

“An authoritative text by a distinguished historian.”—**Beverley Naidoo**, *Times Educational Supplement*

“Highly readable.... For a neatly compressed, readable, authoritative account of South African history this book will take some surpassing.”—**Paul Maylam**, *Journal of African History*

“In *A History of South Africa* Leonard Thompson again proved his mettle as an historian by augmenting his own insights with the best of those of his erstwhile critics.... The greatest strength of this work is its presentation of such a sweeping and complex history in some of the most lucid prose to be found in such a text. It is an excellent choice for an introductory course, as well as one of the best windows for the general reader to gain perspective on contemporary South Africa.”—**Donald Will**, *Africa Today*

“This magisterial history throws a floodlight on South Africa’s current crisis by examining the past. The absurdity of the apartheid philosophy of racial separatism is underscored by the author’s argument (backed with convincing research material) that the genes of the nation’s first hunter-gatherers are inextricably mixed with those of modern blacks and whites.”—**Publishers Weekly**

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“This is a book that fills a great need. As an up-to-date and authoritative summary of South African history by one of the world’s leading experts on the subject, it will tell students, citizens, and policymakers what they need to know about the deep roots of the current South African imbroglio.”—**George M. Fredrickson**, Stanford University

“This is an outstanding book and in every sense of the word, ‘revisionist.’ It reflects sound scholarship and is highly readable as well.”—**John S. Galbraith**, University of California, San Diego



LEONARD THOMPSON

A History of South Africa

FOURTH EDITION

REVISED AND UPDATED BY
LYNN BERAT

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PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

South Africa is a place of stunning contrasts: extreme wealth and desperate poverty, heroic devotion to the greater good and klepto- and megalomaniacal self-interest, exceptional natural beauty and environmental desecration. It is, perhaps, not so much a “World in One Country” as the official tourism slogan once claimed, but a universe where worlds collide, always jarringly, sometimes violently. This, the fourth edition of *A History of South Africa*, includes a new chapter describing the major developments of the post-Mandela years, a time when the euphoria over the political redemption from apartheid ended and a new struggle for equality and democratic maturity began.

My thanks in this enterprise go to many friends and colleagues in South Africa, the United States and elsewhere. My deepest gratitude goes to Sarah Miller, my editor at Yale University Press, who endured my frequent delays with equanimity and patience.

This edition is dedicated to the memory of Leonard Thompson.

Lynn Ber

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

This edition contains two new chapters: a study of the complex political transition process in light of substantial new evidence and an original account of the new South Africa under President Nelson Mandela and his successor, Thabo Mbeki.

Once again I am deeply grateful to Lynn Berat for her knowledge and insights, her careful reading of drafts of the new chapters, and her skills in taming my extremely ill-behaved computer; also to Charles Grench, former editor in chief of Yale University Press, Laura Jones Dooley, associate managing editor, and Ali Peterson, reprints editor, for their friendship and professional skills.

PREFACE TO THE 1995 EDITION

Readers should be aware that, in South Africa as elsewhere, historians are shaped by the context in which they live and work, and that their publications in turn—especially their textbooks—influence the history of their times. During the British colonial regimes of the nineteenth century, many authors wrote in an imperialist mode. In reaction against that metropolitan bias, British colonists composed works that embodied their perspective as a dominant minority in an African milieu, often at odds with the British metropole; and by the end of the century, when British imperialism was reaching its apogee, Afrikaners were laying the foundations of an exclusive, nationalist historiography. In the segregation and apartheid years, the white regime authorized textbooks and favored other publications in the settler and Afrikaner nationalist traditions of the previous century. Today, those traditions are becoming obsolete. They have been overshadowed by counter-historiographies that, since World War II, have become increasingly rich, varied, and nuanced.

Historians writing from a critical liberal perspective began to expose the racial bias in the established historiography in the late 1920s. From the 1940s onward, their successors placed unprecedented emphasis on the historical experiences of Africans, Indians, and Coloured People. By the 1970s, some scholars were creating a “radical” historiography, which was influenced by Marxism and highlighted the role of capitalism and the growth of class divisions in South Africa. Initially, a rather clear line demarcated the “liberal” and the “radical” perspectives, though each group also contained great differences—there were variations within the liberal tradition, and radicals drew on rival schools of Marxism. Recently, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the collapse of the communist regimes in eastern Europe and elsewhere, and the global movement toward an open economy, the perspectives have converged considerably. With some exceptions, liberals have been radicalized, radicals have been liberalized. In this book, I have drawn on the rich achievements of both streams of contemporary South African historiography.

What of the future? Because historians now live in a post–Cold War and postapartheid context, we may expect new departures in South African historiography. Historians with strong commitments to the African nationalist movement may be expected to write from that perspective, which may lead to partisan works resembling a mirror-image of Afrikaner nationalist writings. Meanwhile, scholars and bureaucrats are working to create and authorize school textbooks that reflect the democratic ideology of the new government, in place of the old textbooks, which emphasized the achievements of Whites and denigrated Blacks.

As a result of the racial structure of South African society, almost none of the scholars who currently hold appointments in history departments in South African universities are Africans and nearly all the historiography of South Africa has been written by white people. In the future, Africans will bring new perspectives, new experiences, and new linguistic skills to the study of South African history. They may be expected to explore fresh topics and produce works with distinctive features. This process will be gradual. It will take time for Africans to acquire professional training and research experience and to receive appointments that provide opportunities for historical research.

We may also expect that historical themes that received scant attention in the past will now come to the fore. Ethnicity is a typical example. Ethnic divisions among Africans were so central to the apartheid ideology that they were taboo for most scholars not tainted by the apartheid regime. Now,

the history of the politicization of ethnicity in South Africa, among Blacks as well as Whites, has become highly relevant. ~~Women's history has already received considerable attention in South Africa~~ but deeper examination of the role of gender in South African history has become a high priority, owing to unresolved tensions between the ideal of gender equality and the patriarchal traditions and practices of African societies. Among many other themes that warrant closer examination in the new South Africa than previously are historical studies of African health, of African families, of African spirituality and ideology, of South African urbanization, and of the South African environment. We may look forward to works on such themes cast in long-term perspective—exploring the continuities and changes through the centuries before and since the conquest and the impact of industrial capitalism.

The scene of a variety of complex relations among diverse cultures, South Africa will always offer challenges to creative scholars. One hopes that South African historiography will remain a rich field of intellectual inquiry into the distant future. Meanwhile, this volume is a succinct survey of the present state of knowledge.

I am grateful to Lynn Berat, Leonard Doob, William Foltz, Christopher Saunders, Robert Shell, and Johann van der Vyver for valuable criticisms of a draft of [chapter 8](#); and to Leslie Bessant, Catherine Higgs, and Sean Redding for comments on the first edition, which they have been using in their university and college classes. This edition, like the first, has benefitted greatly from the professional skills of Charles Grench and Laura Dooley of Yale University Press.

CHRONOLOGY

Millennia B.C.	Hunter-gatherers, ancestors of the Khoisan (Khoikhoi and San: “Hottentots” and “Bushmen”), living in Southern Africa
By A.D. 300	Mixed farmers, ancestors of the Bantu-speaking majority of the modern population, begin to settle south of the Limpopo River
1487	Portuguese expedition led by Bartholomeu Dias reaches Mossel Bay
1652	The Dutch East India Company founds a refreshment station at the Cape of Good Hope
1652– 1795	Genesis and expansion of the Afrikaners (“Boers”); the Khoisan conquered; slaves imported from Indonesia, India, Ceylon, Madagascar (Malagasy), and Mozambique
1795	Britain takes the Cape Colony from the Dutch
1803	The Dutch (Batavian Republic) regain the Cape Colony by treaty
1806	Britain reconquers the Cape Colony
1811–12	British and colonial forces expel Africans from the territory west of the Fish River
1815	Rising of frontier Boers (later known as the Slagtersnek rebellion)
1816–28	Shaka creates the Zulu kingdom; warfare among Africans throughout much of southeastern Africa (the <i>Mfecane</i>)
1820	British settlers arrive in the Cape Colony
1828	The Cape colonial government repeals the pass laws
1834–38	Cape colonial slaves emancipated
1834–35	Xhosa defeated by British and colonial forces
1835–40	Five thousand Afrikaners (later known as voortrekkers) leave the Cape Colony with their “Coloured” clients; a movement later known as the Great Trek
1838	An Afrikaner commando defeats the Zulu army at the battle of Blood River
1843	Britain annexes Natal
1846–47	Xhosa defeated by British and colonial forces
1850–53	
1852,	Britain recognizes the Transvaal and Orange Free State as independent

1854	Afrikaner republics
1856–57	The Xhosa cattle-killing
1858	Lesotho wins war versus the Orange Free State
1865–67	The Orange Free State defeats Lesotho
1867	Diamond mining begins in Griqualand West
1868	Britain annexes Lesotho (“Basutoland”)
1877	Britain annexes the Transvaal
1879	British and colonial forces conquer the Zulu after losing a regiment at Isandhlwana
1880–81	Transvaal Afrikaners regain their independence
1886	Gold mining begins on the Witwatersrand
1895–96	Leander Starr Jameson leads an unsuccessful raid into the Transvaal
1897–98	Rinderpest destroys vast numbers of cattle
1898	Transvaal commandos conquer the Venda, completing the white conquest of the African population of Southern Africa
1899–1902	The War between the Whites: Britain conquers the Afrikaner republics
1904–7	Chamber of Mines imports 63,397 Chinese workers
1906–7	Britain gives parliamentary government to the former republics; only Whites enfranchised
1910	The Cape Colony, Natal, the Transvaal, and the Orange Free State join to form the Union of South Africa
1912	South African Native National Congress (NNC) founded; later becomes the African National Congress (ANC)
1913	Natives Land Act limits African landownership to the reserves; the beginning of a series of segregation laws
1914–19	As a member of the British Empire, South Africa participates in World War I
1917	Anglo American Corporation of South Africa founded
1921	Communist party of South Africa founded
1922	White strikers seize control of Johannesburg but are crushed by government troops
1936	African parliamentary voters placed on a separate roll
1939–45	South Africa participates in World War II on the Allied side
	70,000 to 100,000 African gold-mine workers strike for higher wages; troops

1946	drive them back to the mines
1948	The Afrikaner National party wins a general election and begins to apply its policy of apartheid
1950	The Population Registration Act classifies people by race; the Group Areas Act makes people reside in racially zoned areas
1950 ff.	Security legislation gives the government vast powers over people and organizations
1952	The ANC and its allies launch a passive resistance campaign
1953	The government assumes control of African education
1955	The Congress of the People adopts a Freedom Charter
1956	156 members of Congress Alliance charged with high treason Coloured parliamentary voters placed on a separate roll
1958–66	Verwoerd is prime minister
1959	Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) founded
1960	African and Coloured representation in Parliament (by Whites) terminated Police kill 67 African anti-pass-law demonstrators at Sharpeville; the government bans African political organizations
1961	South Africa becomes a republic and leaves the British Commonwealth
1964	Nelson Mandela and other ANC and PAC leaders sentenced to life imprisonment
1966–68	Lesotho, Botswana, and Swaziland become independent states
1975–76	Mozambique and Angola become independent states
1976–77	At least 575 people die in confrontations between Africans and police in Soweto and other African townships
1976–81	South Africa grants “independence” to the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, and the Ciskei Homelands, but they are not recognized abroad
1977	The U.N. Security Council imposes a mandatory embargo on the supply of arms to South Africa
1978–84	Botha is prime minister
1979	African trade unions can register and gain access to the industrial court and the right to strike
1980	Zimbabwe (previously Rhodesia) becomes independent
1981–88	South African forces invade Angola and make hit-and-run raids into Lesotho, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Zambia; anc guerrillas sabotage South African

- 1983 United Democratic Front (UDF) formed
- 1984 A new constitution gives Asians and Coloureds but not Africans limited participation in the central government; Botha becomes state president
- 1984–86 Prolonged and widespread resistance to the regime in black South African townships; violent government reactions
- 1985 First contacts between the government and imprisoned and exiled ANC leaders
- 1986 Pass laws repealed
- The government proclaims a nationwide state of emergency, detains thousands of people, and prohibits the press, radio, and television from reporting unrest
- The U.S. Congress passes the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act over President Reagan's veto
- 1986–95 Violent conflict between Zulu supporters of Inkatha and the ANC in KwaZulu and on the Witwatersrand
- 1987 Three-week strike by 250,000 African mine-workers
- 1988 South Africa undertakes to withdraw from Angola and cooperate in U.N.-monitored independence process in Namibia
- 1989 De Klerk succeeds Botha, first as leader of the National party, then as president
- 1990 De Klerk unbans the ANC, PAC, and SACP; releases Mandela and other political prisoners; Namibia gains independence
- 1990–91 1913 and 1936 Land Acts, Group Areas Act, Population Registration Act, and Separate Amenities Act repealed; political organizations unbanned; state of emergency revoked; amid widespread violence, delegates from 18 parties start formal negotiations
- 1992 White voters support the negotiation process in a referendum
- The ANC breaks off negotiations with the government after an Inkatha mob massacres 46
- 1993 Negotiations resume; de Klerk, Mandela, and leaders of 18 other parties endorse an interim constitution
- 1994 Governments of the Bophuthatswana and Ciskei "Homelands" collapse
- The ANC wins first nonracial election (April 27–30)
- Nelson Mandela is sworn in as president (May 10) and forms Government of National Unity

Crime escalates

1995

Racial conflict in the police force (January)

Inauguration of the Constitutional Court (February); it abolishes the death penalty (May)

Disturbances in universities (March)

Inkatha withdraws from the Constituent Assembly (April)

Inauguration of the Commission for the Restitution of Land Rights (May)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission starts work

1996

The Constituent Assembly enacts a permanent constitution

The National party withdraws from the Government, leaving the Inkatha Freedom party as well as the ANC

1998

Publication of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report

1999

General election: the ANC wins 66 percent of the vote

The Democratic party replaces the National party as the official opposition

Mandela retires, succeeded by Thabo Mbeki

Strikes by government employees, including teachers

2000

Large-scale industrial strike

Crisis in Zimbabwe has repercussions in South Africa

The National party merges with the Democratic party

13th international conference on AIDS meets in Durban

2001

Promotion of Access to Information Act takes effect

Grootboom right to housing case decided by Constitutional Court

2002

Treatment Action Campaign case on access to anti-retroviral drugs decided by Constitutional Court

Formation of Democratic Alliance

African Union launched in Durban

New Partnership for African Development created

2003

Patricia de Lille forms Independent Democrats

Cabinet overrides Mbeki and announces antiretroviral drug rollout plan

Enactment of Broad-Based Black Empowerment Act

2004	Mbeki elected for second term
	Law on Anti-Terrorism adopted <i>Jaftha v. Schoeman</i> right to housing case decided by Constitutional Court
2005	New National party disbands Mbeki removes Jacob Zuma as deputy president Zimbabwean parliamentary elections
2006	Zuma acquitted of rape charges Judicial Service Commission rejects public inquiry into activities of Cape judge John Hlophe U.N. Special Envoy for AIDS in Africa says South Africa promotes “lunatic fringe” attitude toward AIDS
2007	Scorpions indict Zuma on corruption charges Constitutional Court judges file charges against Judge Hlophe Zuma defeats Mbeki for ANC presidency at ANC conference in Polokwane
2008	Power-sharing agreement in Zimbabwe Corruption charges against Zuma dropped Mbeki resigns Kgalema Motlanthe inaugurated Barbara Hogan becomes minister of health Congress of the People (COPE) founded
2009	Zuma elected president Zuma appoints Sandile Ngcobo as chief justice Zuma gives World AIDS Day speech announcing policy to distribute antiretroviral drugs widely
2010	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development report labels South Africa one of the world’s most unequal societies Government acknowledges that Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Program has been largely a failure South Africa does not issue visa to Dalai Lama to attend Desmond Tutu’s eightieth birthday party
2011	Activist Andries Tatane killed by police during service delivery protest South African Human Rights Commission investigates complaints about water quality and supply
2012	ANC centenary celebrations

Moody's downgrades South Africa

ANC conference at Mangaung, Zuma reelected ANC president

2013

Mamphela Ramphele forms Agang SA

South African troops killed in Central African Republic Passage of Secrecy Bill

Julius Malema forms Economic Freedom Fighters

2014

Twentieth anniversary of end of white rule

CHAPTER 1

The Africans

The Significance and Problems of Precolonial History

Modern Western culture is inordinately present-minded. Politicians are ignorant of the past. School curricula foreshorten the historical record by focusing on recent events. People lack a sense of their location in time and fail to perceive that contemporary society is constrained by its cultural as well as its biological inheritance.

Many historians of the white South African establishment start their history books with a brief reference to the voyage of Vasco da Gama round the Cape of Good Hope in 1497-98 and then rush on to the arrival of the first white settlers in 1652.. Other historians are so committed to emphasizing the role of capitalism as the molder of modern Southern Africa that they ignore the processes that shaped society before Europeans began to intrude in the region.

The precolonial history of Southern Africa is significant in its own right, providing examples of the constraints and possibilities, achievements and setbacks of preindustrial and preliterate communities as they established their niches in a variety of environments. It is also significant as providing essential links in explaining what has followed. Indigenous Southern Africans were not a tabula rasa for white invaders or capitalists to civilize or to victimize. Over many centuries, they had been developing social forms and cultural traditions that colonialism, capitalism, and apartheid have assaulted, abused, and modified but never eradicated. One cannot understand how Africans have endured the fragmentation of their family life by migrant labor unless one has knowledge of their customary social values and networks. Nor can one fathom the vigor of black resistance to the apartheid state without knowledge of precolonial African ideas about the social and economic obligations of rulers and rights of subjects, and the basis of political legitimacy.

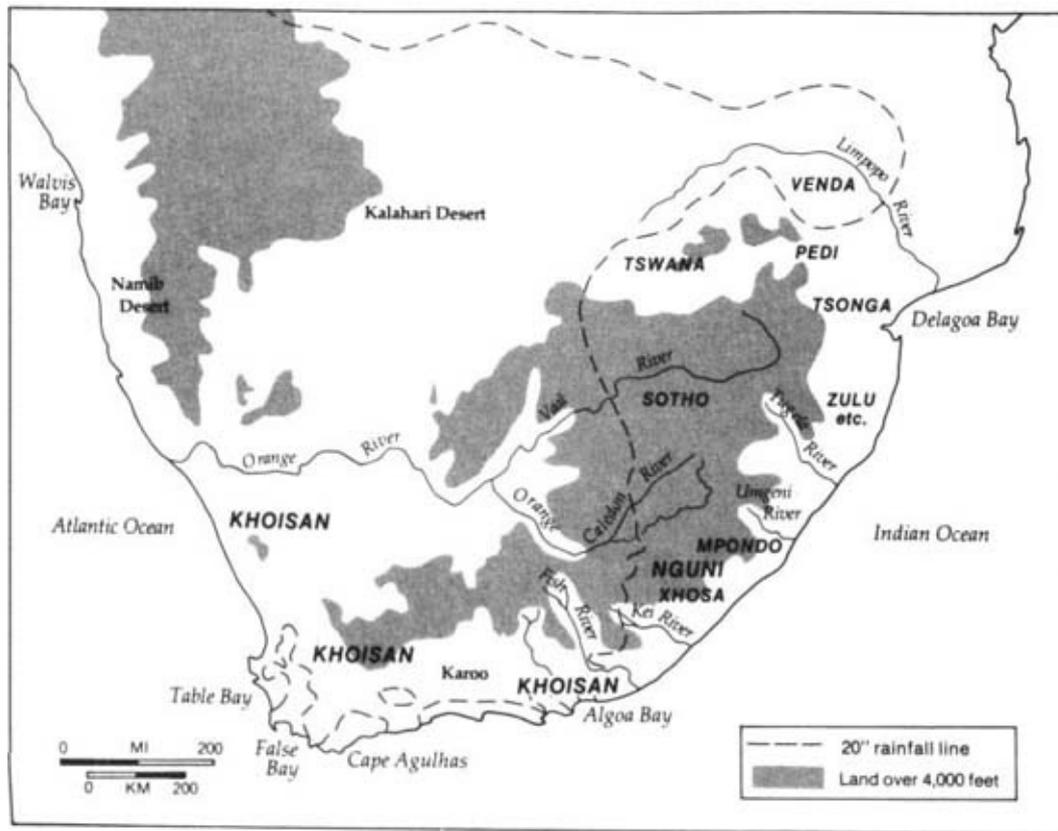
The precolonial inhabitants of Southern Africa, however, were not literate, and there are peculiar difficulties in reconstructing the history of preliterate societies. Archaeologists, physical anthropologists, and linguists provide us with information. So do social anthropologists who study the societies in their present condition and authors who record the traditions that have been handed down within those societies. But even when we have a rich collection of such sources, our knowledge of the history of societies in the period when they were neither literate nor in contact with literate people is patchy. The archaeological record includes only a fraction of human remains and human products. We are on shaky ground when, as we must do, we draw historical inferences from comparative linguistics and from social anthropology. We know, moreover, that people manipulate and modify traditions to suit their interests.

In unraveling the prehistory of Southern Africa, the best we can do on many crucial topics is to express approximations, probabilities, and informed conjectures derived from the available evidence. The situation improves when we reach the time when literate eyewitnesses began to produce written descriptions; but not until the nineteenth century do we have the first substantial descriptions of societies in the interior of South Africa. Those accounts, moreover, have their limitations. Alien observers are imperfect recorders and interpreters, and we cannot be sure how ancient or how recent were the things that they described. Finally, it was not until the twentieth century that many Africans themselves began to write about their past. The reader should bear these problems in mind throughout this chapter.

The Southern African Environment

Although Southern Africa is at the southern end of the Eurasian-African landmass, it was an isolated region before humanity's technological advances of the past few centuries (map 1). Ocean currents impeded regular access by sea. In the South Atlantic, the Benguela current sets in a northerly direction and retards the approach. In the southern Indian Ocean, the Mozambique current sets strongly in a southerly direction, making it difficult for sailing craft to leave the region, so that the ancient Indian Ocean trade system did not penetrate Africa south of Sofala (modern Beira).

The Southern African coastline, moreover, is punctured by few natural harbors. The best are those in the Cape peninsula and Durban. But in the Cape peninsula, Table Bay is exposed to winter gales from the northwest and False Bay to summer gales from the southeast; and a shallow bar impeded the entrance to Durban harbor until it was dredged using modern equipment. Before the sixteenth century A.D. Southern Africa was a region where human activity was an indigenous process, except as the arrival of people by land from further north modified it.



1. Southern Africa in the sixteenth century

“Pula!” (May it rain!) is a popular greeting in Lesotho, and it is the name of the currency in Botswana. Rainfall has had a profound influence on the history of the region. In the west, the average annual rainfall is fewer than five inches, resulting in desert conditions along the coastline of Namibia and the northern Cape Province. In the east, the average rainfall reaches forty inches a year, producing subtropical vegetation along the Transkei and Natal coastlines. In between, a transitional zone receives about twenty inches of rain a year. To the east of that zone, the rainfall is sufficient for arable agriculture; to the west, it is not. One exception to this division is the Cape peninsula and its vicinity where heavy winter rains are sufficient for intensive agriculture.

These rainfall figures are annual averages. In fact, rain varies greatly from season to season. Throughout most of the region, droughts are frequent. They vary in range and intensity. A drought

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