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Synopsis

A magisterial history of South Africa, from the earliest known human inhabitation of the region to the present. Lynn Berat updates this classic text with a new chapter chronicling the first presidential term of Mbeki and ending with the celebrations of the centenary of South Africa's ruling African National Congress in January 2012. "A history that is both accurate and authentic, written in a delightful literary style." Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Lynn Berat's brilliant addition to Leonard Thompson's superlative history takes the reader on a riveting tour of twenty-first century South Africa in all its triumph and tragedy." Cindy Kaplan, *Committed Artists of South Africa*

Leonard Thompson was Charles J. Stillman Professor of History Emeritus at Yale University. Lynn Berat is an internationally renowned expert on southern African law and legal history who worked closely with Thompson on previous editions of *A History of South Africa*.

I think that Thompson does a good job in handling the scope of such a history. He strikes a nice balance of covering important events and interpretations without getting tedious in the details. Also, he is thoughtful and measured in his analysis. For my purposes - to refresh my memory and to update my knowledge of South Africa in preparation for an upcoming trip there - the book worked well.

Excellent, comprehensive review without being encyclopedic. Well written, easy to read. I couldn't put it down. Gave me a good understanding of the history of this fascinating part of the world and the human struggle for freedom

My recent visit to South Africa inspired my thirst for more knowledge about this nation and how it evolved from its historical beginning to current times. This book is very detailed in explaining the history of South Africa.

Good coverage. The text is very factual, as it should be, but it's hard to see the forest from the trees in this book. Hard to get an overview.

love this book

We used this and Nelson Mandela's Autobiography as our textbooks in my South African History class over at UCSD, and I say it's a great overview of the subject. I have to say the portrait Thompson paints of the area's conquest by Europeans, which took place over several centuries and involved a lot of population displacement and forcing the survivors into segregated reservations or impoverished industrialized servitude, reminded me more of my own USA than the typical late Victorian "Scramble for Africa" invasion. And even though I had originally pictured the British as the most troublesome imperialists in South Africa, the recurring theme in this history is they were commonly the LESSER evil compared to the earlier Dutch colonists (though mind you, this is more of an indictment against the Dutch's extremely vicious inhumanity towards the native Africans than praise for the British). Unfortunately the paucity of written records and recovered archaeological data for South Africa prior to the European invasions has restricted how much information Thompson can present in his opening chapter, but it was my favorite since I admired his objective and respectful presentation of the various African groups (San, Khoikhoi, and Bantu-speakers). It's a valuable corrective to many of the racist "ooga-booga" stereotypes affecting their image without being opaquely rose-tinted. For example, while Shaka of the Zulu does come across as a brutal conquering warlord, Thompson emphasizes that his extreme genocidal tactics were innovations of his imperialistic agenda rather than perfectly continuous and representative of southern Bantu military traditions. In this light Shaka wasn't so much a stereotypical "savage African despot" but more like an evil military genius in the vein of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, or Genghis Khan.

This is a first-rate survey of South African history. This is the latest edition of a very successful text written by the late Leonard Thompson which has been updated by his collaborator Lynn Berat. Thompson-Berat attempt a comprehensive survey by opening with the basic ecology and prehistory of what is now South Africa, followed by a nice narrative of the early European contacts & colonization. Excellent chapters on the period of Dutch domination, the major changes that occurred with British conquest and the emergence of more powerful native polities such as the Zulu state, the transforming impact of major involvement in the global economy that followed the discovery of diamond and gold deposits, and on through the development of the modern South African state, the apartheid era, and the subsequent transition to the contemporary South Africa dominated by the ANC. Recurrent themes are the aggressive and destructive nature of European colonialism, the major changes brought about by the penetration of the global economy, and the interesting responses of native African societies. Written well and documented very nicely. My only complaints are the relatively poor quality of the maps and while the bibliography is excellent, an annotated bibliography is always a nice feature in a survey.

Even in its earlier edition, this was the best history of South Africa. Integrates the history and perspective of non-Whites (Africans, Coloureds and Asians) more completely than any other work. Since Leonard Thomson's death, an update was sorely needed. The updated version, which brings it forward to recent years fills a real gap.

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