

A Dry White Season

Director: Elzhan Palcy
1989 (107')



Ben du Toit (Sutherland) is a white history teacher who lives comfortably with his family in Johannesburg. His tranquil life is unscathed by the Soweto uprising in the summer of 1976 when South African police murder black schoolchildren during a peaceful demonstration. Then Gordon, his gardener for 15 years, asks him to help locate his young son who disappeared following the demonstration. Then Gordon disappears.

Based on the novel by André Brink, *A Dry White Season* imagines the challenges and consequences facing those who dare question the prevailing system. Is it better to close your eyes and enjoy the benefits that the system offers or challenge the system for the injustices that bring those benefits?

Vocabulary and expressions:

Baba: Respectful term used to father figure.

Baasie: Form of address blacks sometimes felt compelled to use when speaking to whites.

Townships: During the Apartheid Era blacks were evicted from properties that were in areas designated as "white only" and forced to move into townships which were for "non-whites".

Kaffir: Racial or ethnic slur used against blacks in South Africa. Very offensive.

Give something up: Stop doing something; stop being involved in something.

Counsel: Legal advice given by a lawyer.

My counsel to you is to give it up.

Chuck the lot: Completely stop a particular activity you are involved in.

My advice to you is to chuck the lot.

Slaughterhouse: A place where animals are taken to be killed.

More lines from the film:

When the system's threatened they'll do anything to maintain it.

A character explaining the torture and killing carried out by the state.

Welcome to South Africa, Ben du Toit.

Said ironically to Ben (a white South African) after Ben opens his eyes to the reality of apartheid South Africa.

It's our country Ben. We made every inch of it.

Ben's wife in defence of maintaining the apartheid system.

The best way to remember a man is to keep on fighting.

Stanley (a black South African activist) talking after the murder of another person by the state.

The Soweto Massacre, June 16, 1976.

In 1974 the white South African government passed a law which mandated that all schools be taught in both English and Afrikaans, the linguistic variant of Dutch developed in the country by the nation's white inhabitants. Blacks under apartheid resented having to learn the language, which many didn't use in traditional conversation, considering it the language of their oppressors. On June 16, 1976, a march in the all-black township of Soweto protesting the law drew thousands of protestors. After scuffles between marchers and police, the police opened fire into the crowd, killing 23 people, including children. This incident triggered the uprising, which lasted for days and resulted in the deaths of between 200 and 700 people, with over a thousand injured. Photographs from the uprising were broadcast around the world and the event is seen as helping fuel the anti-apartheid movement of the 1980s which eventually brought down the racist white regime.

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