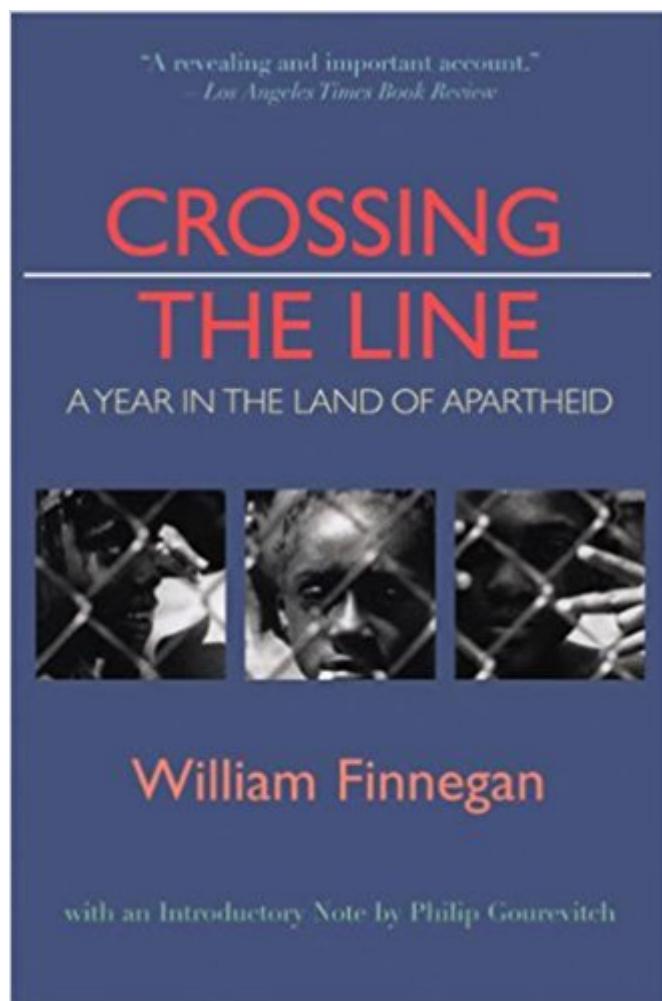


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Crossing The Line: A Year In The Land Of Apartheid



Synopsis

The award-winning debut by the acclaimed author of *Cold New World*. Named by The New York Times Book Review as a top ten nonfiction book of 1986, this seminal piece of cross-cultural journalism is an account of a white American's experience teaching black students in South Africa; an account essential for its incisive coverage of the student anti-apartheid movement, as well as for the unpretentious charms of its prose.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In one of the best recent books on South Africa, an American vividly recalls his experiences as a white teacher of black students near Cape Town and intersperses more detached descriptions of what was going on under apartheid. Finnegan wanted attentive, disciplined students at the same time that he encouraged in them a radical skepticism, a critical, independent habit of mind, a combative approach to all forms of vested authority. He tried to counsel his students to aim high and work hard, and he often met with hostility. Within that one year, he became acutely aware of how rapidly they were becoming more active in boycotts and protests and forming an essential element of a growing revolutionary movement. He shows how the Afrikaners' hatred for African children has led to bloody massacres and how their fear is an unspoken, unconscious recognition that communal violence is retribution for the countless blacks killed and maimed over the years. A final section describing Finnegan's long hitch-hiking trip with a bitter, white-hating, 18-year-old black woman beautifully shows the apartheid situation in microcosm. Copyright 1986 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Young Americans could find no better introduction to South Africa than this captivating memoir: the education of William Finnegan, a highly articulate and thoughtful California surfer who taught for a year at a Coloured high school outside Cape Town and hitchhiked around the country. Remarkably, there also emerges an account of the 1980 school boycotts and the complexities of black thinking about resistance that makes the book an original work of value to the academic specialist."--"Foreign Affairs

William Finnegan, an American, has authored an utterly absorbing look at life - particularly black life - in Apartheid-era South Africa. As an American intimately familiar with the political culture of that troubled country, it and the resistance it engendered is an ongoing source of wonder that the South Africa of 2007 could have emerged as a "light unto the world" given the violence, racism and depravity of its first three centuries of history. When this volume was written, Nelson Mandela was a Robben Island prisoner, P.W. Botha was president of the world's preeminent para-fascist and unashamedly racist state, and black aspirations toward freedom, equality and dignity were answered with the bullet, the bullwhip and the hangman's noose. "Crossing the Line" provides important and compelling insights: the sights, smells and sounds of everyday life in the face of oppression that can only be labelled monstrous, the unimaginable courage of the people - particularly the children - that fought it, and the desperate, despicable character of those who sought to keep in place a system whose evil and efficiency have only been rivaled by the likes of the Third Reich. Finnegan's account of life in a "coloured" suburb of Capetown is sensitive and poignant. The reader is drawn into his wonderfully textured account of some essential elements of life in apartheid South Africa. I would unhesitatingly recommend this book to any American who seeks to understand what precisely apartheid was and how it functioned, particularly to students (Finnegan chronicles in detail his year of teaching in a Capetown "coloured" high school) interested in world affairs, current events, civil rights, and the use and limitations of civil disobedience. It is a brilliantly uplifting and powerful story, offering the reader a textured account of the indomitability of the human spirit.

I read this book about fifteen years ago and even after all these years, the power of the words and images has stayed with me. It is an amazing story and provides important and compelling insights. It gives the reader a true sense of being there -- in South Africa -- under apartheid. Reading this book truly changed my life. I was 15 when I read it and it enabled me to fully understand the issues and challenges that people all over the world face. I would recommend it to high school students

interested in world affairs, current events, history, civil rights, African history, or civil disobedience. I would recommend it to the college student and the adult. I think it is a must-read. It is a moving, uplifting, powerful story. It is an example of how the human spirit can overcome all. Enjoy!

Finnegan's discovery of life in Cape Flats, S.A. is poignant and thoughtful. As the reader, you are drawn into his understanding as he captures some essential elements of life in apartheid South Africa. The rampant racism, segregation and human misery contrasts remarkably with the "other side of the tracks." I teach African studies in high school and have always used this novel to bring to life the educational system of the old South Africa and the disparities that persist there. Finnegan's thoughtful, caring concern for his students becomes evident in his approach to his writing...in the care he takes to bring Cape Town & Flats to the reader. Wonderful book!

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