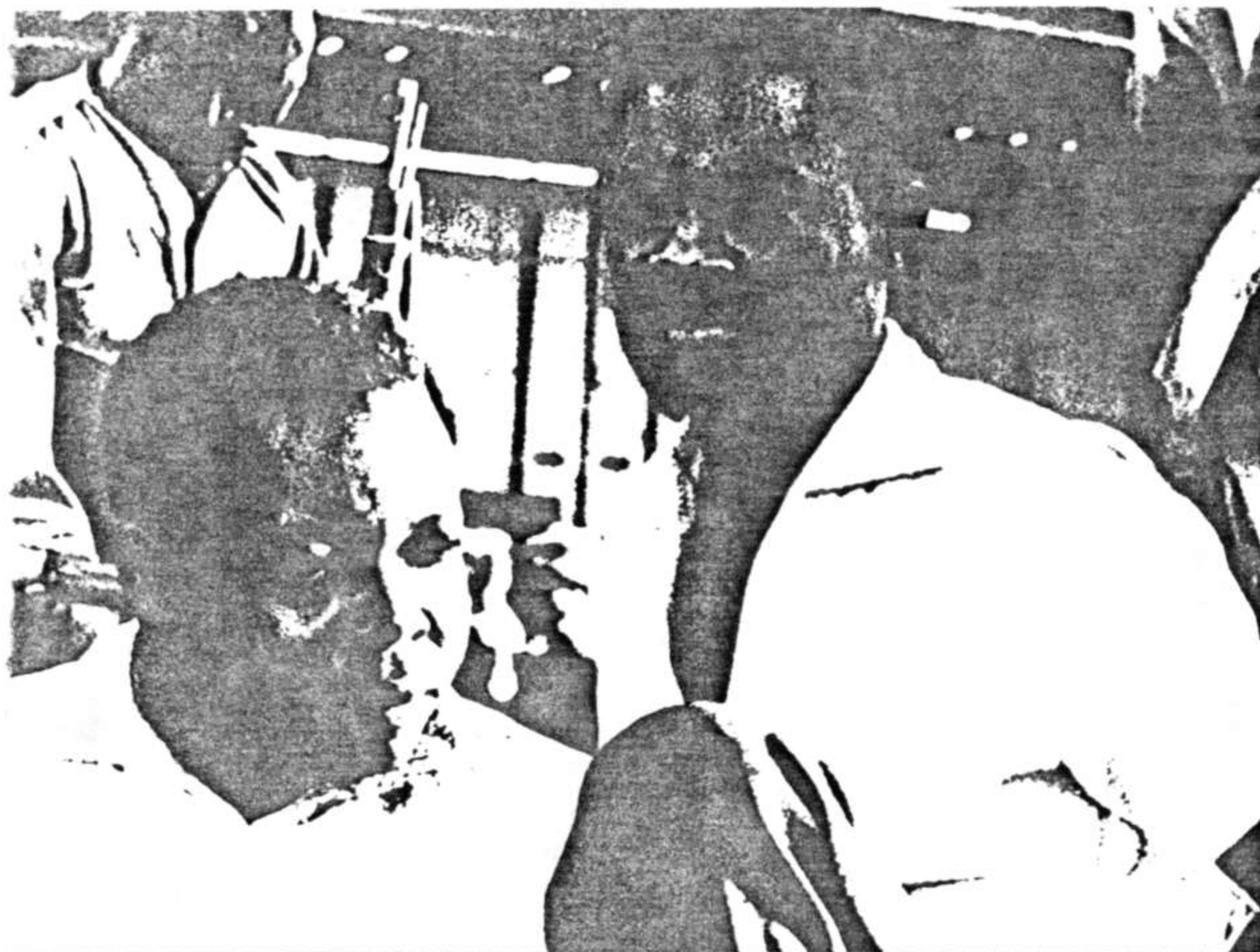
silenced prophecies of its past. The film concludes by asking why the lights on Belgian freeways are lit all night: is it to be sure the ghost of the prophet, indeed of all prophets, does not return? Lumumba and Allah Tantou (pg. 8), another personal film essay on African independence, share the search for a lost father, one spiritual, the other biological, the search for a second African independence where the prophecies of the first can finally be fulfilled.

"Lumumba triumphs on two levels: as a pungent exploration of a nightmarish epoch in modern Africa and a cogent comment on the very activity of sifting through the past."
— Newsday

"An incredibly sensitive deconstruction of Patrice Lumumba and post-colonial Africa."
— Village Voice

"A true poem on history, a country and a man."
— Liberation

—Notes by California Newsreel



producer/director:
Raoul Peck
 France/Germany/
 Switzerland, 1992
 in French with English
 subtitles
 69 minutes, video and
 16mm film

*Lumumba taken
 prisoner November
 30, 1960*

Chronology: 1960 Year of Hope and Betrayal

Eighty times the size of Belgium, the Congo was one of the most brutally and irresponsibly governed colonies in Africa. At the time of independence, there were fewer than 30 African college graduates in a nation of 14 million and all political activity was repressed. Born in 1925, Patrice Lumumba founded the Congolese National Movement, the only non-ethnic party, less than two years before it assumed power in 1960. Faced with intense external and internal opposition and denied the resources for nation-building, Lumumba was overcome by the tragic sequence of events chronicled in this film.

January 27, 1960 - Lumumba is released from prison to attend a Roundtable Conference where Belgium agrees to hold democratic elections and grant independence by June 30th.

May 29, 1960 - Lumumba's party unexpectedly receives the highest vote in the elections; he becomes

Prime Minister, Joseph Kasavubu, leader of the opposition, Head of State.

June 30, 1960 - Independence; Lumumba alarms Europeans by his frank speech at ceremonies.

July 5, 1960 - Congolese militia (*Force Publique*) mutinies against its Belgian officers and terrorizes European civilians.

July 10, 1960 - Belgian paratroopers occupy strategic sites; Lumumba appoints a 29 year old ally, Mobutu Sese Soko, as head of militia.

July 11, 1960 - Moise Tshombe, with strong Belgian backing, declares mineral-rich Katanga province independent.

July 13, 1960 - Lumumba's request for a U.N. peace-keeping force is accepted.

September 5, 1960 - Kasavubu dismisses Lumumba as prime minister; U.N. troops protect Lumumba from arrest.

September 14, 1960 - Mobutu

stages a military coup; forms an alliance with Kasavubu.

November 27, 1960 - Lumumba escapes to join supporters in Stanleyville but is captured by Mobutu's troops; U.N. does not intervene.

January 17, 1961 - Lumumba is flown to Elisabethville in Katanga; he is murdered sometime in the next three days, with Belgian and possibly CIA complicity.

The present - Since 1965, Mobutu has been head of one of the most corrupt dictatorships in Africa. In a country of 33 million where the average wage is \$160 a year, his personal wealth is rumored to be more than 8 billion dollars (equal to the Zairian national debt.) In mid-93, Mobutu continues to resist pressure from the democratic opposition and international community to hold free elections.