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History

A Rainbow in the Night: The Tumultuous Birth of South Africa
Dominique Lapierre
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The history of South Africa is largely the story of apartheid-the political subjugation and persecution of the non-white population-which became national policy in 1948, but which had its roots in Holland's colonial presence. The Dutch settlers, who arrived in 1651, soon cut their ties to Holland and took the name "Afrikaners." They believed they were biblically ordained to rule the indigenous population: in 1658 they slaughtered the Khoi nomads and soon after the Xhosa tribe. Thus began more than three centuries of brutality that did not end until 1994 when Nelson Mandela was elected the first president of a united South Africa.

Lapierre, the distinguished author and co-author of eleven previous books, including Is Paris Burning?: How Paris Miraculously Escaped Adolph Hitler's Sentence of Death in August 1944 and City of Joy, acknowledges that he has not written a comprehensive account of South Africa. What he offers is a short, very readable, and sometimes moving narrative of the events and people who have brought disgrace and fame to the country.

The first half of the book describes the Afrikaner rise, culminating in the bloody Boer War (1899-1902), in which 33,000 Afrikaners were killed by the British and the Afrikaner states were absorbed into the Commonwealth. Four years later, Great Britain's Liberal party swept into power and recognized the Afrikaner Transvaal Republic and the Orange Free State. The author also shows the chilling connection between Nazism and apartheid when in 1938 leaders of the Broederbond, South Africa's racist movement, were enthusiastically indoctrinated at Hitler's German universities.

The book's second half includes mostly personal stories and draws heavily on Nelson Mandela's A Long Walk to Freedom. Stirring accounts of anti-apartheid leaders, including Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu, are complemented by the tales of lesser known heroes. Notable among them are Helen Lieberman, a white woman revered as "Mama Helen" by the blacks for whom she risked her life, and the renowned cardiologist, Christiaan Barnard, an

outspoken opponent of apartheid, who performed the first heart transplant.

Readers in search of an academic appraisal of South African history will have to look elsewhere. Those interested in a brief, revealing work that accentuates the human drama of this nation's contentious history will find this book enlightening. Sixteen pages of photographs complement the book's approach. It is a worthy choice for high school and public libraries. (November) Karl Helicher