

Sample Essay #1

Part 2: Foundational Issues

1) True, on the surface, South Africa appeared to be two nations in one. The white citizenry of South Africa was structured like a western society. They enjoyed the trappings of a parliamentary democracy, an independent judiciary, press freedom, and a more educated and affluent citizenry. Meanwhile, the black population of South Africa were viewed as a third-world or developing country, where they were politically and economically disenfranchised, possessed no individual rights or press freedoms, suffered from poverty and malnourishment, and had high illiteracy rates (South Africa Media System, p. 3). Black people could not attain financial mobilization and could only aspire for employment in low-wage industries, such as factory or domestic positions. This method allowed them to contribute to the economy without gaining power. Black South Africans also had to carry travel passes to move around their own country, especially in white neighborhoods. They didn't get the benefits of white privilege and many were forced by the government to geographically relocate to the South Western Township (more popularly known as Soweto) in Johannesburg.

However, the English and Afrikaners faced philosophical disagreements on apartheid, thus challenging the duality of identities. Given their ability to operate under libertarian confinement, the English press saw it as their mission to present an opposing side to apartheid, arguing that it was fundamentally wrong to subjugate people based on the classifications of race. Although this could be seen as a patronizing and paternalistic approach considering that the English press still enjoyed the privileges of apartheid (Olorunnisola). They managed to operate under immense press freedom based on their white status. Nevertheless, this philosophical clashing between the two majority-white ethnicities turned explosive at some points, illustrating the lack of unity between them. In the 1966 crackdown on apartheid foes, eighteen organizations were arrested and detained. This group also consisted of "seven prominent whites, including Dr. Beyers Naude, Director of the Christian Institute, and Donald Woods, editor of the *Daily Dispatch* of East London, who had campaigned editorially for a full-scale probe of Steve Biko's death, were banned" (Hachten, p. 6). Hachten also said that "although more liberal these most, Woods was a well-regarded establishment editor. The banning of a newspaperman if such reputes was unprecedented" (p. 6). These severe measures were taken under the Internal Security Act, in which the majority black-staffed publication *The World*, was also prohibited. Hachten reveals how despite *The World* being considered a black publication, "these successful newspapers were owned and managed by the profitable Argus company" (p. 6). The ownership of black opposition publications by the English press, exemplified their disapproval of apartheid.

Other English-language opposition papers include the *Rand Daily Mail* the *Sunday Express*, who revealed an elaborate scheme regarding English newspapers known as Muldergate in 1978. The scheme involved a network of secret and illegal expenditures of government funds to gain allies and punish enemies of South Africa domestically and internationally. According to Hachten, the "opposition press took a special interest in those directed at the National party's particular 'enemy' - the English-language press" (p. 7). The *Rand Daily Mail* for example, was an outspoken critic to the oppression of apartheid and demonstrated "aggressive reporting of the black community and the inequities it suffers" (Hachten, p.

18). The government wanted to build Afrikaner self-confidence by secretly kickstarting pro government newspapers such as *The Citizen*, which would be in direct competition with the *Rand Daily Mail* as an influential publication. The Citizen was meant to “provide something the National Party never had before: editorial support in an English language newspaper” (p. 7). According to Olorunnisola, English is the first language of business and instruction in South Africa, making it popular among various ethnic communities, including black people. The government figured that if it had at least one English-speaking newspaper actively supporting the apartheid regime, it would demoralize black South Africans who believed that the English press is a strong vocal ally against the evil nature of apartheid.

The roots of dissension in the white community further dismantle the idea of a two-nation system. There were even conflicting opinions amongst the English press. *The Mail's* staunch criticism and anti-apartheid radicalism are often cited “as a primary reason for [its] financial problems. A good many white readers (and advertisers) do not particularly enjoy reading about such unpleasant realities” (Hachten, p. 18). This English newspaper ultimately fired its editor and tried to replace its liberal editorial line with a more conservative one to appeal to white readers, who still prefer to place their own political and survival first amidst a monopoly of power and affluence. Hachten put it best when he stated that South African newspapers “have been identified with one or other of the dominant white language groups, with their very different cultures, political philosophies, and economic interests. They have reflected, and been a part of, the struggle for power between these groups” (p. 21). These examples demonstrate the complexities of South Africa, and how the multiethnic nation shouldn't be simplified as a mere “two nations in one.”

3) True, media laws and decrees, freedom of expression and of the press drastically declined for Black South Africans and eventually White South Africans. For instance, in 1982, the Steyn Commission submitted a report to Parliament, recommending proposals on further restricting the opposition press. One of the proposals included a register for journalists, similar to a licensing system for medical professionals. According to Hachten, “many journalists regarded the register as another Botha proposal to tame or control the press without actually placing government censor in every newspaper office. Even Afrikaans newspapers had opposed the register” (p. 19). Despite opposition from both the Afrikaans and English press, the Nationalist party powered through with the Registration of Newspapers Amendment Act, which stated that “the minister of internal affairs may cancel the registration of any newspapers if the publishers of such newspapers do not subject themselves for disciplinary purposes to a body concerned with journalistic standards” (Hachten, p. 19). Newspapers agreed to further regulate themselves and relinquish a little more of their freedom in the presence of stricter laws and additional government scrutiny. The press freedom the English press enjoyed was slowly evaporating, even the Afrikaans press was slowly looking at a more authoritarian regime.

Concerns about black political expression also carried over into the Publications Act of 1974 and its predecessor the Publication and Entertainments Act of 1973, which “provide an elaborate mechanism for censorship of virtually all expression except for the thirty or so daily and Sunday newspapers and eighty-eight other periodicals belonging to the Newspaper Press Union” (Hachten, p. 16). This was meant to ruthlessly restrain the political expression of black and university students, whose opinions were seen as a form of insubordination. These restrictions spilled over into white society, in which the government began receiving pressures from the educated white class to provide less censorship of books and movies.

According to Hachten, “the threat of censorship led to self-censorship” (p. 17). Newspaper publishers and editors from all racial spectrums were censoring themselves to placate the National party and avoid crippling sanctions, although by doing this, they were relinquishing their freedoms to appease National party critics in an effort to stay in business. Working journalists even questioned the role of the Press Council, saying its purpose is meant for “self-regulation, not self-censorship” (Hachten, p. 17). The chilling of speech was again formed by a series of crippling blows by the government on *The Post* and *The Sunday Post*, which were “the only two black newspapers in the country with significant daily and weekly circulations” (Hachten p. 14). Owned by the Argus company, they were suspended from publication and officers served banning owners on prominent black journalists and members of the black journalists’ trade union. Considering that the paper was out of commission for two months due to a strike, when they finally reached an agreement, the government said its license had lapsed due to their two-month absence. Argus insisted on completing a reregistration application, but the government threatened to ban the papers under the Internal Security Act, which could not be appealed (Hachten, p. 14-15). The subsequent banning as Argus company chief, Hal Miller put it is “another bard [that] has been added to the cage which is beginning to circumscribe our freedom” (Hachten, p. 15). South Africans across all racial spectrums were shocked and angry at this event. “David Dalling, a Progressive Federal party spokesman, was blunt: ‘The banning is a fascist step that is brining the revolution nearer.’ Even the Afrikaans press joined in the worldwide outcry. Editorials in both *Die Transvaler* and *Beeld* questioned the necessity of closing the papers, and *Die Transvaler* said the banning of the journalists smacked of arbitrary action against individual freedom” (Hachten, p. 15).

These government restrictions caused a decline in meaningful dialogue for all South Africans, including those who enjoyed press freedom in a relatively libertarian model. As the fear and paranoia grew to limit black dissent and expression, so did the need to censor and suppress oppositional newspapers. The fact that authoritarian tactics used to stifle the black press also spilled over into the English and Afrikaner press, shows how three press subsystems can ultimately overlap to form in South Africa’s case, one totalitarian regime. After a certain point, no group was immune to the National Party criticisms and restraints, especially when it came to the press.

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