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## Will the Bantu Overcome?

*The Separated People: A Look at Contemporary South Africa*, by E. J. Kahn, Jr. (Norton, 278 pp., \$5.95), *The Long View*, by Alan Paton (Praeger, 295 pp., \$6.95), and *Against the World: Attitudes of White South Africa*, by Douglas Brown (Doubleday, 253 pp., \$4.95), point up the paradoxes inherent in apartheid. Charles Miller is a freelance writer and critic specializing in African affairs.

By CHARLES MILLER

"SHORTLY BEFORE I SET FORTH to South Africa," writes E. J. Kahn, Jr., "I met a businessman from there who was living in the United States . . . 'You'll have a good time if you forget about politics,' he said. It was as if he had told Commander Peary to forget about snow and ice."

Kahn, the top-notch reporter whose humor-laced conversational style has graced many an issue of *The New Yorker* for many a year, certainly couldn't duck politics while in South Africa. Nor did he wish to. But readers expecting a new outrage against humanity on every page of *The Separated People*—a richly informative adult's primer on that country—will be disappointed, because Kahn makes a real college try at objectivity. Believe it or not, the milk of human kindness can flow, and often does, from some of the unlikeliest places in South Africa, and one of the book's nicer assets is its cornucopia of detail documenting not only the country's meanness but its heart as well.

Space permits attention here to only one of the countless human paradoxes in *The Separated People*: the law courts. Perhaps the high point of the book is the chapter on the trial of Demitrio Tsafendas, Prime Minister Verwoerd's deranged assassin, in which no effort was spared to assure that justice was done and seen to be done. The proceedings were enlivened

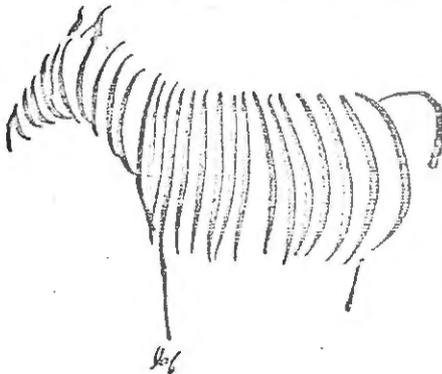
by the presence of the engaging Supreme Court Judge-President Andrew Brink Beyers, "an earthy, no-nonsense man" who has been known to laugh openly at some of his country's more addleheaded race laws, and who once said, "I defy anyone to distinguish in half-light between the Judge-President when he goes fishing and a colored wharf boy."

Kahn has a special genius for lighting a fire under what would ordinarily be dreary legalistic mumbling. In the two chapters dealing with the World Court hearings on South Africa's disputed mandate over South West Africa, the soporific nit-picking that set the tone of this twenty-year marathon of due process is electrically transformed by Kahn into fast-breaking "hard news."

Do I skirt Topic A? Yes. Does Kahn? Hardly: it's there in all its odious abundance. Even Kahn's herculean effort to be fair doesn't shut out the clammy fog of dread that penetrates every corner of the land and every segment of the population—by no means excluding the "poor rich whites." But the real value of *The Separated People* lies in its balance. Certain readers may find it hard (or may not wish) to believe that the sun can occasionally peep through the fog. Now and then it does, and Kahn rates a deep bow for recording the phenomenon in supremely readable fashion.

During a visit to South Africa some years ago I had the immense pleasure and privilege of meeting Alan Paton. As a person he impressed me as being slightly less militant than a gardener, which may or may not be surprising. But one certainly doesn't look for mildness and detachment in Paton's writing, and one certainly won't find them in *The Long View*, which shows the tireless guerrilla of South African letters at his slashing best.

*The Long View* consists mainly of articles that Paton has written over the past decade for a magazine called *Contact*, official organ of South Africa's Liberal Party—a tiny band of patriots who fearlessly and vigorously dissent from their country's iron-age policies. Paton, a founding member, has thrice served as party chairman and has always been the liberals' strongest, most respected, and most feared voice, although he himself would probably deny it. In the broadsides he levels at the South African government he pours it on with all his characteristically lethal eloquence and relentless logic, all the more telling for



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their restraint. It's a glorious experience to become involved in the writing of a polemicist with so breathtaking a gift for simple but soaring prose.

At the same time, though, one may wonder why he bothers. After all, we have long since passed the point where any indictments of South African police-statism don't echo what has already been written or spoken a hundred thousand times before. One can legitimately ask whether *The Long View* isn't just another exercise in preaching to the converted.

—It is indeed, and “preaching” is the operative word, for the Liberal Party needs all the inspirational sustenance it can get. A systematic campaign of legalized harassment, intimidation, and psychological torture (sometimes it can be physical) has castrated the party as a political force and broken many of its leaders as individuals. (The government's most potent anti-Liberal weapon is an ingenious thing called a banning order, which removes a person, without trial or appeal, from normal human intercourse for five years—immediately renewable at officialdom's whim—without actually putting him behind bars.) Yet a valiant few are sticking it out. To them, Paton's articles aren't just expressions of political opposition; in a very real and vital sense they are sermons, and impassioned sermons at that, delivered with the same bring-you-to-your-feet wallop that people like Winston Churchill and Martin Luther King, Jr. could inject into their spoken messages.

Maybe it's quixotic to imagine that Liberal resistance would vanish entirely without Paton's ringing fight talks. I'm not so sure. Nor is *The Long View's* editor, Edward Callan, who says in his excellent biographical introduction: “Liberals like Paton are no longer occupied with keeping a parliamentary party alive; they are trying to keep the breath of life in the liberal spirit itself.” And, in his address to the party's annual congress in 1965, Paton himself in relatively subdued tones put it this way: “At the moment it is possible to believe that nothing will change, that [the government] will never consent to any change that threatens its own position of power, however remote that threat may be . . . For how long will this future last? My answer is ‘I do not know.’ To me there is another question: ‘How long can I last?’ And there is still another question: ‘Is it worth trying to last?’ . . . I think it is worth trying to last.”

I would say that the most illuminating and unquestionably the most provocative of these three books is Douglas Brown's *Against the World*. Brown, a newspaperman with long experience in South Africa, has come up with a searching look at the white South African mentality and what makes it tick. Here the

reader will see certain potent forces at work, reflected particularly in the outlook of the 1,800,000 Afrikaners who to all practical purposes rule South Africa and who in turn are ruled by an almost pathological drive to preserve their identity as a people.

In oversimplified terms, it can be said that Afrikanerdom gets its granite muscle from three principal sources: an abiding hostility toward South Africa's 1,700,000 English-speaking whites; the Afrikaans language, living symbol of a heavy-handed but dynamic culture; and, above all, the grim spiritual nourishment of the Dutch Reformed Church, which is also both root and justification of apartheid. These forces carry the weight and authority of long tradition; but Brown also traces the emergence of a more recent influence on Afrikaner thinking that has produced a ferment in all white attitudes. Ironically, it may mean the beginning of the end for white supremacy.

FOR nearly three centuries the Afrikaner was fundamentally a man of the soil, but after 1948, when his Nationalist Party gained ascendancy, he rapidly became a figure to be reckoned with in a South African business world previously dominated by the English. In this new role as tycoon he was forced to come to grips with an unsettling specter: the possibility that apartheid “was intrinsically doomed to a society so heavily industrialized.” As Brown puts it, “The laws of economic development that had destroyed feudalism in Europe, brought about the French Revolution and produced the British Reform Bill could not be indefinitely held in suspense in South Africa. What the worker was in Detroit and Manchester he must eventually become in Johannesburg—the chief producer, the chief consumer, the master, therefore, of the economy.”

Since the worker in this case is of course the black man, the Afrikaner has sought to stave off his impending power by various means. Best known has been creation of the controversial “Bantustans”—self-governing black states within South Africa (at present there is only one), which will ultimately, so it is said, enjoy total sovereignty. But one wonders how the Afrikaner expects to serve his own interests with this socioeconomic curiosity. Through complete racial separation South African industry would be denied not only its indispensable fuel of cheap black labor (thus forcing whites into “Kaffir work”) but, much more to the point, its biggest domestic customer. This is the grand paradox, compounded by an all but nuclear African population explosion and a steadily growing shortage of skilled whites: at a time when the future, everyone agrees, depends on further industrialization.

Yet the Bantustan idea does represent at the very least a sign that the ice is breaking and, far more significantly, an increasing (if seldom openly acknowledged) awareness among whites that the picnic may not last forever. Brown appears to consider this far from a dream, looking to “the ultimate collapse of apartheid . . . under the weight of its economic absurdity.”

The prospect, it should be added, is one that he relishes. With the exception of Paton I don't know of any writer who articulates his loathing for South African racism with such fine bite. Yet it is here that Brown also parts company with most foes of apartheid, for he is convinced that racial equality, if it ever comes to South Africa, will be brought about only with the consent and effort of white South Africans, and that external interference can only decelerate the process if not bring it to an outright halt.

In amplifying this view he takes what could almost be called a tack to the right, and once or twice even seems to lose his cool: “It would be a mistake . . . for the world to renew its crude pressure on South Africa”; “It is a pity that left-wing publicists in the West should combine so much facile ruthlessness with so marked a lack of realism.”



The above does an injustice to Brown because it quotes him out of context. His line of reasoning, moreover, isn't at all unsound, especially if you accept his premise that “the whole situation is instinct with change, and dangerous enough for all concerned, without any interference from outside . . . the moral and intellectual situation has become fluid . . . There has been a thaw.” Yet just how tenable is this argument? Undeniably certain forms of outside kibitzing—notably from the U.N.—are either useless or self-defeating; unquestionably most voices of protest amount to so much wind. But can it really be said that speaking out—and acting, wherever feasible—has only a retrogressive effect, that it serves only to stiffen resistance? If there is indeed a thaw in South Africa (and I'm quite sure there is), one finds it most difficult to believe that the change in climate has been wholly self-generated, that respected individuals and groups on the inside have failed entirely to reach the white South African conscience—be it not, that I do present for and find that a real and serious challenge to the far worker's “crude pressure.” After all, even South Africa is not an island unto itself.