Beyond the Boycott: Documenting Apartheid in the Films of Peter Davis and Sharon Sopher

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"Big, beautiful, breathtaking!" exclaimed an advertisement from a 1968 issue of *The Economist*. Africa's greatest nation was, according to the South African Tourist Corporation, "the golden holiday-land" with the "grandest, most inspiring and varied scenery it is possible to imagine." Appealing to the sense of adventure in Western tourists, particularly from Great Britain and the United States, the advertisement promised "vast, natural game reserves teeming with the greatest variety of wild life in the world" while also offering "modern, sophisticated cities full of excitement and bustling with life."[1] Nowhere in the advertisement, however, were the brutalities of apartheid noted. This particular advertisement appeared in a special issue of *The Economist* titled "The Green Bay Tree," an extensive study on South Africa by deputy editor Norman Macrae.

Macrae's article concluded that South Africa was a potent economic force and encouraged further investment into the country from the United States, Great Britain, and other Western nations. South Africa, Macrae believed, was the crucial impetus behind further development in Africa, and the nation was on the cusp of becoming one of the world's premier industrial nations. Thus Macrae recommended that the Western community embrace the nation's potential. But Macrae was also very critical of apartheid. "This plush little white community," Macrae wrote, "must realize that it lives in a country where a great deal of human hardship is being suffered, and it must stop the present terrible trend towards a deadening of national and individual conscience."[2]

Juxtaposed with the alluring advertisements selling tourism in South Africa, Macrae's article stressed a growing concern within the global anti-apartheid movement: the allure of both South Africa's natural beauty and its investment potential. South Africa held appeal not only with businessmen and tourists, but also to American and other foreign artists who were paid handsomely to perform in South Africa. By 1968, a global cultural boycott of South Africa was underway that strongly discouraged travel to South Africa, particularly by the artistic community.

While many artists in the United States and around the world chose to boycott performances and other cultural exchanges in South Africa, some felt that in order to best confront apartheid, they must visit the country. This sentiment was especially true among documentary filmmakers, who, unlike poets, novelists, painters, musicians, and actors, faced difficulties in creating films on South Africa from the outside without relying on mere stock footage. Only a handful of western films concerning South Africa under apartheid had been undertaken before the 1970s, including Michael Scott's *Civilisation on Trial* and Lionel Rogosin's *Come Back, Africa*. Apartheid had made its way to the United States through the film *Last Grave at Dimbaza*, a 1973 documentary

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[1] Advertisement, *The Economist*, 29 June 1968, vi.

[2] Norman Macrae, "The Green Bay Tree," *The Economist*, 29 June 1968, xlvi.

shot secretly in South Africa. The film was produced by South African exile and PAC leader Nana Mahomo and had been smuggled out of the country to West Germany. It won numerous international awards, and played an important role in raising global awareness of apartheid, particularly at American colleges and universities.[3]

One of the most influential filmmakers in the United States to confront apartheid was Peter Davis. Davis was born in 1927 in the United Kingdom and educated at Oxford University before immigrating to the United States, where he was eventually granted citizenship. He won the 1974 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature for *Hearts and Minds*, which explored American military involvement in Vietnam. Davis also won numerous Emmy and Peabody awards for his work with CBS News in the 1970s. Following his work on the Vietnam War, Davis turned his attention to apartheid in South Africa.

Davis became involved in the struggle because he "felt personally offended by apartheid," and believed that he could best "confront it through making documentaries."[4] He felt that South Africa's system of segregation "survived, even flourished, because the apartheid regime had powerful friends," including the governments of the United States and most of Western Europe, and that the responsibility for agitation fell upon the people, particularly those outside of South Africa's self-censored society.[5] Davis recalled that South Africa was only a mild concern in the worlds of television and film in the 1970s, though his first encounter with the country and apartheid had occurred when *60 Minutes* sent him to Swaziland for an exposé on the sex and gambling markets in the country, which included stories of white South African men crossing the border to engage in sexual activities with black Swazi women.

Davis's first film on South Africa was a study of Afrikaner nationalism, titled *South Africa: The White Laager*. It was funded by Swedish Television, the United Nations, and CTV Canada. Davis also tried to secure financing from German and U.S. television, but was unsuccessful. The film explored the history of the Afrikaner race in South Africa in an effort "to understand apartheid we must understand how Afrikaners came to power."[6] The Afrikaner race was widely criticized for its *laager* mentality, which dated back to the Battle of Blood River in 1838, when a small group of Afrikaners, then known as Boers, barricaded themselves amongst a circle of wagon carts and defeated an estimated 10,000 Zulu warriors in battle.[7] The image of the *laager* persisted throughout the apartheid years as the white-minority government faced pressure from both internal and external forces of change, yet refused to embrace progress. Davis used this powerful imagery throughout his film.

Davis traveled to South Africa in 1976 to begin filming on *The White Laager*. He and his film crew had a harrowing experience near the end of their filming, as the group was arrested in the homeland of the Transkei and detained by South African police. "The

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[3] Paul T. Miller, "Review of *Last Grave at Dimbaza*," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 1, no. 8 (June 2007): 129-131.

[4] Peter Davis, "Documenting Apartheid: Thoughts on 30 Years of Looking at South Africa," private collection, provided by the author, 6.

[5] Ibid., 3.

[6] *South Africa: The White Laager*, directed by Peter Davis (New York: Learning Corporation of America, 1977).

[7] Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 91.

authorities became suspicious," Davis recalled, "we never knew why."[8] Davis even had to hurriedly flush the names of South African contacts down the toilet to protect their identities as the police were entering the house where he and his film crew were staying. After being whisked away in the middle of the night, Davis and his film crew were kept in jail overnight. "I had no great concerns about what they would do to us," Davis said, as he knew that foreign journalists were typically detained for three days and then deported.[9]

On 10 June 1976, Davis's Temporary Residence Permit was withdrawn and he was given twenty-four hours to leave South Africa. The Minister of the Interior revoked Davis's permit and warned, "failure to leave the Republic of South Africa as directed will render you liable to prosecution."[10] His entire film crew was also ordered to leave South Africa. Davis ultimately left the country on 16 June, the same day that the Soweto Uprising began. But Davis was pleased to announce that "despite the expulsion order by the Government of South Africa to the film crew – for which no explanation was ever forthcoming – our documentary on the Afrikaners will be ready for release in December 1976."[11]

Davis wrote to *The New York Times Magazine* to query if the publication would be interested in a running story on *The White Laager*, which Davis thought would be timely considering the intensity of the Soweto Uprising. Davis wrote, "the film treatment was written prior to my visit to South Africa, and so lacks the flesh and blood I can now add – my interviews with [André] Brink and [Beyers] Naudé were what got me thrown out of the country, I think."[12] The *Times Magazine* replied, "we prefer to pass on your Afrikaner piece....it is too much of a historical survey and not really a deep probing of the Afrikaner mind today and what made it that way. Sorry."[13]

After finishing *The White Laager*, Davis approached PBS to see if the network would air the film on its stations across the country. David Kuhn of WGBH-Boston did the final editing of the script, and gave Davis a ten-page critique. Kuhn wrote to Davis, "your text is so dense that the overall effect left me quite overwhelmed. I think this [edit] may ease that effect, making it easier for the viewer to stay with you. I hope you will accept these suggestions in the spirit in which they are offered."[14] Davis was astonished at the critiques of the film, particularly since they came as the deaths in Soweto continued to mount. He learned from the experience, "in the United States at the level of those who decide what you are allowed to see on television, apartheid was not seen in...absolutes....there always seemed to me to be a stratum of sympathy for white South Africans that, reluctant as I was to come to that conclusion, could only be explained in terms of racism, however well concealed under the mantle of a 'balanced presentation'."[15] Despite the heavy edits and Davis's concerns over them, PBS agreed to broadcast the film.

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[8] Davis, "Documenting Apartheid," 4.

[9] Ibid., 5.

[10] Secretary for the Interior to Peter Davis, 10 June 1976, folder: 12d, box D, Peter Davis Papers [hereafter cited as Davis Papers], Black Film Center/Archives, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

[11] Note on expulsion order, undated, folder: 12d, box D, Davis Papers.

[12] Peter Davis to Gerald Walker, 19 June 1976, folder: 18d, box D, Davis Papers.

[13] Gerald Walker to Peter Davis, 7 July 1976, folder: 18d, box D, Davis Papers.

[14] David Kuhn to Peter Davis, 13 April 1977, folder: 11d, box D, Davis Papers.

[15] Davis, "Documenting Apartheid," 6.

The White Laager was initially broadcast on 27 May 1977. It received good reviews and repeated broadcasts on PBS throughout the summer and fall. The *New York Times* called the film "illuminating, infuriating and sad."[16] A review in *The History Teacher* stated that Davis "rendered a valuable service" with the production of his film, which was "lauded for its accurate and informative documentation of the Afrikaners."[17] In a letter to Dave Lacey, Davis wrote of *White Laager*'s success. "Good noises," Davis noted, "including indignation from the South African Government. Andrew Young's aides have seen the film…and were very complimentary."[18]

Following *The White Laager*, Davis expressed interested in creating a broad documentary on U.S. relations with South Africa, beginning with Adlai Stevenson's condemnation of apartheid in the United Nations in the 1960s. Davis had 8,000 feet of film and felt "this subject is now ripe for a fuller examination, in the light of Kissinger's meeting with Vorster…and of course other events, including Angola." Davis also recognized that the United States was experiencing "the beginnings of what might just be a strong Black American lobby on [South Africa]."[19] But ultimately Davis moved his attention to the internal struggle in South Africa, a far more risky project.

Davis's next film was to be a study of black South African resistance to white rule. The project was originally titled *Azania*, referring to the name proposed as a replacement for South Africa after the end of white rule by Ghana President Kwame Nkrumah at the All-African Peoples Conference in Accra in 1958. Davis changed the title to the understated *The Resistance* before settling on *Generations of Resistance* to reflect the long history of black resistance to white rule in South Africa. The film would "describe the systematic destruction of African cultures and societies, culminating in the deliberate dismantling, by law, of the very family structure itself – all to serve the purposes of the white man." Davis noted, "the greatest challenge will come with the search for materials inside South Africa itself." He believed that filming in South Africa would "be burdened with massive problems of logistics: the creation of a network of helpers (none of whom may be compromised) to film and research on a substantial scale, and the movement of material in and out of the country. The complexity and delicacy of this essential element of production cannot be overstated."[20] Davis concluded, "inside and outside South Africa, the material will be collected against the vigilance of the South African Bureau of State Security."[21] Despite his concerns, Davis had high aspirations for the film. *Generations of Resistance*, Davis said, "in depicting the black patriots, will trace the line of resistance from earliest times up to the present, it is intended that the documentary will itself prove a unifying tool for all Azanians, as well as winning support and sympathy for their cause."[22]

The film's projected budget was $174,200, $60,000 of which United Nations Film promised to provide. Davis sought $50,000 each from Swedish TV and PBS, but the Corporation for Public Broadcasting refused funding on the grounds of insufficient funds.

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[16] John O'Connor, "TV Weekend," *New York Times*, 27 May 1977, p. 66.

[17] Joel Splansky, review of *South Africa: The White Laager* and *Spear of the Nation*, *The History Teacher* 13, no. 1 (November 1979): 110-113.

[18] Peter Davis to Dave Lacey, 16 June 1977, folder: 13d, box D, Davis Papers.

[19] Peter Davis to David Fanning, 26 August 1976, folder: 18d, box D, Davis Papers.

[20] Draft proposal, *Azania*, undated, folder: 13D, box D, Davis Papers.

[21] Proposal, *Azania: The Problem of Unity*, undated, folder: 14d, box D, Davis Papers.

[22] Draft proposal, *Azania*, undated, folder: 13D, box D, Davis Papers.

Ultimately Davis received funding only from Swedish TV. The filming of *Generations of Resistance* was difficult and more costly than imagined, as Davis "had underestimated the dimensions of the subject, made much more difficult by travel and logistical problems, and lack of communication between the various liberation groups and individuals – even when of the same organization." Davis made an impassioned plea to David Fanning, a friend of his at KOCE-TV in Huntington Beach, California, writing, "I am in urgent need of money, since I have carried the film to a large degree out of my own pocket, and that pocket has now reached its bottom. I am now at the point where I can't continue, but will be forced to look for other work just to support myself. Could you let me know as soon as possible what can be provided – the situation for me is critical."[23]

In the prospectus for the film, Davis noted, "up until now, the history of South Africa has largely been written by those who hold power in that country. This film will be an attempt to interpret history from the other side of the oppressed, a side which has been largely ignored by the outside world." Davis wanted *Generations of Resistance* to be "an instrument for educating people about the true facts of the dispossession of the people of South Africa of the land that is rightfully theirs. To a large extent, the outside world is ignorant of the depth of the African struggle for liberation." Davis proposed chronicling various black resistances to white rule, including the Rand strikes, the Alexandra bus boycotts, the growth of the African National Congress Youth League, the Sharpeville and Pondoland massacres, the rise of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the Durban strikes, and the Soweto Uprising. "Beyond the historical," Davis wrote, "the film will go into the nature of the current struggle, not only on the level of South African politics, but also on the geopolitical level: The reactionary role of the West and its support of white South Africa, which may postpone (but cannot alter) the final outcome." Davis concluded, "we believe that this documentary could itself play an important role in the struggle."[24]

Larry Adelman, co-coordinator of the Southern African Research Center, wrote to Gilbert Lauzon of the Office of Public Information at the United Nations, "you must be proud to be associated with such a film. Reading the script, we were struck by its sensitivity and even-handedness. We eagerly await its release where the need for a film on the subject is great. The film will serve as the long-awaited complement to *Last Grave at Dimbaza*. Our experience suggests that Mr. Davis's film will be of great use to academic as well as civic organizations hoping to raise public awareness and involvement in fighting apartheid."[25]

Davis corresponded with the ANC and PAC in exile to obtain photographs and footage for *Generations of Resistance*. Francis Meli, the ANC's Director of External Publicity in London, wrote to Davis, "we are very happy to learn that you are preparing a film on the history of South African resistance....We think this will be of great assistance to our struggle and will help intensify the campaign for the release of all South African political prisoners."[26] Both organizations were pleased to have a sympathetic portrayal of the struggle and an ally in the international movement against apartheid.

[23] Peter Davis to David Fanning, 24 November 1978, f: 1c, box C, Davis Papers.

[24] Draft proposal, "The Resistance: A documentary film on the history of the black liberation struggle in South Africa," undated, folder: 10c, box C, Davis Papers.

[25] Larry Adelman to Gilbert Lauzon, 23 July 1979, folder: 1c, box C, Davis Papers.

[26] Francis Meli to Peter Davis, 16 February 1979, folder: 1c, box C, Davis Papers.

Filming for *Generations of Resistance* took place in 1978 in Botswana, Tanzania, South Africa, and Zambia. Davis interviewed the ANC in exile but was not allowed to film either their headquarters or members, while the PAC gave Davis full access. Davis also had difficulties getting into South Africa, as after having been banned during the filming for *The White Laager*, Davis and his film crew were forced to enter South Africa clandestinely. Fortunately for Davis, he met David R. Norland, the U.S. ambassador to Botswana , Lesotho, and Swaziland, in Botswana and accompanied the ambassador on a flight into Lesotho, where Davis then entered South Africa via the supposedly independent homeland of the Transkei. "This part was all bravado," Davis recalled, and "we didn't linger long. But I had proved that it could be done, and this would come in useful in the future."[27]

Generations of Resistance chronicled the rise of black resistance to white rule in South Africa, beginning with the Bambata Revolution of 1906. Davis showed that most of the resistance was futile, and that the movement was hindered by a severe lack of leadership following the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960 and the Rivonia Trial of 1963-1964, which sent hundreds of black South African leaders either to exile outside the country or to prison on Robben Island.[28] The film was not as compelling or visceral a film as *The White Laager*, partially due to Davis's difficulties finding financing for the film, as well as increased troubles with the South African government. Davis received another banning order from Minister of Justice Jimmy Kruger on 20 February 1978. Kruger was "satisfied that you [Davis] engage in activism which endanger or are calculated to endanger the maintenance of public order." Besides restricting Davis's movements, the banning order prohibited Davis from preparing, compiling, printing, publishing, or disseminating any publications.[29]

As with *The White Laager*, the response to *Generations of Resistance* was largely positive. The *New York Times* found *Generations of Resistance* to be a powerful film, but felt that Davis had under-editorialized throughout. "His film," the review noted, "is disturbing, and would be even more so if particular points were more patiently explained. Once again, Mr. Davis lets the facts speak for themselves, without going to sufficient pains to make things clear."[30] Another review called the film innovative as an advocacy feature and noted that Davis "clearly demonstrated his mastery of the medium….the resultant film is very moving."[31] *Generations of Resistance* received repeated play on PBS throughout the 1980s.

After completing *Generations of Resistance,* Davis directed several further films on South Africa, including *Winnie Mandela: Under Apartheid*, *In Darkest Hollywood: Cinema and Apartheid*, and *Remember Mandela!* The latter was screened at the 1988 Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, along with Davis's photo exhibition of Nelson Mandela. In 1987 Davis produced a traveling photograph exhibit on Mandela and the ANC that explained "how a man imprisoned for life 25 years ago by South Africa's

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[27] Davis, "Documenting Apartheid," 9.

[28] *Generations of Resistance*, directed by Peter Davis (San Francisco: California Newsreel, 1979).

[29] Banning Order, James Thomas Kruger to Peter Davis, 20 February 1978, folder:13a, box A, Davis Papers.

[30] Janet Maslin, "The Screen: Apartheid, Spanish-American War," *New York Times*, 29 May 1980, p. C16.

[31] Bruce Fetter, review of *Generations of Resistance*, *Journal of African History* 22, no. 1 (1981), 143.

white minority government has grown in stature, both within South Africa and the world, to become the most respected symbol of black resistance to apartheid. Indeed, Mandela's release from prison is seen, in the eyes of many, as South Africa's last remaining hope for peaceful political change." The exhibition opened at the United Nations in October, 1987 and at the Leipzig International Documentary Festival the next month.[32] South African poet, anti-apartheid activist, and exile Dennis Brutus praised Davis's exhibit, writing, "this is a powerful tool for information: I am glad to strongly endorse it – I hope it will be widely seen. I spent time in Robben Island Prison with Nelson Mandela, and worked with him previous to that. This exhibit pays tribute to him and the courageous struggle of the African National Congress for a free South Africa."[33]

The screening of Davis's film and his photo exhibit on Nelson Mandela at the 1988 Democratic National Convention proved not only that apartheid in South Africa had become an important issue in domestic politics, but also that the work of artists had an influence on policymakers. But Davis had negative experiences with television in the United States throughout all of his South African projects, as he believed "that all American networks acquiesced to censorship" in works focusing on South Africa.[34] For several of his later films, including *Remember Mandela!* and *Winnie Mandela*, Davis received neither funding for the film nor television screening in the United States. These slights were blessings to Davis, however, as the films were consequently shown to groups in churches, universities, political organizations, and independent theaters, and the screenings were usually followed by discussion. Davis believed this method to be more effective, as it "was an excellent form of consciousness-raising, and I'm not sure that video is as effective a medium as film was in that regard. It seems to me that video viewing is more of a personal and less of a group activity, and so less politically useful."[35] Ultimately Davis was proud of his work, and was confident that his documentary films on South Africa had an influence in the larger anti-apartheid movement. During a visit to South Africa in the post-apartheid years, a former student activist told Davis that he and his colleagues used *Generations of Resistance* during the student movement of the 1980s in South Africa. Davis recalled, "this was the high-point of all my many visits to South Africa, an indication that one had at last a walk-on part in the great apartheid drama."[36]

Like Peter Davis, journalist and documentary filmmaker Sharon Sopher chose to visit South Africa to confront apartheid in her work. Sopher graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1968 before moving to New York, where she worked for CBS and NBC throughout the 1970s. In 1977, Sopher won an Emmy Award for her reporting on black Muslims in the United States. Sopher's first trip to Africa came in 1976, when NBC sent her to Southern Rhodesia to cover the ongoing civil war between Robert

[32] Press release, "New Traveling Photo Exhibition about South Africa's Nelson Mandela and the ANC," 5 September 1987, Crisfield Films & Video, folder: 12g, Box G, Davis Papers.

[33] Handwritten note, Dennis Brutus to Judea Crisfield, 18 November 1987, folder: 12g, Box G, Davis Papers.

[34] Davis, "Documenting Apartheid," 11. Also see Nesbitt, *Race for Sanctions* and Prexy Nesbitt, *Apartheid in Our Living Rooms: U.S. Foreign Policy and South Africa* (Chicago: Midwest Research, 1986).

[35] Ibid., 14.

[36] Ibid., 1.

Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), and Ian Smith's white minority government.

Sopher's initial trip to Africa had a large influence on her. She recalled, "the people [of southern Africa] were the opposite of everything I'd ever seen on people in Africa, which had been so discriminating. I wanted to put a human face on people, who weren't often presented that way. I believe in media as a tool for social change."[37] Sopher returned to Africa in 1982 to film her first independent documentary, *Blood and Sand: War in the Sahara*, which explored the war between Western Sahara and Morocco and Mauritania. Two years later, Sopher visited South Africa to film *Witness to Apartheid*.[38] Sopher said that Desmond Tutu and Beyers Naudé urged her to film in South Africa instead of creating a documentary from outside. "As a journalist," Sopher commented, "I've had an unusual opportunity to be in South Africa and to witness apartheid in a way many journalists aren't able to do while they're there."[39]

Released in 1986, *Witness to Apartheid* chronicled the abuse of children by the South African government. The film was released in conjunction with *The War Against Children: South Africa's Youngest Victims*, a report from the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights in New York. The report noted that children had moved to the forefront of the growing political turmoil in South Africa, and documented thousands of cases of children being arrested, detained, and tortured. It reported "that such children are routinely assaulted with fists, rifle butts and sjamboks [metal tipped whips]. Others have been subjected to electric shock while undergoing intensive interrogation." *The War Against Children* also criticized the Reagan administration for its "failure to condemn the South Africa's war against children in a manner commensurate with the severity of the current situation."[40]

Through her collection of interviews, Sopher found that eighty-three percent of all children who were detained by the South African government were physically tortured. *Witness to Apartheid* contained shocking footage of interviews with young black South Africans, the large majority of them males, many whom were permanently damaged after being subjected to torture. One of the most appalling stories Sopher examined was that of Johnny Mashiane, a black teenager who was detained and tortured for three weeks by South African police. Sopher showed pictures of a smiling, healthy Mashiane before his detention, followed by an interview with the young man where physical remnants of his torture remained, and it was obvious that his mental state had diminished. "After what they did to me," Mashiane said, "I feel like dying." Mashiane's speech was slurred, his face was battered, and he had a distant, absent look in his brown eyes as he spoke with Sopher.[41]

Sharon Sopher and her film crew faced difficulties from the South African government throughout the filming of *Witness to Apartheid*, as they were arrested,

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[37] Juhie Bhatia, "Producer Turns Lens on Self to Reveal AIDS Growth," *Women's eNews*, 10 October 2004, http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/2010/ [accessed 5 May 2008].

[38] Ibid.

[39] Sharon Sopher, interview by Julie Fredrikse, undated, audiocassette, Julie Fredrikse Collection, UWC-Robben Island Mayibuye Archives, University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa.

[40] Press release, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, undated, folder: Topical – "Witness to Apartheid" (Film) – 1986, box 41, PAC.

[41] *Witness to Apartheid*, directed by Sharon I. Sopher (San Francisco: Southern Africa Media Center, 1986).

detained, and interrogated by South African authorities. They were released because Sopher "was an American and [the South African government] did not want another international incident." For her film, Sopher interviewed several prominent South Africans, including Desmond Tutu, the first black South African Anglican Archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 1984. Tutu said, "the [South African] government has become paranoid. They are really scared that people should know the truth. They are saying you [Westerners] are responsible for the ghastly images seen overseas. I don't know how they think you make up scenes [like these]."[42] Following the film's production and before its release, Tutu praised *Witness to Apartheid*. "I hope so very much," Tutu wrote in an advance press release, "that you who view this film will be filled with revulsion and anger and most importantly, be galvanized into action to help dismantle apartheid and assist in bringing to birth the new South Africa."[43]

Sopher's film received general critical praise, though there were questions about Sopher's objectivity. The *Washington Post* commented that the film could "be faulted for appearing simplistic" and lacking balance, but also noted that "its punch is less in its words, however, than in the riveting strength of its pictures."[44] The *New York Times* also wondered about Sopher's bias, as it noted, "many of the interviews seem designed to get the response that Ms. Sopher wants," but concluded, "the record laid out powerfully here is of heightened protests and tougher crackdowns. No one expressed much hope for reconciliation or accommodation."[45] *Witness to Apartheid* was nominated for the Best Documentary Feature at the 1987 Academy Awards, but lost to Aviva Slesin's *The Ten Year Lunch: The Wit and the Legend of the Algonquin Round Table*. Sopher concluded that ultimately her journey into South Africa had been warranted and necessary for the anti-apartheid movement. "Apartheid doesn't happen just inside South Africa," Sopher said. "It happens outside South Africa. And in a sense apartheid happening outside South Africa in terms of creating support for what goes on inside South Africa is almost more important."[46]

Peter Davis and Sharon Sopher risked much in traveling to South Africa for their art. Both they and their film crews faced the threats of violence and detention from the South African government, though both artists believed such threats were necessary sacrifices and indeed illustrated not only the brutalities of apartheid, but the lengths to which the South African government was willing to go to delay or hinder release of documentaries concerning apartheid. Both Davis and Sopher brought the harsh images of apartheid to the Western world community, helping to embolden the struggle against apartheid in the United States and across the globe.

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Desmond Tutu to Friends, 7 April 1986, folder: Topical – "Witness to Apartheid" (Film) – 1986, box 41, PAC.

[44] Philip Smith, "Images of Apartheid's Violence," *Washington Post*, 8 October 1986, p. D15.

[45] Walter Goodman, "'Witness to Apartheid' And 'Assembly Line," *New York Times*, 18 April 1986, p. C4.

[46] Sharon Sopher, interview by Julie Fredrikse, undated, audiocassette, Julie Fredrikse Collection, UWC-Robben Island Mayibuye Archives, University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa.