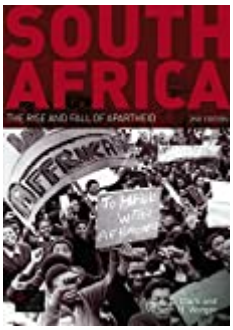
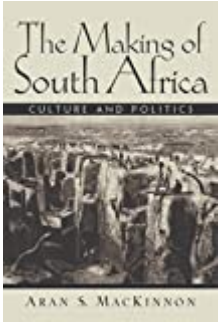
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Nancy L. Clark, William H. Worger. *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid.* Second edition. New York: Longman, 2011. 187 pp. $27.33 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4082-4564-4.



Aran S. MacKinnon. *The Making of South Africa: Culture and Politics.* Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004. xv + 320 pp. $38.60 (paper), ISBN 978-0-13-040681-1.

Reviewed by Christopher Lee (Department of History, Harvard University)

Published on H-SAfrica (August, 2004)

Assessing and Teaching South Africa's Past: Two New Textbooks

The political transition of 1994 has, over the past decade, invited a slew of textbooks that have sought to take stock of South Africa's past and muse on its possible futures. This trend has fortunately involved many of South Africa's leading historians.[1] Oscillating between concerns for descriptive narrative and empirical analysis, these texts have consequently provided a range of options for teachers to choose from. Seizing upon the tenth anniversary of 1994, these two recently published textbooks are excellent additions to this growing body of literature. The common strength they share is their concerted effort to make South Africa's history as accessible as possible to non-specialists, that is, teachers (and students) who want to grasp the issues and themes of South Africa's complex past quickly. Such accessibility is largely achieved through the details: helpful maps, illustrations, timelines, glossaries, bibliographies, website suggestions, recommended discussion questions, even reprinted primary source documents. These two books are therefore highly recommended to teachers for whom this material will be new, though experienced scholars of South Africa's past will also find pleasures amidst their

pages.

Textbooks on South Africa have tended to fall into two camps, those focusing on the twentieth century and those focusing on the country's entire history, from the pre-colonial period to the present. Aran S. MacKinnon's *The Making of South Africa: Culture and Politics* falls into the latter category. Divided into eleven chapters, MacKinnon provides a conventional overview of South Africa's past, though with a particular emphasis on political economy as underscored in his preface. His first three chapters cover pre-colonial societies, the establishment of the Cape colony, and the arrival of the British at the turn of the nineteenth century, respectively. The next three chapters address the remainder of the nineteenth century, with the Mfecane, the Great Trek, and their attendant issues of conflict and state formation comprising the central themes of these chapters. Chapter 6, the third of these three, focuses on the discovery and development of diamond mining in Kimberley and the revolutionary transition it marked, leading South Africa into its modern period. The remaining five chapters address the key events and issues of the twentieth century: the South African War and Reconstruction; segregation in the new Union of South Africa; the apartheid period; post-1976 activism and the negotiated end of apartheid; and finally, reflections on the "new" South Africa and the possible paths it might take in the future, vis-Ã -vis issues such as HIV/AIDS, the TRC, black economic empowerment, crime, and other challenges.

Running through his book like this oversimplifies the tremendous amount of detail MacKinnon provides. *The Making of South Africa* is very well balanced in combining a social history of economic and political change with vivid historical personalities and situations that make this history come alive. The experiences of women, a wide sample of ethnic groups, and a range of competing social classes are all well represented. Moreover, MacKinnon's writing style is clear and fluid, ideal for any textbook.

If there is a general argument or interpretive framework that unifies this heterogeneity, it is one that emphasizes the historically developed connections between these various social groups: the early competition over the same sets of resources such as land, the contradiction of social separation and labor dependence, and the eventual arrival of mutual, if at times uneasy, understanding after centuries of conflict and co-existence. There are scenes of domination and acts of resistance, but the production of a common history through such engagement comes through.

A defining characteristic of MacKinnon's text is the provision made for discussion questions at the end of each chapter. This addition, no doubt, will be very useful for teachers who are unfamiliar with the important themes of South Africa's past. To give an example, at the end of chapter 8, "From Union to Apartheid," the questions offered are:

"(1) What was segregation like in South Africa? How did it serve white interests politically, economically, and socially? (2) What was the relationship of Afrikaner nationalism to the white state and how did the Afrikaners perceive themselves? (3) Consider the various dimensions of segregation legislation. What were the most obvious features of segregation and how were they justified? (4) What were the different strands of opposition politics and action in South Africa at this time? What role did Indians such as Gandhi play in developing black protest politics? (5) Discuss the early formation and policies of the ANC. How did the ANC policy and tactics change between 1912 and the 1940s and why?" (p. 208).

Such questions, if self-evident to the seasoned scholar, will nevertheless be helpful to other teachers seeking guidance as to how to orient lectures and class discussion. A bibliography with brief book summaries is also provided at the end of each chapter for further reading, another convenient addition. Ample maps and illustrations are also well-spaced throughout the text.

There are some caveats that deserve mention. From a periodization standpoint, some historians may question MacKinnon's distinction between a "first phase" of industrialization in Kimberley and a "second phase" taking place on the Witwatersrand only two decades later, as distinguished by his two separate chapters on these developments. Given the brevity of time, it appears more accurate to combine the two as one phase oriented around the rise of a mineral-based economy, with a second phase taking hold during the early-twentieth century as auxiliary industries of commodity manufacturing were established.[2]

A second concern regards balance. Though his eleven chapters provide a very useful framework for constructing a basic survey course, many teachers will likely spend more time on the twentieth century than, say, the eighteenth century. In this sense, the empirical balance in the book may work against its intentions: teachers will likely want more discussion of the segregation and apartheid periods–currently only one chapter each–than on the de-

tails of the frontier wars, for example. This predicament is perhaps an issue the individual teacher can cope with on his or her own, though it might merit consideration for a second edition of this text.

A final comment regards the bibliography. It is substantial, providing an overview of the major works of South Africa's historiography. And yet I was surprised to see the work of some scholars go unmentioned: Charles van Onselen, Belinda Bozzoli, John and Jean Comaroff, George M. Fredrickson, Mahmood Mamdani, and Deborah Posel, among others, are unlisted. Granted not all these are historians, but they certainly are scholars who have influenced the interpretation of South Africa's past. Similarly, the work of activist-intellectuals such as Steve Biko, Es'kia Mphahlele, and Neville Alexander deserve inclusion. Recommendations of fiction, plays, and film would also be helpful, given their frequent use for class discussion sections. Again, these additions should be considered for a second edition of this text.

As suggested by its title, *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* by Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger falls into the category of twentieth-century textbooks. However, unlike other histories of South Africa in the twentieth century, Clark and Worger's book focuses more exclusively on the apartheid period and places more emphasis on analysis than narrative, their key questions being: What was apartheid? From what conditions did it arise? How did it end?

Divided into four parts, Worger and Clark begin with "Setting the Scene," a section that provides an introduction and historical background to the apartheid period. They cover 350 years of history–3.5 million years if you include the fossil record–in twenty-one succinct pages. Part 2, entitled "Analysis," focuses on the implementation of apartheid, its contradictions between theory and practice, and the role of activism in its decline. This section is well-detailed, providing a summary of legislation, the events and strategies undertaken by activists, and the competing notions of what "apartheid" meant. Indeed, Clark and Worger are particularly good at underscoring the ambiguities that existed among South African politicians in how to define and implement apartheid, and how this contention played itself out over time: creating contradictions and providing the opportunity for activists to achieve political change. Though it may often appear as such, apartheid was not a static policy. Part 3 offers an assessment of the period–examining in particular its contemporary legacy–and part 4 is comprised of reprinted primary source documents. This final section is a particular strength of this book, providing the voices and perspectives of various activists and politicians, from Biko and Mandela to Verwoerd and De Klerk. A copy of the Freedom Charter of 1955 is also included.[3]

Unlike MacKinnon's text, this is not a book that a teacher could as easily build a course around. However, its conciseness–its total text runs 150 pages–makes it ideal for teaching apartheid within a general survey of modern African history, a comparative history class, or a world history class. In fact, this text appears unparalleled in providing a quick and accessible guide to apartheid and its various facets.

In sum, both of these books are welcome additions to an already crowded collection of textbooks. Their strengths rest primarily on their degree of accessibility to the non-specialist. Indeed, they appear to be the best textbooks now out for this purpose.

And yet they also pose the question of inventiveness vis-Ã -vis the writing of nation-state histories. Both follow linear narratives from the past to the present, both represent a summation of existing knowledge: they do what textbooks are supposed to do. But I am curious if there might be other, more imaginative ways of discussing a nation's past, while still being comprehensive, accessible, and achieving the many other qualities that teachers, and publishers, look for. Perhaps a quixotic note to end on, but given the existing field, a question now worth pondering.

Notes

[1]. William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 2001); Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Robert Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation, and Apartheid* (London: Blackwell, 2000); John Omer-Cooper, *History of Southern Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994); and T. Davenport and Christopher Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). Also excellent, particularly for images and photographs, and involving senior historians such as Colin Bundy is: *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa* (Cape Town, New York: Reader's Digest Association, 1994).

[2]. From an empirical narrative perspective, his chapters may stand as they are. This suggestion is more a matter of analytic emphasis than a restructuring of the

book itself.

[3]. These documents also include, for example: "Verwoerd Explains Apartheid, 1950"; "Mandela Speaks on the Need to Challenge Apartheid, 1953"; "Stephen Biko Explains 'Black Consciousness,' 1971"; "Dan Montsisi Testifies as to the Origins of the Soweto Uprising, 1976"; "An Ordinary Policeman Explains His Involvement in the Killing of Stephen Biko, 1977" (a statement from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission); and "Mandela Speaks of Freedom Attained at His Inauguration as President of South Africa, 1994."

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

https://networks.h-net.org/h-safrica

Citation: Christopher Lee. Review of Clark, Nancy L.; Worger, William H., *South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* and MacKinnon, Aran S., *The Making of South Africa: Culture and Politics.* H-SAfrica, H-Net Reviews. August, 2004.

URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=9658

Copyright © 2004 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.