



A History of South Africa

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

In *A HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA*, Yale historian Leonard Thompson draws on nearly a century of scholarship, enabling the general public to understand why South Africa's problems have grown to their current magnitude.

Starting with an examination of the earliest oral records of the indigenous peoples of the region—particularly their social patterns, forms of governance and means of survival—Thompson surveys the successive waves of European migration.

Thompson's account of the Imperial Dutch and their use of the Cape of Good Hope as a way station, the English and their clients, the gold and diamond miners, is balanced by an examination of the African response. The ways in which Afrikaaner society gradually became a virtual mimicry of the indigenous social patterns are handled meticulously. Particularly well covered, and possibly surprising to the nonexpert, is Thompson's account of the wars fought by the indigenous Africans throughout the nineteenth century, and their sophisticated military unification concurrent with, but not caused by, the external European threat.

The emergence of Boer/Afrikaaner society as a political player in the mid-1800's will also come as a surprise to those who are more accustomed to accepting the modern-day Boers' own heroic, but not entirely authentic, history. Equally surprising will be Thompson's depiction of the late nineteenth century British as power brokers who believed their Empire so threatened by Afrikaaner rejection, that war on a previously unimaginable scale was the only solution—a war which has today resulted in a nation whose people, "acquiescent but not quiescent," are at one another's throats.

This is a work of synthesis rather than original evaluation. Still, *A HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA*, by drawing together in an orderly and systematic fashion the facts in the matter and voices from all sides, can help interested readers to discover a far more reasonable basis for discussion of this critical international problem than mere argument has provided.

Sources for Further Study

Booklist. LXXXVI, June 1, 1990, p.1876.

Boston Globe. June 3, 1990, p.51.

The Chronicle of Higher Education. XXXVII, September 12, 1990, p. A8.

Foreign Affairs. LXIX, Fall, 1990, p.198.

Kirkus Reviews. LVIII, April 15, 1990, p.565.

Library Journal. CXV, May 15, 1990, p.86.

The New York Review of Books. XXXVII, September 27, 1990, p.20.

A History of South Africa: A History of South Africa

The New York Times Book Review. XCV, July 15, 1990, p.12.

Publishers Weekly CCXXXVII, May 11, 1990, p. 244.

The Times Educational Supplement. August, 1990, p. 16.

Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:

<http://www.enotes.com/history-south-africa-salem>