



UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

Department of Communication

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Office for Film and Broadcasting

FILM AND TELEVISION REVIEWS AND INFORMATION
(TV information for week of May 29-June 4, 1977

#303
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Capsule Movie Reviews: BETWEEN THE LINES; FRATERNITY ROW; THE HOUSE
BY THE LAKE; THE WILD DUCK

TV Reviews: THE LAND (NBC 5/29); SOUTH AFRICA: THE WHITE LAAGER (PBS 5/27)

"SOUTH AFRICA: THE WHITE LAAGER" DEPICTS RACIST REGIME ON PBS, MAY 27th

The Afrikaans word, "laager," means an armed camp and for South Africans conjures up the picture of covered wagons drawn in a circle against hostile attack. It is an image familiar enough to Americans whose heritage, like that of the Afrikaner, is rooted in the pioneer experience. The difference is that for South Africans the image has remained vivid reflecting the state of mind of a people who feel besieged by enemies from without and within. How this came to be is described in SOUTH AFRICA: THE WHITE LAAGER airing Friday, May 27 at 10:00-11:00 p.m. on PBS channels.

Of all the television programs on the unfolding tragedy of South Africa today, this is the only one to take the time to seriously trace its origins in the past. From this perspective, one can see that the South African is a victim of history, a people composed of Dutch, Huguenot, and German stock who displaced the original inhabitants of Africa's coastal tip and were in turn displaced by the British. The Boers, as they called themselves, fled

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inland into the Transvaal on what is known as the Great Trek from which the image of the "laager" derives. When gold and diamonds were discovered in the region, the British again intervened using more than 250,000 troops to crush less than 30,000 Boer guerrillas.

As part of the Commonwealth, South Africa fought on the side of the Allies during the Second World War, interning hundreds of Boers who dissented from an "imperialist" conflict. After the war, these internees organized the National Party, gained power, and fashioned a new kind of state, one which became totally isolated from the world community. Their first acts were to break the economic domination of English ownership and to institute the racist apartheid laws of 1948. Their fortress mentality has been growing ever since but increasingly to outsiders South Africa appears today to be more of a prison than a fort. With a population of 24 million, only 4 million of whom are white, the regime must rule ruthlessly to maintain its control. As harsh as have been government measures against dissidents, opposition continues, especially from Christian groups. When Angola fell in 1975, South Africa found itself completely surrounded by black nationalist states who were united principally by the goal of imposing majority rule in South Africa.

British filmmaker Peter Davis has built his documentary from the visual record of newsreels, South African movies, and his own filming there. Supplementing these visuals and Davis' intelligent commentary are some excellent interviews with representatives of the regime and those who oppose it. The highlight of these is the moral condemnation of South Africa's repressive laws made by Dr. Beyers Neude of the Christian Institute whose organization is dedicated to racial equality and whose very act of talking with a foreign reporter will likely result in official reprisals against him. Davis has succeeded well in giving some sound perspective and insight into the realities behind the headlines about South Africa which have become depressingly familiar to newspaper readers.