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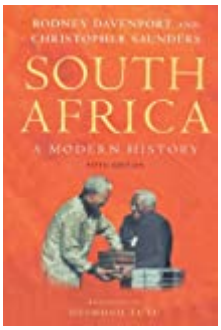

T. R. H. Davenport, Christopher Saunders. *South Africa: A Modern History.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000. xxx + 807 pp. $35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-312-23376-1.

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Standard Text Brought Up to Date

'Standard text brought up to date'

The first edition of Rodney Davenport's *South Africa: a Modern History* appeared in 1977 and was immediately acclaimed as the standard textbook on South African history. Since then a generation of undergraduate students in the English-speaking world have found the succeeding editions indispensable to understanding both the South African past and present. But as succeeding editions appeared, so the pithy account which characterized the first edition tended to become lost in a wealth of detail. By the time the fourth edition appeared in 1991, the volume had increased to 662 pages. As a result, although the book remained a text constantly to be used and consulted, its usefulness as a survey of South African history was being called into question. While ideal for individual periods or individual themes, the student coming fresh to South African history was now often directed to more accessible texts. The elegance of Davenport's prose and the insights he offered on the past, however, ensured that the book would remain the most important text on South African history. Equally important, each new edition incorporated into the existing text many of the latest interpretations and findings, and offered succinct evaluations of much recent scholarship.

When the fourth edition appeared in 1991 it took the story of the past up to the dismantling of the apartheid state and the momentous happenings of 1990; the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC), Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and South African Communist Party (SACP) and the release from prison of Nelson Mandela.

So momentous have the events of the last decade of South African history been that the fifth edition has scrapped the last two chapters of the fourth edition (on the political economy of South Africa in the 1980s). Part of the material in these chapters has been included in a new final section, 'Challenge and response,' whose three chapters devote an extra 140 pages to the text. This pushes the size of the book up to almost 850 pages and, at the same time so increases its price as to offer another reason why history departments are wary of prescribing it for their undergraduate students. This is most regrettable as the new edition provides most stimulating insights on the 1990s, while incorporating much of the lat-

est scholarship into the previously published text on the earlier period.

This edition also marks a departure from the previous editions in that Christopher Saunders of the University of Cape Town has joined Davenport in the writing of the new chapters and the revision of the existing fourth edition. So happy is the marriage of the two styles that at no stage is the reader conscious of any unevenness resulting from the joint authorship.

The new edition follows its predecessors in its meticulous commitment to assimilating the latest scholarship. As a result the treatment of issues such as the relationship between settlers and the Khoisan, slavery, the *mfecane*, the Anglo-Boer War, and the activities of the ANC in exile are far more nuanced than they were ten years ago. But, as is probably inevitable in any undertaking of this magnitude, some sections have received less attention than others. Sections on nineteenth-century Natal, for example, do not incorporate the latest scholarship on the African homestead economy, land tenure or the growing tensions which led to the 1906 Bhambatha rebellion. And, as the text becomes more bulky so the danger grows of unnecessary errors occurring. Page 235, for example has the Bhambatha rebellion taking place during the premiership of FR Moor and, four lines later, of Charles Smythe. Errors such as this could be avoided by more rigorous editing and proofreading.

Of more concern are the errors which are now creeping into the bibliographical notes. The cross-referencing has become unwieldy and confusing, and entries are not always accurate or appropriate. To give KwaZulu-Natal examples again. The reference in 4.6 (northern Nguni) to JB Wright's work on the Zulu refers the reader to 4.1 on the Tswana; the reference in 6.5 (African administration in Natal) to my work on colonial Natal refers the reader to 7.7 on the Zulu Kingdom where no references are included.

Scholars familiar with previous editions will turn to the new chapters to see how the authors have coped with the exceptionally difficult task of unravelling, and making coherent, the events of the 1990s. This has been done exceptionally well. Chapter 19 provides a succinct account of the political developments of the decade while chapters 20 and 21 incorporate material from the previous edition in two outstanding new overview chapters focusing on economic and social policies.

Chapter 20, 'Towards the sharing of South Africa,' begins with an excellent overview of the land question during the twentieth century, followed by discussions of mining, trade and labour relations. It ends with an account of the attempts to impose urban segregation and at the first stirrings of doubt as to the feasibility of segregation. Chapter 21, 'Body, mind and spirit: a quest for humane values' I found a particularly absorbing if depressing chapter. It begins by tracing the development of health care until the idealistic plans of the new post-1994 government to ensure adequate health facilities for all were undermined by the realities of HIV-AIDS, corruption and inadequate funding. In this chapter the authors relentlessly remind their readers of the human tragedies imposed on South Africans by the apartheid state. A mere ten years after the final collapse of apartheid it seems incomprehensible that any government could have considered racially divided health and social welfare policies. The chapter continues with discussions of sport, education and religion before concluding with an overview of the truth and reconciliation process.

In conclusion, the fifth edition of *South Africa: a Modern History* remains as indispensable to southern Africanists as were its predecessors. It remains an ideal reference work and should be owned by any serious student of South Africa's past.

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