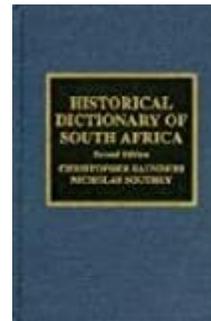




Christopher Saunders, Nicholas Southey. *Historical Dictionary of South Africa*. 2nd Edition. Lanham, Maryland and London, England: Scarecrow Press, 2000. xlv + 375 pp. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8108-3646-4.



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'A New Guide to the History of South Africa'

'A New Guide to the History of South Africa'

The second edition of the *Historical Dictionary of South Africa* is an indispensable reference work for anyone interested in modern South African history. It is really a short encyclopaedia with entries for a diverse range of topics relating to the history of what is now the Republic of South Africa. It includes an invaluable bibliography of relevant published sources; a useful chronology of South African history to 1998; a table charting the growth of South Africa's population since 1904; and four helpful historical maps.

The dictionary entries are this volume's *raison d'être* and are reason enough for students and specialists alike to acquire it. The entries are admirably clear and concise and there is a remarkable breadth of coverage in just 289 pages. This is a reliable source of basic facts about individuals ranging from Abdullah Abdurahman to Alfred Xuma; peoples from Afrikaners to Zulus; organizations from the Anglo American Corporation to the Urban Foundation; political parties from the African National Congress to the United Party; events from the Afrikaner rebellion to the Wind of Change Speech; industries from

diamonds to wine; concepts from Baasskap to racism; policies from apartheid to Total Strategy; and places from Azania to Zimbabwe. The *Dictionary* provides an introduction to South African historiography, with entries for historians such as W.M. Macmillan and C.W. de Kiewiet; and occasionally explains historical debates, such as that over the *mfecane*. It also introduces South African literature with entries for writers such as Alan Paton and Bessie Head. It is, furthermore, a good guide to the minefield of South African terminology for ethnic and racial groups. Entries typically range in length from one quarter of a page for minor topics, such as the Dominion Party; to almost four pages for major ones, such as the African National Congress.

The twenty-two page chronology included in the *Dictionary* is also valuable, particularly for its coverage of the late twentieth century. The maps are well-conceived but rather poorly reproduced.

The bibliography included in the *Dictionary* is a remarkable compilation of published material relating to South Africa's history. It too is reason enough to acquire this volume. Here readers will find an up-to-date list

of books and articles conveniently organized by subject. There are also lists of serials, bibliographies, and edited source material. There are roughly 1500 entries relating to topics as diverse as Architecture and Art, Strikes and Trade Unions, Segregation and Apartheid, and Health and Disease. Few people with an academic interest in South Africa will fail to discover something new and useful in these listings. My only complaint relates to the absence of an author index for the bibliography, since an author is often as good a starting point for research as a subject. Moreover, it is sometimes difficult to guess how particular works have been categorized. My own article on South Africa and the sterling area has, for example, been listed under "Mining" when it could just as easily have been listed under "Banking, Currency, and Finance". Still, it is doubtful that there is a better bibliography for a study of modern South Africa than the one found in the *Dictionary*.

I have few general criticisms of this volume. I turned repeatedly and productively to the *Dictionary* while preparing a new set of lectures for Canadian undergraduates on the rise and fall of apartheid. The *Dictionary* was particularly good for this purpose because of the strong coverage it gives to the end of the apartheid era. Indeed, the *Dictionary's* real strength lies in its coverage of the last one hundred years of South African history, though it includes useful general coverage of preceding centuries.

Biographical entries might have included more consistently the educational and religious background of individuals. J.T. Gumede was one of the few significant individuals for whom I looked but could not find. An entry explaining South Africa's Roman Dutch legal system would have been helpful, as would entries for the most important general elections—1924, 1948 and 1994. It may seem odd to ask for an index to a dictionary but it would be useful (particularly for the uninitiated) to know which entries related to subjects such as literature, religion, political parties, or war. An index could also provide a guide to abbreviations such as CODESA and CCB. Finally, an index would direct readers to people or things mentioned in the dictionary but which have no entry of their own—such as Clements Kadalie or the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act.

Specialists will no doubt wish to quibble about entries relating to their own particular areas of expertise. This specialist is no exception. The following comments are offered in a constructive spirit and in the hope that this excellent book might be even better in future editions:

In the chronology, the entry for 1931 should include the fact that Britain left the gold standard and devalued sterling, the currency used by most of the British empire.

The entry for 1932 should note that South Africa, when it left the gold standard, tied its currency at parity with sterling, thereby falling into line with most of the British empire.

Commonwealth: First, pressure from Canada's prime minister, W.L. Mackenzie King, as well as from J.B.M. Hertzog, spurred Britain into recognizing in 1926 the autonomous constitutional status of the dominions, a recognition enshrined in the Statute of Westminster in 1931. Secondly, the idea that the controversy over apartheid held the Commonwealth together in the 1970s and 1980s could perhaps be dropped. It sounds (to this Canadian reviewer) a bit too much like Pik Botha's perverse and self-aggrandising propaganda.

Currency: It should be explained here that the pound sterling (in its local guise) was in practice South Africa's currency from 1933 to 1967. The Rand was introduced in February 1961 (i.e. before the establishment of a republic) but it was simply ten shillings (half a pound) until sterling's devaluation in 1967. Indeed, many South Africans continued to do business (strike deals, advertize goods for sale, etc.) in pounds well into the 1960s.

Fusion: Mention should be made of the fact that Fusion was precipitated by the crisis over whether South Africa should stay on the gold standard or devalue its currency and tie it to sterling—the common currency for most of the British empire.

High Commissioner: This is an inescapably confusing term. It must be emphasized that it has had two quite different meanings in the twentieth century. Early on it meant a sort of "super-governor" in South Africa or elsewhere in the British empire. After 1931 it came to be applied to the senior diplomatic representative exchanged between Commonwealth countries - hence the presence in South Africa today of dozens of High Commissioners.

Simon's Town: It should be noted here that the Simon's Town agreements between Britain and South Africa were signed in 1955, and that Britain continued to claim right of access to the naval base and have a small naval presence there until 1975 when the agreements were finally terminated by mutual consent. South Africa repeatedly insisted that the agreements obliged Britain to sell arms to South Africa for the defence of the "Cape Route", an obligation that Britain disputed in the 1960s

and early 1970s.

There are no doubt other improvements that could be made to the *Dictionary* and I am sure that its authors will welcome any constructive comments that H-Africa readers care to offer.

In conclusion I have no hesitation in recommending the second edition of the *Historical Dictionary of South Africa* to any student, specialist or library with an interest in the modern history of South Africa.

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