Introduction

I first met South Africans in the summer of 1978. As interpreter for francophone Africans visiting the United States with Operation Crossroads Africa, I found them mixed in with groups of young African leaders brought in from twenty to thirty countries at a time.

Traveling across the wilds of northern New Jersey from JFK airport to the Princeton campus for orientation, one collared South African clergyman made quick eye contact with me in the airport shuttle and undertook to explain his bizarre country: "Brother!" he said with deep belly laughs. "You can't imagine how strange my country is. So strange, that the penalty for a black man sleeping with a white woman is a year in prison!"

I knew apartheid South Africa had peculiar rules and restrictions, but wasn't yet versed in the particulars.

"Well, Brother, let me tell you," the clergyman continued. "It was worth it, every minute of it!" He laughed even harder.

There was something exceptional about the South African visitors to the United States in those days—most but not all of them "black" and "colored," to use the South African nomenclature. Cloistered but worldly, committed to social and political changes that seemed unlikely at the time, they persevered through minefields of distrust laid by Africans of other countries. Surely, if they were allowed by the apartheid regime to travel to international fora, they must be stooges, or worse: spies.

I interpreted French through tense and arduous hastily arranged meetings long into the night in the Princeton dorms. I tried to keep a neutral tone because I was the uninvited but necessary guest to get the messages across. I tried to convey them without interpretative body language or innuendo, as Malians, Nigerians, Ivoirians, Liberians, and others subjected South Africans to harsh scrutiny. Opponents at home to their own system at personal risk and cost, the South Africans weathered the suspicions of the others, in tranquil Princeton, that they were in fact the regime's patsies. Eventually they gained the others' trust. It wasn't easy.

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Profound change in South Africa was imminent, but no one knew it then. Coinciding in time with events and efforts that corroded communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe to the breaking point, similar patterns played out in South Africa. Along with others, the United States Embassy pushed the envelope of transformation, hastening a painful process and short-circuiting the violence everyone expected. U.S. diplomats and their South African local employees in Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town, and Pretoria engaged daily in brinksmanship with police, ministry officials, and educators of the apartheid regime. They managed to get "majority" South African students and professionals to the United States in significant numbers, cracking open the seemingly unshakeable clouded glass ceilings. In effect they outsmarted apartheid every day for a twenty-year period.

Sharpeville 1960. The Soweto Uprising 1976. Constructive engagement, military and economic boycotts, debates on American campuses—the brew was volatile. A country's wealth, talent, and beauty lay largely unrealized, while tantalizing information began to circulate within the country about the vibrant changes on the outside, in the United States and other dynamic societies, overtaking South Africa in most forms of development.

Even as few could have predicted the events in Berlin of 1989, likewise few could foresee that apartheid in South Africa might yield a more normal society, short of the bloodbath many expected with or without change. A just society, with economic and social outlets for all South Africans, and basic parity in a country of income extremes seemed unattainable goals. Even the movements of the privileged within the system—many of whom sought justice in their society—were blocked overseas, where they were mistrusted and shunned. They left in waves of emigration in the 1970s and 1980s.

The work of U.S. officials and their employees during that period richly deserves recognition for their contribution to the outcome two decades later. Their story is largely untold outside their own circles. This volume gives voice to a number of the witnesses: officials, local employees, and South African "grantees" of all races who made it to the United States during turbulent times and later took up the reins of leadership in the new South Africa of the 1990s.

Quietly in the background, South African and American employees of the U.S. Information Service (USIS) in Pretoria, Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town prepared for a future few thought possible. The USIS staff engaged local publics of all stripes and identified South Africa's likely future leaders. They visited townships "illegally," testing the limits and bending the rules of diplomatic engagement. The Fulbright, Humphrey, and International Visitors programs spirited out perhaps 2,000 to 3,000 individuals from South

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Africa's majority and other communities, broadening their horizons and preparing them for the leadership roles they would eventually inherit.

The work required tact and skill. The regime resisted allowing travel for many of those chosen for exchanges and sought to impose limits on their contacts with the outside. The USIS staff meanwhile went ahead making travel arrangements. Seeking to avoid deeper pariah status, the regime often "blinked," and allowed USIS programs to proceed over the impediments they'd established through exit visas, police monitoring, and sometimes prison.

Apartheid adversely affected all social and ethnic groups, including the supposed beneficiaries. This is not to say that all suffered equally.

Though white Afrikaners enjoyed material benefits, they endured scorn outside their country and resentment within. The *verkrampte: conservative/right wing* (intellectually constipated) among them well merited this fate, less so many others within the Afrikaner groupings. Ignorance in itself is a handicap and many imposed this weakness on themselves by turning a blind eye to the system's irregularities.

June Goodwin and Ben Schiff's *Heart of Whiteness* (New York: Scribner, 1995) reveals a wide gamut, from the "bitter-enders" at the one extreme to militants for change at the other. No group is monolithic, and Afrikaners, too, had their variants. All—Afrikaners and others alike—required a view of the outside.

The most famous and most often cited exchange program concerned F. W. de Klerk, who traveled to the United States in 1976 on an International Visitors grant and later said, "In the U.S. I came to understand race relations." (Bob Heath, interviewed in this collection, handed De Klerk his plane ticket). In 1993, De Klerk and Nelson Mandela received the Nobel Peace Prize together.

But there were many other stories that give evidence of the significant role U.S. exchanges played in South Africa's social and political evolution during the apartheid period. In 1993 I attended a debriefing of a group audaciously selected to coexist during their three weeks in the United States: representatives from the South African Security Force shared meetings and an itinerary with members of the Umkhonto we Sizwe or MK—the militant wing of the African National Congress, considered "terrorists" by the old guard.

Prior to the U.S. trip, they had expended most of their energies seeking to kill each other. Now, at the end of their tour and one year before the elections of 1994, they sat together and shared a few laughs. The white Afrikaner who spoke that day on behalf of the group at the United States Information Agency headquarters in Washington—with some resentment but

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full awareness of the humor of the situation—said, "We understand your ploy in having us travel together: you wanted us to understand one another better. Well, to a great extent, you have succeeded."

Outsmarting Apartheid is an account of what "soft power" was able to achieve in the challenging years of apartheid in South Africa. Funding restrictions and new approaches to public information have altered the energies and dynamism soft power had during the period of these accounts. It remains to be seen whether these narratives may serve as a model for future endeavors, or as historic memorabilia.

Soft power served in South Africa, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere to energize and empower future leaders, while tempering the perceptions of previous and incumbent leaders. When unexpected changes opened in the society—especially after Nelson Mandela's dramatic release from prison in February 1990—the cadres were already formed and ready to take up the reins of political, economic, and social direction of the country.

Bart Rousseve

Bart went to South Africa each year to recruit exchange visitors—Fulbrighters and the International Visitors program of the U.S. Information Agency in its various iterations ("State CU," "USICA"). He coordinated the Young African Leadership Program (YALP) of Operation Crossroads Africa (OCA), AFGRAD grants from the Agency for International Development, and visitors at the African American Institute and Institute of International Education in New York. At OCA he worked under the inspired leadership of Jerry Vogel, who tells a compelling story himself in these pages.

On a stopover to see me in Denmark in 1987, Bart opened his passport and showed me his South African visa. As an African American he was admitted each year—his very presence a thorn in the side of apartheid—as an "honorary white" for the duration of his visits. The regime was inventive at circumventing its own intricate abnormalities, even as it had been in creating them in the first place.

Bart was an almost–Franciscan seminarian from New Orleans, who had left his training there in the 1970s after three years to work in the secular realm of exchanges with Africa. Two decades later, he called friends to let us know he was returning to the fold. He'd sold his condo on New York City's West End Avenue, packed his belongings into a car, and was heading to a Franciscan monastery in Boston.

He never made it. His death in a car accident on the Taconic Parkway on an August night in 1994 seemed like a "fast track to heaven" for him, or

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so many of us reflected at his funeral in New York later that month. Losing Bart took a large toll on the momentum of the work in South Africa, but others took up the slack: Judith Waite, Ellen Berelson, Jerry Drew, Arlene Jackson, and others.

South Africa captures the affection and fascination of all who experience it. The country remains undefined, unfulfilled, unrevealed. Trouble, promise, and enticement always seem to abound. Crime, HIV/AIDS, and corruption stand at worrisome levels, but so do humor, energy, willingness, and redemption make their indelible marks. "*'n Boer maak 'n plan,*" goes the national refrain. The blunt Afrikaans phrase might be rendered as "Let's just get on with it." Reviled Afrikaners, too, made their contributions to the country's future, and will always remain part of the entity. There is none other like it.

The content from these interviews holds a mirror to South Africa's recent past, present, and future. It also evokes unlikely achievements of bold individuals who did "public diplomacy" before it even had the name. Their tales show U.S. diplomacy at its most effective. Close parallels exist with the work of U.S. embassies in Eastern Europe in the two decades before the dramatic transitions there.

Patient, even plodding efforts, cat-and-mouse games, improved South Africa's human condition by drawing on modest resources combined with rich gray matter and stamina. Pride and honor go to those on the ground who ran these programs during their country's darkest times. They enriched me throughout the project. And they left a monument, herein partly enshrined.

The dates preceding each interview indicate the times I conducted (or began) each interview. The texts here have been somewhat edited and greatly shortened to accommodate the requirements of book form. I leave aside most ellipsis points that strict editing would require. Readers will see the occasional ellipsis, indicating the omission of a whole section of a text, more than just a phrase or single paragraph. I have opted for American spellings ("colored," "program") where I had to choose. The text is otherwise faithful to the original audio recordings.

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