

Our march to freedom is irreversible. We must not allow fear to stand in our way. Universal suffrage on a common voters' roll in a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa is the only way to peace and racial harmony.

1 OUR FATHERS DWELT TOGETHER IN PEACE

The resilience of our people and their determination to be free defies all odds: it is an unshakeable belief in democracy and non-racialism which motivates them to forge ahead.

'MESSAGE FROM THE YOUTH LEADERSHIP', issued from underground by the South African Youth Congress, 1989

What is the unifying perspective of the Mass Democratic Movement? It is, simply, to turn our country into a non-racial, democratic and united South Africa.

TITUS MAFOLO, a spokesperson for the Mass Democratic Movement, 1989

The '70s saw the collapse of the partition state, the '80s saw the shift to the integrated state — the '90s will see the battle for the non-racial democratic state.

FREDERIK VAN ZYL SLABBERT, director of policy and planning for the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa, 1989

In the face of the severest persecution and repression imaginable — banning, torture, imprisonment, maiming, killing — the ANC has a proud and incomparable record of consistently maintaining its policy of non-racialism.

AHMED KATHRADA, member of the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party and the High Command of the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, 1989

We call upon our white compatriots to join us in the shaping of a new South Africa — the freedom movement is a political home for you, too. Universal suffrage on a common voters' roll in a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa is the only way to peace and racial harmony.

NELSON MANDELA, in his first public address upon his release from prison, 1989

When the people of South Africa make their demands for justice, there is one word they use again and again: 'non-racialism'. In an era of pat slogans, sung and shouted at mass meetings and headlined in leaflets and banners, this word stands out precisely because it is not glib. The demand for a non-racial South Africa is the common ground that unites a wide range of forces for change. The primary goal is a completely restructured society, a democracy in which people are not differentiated according to racial criteria, but enjoy rights as equal citizens in one united country. To be democratic, the future South Africa must be non-racial: that premise is fundamental.

This book traces the development of the theory and practice of nonracialism in South Africa through the words and writings of its people. The focus is on their lived experience in a struggle for change that defines the enemy as a system — not as members of particular racial or cultural groups.

To understand non-racialism, one must first understand the racialism it seeks to displace. From the first settlement at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652 and for the next two centuries, an ideology based on racial prejudice came to sustain the trading interests of Dutch, and later British, merchants. Inequality between blacks and whites stemmed from the pressing need of European settlers producing agricultural products for the world market to exploit the labour of the indigenous population.

At first the settlers imported labour from the slave markets of Asia and West Africa, for the indigenous people saw no need to leave their viable and independent societies to work for others. But as soon as the settlers were powerful enough, they began attacking these hunter-gatherer and herder communities with their horses and guns, taking land and livestock by force. Those unable to escape beyond the frontier became the settlers' slaves.

The Xhosa were not completely conquered, and there were many wars after this one of 1818. ~~Even~~ Even in the land that was ~~settled~~ colonised, many Xhosa households continued to live *and farm* on their own land. But the British encouraged more and more English settlers to settle in the frontier region. Life would never be the same again. ~~Britain needed more and more raw materials for her growing industry. The white settlers could not satisfy~~ *the demand.* In 1823 the famous British missionary, Dr John Philip, wrote 'While our missionaries beyond the borders of the colony of the Cape of Good Hope are everywhere scattering the seeds of civilisation, social order and happiness, they are ...extending British influence and the British Empire. Wherever the missionary places his standard among a savage tribe, their prejudices against colonial government give way; their dependence upon the

In the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Boers (descendants of the Dutch settlers who spoke a dialect that came to be called Afrikaans) swallowed up more and more land. Only the larger and more powerful Bantu-speaking societies later encountered by Boer and British settlers were able to mount effective resistance. Xhosa society, relentlessly driven eastwards in a series of frontier wars, nonetheless retained its political independence well into the nineteenth century, by which time many other African societies were beginning to assert control over traditional domains now penetrated by Voortrekkers' and other settlers. This led to increasing interdependence between black and white: settler farmers often paid tribute to chiefs, and cohabitation was not uncommon.

There was no inherent racism in traditional African society. In early contacts, shipwrecked Portuguese sailors were integrated into Xhosa communities and English traders became Zulu chiefs. Without the means to exploit, whites embraced blacks as equals; when not threatened with dispossession, blacks welcomed whites.

It took the large-scale investment of international capital in the late nineteenth century, and the destruction of independent African societies in order to provide a workforce for the mines, to create a single racially-stratified society in South Africa. Such accommodation as had existed on the frontier was shattered by rapid industrialization. Whites, who mainly owned the means to produce wealth, needed blacks to work for them at wage levels well below the rate required to support workers and their families. Whites needed an ideology to defend this exploitative labour form. A philosophy of racial superiority justified the system and a battery of racial laws enforced it.



LIFE ON THE FRONTIER WAS NOT SO RIGIDLY SEGREGATED: MUTUAL DEPENDENCE AND RESPECT CUT ACROSS RACIAL AND SOCIAL DISTINCTIONS, AS SHOWN BY THIS MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY PAINTING OF BOERS WITH THEIR KHOI SERVANTS. THE RACIAL DIVISION BETWEEN MASTER AND SERVANT WAS INSTITUTIONALISED IN THE MORE ADVANCED ECONOMY OF SETTLER SOCIETY.

(SOURCE: JOHANNESBURG PUBLIC LIBRARY AFRICANA COLLECTION)

The war, British chiefs, is an unjust one. When our fathers and the fathers of the Boers first settled here they lived together in peace. Their flocks grazed on the same hills; their herdsmen smoked out of the same pipes; they were brothers. Then the Boers made commandos on our fathers. What they could not get from our fathers for old buttons, they took by force. The white men hated us but could not drive us away. When there was war we plundered you. When there was peace some of our bad people stole, but our chiefs forbade it. You came at last like locusts. We stood, we

Independent African societies resisted conquest and colonization in the only way they could, by force of arms. Still, the desire for cooperation and the preference for peaceful coexistence were continually expressed.

The war, British chiefs, is an unjust one. When our fathers and the fathers of the Boers first settled in the Zuurveld [far eastern Cape Colony] they dwelt together in peace. Their flocks grazed on the same hills, their herdsmen smoked together out of the same pipes — they were brothers.

Then the Boers made commando [raids] on our fathers. What those covetous men could not get from our fathers for old buttons they took by force.

Our fathers began to hate the colonists, and aimed at their destruction. The white men hated us, but could not drive us away. When there was war we plundered you. When there was peace some of our bad people stole, but our chiefs forbade it. You came at last like locusts. We stood — we could do no more.

You sent a commando, you took our last cow. Without milk, our corn destroyed, we saw our wives and children perish. We saw that we must ourselves perish. We followed, therefore, the tracks of our cattle into the Colony. We plundered and we fought for our lives. We found you weak — we destroyed your soldiers. We saw that we were strong and we attacked your headquarters. And if we had succeeded, our right was good, for you began the war. We failed, and you are here.

We wish for peace. We wish to rest in our huts, we wish to get milk for our children, our wives wish to till the land. But your troops cover the plains and swarm in the thickets, where they cannot distinguish the man from the woman and shoot all.

XHOSA CHIEFS to the British forces which invaded their land, 1818²

Faced with aggressive armies fuelled by the industrial power of Britain, Africans lost their freedom but not their spirit of resistance. A tradition of defiance existed from the earliest slave revolts and continued into the industrial age. Agricultural communities resisted relocation, preferring even sharecropping to wage labour. Squatting, illicit liquor brewing, industrial sabotage, desertion, strikes: defiance had many faces.

New conditions gave rise to new forms of resistance, and new generations no longer yearned for a return to a traditional autonomy. The consciousness that developed in the early twentieth century aspired towards equality in the modern industrial society and inspired new forms of organization to achieve this goal. This evolving resistance to racial oppression never took the form of a single homogeneous ideology, but has always been as varied and complex as the society that engendered it. A key distinction to emerge was that between the liberal tradition, rooted in nineteenth-century British missionary culture, and a popular democratic tradition that emerged with black working-class organizations.

The main concern of the liberal tradition was to draw a small minority of the oppressed into an alliance with the elites, with change to come from the top down. Characterized by reformism and paternalism, liberalism never challenged the basic features of exploitation, seeking merely to make the unjust system more humane. As will be shown, the liberal tradition has proved to be a minority trend.

The popular democratic tradition is rooted in an alliance of all the oppressed. As workers began to organize against the racial system that took from them the means of controlling their lives and the wealth they produced, they joined forces with others of all races and social backgrounds committed to change 'from below'. This popular democratic — and non-racial — tradition gave rise to a mass movement that has dominated South African resistance politics. Non-racialism runs like an unbreakable thread throughout the movement's history.

NOTES:

¹The Afrikaans word for pioneers is commonly applied to burghers who joined the 'Great Trek' of the 1830s. Mythologized by twentieth-century nationalists as a single event — a rite of passage giving birth to the Afrikaner nation — this migration was made up of several different (sometimes feuding) parties of burghers who trekked north to escape British rule at the Cape, and later founded the republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.

²Quote adapted from Pringle, Thomas, and Josiah Conder. "Narrative of a residence in South Africa." Edward Moxon, 1840.