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BLACK PERCEPTIONS OF SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY

By

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FOREWORD

South African historiography is a subject surrounded by controversy, but it is also a topic that has enjoyed considerable attention in recent years. However all the historiographical works consulted had limitations with regard to how Blacks expressed their vision of South African history. The concept of a unique Black perception was rejected for a variety of reasons. Either on the grounds that no substantial body of work existed that could be called a "Black school", or on the basis that the recognition of such a school would imply the acceptance of race as a distinguishing feature in society. Consequently Black interpretations were neglected.

To overcome this shortcoming "documents" that generally do not concern the historian are utilized. The primary area of interest is to establish how Blacks understand the contribution of the past to the present. Frequently the expression of this perception is not to be found in primary sources. A rich mine of insight is to be found in literary works, and the critiques of Black literary critics. The former works include the historical dramas of HIE Dhlomo that have been so comprehensively collated in H.I.E Dhlomo. Collected Works, edited by T Couzens and N Visser. The latter critiques are significant because they argue that Black literature is formed by the experience of being-Black. Here the works of NC Manganyi, Looking Through the Keyhole and Being-Black- in- the World; of L Nkosi, Home and Exile; of S Biko, I Write What I Like; and of E Mphahlele, The African Image are of particular significance.

Where possible extensive use was made of published histories such as the works of the early writers like SM Molema's, The Bantu Past and Present, ST Plaatje's, Native Life in South Africa. One work that proved impossible to locate, either locally or overseas, was that of WB Rubusana, "History of South Africa from the Native standpoint", allegedly published early in the twentieth century. Although the existence of this work is in doubt its title indicates that by the beginning of



this century there was already a feeling that there was more than one perspective of South African history.

For the modern generation of writers WM Tsotsi's, From Chattel to Wage Slavery; BM Magubane's, The Political Economy of Race and Class, amongst others, were analysed. In addition works that addressed specific issues such as the collection by DDT Jabavu of papers and addresses on The Black Problem and The Segregation Fallacy were also included.

Autobiographies such as Freedom For My People, Let My People Go and The Autobiography of an Unknown South African by ZK Matthews, A Luthuli and N Mokgatle respectively were included in this dissertation because the authors showed a great concern with the past through which they had lived, and the past that contributed to the situation into which they were born.

The scope of the sources is deliberately eclectic in order to establish whether the themes that come to fore are peculiar to a specific era, generation of writers or genre of writing. The broad spectrum of sources indicates that there is a consistency in the themes that are to be found irrespective of when they came under discussion. Nevertheless there are shifts in emphasis depending on the era from which the source emanated.

Nevertheless some reliance is placed on published documents because they frequently contain an implied or explicit interpretation of the past to justify the statements being made or action being taken. Therefore the latter documents are approached from a different angle than that which is usually adopted by the historian.

In conclusion I would like to express my thanks to a number of people. Firstly to my promoter Dr JEH Grobler for being a patient, tolerant and unobtrusive guide during the course of this study. His extensive library and document collection was most useful. And to his predecessor as promoter, Prof FA van Jaarsveld, whose thoughts and library were readily available.



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On a more personal note sincere thanks and appreciation to my wife Pam, who had to cope with physical and emotional crises while work was in progress yet never intruded in the completion of this dissertation. Thank you for your proofreading and suggestions on style. To my son Otto I would like to say that I hope that we can get on with the business of being father and son.

Lastly I dedicate this dissertation to my late father, and to my mother who in her own way has been supportive of my endeavours.