

## Book reviews/Boekresensies

### Valuable source for teachers

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*From Apartheid to democracy: South Africa 1948 - 1994*

Shuter and Shooter, Pietermaritzburg, 1998

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Over the past years there has been a steady decline in the general historical orientation of History 1 students. Many of them have not even taken History as a matric subject and those who have often have difficulty in connecting History to their own past experiences and memories. The upshot of all this is that first year History lecturers are experiencing more and more the same problems and needs as secondary school History teachers. This includes the need for suitable core texts to prescribe for students. *From Apartheid to democracy* is a school text book, specifically written to meet the need created by the Contemporary History included in the Interim Syllabus and to help school pupils relate their own world of experiences to the History they learn about at school. On the tertiary level, the book functions well as a core text to provide a historical context for more specialised studies on aspects of contemporary history. It could also function as a quick reference guide to political history of the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in South Africa.

Both the structure and the content of *From Apartheid to democracy* reflect both the demands of the syllabus and the professional historical and didactic insight of its authors. The material is organised in narrative form and broken into four chronological chapters. Within this chronological structure, each period is characterised and accessed through a particular theme: the rise and implementation of Apartheid until 1960, the stagnation of black resistance politics during the 1960's, its resurgence through 1976 and the post-Soweto groundswell of black resistance. This structure is both clear and easy to follow. At the same time it reflects the title of the book. This is not meant to be a general political history of South Africa: it is strictly a history of the Liberation Struggle. Relevant aspects of white politics in are briefly indicated. Relevant social and cultural events and processes receive more attention, but whether this is enough to locate the Struggle

in the total South African past is a matter of opinion. Either way, the discussion would have been academically more meaningful (and more genuinely educational) if the Struggle had been clearly contextualised, both in terms of Africa and of the wider world. On the other hand, *From Apartheid to democracy* is strictly a secondary school text book and has to follow the constraints imposed by the syllabus.

Within the constraints imposed by the syllabus, the needs of secondary school pupils and probably) the publisher, the book does a good job, and certainly fulfils an acutely felt need among History teachers. To its credit, the book constitutes a clear narrative that is undoubtedly more accessible to junior undergraduate students than the more academic alternatives historians would usually think of prescribing. It includes large numbers of relevant illustrations that bring home the realities of the past half century far better than any written description, a glossary of unusual words and a variety of exercises, diagrams and “spider diagrams” designed to help students to *understand*, rather than merely know about the past.

Competent teachers will also welcome the fact that the book makes no attempt to usurp their role. The teacher’s input is still essential, not only in explaining the text and helping pupils to acquire historical skills through the exercises suggested after each theme. The teacher also has an essential part to play in providing background material and more detailed content as well as making the book and its content relevant to the particular needs and lifeworlds of her / his particular pupils. The lists of additional reading at the end of each chapter will help both teacher and pupil to locate the additional information they need. However, any teachers looking for a definitive text to do their job for them will have to carry on looking.

Two further points need to be made about the book. Firstly, the level of detail in the discussion decreases dramatically as we move closer to the present. (The period: 1948 - 1960 fills over 50 pages, whereas 1976 - 1994 is covered in 19.) This trend reflects the current state of historiography and suggests an urgent need for more studies of relevant, contemporary history. Secondly, the quality of the text deserves a more user-friendly layout. The presentation of the material tends to be cramped and it is not always easy to distinguish the material in a theme from the practical exercises based on it or even from the summaries that end each chapter.

In conclusion, this book fulfils a definite need in both secondary and tertiary history education and deserves the serious consideration of both history teachers and first-year lecturers.

Geoff. Allen.

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