

University of Durban-Westville, 1961-2003 – Undoing Apartheid, Building a Non-Racial Culture

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This book is a reflection on the historical milestones surrounding the University of Durban-Westville's (UDW) founding. The authors solicited the perspectives of selected individuals who had experienced access to higher education under apartheid. They critically examine the impact of racial segregation on the so-called historically Black universities in general, and UDW in particular. What was of great interest to the authors was the initial education provided for Indians in South Africa and the eventual establishment of UDW, dating back as far as 1961, and tracking its development up to 2003. The authors called for insights into the lived experiences of relevant individuals regarding the functions of the university, including, among others, the social and educational purposes, teaching and learning, access to opportunities, development of academic disciplines, research and scholarship, community engagement, and administration. Furthermore, submissions were invited on the institutional culture, academic freedom, public accountability, governance, leadership and management, finance, architecture and planning, as well as student and staff politics. The main focus of this book is the historical origins and development of UDW over the four decades since its establishment.

The book provides a detailed history of UDW and its operational framework since it was established. The organic link between the past and the present plays out in significant ways. The authors critically examine the magnitude of the challenges the university faced and how they were addressed. They also determined future possibilities. As the

authors continue to explore the dynamics of transition, they highlight the positives of the institution's productive capacity, with a keen focus on UDW's rich legacy, which includes graduates, alums, and academic staff who have secured top positions in government institutions and civil society. Another interesting aspect of this book is the extent to which the authors explored competing perspectives on the merger of UDW and the University of Natal to become the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The critical reflections around the curriculum informed this narrative to a large extent. The chapters in this book navigate the extent of complicity, cultural chauvinism, and intellectual ferment that characterised the competing worlds on campus. Part of the book examines how the events in apartheid South Africa, such as the Sharpeville massacre, the 1976 Soweto uprising, and the assassination of Steve Biko, to name a few, are discussed. Still, a few influenced the political environment on the UDW campus. There was a fervent desire among students at the time to dismantle apartheid structures. The introduction of the so-called 'Bush colleges', referring to those universities whose establishment was largely informed by racial discrimination, fuelled the flames of radicalism across the country. The authors demonstrate how these events shaped the political culture on the UDW campus.

South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994 impacted various sectors within the country, including institutions of higher learning. Badat and Vahed explore the scale of this transformation trajectory in the context of UDW amid a changing political economy and the massification of anti-apartheid structures. They contend that UDW became largely deracialised; this was evidenced by changes in student enrolments and in the demographics of the staff complement, both academic and non-academic. The new higher education landscape, which was beginning to unfold, culminated in the merger of UDW and the University of Natal. Badat and Vahed contend that the historiography of UDW presented enormous challenges. Chief among these was the denial of access to institutional records, such as the minutes of the council and senate, planning committees, and other related meetings. One was compelled to rely on material produced by organisations and structures that were part of the contestations, on articles published at the time, and on the versions of the participants. The views and interpretations of those cited took precedence over other relevant sources. The authors' greatest concern was the lack of sufficient room to interrogate the participants and to provide alternative accounts. It therefore stands to reason that part one of this book cannot be regarded as the objective and authoritative history of UDW, as these limitations have seriously compromised its credibility.

Chapter 7 deals primarily with student and staff politics. The authors examine how students and staff navigated the institutional culture, which was riddled with enormous challenges and fundamental issues. Apart from the vicissitudes that characterised UDW at the time, there were positive legacies crafted in the process. Chief among them was the calibre of graduates that UDW produced. Most of them rose to prominence across sectors of the country's economy and beyond. Such achievements enhanced the authors' notion of the university's reputational prestige. Chapter 8 focuses on the transition of UDW to UKZN, which sparked contestation over narratives among intellectuals from the former University of Natal and UDW. Some academics from UDW expressed misgivings about the merger of the two institutions; perceived this move as a ploy to subjugate UDW to the "giant" University of Natal. Part two of the book comprises 14 chapters on various humanities and social sciences disciplines. These chapters question the quality of the courses that were offered by the so-called "Bush Colleges" or historically disadvantaged universities. Here, the authors critically examined the connections between the curriculum designed for these institutions and the demands of the labour market. Such a comparison extended to the curricula followed by the former "liberal or white universities" and their relevance to the needs of the employment sectors. The arguments advanced by the authors regarding the modalities and perennial challenges of segregated higher education systems are constructive and progressive. The authors guide the narrative very well and clearly demonstrate how the past systemic challenges within the higher education sector in South Africa have shaped the current university education.

The authors have captured the essence of UDW's political culture and the pertinent challenges it faced before it transitioned to UKZN. They prove a detailed history of UDW and its overall impact on its products. They also demonstrate how competing perspectives shaped intellectual discourse around the composition of UDW, its functions, and its limitations. One may safely recommend this book to students and academic staff, as well as to the general public. Such histories have been largely negated in the past, leaving most South Africans with a compromised sense of history.