

## The 1964 Zanzibar Revolution and Its Revolutionaries

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I took three brief pre-dissertation research trips this summer to examine North American sources of information on the Zanzibar Revolution. This revolution, on the nights of 11-12 January 1964, came just one month after independence was granted. There was an American presence in Zanzibar at the time, which included scholars, journalists, CIA, US consular staff, and employees of Project Mercury, a US space tracking station in Zanzibar.

My first trip took me to the Michael Lofchie collection of Zanzibar Publications 1909-1965 at UCLA. Professor Lofchie wrote the seminal scholarly piece on the Zanzibar Revolution in 1965, *Zanzibar: Background to Revolution*. Lofchie's collection includes numerous local newspapers, political pamphlets, and a 1948 social survey that has provided critical information about different social groups' access to education and resources during the colonial period that preceded the revolution. Additionally, there were transcripts on the hearings held by a Commission of Inquiry into disturbances during the 1961 elections that many scholars see as a precursor to the revolution. Finally, I had informative meetings with Professor Lofchie, in which he provided me with more contacts who were in Zanzibar at the time of the revolution.

I then proceeded to the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library in Austin, Texas, where all of the official US foreign policy documents about the Zanzibar Revolution are housed. LBJ came to power just months before the Zanzibar revolution, but he was kept abreast of the situation on a regular basis, in part because of Project Mercury. State Department memos mostly outline decisions about the tracking station, the evacuation of American citizens, and diplomatic relations with the new government of Zanzibar. They became more interesting when the US Consul was arrested and deported from Zanzibar by the new government. Tapes of LBJ's phone conversations were among the most interesting data which clearly demonstrated Johnson's view of the situation in Zanzibar and its new revolutionary government. The



President outlined important strategic reasons for recognizing this new government to the British Prime Minister, who was stalling on the issue. The length of time the US and UK waited to recognize the new Zanzibar government ended up backfiring on them, as it gave Eastern Bloc countries time to move in with support, right in the midst of the Cold War.

Finally, I went to Ottawa, Canada to interview Clyde Sanger, who wrote the introduction to the autobiography of one of Zanzibar's revolutionaries. Sanger was also a reporter for the Guardian in 1964, and was put under house arrest by the new government when he arrived in Zanzibar just days after the revolution. Sanger had impeccable records from the 1960's, including never-published photos of some of the revolutionaries, official Zanzibar government documents, and numerous newspaper clippings. Not only did Sanger enlighten me with his personal experience during the revolution, but he also put me in contact with other sources.

The opportunities presented by interviewing principal witnesses and reviewing primary source material allowed me to develop new networks and sources for continuation of my dissertation research.

*Ann Lee Grimstad is a doctoral student in the Department of History and received funding from the Center for African Studies to conduct this research.*

