

GYS DUBBELD

*Seretse Khama*

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This slim volume belongs to a new series, entitled *They fought for freedom*, which consists of short biographical studies of black twentieth-century southern African leaders, and which appears to be aimed at senior school students. The publisher's blurb argues that "most of these leaders have been largely ignored by the history books", and that the purpose of the series is to "restore them to their rightful place in history". Over a dozen titles are in preparation under the editorship of historian John Pampallis, who has achieved prominence locally with his recent *Foundations of the new South Africa* (1991).

While it is undoubtedly true that many histories, particularly those aimed at younger readers, have underplayed the role of blacks in the history of the subcontinent - as Christopher Saunders pointed out in his *Black leaders in southern African history* in 1979 - such an assertion is less valid in the case of Seretse Khama. This book also does not seek to provide new information or insights on its subject, but rather summarises existing historical work to provide a sympathetic portrayal of the life of the first president of Botswana.

The strengths of the volume lie rather in other areas. A considerable amount of information is presented clearly and concisely, the material is well ordered, the narrative is uncluttered, good use is made of illustrations and maps, and various exercises have been included at the end of the text for student revision. It unashamedly sets out to tell a story in a lively and entertaining fashion, and it certainly succeeds in this objective.

It is somewhat ironical that, at a period when popular history and "history from below" are being widely propagated, a series devoted to the role of leaders should be produced from a populist perspective. Does this perhaps show that, in order to make history both accessible and popular, historians cannot focus only on "the people", but must also consider important and interesting leaders?

Some professional historians may dislike the approach and style of this volume, and may also dismiss it as a superficial text. It deserves, however, to be taken seriously by a profession which often neglects the necessity to communicate effectively with its younger students: this biographical study is likely to be read with considerably more pleasure and remembered for far longer than many duller and drier standard textbooks.

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