

Men are not born brothers; they have to discover each other, and it is this discovery that apartheid seeks to prevent.

What is apartheid?

It depends who's answering. If you ask a member of the South African government, he will tell you that it is separate and parallel development of white and black. If you ask an ordinary white man who supports the policy, he will tell you that it is the means of keeping South Africa white. If you ask a black man ... well, he may give you any of a dozen answers arising out of whatever aspect of apartheid he has been brought up short against that day, for to him it is neither an ideological concept nor a policy, but a context in which his whole life, learning, working, loving, is rigidly enclosed. He could give you a list of the laws that restrict him from aspiring to most of the aims of any civilised person, or enjoying the pleasures that everyone else takes for granted. But it is unlikely that he will. What may be on his mind at the moment is the problem of how to save his bright child from the watered down 'Bantu Education' which is now being substituted for standard education in schools for black children. Or perhaps you've merely caught him on the morning after he's spent a night in the police cells because he was out after curfew hours without a piece of paper bearing a white man's signature permitting him to do so. Perhaps (if he's a man who cares for such things) he's feeling resentful because there's a concert in town he'd not be permitted to attend, or (if he's the kind of man who isn't) he's irked at having to pay a black market price for a bottle of brandy he's debarred from buying legitimately. That's apartheid, to him.

All these things, big and little, and many more.

If you want to know how Africans-black men and women-live in South Africa, you will get in return for your curiosity an exposition of apartheid in action, for in all of a black man's life, all his life, rejection by the white man has the last word. With this word of rejection apartheid began, long before it hardened into laws and legislation, long before it became a theory of racial selectiveness and the policy of a government. The Afrikaner Nationalists did not invent it, they merely developed it, and the impulse of Cain from which they worked was and is present in many white South Africans, English-speaking as well as Afrikaner.

Shall I forget that when I was a child I was taught that I must never use a cup from which our servant had drunk?

I live in the white city of Johannesburg, the biggest city in South Africa. Around the white city, particularly to the west and north, is another city, black Johannesburg. This clear picture of black and white is blurred only a little at the edges by the presence of small Coloured (mixed blood) and Indian communities, also segregated, both from each other and the rest. You will see Africans in every house in the white city, of course, for every house has its servants' quarters, built not less than a certain minimum regulation distance from the white house. Sophisticated Africans call this backyard life 'living dogsmeat'- closer to the kennel and the outhouses than to the humans in the house. But no black man has his *home* in the white city; neither wealth nor honour or distinction of any kind could entitle him to move into a house in the street where I or any other white persons live. So it easily happens that thousands of white people live their whole lives without ever exchanging a word with a black man who is like themselves, on their own social and cultural level; and for them, the whole African people is composed of servants and the great army of "boys" who cart away or deliver things-the butcher's boy, the grocer's boy, the milk boy, the dust boy. On the basis of this experience, you will see that it is simple for white men and women to deduct that the black men and women are an inferior race. Out of this experience all the platitudes of apartheid sound endlessly, like the bogus sea from the convolutions of a big shell: *they're like children . . . they don't think the way we do . . . they're not ready ...*

Black men do all the physical labour in our country, because no white man wants to dig a road or load a truck. But for every kind of work a white man *wants* to do, there are sanctions and job reservations to shut the black man out. In the building trade; and in industry, the Africans are the unskilled and semi-skilled workers, and they cannot, by law, become anything else. They cannot serve behind the counters in the shops, and cannot be employed alongside white clerks. Wherever they work, they cannot share the washrooms or the canteens of the white workers. But they may buy in the shops. Oh yes, once the counter is between the black customer and the white shopkeeper, the hollow murmur of the apartheid shell is silenced they *are* ready, indeed, to provide a splendid market, they *do* think enough like white people to want most of the things that white people want, from LP recordings to no-iron shirts. The real life of any community-restaurants,

bars, hotels, clubs, and coffee bars-has no place for the African man or woman. They serve in all these, but they cannot come in and sit down. Art galleries, cinemas, theatres, golf courses, and sports clubs, even the libraries are closed to them. In the post offices and all other government offices, they are served at segregated counters.

What it means to live like this, from the day you are born until the day you die, I cannot tell you. No white person can. I think I know the lives of my African friends, but time and time again I find that I have assumed, since it was so ordinary a part of average experience, the knowledge in them of some commonplace experience that, in fact, they could never have had. How am I to remember that Danny, who is writing his Ph.D. thesis on industrial psychology, has never seen the inside of a museum? How am I to remember that John, who is a journalist on a lively newspaper, can never hope to see the film I am urging him not to miss, since the township cinemas are doubly censored and do not show what one might call adult films? How am I to remember that Alice's charming children, playing with my child's toy elephant, will never be able to ride on the elephant in the Johannesburg Zoo?

The humblest labourer will find his life the meaner for being black. If he were a white man, at least there would be no ceiling to his children's ambitions. But it is in the educated man that want and need stand highest on the wrong side of the colour bar. Whatever he achieves as a man of learning, *as a man* he still has as little say in the community as a child or a lunatic. Outside the gates of the university (soon he may not be able to enter them at all; the two 'open' universities are threatened by legislation that will close them to all who are not white) white men will hail him as 'boy'. When the first African advocate was called to the Johannesburg Bar, just over a year ago, government officials raised objections to his robing and disrobing in the same chamber as the white advocates. His colleagues accepted him as a man of the law; but the laws of apartheid saw him only as a black man. Neither by genius nor cunning, by sainthood or thuggery, is there a way in which a black man can • earn the right to be regarded as any other man.

Of course, the Africans have made some sort of life of their own. It's a slum life, a make-do life, because, although I speak of black cities outside white cities, these black cities are no Harlems. They are bleak rectangular patterns of glum municipal housing, or great smoky proliferations of crazy,

chipped brick and tin huts, with a few street-lights and few shops. The life there is robust, ribald, and candid. All human exchange of the extrovert sort flourishes; standing in a wretched alley, you feel the exciting blast of a great vitality. Here and there, in small rooms where a candle makes big shadows, there is good talk. It is attractive, especially if you are white; but it is also sad, bleak, and terrible. It may not be a bad thing to be a Sophiatown Villon; but it is tragic if you can never be anything else. The penny whistle is a charming piece of musical ingenuity; •but it should not always be necessary for a man to make his music out of nothing.

Some Africans are born, into their segregated townships, light enough to pass as Coloured. They play Coloured for the few privileges-better jobs, better housing, more freedom of movement-that this brings, for the nearer you can get to being white, the less restricted your life is. Some Coloureds are born, into their segregated townships, light enough to pass as white. A fair skin is the equivalent of a golden spoon in the child's mouth; in other countries coloured people may be tempted to play white for social reasons, but in South Africa a pale face and straight hair can gain the basic things-a good school, acceptance instead of rejection all the way along the line. It is the ambition of many coloured parents to have a child light enough to cross the colour bar and live the precarious life of pretending to be white; their only fear is that the subterfuge will be discovered. But, the other night, I was made aware of a different sort of fear and a new twist to the old game of play-white. An Indian acquaintance confessed to me that he was uneasy because his thirteen-year-old son has turned out to have the sort of face and complexion that could pass for white. 'He's only got to slip into a white cinema or somewhere, just once, for the fun of it. The next thing my wife and I know he'll be starting to play white. Once they've tried what it's like to be a white man, how are you to stop them? Then it's the lies, and not wanting to know their own families, and misery all round. That's one of the reasons why I want to leave South Africa, so my kids won't want to grow up to be something they're not.'

I've talked about the wrong side of the colour bar, but the truth is that both are the wrong sides. Do not think that we, on the white side of privilege, are the people we might be in a society that had no sides at all. We do not suffer, but we are coarsened. Even to continue to live here is to acquiesce in some measure to apartheid-to a sealing-off of responses, the cauterisation of the human heart, as well as to withholding the vote from those who

outnumber us, eight to one. Our children grow up accepting as part of natural phenomena the fact that they are well-clothed and well-fed, while black children are ragged and skinny. It cannot occur to the white child that the black one has any rights outside of charity; you must explain to your child, if you have the mind to, that men have decided this, that the white shall have, and the black shall have not, and it is not an immutable law, like the rising of the sun in the morning. Even then it is not possible entirely to counter with facts an emotional climate of privilege. We have the better part of everything; how difficult it is for us not to feel, somewhere secretly, that we *are* better?

Hundreds of thousands of white South Africans are concerned only with holding on to white privilege. They believe that they would rather die holding on to it than give up the smallest part; and I believe they would. They cannot imagine a life that would be neither their life, nor the black man's life, but another life altogether. How can they imagine freedom, who for years have had to be so vigilant to keep it only to themselves? No one of us, black or white, can promise them that black domination will not be the alternative to white domination, and black revenge the long if not the last answer to all that the whites have done to the blacks. For such is apartheid that, like many whites, many blacks cannot imagine a life that would be neither a black man's life or a white man's life.

Those white South Africans who want to let go--leave hold--are either afraid of having held on too long, or are disgusted and ashamed to go on living as we do. These last have become colour-blind, perhaps by one of those freaks by which desperate nature hits upon a new species. They want another life altogether, in South Africa. They want people of all colours to use the same doors, share the same learning, and give and take the same respect from each other. They don't care if the government that guarantees these things is white or black. A few of these people go so far as to go to prison, in the name of one political cause or another, in attempts that they believe will help to bring about this sort of life. The rest make, in one degree or another, an effort to live, within an apartheid community, the decent life that apartheid prohibits.

Of course, I know that no African attaches much importance to what apartheid does to the white man, and no-one could blame him for this. What does it signify that your sense of justice is outraged, your conscience

troubled, and your friendships restricted by the colour bar? All very commendable that your finer feelings are affronted—he's the one who gets it in the solar plexus. All this lies heavily, mostly unspoken, between black and white friends. My own friends among black men and women are people I happen to like, my kind of people, whose friendship I am not prepared to forego because of some racial theory that I find meaningless and absurd. Like that of many others, my opposition to apartheid is compounded not only out of a sense of justice, but also out of a personal, selfish, and extreme distaste for having the choice of my friends dictated to me, and the range of human intercourse proscribed for me. I am aware that, because of this, I sometimes expect African friends to take lightly, in the ordinary course of friendship, risks that simply are not worth it, to them, who have so many more basic things to risk themselves for. I remember a day last year when some African friends and I went to the airport to see off a close friend of us all. I had brought a picnic lunch with me, and so had Alice, my friend, for we knew that we shouldn't be able to lunch together in the airport restaurant. What we hadn't realised was that we shouldn't be allowed to sit outside on the grass together and eat, either; "non-Europeans" were not supposed to be admitted to the lawns. I wanted to brazen it out, sit there until we were ordered off into segregation; it was easy for me, I am white and not sensitised by daily humiliations. But Alice, who has to find words to explain to her children why they cannot ride the elephant at the zoo, did not want to seek the sort of rebuff that comes to her all the time, unsought.

Black and white get to know each other in spite of and under the strain of a dozen illegalities. We can never meet in town, for there is nowhere we can sit and talk together. The legal position about receiving African guests in a white house is unclear; we do have our friends in our houses, of course, but there is always the risk that a neighbour may trump up a complaint, to which the police would always be sympathetic. When you offer an African guest a drink, you break the law unequivocally; the exchange of a glass of beer between your hands and his could land you both in the police court on a serious charge. Officially, you are not supposed to enter an African 'location' without a permit, and when we go to visit friends in a black township we take the chance of being stopped by the police, who are looking for gangsters or caches of liquor, but will do their duty to apartheid on the side. Three days ago I was one of a small group of whites who had to get up and leave the table at the wedding reception of an African medical student; a white official of the gold-mining company for whom the bride's father

worked, and on whose property his house was, drove up to inform us that our invitations to the wedding were not sufficient to authorise our presence in living quarters provided for Africans.

No friendship between black and white is free of these things. It is hard to keep any relationship both clandestine and natural. No matter how warm the pleasure in each other's company, how deep and comfortable the understanding, there are moments of failure created by resentment of white privilege, on the one side, and guilt about white privilege on the other.

*Another life altogether.*

Put the shell to your ear and hear the old warning: Do you want to be overrun by blacks?

I bump an African's scooter while parking, and before he and I have a chance to apologise or accuse, there's a white man at my side ready to swear that I'm in the right, and there are three black men at his side ready to swear that he is in the right.

*Another life altogether.*

Put the shell to your ear and hear the old warning: Are you prepared to see white standards destroyed?

A friend of mine, a dignified and responsible African politician and an old man, is beaten up by white intruders while addressing a meeting of dignified and responsible white people.

Living apart, black and white are destroying themselves morally in the effort. Living together, it is just possible that we might survive white domination, black domination, and all the other guises that hide us from each other, and discover ourselves to be identically human. The least we could all count on would be the recognition that we have no more and no less reason to fear each other than other men have.

*-Africa Seminar Washington, D.C., 1959*