



## Students Must Rise

### Struggle in South Africa Before and Beyond Soweto '76

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**S**tudents Must Rise was written to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1976 Soweto uprising. Reading it in 2016, with a new education crisis in our universities, can induce a sense of *déjà vu*. My own grasp of the “then” and the “now”, which are often compared, has been a little bit fuzzy. This book’s sometimes bracing, sometimes intimate, personal accounts give the reader a sense that this is a 40-year (or even 60-year) tale without the final chapter that more conventional historical accounts might offer. I was no longer left questioning what is strictly new in the events of 2016, and far more aware of the differences.

It begins with a classical dialectical premise: the proliferation of black schools – intended to ensure a steady

stream of black labour for the white supremacist regime – effectively opened up the necessary space for resistance. The themes present the necessary complexity of the resistance that pervaded South African political, social and cultural life and built an important bridge between urban- and rural-based politics. This is something we do not attend to today, with the relentless focus on historically elite institutions. I also appreciated the details of the relative “unknowns”, the non-brand-name everyday heroes who, in their own important ways, fought to bring down a crumbling order. The authors bring commendable balance to a skewed historical narrative. Certainly, there can only be a healthy appreciation for the skill of the research and writing here

that allows the book to jump between the general and the detailed aspects of the time.

This work does quite a lot to highlight the importance of Black Consciousness and Pan-Africanism, perhaps to draw connections between the past and present. The small mention of non-racialism with reference to the significant role of the United Democratic Front (UDF) is a sign of our times, where identity shapes the weave of history. This is the only criticism I have of the book. The contemporary thesis of “intersectionality” sees capitalism alongside racism, sexism, ableism and heteronormativity, as opposed to a system of exploitation and expropriation. This is a significant development in left politics. [NA](#)