

11-1-2010

David Welsh. *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid. Johannesburg and Cape Town*: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2009.

David Brokensha Ph.D.

University of California Santa Barbara (Professor Emeritus) Cape Town, South Africa,
david@fishhoek.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brokensha, David Ph.D. (2010) "David Welsh. *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid. Johannesburg and Cape Town*: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2009.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 2: No. 1, Article 11.

DOI: 10.62608/2158-0669.1043

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol2/iss1/11>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of International and Global Studies* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact phuffman@lindenwood.edu.

David Welsh. *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*. Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2009.

Apartheid is an almost universally recognized word; defined as “segregation on grounds of race,” it refers primarily to the conditions in South Africa from 1948, when the National Party (NP) was voted into power, until 1994. Countless books have been written on this topic, and David Welsh’s magisterial book demonstrates that there is indeed room for another study.

Even in 1948, racial segregation was not new. Governor van Riebeeck had ordered that a fence be built between blacks and whites in Cape Town in 1659. The Natives Land Act of 1913 declared that Africans could buy land only in reserves. Africans were only sojourners in urban areas; whites had preference in certain jobs, and residential segregation was in place. Under the new NP government in 1948, however, a comprehensively racialized segregation of the state became institutionalized. South Africa was not the only nation that discriminated harshly on grounds of race, but it was unique in doing so openly and legally.

In 1948, when the NP was voted into power, Afrikaners constituted 55% of the white population; the remaining 45% of South Africa’s white population was almost entirely English-speaking. Nearly all Afrikaners supported the NP, which also had some English speaking followers, especially from my own people in Natal.

The African National Congress (ANC), which had been formed in 1913, consisted originally of educated Christian leaders, exemplified by the moderate Chief Albert Luthuli, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. These leaders mainly sought accommodation within the system rather than any radical changes. Although a 1948 commission had recognized that Africans were in town permanently and that total segregation was impracticable, the new government soon set out to change that.

Welsh divides the period of apartheid into three phases: (1) 1948 to 1959, when the NP increased its power and set about strengthening the existing segregation and extending it to nearly all areas of life, (2) 1959 to 1966, when the homelands (“Bantustans”) were established, where Africans were supposed to “develop along their own lines”; and (3) 1966 to 1994, a period of intensified measures created to support the government, followed by the gradual erosion of apartheid, with African nationalism becoming unified and stronger, and the final, agonizing process of a negotiated settlement.

Key legislation of apartheid included the 1950 The Population Registration Act, which was described as “the linchpin of apartheid,” and which classified the population into four groups: Whites (“Europeans”), Bantu, Indians, and Coloreds, (the last two groups comprised less than 2% each of the total population). This racial classification determined where people could live and work, where they could go to school or to the hospital, where they could have recreation, even which blood donors they would use. The justification for such classification, it was argued, was that the separation of the races would reduce friction between them. Also enacted in 1950, The Group Areas Act mostly affected Indians and Coloreds, thousands of whom were moved from residential areas they had occupied for generations to designated reservations on which they were required to live. Other apartheid legislation and policies included The Suppression of Communism Act (communism being presented as the “bogeyman” for 40 years); the prohibition of “mixed marriages”; The Immorality Act, outlawing sexual intercourse between “races”; the control of Bantu authorities; the removal of the Coloreds from the electoral roll, (educated Colored

voters in the Western Cape having had the vote since 1853); and the establishing of a different system of Bantu education, the premise of which was to provide a limited and practical education for Africans. Each culture was thought to have the capacity of development along its own lines; Africans were deemed to be destined primarily for manual labor, so that an advanced education was not appropriate for them. Finally, the NP established eight ethnic units, each with its own "homeland," and all Africans—even those who were third-generation urbanized—would be citizens of one of the homelands. The homelands were poor, crowded, often fragmented, and were clearly not sustainable.

By 1960, the basic framework of apartheid was in place, and in the same year, Harold Macmillan, the British Prime Minister of Britain, delivered his historic *Wind of Change* speech in the South African Parliament. Despite his warnings, the NP was not moved. One of Apartheid's principal aims - if not *the* principal one - was to abort the urban revolution among Africans by deeming urban Africans to be "temporary sojourners".(p 212). Influx control was the measure meant to ensure that Africans did not become permanent urban residents. The Pass laws (which had existed in various forms since the 1760s) were extended to include women; all urban Africans needed a Pass (dompas), signed by their employer, allowing them to be in the towns. It was estimated that half the African urban Africans were illegals. From 1946 to 1965, there were 6.5 million prosecutions. *Dompas* were a major feature of apartheid and figured prominently in literature depicting the cruelties, humiliations, and broken lives associated with the apartheid state.

The 1960s saw one of the first turning points in the anti-apartheid movement when protests at Sharpeville resulted in 69 deaths, the majority of the dead having been shot in the back; this was followed by the declaration of a state of emergency, the detention of over 11,000 people, and the banning of the ANC and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC). The Soweto uprising of 1976, "a seminal event in the decline of apartheid," (p 101) was triggered by the compulsory use of the Afrikaans language at African schools. However the uprising was also a sign of the general hatred of apartheid. The following year, the murder, by policemen, of Steve Biko, the dynamic and popular leader of Black Consciousness, which had an enormous following among disaffected urban young Africans, also led to nationwide riots and protests, to which the government responded brutally. As Welsh explains, "Torture, solitary confinement, detention without trial, and deaths in detention became commonplace" (p73). These events led to an increased international isolation of South Africa, a consequence that concerned many educated Afrikaners. These events also ominously contributed to the "permanently" changed "mood of blacks" (p. 162). These years remained difficult for the ANC, with most African leaders being in exile, in prison, or banned. Inkatha, the Zulu party led by the unpredictable Gatsha Buthelezi, was involved in spiralling, horrific violence in Natal in the early 1990s, with over 11,000 deaths. The ANC, UDF (another political party), Inkatha, independent warlords, and the SA Police were all involved, but "apartheid was the primary cancer underlying the violence" (p 313).

By the 1980s, some leaders within both the NP and the ANC had recognized that a deadlock had been reached and that neither side could win. Both parties faced sharp internal divisions. Some in the ANC were in favor of intensifying the armed struggle, while others wished to come to the table at once. In the NP, the hardliners talked of fighting to the death, while moderate members wished simply to talk. Mandela, who had been moved from Robben Island to the mainland in 1982, was

visited by the Minister of Justice in 1985. In the following years, there were many tentative “talks about talks,” with secret meetings being held in Europe, Lusaka, and Dakar, some with government representation, others organized by businessmen, sportsmen, and NGOs. P. W. Botha (President from 1978 to 1989) made some concessions, including the abolition of both Influx control and “petty apartheid”—including the segregation of shops and beaches. The ANC was not impressed, however, as they saw no significant political change. Welsh quotes de Tocqueville, saying, “the most perilous moment for a bad government is one when it seeks to mend its ways” (p. 244). By this time, the ANC had more leverage, with an increasing, permanent urban population, many members of which were essential to the economy.

When F. W. de Klerk became President in 1989, he knew it was essential that negotiations begin soon, and in February 1990, he made his dramatic speech, removing the ban on the ANC and releasing Mandela and others from prison. Despite the fact that 1990 was the most violent year in South African history, the next four years saw a painfully negotiated settlement eventually reached in 1994. De Klerk and Mandela, who immediately became key figures in the protracted negotiations, first met in 1989, and both men realized that they “could do business” despite the many obstacles they faced. Specifically, the NP wanted the ANC to give up the armed struggle, which Mandela was reluctant to do until political concessions were made by the NP. There were heated discussions about group versus individual rights; a federal versus a unitary state; whether amnesty should be given for criminal as well as political acts; what the position of minorities (whites, Coloreds, and Indians) would be; what economic system would be in place; whether a one-party authoritarian state would emerge; and whether a “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” be set up (which, of course, one was).

Welsh addresses, in a very balanced manner, the main topics of controversy regarding the fall of apartheid, including: (1) What was the relative significance of the roles played by de Klerk and Mandela? (2) How effective were international sanctions—including not only economic sanctions but also those placed on South Africa’s athletics, arts, and education? (3) How directly did the protests by international students, the World Council of Churches, and United Nations contribute to the fall of apartheid? (4) What was the importance of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK), the armed wing of the ANC, also called “The Spear of the Nation,” which carried out 1200 attacks between 1976 and 1989?. (5) Did the South African Military and NP political leaders know and authorize thousands of violent and illegal acts of brutality, or were these acts mainly the result of “rogue elements”? Welsh meticulously describes and analyzes the dramatic and tragic events of the apartheid years, giving due recognition to all the key players. He concludes by saying, “Democracy has survived, and even if it is democracy of a poor quality, South Africa is nevertheless a vastly better society than it was under apartheid,” to which I, as a resident of Capetown, can despite some grave concerns attest.

David Brokensha, Ph.D.
University of California Santa Barbara (Professor Emeritus)
Cape Town, South Africa
david@fishhoek.com