

Saving Nelson Mandela: the Rivonia trial and the fate of South Africa (Pivotal Moments in World History) by Kenneth Broun.

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 ***Saving Nelson Mandela: the Rivonia trial and the fate of South Africa (Pivotal Moments in World History) by Kenneth Broun (review)***

Christopher Nicholson

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

Christopher Nicholson (bio)

Kenneth Broun (2012) *Saving Nelson Mandela: the Rivonia trial and the fate of South Africa (Pivotal Moments in World History)*. Minneapolis: Minnesota Press

The eighth century scholar of Charlemagne, Alcuin, spoke of man as the slave of death, a passing wayfarer, a lantern in the wind. It is poignant that this review is being written at a time when the life of ex-President and national icon Nelson Mandela hangs in the balance. This book deals with a trial in which Mandela was an accused and concentrates on the monumental efforts to save him from the gallows. However, that said, an important consideration is the context within which the trial took place.

The work of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche dealt with issues of authority and the imposition thereof. In his last work *The Will to Power*, he postulated the sort of hegemony necessary to govern and suppress. He spoke of the maintenance of the military state as the last means of all of maintaining the great tradition with regard to the supreme type of man. In addition he spoke of policies that perpetuate enmity and difference in rank which may appear sanctioned in this light.

The rule by whites in South Africa until 1990 was achieved through a form of military state with the emphasis on a supreme type of man who claimed the monopoly on status and wealth. This claim was based on race and never brooked any opposition by those Blacks seeking to wrest it from them. That it caused enmity is evidenced by the decades of defiance in the country as the oppressed wrestled for a share in the economic resources of the land.

Claude Helvétius, a French philosopher who lived in the eighteenth century, said that men seek power so as to possess the enjoyments available to the powerful. The enjoyments sought after by the Whites were all those [End Page 122] material benefits that flow from ownership of all the best land, minerals and economic activity. The founder of modern economics, Adam Smith also pointed out the colonial

greed that characterised the 'the masters of mankind'. The white rulers of South Africa saw themselves as the masters of the fates of all citizens in the country and resisted with very real and institutional violence, any attempt to obtain the franchise. From the early twentieth century when an ANC delegation went to England to petition the government to consider giving political rights to the black majority in South Africa, attempts have been made in non-violent fashion to persuade the rulers to give up their power.

History shows that this was all to no avail. The Greeks reckoned that violence was justified to overthrow tyranny. Lenin said much the same in January 1918 when addressing the Third Congress of Soviets. He maintained that not a single question pertaining to the class struggle had ever been settled except by violence. He approved of violence when it was committed by the toiling and exploited masses.

When political activists in South Africa decided to take Lenin's advice, they were dragged before an apartheid court and the judge was faced with the dilemma of what sort of sentence to impose. This compelling book, written by Kenneth Broun, the Henry Brandis Professor Law Emeritus at University of North Carolina School of Law, deals with the Rivonia Trial that took place in South Africa between 1963 and 1964. Ten leaders of the ANC were tried for 221 acts of sabotage designed to overthrow the apartheid state. The trial was named after Rivonia, just outside Johannesburg, where 19 ANC leaders were arrested at Liliesleaf Farm.

The trial was essentially a mechanism through which the apartheid government attempted to silence the ANC who were fighting for the political rights of all. At the time all prosecutions were carried on the instructions of the Minister of Justice. In other words there was no independent prosecuting authority as is firmly entrenched in the new Constitution. The control of prosecutions by politicians has been condemned from many sources. The authoritarian US President George W Bush said on the twentieth anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy on November 6...

Review

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