

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JCB-10: A Look at the
Coloured Community

16 Dan Pienaar Road
Durban, Natal
Republic of South Africa
June 1st, 1962

Mr. Richard Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

There are many interesting parallels between the South African Coloured people and the American Negro. Each is a group today only because colour singles them out for discrimination. They each have developed a culture that has little in common with that of the tribal African. And perhaps their most striking similarity lies in their mutual desire for full citizenship in their respective countries.

However, while the position of the Negro has improved considerably in the last fifteen years, the opposite has been true in South Africa. The Coloured population has not yet reached the point where they have a strong group consciousness, nor do they have the hope of a national government implementing a constitution in which their rights are fully guaranteed.

They lack what other South African racial groups have and that is a distinct cultural identity of their own.

Their culture is that of the White South African, especially the Afrikaner. Even the Cape Malays, who with their Moslem faith are about the most 'foreign' of the Coloureds, speak Afrikaans. Because there is so little difference in culture, light skins have made possible easy entry into the White community. One social worker estimates that in recent years 25,000 have left the Cape to establish White identities in the Transvaal.

White and Coloured communities are intertwined not only culturally but also biologically. There are more than a few instances where families are split between the two groups. The number of Whites with Coloured ancestry is debatable but the number seems significant. When the Population Registration Amendment was proposed, intimating that any descendent of a Coloured person would be classified as "Coloured", an Opposition member remarked, "Except for Dr. Verwoerd, there goes most of Parliament and the entire Cabinet." (Dr. Verwoerd was born in Holland.)

A people with striking dissimilarities

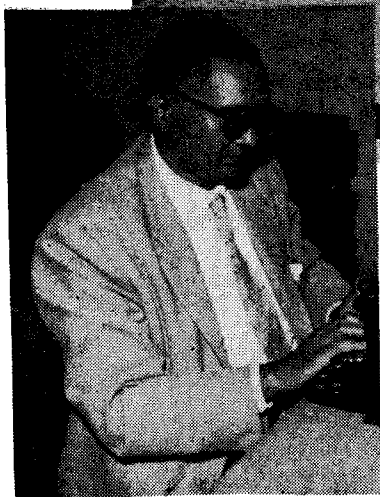
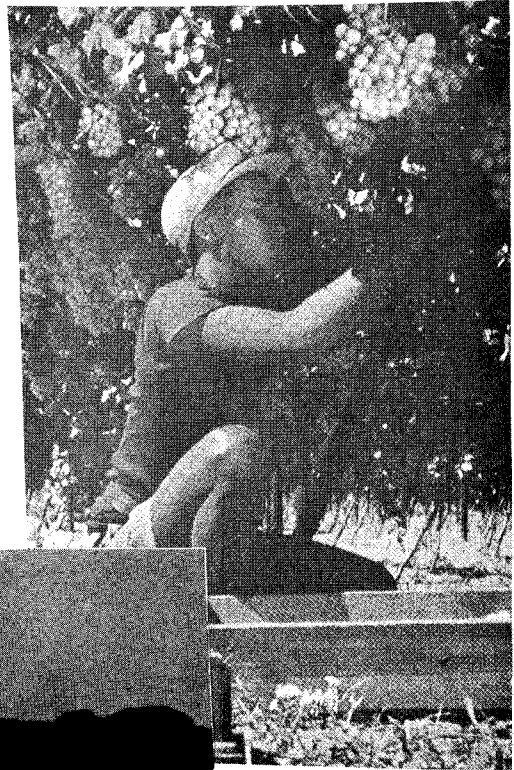
A Coloured leader told me not long ago that there is as much unity among his people as there is among the Whites. This isn't much. Most of the various Coloured groups find more in common with their White counterparts than with people of their own "nation". Coloureds living in the Western Cape speak Afrikaans, those outside that area speak English and a small percentage are bi-lingual. I was told that English is being used more and more, however, perhaps as a reaction against Government policy. The Dutch Reformed Mission Church, long the dominant Coloured religious body, has been losing ground to the Moslems in the Cape along with the Anglicans, Congregationalists and the Churches of the Apostolic Faith Movement. Most of the Natal Coloureds are Roman Catholic.

There is as little common ground between the educated Coloured city dweller and the farm laborer as between the educated urban Negro and the migrant farm worker in the States. The Coloured farm hand, with little opportunity for education or advancement, distrusts those of his race who are too citified or too educated.

In the rural areas Coloured-White relations (often pointed to with pride by Whites to show that good race-relations do exist in South Africa) are on a master-servant basis. Rural Whites consider the Coloureds to be lazy and incompetent but somehow belonging to them; the Coloureds accept this relationship as a kind of security against change and responsibility. Both groups have much in common. The conservative heart of the Nationalist Party lies in the Platteland, the farm area, and the same holds true for the Coloureds. What political consciousness there is in this area is expressed primarily through the Afrikaans Kleuringbond which accepts the Government's racial policies, or the Coloured People's National Union which is willing to cooperate with the Government although it is not wholeheartedly in favor of apartheid.

Coloured people have developed an urban society which is as diverse in thought as in the ranges of its economic positions and educational background. Most are still striving for those jobs which will keep them above the bread line. But there is a growing middle class of educational, professional and business men. Within this group, upon whom the main political burden falls because they are most sensitive to insult and most aware of the consequences, there are all sorts of divisions, many of them caused by prejudice of some kind or other.

On opposite page: Some of the people who make up the Coloured community.



Light skin is judged superior to dark. (Most of the leaders with whom I talked could have passed for White.) White people consider the Cape Malays to be morally superior. This causes bitter feeling among some Coloureds who claim that when a Coloured does something good he is called a Malay while, when a Cape Malay does something bad he just takes off his fez and the rest of the community gets the blame. Cape Coloureds consider themselves to be greatly superior to those who have no historical identity in the Cape. They, in turn, are scorned for what other Coloureds consider to be their superficial pride.

Their educated society supports the Eoan group, young talented Coloureds who provide some of the best musicals and the only good Opera in the Cape. They hope to present to the world through this group the picture of a creative and cultured people in the European sense of the word.

The Coon Carnival, held in the Cape during the New Year holidays each year,



Above: The Eoan Group ballet

Right: Cape Coloureds cavort on the Newlands Rugby Field during Coon Carnival time



is an equally creative endeavor representing a more exclusively South African culture. The marching, singing and sartorial contests that make up the Carnival are planned and performed by Coloureds (often Malays) who work in the more menial jobs in the city. Educated Coloureds worry that the buffoonery and wild costuming will encourage the image of the happy-go-lucky illiterates which Whites have built up over the years. (This objection is reminiscent of Negro leaders twenty years ago who deplored jazz for the same reasons.) Actually the Carnival not only gives the working man his day in the sun; it is probably the most colourful and exciting entertainment that Cape Town sees during the year, and in some ways represents the best in South African folk art.

The worry about images is not completely unfounded. The stereotype that they are dirty, illiterate and lazy has been reinforced by discrimination which limits their opportunities in employment, health and education. Many find it difficult to gain confidence because they are so constantly reminded directly and indirectly of their presumed inferiority.

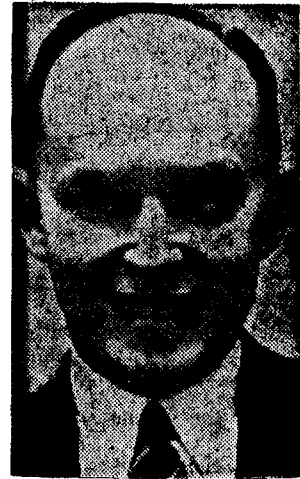
The ugly fear of 'mongrelizing'

The White man's underlying prejudice is based on an irrational fear of miscegenation. This fear is given wide support. A few weeks ago the Afrikaans newspaper, Die Transvaler said it considered the Population Registration Amendment to be "one of the most important measures to counter miscegenation." "There is adequate biological and anthropological proof that race mixture can only have catastrophic results," it concluded.

This view has also been expounded by the new Secretary of the Department of Information and the former South African Ambassador to the United States, Mr. Wentzel du Plessis. He supports his belief in a first page editorial in Bantu by quoting an American tract published by Liberty and Property, Inc., of California which, he says, throws light on "some activities of the Communist Party in spreading subversive and well-financed propaganda on the race problem, the hidden purpose of which is the ultimate production of a single mongrel race of uniformly mediocre mental capacity which can be readily controlled..." It recommends that the only practicable solution to America's race problem is segregation "which could save the American nation from eventual and not too distant racial decay." Mr. du Plessis concludes from this that if differences between people were better understood rather than the propaganda of "Communists and other 'one-worlders'there would then, no doubt be greater understanding of and sympathy for South Africa's answer and solution: Bring together

those who belong together and help those who need it to develop separately according to their own inherent capacities." The implication for South Africans is that thinking Americans agree with him. This has been brought home to me by the number of times it has been quoted to me as authoritative.

Perhaps a Dutch Reformed minister in the Transvaal best reveals the kind of prejudice which has led to a desire for separate development. "The Coloured people," he says, "came into being through miscegenation with the Whites. And as a mongrel race they are, to us, the writing on the wall, a warning against what can happen with inter-mixture. They are Western in their mode of living. They speak our language, sing our songs, live in our country. But they are a people notorious for their moral corruption; lies to them are second nature.



Mr. Wentzel du Plessis
Secretary of the S.A.
Department of Information and former
Ambassador to the
United States.

"They are absolutely unreliable in any matter, have little ambition and get their greatest pleasure from a bottle of wine and debauchery. They have developed into their own nation, a different nation from us, White Afrikaners, and this difference we should uphold as coming from God."

Dr. Richard van der Ross, leader of the Coloured National Convention, has pointed out that, rather than usurping the ways of the Afrikaner, the Coloureds actually preserved and developed Afrikaans before the White South African Dutch took any interest in it. Many of the best-loved of Afrikaner folk songs, "Dar Kom die Alabama" for instance, are creations of the Coloured. In an "Open Letter to the Afrikaner" appearing in the Cape Times, he indicates that many Afrikaners and Coloured people share common names and even ancestors. He recalls that an early and respected Governor of the Cape was the son of a White father and a Coloured mother. "I know many Afrikaners for whom I have the very highest regard in terms of sincerity, intellect and integrity. Why then are you prepared to allow a state of affairs where high walls must be erected between us? Why must we not be allowed to work together, play together, worship together, study together. I know what you will say: But surely this will lead to inter-marriage, to a Coloured nation?

"Let me say that I have known the University of Cape Town for more than 20 years, and studied there for most of that period, but I have not known one case of marriage across the colour line as a result of associations formed there. But even if there were such cases, would this have been so terrible? We often hear your politicians speaking of the natural divisions of types, but are not your farmers experts at cross-breeding stock and grain with excellent results?"

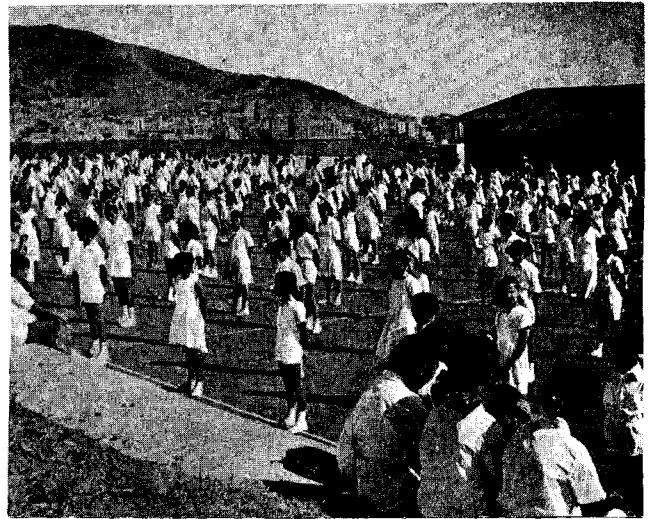
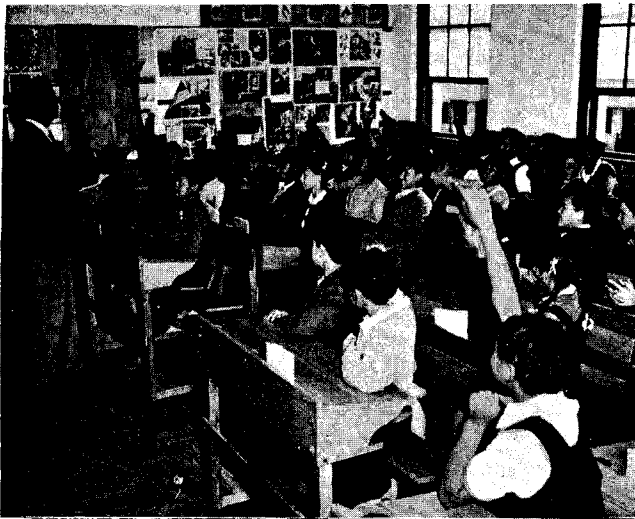
The development of a "national identity"

However that may be, the Government is bent on separating the Coloured people "to enhance their national identity" whether they want it or not. This is being done geographically (in certain prescribed rural and urban areas), occupationally (by defining the kind of work they may do and the industries in which they may do it), economically (by allowing salaries and pensions of Coloured employed to be about 65% of what Whites receive) and educationally.

Today Coloured college students have no choice but to go to the Coloured University College, unless they take a correspondence course offered by the University of South Africa. Much is being spent on new buildings, equipment and a large faculty. However Coloured students, already convinced that an all-Coloured education must be inferior to a White one, deplore the lack of contact with students who come from diverse backgrounds. They look upon the present faculty, made up primarily of White Afrikaners, as too limited in scope and worry that any eventual all-Coloured faculty might be more so. They fear that, as a Coloured University, students and faculty will be too easily cut off from the main streams of thought and the exchange of ideas which stimulate students to think for themselves, to discuss and explore a wide range of ideas.

Coloured children in the primary and secondary grades have attended segregated schools for a long time. There has been no compulsory education for Coloureds. While teachers' salaries have been paid by the Province, most of the schools are directly under the control of various churches, in most cases the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. It is now expected that these schools, like the African ones, will soon be taken over by the Government to be run by the Department for Coloured Affairs.

Nationalists argue that control over these schools will give Coloured teachers opportunity for advancement by eventually replacing most of the White supervisors. It would also give parents more responsibility for their children's education by representation on local school committees and boards. It is



A Coloured classroom in the Cape, and an outdoor display of fitness

implied, of course, that the Coloured people will be asked to take more direct financial responsibility for their schools as was the case in Bantu education.

The greatest restriction already on Coloured education is the inability of most parents to adequately support the schools on their low incomes. A teacher pointed out, "The teacher in a school for Coloured pupils is constantly up against the fact that the children are too poor to provide the essentials." It is possible to get books, uniforms and food for underprivileged children from the Government in some instances, but a good deal of red tape is involved and children often go for several months of the term without books. Also any drop in grades is deemed sufficient reason to discontinue help so that a very conscious pressure accompanies any help of this kind.

Perhaps the greatest fear of any change-over however is that Government-operated schools will covertly indoctrinate the children to accept a White Baaskap society. The very fact of segregated schools, inferior to those of White children, has already conditioned Coloured children to some extent.

How much apartheid?

Increased segregation has produced more unity than had previously been thought possible between the various political groups, although their total number of adherents still equals only a small percentage of the total Coloured population.

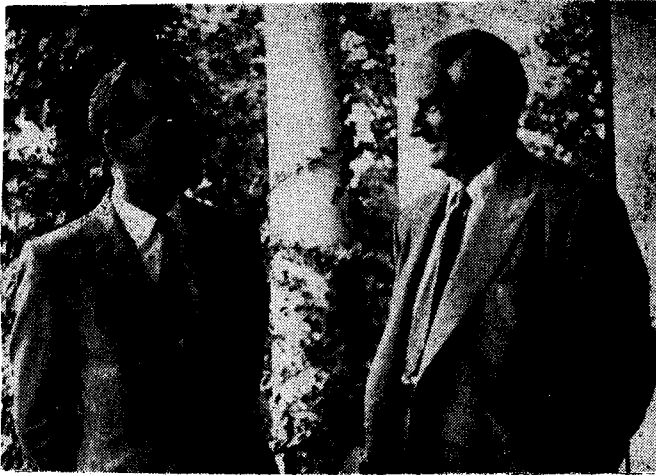
The major outlets for political action range from the conservative Kleuringbond and the Coloured People's National Union, through the moderate Coloured Convention movement, which perhaps is the most broadly-based of the various groups, to such left-wing groups as the Coloured People's Congress and the pro-Communist Non-European Unity Movement. The Liberal and Progressive Parties also have some Coloured members. Today the major division between these groups is "How much apartheid should we accept?" or "Where shall we draw the line between acceptance and protest?"

A small minority see in separate development a hope that the Coloured people can lift themselves as a group and finally attain some kind of stature. An equally small group look toward the day when they will gain their rights under a Black government.

Most have no desire for a group identity but want only to be treated as individuals in a White community. These are divided into those who cooperate with Government policy since there is no other alternative, and those who refuse to cooperate and continually protest. Adam Small, a poet and the only Coloured on the faculty of the Coloured University College, holds the first point of view. He is considered something of a traitor because he is teaching in what is disparagingly called "the Bush College", and students and adults alike attempt to write him off. However, he defends himself by asking, "Who is more wrong - I who accept this situation and try to make the most of a bad thing, or the ones who will use the Coloured entrances and counters and send their children to segregated schools and then refuse to cooperate only with the other policies that separate? If they were consistent they would not obey any of the laws which segregate them; the laws which tell them on what bench to sit as well as those which indicate his college." Those who are criticized answer that they see no sense in protesting everything, but save themselves for those matters which have vital importance for them and where they might possibly have some effect.

Many Coloureds will accept apartheid when it is applied to Indians and Africans - when it separates them from other non-Whites - for this points up their superior position as close to or part of the White Community. (The Government has traded on this leaning more than once.) They oppose segregation only when it separates them from the Whites.

The truth is that, in spite of vigorous discussion and protest against the White actions, the great majority of Coloured people, within and outside of existing political groups, so long for White acceptance that if the Government today gave them any encouragement at all that they might be accepted as even an inferior part of the White world they would be satisfied. They would much prefer White domination to African. With the White



Above: Dr. Richard van der Ross, leader of the National Coloured Convention, with Field Marshal Montgomery during his recent visit.



Right: Mr. George Golding, head of the Coloured People's National Union.

they know and share many things in common; the African is a stranger. And a stranger of whom they feel more than a little jealous. Africans who have been used to having nothing are now to be given independent states. Coloureds who have for so long had a share in the White community and who have lost so much are to be given insignificant municipalities engulfed by White rule, and useless tracts of land which few will have any desire to farm. To them this is the cruelest cut of all.

A White nation for South Africa

However, there is very little hope that the Coloureds will even be allowed near the White fold. The Prime Minister has made it clear that he does not think of Coloureds as part of the nation. They are citizens of South Africa, but he claims a great difference between being a citizen and forming a part of what he considers to be the South African nation. "With the coming of the Republic the possibility exists that the Whites can be formed into one nation," he has said. "The Coloureds and the Indians will always remain separate entities."

The Mother Church of the Coloured Dutch Reformed Church gave its blessing to this statement as far as many Coloureds were concerned when, at its Synod held in Cape Town in November, it decided to reject the liberal race policy of the Cottesloe Conference and to withdraw from the World Council of

Churches. Although there was some opposition to this move, it clearly represented the majority of the members.

Many of these Whites exasperate the Coloureds because they sincerely believe that if the "pin pricks" of apartheid could be removed there would be no problem in race relations. With the best intentions they try to remove them by implementing the apartheid policies as humanely as they know how. It is difficult for the Coloureds to understand why these people can't grasp the fact that the policies themselves, not just the pin-pricks, upset the non-Whites.

"You put a man out of his house or his school or his church. You tell him he has to leave because he is of the 'wrong' colour. Then you assist him by getting a reputable firm of furniture removers to move his stuff. You have a first-aid attendant to see to him when he barks his shins on the lorry. You wave him a friendly goodbye. You go out of your way to be nice to him. But do you really win this man and his family over? No. He has only one reply - 'Why did you put me out?'"

"It is extremely difficult", said another teacher, "to cooperate with people who by their actions show they prefer our room to our company."

Where can they go from here?

Today's Coloured leaders seem to be products of English speaking White Universities, with perhaps some foreign study. They grew up in a period of relatively rich debate and adventurous liberalism when colourful Dr. Abdurahman's African Political Organization was still spurring the exchange of ideas in the Coloured community. For the most part they are teachers or school principals since these professions, along with the ministry, are most readily open to them. Except for George Golding, who may profit from the move, they have a special fear of being under the Department of Coloured Affairs where they will be completely restrained from political activity, thus cutting off the most reasonable-minded leaders and leaving the political field to those who agree with the Government and to Communists or other extremists.

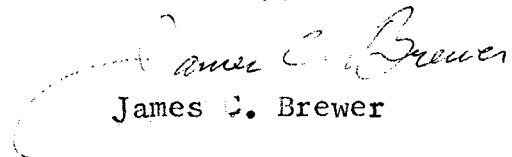
They feel that continued frustration and segregation in education has produced an inertia among today's youth so that it is hard to see where the leaders of tomorrow will come from, or in what direction they will lead. Their fear is that the cutting off of youth's contact with other racial groups, coupled with the squeeze caused by the conflict of White and African interests, will foster racial antagonism in future generations that will be

even harder to combat.

Right now only the intellectual leadership see their rights tied up in any way with the rights of all, Black or White.

But the time may come when the unity which the Government is trying to impose on the Coloureds will backfire into a really unified opposition. And without White acceptance the Coloured has no alternative but to join common cause with the African.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "James C. Brewer". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

James C. Brewer

Pictures courtesy of South African Information Service, Die Burger
Die Banier and the Cape Times.