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Leonard Thompson. *A History of South Africa*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000. Pp. 358. Paper \$17.95.

While there is no room for guessing when it comes to the subject matter of renowned historian Leonard Thompson's *History of South Africa*, its brevity may leave one wondering about the actual content. Despite its relative brevity, readers should rest assured that his treatment of the volatile region with its equally unstable past does not gloss over the important details. For a region that appears to have always been immersed in conflict, Thompson's book sheds light on both a history and a region that has been inaccessible to many students/historians in a condensed yet detailed format. Considered to be an expert in the field (developing South African Study programs at both UCLA and Yale), Thompson's third edition includes two new chapters addressing the political transition from apartheid and the new South Africa as led by Mandela and Mbeki.

In an effort to provide a non-Eurocentric history of the region, the book begins thousands of years ago with the native tribal societies rather than in 1652 with the arrival of the Dutch East India Company. Providing this history helps to dispel the misguided notion that South African civilization begins with the arrival of Europeans. Drawing on the research of anthropologists and archaeologists, Thompson explains that describing pre-colonial South African society as primitive is erroneous. Further dispelling this myth, Thompson labels Europeans as "White Invaders" rather than the commonly used term of "white settlers." Consequently, readers find themselves learning of South African regional history from a non-traditional South African perspective. Thompson's history, segmented by era, allows one to see the societal evolution that led to apartheid and its eventual dismantling. The author shows how events such as the Anglo-Boer War impacted the region from a variety of different perspectives. By devoting attention to all members of South Africa's color bar, Thompson provides a thorough examination of major developments. Without overwhelming the reader with an abundance of details, Thompson clearly explains the role of capitalism, mining, labor, and imperialism.

Readers will find a variety of informational tools to illustrate South Africa's history. At the beginning of the book, a chronology offers a quick reference. Also useful are the numerous photos and maps provided alongside a number of tables containing statistical data. These tools coupled with the breadth of Thompson's historical content provide a great starting point into South African studies. The book creates a framework that opens up research into more specific areas. By telling the story of South Africa as South African history and not as an extension of European history, Thompson distinguishes the region as independent from its colonial past.

—*Kelly Rios*

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Yuri Slezkine. *The Jewish Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. Pp. 344. Cloth \$45.00, paper \$18.95.

The qualities that best describe a successful Modern individual—mobility, literacy, occupational flexibility—are equally appropriate in describing the Jewish experience from ancient times to the present; it follows that while Jews have a long tradition of being quintessentially “Modern,” the rest of the Western world has, metaphorically speaking, become increasingly “Jewish.” So argues University of California Berkeley professor Yuri Slezkine in *The Jewish Century*, a work that is as antagonistic as it is compelling.

Though focused on the Diaspora of twentieth century Russian Jews, the book's broad scope is evident in Slezkine's comparison of the “Mercurial Jew” (read: adaptive and enterprising survivor) to various counterparts, from sixteenth-century Parsi moneylenders to nineteenth-century Chinese merchants. Such comparisons help identify and analyze a set of traits and practices that characterize the entrepreneurial “professional strangers” found throughout history. Echoing previous scholarship on Jewish “otherhood,” Slezkine asserts that as occupants of religious and social margins, Jews have often been uniquely positioned to play key roles in the commercial, academic, and artistic development of their “host” nations. This paradoxical symbiosis reached its apex in the nineteenth century, when several nationalistic movements assumed traditionally “Jewish” attitudes in matters of commerce, law, and education while simultaneously restricting Jewish participation in these same fields.