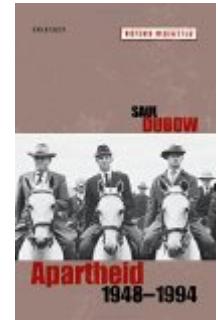


**Saul Dubow.** *Apartheid: 1948–1994*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 384 S.  
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**Reviewed by** Melanie Boehi

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Saul Dubow wrote the preface of ‘Apartheid, 1948–1994’ in July 2013, at a moment when the prospect of the passing of former South African president Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela weighed heavily on the country. Mandela, Dubow assumed, would certainly be remembered as the major figure of the post-apartheid transition, but “[w]hat of the system he dedicated his life to overthrowing and which in his own person he so magnificently transcended?” (p. v) Whites, Dubow surmised, would prefer to forget apartheid, while politicised young blacks would keep its memory alive and “born-frees” would likely be “disinclined to dwell too deeply on the pain and indignities suffered by their elders.” (p. vi) Two years later, born-free students started the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall movements at South African universities and demonstrated that they were not at all disinclined to address apartheid and its legacies. While Dubow’s expectation of the born-free generation turned out wrong (and he was by far not alone in this), his book turned out very timely. Apartheid and its histories are back on the table of the students and those who want to keep up with them. ‘Apartheid, 1948–1994’ is a

stimulating reading for everybody interested in studying, reconsidering and expanding the understanding of apartheid in South Africa.

Saul Dubow has in the past widely published on the ideological, intellectual and institutional histories of scientific racism, racial segregation and apartheid in 19th- and 20th-century South Africa. Following the objective of the “Oxford Histories” series “to reappraise ‘turning points’ which, for this or that circumstance, might so easily have turned other ways” (p. vii), Dubow argues that South Africa’s historiography is too often premised on teleological trajectories, ranging from racial segregation to apartheid, resistance and redemption. Instead, Dubow proposes to “neither assume that racial segregation was bound to transmute into the yet harsher version of apartheid, nor take for granted that the African National Congress, led by Nelson Mandela, would eventually overthrow white supremacy.” (p. viii) Dubow’s book thus distinguishes itself from many existing monographs on South African history through its alertness to paths not taken. Moreover, Dubow argues in favour of paying greater

attention to the histories of state power, political economy and ideology, which recently have been neglected in studies that prioritised social history and the history of the liberation movements. Dubow thus attempts to bring these histories together and “to interweave accounts of state power, ideology, resistance, religion, international politics, and transnational solidarity, within a common frame of analysis.” (p. 301)

The book’s chapters are ordered chronologically and apply the integrated approach described above. Dubow thereby provides an impressively broad analysis of the existing academic literature and various genres of historical records, including biographies and autobiographies, fictional literature, music and photography. He shows that such an approach is suitable for opening up ways to study state ideology together with everyday life experiences, and analyse how they reinforced each other. Instead of asking how apartheid was defeated, Dubow suggests examining how it survived so long. Apartheid, he argues throughout the book, worked in complex ways, constituted both an idea and an ideology, and had a surprising capacity for adaptation and reinvention. Integral to apartheid’s survival were “[s]trategies to ensure compliance and invite effective complicity”. (p. x)

The first chapter analyses the National Party’s campaign and victory in the 1948 election. Dubow argues that apartheid was not “the natural fulfilment of Afrikaner nationalism” but rather “the means to a more immediate end: political power.” (p. 29) While the concept of apartheid had been discussed among Dutch Reformed Church missionaries and Afrikaner intellectuals since the 1930s, the National Party, in its well-organised election campaign, did not prioritise race and apartheid but address a variety of issues relevant to Afrikaner voters. Apartheid in 1948 was thus not a radical innovation but an intensification and confirmation of the already existing order of racial segregation. The second chapter discusses

the years following the 1948 election, during which apartheid served as a political programme to achieve *baaskap* (bossship) and white supremacy. The election was followed by the Afrikanerisation of the public service and the introduction of discriminatory laws against black citizens. These were met with protests, in particular the African National Congress’ (ANC) Defiance Campaign, as well as criticism from the newly established United Nations. However, the apartheid state cracked down heavily on opponents and arrested many leaders. The third chapter focuses on the shooting of protesters in Sharpeville on 21 January 1960 and subsequent developments. Sharpeville became, and continues to be, an iconic symbol of the evil of apartheid and the popular resistance against it. Dubow reminds readers that greater attention needs to be paid to the role of black policemen, as their presence in Sharpeville and beyond (black police constituted about half of the national force by 1955) reflects how the apartheid state sought to divide communities and always depended on collaborators. The fourth chapter is concerned with the era of high apartheid in the 1960s, when South Africa experienced rapid economic growth and apartheid ideology evolved from white domination to “an elaborate and obfuscatory ideology of multi-national development.” (p. 105) Space became increasingly racialised in the cities as well as the rural areas; between 1960 and 1982 over ten per cent of the South African population was forcibly removed. While the most prominent critics of apartheid at the time were white liberals, black authors like Bessie Head or Es’kia Mphahlele also published their critical work during the 1960s. The silencing of the opposition was thus never total.

The fifth chapter examines the oppression of the liberation movements in the second half of the 1960s. With many activists of the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) banned, imprisoned or forced into exile, organisational work within South Africa became extremely difficult. The sixth chapter analyses the 1970s when de-

spite international isolation white supremacy seemed to be secure, with the economy booming and the liberation movement scattered. However, the Black Consciousness Movement emerged as a challenge to white supremacy in a way unexpected by both the government and the liberation movements. The seventh chapter shows how in the era of the late 1970s and early 1980s the apartheid government embarked on a programme of reforms and counter-revolutionary measures. The eighth chapter is concerned with the 1980s. While increasing international sanctions and pressure were key factors, the most important dynamics of change were internally generated, weakening the government, strengthening the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, and helping the ANC to position itself as government in waiting.

‘Apartheid, 1948–1994’ is relevant for a broad audience. For students and a general public, it provides an accessible and coherent general overview of relevant events, developments, literature and historical records, and serves thus as a suitable entry point for studying the history of apartheid in South Africa. The book also includes a useful guide to further reading. For readers already familiar with the literature and records on which Dubow’s account is based, it is interesting because it provides fresh and challenging perspectives, both of Dubow himself and younger South African historians. The vast scope of the subjects covered, and the multiple angles taken into consideration make the narrative at times very dense and somewhat kaleidoscopic. However, this serves the purpose of the book which probably less than providing a definite interpretation of apartheid wants to animate readers to think anew about knowledge that has been taken for granted, and to serve as a starting point for studies going out in various directions, however paying attention to the connection and integration of multiple stories and histories.

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