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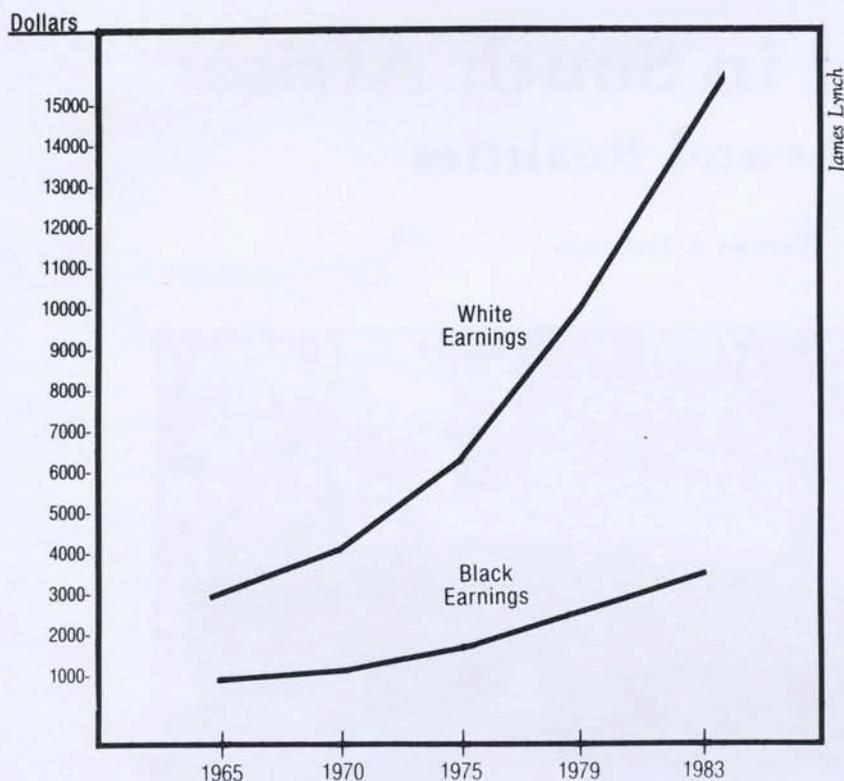
APARTHEID -- the word conjures up a variety of images and emotions as you sit watching the evening news. What is this system? and why are all those people protesting against it, even to the extent of sacrificing their lives? As we watch the unfolding conflict in South Africa, it may be important to examine in some detail the nature of the 'monster' called apartheid. While most writing about South Africa has been accurate,

there do still exist some myths which require carefully reasoned repudiation.

The first of these involves the argument that South Africa is just too complex for Americans to understand -- this is a myth presented in the media through pronouncements by the likes of Pat Buchanan and James Kilpatrick. These writers (and the South African government) wish us to believe that all those different 'groupings' of people require a political solution very

different from a democratic formula. The truth of the matter is that apartheid is simply an ideological system of racial superiority through which a white minority (15%) persists in dominating and exploiting the majority of the population who are then denied even basic human rights.

Another misconception (well-meaning though) is the attempt to frame the South African conflict in "civil rights" terms and to draw extensive analogies



James Lynch

Figure 1
**Manufacturing Average Earnings per Year
 for White and Black Workers
 1965 - 1983**

between South Africa and the situation in the U.S. prior to 1970. While there are clearly some similarities, the civil rights analogy soon breaks down when confronted by the difference in numbers (American blacks account for about 15% of the population) and the real (though often challenged) legal and constitutional protection accorded blacks in America. In South Africa, the conflict is primarily about political power, not about civil rights; opening beaches, restaurants and restrooms to all races is largely irrelevant and avoids the basic issue of the franchise. Under apartheid the majority of South Africa's residents are denied full voting rights. They are constitutionally prevented from participating as equals in the country of their birth and from making decisions that affect them. The struggle in South Africa is, therefore, not about compelling others to live up to a Bill of Rights (nonexistent there), but rather to change or replace the constitution. In this sense we are witnessing a revolutionary struggle as it is occurring in South Africa, more akin to the American Revolution than to the civil rights concerns.

On American campuses, much of the discussion of apartheid concerns the role of U.S. companies which have

investments in South Africa. There are at present about 300 American companies in South Africa, with total investments in the range of \$3 billion. Arguments for divestment (withdrawing American corporate involvement) point out that these companies aid and abet the white government by their provision of capital, technology, and, in the case of General Motors, military vehicles. American companies, by their dominance in strategic sectors (oil, computers, automobiles) help sustain the apartheid regime; without this support, the South African economy would be in worse shape than it is right now. Proponents of American investment maintain that their presence helps black South Africans and that to pull out would only "hurt those we are trying to help." The truth of the matter is that their presence has mostly helped white South Africans. As the accompanying graph (figure 1) indicates, the wage gap between white and black has only widened during the period of increased American investment. Even incorporation of the "Sullivan" principles which favor equal pay scales and facilities for black and white, are doomed to failure because the assumption is still that wage concessions and better toilet facilities will ease the con-

flict.

A familiar contention by those who support the apartheid regime is that blacks in South Africa are better off than people in the rest of Africa. The facts easily reveal this to be a distortion of reality. Perhaps the most tragic indicator of social well-being or "quality of life" is the infant mortality rate -- the number of infants statistically expected to die in the first year of life. Comparative figures (per 1000) are:

- South African Whites: 12
- Rural South African Blacks: 282
- Kenya: 86
- United States: 11
- Mali: 153

The quality of life for black South Africans is substantially lower than for their white counterparts because apartheid prevents them from having access to quality health care. In fact it has been reported that 2.9 million black South African children under the age of fifteen suffer from malnutrition; this in a country which has enormous agricultural and mineral wealth. An additional area where black South Africans rank lowest in Africa is in the cohesion of family life. Through the pass law system, more than three million families have been torn apart. Black women and children are restricted to the barren "homelands" away from the urban areas (figure 2). Black males (officially designated as 'labor units') can only see their families for two weeks per year. If wives and children are caught visiting in the city, they are liable for arrest and a jail sentence. The pass laws represent the greatest indignity of apartheid. It crystallizes the stark inhumanity of a vicious racist policy which has no place in the "civilized" world and which must be removed.

With all the talk of change emanating from South Africa, it is important to examine these much vaunted "changes." In common with many other countries, South Africa uses semantics to win friends and influence enemies. For most of this century the white government has resorted to either name-calling, branding the opposition as a bunch of 'communists' (reminiscent of Dr. Martin Luther King's treatment) or renaming people and groups (as 'Kaffirs,' Natives, Bantu, African, Plurals, Coloureds, and Blacks). The government's intent has been consistent throughout -- to divide and rule the population and to avoid

sharing political power. The same intransigent approach is present today as the Afrikaners (the local name for Dutch-descended whites in South Africa) spend vast sums of money to convince the world that they are 'changing.' Again, their idea of change is far removed from that which is required to bring about social justice in South Africa. The much heralded "abolition" of the pass laws is a case in point where the white regime merely replaces one set of discriminatory laws with another, "softer" sounding one. When pass laws become "planned urbanization" they still serve to demean and destroy. The white regime has been unable to accept the black view that "apartheid cannot be reformed, it must be eliminated." While some in the white group indicate a willingness to desegregate certain beaches and to involve selected blacks in 'consultative and advisory level' talks, black South Africans refuse to accept anything less than the extension of full voting rights to all South Africans. The incompatibility of these solutions is inevitable given the fact that true communication between the groups has not been possible since 1652 when European settlers beat the indigenous population into submis-

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sion. Even today, the Afrikaner government, blinded by its sense of racial superiority, refuses to act in good faith by releasing authentic black leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu and discussing the transition to a democratic and just society. By clinging to power, white South Africa makes inevitable a bloody confrontation. Many studies have shown that psychologically, the Afrikaners realize

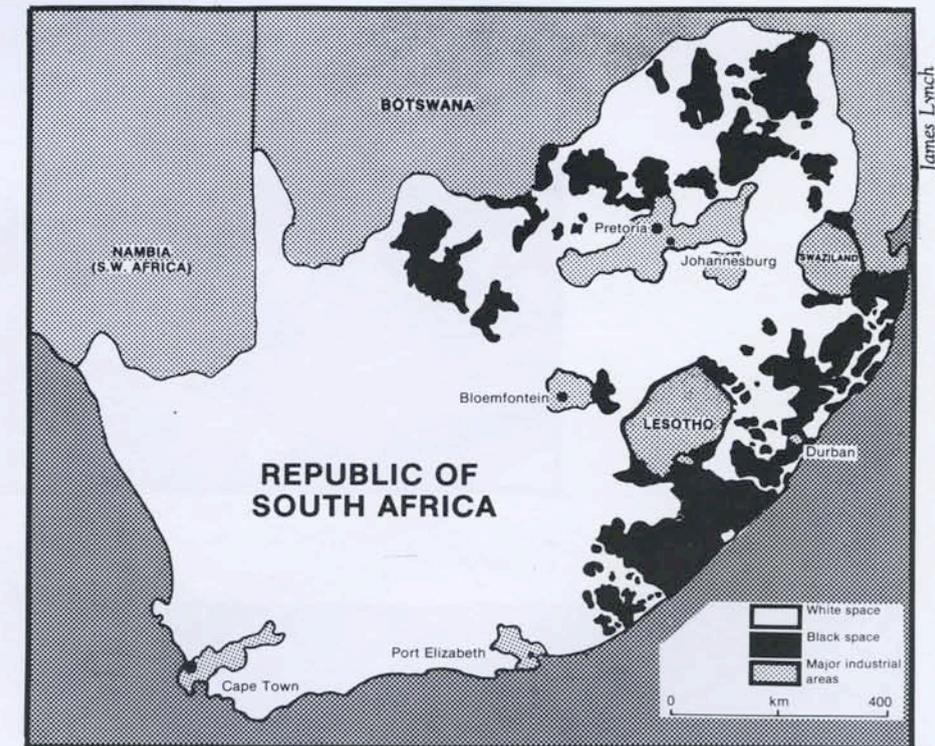


Figure 2

"White" and "African" lands in South Africa, in relation to major industrial areas.

that their monopoly hold on power is fast coming to an end. The watershed probably occurred during 1985 when black South Africans challenged the system as never before. It is clear now that South Africa will be changed in the not too distant future, despite, and maybe even because of the white shift to the right.

But what are Americans to do as these changes occur? The U.S. has a deep interest in South Africa, which is the source of most of its vital strategic minerals -- cobalt, titanium, platinum, and chromium. From the American perspective, these sources should be maintained, not only in the short but especially in the long run. The way to do this is to align much more closely with the majority of South Africans who have time and history on their side. Friendships established at this stage of the struggle will bear fruit when a new government comes into power. Divestment and disinvestment (selling stock in those American companies which operate in South Africa) are essential features of a position on the side of those who are suffering. But divestment is not an end in itself; Americans concerned with social justice and freedom for all, should consider more positive steps which may

include "constructive engagement" with black South Africans and their representative leaders, the African National Congress. The struggle against apartheid is a struggle to remove internal injustices; it is not part of an East-West conflict as the Reagan administration tries so hard to suggest and freedom-loving people everywhere should not hesitate to support a true struggle for liberation and dignity.

Apartheid in South Africa presents the world with a serious moral issue which merits discussion in business, church and academic circles. Americans, because of their own tortuous history of race relations, will always be compelled to consider the implications of racial prejudice and therefore colleges and universities would be remiss if they did not fully participate in analyzing the causes, effects and demise of apartheid. As Martin Luther King reminded us, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

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