

The Birth and Death of a Tar Baby:
Henry Kissinger and Southern Africa

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of Henry Kissinger and his foreign policy toward southern Africa, using the civil war in Angola in 1975 as a case study. It interrogates the influence of race, ideology, and culture on the formulation of the so-called “tar baby” option in National Study Security Memorandum 39, as well as Operation IAFEATURE. Additionally, this thesis unpacks the foundations of the ideological divide between Kissinger and the African Bureau of the State Department.

Historians have long attributed the foreign policy of Kissinger toward southern Africa to the tenets of *realpolitik* and the Cold War prism. They have not, however, taken the question a step further to ask *why* Kissinger continually fell back on such anachronistic beliefs. This thesis takes the analysis further, asking *why* Kissinger believed a civil war in Angola must have the East/West Cold War as its primary cause.

The evidence gathered for this study comes from a number of archival sources. The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, the Western Manuscripts Collection at the University of Missouri, and the Foreign Relations of the United States collections are all heavily drawn upon. Additional information was gathered from newspapers, periodicals, personal memoirs, and interviews conducted both by CNN and the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training at Georgetown University.