



Diamonds in the Rough: Corporate Paternalism and African Professionalism on the Mines of Colonial Angola, 1917–1975 (New African Histories)

Todd Cleveland

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Diamonds in the Rough explores the lives of African laborers on Angola's diamond mines from the commencement of operations in 1917 to the colony's independence from Portugal in 1975. The mines were owned and operated by the Diamond Company of Angola, or Diamang, which enjoyed exclusive mining and labor concessions granted by the colonial government. Through these monopolies, the company became the most profitable enterprise in Portugal's African empire. After a tumultuous initial period, the company's mines and mining encampments experienced a remarkable degree of stability, in striking contrast to the labor unrest and ethnic conflicts that flared in other regions. Even during the Angolan war for independence (1961–75), Diamang's zone of influence remained comparatively untroubled.

Todd Cleveland explains that this unparalleled level of quietude was a product of three factors: African workers' high levels of social and occupational commitment, or "professionalism"; the extreme isolation of the mining installations; and efforts by Diamang to attract and retain scarce laborers through a calculated paternalism. The company's offer of decent accommodations and recreational activities, as well as the presence of women and children, induced reciprocal behavior on the part of the miners, a professionalism that pervaded both the social and the workplace environments. This disparity between the harshness of the colonial labor regime elsewhere and the relatively agreeable conditions and attendant professionalism of employees at Diamang opens up new ways of thinking about how Africans in colonial contexts engaged with forced labor, mining capital, and ultimately, each other.

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