

100. PETER DAVIS



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PROGRAM NEWS

Documentary Showcase #128
"South Africa: The White Laager"
One hour
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"SOUTH AFRICA: THE WHITE LAAGER" -- A PROGRAM ABOUT
THE WHITE PEOPLE WHO RULE A BLACK COUNTRY

"South Africa: The White Laager," at
on Channel over PBS, takes a look at apartheid and
white intransigence in South Africa, focusing on the Afrikaaners --
a mixed breed of Dutch, German and French immigrants who were the
country's original White settlers.

For Afrikaaners, the past is a long history of domination by the
English. Their early prosperity was based on enslaving the Blacks of
South Africa, and in 1834, when Britian abolished slavery, 2000
Afrikaaners (also called Boers) fled inland to escape the British --
a move which put them on African tribal lands and into battle with the
Black population there. In one 1838 clash 500 Boers formed a "Laager"
(a circle of covered wagons) and successfully repulsed over 10,000
Zulus. This "Laager" is the central metaphor of the program.

Afrikaaner history reflects a feeling of being embattled and
having no where else to go. Documentarian Peter Davis' film tells
us that Afrikaaners are driven by one all-pervading fear -- having to
undertake one more great trek out of their nation. By doing every-
thing they can to prevent history from repeating itself, they are in fact
reenacting it -- only this time they have cast themselves as the
oppressor and the Blacks as the oppressed.

The Documentary follows the Afrikaners through their struggles against British domination from the abolition of slavery and subsequent retreat into the interior, through war against the Boers by the British who wanted to annex the lands the Boers has settled, through the second World War and the Boer's fear of Black Africans who were pouring into the cities as laborers. The newly formed Nationalist Party ran a campaign in 1948 that called for strict separation of the races and won -- giving the Afrikaner point of view the political strength it has maintained until the present day.

These twenty nine years of Nationalist rule have seen South Africa develop into a nation with the highest prison population in the free world. More than 20,000 books are banned. Poets, writers, teachers and clergymen have been put in jail for opposition to the government. Other repressive measures have been allowed to develop under the Nationalist government -- the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act makes it a crime to advocate racial equality. The South African Minister of Justice can incarcerate anyone he deems to be an enemy of the State, and riots have become a staple of South African life.

As one critic of apartheid is heard to say on the program, "If we were wise enough, we'd look ahead and say, let us work this out together." The Afrikaners are not looking ahead -- only back -- to that Laager.

"South Africa: The White Laager" is a film by Peter Davis produced in association with Swedish Television, United Nations Television and WGBH/Boston. It will be distributed nationally by the Public Broadcasting Service.

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