

Conrad Stein. *Cape Town*. New York: Children's Press, 1999. 64 pp. \$26.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-516-20781-0.



Reviewed by Mark P. Snyders

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At first glance *Cape Town* is a wonderfully illustrated book with many strikingly positive features. The photographs of the city and its people are crisp, clear, colourful and hide nothing of the city's character. The chronology of events, excellent glossary, index, street maps and the list of on-line electronic resources add much to the quality of the book. *Cape Town* also contains a number of facts about the city's diverse population, local and national history, wildlife, and places of interest.

A more detailed inspection reveals that the book, like the city itself, has some shortcomings. Stein errs when he states that the early Dutch settlers attempted to "live in peace with the local people (p.23)." In fact, war quickly erupted when the Dutch began settling on the land of the local Khoikhoi people. Many would also question the following statement: "The British fought the Dutch. The Whites fought the Blacks. A sense of order prevailed in the early 1900s when the Union of South Africa was formed." The British did fight the Dutch and both groups did fight the indigenous Blacks. However, although the wars ceased, order did not prevail after the British and

the Boers formed the Union government. The Land Act of 1913, an early piece of Union legislation, stripped Black South Africans of most of their land and created havoc in millions of lives. There are other instances where Stein's choice of words could have been better. Rebellious would have been a better way to describe "disobedient" slaves. Also, describing Cecil Rhodes as an "amazing Englishman" (p. 49) and focusing exclusively on his accomplishments ignores the many ruthless, racist acts perpetrated by him. One also wonders how education in Cape Town can be a "success story" when "the high school drop-out rate is high" (p.35).

Stein's view of the Cape Town is mainly that of a tourist and he has highlighted what tourists would like to see. Having lived in Cape Town myself, the book helped me relive many pleasant memories. This book will be useful if combined with other works, ones that help students explore various perspectives of South African history and study the complex issues people are facing today in a society shaped apartheid.

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