

Roger Bell, *In Apartheid's Shadow: Australian Race Politics and South Africa, 1945–1975* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2019). pp. xii + 352. AU \$39.95 paper.

After the end of World War II, systems of racial discrimination continued to be key building blocks of many nations, including two of the southern dominions of the British Commonwealth: Australia and South Africa. For the latter, politics and society were fundamentally shaped by the all-embracing apartheid system. For the former, the White Australia immigration policy, combined with internal legal, cultural and social programmes, practices and norms, determined the racial make-up of the Australian population and underpinned the systematic discriminatory treatment of the Indigenous peoples. In the three decades after 1945 in both nations there were growing challenges to these systems of racial discrimination and exclusion.

In this important book, Roger Bell tells the story of these 30 years by exploring the interaction between the two nations over issues of race, at many levels including diplomacy, trade, defence, sport and politics. Bell makes a penetrating historical analysis of the relationship between the growing opposition to apartheid in Australia and the gradual undermining of the White Australia policy and the development of opposition to the discriminatory attitudes and practices suffered by Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander peoples. His argument about Australian attitudes and actions towards South Africa is placed against the international context of decolonisation and the growing global resistance to racial discrimination. All these elements make *In Apartheid's Shadow* a highly significant study of both Australian international and national history.

For the first 15 years of this era, Bell establishes that within Australia there was almost a complete consensus that South Africa was a “normal” nation not unlike itself. This was true of elite opinion as well as general public opinion. There were a few critical voices, such as the Reverend Alan Walker, and there were many who doubted that the apartheid system could last, but there was general Australian acceptance of the situation in South Africa. Equally, Bell demonstrates that Australia’s race-based immigration policy and its discriminatory policies and practices against the Indigenous peoples had widespread public support or acceptance. As Bell documents, the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 marked a turning point as there gradually emerged a small, but growing Australian protest movement opposed to the South African apartheid state, which in turn led to a slow, belated and far from complete shift in public opinion. Australian views on South Africa were slow to change through the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s. The movement in support of equal rights for Indigenous Australians both fed off and fed into the anti-apartheid movement.

Bell sets these domestic developments against a changing international climate that became increasingly critical of South Africa. Yet as he powerfully demonstrates, even as attitudes of some Australians were changing, successive coalition governments maintained close defence, security, trading and other connections with the South African regime. The heroes of Bell’s story are not the Australian prime ministers, politicians, diplomats, business leaders or indeed the general public; they are the relatively few activists who, in the face of much vilification and state repression, protested against and eventually stopped South African sporting tours and laid the groundwork for the change of policy under the Whitlam government. By the mid-1970s Australia and South Africa were no longer “Sisters of the South,” no matter that many Australians still wished that to be the case. *In Apartheid's Shadow* also explores how apartheid as a foreign policy issue played a role in undermining the White Australia policy and in awakening many white Australians to the horrors that Indigenous people faced across this continent.

This book is full of important historical insights into vital parts of this story, including Robert Menzies’ attitude to apartheid and South Africa’s expulsion from the Commonwealth, Australian diplomatic reporting from Pretoria, Australian diplomacy at the United Nations over race issues, the evolving views of Australian media commentators and journalists on apartheid, the enduring trade, defence and other connections Australia

maintained with South Africa over the entire era, and the rather slow and tortured ending of Australian sporting links with South Africa and the Whitlam government's policies. As Bell reveals, Australia's race politics and diplomacy towards South Africa throughout this era was not often a positive story for Australians, either as a people or a nation. This is a beautifully written, deeply researched and powerfully argued book. Bell forces us again to rethink the golden era of Australia's long post-war boom, which was not simply a period of sprawling suburbs, sunshine, beaches, and growing prosperity, but also a time when many Australians and their governments turned a blind eye to racial discrimination here and overseas and left unfinished the business of eliminating it.

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