



Tainted Soul by T. Ptah Mitchell. Berkeley, California: Blackbird Press, 2010, pp.148. \$15.00.

Reviewed by Zulu King

This book is a film script about one of the North American Afrikans (NAA's) who hijacked a plane, landed in Cuba, got fronted on by the government, thrown in the dungeon, and politicized with 'los gentes veridad', the unspoken mass of 'Afro-Cubans' who go through the same shit as their fellow NAA's here in America. The reader is exposed to a non-romanticized survey of modern Cuba, as well as the classic contradictions of Pan Afrika and the so called Afrikan Diaspora. Without taking a side in the dynamics of this ongoing dialogue on 'how to struggle and how to win', the author does introduce the reader to a world where you don't have to hop on a plane, risk extradition or even xenophobia, since the perspective and stylistics is really first person

even when written from second or even third person.

The screenplay was inspired from a book. Reading the script only makes one want to see the movie.

Michael, the main character, is an average nigga from the local NAA community; one of the lumpen, if you will. He has an idealized notion of revolution and Cuba as a haven for North American revolutionaries based on the social climate, recent events and hearsay. His main problem is that he is an affiliate of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense and not a member per se, like many in the community who loved and supported the Party but did not follow the ideological and organizational rules to a tee. So Micheal's loyalty to the movement while unquestioned on his part was questioned by some of his so called comrades. Since he was not part of the 'inner circle' his lines to Cuba are not solid. In fact he might have been led on to do an impossible mission because some of the brothers, doubting Micheal, didn't believe he could pull it off. But when he did pull it off, with little strategy and tactic, no means was provided to support him. He essentially hijacks the plane because he was informed that if he did so, he would be greeted with open arms from the revolutionary Cuban government as an ally against the spread of American imperialism. The problem was that he did not receive authorization and support from the Central Committee of the Party; also, during the hijacking, he made the mistake of jacking a high level undercover agent from Cuba on the plane, who was coming back to Havana to debrief his superiors.

To Micheal all white people, (except his white ho back in Berkeley of course), were the enemy, so he had no clue that there was another revolutionary on the plane besides him. So by the time the plane landed in Cuba, Cuban did not know whether Micheal was an agent of revolutionary blacks in America, a spy for the American government, since there was no communiqué between Cuba and the Black Panther Party of this specific activity.

Micheal is thrown in jail after Cuban officials decide that he's an American spy and not a revolutionary and sentences him to 12 years in Havana prison. It is this unknown aspect of Cuban society that for the first time I've seen (save Carlos Moore's book "Castro, the Blacks and Africa") is explored and illustrated, where the parallels of black life in Cuba are similar to black life in the USA. We fill the prisons there, we're dropping out of school there, and we're at the bottom of society there. We're labeled as the thugs, criminals and any original social practices we demonstrate become either illegal or subsidized. Sounds familiar?

Here Michael learns from the majority of the Cuban prisoners the harsh reality of Cuban society. The bottom of the slave ship, all these Afrikan's from all over the Western Hemisphere, imprisoned for so called 'counterrevolutionary' activities: from attempting to leave Cuba, to criticizing government, etc. But these people never met a real nigga from the USA, and they could not understand why Micheal wanted to come to Cuba so bad, how loud, audacious, courageous and principled he was, even in the face of the Cuban police.

One crucial thing I must say, the ability for Ptah to tell this story and remain objective, authentic and loyal to the audience, without taking sides requires skill and diplomacy. At times I doubted if this was a 'reactionary' story of a 'revolutionary' story, because so many contradictions come up. Many times I asked myself, do I support Michael smashing on the Cuban government? I mean they have done much to help us Afrikans in America, from medical school, to Assata, Robert F. Williams to Hip Hop. But then I remembered something Kwame Ture (RIP) said to the effect that the principles of socialism and revolution will always remain intact, it is the human organization we must work on. This informs me that the Revolutionary Government will remain in principle as long as she is honest with herself and accepts criticism from inside as well as from outside. And we must remain vigilant and militant that criticism should be not considered or labeled as 'reactionary' or 'counterproductive'.

Nowadays movies are much like music, if you're promoting revolutionary culture, you'd best have independent means to put out your own art and technology. Kudos to Black Bird Press for putting out the book. As the author says in the introduction, everyone in L.A. has a cousin who is a big shot in Hollywood. So either wait (forever) for someone else to put your movie out for you, or do it yourself. Perhaps the more who read *Tainted Soul* will demand a movie version, as the people demanded a movie that documented one of the most revolutionary acts of modern Afrikan history, the liberation of Haiti.

A task, that our most ablest of Pan Afrikan artists, Elder Danny Glover so aptly assumed responsibility of... *Tainted Soul* in no way compares to a historiography of Haiti, but does contribute to that 'great pan Afrikan conversation' and does bring local hood heroes to the forefront of international affairs. Hopefully, we don't have to wait too long for the movie.