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THE S.A. INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

NOT TO BE REMOVED

SOUTH AFRICA IN THE AMERICAN MIND

Alan Pifer

OCCASIONAL PAPER

GELEENTHEIDSPUBLIKASIE



DIE SUID-AFRIKAANSE INSTITUUT VAN INTERNASIONALE AANGELEENTHEDE
THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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SOUTH AFRICA IN THE AMERICAN MIND

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October 14, 1981.

I am much honored by this invitation to deliver the fourth annual Commemoration Day Lecture at the University of the Witwatersrand, following in the footsteps of such distinguished men as Alan Paton, Sydney Kentridge and Justice J H Steyn. Although accepting the invitation meant a special trip to South Africa, I could not pass up the opportunity to show my respect for this great institution and its courageous vice chancellor.

I should perhaps make clear at the outset my long-standing attachment to your country. I first came here some 28 years ago, never dreaming that I would come back many times again, traveling widely, making lasting friendships with all kinds of people, enjoying your marvellous hospitality and coming to appreciate the unusual beauty of the land. That, however, is what happened. South Africa is now a part of me, and I doubt I shall ever get it out of my system.

Beyond the emotional claims that South Africa and its people have placed on me, I have found this country endlessly absorbing as a microcosm of the world-wide problem of how peoples of differing colors and cultures are to live peacefully and happily together. South Africa, in fact, presents as great a challenge on that score as exists anywhere, making what happens here a matter of wide international significance and concern.

An aspect of your country that has been of particular interest to me is your higher educational system. I have always believed that if a nation's most talented young people are able to share their university experience and be exposed to the same intellectual challenge, they will be better prepared to work together harmoniously later for the common welfare. It is heartening to me, therefore, to see that black students are now attending your predominantly white universities in growing numbers.

I realize full well that here at the Witwatersrand University you would always have had it thus and by recognized right, and I must express to you my admiration for the brave fight you have put up for so long to be an institution open to all races. That battle, again, has had significance far beyond South Africa and now occupies an honored place in the historic quest of universities generally to secure their freedom from interference by the state.

It occurred to me in thinking about a topic for this lecture that it would be entirely appropriate for me as an American, and I hope of interest to you, to discuss the question of American attitudes toward your country. I thought that if I were to examine not only what these appear superficially to be but, at a deeper level, what lies behind them, this would give you some basis for a long-term assessment of the probable course of official United States policy toward South Africa. In selecting this topic for the lecture, which I have entitled "South Africa in the American Mind", I

assumed/...

assumed, of course, that what we in the United States feel about your country and how we act toward it is of some consequence to you here. This may strike you as an unwarranted, indeed arrogant, assumption, but it has been my observation over a good many years that the United States, for better or worse, does loom rather large in both your domestic and international calculations.

In dealing with this subject, the principal point I shall try to develop is that, whatever its seeming vicissitudes from one administration to another, official American policy toward South Africa is always subject ultimately to the prevailing convictions and attitudes toward racial equality and human rights that arise from our own national experience. This proposition leads to the view that American opposition to apartheid, however the latter may be dressed up or rationalized, will be a permanent factor in setting bounds to the nature of the relationship between our two societies.

There are, to be sure, other American interests in your country, of a strategic and economic nature. These are spelled out in the recently published report of the Study Commission on US Policy Toward Southern Africa - which, by the way, I urge you to read, since it represents the unanimous views of eleven prominent Americans from widely varying backgrounds. Nevertheless, it is the racial and human rights aspects of South Africa which dominate American thinking and which, in the final analysis, will always be decisive.

United States-South Africa Relations -- The Record

Prior to World War II, I think it is fair to say, South Africa hardly existed in the consciousness of Americans except perhaps for a vague awareness that something called the Boer War had taken place there at one time. If they were aware of it at all, they probably simply thought of it as somehow part of the British Empire and a place where gold and diamonds were mined. Its history, its constitutional status, its racial composition, the languages spoken, its geographical features all would have been a mystery. The American people in those days were immensely ignorant of the rest of the world and largely uninterested in it. It was, furthermore, a period when American interest in South Africa specifically because of the latter's racial situation would have been virtually non-existent because the United States was still a firmly segregated society itself, *de facto* in the North and *de jure* in the South. The great drive there for racial equality had scarcely begun.

It was during the Second World War that Americans gradually became aware of South Africa, principally as a loyal ally that, for the size of its population, was making an extraordinary contribution to the war effort. They also became familiar with the name of General Smuts as a world leader and as one of the architects of the post-war order based on establishment of the United Nations Organization. At the end of the war and immediately thereafter his reputation among Americans stood high. He stood for democracy and freedom, and, through the power of his personality, in our eyes invested his country with those attributes.

It came as quite a shock to us, therefore, when shortly after the establishment of the United Nations, South Africa was called to account there by India for its treatment of its Indian population. The defeat of General Smuts in your 1948 election and advent of National Party rule was an even greater surprise to us. Then, as apartheid rapidly took shape here in the decade of the 50s, while we at home began to move steadily in the opposite

direction/...?

direction, disillusion with your country mounted. Two events, publication of Alan Paton's immensely moving and widely influential novel, *Cry the Beloved Country*, in 1948 and the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, added immeasurably to our disenchantment. South Africa soon became in American eyes not the admired democratic ally of the great struggle against Nazi tyranny, but a place that had somehow become untrue to all that the war had been fought to achieve.

Most Americans, nonetheless, gave little real attention to events here in South Africa, at least through the decade of the 50s. Deeply absorbed in our own affairs during those years, such concern as we had for international matters was almost wholly directed toward our continuing confrontation with the Soviet Union and its Communist allies in Europe and Asia.

In the 1960s, however, interest in South Africa began to rise. These were the years when the United States was making major advances toward racial equality at home, which automatically called attention to South Africa's growing racial tension. It was also a period when newly independent nations, especially those in Africa, began to raise their voices in the United Nations and elsewhere to complain about apartheid. The official attitude of the United States Government toward your government during those years of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations became progressively cooler and more distant.

From 1968 to 1976, the years of the conservative Nixon and Ford administrations and the Kissinger ascendancy in international affairs, official American attitudes toward South Africa warmed somewhat, to a degree that your government believed it had the support of ours for an invasion of Angola in 1975, only to be sharply let down as Congress became alarmed and reacted negatively. Whatever the tenor of the administration's views during this period, however, opposition to apartheid was mounting in nongovernmental circles -- among church groups, university students and faculty members, the media and in various kinds of voluntary organizations, including, of course, those concerned with civil rights. The death of Steve Biko in detention in 1977 added enormously to this opposition.

With the advent of the Carter administration in 1976, representatives of these nongovernmental groups achieved powerful positions in government, and the official policy of our government toward yours became distinctly hostile. A number of actions, with which you are of course familiar, were taken to give expression to this hostility. Official US-South African relations reached their lowest ebb ever.

Outside the government, opposition to your government's racial policies took a variety of forms, in particular, sustained protests by faculty and students on college and university campuses against institutional investment in American corporations doing business in South Africa and challenges by religious and other organizations to corporate policies respecting South Africa presented at annual shareholder meetings. The business community itself, however, continued to be friendly, or at least neutral.

How should we characterize the administration of President Reagan, on whose election so many whites in South Africa placed such large hopes? Let us look first at a typical criticism of it, exemplified by a list of charges made against it by the Democratic National Committee at its meeting on June 5, 1981. The list reads as follows:

1 The/...

1 The current US administration has relaxed its pressure on South Africa to comply with the United Nations Security Council plan for a peaceful transition to majority rule in Namibia.

2 The Reagan administration has voiced no official protest against South Africa's recent invasions into the sovereign states of Mozambique and Angola.

3 Members of the administration have violated a long-standing US policy to deny visas and meetings to high-ranking South African military/intelligence officers.

4 The Reagan administration has requested that Congress lift the ban on CIA activities in Angola in order to allow for US assistance to the South African backed insurgent group, UNITA, in Angola.

5 The administration is considering lifting restrictions on the export of nuclear fuel, computers and other high-level technology to the South African government.

More recently, of course, the veto by the United States on August 31 of a US Security Council resolution condemning South Africa for its incursion into Angola that month has provoked expressions of dismay in a variety of quarters in the United States.

A very different view of the administration's policy is revealed in an internal State Department memorandum prepared last May by Chester Crocker, Assistant Secretary for Africa, to brief Secretary Haig for the forthcoming visit to Washington of your foreign minister, Pik Botha. The memorandum, opening with a claim that the political relationship between the US and South Africa has arrived at a historic crossroads, says:

"After twenty years of generally increasing official US government coolness toward South Africa and concomitant South African intransigence, the possibility may exist for a more positive and reciprocal relationship between the two countries based upon shared strategic concerns in Southern Africa, our recognition that the government of P W Botha represents a unique opportunity for domestic change, and willingness of the Reagan administration to deal realistically with South Africa."

Following this, Mr Crocker turns to the problem of Namibia, noting that it complicates our relations with our European allies and with black Africa and is, therefore, a primary obstacle to the development of a new relationship with South-Africa. On this matter he says:

"It also represents an opportunity to counter the Soviet threat in Africa. We need Pretoria's cooperation in working toward an internationally acceptable solution to Namibia which would, however, safeguard US and South African essential interests and concerns."

Further along in the memo, the Secretary is advised to address the following words to Mr Botha when he meets him:

"Although we may continue to differ on apartheid, and cannot condone a system of institutionalized racial differentiation,

we/...

we can cooperate with a society undergoing constructive change. Your government's explicit commitment in this direction will enable us to work with you. You must help make this approach credible. You also should recognize that this period represents your best shot, a rare opportunity, because of our mandate and our desire to turn a new leaf in bilateral relations."

More recently, in a speech delivered in Honolulu on August 29, Mr Crocker further elucidated the administration's policy toward your country. He said there:

"In South Africa..., it is not our task to choose between black and white. In this rich land of talented and diverse peoples, important Western economic, strategic, moral and political interests are at stake.

"We must avoid action that aggravates the awesome challenges facing South Africans of all races.

"The Reagan administration has no intention of destabilizing South Africa in order to curry favour elsewhere. Neither will we align ourselves with apartheid policies that are abhorrent to our own multiracial democracy. ...the US seeks to build a more constructive relationship with South Africa, based on shared interests, persuasion and improved communication."

Here, then, are two entirely different representations of the administration's position, one by its critics claiming that it is in the process of undoing twenty years of American firmness toward South Africa and the other by a high ranking official suggesting that the United States must recognize the strategic importance of South Africa but should use the bait of friendlier relations with Pretoria to get an acceptable agreement on Namibia and as a *quid pro quo* for an easing of apartheid inside South Africa.

The Reagan administration has used the phrase "constructive engagement" to characterize its South African policy, as opposed to the frosty aloofness of the Carter years. What this term really means it is too early to say. It could mean making a serious effort through quiet diplomacy to influence your government to modify its racial policies, or it could signify a decision, in effect, to ignore apartheid while seeking pragmatic working relationships with Pretoria in such areas as defense, technology transfer, and the supply of strategic minerals. Having taken the position, however, that there is more to be gained in regard to an easing of apartheid by a friendly than a hostile attitude, the administration has made itself vulnerable to a severe loss of credibility in the eyes of many Americans and of the world at large, if, in fact, in due course, it has nothing to show in Namibia or by way of change in South Africa for this approach. This is all the more true in view of the fact that the American veto, to which I have just referred, on the matter of South Africa's August incursion into Angola caused us to break with our traditional allies, Britain and France.

The/...

The Basic Determinants of US Policy

The thumbnail sketch I have just given of American attitudes toward your country over the past half century seems to suggest that these have lacked consistency and, at least on the official side, have varied according to the political and geopolitical outlook of whatever administration happened to be in power. One can read the record that way. Nevertheless, it is my contention that, increasingly in recent years, at the most meaningful level, our attitudes, and hence basic policy toward South Africa, have come to be determined not by such superficial considerations but by long-term trends within the United States itself relating to racial equality and the realization of human rights, and this, I am convinced, will be the case in the future. From here on out, I believe, no administration, whatever its philosophical orientation, will be able, in setting its policies toward South Africa, to ignore the deep impression that our own struggle for equality for all persons irrespective of race, sex, creed or national origin has made on the American psyche. Our national sensitivity on the subject of discrimination, especially on racial grounds, lies there in the background ready to burst forth at a moment's notice and exert a powerful influence on American policy.

It would, therefore, seem unwise for anyone here in this country to take either too much comfort or become too discouraged, depending on their outlook by what they see as the policies of the current American administration, because it too, in the final analysis, must be governed by our basic American beliefs on the subject of civil rights.

I believe, indeed, that a prominent Republican Senator, Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas, was not simply warning South Africa but was also sending a signal to our own administration when she wrote in an article published in the Washington Star on June 10 of this year the following words:

"The euphoria in Pretoria and the despair in black African capitals about the conservative turn in American government originates in a false but widespread belief among political commentators that the election signalled an American acquiescence to South Africa's institutionalized system of racial oppression, apartheid.

"The commentators focus on people on the vocal fringe of conservatism and overlook the mainstream Republican philosophy, and how that philosophy views the content and practices of apartheid.

"We voted in November for principles that are, in fact, in direct contradiction to apartheid. We voted for maximum individual liberty and freedom of choice; for policies that are formulated with the family in mind; for widespread distribution of private property as a cornerstone of liberty; for the right of law-abiding individuals to pursue happiness without undue governmental intervention; and for a party that declared war on government overregulation.

"...although South Africa is frequently described as 'a bastion of free enterprise in Africa', the overwhelming majority of South Africans have never known free enterprise or the benefits in terms of human liberty it can provide. Such a system holds little enchantment for a party dedicated to free enterprise."

Some/...

Some South Africans may wonder by what warrant Americans feel they have a right to criticize South Africa's internal policies -- especially since the American situation, where blacks are only 12 percent of the population, is so fundamentally different from that of South Africa where they constitute 83 percent.

The answer, it seems to me, lies in two characteristics of your country that in our American eyes inescapably internationalize matters there that South Africans may regard as their exclusive concern. First it is a place that practices official racial discrimination, in contrast to the nondiscriminatory goals we have set for ourselves at home, and, reasonably or not, use as a standard for the behaviour of others. Second it is a nation that claims to be part of the Western democratic community, and yet systematically denies to the majority of its citizens the essential human rights that define the Western tradition.

It is these characteristics that make your country a place we cannot regard with the relative indifference with which we view many other nations that violate human rights fully as much as does South Africa, some of which, ironically, are among its most vocal critics.

There is also the fact that deep down inside many Americans have an unspoken, though nonetheless real, fear that large-scale interracial violence here in South Africa might have immediate and serious repercussions in the United States, very possibly putting in jeopardy our own rather fragile state of racial harmony.

What I am suggesting -- and it is all important -- is that we Americans have both a sense of psychological affinity with your country because of its multiracial character and certain expectations of it because of its claim to be part of the West, and these realities often prompt us to act as if what happens here is as much our business as it is yours, however unreasonable that may seem to you.

Given the special nature of the place which South Africa occupies in the American mind and its relationship to the United States, policy toward your country, two very important questions naturally arise. First, how firm is the American commitment to racial equality? And, second, how firm is our commitment to the promotion of human rights in other nations as a cornerstone of our foreign policy?

The American Commitment to Racial Equality

In the space of a short paper such as this, one could not possibly describe the long, arduous road that led finally to a commitment to racial equality in the United States, and no doubt many of you are familiar with that story anyway. It is a tale replete with moral blindness, hypocrisy, and paradox but also vision, courage and idealism, combined with a good measure of pragmatism. Along the way the nation changed from a slave-holding society, to one in which blacks were legally free but were systematically denied the rights accorded to other citizens, to one, finally, in which they now enjoy full equality under the law, although, unhappily, still suffer from a social legacy of self-perpetuating poverty and ignorance as well as from certain forms of subtle -- and sometimes not so subtle -- discrimination based on racist attitudes that have proven difficult to eradicate.

What/...

What has been the nature of racism in the United States? Joel Kovel, in his book, *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, makes a useful distinction between "dominative" and "aversive" racism, in effect, the prevailing modes of the South and the North. Dominative racism was intrinsic to the very nature of Southern society, forming the basis not only of its social organization but also of its economy. Maintained until the Civil War by the institution of slavery, it was perpetuated thereafter for another hundred years by state laws and local ordinances, backed always by the threat of violence, that kept blacks firmly in a servile status.

There can be no question that dominative racism, which Southern whites believed was essential to their survival, in fact was responsible for the social backwardness and economic retardation that characterized their region until very recent times. Harmful not only to blacks but also to whites, it was an expensive indulgence the area could ill afford. Even today, after all that has happened, it continues to show its ugly visage from time to time, especially in rural areas of the South where it remains a threat to the rights and well being of poor, uneducated blacks.

Aversive racism, on the other hand, was characteristic of the North and involved not so much an attempt to keep blacks in a position of servitude as to exclude them from white company, from the mainstream of society. This was accomplished in part by law but mainly by convention. Blacks had rights but were prevented from enjoying them by massive, white social pressure, especially in the matter of housing where discrimination has always been, and continues to be, quite general. Aversive racism, too, has had its costs, most particularly as a major contributing factor to the development of black ghettos in the great cities of the North, with the consequent problems of inner city decline, unemployment, poverty, social dependency and crime.

All in all, the costs of racial discrimination and exploitation have been staggering in the United States. If only we had set out after the trauma of the Civil War to bring our black citizens steadily and fully into the mainstream of our national life, how much better a nation ours would be today, and what a terrible toll in blighted lives, social conflict, economic waste and diminished humanity among both blacks and whites might have been avoided.

Admittedly this opinion is not shared by all Americans today because of the stubborn persistence of racism in some quarters, because of a mindless tendency to blame blacks for the very problems that have been caused by centuries of white mistreatment of them, and because of the racial animosity this mistreatment has engendered on both sides. Nonetheless, it is a valid conclusion to draw from our experience. Our long delay in achieving racial equality was a tragedy for the nation and the costliest error in our history.

One must be careful, however, in being candid about our historic failures and continuing shortcomings not to give the impression that we have not achieved great successes in our long quest to eliminate racial inequality. The fact is that in every sphere of our national life, blacks have by law gained full equality of opportunity and in many instances have gained a substantial measure of equality itself. The right to equal opportunity is a fact now in employment generally, in the professions, in the judiciary, in the civil service, in education, in entrepreneurial enterprise, in the skilled trades, in the arts, in the military, in sports and in a host of other areas.

Blacks/...

Blacks, it is true, have yet to achieve parity in elective public office in proportion to their numbers, but they have served on the Supreme Court, in the Cabinet, in the Senate and House of Representatives and in a wide range of posts at the state and local level. Prejudice still inhibits their movement into the highest executive levels of business, but their lack of representation there also in part reflects their earlier exclusion -- now no longer the case -- from lower levels of management and, hence, lack of relevant experience.

We have, perhaps, achieved our greatest success in the field of higher education, where the enrollment of blacks is now, proportionately, virtually the same as that of whites. It is true that there was considerable tension in our colleges and universities when blacks first began to enter previously all white institutions about fifteen years ago, and some of that tension is still to be found. Nevertheless, although some traditionally black institutions continue to exist, the total integration of student bodies in traditionally white colleges and universities is now an accepted fact and, on the whole, is going remarkably smoothly. It has required some considerable effort by these institutions to adjust to the sensitivities of black students and to their generally poorer academic preparation, and black students, for their part, have made some concessions to the prevailing white ethos. But in neither case has the required adjustment proven insuperable. The importance of the fact that young people of both races are sharing a common higher educational experience simply cannot be overstated.

At the faculty level the participation of blacks has proceeded more slowly. This is attributable in part to continuing prejudice but, more importantly, to a shortage of qualified candidates resulting from a rejection of teaching by the most able young blacks in favor of other careers where the economic rewards are higher.

Virtually all of the truly astounding progress we have made toward racial equality in the United States has taken place in the past three decades or less -- less than half my lifetime. How after eight post-Civil War decades in which little progress was made did this extraordinary transformation take place? What were the root causes of it?

Looking back from the vantage point of 1962 on developments in American race relations since the famous Myrdal study twenty years earlier, Arnold Rose, a colleague of Myrdal's in the study, wrote:

"The major forces causing the rapid change in race relations since 1940 seem to have been continuous industrialization and technological advance, the high level of mobility among the American people, economic prosperity, the organization and political education of minority groups, an increased American awareness of world opinion, a consistent support for civil rights on the part of the Supreme Court and a lesser support from the other branches of the federal government and of the Northern state governments, and the propaganda and educational effort for more equal civil rights."

While Rose's findings, viewed from today's perspective, appear generally valid, he seems to have overlooked the immense significance of the Second World War for social change. Not only was there the fact that the general moral climate of the war shed an obviously unfavorable light on continued racial discrimination. There was also the influence that the experience

of/...

of serving abroad in racially tolerant societies had on young blacks, opening their eyes and raising their aspirations. Indeed, the greatest protest movement of the 1960s, characterized by sit-ins, freedom marches and mass demonstrations was but the outward visible sign of profound inner change in American society, in which many blacks had become determined to achieve equality and many whites had come to think that this was only right. The often brutal response to the protest movement, however, fully reported in the press and beamed into the average American home by radio and television, did serve mightily to galvanize the national will for change and to prepare the ground for the great advances that were about to come. Never in our history had freedom of the press been more important.

The five and a half years of Lyndon Johnson's presidency, from 1963 to 1968, saw the enactment by the Congress of far-reaching civil rights legislation affecting employment, voting rights, education, public accommodations and a number of other important matters. It also saw the instituting of "affirmative action" -- mandatory special effort to compensate blacks for the past inequities they had suffered. Although the ground for these advances was by then well prepared, it is doubtful they would have been as vigorously and firmly pursued had it not been for President Johnson's leadership, determination and political skill with a still partially reluctant Congress.

It must be recognized, however, that the great achievements of the 1950s and 1960s were the end result of currents that had begun to stir in the nation as early as 1830 when a group of courageous men and women in the North, led by William Lloyd Garrison, began to agitate for the abolition of slavery. Although the American Constitution had specifically acknowledged the existence of slavery by saying in Article I, "representatives and taxes shall be apportioned among the several states ... by adding to the whole number of free persons ... three fifths of all other persons," the spirit of that document and specifically the wording of the Bill of Rights, the first 10 amendments to it, seemed to guarantee equality for all men. Certainly, belief that all men are created equal was explicitly stated in the earlier Declaration of Independence and, indeed, was the very heart of what Gunnar Myrdal called the American Creed, the set of philosophical beliefs derived from the ideas of the Enlightenment, from Christian dogma and from the English Common Law that were the founding tenets of the new republic and that have been its guiding principles ever since. Only by denying the humanity of slaves and regarding them purely as chattel could the founding fathers reconcile their adherence to the American Creed with violation of it in the practice of slavery.

This conflict between ideals and practice, what Myrdal was to call the American Dilemma, was, however, deeply troublesome to the Abolitionists. They simply could not abide the national hypocrisy implied in it. Hated and persecuted not only in the South but also in the North, they nevertheless persisted in their cause and gradually began to have an impact on Northern opinion. By the time of the Civil War in 1861 they had become widely influential.

The Civil War, however, that disastrous conflict that cost more than half a million lives in a population that then numbered only 31 million -- about the size of South Africa today -- and devastated the South so heavily that its economic and social progress was impeded for the next hundred years, did not start as the result of an attempt by the North to impose the abolition of slavery on the South. Slavery, however, was the underlying issue and

before/...

before the War was over President Lincoln felt obliged to issue his great Emancipation Proclamation.

The Civil War, thus, led directly to three notable amendments to the Constitution in the years immediately following it from 1865 to 1870, the thirteenth, which declared slavery to be unconstitutional; the fourteenth, which declared that all persons born in the United States are citizens of that nation and of the state in which they reside, that no state shall abridge their privileges and immunities nor deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor deny to any person the equal protection of the laws; and the fifteenth amendment, which decreed that the rights of citizens to vote shall not be abridged on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

It would have seemed at this point that the nation was ready to embark on a course that would lead rapidly to full equality for blacks; but in fact the North became preoccupied with its own industrial and agricultural development and proved unwilling, after the short Reconstruction episode, to impose a new order on a defeated South and, indeed, was subject to a large measure of aversive racism itself. The resulting situation has been aptly described by Jack Greenberg, a leading American civil rights lawyer familiar with South Africa, as follows:

"Black codes, segregation statutes, racist social practices, all manner of legal, illegal and violent restrictions on the franchise, and lynch mobs continued for many years to keep the black man in a position as close as possible to that which he was in during slavery. The American South and large parts of the rest of the country enforced American versions of the South African group areas act, reservation of separate amenities act, pass laws, rural access legislation, job reservation, immorality act, prohibition of mixed marriages act, and various euphemistic limits on black voting in the form of grandfather clauses, literacy tests, technical registration limitations, and so forth."

Additionally, during the past Civil War years there developed the pernicious doctrine of "separate but equal." Never more than a fiction and a sham, this doctrine was, nevertheless, given judicial sanction by the Supreme Court in Plessy vs Ferguson in 1896 and remained the law of the land until it was finally reversed by Brown vs Board of Education in 1954. This sixty year violation of constitutional mandate was particularly harmful because, having the appearance of fairness, it gave white Americans, among them many of our most respected leaders, relief from any qualms of conscience they might otherwise have had about the way blacks were treated.

The Brown decision, although a stunning event when it came, was also not an isolated happenstance but was, rather, the culmination of a long litigative effort in the courts by civil rights organizations to chip away at the separate but equal doctrine. America's conscience during that lengthy detour on the road to equality had become weakened but was not dead, and with the Brown ruling and its aftermath, the decision by President Eisenhower to federalize the Arkansas National Guard in order to enforce school integration in Little Rock, followed in turn by the great gains of the Kennedy and Johnson years, it came rapidly back to life.

Since then, two issues, the imposition of quotas to achieve equality in employment, /...

employment, higher education and other areas and court mandated busing of pupils to achieve school integration, have stirred immense controversy in the nation. These developments, the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in some places, and more recently, a growing fear that the Reagan administration will have less concern for the enforcement of civil rights than did the Carter administration might lead some observers to conclude that there is a diminished commitment now in the United States to the goal of racial equality.

Admittedly, as we have seen, some Americans continue to be infected by primitive racist thinking, and admittedly, too, there is considerable white backlash against blacks today, for a variety of complex reasons. The next few years, therefore, will very likely be ones in which the nation generally marks time or even retreats on the civil rights front, with, probably, little or no leadership at the federal level. The years ahead are also likely to be ones in which blacks suffer high unemployment and lose economic ground as a result of the recession and cuts in federal social programs from which they have benefited substantially.

Nonetheless, I do not believe that this setback, distressing as it is, indicates a weakening of our basic national commitment to racial equality. It is my firm belief that the great gains we have made in the past three decades are irreversible -- that as a nation we neither will nor can go back on them. As we have seen, these achievements were the product of broad and powerful economic and social forces in the nation that were not to be denied, as well as the culmination of more than a hundred and thirty years of struggle, of gradually facing up to the fact that we could not live with our consciences -- could not abide our special American dilemma nor hold up our heads in the civilized company of western nations -- as long as we treated people of color in our society unequally. The trauma and bloodshed that have marked the long road to this realization are too deeply etched into the soul of the nation for the vast majority of Americans ever to be willing to abandon it. If you have any doubts on that score here in South Africa, I urge you to dismiss them.

The American Commitment to Human Rights in its Foreign Policy

Let us turn now to the second question -- whether the promotion of human rights in other countries will continue to be a significant feature of American foreign policy. The answer to this question is, I believe, also positive but must be stated somewhat more cautiously, since our record as a nation in this regard has been marked by a good deal of inconsistency as the result of the inevitable interplay of pragmatism and idealism in specific situations.

The American idea of human rights goes back to the nation's origins. The founding fathers, such men as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, believed that the moral legitimacy of the new republic they had established derived from the proposition, set forth by John Locke and other Enlightenment philosophers a century earlier, that human beings possess fundamental natural rights, that these are beyond the authority of government and independent of it, and that a government may make just claims on its citizens only if it respects and protects these natural rights. The founding fathers also believed that the nation they had established was a unique creation, the first political system to be based on and be consonant with the laws of nature and, as such, was a model for the world

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to emulate. Over the years since, people in other nations have looked to the United States as a very special place, a place of hope for mankind but also a place that should be measured against its own high ideals and severely censured if its performance fell short.

The United States Constitution, which came into effect in 1788, did not, as originally drafted, contain a basic list of human rights, because such rights were considered to be implicit in the very principles on which the new government was founded. Nonetheless, the lack of such a list was considered a defect by many citizens, and consequently one was added in the form of the first ten amendments, which were adopted in 1791. The Bill of Rights, as these amendments came to be known, included such important guarantees as the right of *habeas corpus*, the right to trial by jury, the right to freedom of religion, the right of assembly, the right to petition the government for redress of grievances, the right to freedom of speech and of the press, the right not to be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law, the right of an accused person to a speedy and public trial, to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation, to be confronted by witnesses against him and the assistance of defense counsel, and freedom from cruel and unusual punishment.

The guarantees provided in the first ten amendments have stood the test of time remarkably well and are basic to what Charles Frankel has defined as a modern conception of human rights that, in his view, can be said to be valid moral claims on every government on earth. He classifies these rights under four broad headings:

- 1 The right to bodily security and integrity and to freedom from the psychic as well as the physical threat of governmental terrorism.
- 2 The rights of accused persons in criminal proceedings -- that is, the right to counsel, the right to be brought before a magistrate and the right to a speedy trial.
- 3 The right to religious and intellectual freedom.
- 4 The right to individual privacy and familial relations.

Under the last of these headings, Frankel says:

"In the present century, totalitarian governments have unleashed savage assaults on the rights of privacy and family. The evidence indicates that they have undertaken no policies which have aroused greater resistance. The separation of families, their forcible removal from their native settings, the introduction of spies into the home, are regarded everywhere as trespasses across a boundary that no government should cross. No action anywhere is more likely to alienate a people or produce a more widespread sense of outrage. And to ask governments to desist from such behaviour out of decent respect for the opinions of mankind is surely not to ask them to perform a superhuman task."

The question arose very early in its history of whether the United States, because of its nature, had an obligation to reach beyond its own shores to encourage and protect human rights in other nations. A difference that arose between the Democrats, led by Jefferson and Madison, and the

Federalists, /...

Federalists, led by Alexander Hamilton, over the support to be given to the French Revolution, was settled when the young nation decided to adopt an isolationist, noninterventionist stance. With only occasional deviations, this was to be the basis of American foreign policy for a century and a half to come. John Quincy Adams, sixth president of the United States, in an often quoted passage made clear our disinclination to intervene in the affairs of other nations to promote the cause of human rights. He wrote:

"Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there shall be America's heart, her benedictions, and her prayers. But she goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator of her own. She will recommend the general course by the countenance of her voice, and by the benignant sympathy of her examples ... (If she did more,) she might become the dictatress of the world. She would no longer be the ruler of her own spirit."

It was not until close to the end of the 19th century that this policy of nonintervention abroad in behalf of human rights was breached. At that time freeing the Cuban people from Spanish tyranny was used as a justification for provoking Spain into the Spanish-American War, and instructing the Filipino people in the workings of democracy was the stated reason for retaining control of the Philippine Islands after that war. There was, no doubt, an element of disingenuousness in the justification provided for each of these actions but also a good deal of true idealism.

The American interest in human rights during the nineteenth century and twentieth up through the Second World War was rather different from that of today. It was focused principally on the question of self-determination for autonomous peoples and was based on the assumption, drawn from our own experience, that the power of self-determination would automatically produce a freely elected democratic government, which would, in turn, automatically guarantee the human rights of the individual citizen.

It was Woodrow Wilson, president of the United States from 1913 to 1921, who made intrusion into the affairs of other nations in the name of this concept of human rights into something of a crusade and used it both to justify American intervention in Latin America on several occasions and entry of the United States into World War I.

Franklin Roosevelt, in his years as president, also subscribed to the self-determination theory of human rights but believed that proving that democracy could work at home was all that was required. The example this provided would be sufficient, he believed, to secure the development of democratic regimes elsewhere, with their intrinsic guarantee of individual rights.

How naive this idea seems today in the wake of the evil, tyrannous governments that have appeared as the result of self-determination in many nations of the world, from Nazi Germany to Idi Amin's Uganda to Pol Pot's Cambodia. Nonetheless, it grew naturally out of the conviction of the founding fathers that inherent in the very nature of the government they had established was a sacred mission to encourage other people to follow our example. The only real issue throughout all those years up to about

1945 was whether the mission should be pursued solely by setting the best possible example of democracy in practice or should be supplemented by actual intervention in the affairs of other nations.

In the post-war years, under the presidencies of Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy, the American interest in human rights took another turn and became identified almost exclusively with anti-Communism. Becoming so virulent at times that it threatened civil liberties at home and caused us to support right-wing dictatorships in various parts of the world, red baiting became a grotesque perversion of our historic concern for human rights. Our intervention in Vietnam in the 1960s was based on a perception that somehow vital American security interests were at stake there in saving the country from Communist tyranny. This, however, obliged us to give our support to the corrupt and despotic South Vietnamese government. The revulsion of the American people against the falsity of this position and restrictions this placed on prosecution of the war eventually brought about our complete withdrawal from Indochina. At that point, the early 1970s, the notion of foreign intervention to protect human rights in nations thought to be menaced by Communist encroachment was thoroughly discredited. Indeed, disillusion with the Vietnam fiasco was one of the factors that helped elect Jimmy Carter in 1976.

President Carter took office determined to rescue human rights from the anti-Communist cul-de-sac in which it had become trapped and make it the cornerstone of a new American foreign policy. This implied that we were to be as critical of human rights violations by right-wing authoritarian regimes, even if they were traditional American allies, as we were of rights violations by Communist states.

It was not long before the Carter administration's human rights policy ran into serious trouble from several directions. First, the administration found that the policy could not, in fact, be applied in the case of key allies such as South Korea that were notorious violators of human rights, and this tended to discredit it. Second, it became overly identified with the question of Soviet dissidents and the emigration of Soviet Jews. Third, African states found the eagerness of our government to use a boycott of the Olympic Games in Moscow as a means of protesting the suppression of human rights in Afghanistan, in contrast to a previous administration's unwillingness in connection with the Montreal Olympics to use the same weapon as an indirect way to get at South Africa, hypocritical. Finally, conservative elements in the United States became increasingly disturbed at the way certain nations which they considered to be staunchly anti-Communist, such as Chile and Argentina, seemed to have been singled out for special punishment. By the end of the Carter administration, the specifics of its human rights policy were in considerable disarray, although in the Congress and among the American people at large there was still considerable support for the promotion of human rights as a general matter of broad principle.

This, of course, illustrated once again an old dilemma -- that the United States cannot be true to its deepest nature and its founding principles unless it tries to promote human rights generally throughout the world, but when it does do so, all sorts of practical problems arise.

The Reagan administration has maintained that it is as strong in its support for human rights as any of its predecessors, but says it will try to promote these through quiet diplomacy rather than by the kind of public

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scolding that it believes has proven ineffective in the past. Jeanne Kirkpatrick, United States Permanent Representative at the United Nations, at a press conference on July 2 of this year, stated that the administration is firmly committed to opposing violations of human rights "anywhere at any time". She condemned what she described as the "great deal of mythology" that has developed on the subject and said administration spokesmen had reiterated on many occasions that "we are prepared as best we can to support the extension of freedom and due process, juridical freedom and political freedom."

At the same time, she said, they did not believe that it made sense to focus simply on human rights violations in Argentina or Uruguay when massive violations of human life were going on in such places as Cambodia and Uganda. "What we support," she added, "is an even-handed, non-selective human rights policy. The mechanisms we will use to try to implement that policy will depend on specific cases, on our judgment of what will be most effective."

It is too early to tell whether the approach of this administration will be effective or, indeed, how sincere are its avowed intentions. Quiet diplomacy can sometimes be effective if pursued diligently, or it can simply be a smokescreen for doing nothing. Possibilities for evasion of responsibility also exist in the distinction the administration has tried to draw between "totalitarian" and "authoritarian" regimes, as if the suppression of liberty by the latter is somehow less reprehensible than its suppression by the former. Nevertheless, I believe it is only right at this stage to take the administration's claims at their face value and not discount them until there is real evidence on which to do so.

The most interesting thing about the administration's statements on human rights, however, is that it has felt obliged to declare its intentions in regard to that sensitive area publicly -- in effect to put itself on notice to the world. I do not believe this would have happened had it not been for the attention given to the subject by the Carter administration and the extensive interest in it over recent years in the Congress.

The cause of human rights will in the years ahead be pursued in different ways at different times. Administrations will come and go, and they will show varying degrees of interest in the subject. In the nongovernmental arena, however, among religious and humanitarian groups, concern will remain high. Amongst the people at large interest will rise and fall according to broad political trends and in response to specific events that have the potential to arouse public opinion. Never again, however, in my opinion, will the American nation, in the aggregate, allow its concern for human rights throughout the world to become moribund.

I believe, furthermore, that it will be far more difficult in the future, largely because of Vietnam, for any administration to pursue a human rights policy identified solely with anti-Communism. From here onwards for the moral case against human rights atrocities of the left to be credible, both to the American people and to the world, it will have to be balanced by an equally firm stand against atrocities of the right. The logic of this linkage is inescapable.

The fact is that the United States is locked in a long-term struggle with the Soviet Union that will last at least the rest of this century and probably longer, a struggle that our American belief in freedom makes

inevitable/...

inevitable for us. That contest is taking place not on our own shores but in the hearts and minds of other peoples and particularly the Third World peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America. It is a contest that can never be won by arms alone, although their use may be necessary at times. It can be won only by convincing the world that the ideals of human equality and freedom of the individual to which we aspire are superior to the statist tenets of Communism. This is why governments that deny equality and suppress liberty, however anti-Communist they may claim to be, are, over the long term, more of a liability than an asset to us.

Conclusion

Returning now to the question of American attitudes toward South Africa, one can readily see why your country is such a special case for us -- why, as I have suggested, we consider events there almost as much our business as yours. The fact is that South Africa touches two of the deepest and most sensitive nerve centers in our very being as Americans, our commitment to racial equality and our commitment to human rights, which, of course, are themselves intimately related. As I have shown, our performance in regard to both of these commitments has at times been marked by failure, back-sliding and hypocrisy and no doubt will be in the future. Nonetheless, the record is one of persistent long-term progress which has brought us a tremendous distance, much too far ever to return and much too far to allow substantial numbers of Americans ever again to be anything but critical of regimes elsewhere that deny racial equality and suppress human rights. It is that reality which will set the bounds of American policy toward your country from here on out, and make our attitude of opposition to the racial and human rights policies you are now pursuing unrelenting.

In closing, let me say that I have no greater hope than to live long enough to see the day that the relationship between our two great nations becomes one of total trust and true friendship based solidly on a shared commitment to fundamental human rights and the highest human values. What an exhilarating prospect that presents, and how important it could be for Africa and for the world. I do not delude myself into thinking that such a prospect is a certainty -- far from it -- but I am enough of an optimist to regard it as possible. In any event, it is to that end that I have devoted my better than a quarter century of interest in your country and will devote such years as remain to me.