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THE STARVATION OF
YOUNG BLACK MINDS:
The Effect of Book Boycotts
in South Africa

*Report of a
Fact-Finding Mission to South Africa
May 18-28, 1989*

SPONSORED BY:
The Association of American Publishers
and
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Introduction

For ten days in the spring of 1989 a prominent American publisher and a distinguished member of the American library community visited the Republic of South Africa. Their mission was to survey the availability of U.S. books and other educational materials and to learn, at first hand, how South African writers, librarians, educators and anti-apartheid activists feel about books and educational materials being included in the cultural boycott against South Africa undertaken by certain individuals and organizations in the United States.

The mission was composed of Lisa Drew, Vice President and Senior Editor of William Morrow & Company, and Robert Wedgeworth, Dean of the School of Library Service at Columbia University. During the course of their visit they talked with more than 75 individuals, black and white, and visited numerous schools, libraries, universities and private charitable organizations, gathering facts and relevant opinions regarding the boycott. During an informal debriefing shortly after their return, Dean Wedgeworth told the sponsoring organizations that by embargoing the sale and shipment of U.S. books to South Africa, Americans are unwittingly abetting the South African government in its "systematic starvation of young black minds."

The mission was carried out under the auspices of the International Freedom to Publish Committee of the Association of American Publishers (AAP) and the Fund for Free Expression. It was also supported by the Freedom to Read Committee of AAP.

The AAP International Freedom to Publish Committee is the only group formed by a major publishers' organization anywhere in the world for the specific purpose of defending and broadening the freedom of written communication internationally. The committee monitors human rights issues and provides moral support and practical assistance to publishers and authors outside the U.S. who are denied basic freedoms. The International Freedom to Publish Committee carries on its work in close cooperation with other human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch and PEN International.

The Fund for Free Expression was established in 1975 by a group of publishers, authors, lawyers, journalists and concerned citizens to promote freedom of expression throughout the world, as guaranteed by Article 19 of

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Fund supports anti-censorship efforts around the world. The Fund for Free Expression is an arm of the Human Rights Watch.

The Freedom to Read Committee is the Association of American Publishers' First Amendment advocacy group. Working to promote and strengthen First Amendment rights, the committee plays a major educational role, through its reports and public programs. The Freedom to Read Committee has participated, as plaintiff and as a friend-of-the-court, in a number of landmark First Amendment cases and works closely with other organizations to promote the cause of intellectual freedom.

The following is the formal report of the mission and its recommendations, which have been strongly endorsed by the sponsoring organizations.

Background

Prior to 1984, container shipping and the existence of a few subsidiaries of U.S. publishing companies in South Africa made it possible for U.S. books in quantity to be competitive in the South African market. After the U.S. enacted the 1986 Anti-Apartheid Act imposing economic sanctions on South Africa, certain educational and cultural organizations—thinking that the sanctions did not go far enough—promoted a cultural boycott as well. A few corporations whose principal products could not be sold in South Africa due to the economic sanctions, also happened to have publishing interests.

A number of local school boards, libraries and city councils around the U.S. threatened these companies, and independent publishers and booksellers as well, with a boycott of their products if they did any business with South Africa. Some were asked to sign pledges to this effect. The immediate result was that those with South African companies sold them to local buyers at bargain prices. Other publishers, without publicizing the action, have stopped shipping books to South Africa.

Such restrictions on the free exchange and dissemination of information and ideas are contrary to the traditions of publishing, education and culture in the U.S. and specific amendments have been proposed for the 1989 Anti-Apartheid Act making it clear that it excludes books, educational materials and medical supplies.

The Mission

The goal of the groups sponsoring the survey was to ascertain the effect of the boycott on the South Africans—especially representatives of the mass democratic movement (MDM) who are not banned by the South African government. Although we heard a great deal about it, our mission was NOT to determine how divestment was affecting the South African government or whether it was a good strategy.

We visited and/or spoke at length to more than 75 representatives of various organizations and institutions. Although they had various reactions to the cultural boycott in general, *not one supported the inclusion of books and educational materials*. Among the organizations and institutions represented in our discussions were:

5 Universities

- University of Witwatersrand (WITS)
- University of Cape Town (UCT)
- University of the Western Cape (UWC)
- University of South Africa (UNISA)
- University of the North

4 Schools

- The Open School, Johannesburg
- FUNDA Center, Soweto
- St. Barnabas, suburban Johannesburg
- Sea Point, Cape Town

2 Private educational organizations

- SACHED Trust, Johannesburg
- READ, Johannesburg

2 National Libraries

- The State Library, Pretoria
- The South African Library, Cape Town

1 City Library, Cape Town

1 Provincial Library, Pretoria

3 Black Townships

Athlone

Mamelodi

Soweto

3 Bookstores

Central Johannesburg Shopping Center

Juta, Cape Town

Eve Jammy, Johannesburg

1 Book Distributor

Exclusive Books

4 Publishers

David Philip

Tafelburg, Daniel van Niekirk

COSMOPOLITAN and FEMINA, Jane Raphaely

SOUTH AFRICAN REPORT, Raymond Louw

Numerous writers including Nadine Gordimer, Jonathan Paton, Ahmed Essop, Chris van Wyck and Alastair Sparks.

We acknowledge the assistance and counsel of Selma and Jules Browde, Johannesburg; Mary Burton, the Human Rights Monitor in South Africa, Cape Town; and the USIS in Pretoria, for making it possible to meet so many people in such a short time.

In the preceding list are a number of institutions which are heavily funded by the South African government. One would normally assume, therefore, that they would support apartheid. However, it is surprising to see the extent to which government- supported libraries and universities are continually and actively engaged in challenging the system.

There are 20 universities in the country, all of which are theoretically open to all races. A few remain almost totally white due to restrictive admissions policies. Several others are almost totally black* due to their location in the so-called black homelands or as a result of their original designation as ethnic universities. This latter restriction is no longer enforced. Nevertheless, the University of the North which was established to serve the Sotha, Tsonga

* As used here, "black students" includes those of Asian or mixed-race backgrounds.

and Venda populations has attracted only a few white or Indian students out of a student body of 7,000. The University of the Western Cape which was established to serve the coloured population has about 60 whites in a student body of 12,000.

Most of the formerly all-white universities have steadily increased their black enrollments. WITS and UCT now have black enrollments of over 20%. The Law School at WITS is 37% black and the Medical School is over 40%. The largest university in South Africa, UNISA, a correspondence school, is almost 50% black. In each of these instances black African students comprise the largest component of the black enrollment.

Beyond efforts to diversify enrollments, several of the universities have been quite vocal in their attempts to represent a progressive element in South African society. They have issued policy statements on the importance of political rights and human rights for all of South Africa's people and they have successfully defended themselves from interference in their internal policies by the government in an unprecedented case decided by the Supreme Court.

While these universities are demonstrably more progressive than others, the assumption that their source of funding determines their policies, as it does in the U.S., is incorrect.

With the exception of the determinedly all-white towns like Pretoria, the city public libraries are open to all races. Employment of black personnel above the clerical level is not common. The availability of qualified personnel is most frequently cited as the barrier to the employment of more black librarians. The lack of evidence of any significant effort to change this situation either by the employing institutions or the professional society is some indication that it is not perceived to be a major problem. Yet the majority of users we observed in public libraries were black students using out-of-date textbooks, while the staffing and collections are oriented toward a group of more sophisticated users barely in evidence.

The schools we visited were private and charitable efforts to supplement or supplant what the government of South Africa provides for black students. We were told that the public schools situation is characterized by substandard

instruction, inferior texts where available at all, frequent student strikes to protest school conditions and major distractions resulting from student involvement in the Mass Democratic Movement in black communities. Students reported that their lives are systematically disrupted by police efforts to combat racial unrest among blacks. They are also routinely and randomly detained and questioned about the MDM for indefinite periods. There is great concern that this generation of black students is missing the opportunity to prepare for leadership responsibilities.

For the most talented black students a few private schools are the only alternatives at the elementary and secondary level. For others, several private educational and cultural organizations attempt to combat illiteracy, train teachers and provide materials to students and teachers. The work of all of these organizations, schools, libraries and universities is vitally affected by the cultural boycott.

Effect of the Boycott

Non-fiction books and other educational materials from the U.S. are generally unavailable to South Africans in schools, libraries or bookstores. Orders sent to U.S. publishers and booksellers are returned routinely with notices that the firm does not do business in South Africa. Some of the more obvious effects are:

1. Those books that manage to make their way to South Africa via third parties are expensive and very slow to arrive.
2. In certain fields, universities must use inferior texts as alternatives to U.S. books.
3. South African university students are cut off from vital sources of information and access to postgraduate research in the United States by private firms and by some libraries, including the Library of Congress, who simply do not respond.
4. There has been a dramatic increase in photocopying and a decrease in efforts to combat it, recognizing that a text now costing \$50-\$60 can be made affordable by sharing the cost through selling photocopies.
5. An even poorer education is being provided those who need it most. The emphasis of the majority of blacks is now on education. With the government spending five times more on education for whites than blacks, the book boycott weakens the meagre alternative resources for blacks.
6. American books of general interest in South Africa—civil rights movement, ethnic children's and young adult literature, books of Jewish interest and non-racial, non-geographical picture books for children—are in short supply.
7. An indirect effect is a more insular South African white population which is not exposed to the realities of the world.

Conclusions

For these and other similar reasons, *all of the persons with whom we spoke, even those who support economic sanctions and the general cultural boycott as it affects athletic contests and rock concerts, oppose the boycott on books.* Some U.S. books (mostly fiction and politics), find their way to South Africa in British editions and they are popular despite their expense. They carry the banner of American culture, but the bulk of exposure is represented by movies and television. (The most popular TV show in the black township of Soweto is "Dallas," while in the white Orange Free State it is "The Cosby Show.")

Many publishers, librarians and educators are increasingly uncomfortable with the irony of the U.S. role in helping the government of the Republic of South Africa to isolate its population by stemming the free flow of information and ideas from the U.S.

However, it also seems clear that simply removing books from the cultural boycott might appear a self-serving action on the part of the U.S. publishing industry. Whatever action is proposed by the publishing industry and supported by library and educational interests should be directed toward expressing a commitment to the free flow of information and support for the individuals and organizations working to build a non-racial society in South Africa.

Recommendations

1. That the Association of American Publishers urge its members and other publishers to discontinue the boycott of books and other educational materials for South Africa.

2. That the AAP request the support of the American Library Association, African Studies Association and other relevant educational and cultural organizations for this action. The basic tenets of these organizations support this position, it is consistent with U.S. economic sanctions, and it is supported by the African National Congress in its most recent policy statement on the cultural boycott issued in Lusaka, May 1989.

Paragraph 2.6 of that policy statement reads as follows:

“The suppression and circumscription of the inflow of information, cultural products and artefacts from outside South Africa is an important weapon in the arsenal of the oppressor regime, which it wields to consolidate its power vis-a-vis the oppressed and exploited majority. The NLM and the MDM support the inflow of progressive cultural products, artefacts and ideas into our country so that these become readily accessible to the widest sections of our people. We support and encourage the dissemination of all cultural products, artefacts and ideas that enhance the struggle for democracy and promote democratic human values as opposed to the oppressive, retrograde values and misanthropic ideals. This applies to books, newspapers, magazines, video, film and sound recordings manufactured and produced outside of South Africa.”

3. That the AAP encourage its members to donate books to designated schools, libraries and charitable organizations active in the struggle for a progressive, non-racial society in South Africa.

4. That the AAP encourage those U.S. corporations that have divested their South African holdings to continue some of their charitable contributions to worthy and progressive recipients.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Drew
William Morrow & Co.
105 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10016

Robert Wedgeworth
Columbia University
516 Butler Library
New York, NY 10027

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LISA DREW

Before moving to William Morrow and Company in 1984 to become Vice President and Senior Editor, Lisa Drew spent 23 years of her publishing career at Doubleday, the last five as Executive Editor and Co-Editorial Director of the General Publishing Group.

Born in Evanston, Illinois, she grew up in Neenah, Wisconsin and received a B.A. from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. She has been an active member of the faculty at New York University's School of Continuing Education, the Editors Lunch Group, the Women's Media Group (of which she served as president and treasurer), the National Press Club, PEN International and Kappa Alpha Theta.

Ms. Drew joined the AAP International Freedom to Publish Committee in 1975. The 1989 mission with Dean Wedgeworth was her second trip to South Africa. Under the auspices of the International Freedom to Publish Committee she visited there in 1986, meeting with writers and publishers to discuss the banning of books and articles and the harassment of writers in that country. She became a member of AAP's Freedom to Read Committee in 1988.

ROBERT WEDGEWORTH

In 1985 Robert Wedgeworth was named Dean of the School of Library Service at Columbia University, assuming the leadership of a program to revitalize the nation's oldest graduate program in the field of library science.

From 1972 until he joined the Columbia faculty, Dean Wedgeworth was the Executive Director of the American Library Association, an organization with more than 40,000 members and an annual budget in excess of \$11 million.

He has been a teacher (at Rutgers—The State University of New Jersey) and a working librarian at several institutions of higher education, including Brown University and Park College in Parkville, Missouri.

Dean Wedgeworth holds a Master's degree in Library Science from the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science in Urbana, Illinois and has received numerous honorary degrees from institutions including the College of William and Mary, Western Illinois University, Atlanta University and Park College. Among his recent research activities, he chaired the Task Force on the Economics of Access to Library Materials sponsored by the ALCIS, a division of the American Library Association, and was Chairman of the Advisory Committee for the *New York State Systems Study 1989* carried out by King Research, Inc.



Robert Wedgeworth and Lisa Drew in front of the South African State Library, Cape Town—the oldest library in South Africa.



In Johannesburg Lisa Drew talked with Ennice Mopeli, Librarian of the South African Council for Higher Education Development (SACHED) which provides grants and other support for college students.

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1718 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20009

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485 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10017