



Why Race Matters in South Africa

By Michael MacDonald

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This book tells the story of how the transition to democracy in South Africa enfranchised blacks politically but without raising most of them from poverty. It shows in detail how the continuing strength of the white establishment forces the leaders of the African National Congress (ANC) to compromise plans for full political and economic transformation. Deferring the economic transformation, the new dispensation nurtures a small black elite. The new elite absorbs the economic interests of the established white elites while continuing to share racial identities with the majority of their countrymen, muffling the divisions between rich whites and poor blacks, thus ensuring political stability in the new South Africa.

Although democratic South Africa is officially "non-racial," the book shows that racial solidarities continue to play a role in the country's political economy. Ironically, racial identities, which ultimately proved the undoing of apartheid, have come to the rescue of contemporary democratic capitalism. The author explains how and why racial solidarities are being revamped, focusing particularly on the role of black economic empowerment, the black bourgeoisie, and how calls to represent the identities of black South Africans are having the effect of substituting the racial interests of black elites for the economic interests of the black poor.

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Editorial Review

Review

Why Race Matters in South Africa is rare and important work. A probing study of South African racialism before and after apartheid, this is also social science with historical and theoretical depth, political theory with deep empirical grounding, and political economy fruitfully supplemented by political theory and cultural analysis. The writing is wonderfully clear and compelling, and the analysis is complex and insightful. This book should be of interest to a wide range of scholars, including those in comparative politics, African politics, state theory, theories of race and ethnicity, and political and cultural theories of identity. (Wendy Brown, University of California, Berkeley)

Why Race Matters in South Africa is an important and timely book both for its theoretical and its empirical contributions. It fills a void to engage what is an increasingly central debate on the politics of economic power and race in South Africa and beyond. This book offers a thoughtful academic analysis of pressing current issues which are central to any meaningful discussion of the very nature of democracy, identity, and political economy (Elke Zuern, Sarah Lawrence College)

Why Race Matters is an exposure of the intimate link between racialism and political economic power, how in Neville Alexander's words, a nonracial capitalism is impossible, as it is also a devastating critique of the limitations of liberal non-racialism, conceived as the "representation of identities." But it is also, for political theorists, a paradigmatic case study of a future perfect (not subjunctive) politics of the impossible, an empirical enactment of a non-racialism to come. (Diane Rubenstein *Political Theory* 2010-08-01)

This book is a tour de force...[It's] a rich, subtle, and analytically powerful account of the persistence of race in political and economic systems that are ostensibly race-blind. (Courtney Jung *Comparativ* 2008-02-01)

About the Author

Michael MacDonald is Frederick L. Schuman Professor of International Relations at Williams College.

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