

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN  
Department of History  
Semester I, 1988-89

HISTORY 446

HISTORY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

Instructor: Kenneth Curtis  
5102 Humanities 263-1838

Course Description:

The system of apartheid casts an immense shadow over the people of South Africa. This course is designed to give the student a deeper understanding of the current crisis through an historical survey of the political and economic forces which have made South Africa a country divided against itself. Because of the extreme urgency of the crisis in Southern Africa today it is impossible to divorce historical study from attention to current affairs; in fact, in revolutionary situations the interpretation of history itself becomes a battleground between the contending parties. We will therefore pay close attention to current events and their relationship to the South African past.

It is something of a paradox that modern South Africa has been governed under a philosophy of "apartheid" - "separateness" - when the trend of the past three hundred years has largely been in the opposite direction, of bringing together peoples of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds into a unified economic and political system. This perspective of historical unity will provide a framework for an exploration of the three basic periods of South African history: its origins as an agricultural and pastoral society, its transformation in the late 19th and early twentieth centuries as an industrial society, and finally the entrenchment of the apartheid state since 1948 and the resistance this process of enforced segregation has engendered.

Of course, this unity has been formed in a context of gross inequality based largely on racial differentiation. It is precisely because South Africans from all ethnic and racial groups have been fighting for control of the same resources - land, labor, cattle, capital, political representation - that South African history is marked by such constant conflict. The struggle of the rural poor and the urban working class for economic and political enfranchisement is another constant theme in South African history, and one to which we will pay close attention.

Finally, it must be remembered that these internal struggles for political and economic power have taken place in an international context: from the role of Dutch imperialism in the establishment of a European beachhead at the Cape in the 17th century, to the creation by British colonialists of the modern South African state, to the much maligned American economic and political influence in the region in the 20th century, to the hegemony exercised today by apartheid South Africa itself over its front-line African neighbours.

Course Requirements:

1) Attendance and Participation. Regular attendance at lectures and films is, of course, required. This includes Friday afternoons! There are no separate discussion sections in this course, but I feel that it will be very important that we have a chance to talk about the lectures and readings, and their relationship to South African current events. I have therefore set aside some class periods for discussion. Regular and intelligent participation in these discussions can have a positive impact on your final grade, especially in borderline cases.

2) Current Events. Although not a formal requirement, I expect you to take a sufficient interest in South African affairs to be on the look out for newspaper and magazine articles related to the country. To make this easier for you, I will clip all South Africa related articles from the New York Times and other sources and keep them in a folder outside my office. I will start a new folder every week. There is a bench nearby, so you can browse in reasonable comfort. Feel free to add clippings or photocopies of material you run across, but do not, under any circumstances, remove the folders from their place outside my office.

3) Assigned readings. You are expected to keep up to date on your reading. In addition to a packet of readings available from Kinko's, the following texts are assigned:

(i) Denoon and Nyeko: Southern Africa since 1800. A convenient outline of political and economic developments, although it is somewhat weak on events since 1948.

(ii) David Mermelstein: The Anti-Apartheid Reader. The perspective of this book is obvious from the title. It is an anthology of short articles and excerpts from longer works.

(iii) J.M. Coetzee: Waiting for the Barbarians. A harrowing novel written by a white South African; an exploration of the theme of the brutality of empire and the torment of a decent man who finds it impossible to remain neutral between a cruel state and its victims.

(iv) Alex La Guma: Time of the Butcherbird. A black South African novelist dramatizes the violence engendered by racial hatred and inequality.

(v) Ryszard Kapucinski: Another Day of Life. A Polish journalist relates his personal experience of the chaos of civil war in Angola in the mid-1970's.

4) Recommended Material.

(i) South Africa: Time Running Out. A clear, concise, well written appraisal of the South African situation compiled in the early 1980's by an American foreign policy institute. A good reference source to have on hand.

(ii) SOUTH AFRICAN MUSIC! There is nothing that will give you a better feel for the power and dynamism of black South African culture than listening (and dancing!) to the music coming out of the townships. There are many excellent anthologies of this mbaqanga music available. I especially recommend "Thunder Before Dawn" (Earthworks/Virgin 90866) and "The Indestructible Beat of Soweto" (Shanachie 43033). A recent album by the world-famous South African singer Miriam Makeba, "Sangoma", is more traditional in its orientation (Warner Bros. 25673). B-Side Records (further up State Street) has a good stock of African music; you can also try Rose Records and Vision d'Afrique on Regent St.

5) Map Quiz. You will be expected to be able to locate the following geographic features: the nations of Southern Africa and their capitals; the four provinces of South Africa; major South African cities; major physical features of South Africa. The quiz will be pass/fail. It will be given only once in class, if you fail on the first try you must arrange to take it again during my office hours. If you do not pass the map quiz by the time of the mid-term exam, your exam grade will be dropped one-half letter grade (e.g. your B will become a BC!)

6) Examinations. There will be one mid-term and a cumulative final exam. The format of the exams will be discussed in class.

7) Written Assignments:

(a) Three credit students will be assigned approximately one-hundred extra pages of reading from The Anti-Apartheid Reader, and will write a two or three page essay on the material covered therein. Papers due Friday, December 2.

(b) Four credit students will select one of the following sets of two books, read both, and write a critical essay of from eight to twelve pages setting forth the issues covered and the viewpoints of the authors. You must inform me of your choice of books by the fourth week; papers are due Wednesday, December 7. If you are poverty-stricken and cannot afford to purchase these books, you can read them in the reserve room at Helen C. White.

Four Credit Option: Choose one of the following four book sets:

I: These two books deal with the black opposition to the South African status quo, the first in historical context and the second in very current terms:

Edward Roux: Time Longer than Rope. Roux was a white South African who was actively involved, as a member of the South African Communist Party, in political and labor struggles in the 1920's and 1930's. This book details African resistance to oppression through the 1950's.

Stephen Davis: Apartheid's Rebels. A very up to date account of the political organization and military potential of the African National Congress, written in a straightforward, journalistic style. This book brings the theme of resistance up to the present day.

II: These books put more of a focus on the international context of apartheid, and the relationship of the South African situation to western strategic and economic interests:

William Minter: King Solomon's Mines: Western Interests and the Burdened History of Southern Africa. In this history of twentieth century South Africa, Minter concentrates on the American connection, and demonstrates the culpability of succeeding American administrations in allowing the apartheid nightmare to continue.

Anthony Sampson: Black and Gold. Sampson is a British journalist who specializes in studies of multinational corporations. In this book he provides an overview of the present political situation while emphasizing the role of western and South African business interests.

III. These books will give you an insight into the Afrikaner mind, to help answer the often asked question: "How can people who call themselves Christians rationalize the system of apartheid?":

T. Dunbar Moodie: The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion. A history of Afrikaner thought in the three hundred years leading up to the establishment of apartheid, with special attention to the particularly Calvinist form of Christianity which lies behind much Afrikaner thinking.

Leonard Thompson: The Political Mythology of Apartheid. Thompson concentrates of the use of myth in Afrikaner thinking to create historical and even divine justification for their actions.

IV. These books both compare the South African and American experiences of white supremacy. They will give you an idea of what was similar and what was different in the development of institutionalized racism in these two societies, especially in the late 19th century:

George Frederickson: White Supremacy: A Comparative Study on American and South African History. Frederickson describes American race relations in general terms from the earliest days of settlement and frontier to the establishment of the Jim Crow regime in the South, and describes both the essential similarity and the many important differences of detail with the South African experience.

John Cell: The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South. Cell focusses more narrowly on the late 19th and early 20th centuries and on the specific problem of segregation. Cell agrees with Frederickson that the doctrine of white supremacy was a constant in both societies, but he argues that segregation was not just a natural outcome of this attitude but a specific policy choice made in fairly recent times. He describes how and why racism took the peculiar form of segregation in both societies.

Grading System:

3 credit students:	4 credit students:
Mid-term: 30%	Mid-term: 30%
Paper: 20%	Paper: 30%
Final: 50%	Final: 40%

STUDENTS WHO HAVE REGISTERED FOR HONORS CREDIT: Please get in touch with me as soon as possible.