

Fransjohan Pretorius (ed.), *A History of South Africa: From the Distant Past to the Present Day*

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Fransjohan Pretorius is professor of history and an experienced author and editor of eight books about the South African War. He has come together with a diverse team of twenty seasoned historians to write South Africa's history from the pre colonial era to the present day. The book contains evidence, case studies, statistics and historic facts in an attempt to write a more balanced history of the country.

The themes encompassed in this book include social, political, religious and environmental issues, and covers aspects that show change over time in South Africa physically, socially and economically. The original publication was an Afrikaans version entitled *Geskiedenis van Suid Afrika: Van Voortye tot Vandag*. The book is suitable for a large audience from the tertiary history student to history educators and their pupils and is a significant addition to existing work on South Africa's history.

The collection of chapters discuss and analyse the history of South Africa starting from the emergence of human life in East and southern Africa 7 to 12 million years ago and explains in detail the geographic formation of the earth after

the Big Bang that eventually led to the formation of continents, giving way to the early environmental history of South Africa. Johan de Villiers introduces the earliest Portuguese navigators Bartholomew Dias (1488) and Vasco da Gama (1498) who first made contact with the local inhabitants and paved the way for other foreign nationals to arrive at the Cape in the course of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Eventually the *Vereerigde Oost Indische Compagnie* (VOC) established a settlement at the Cape in 1652. The VOC played a huge role in the population increase and economic development of the Cape when slaves from Angola and Guinea, Madagascar and Asia were brought to work in the agricultural sector and as tradesmen and domestic workers. Not only did the Dutch settlers contribute to the economy of the Cape, they were also responsible for the dwindling number of the Khoekhoen and Bushmen as a result of conflict over land and livestock that left many indigenous people dead. Many Khoekhoen also died from the smallpox epidemics of 1713, 1755 and 1767.

However, the situation in the Cape soon changed when the British occupied the territory in January 1806 and this brought a new dimension to the composition and nature of the population in the colony. In chapter four, De Villiers continues to provide an account of the Cape under British rule. The British were particularly interested in the Cape Colony because it was a strategic location on the sea route between Europe and the trading posts in Asia. By the 1820s, the number of British settlers in the Cape Colony had grown from about 4 000 to 46 000. In 1834 the British government abolished slavery and labelled it as "evil ... [it] had to be eradicated because it violated the dignity, personal freedom and responsibility of the people involved" and this brought tension between the Dutch Afrikaans speakers who were not amenable to the growing British influence and the Cape colonial government (p 92).

Jan Visagie explores the emigration of Voortrekkers into the interior, a theme that cannot be ignored in the history of South Africa because of its significance in the spread of white influence throughout the entire region of the country. Also known as the Great Trek, the trek was motivated by protests against British rule and British reforms that attempted to introduce the legal equality of white and black people. The Afrikaners were exposed to political and social changes which threatened their status and security and limited their freedom. The Afrikaners regarded moving out of the Cape Colony as their only solution. Between 1835 and 1845 more than 2 500 heads of white families migrated to the northern and north eastern parts of South Africa and each white family was accompanied by at least two or more black employees. Altogether, the Great Trek gave Afrikaners a stronger feeling of solidarity and identity despite the great deal of hardship and grief that was endured during their trek to the interior.

Hermann Giliomee provides five chapters in which he writes about Afrikaner nationalism and the concept of apartheid. After the Great Trek, the Afrikaners began to form a clearly identifiable group based on their origin, language and religion. By 1875, the group had gradually accepted the name Afrikaners. The Orange Free State became the model Afrikaner republic and had the most efficient administration. Paul Kruger prioritised Transvaal interests; he used the language of a nationalist and urged all Afrikaners to support the Orange Free

State, the Transvaal Republic and the Afrikaners in the Cape Colony against British imperialism.

The book discusses why the South African War of 1899-1902 is very significant in South African history and why it birthed a revival of Afrikaner nationalism. Although this war was as a consequence of tension between the Boers and the British, it closely involved the black population groups in the country, having the black and the coloureds serving in non-combatant roles. After the war and until 1948, Afrikaner nationalism was at its peak when the Afrikaner nationalists wanted South Africa to be as independent from Britain as possible. Thus, the National Party was formed in Bloemfontein in January 1914.

David Scher provides an astute analysis of the consolidation of the apartheid state from 1948 when the National Party won the elections and after it formed an alliance with the Afrikaner Party with the slogan "South Africa belongs to the Afrikaners" (p 311). Furthermore, apartheid implemented separateness and encouraged other racial groups to develop along their lines. Kobus du Pisani adds to Scher's argument and discusses the policy of apartheid under B.J. Vorster and the implementation of the homeland policy that was initiated by Verwoerd. This policy deemed that black ethnic groups in South Africa should have their own homelands and become independent states and promote self-governance.

Unquestionably, segregation and apartheid did not remain unchallenged. Black political awakening has its roots in the eastern districts of the Cape Colony from 1875. In the early twentieth century those black people who had received education at mission institutes led black politics. The South African Native National Congress was then formed in 1912 in Bloemfontein to unite all black South Africans politically and to become the mouthpiece for black people. Black resistance against apartheid continued to grow in the 1950s through to the 1980s.

Grietjie Verhoef provides two chapters about South Africa's economic history from the nineteenth century to the present. Initially, South Africa's economy depended exclusively on agriculture. This changed with the discovery of diamonds in the Kimberley area and gold on the Witwatersrand in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The emergence of early industries during the mineral revolution resulted in the formation of trade unions; their primary aim being to unite all white workers. Black workers had no trade union representation until 1917 when the Industrial Workers of Africa union was formed with the assistance of left-wing white revolutionary socialists.

Towards the end of the book, there are interesting accounts about the respective social standing of three of South Africa's racial groups during the apartheid era: the coloured people, Indians and English-speaking South Africans. During apartheid, most coloureds were loyal to the Afrikaners because of language, religion and culture. Although coloured people lived relatively better than Africans, the majority of them suffered due to colonialism, segregation, apartheid and exploitation. Similarly, many Indians suffered emotionally, psychologically and materially as over 140 000 faced forced removals from their homes in Durban to Chatsworth and Phoenix. Even so, some Indians benefited from the establishment of their own institutions and the period from the mid-1960s

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to the 1990s witnessed economic mobility. The English speaking South Africans are regarded as being 'uncertain of their identity' (p 588). The history of the English speaking group began with the British occupations of the Cape Colony in 1795 and 1806. While the English speakers retained their group and religious identity, many Jews were integrated into the group's life, as were other whites who were adopting English as a home language. Eventually, English speaking South Africans became more than a British community.

Elize van Eeden closes the book with a chapter on environmental history, a field that still needs endeavour in the history of South Africa. She gives an interesting overview of South Africa's geography and the relationship between humankind and nature and stresses the importance of environmental education in schools to advance environmental conservation.

A History of South Africa from the Distant Past to the Present Day has delivered what it promises in the title. The history of South Africa is written from the primeval past right up to 2013. Although this book is an important contribution to South African historiography, informative and educational to anyone interested in the history of the country, political and Afrikaner history dominates. Themes on apartheid, resistance and Afrikaner nationalism from the South African War until the 1970s overwhelm the text and the main figures of these events are portrayed as super and heroic. The book should have also considered themes on gender and childhood for a more balanced narrative on South African history.

Charmaine Hlongwane
University of Johannesburg