

# Skin Lighteners, Black Consumers and Jewish Entrepreneurs in South Africa

by *Lynn M. Thomas*

In 2001, the Apartheid Museum opened in Johannesburg to critical acclaim along with some questioning of the motivations and moral standing of those who financed it. Abraham and Solomon Krok, South African businessmen and twin brothers born to Jewish immigrant parents, bankrolled the project. By the mid 1990s the Kroks ranked among the country's wealthiest families. Partly inspired by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, they sought to build a museum dedicated to those who lived and died under apartheid as part of a larger entertainment complex that would include a casino and amusement park. Whereas the Holocaust Museum memorializes the persecution and murder of European Jews before and during the Second World War, the Apartheid Museum would do the same for those who suffered under the racist South African state. To design the museum, the Kroks hired distinguished South African architects, artists and academics. This team's efforts have been largely well received. National and international critics alike have applauded the building's dignified modern aesthetic and the exhibits within for effectively conveying apartheid's inhumanity and people's courageous struggles against it.<sup>1</sup>

Yet some have questioned whether it was appropriate to locate the sombre memorial within the Kroks' light-hearted entertainment complex. Others have drawn attention to the enterprise that made the Kroks wealthy enough to sponsor such a project. They see a profound irony in the fact that a family fortune generated from the sale of skin lighteners to black South Africans has underwritten a museum dedicated to documenting the racism of apartheid.<sup>2</sup>

It was the Kroks' former status as manufacturers of skin lighteners that first drew me to their story. When, a few years ago, I began researching the transnational history of skin lighteners in South Africa, East Africa and the United States, their names often came up. Almost invariably, whenever I explained my topic to South African academics, business people and medical professionals, they asked, 'Have you ever heard of the Krok brothers?' For these interlocutors, the Kroks were the most memorable figures associated with the country's skin-lightener trade. Although the

*History Department, University of Washington, Seattle*

*lynnmt@uw.edu*

Kroks, who began their business in the 1950s, were not the first to manufacture skin lighteners for black South African consumers, they pioneered new formulas, direct marketing techniques and multiple brands. Over time, these strategies enabled the Kroks to dominate the region's skin-lighteners market and diversify into other enterprises. When, in the 1980s, progressive medical professionals and Black Consciousness activists joined forces and campaigned for a government ban on skin lighteners, the Kroks were their main opponent. Following passage of the ban in 1990 and the end of white minority rule in 1994, the Kroks remained influential business people and, through projects like the Apartheid Museum, they sought, like many other whites, to forge reputations better attuned to post-apartheid politics.

This essay considers the rise and decline of South Africa's lucrative and controversial skin-lighteners market through examination of the Kroks' business history and their evolving personas as millionaires and philanthropists. Such examination reveals how the skin-lighteners trade emerged as part of a broader rise of black consumer culture in the wake of the Second World War. In so doing, it contributes to a small but growing body of scholarship that demonstrates how under apartheid the curtailment of blacks' political and social rights coexisted with a significant expansion in black consumption, creating new economic opportunities for well-placed and mainly white entrepreneurs.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, this essay reveals how, as part of the anti-apartheid movement of the 1980s, such consumption and those who profited from it could become the object of ethical and moral condemnation.

The Kroks' position as the most notable people associated with South Africa's skin-lighteners trade was shaped by both their social experiences as second-generation Jewish immigrants and their self-identification as Jewish philanthropists. Most biographical studies of Jews and apartheid have examined liberals and radicals who heroically resisted state racism. Such studies suggest, as Shula Marks has observed, that 'specifically Jewish values' encouraged a disproportionate number of Jews to join the South African left.<sup>4</sup> The story of the Kroks, however, paints a different, more complex picture. Although their experiences and endeavours as Jewish immigrants and entrepreneurs contributed to a certain familiarity with black South Africans, that closeness has been more readily interpreted as exploitation than solidarity. In this way, the Kroks' position was similar to that of itinerant Jewish traders or *smouse* who plied the southern African landscape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, selling products to a racially diverse clientele. As Charles van Onselen has argued, the socially ambiguous position of *smouse* enabled them to 'move between different worlds' but also exacerbated 'deep-seated prejudices and suspicions'.<sup>5</sup> This essay explores how related intimacies and uncertainties informed the rise and demise of skin-lightener manufacturing in South Africa.

## IMMIGRANTS AND ENTREPRENEURS

The first time I met Solomon Krok, in 2008, he explained that he was tired of fielding criticism about how he and his brother had made their fortune through skin lighteners. He recounted how such criticism had lately resurfaced when he appeared on a radio talk-show to discuss another issue, and listeners and the host turned the conversation towards condemnation of the Kroks' early enterprises. Similarly, the Australian press delighted in reporting the origins of the family's fortune when in 2007 one of Abraham's sons purchased the most expensive house in Sydney.<sup>6</sup> More recently, the subtitle of a newspaper article about disputes within the Krok family referred to Abraham as a 'skin-lightening tycoon'.<sup>7</sup> S. Krok hoped that I, a historian from the United States, would help set the record straight. For the most part, S. Krok steered our conversations to topics he felt comfortable discussing: his family history, how they started their cosmetics company, and how they challenged the strictures of apartheid.

The Kroks' family history in South Africa began just prior to the passage of the 1930 Immigrant Quota Act. Partly spurred by the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924 that also targeted Jews, the South African law severely restricted immigration from Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Palestine. The twins' parents, in fact, decided to emigrate to South Africa after being refused entry to the United States. Their father left Rokiskis, Lithuania in 1925-6 and their mother followed a couple of years later.<sup>8</sup> When Solomon and Abraham were born in 1929, their parents were still '*greener*', a Yiddish term for recent immigrants with limited facility in English. Their mother only learned that she was having twins after Solomon was born and the doctor relayed through a translator that another baby was on the way. Nineteen hours later, as the Kroks like to recount, Abraham arrived.<sup>9</sup>

Their father first tried to strike it rich in South Africa's diamond industry but soon turned to commerce. The twins grew up around his general store in Regents Park, an inner suburb of Johannesburg whose shops served customers from across South Africa's racial classifications. In opening a shop, Krok senior joined the occupation most commonly held by South African Jews. A 1936 survey found that 48% were in sales while 17.6% were in production, and only 1.9%, in agriculture.<sup>10</sup> Many had been traders before emigrating from eastern Europe and arrived with the skills and capital necessary to launch modest enterprises.<sup>11</sup>

Just as their father's career was typical of the first generation of Jews who emigrated after the South African War, Solomon's and Abraham's schooling seemed to prepare them for the shift from trade to profession that was so characteristic of the second generation. As the children of upwardly mobile immigrants, they graduated from Forest High, an English-language school. Solomon then trained as an accountant and Abraham as a chemist/ pharmacist. But rather than becoming staid professionals, they developed an

expansive enterprise. S. Krok described this development as the fruition of a long-held plan. He recalled that when they were still students he opened a savings account under the name 'Twins Twice as Good' with the intention that it would eventually be used to start a manufacturing company.<sup>12</sup> The Kroks' interest in manufacturing made good business sense. Since at least the 1920s, various observers had complained of the South African economy's saturation with traders and 'middle men'.<sup>13</sup> Some of these complaints were, in fact, thinly veiled anti-Semitic diatribes. Beginning at the turn of the century, much of the region's white Christian population had responded with heightened anti-semitism to the emergence of a small but very wealthy group of Anglo-German Jewish financiers alongside the influx of a significant number of poorer eastern European Jews.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, the estimation by the Kroks and others that the South African economy was ripe for the growth of secondary industry proved correct. What distinguished the Kroks from many other manufacturers was their targeting of black rather than white consumers.

In 1953, just five years after the National Party came to power and began instituting apartheid, the Kroks purchased Devon Pharmacy from Henry Moss, a Jewish chemist with whom Abraham had been apprenticed. This pharmacy was located on Noord Street, the northern boundary of the Central Business District (CBD). Up until the mid 1970s, Johannesburg's CBD remained the commercial district for the entire city. The inner core contained corporate and financial offices and high-end stores catering to white consumers while the outer edges included wholesale traders and low-end retailers who served a racially diverse clientele. Segregation rules stemming from the 1923 Urban Areas Act and, later, apartheid's Group Areas Act ensured that no blacks, apart from live-in domestic workers, legally resided in the area. Yet the dramatic increase in Johannesburg's African workforce during the Second World War meant that the CBD's perimeter bustled with black shoppers and commuters.<sup>15</sup> By purchasing a pharmacy between the train station and one of the busiest bus ranks, the Kroks placed themselves smack in the middle of the commercial boom generated by black urbanization.

Under Moss's ownership, Devon Pharmacy had manufactured medicines and marketed them through black hawkers or sales agents. When the Kroks took over, they expanded these enterprises. One of their earliest products was Bloodlax, marketed as a combined 'blood purifier' and laxative. The packaging (see Fig. 1) featured photos of the Kroks as young boys, linking the product to their own self-promotion. Bloodlax and other items were first made at their mother's kitchen table. Soon, they moved production to a factory in Doornfontein, a mixed-raced area that had long served as a first neighborhood for Jewish immigrants.<sup>16</sup>

The Kroks entered cosmetics manufacturing by purchasing SuperRose, a line developed by two other Jewish businessmen on Noord Street: Selman Super, an optician, and Benny Rosenberg, a doctor. The original SuperRose

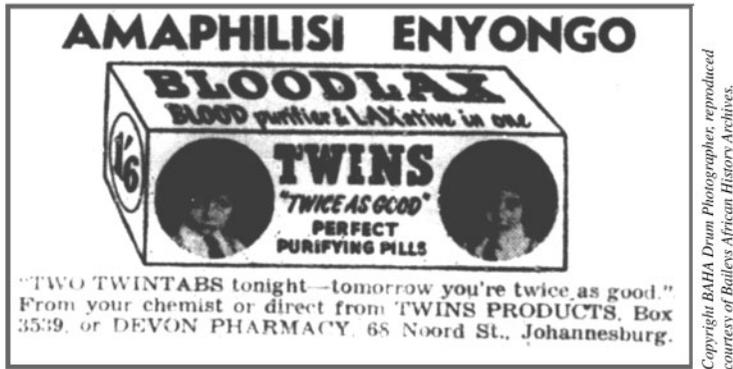


Fig. 1. Ad for Twins medicinal product, Bloodlax, featuring photos of Abraham and Solomon Krok as young boys. The top caption, in isiZulu, says 'pills for biliousness'. *Golden City Post*, 27 Jan. 1957.

creams targeted black consumers but did not contain a skin lightening agent. Initially, sales of SuperRose, S. Krok explained, were dwarfed by the 'run-away seller' of the period: Karroo skin lightening cream with ammoniated mercury.<sup>17</sup> Based in Middelburg, a farming town 700 kilometers southwest of Johannesburg, the Karroo company was owned by Afrikaans businessmen.<sup>18</sup>

Karroo was not the first skin lightener sold in South Africa. By the mid 1950s, commercial skin lighteners had been sold there for decades, first mainly to whites and later to people of colour. Since ancient times, women in parts of Europe, the Mediterranean and Asia had used skin whiteners and lighteners for reasons which ranged from concealing blemishes to evening out skin tone to bleaching their faces. During the nineteenth century, these preparations became popular and profitable commodities in Europe, the United States and various imperial outposts including South Africa. They appealed to white women and some men by playing on a bourgeois and racialized aesthetic that valued skin purged of evidence of outdoor labour and intimacy with dark-skinned 'others'. These cosmetics also appealed to black and ambiguously raced people, including Jews, who sought to navigate social hierarchies that privileged lightness, and to achieve aesthetic ideals rooted in both colonial and precolonial conceptions of beauty.<sup>19</sup>

British and U.S. pharmacy handbooks from the early twentieth century regularly provided formulas for 'face bleaches' or 'freckle creams'. Such preparations lightened the skin by covering it with white powder from starch, rice or chalk. Others contained irritants such as hydrogen peroxide, lactic acid or citric acid that stripped away the top layers of the epidermis and exposed lighter untanned layers beneath. Still other preparations

included ammoniated mercury that interfered with the production of melanin.<sup>20</sup> During the interwar period, skin lighteners fell out of favour with many white consumers as pale skin became a sign of those confined to factory and office work, and tanned skin a symbol of having the leisure time and affluence to enjoy outdoor holidays and the health benefits of the sun's vitamin D. While skin lighteners decreased in popularity among white women, they continued to be heavily marketed to African Americans through the early 1960s.<sup>21</sup> And among black South Africans, skin-lightener sales did not peak until the 1970s.

The earliest evidence of skin lighteners being marketed to black South African women dates to the early 1930s. They surfaced through two different routes: one entailed the importation of products made by African American companies and the other, the distribution of products manufactured in South Africa. By the 1920s, some of the largest and most profitable black-owned businesses in the United States, such as Madame C. J. Walker and Apex, sold cosmetics, including skin lighteners.<sup>22</sup> Soon after these U.S. products entered South Africa, some white pharmacists began advertising their own skin lighteners to black consumers.<sup>23</sup>

Local manufacture of skin lighteners took off after the Second World War as white businesses sought to cultivate black consumers and the right-wing National Party's electoral victory in 1948 ensured that skin colour took on greater political salience. Under apartheid, even more than in prior forms of segregation, nuances of skin colour could inform where one lived, one's school and work opportunities, whether one could vote, and whether one needed a government pass to move in and out of urban areas. Like whites, black consumers used skin lighteners for a variety of reasons which ranged from clearing blemishes to lightening tanned skin to 'brightening' to looking more 'modern' or sexy. Nonetheless, the broad appeal of these products relied on pernicious official and popular ideologies that linked lighter skin to power and beauty.<sup>24</sup>

Whereas little evidence suggests that blacks used skin lighteners specifically to obtain official reclassification within apartheid's four-tiered racial hierarchy ('European', 'Asian', 'coloured' and 'African'), they were certainly thought to enhance prospects in social and work settings that privileged light skin. In the mid 1980s, Eldridge Mathebula, a leader of the Black Consumers' Union, reflected on their appeal: 'I don't know if many blacks have tried to get reclassified by lightening their skin colour, but psychologically they believe they will have more opportunities and be more successful in whatever they do if their skin is whiter'.<sup>25</sup> Some job advertisements invited only applicants who were 'light-skinned' or 'slightly coloured'.<sup>26</sup> Amid this pervasive racism and colourism, a handful of companies undertook the mass production and aggressive marketing of skin lighteners. By the late 1960s, a remarkable sixty percent of urban African women reported using bleaching/lightening creams, making them

the fourth most commonly used household product (after soap, tea and tinned or powdered milk).<sup>27</sup>

Seeking a slice of this lucrative market, the Kroks began to manufacture SuperRose Freckle and Complexion Cream with ammoniated mercury. The Kroks marketed this new product by suggesting that it made women irresistibly attractive to men (Fig. 2). Dermatologists agreed that while ammoniated mercury might lighten skin in the short term, prolonged use at higher concentrations could result in patches of darker pigmentation as the mercury oxidized and deposited in the skin.<sup>28</sup> Such effects together with concerns over kidney damage prompted the U.S. and South African governments eventually, in the 1970s, to prohibit mercury from cosmetics.

In the late 1950s, the Kroks launched SuperRose Pimple, Freckle and Complexion Lotion (Fig. 3), an alcohol rather than cream-based skin lightener. S. Krok remembered this as their 'breakthrough'. The Kroks adapted the formula for an anti-acne preparation by adding hydroquinone as ammoniated mercury did not fully dissolve into a clear liquid. During the 1940s, hydroquinone, a chemical commonly used to treat rubber and in photographic development, had emerged as a skin-lightening agent when a series of industrial accidents in the United States revealed its ability to impede the production of melanin.<sup>29</sup> S. Krok recalled that they heavily marketed SuperRose Lotion by focusing all advertising resources on it and giving out thousands of free samples at their pharmacy and at the nearby train and bus stations. The Kroks realized the lotion was a commercial success, S. Krok explained, when a shop in Witbank, a industrial town 140 kilometers away, ordered ninety dozen bottles. By the mid 1960s, demand was so great that they moved production to a larger factory, employed over 500 people, and reported sales totaling R3 million.<sup>30</sup>

The Kroks' strategy was to 'piggyback' on the success of Karroo, S. Krok recalled.

So I said to my brother we don't have to fight these guys [Karroo]... We said we don't care if you use any famous cream as long as before you use that cream you cleanse with our lotion. And it became the hottest seller in the world.

S. Krok noted that the amount of hydroquinone in the original SuperRose Lotion was one or two percent and, hence, in accordance with the then and still current U.S. Federal Drug Administration (FDA) guidelines for hydroquinone in cosmetics.<sup>31</sup> Yet, by recommending that their lotion be used before applying a cream, the Kroks encouraged consumers to double their exposure to the skin-lightening agents. Moreover, medical research has revealed that, compared with creams and oils, alcohol significantly increases hydroquinone's penetration of the skin.<sup>32</sup>

In order to catch up with and later overtake Karroo, the Kroks adopted direct marketing strategies. Besides distributing free samples, they held



**Men Run Mad**  
after women who

use  
**SUPER ROSE CREAMS**  
and  
**SOAP**

**10/-**  
the  
set



**How to gain a BRIGHTER, LIGHTER, New Look COMPLEXION?**  
At night (1) Wash with Super Rose Night Soap; (2) Apply Super Rose Night Cream.  
In the morning (3) Wash with Super Rose Day Soap; (4) Apply Super Rose Vanishing Cream for the day-time.  
After using the Super Rose Society Set your skin will become velvet smooth, fresh, light and lovely. You will then know why men go mad about women who use these famous Super Rose Creams.

From **TWINS PRODUCTS**  
68 Noord Street, P.O. Box 3638,  
Johannesburg.

Copyright BAHIA Drum Photographer, reproduced courtesy of Baileys African History Archives.

Fig. 2. Ad for Twins SuperRose cosmetic creams. *Golden City Post*, 25 Nov. 1956.



First thing in the morning,  
last thing at night  
...and out go pimples overnight

**SUPER-ROSE SPECIAL PIMPLE, FRECKLE AND COMPLEXION LOTION** works overnight, cleans your skin, overnight. Contains 'Purpale', the new wonder-waxer chemical combination for all types of complexion.

Pushes its way into the pores of your skin, deeper and faster than creams. Leaves a soft, smooth, alluring complexion and a lighter, brighter skin. Double size bottle, 50 cents. Ordinary 30 cents.



**Super-Rose** SPECIAL PIMPLE, FRECKLE AND COMPLEXION LOTION

Price Suggested  
TWINS PRODUCTS, 12701 S.W. 17th Ave., MIAMI, FLORIDA 33156  
P.O. BOX 3538, JOH.

Reproduced courtesy of Creative Magazines.

Fig. 3. Ad for Twins SuperRose Pimple, Freckle and Complexion lotion. *Bona*, May 1959.



...in your spare or full time!

Introducing our famous  
**Super Rose Face Creams and Soaps**  
as illustrated. You will become popular in your district by distributing our creams and "TWICE AS GOOD" REMEDIES.



**SUPER ROSE**  
only 10/- set  
for that  
Brighter, Lighter,  
New Look Complexion.



P.O. Box 3538 or call  
Devon Pharmacy, 68 Noord  
Street, Johannesburg, or call  
at "Twins Shop," cor. Bree  
and Fraser Streets.

Copyright BAHIA Drum Photographer, reproduced courtesy of Baileys African History Archives.

Fig. 4. Twins ad recruiting sales agents. *Drum*, January 1957.

demonstrations outside stores, factories and mining compounds. They also developed an extensive network of sales agents that included some of their own factory workers. At a 1969 conference on the African market, L. M. Guthrie, a manager for a local drug company, lauded Twins for succeeding against much larger competitors because of its hands-on engagement with African sellers and consumers. Instead of expensive ad campaigns, Guthrie explained, Twins passed a greater share of the profits along to wholesalers and retailers ensuring that 'their product . . . [was] peddled far and wide by illicit hawkers'.<sup>33</sup> A small ad from a 1957 issue of the influential black photomagazine *Drum* (Fig. 4) illustrates how Twins recruited agents with the promise of 'big money' and popularity.

Citing these agents as one way in which Twins challenged the strictures of apartheid, S. Krok claimed that he spent considerable time at government offices securing passbook certificates for hundreds of salesmen that enabled them to travel freely.<sup>34</sup> In some ways, these black agents were akin to the Jewish *smouse* decades before, who established commercial toeholds throughout the country. Yet the fact that black agents had to secure their mobility from apartheid bureaucrats underscores the structural differences in the opportunities available to those *smouse* and to black traders, especially under apartheid. Just as their marketing strategies were more hands-on than those of their competitors, the Kroks' ads demonstrated a greater appreciation for the multiple reasons why black consumers purchased skin lighteners. A 1959 ad, for example, provided an extensive list of the problems that could be cured by SuperRose: 'pimply, muddy, off-colour, dark complexion' skin would become 'smooth, lovely, non-shiny, new look, clear, free of freckles, brighter, lighter'.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, by the late 1960s Twins radio ads referred to their Hollywood 7 brand as a 'skin brightener' rather than a lightener, a descriptor more in line with the notion of 'glow' that one of the few senior African marketing consultants insisted was the primary quality sought by black consumers from such products.<sup>36</sup>

Whenever I interviewed white businessmen who had been involved in the skin-lightener trade, I asked them why the products had been so popular. Most chuckled and provided the same pat answer: 'Black people want to be white and white people want to be black'. By equating skin lightening with tanning, this answer suggested a topsy turvy world of skin colour. Through jest, these businessmen denied that the appeal of skin lighteners related to South Africa's racial hierarchy. S. Krok, by contrast, offered a more subtle and substantive response:

If a black had a light skin, they were perceived to be in a different status than a black dark person. I believe it was a status symbol that I'm lighter, I'm more educated, I'm more affluent or I'm more Westernized.<sup>37</sup>

More than others involved in the trade, the Kroks sought to understand what motivated consumers. To learn, they consulted shoppers and hawkers and, later, hired research firms to conduct consumer surveys.<sup>38</sup>

By the 1970s, the Kroks had acquired a large slice of the skin-lighteners market. In addition to SuperRose, they developed other brands including He-Man, Hollywood 7, Super Scott, Kool Look, Aviva, Tanlite and Alco. S. Krok explained that this multiplication of brands represented a deliberate strategy 'to compete with ourselves so we could keep the opposition out'.<sup>39</sup> Most of the Krok brands contained hydroquinone as the active ingredient, enabling them to survive the South African government's 1975 ban on mercury.<sup>40</sup> As Karroo still used ammoniated mercury, the ban was that company's death knell, which left the Kroks' numerous brands to dominate the market.

Having achieved dominance, the Kroks proved astute business people. They paid close attention to developments in the regional and international skin-lighteners trade, and diversified. Whereas Karroo focused its energy for decades on a single product, the Kroks invested in other areas of commerce including food, furniture, construction, engineering and entertainment. During the 1980s, they extended their business holdings by buying subsidiaries of foreign companies as they pulled out of South Africa due to growing international condemnation of apartheid. As S. Krok explained to a journalist, with a frankness that would have appalled many progressive activists: 'Any go-ahead businessman has to take advantage of disinvestment'.<sup>41</sup>

During our second meeting, I asked S. Krok whether he thought their social position as Jews had, in some way, encouraged them to produce for the black consumer market. Curtly and correctly, S. Krok answered that Karroo, the company that had pioneered the mass production of skin lighteners in South Africa, was an Afrikaans, not Jewish, company. Perhaps wary that I would brand the now discredited skin-lighteners trade a Jewish one, he insisted that being Jewish had little to do with their business enterprises.<sup>42</sup>

The evidence gathered here, however, suggests that the Kroks' experiences as second-generation Jewish immigrants did shape their involvement in the skin-lighteners trade. Their upbringing within a family and broader community where commerce was commonplace contributed to their knowledge of such activities. More specifically, their acquisition of Devon Pharmacy and the SuperRose brand from other Jewish business people reveals how their enterprises emerged through Jewish commercial networks, and how those networks cultivated consumers across racial lines. Similarly, their extensive use of black sales agents resonated with the trading tradition of the *smous*. Finally, the Kroks' membership in a social group whose assimilation into South Africa's dominant white minority was rapid but contested may have left them more attuned to the status and race dynamics that motivated practices like the use of skin lighteners and hence better able to market such products.

## SKIN-LIGHTENER CONTROVERSIES

Soon after gaining control over the market, the Kroks faced concerns about hydroquinone. Just prior to the 1975 ban on mercury, a representative of Twins Products, probably seeking to ascertain the possibility of future restrictions on hydroquinone, contacted the FDA in the U.S. An official explained that the FDA recommended that warning labels be provided on all cosmetics containing hydroquinone and that concentrations be limited to two percent.<sup>43</sup> Knowledge of these guidelines did not translate into adoption. Twins did not immediately introduce warning labels and the concentration of hydroquinone in their skin lighteners frequently exceeded two percent.<sup>44</sup>

By the mid 1970s South African doctors had begun to warn of the disfiguring and potentially carcinogenic effects of hydroquinone. Dermatologists, most prominently G. H. Findlay, documented how prolonged use of skin lighteners with hydroquinone (usually three years or longer), particularly at higher concentrations (above three percent), combined with the high levels of exposure to ultraviolet rays common in southern Africa, could produce a form of bluish-black hyper-pigmentation known as exogenous ochronosis. Thirty percent of all black patients seen at a dermatology clinic in Pretoria sought treatment for hydroquinone-induced ochronosis. Findlay and his colleagues believed that such disfigurement was long-term, if not permanent. They surmised that this epidemic dated back to 1966, when a number of manufacturers increased the hydroquinone in their skin lighteners.<sup>45</sup> A follow-up study in 1980 analyzed thirteen brands and found that they contained anywhere between 2.5 and 7.5 percent concentrations. Notably, the Kroks manufactured seven of the thirteen brands tested, and two of theirs contained the highest concentrations, of between 5.5 and 7.5 percent hydroquinone.<sup>46</sup>

Around the same time that the government banned mercury and doctors began expressing concern over hydroquinone, Black Consciousness activists started criticizing all skin lighteners on political and moral grounds. Influenced by African nationalism and the Black Power movement in the United States, Black Consciousness (BC) attacked apartheid policies and advocated black pride and political self-reliance. At a trial in 1976, a year before his death at police hands, Steve Biko, the most prominent BC leader, evoked black women's efforts to make their 'skin as light as possible' as evidence for the necessity of the motto 'black is beautiful'.<sup>47</sup> When interviewed in the 1980s, other BC activists Malusi Mpumlwana, Thoko Mbanjwa and Mamphela Ramphele cited the continued use of skin lighteners by some in the predominantly coloured western Cape as evidence of the need for further 'conscientization' in that area. Mpumlwana, in a subsequent interview, portrayed the rejection of skin lighteners as a common first step in becoming politically aware.<sup>48</sup> Attesting to the power of this political ideology to rework everyday practices, Emma Mashinini, a

prominent labour activist, attributed her and other women's abandonment of skin lighteners to BC: '[It] saved us from hating the colour of our skin'.<sup>49</sup>

BC activists teamed up with medical allies to make opposition to skin lighteners into a progressive political issue. In 1982, they succeeded in limiting the maximum concentration of hydroquinone allowed in cosmetics to two percent, bringing South African regulations into accord with U.S. guidelines.<sup>50</sup> For the remainder of the decade, the Kroks and their spokespeople evoked this regulatory concordance to lend credibility to their products. In turn, activists argued that despite the two percent regulation, skin lighteners continued to cause problems.<sup>51</sup> They explained that the U.S. regulations were inadequate for South Africa where black consumers experienced more intense exposure to ultra-violet rays and applied skin lighteners more heavily, more frequently, and for longer durations than their American counterparts.<sup>52</sup> Together, BC and medical activists urged the government to ban hydroquinone from cosmetics. Although their campaign did not immediately convince government officials, it did influence consumers: by the mid 1980s, skin-lightener sales began declining at an annual rate of ten percent.<sup>53</sup>

A number of the white activists who participated in this campaign were Jewish. After 1948, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the representative organ of the country's Jewish groups, declared that it was not a political body and that it would only resist anti-semitic aspects of apartheid policies. Fearing that National Party politicians might act on their warnings that Jews 'were guests in South Africa', and sharing the same anti-black racist attitudes as many of their white compatriots, most Jews fell in line with the Board's position. Some very wealthy and well-connected South African Jews, like the Oppenheimer family, sought to reform apartheid by supporting liberal alternatives to the National Party. A vocal minority took a more radical route. Jews constituted only about four percent of South Africa's total white population of two and half million after the Second World War but they made up forty percent of the country's white left. In recent years, various explanations have been offered for why Jews were so numerous in anti-apartheid organizations, ranging from experiences of persecution and radicalism in Eastern Europe to 'perspectives and qualities that are uniquely Jewish' to difficult family situations.<sup>54</sup>

When it came to the issue of skin lighteners, some Jewish activists may have also been motivated by the position of two affluent Jewish businessmen as the most prominent manufacturers. At a time when the Kroks rarely featured by name in press coverage of skin lighteners, Johannesburg-based Jewish activists, in particular, were more familiar with them through social connections than their non-Jewish counterparts. Moreover, for these young activists, the Kroks embodied commercial interests that directly profited from the racism of apartheid, an element of South African Jewry against which they sought to define themselves.

Jewish activists worked with others to challenge the manufacture of skin lighteners through legal and media channels. In the early 1980s, Geoff Budlender, a Jewish lawyer at the Legal Resources Center (LRC) in Johannesburg, sought to build a class action lawsuit. He explained, in a phone conversation, that they were particularly interested to find the Kroks, as the largest manufacturers, liable. The case floundered once it became clear that consumers had used many different products, making it difficult to target specific companies.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, *Learn and Teach*, an adult literacy magazine established in 1981, with its founding editor, Marc Suttner, an activist from a Jewish family, played a prominent role in campaigning for a ban on hydroquinone. *Learn and Teach* articles emphasized the dangers of skin lighteners, affirmed the BC motto 'black is beautiful', and featured photographs of consumers whose faces had been disfigured (Fig. 5).<sup>56</sup> Interviewed in 2009, Suttner explained that having grown up in Johannesburg's Jewish community, he knew of the Kroks when launching the magazine's anti-skin lightener campaign.<sup>57</sup> In 1982, *Learn and Teach* succeeded in pressuring the popular magazine *Drum* to stop featuring skin-lightener ads and forsake significant revenue.<sup>58</sup>

During the 1980s resistance to apartheid peaked. The United Democratic Front (UDF), founded in 1983 to protest against the continued political exclusion of those classified as 'African', grew into an anti-apartheid coalition of labour, civic, church and student organizations. Guided by the principles of the 1955 Freedom Charter, the UDF sought to make the country 'ungovernable' through civil disobedience and to foster a 'people's democracy'.<sup>59</sup> The government responded to the UDF and other anti-apartheid groups by declaring a State of Emergency in 1986. In this highly charged and often violent political struggle, more and more South Africans felt compelled to oppose apartheid through public action. Condemnation of skin lighteners, in this context, became a safe way for a range of consumer, medical and women's groups – including even the Housewives' League of South Africa – to demonstrate some commitment to political change. A black business group reportedly told P.W. Botha, South African President from 1984 to 1989, that if he failed to heed popular calls to ban hydroquinone, he would not have 'credibility on wider issues'.<sup>60</sup> Opposition to skin lighteners had become a political litmus test.

By 1987, the National Black Consumer Union (NBCU) and the Dermatological Society of South Africa were leading the campaign to ban hydroquinone. In line with the grassroots approach of many anti-apartheid organizations, the NBCU sought to raise awareness by giving community talks. Ellen Kuzwayo, NBCU president and a highly respected activist since the 1960s, worked closely with doctors Charles Isaacson and Hilary Carman to convince two of the largest supermarket chains in the country to require manufacturers of skin lighteners to place stronger warnings on their products or face being taken off the lists of suppliers.<sup>61</sup> The government finally responded to activists' demands by introducing a draft regulation banning

## Skin lightening creams: a big new problem



Reproduced courtesy of Stephen Rothenburg, Learn and Teach.

Fig. 5. Photo of a woman whose skin had been damaged by skin lighteners. It accompanied an article urging a ban on all skin lighteners, published in an anti-apartheid adult literacy magazine: *Learn and Teach*, 1982.

hydroquinone from cosmetics. The South African parliament passed the regulation in December 1987, with an implementation date of 1 July 1988.<sup>62</sup> A week before that, however, the Minister of National Health and Population Development, Dr W.A. Van Niekerk, unexpectedly deferred the ban for thirty months, citing the need to give manufacturers a more 'reasonable period' for phasing out their stock.<sup>63</sup>

Activists blamed the Kroks for the postponement. As Twins reportedly controlled seventy percent of South Africa's skin-lightener market and their profits were estimated at between R70 and R80 million per year, it is hardly surprising that the Kroks and their associates defended their products.<sup>64</sup> Abraham Krok complained that a ban on hydroquinone would have a serious effect on their company's profits and announced that they had begun investigating alternative formulas. Seemingly unrattled by the political unrest shaking the country, he was reported as optimistic that 'Black disposable income' and hence the market for such consumer products would continue to increase.<sup>65</sup> Tony Bloom, a prominent liberal businessman and head of the Premier Group that by then owned fifty percent of Twins, argued that skin lighteners should be treated like cigarettes: 'everyone knows they can damage your health, but should have the right to buy them if they choose'. Citing compliance with U.S. FDA guidelines, Bloom insisted that products like SuperRose and He Man were only harmful when 'overused' or used in combination with 'household products'.<sup>66</sup> Following the deferment of the ban, Ian Ellis, the general manager of Twins, announced that the company would sue anyone who continued to make 'unsubstantiated allegations' that their skin lighteners were unsafe. He added that a ban would harm consumers by encouraging them to turn to 'unscrupulous backstreet operators'.<sup>67</sup>

The government's capitulation infuriated activists, who now ranged from the country's Pharmaceutical Society to the Black Taxi Association. For leftists, it smacked of collusion between capital and the apartheid state. As one medical doctor put it, the postponement demonstrated how 'the interests of industry and capitalism' superseded the 'health and wellbeing of individuals'. Others noted that the health of all individuals was not so easily ignored. If sun-tan lotions were damaging white consumers, the NBCU argued, they would be banned immediately.<sup>68</sup> One health activist explained that because of the government's indifference, blacks referred to exogenous ochronosis as 'apartheid disease'.<sup>69</sup> Given the evidence gathered by medical practitioners on hydroquinone's harmful effects, proponents of the ban ridiculed Twins' threat of a lawsuit and questioned the government's motives in deferring it.<sup>70</sup> When Minister Van Niekerk's successor, Dr Rina Venter, replaced him in early 1990, she accelerated implementation of the ban despite a last-minute legal challenge by the Kroks.<sup>71</sup>

In August 1990, while the National Party government and the recently legalized African National Congress negotiated the country's transition from minority to majority rule, all cosmetics containing hydroquinone

were prohibited. Moreover, South Africa became the first and only country in the world to restrict cosmetics advertisements from claiming to ‘bleach’, ‘lighten’ or ‘whiten’.<sup>72</sup> In forbidding the language of lightening from all cosmetics ads as well as banning specific ingredients, South Africa’s regulation bore the mark of the broad anti-racist political movement from which it emerged.

Passage of the ban left Twins, according to its general manager, ‘very unhappy’. Reportedly stuck with an inventory worth R13 million, the company considered exporting its remaining stock to neighbouring countries where such bans did not exist.<sup>73</sup> Discouraged perhaps by the prohibition on advertising claims, the Kroks abandoned their efforts to develop a new formula and left its manufacturing entirely.<sup>74</sup> Since the early 1990s, a relatively robust illicit market in imported skin lighteners has existed despite the country’s unique ban.<sup>75</sup>

### MILLIONAIRES AND PHILANTHROPISTS

A couple of times in my interviews with S. Krok, he directly addressed criticism of their company. He dismissed activists who had ‘totally politicized’ skin lighteners and rejected accusations that their products had caused cancer as ‘totally ridiculous’. Echoing Twins’ defence in the late 1980s, S. Krok insisted that their products were in accordance with still current U.S. FDA guidelines, and that they, like manufacturers of aspirin or alcohol, could not be held responsible for consumers who used them inappropriately. He concluded this point by quietly remarking that the 1990 ban had ‘cost us millions and millions’.<sup>76</sup>

Although nearly twenty years after the ban was passed S. Krok still lamented their financial losses, by 1994, when South Africa held its first democratic elections, the Kroks were on firm financial footing. That year, the *Financial Mail* – referring to the Kroks as South African business’ ‘exuberant answer’ to ‘Tweedledum and Tweedledee’ – listed them as the country’s fifth wealthiest family. The article explained that the Kroks had earned their initial wealth through selling ‘harmful skin lightening creams to blacks’, and portrayed them as lively, if controversial, personalities.

‘I’m vibrant, noisy, impatient, impulsive,’ said Sol in 1985, ‘but Abe’s better looking.’ Added Abraham: ‘I’m dull, conservative, less emotional, pragmatic. Sol is irrational, a high risk-taker and gets things done’.

The piece also noted what else made the Kroks well-known personalities: they were ‘great supporters of (mainly Jewish) philanthropic enterprises’ and co-owners of the ‘glamour soccer club Mamelodi Sundowns’.<sup>77</sup>

These two dimensions of the Kroks’ profile spoke to racially distinct segments of South African society. Many Jews were familiar with the Kroks’ contributions to Jewish charity organizations in South Africa and Israel. Such philanthropy had long been a part of how wealthier Jews aided

less fortunate co-religionists and demonstrated that they were not 'greener' any more but, instead, respectable pillars of the community.<sup>78</sup> The Kroks helped to found, in the mid 1990s, a South African branch of Aish Hatorah, a politically conservative and pro-settler organization devoted to connecting Jewish youth to Israel by sponsoring study fellowships there.<sup>79</sup> In 2006, the Kroks were awarded a lifetime achievement award for their philanthropic work by the South African Jewish Achievers. Coverage of that award in the Jewish press discussed their family and business history but made no mention of skin lighteners.<sup>80</sup>

Whereas the Kroks' philanthropic work won accolades from Jewish groups, their ownership of a soccer team was about enhancing their reputation among blacks. For years, barred from many other forms of commerce, black businessmen owned football clubs as potentially lucrative enterprises that garnered significant publicity.<sup>81</sup> In 1989, at the height of the skin-lightener controversy, the Kroks purchased a fifty-one percent stake in the Mamelodi Sundowns. A. Krok explained to a journalist that they hoped this venture would better connect them to black consumers: '80% of black people in this country support soccer. By getting involved you are first helping the community and you are also getting a lot of mileage for your products'. Positioning themselves as racial middlemen, he explained that they also hoped to lure back white football fans who had become 'frightened' to attend matches with overwhelmingly black crowds. As owners of the Sundowns, the Kroks became passionate fans, attending all games and financing improvements in recruitment and training of players. When the Sundowns won their third consecutive league championship in 2002, the Kroks celebrated at the post-match party by dancing on stage.<sup>82</sup> Although such activities garnered attention, they did not displace skin lighteners as the thing that many South Africans most associated with the Kroks.

The Kroks' sponsorship of the Apartheid Museum provided another opportunity to enhance their reputation. Remarkably, given the Kroks' extensive support of Jewish organizations, S. Krok told more than one reporter, 'If there is anything I would like to be remembered for, it is for driving the construction of the Apartheid Museum'.<sup>83</sup> Unlike much of their previous philanthropy this one appealed across South Africa's racial divides, by involving post-apartheid cultural and political elites and by suggesting an analogy between the suffering of blacks under apartheid and that of Jews during the Holocaust.

Yet the museum did not begin from such abstract goals. In 1988, the Kroks purchased Gold Reef City amusement park in Johannesburg. Soon after the new government legalized gambling in 1996 (under apartheid, it was only permitted in the black 'homelands'), the Kroks joined forces with black business partner Reuel Khoza and applied to build a casino in the park. One of the requirements of the application process was that casino development be accompanied by a 'contribution to the quality of community life'. This requirement was intended to reassure social critics of

gambling by expanding the country's tourist attractions and stimulating job creation.<sup>84</sup> The Kroks' first proposal for community betterment was to build a twenty-three-metre bronze statue of the right hand of (then) President Mandela, breaking through jail bars. Viewing it as conceptually crude and too blatantly an attempt to curry official favour, the Gaming Board shelved the proposal. The Kroks regrouped. Two years later, the Board approved their proposal to build the Apartheid Museum and a casino, giving a deadline of three years to complete the project.<sup>85</sup>

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was the inspiration for the Apartheid Museum. The Kroks toured the U.S. museum soon after it opened in 1993. Around that same time, they also visited the Lithuanian villages where their parents were born. The end of the Cold War facilitated such heritage tourism by easing access to eastern Europe. That same seismic geopolitical event also propelled the African National Congress and the National Party towards a negotiated settlement, a development that encouraged many white South Africans to consider more carefully the relationship between their own past and their new position in a post-apartheid nation. In 2000, the Kroks sent the eleven architects and technicians whom they had hired to design their memorial on a visit to the Holocaust Museum. During that visit, the team became committed to crafting a 'narrative museum' that would tell the story of apartheid's rise and fall. On their return, that team grew to include some of the luminaries of South African cultural life: Johannesburg architect Sidney Abramowitch; Christopher Till, curator of the 1995 Johannesburg Biennale; historian Phil Bonner; filmmaker Angus Gibson; novelist Zakes Mda; and actor John Kani.<sup>86</sup> Their renown and, in some cases, their anti-apartheid credentials gave the project cultural and political legitimacy.

The Apartheid Museum opened in late 2001 (after costing R80 million), just within the deadline for the Kroks to avoid losing their casino licence. Most commentators praised it. One applauded its transcendent quality, 'a vernacular that is sleek and modern, modest yet profound, wholly unsentimental'. Another white critic described the power of experiencing exhibits on apartheid according to a randomly assigned identity card that designated her black. These same commentators noted two ironies: this sombre memorial to the devastation wrought by racism originated in a bid for a glitzy casino, and was financed by money earned from selling skin lighteners. Ultimately, though, they insisted that the Kroks' business ventures should not detract from the museum's remarkable achievement. Responding to people who dismissed the Kroks' feat, Robyn Sassen, a frequent contributor to South Africa's Jewish press, wrote that such criticism bespoke a 'xenophobia or anti-Semitism' that reduced the Kroks to 'moneygrabbing dirty Jew[s]'.<sup>87</sup> With these remarks, Sassen named the stereotype that shadowed much discussion of the Kroks. From their dogged defence of skin lighteners to their determined effort to build a casino, the Kroks' pursuit of profits amid political turmoil generated fascination and contempt.

By publicly identifying the Holocaust Museum as the inspiration for the Apartheid Museum, the Kroks suggested a resonance between the racism endured by Jews and by blacks. Such analogizing posed a further irony. Many South African Jews had long bristled at the drawing of parallels between the Holocaust and apartheid, arguing that the unprecedented scale of murder entailed in the former rendered such comparisons unacceptable.<sup>88</sup> Implicitly, the Kroks challenged this mainstream Jewish perspective and insisted on the affinities between the experiences of Jews and blacks.

The Kroks have also sought to garner a place for Jews in post-apartheid South Africa through less public channels. S. Krok explained to me how he had met privately with Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu to convey his concern about how the country's high crime rates had harmed the country's Jewish population. Today, violent crime ranks among the most pressing issues for many South Africans. Whereas prior to the 1990s white privilege ensured that such violence, spawned by poverty and structural inequalities, was largely confined to black and poor areas, the post-apartheid redistribution of policing resources has resulted in the spread of violent crime to more affluent neighbourhoods. This spread has motivated many people of means, including Jews, to emigrate. Since 1991, South Africa's Jewish population has declined from approximately 92,000 to around 70,000.<sup>89</sup> The Kroks themselves have experienced car hijackings and burglaries, and a number of their children have moved elsewhere.

In describing his meetings with Mandela and Tutu, S. Krok demonstrated his access to the country's most respected black leaders. It also enabled him to lecture me, another non-Jew, on Jews' disproportionate contributions to South Africa and the world, and possibly to express a note of contrition.

I am very friendly with Mandela. So one day I said to him . . . 'How many Jews do you think there are in South Africa?' 'Oh, there must be a million' . . . [S. Krok responds] 'There are only 80,000' . . . I went to see Desmond Tutu recently about the crime rate here and I wanted him to do something. So I said to him, 'How many Jews do you think are in South Africa?' '800,000', he says to me. I speak to someone else recently: 'There must be five million.' We make such a contribution to the economy and to the business world that people think that . . . our numbers are large . . . There are more, proportionately, Nobel prize winners that are Jewish than of any other race. So the world needs the Jews [soft laugh]. You can publish it. We make a difference and we add value. And I don't think that we do it only because of greed . . . We're entrepreneurial. And we make mistakes and we're human.<sup>90</sup>

By recounting these overestimations, S. Krok sought not to expose an anti-Semitic sentiment that 'Jews are everywhere' but rather to emphasize that though relatively small in size, the Jewish population had contributed greatly to the country's economy. In addition, S. Krok placed his family's

commercial success within a Jewish tradition of achievement while admitting the universality of fallibility.

### CONCLUSION

By considering the rise and decline of South Africa's skin-lightener trade through the business history of the Kroks, this essay has highlighted the black consumer market that developed under apartheid and demonstrated how elements of that market became the target of broader anti-apartheid protests. To enter this emerging market, the Kroks built on Jewish commercial networks and located their pharmacy in Johannesburg's busiest black shopping and commuting area. They focused on manufacturing a small and relatively affordable commodity that they knew could be highly profitable. The Kroks became competitive sellers of skin lighteners through direct marketing strategies, an extensive network of black sales agents, and numerous brands. Their affinity for hands-on relations with black consumers and eventual dominance of the skin-lighteners trade stemmed from their business acumen and perhaps an appreciation for the simultaneous artificiality and power of social hierarchies, gained through their own experiences as second-generation Jewish immigrants. Over time, the Kroks pushed the trade in more dangerous directions by encouraging consumers to use multiple lightening products and producing ones that contained some of the highest levels of hydroquinone. Ultimately, it was these business practices together with their fierce defence of skin lighteners in the face of compelling criticism from medical and Black Consciousness activists that cast such a long shadow over their reputations.

The Kroks' post-apartheid efforts to rehabilitate their reputations, including the construction of a national museum, have provoked mixed responses. Some have seen ironies in these efforts. Others have acknowledged those ironies but discern a lingering anti-semitism animating criticism of the Kroks. Still others have been struck by the Kroks' consistency. As one former activist put it, from their success in staving off a ban on skin lighteners until 1990 to their more recent courting of the African National Congress's leadership, the Kroks have proved adept at working with whichever nationalists are in power, be they white Afrikaners or black Africans. This last perspective insists that the Kroks have prioritized commercial expediency above political values throughout South Africa's past half-century of dramatic change and struggle. Yet during a time when many of their compatriots have seen greater security and opportunity in emigrating, the Kroks have demonstrated a striking commitment to maintaining a home for themselves and other Jews in South Africa.

**Lynn M. Thomas** is Professor of History at the University of Washington, Seattle. She is the author of *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya* (2003), and co-editor with Alys Weinbaum, Priti Ramamurthy, Uta Poiger, Madeleine Yue Dong and Tani Barlow of *The*

*Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (2008) and with Jennifer Cole of *Love in Africa* (2009). She currently serves as a co-editor of the *Journal of African History* and is writing a monograph on the transnational history of skin lighteners in South Africa, East Africa and the United States.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

For very helpful comments on drafts of this article, I thank Keith Breckenridge, James Campbell, Susan Glenn, Uta G. Poiger, Priti Ramamurthy, Keith Shear and Janelle Taylor; participants in the 2009 'Jews and Empire' conference at UCLA, and especially its convener Sarah Abrevaya Stein; and anonymous readers for the *History Workshop Journal*. I am also grateful to Sarah Espis-Sanchis, who worked as my research assistant in South Africa, and to those cited below who kindly agreed to be interviewed.

1 John Battersby, 'Apartheid Museum a Testament to Triumph Over Adversity', *Sunday Independent*, 28 Oct. 2001; Paul Olivier, 'White Parties Back Apartheid Museum', *Citizen*, 29 Nov. 2001; Rachel L. Swarns, 'South African Museum Recreates Apartheid', *New York Times*, 10 Dec. 2001; Sean O'Toole, 'The Structure of Memory: Johannesburg's Apartheid Museum', *Artthrob* 55, March 2002, [www.artthrob.co.za/02mar/reviews/apartheid.html](http://www.artthrob.co.za/02mar/reviews/apartheid.html); Deborah Graham, 'Apartheid Museum Voted No 1', *Citizen* 3 Oct. 2005.

2 Charlotte Bauer, 'Speaking for Itself, and For All of Us', *Sunday Times*, 2 Dec. 2001; Anne Simmons, 'Shame on Show at Apartheid Museum', *Cape Times*, 7 Dec. 2001; Robyn Sassen, 'Apartheid: Now in Museum Form', 1 May 2002, on blog 'Just Another Day in Africa' at PopMatters, [www.popmatters.com/columns/sassen/020501.shtml](http://www.popmatters.com/columns/sassen/020501.shtml).

3 Nicoli Natrass, 'Economic Aspects of the Construction of Apartheid', in *Apartheid's Genesis, 1935-1962*, ed. Philip Bonner, Peter Delius and Deborah Posel, Johannesburg, 1993; Mark Hunter, *Love in the Time of AIDS: Inequality, Gender, and Rights in South Africa*, Bloomington, 2010, chap. 4; Anne Kelk Mager, *Beer, Sociability, and Masculinity in South Africa*, Bloomington, 2010. For the expansion after the Second World War of a black consumer market in southern Africa more generally, see Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe*, Durham, 1996.

4 Shula Marks, 'Review Article: Apartheid and the Jewish Question', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30: 4, 2004, p. 891.

5 Charles Van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: the Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper 1894-1985*, New York, 1996, pp. 113, 363. Also see Milton Shain, "'Vant to Puy a Vaatch": the Smous and Pioneer Trader in South African Jewish Historiography', *Jewish Affairs*, September 1987.

6 'Krok Brothers Buy Big in Oz: Mansion to be Knocked Down', *Citizen*, 22 Nov. 2007; Wiseman Khuzwayo, 'SA's Super-Rich Krok Trio Stir Up Sydney', *Sunday Independent*, 16 March 2008.

7 Kim Hawkey, 'Krok Family Ripped Apart', *Sunday Times*, 7 Feb. 2010.

8 'Kroks Honoured for a Lifetime of Giving', *Jewish Achievers Awards* (magazine distributed at gala dinner), 2006, p. 8; interview with Solomon Krok by author, 8 Aug. 2008, Summer Place, Johannesburg. Due to illness, Abraham was unable to join these interviews.

9 '5 Krok: R668,7', *Financial Mail*, 7 Jan. 1994; interview with S. Krok, 8 Aug. 2008.

10 'Table 24. Economically Active Jews, By Occupation, 1936-1980', in Sergio Della Pergola and Allie A. Dubb, 'South African Jewry: a Sociodemographic Profile', in *American Jewish Year Book, 1988*, ed. David Singer, New York, 1988, p. 127.

11 Mendel Kaplan and Marian Robertson, 'Introduction', in *Founders and Followers: Johannesburg Jewry, 1887-1915*, ed. Mendel Kaplan and Marian Robertson, Johannesburg, 1991, p. 14.

12 Interviews with S. Krok, 8 Aug. 2008 and (at Milpark Hospital café, Johannesburg) 12 Aug. 2008.

13 Charles H. Feinstein, *An Economic History of South Africa: Conquest, Discrimination and Development*, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 116-9.

14 Hannah Arendt, 'Part Two: Imperialism', in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), new edn, New York, 1979, pp. 204-6; Milton Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*, Charlottesville, 1994, pp. 118-42.

15 Keith Beavon, *Johannesburg: the Making and Shaping of the City*, Pretoria, 2004, chap. 5.

16 Interviews with S. Krok, 8 and 12 Aug. 2008.

17 As previous note.

18 Interview with Francis Roux by author and Sarah Espis-Sanchis, Middelburg, 14 July 2008.

19 Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: the Making of America's Beauty Culture*, New York, 1998, pp. 26-32, 40-43, 226; Nina G. Jablonski, *Skin: a Natural History*, Berkeley, 2006, pp. 158-9; Modern Girl Around the World Research Group (Alys Eve Weinbaum, Lynn M. Thomas, Priti Ramamurthy, Uta G. Poiger, Madeleine Y. Dong and Tani E. Barlow), 'The Modern Girl Around the World: Cosmetics Advertising and the Politics of Race and Style', in *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, ed. Modern Girl Research Group, Durham, 2008.

20 Byron Fenner, *Fenner's Twentieth Century Formulary and International Dispensary*, Westfield NY, 1904, p. 1,385; Francis Chilson, *Modern Cosmetics*, 1st edn, New York, 1934, p. 113; Cleveland R. Denton, Aaron Bunsen Lerner and Thomas B. Fitzpatrick, 'Inhibition of Melanin Formation by Chemical Agents', *Journal of Investigative Dermatology* 18: 2, 1952.

21 Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*; Modern Girl Research Group, 'The Modern Girl Around the World'.

22 Noliwe Rooks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women*, New Brunswick, 1996; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, chap. 7; Susannah Walker, *Style and Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975*, Lexington, 2007, chap. 1.

23 Lynn M. Thomas, 'Skin Lighteners in South Africa: Transnational Entanglements and Technologies of the Self', in *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters*, ed. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, Palo Alto, 2009.

24 As previous note.

25 Carolyn McGibbon, 'Blooming Trade May Be Nipped in Bud', c. May 1987, TimesMedia clippings files, TimesMedia House, Johannesburg.

26 Farieda Khan, 'Creams that are Destroying Black Beauty', *Weekend Argus*, 25 Aug. 1990.

27 *The Urban Bantu Market: Understanding its Complexities and Developing its Potential – Proceedings of a 2-Day Seminar held in February 1969, Durban, Natal*, National Development and Management Foundation, Johannesburg, 1969, p. 21.

28 D. F. Nealon, 'Ammoniated Mercury and the Skin', *Drug and Cosmetic Industry* 52: 2, 1943; Denton and others, 'Inhibition of Melanin Formation'.

29 Edward A. Oliver, Louis Schwartz and Leon H. Warren, 'Occupational Leukoderma', *Journal of American Medical Association* 113: 10, 1939, pp. 927-8; Oliver, Schwartz and Warren, 'Occupational Leukoderma', *Archives of Dermatology and Syphilology* 42: 6, 1940.

30 Interviews with S. Krok, 8 and 12 Aug. 2008; 'Business Achievers of the Month', *Herald Times*, 31 July 1987, p. 6.

31 Interviews with S. Krok, 8 and 12 Aug. 2008.

32 Cheryl Y. Levin and Howard Maibach, 'Exogenous Ochronosis: an Update on Clinical Features, Causative Agents and Treatment Options', *American Journal of Clinical Dermatology* 2: 4, 2001.

33 L.M. Guthrie, 'Successes and Failures in Marketing – the Lessons to be Learned', in National Development and Management Foundation, *The Urban Bantu Market*, p. 68; interviews with S. Krok, 8 and 12 Aug. 2008; interview with Lorato Mosweu (pseudonym) by author and M. Mpho, Tembisa, Gautang Province, South Africa, 18 May 2009.

34 Interviews with S. Krok, 8 and 12 Aug. 2008. From Krok's description it is unclear what he actually did at the pass offices. Other historical accounts suggest that while black employees spent much time at such offices securing necessary documentation, white employers did not.

35 SuperRose ad, *Zonk!*, June 1959.

36 Nimrod Mkele, 'Advertising to the Bantu', in *Second Advertising Convention in South Africa, sponsored by The Society of Advertisers Ltd., Durban, 21st-24th September, 1959*, Johannesburg, 1959.

37 Interview with S. Krok, 8 Aug. 2008.

38 Hollywood Curl (PTY) Limited and The International Hollywood Curl Hairdressers Suppliers and Training Centre v. Twins Products (PTY) Limited, Judgment Supreme Court of South Africa (Appellate Division) case no. 281 of 1987, vol. III, BB1, pp. 388-416.

39 Interviews with S. Krok, 8 and 12 Aug. 2008.

40 B. Bentley-Phillips and Margaret A. H. Bayles, 'Cutaneous Reactions to Topical Application of Hydroquinone: Results of a 6-year Investigation', *South African Medical Journal* 49: 34, 9 Aug. 1975, p. 1,391; D. Saffer, H. Tayob, and P.L.A. Bill, 'Correspondence: Continued Marketing of Skin-Lightening Preparations Containing Mercury', *South African Medical Journal* 50: 39, 11 Sept. 1976, p. 1,499.

41 'Krok Brothers: Mixing a New Brew', *Financial Mail*, 3 April 1987, pp. 31-2.

42 Interview with S. Krok, 12 Aug. 2008.

43 Dr Leonard J. Trilling, Asst Director for Medical Review, Division of Cosmetics Technology, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to H. Wulffhart, Twins Products (PTY) Limited, Johannesburg, South Africa, 6 March 1974: Records of Food and Drug Administration, RG 88, General Subject Files, 1974, 581.1, National Archives and Record Administration, College Park, Maryland.

44 In 1988 a general manager for Twins Products stated that their products contained up to five percent hydroquinone into the early 1980s. Yvonne Grimbeek, 'Postponing of Skin Lighteners' Ban Slammed by City Pharmacists', *Natal Witness*, 15 July 1988.

45 George H. Findlay, J. G. L. Morrison, and I. W. Simson, 'Exogenous Ochronosis and Pigmented Colloid Milium from Hydroquinone Bleaching Creams', *British Journal of Dermatology* 93, 1975.

46 G. H. Findlay and H. A. De Beer, 'Chronic Hydroquinone Poisoning of the Skin from Skin-Lightening Cosmetics: a South African Epidemic of Ochronosis of the Face in Dark-Skinned Individuals', *South African Medical Journal* 57: 6, 9 Feb. 1980, p. 187.

47 Steve Biko, 'What is Black Consciousness?', in *Steve Biko - I Write What I Like: a Selection of His Writings*, ed. Aelred Stubbs, San Francisco, 1978, p. 104.

48 Interviews with Malusi Mpumlwana, Thoko Mbanjwa, and Mamphela Ramphele, Cape Town; and with Malusi Mpumlwana, 7 Aug. 1989, Uitenhage: Karis and Gerhart Collection, Historical Papers, University of Witwatersrand.

49 Emma Mashinini, *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life: a South African Autobiography*, London, 1989, p. 9.

50 'If the Health Department Keeps Its Promise... Say Goodbye to Skin Lightening Cream', *Learn and Teach* 2: 3, 1982; 'Regulations Governing the Sale of Cosmetics Containing Hydroquinone, Mercury, and Lead', *South African Government Gazette* 210, 1982; 'Regulations Governing the Sale of Cosmetics Containing Hydroquinone, Mercury, and Lead', *South African Government Gazette* 219, 1983; interview with Dr Hilary Carman by author, 15 Aug. 2004, Johannesburg.

51 'Skin Lightening Creams a Danger', *Star*, 24 Sept. 1982; Ruth Bhengu, 'The Facts About Skin Lighteners', *Drum*, April 1990.

52 Findlay and De Beer, 'Chronic Hydroquinone Poisoning'; George H. Findlay, 'Ochronosis Following Skin Bleaching with Hydroquinone', *American Academy of Dermatology Journal* 6: 6, 1982; Dr C. Isaacson, Department of Anatomical Pathology, University of Witwatersrand, to Dr Stevens, National Health and Population Development, Pretoria, 25 May 1987: Personal Papers of Dr Hilary Carman (hereafter PPHC).

53 'Cosmetics: Skin Lightener Sales Still Strong', *Finance Week*, 6 April 1989.

54 Quotes from Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, pp. 17, 16; James Campbell, 'Beyond the Pale: Jewish Immigration and the South African Left', in *Memories, Realities and Dreams: Aspects of the South African Jewish Experience*, ed. Milton Shain and Richard Mendelsohn, Johannesburg, 2002.

55 Phone conversation with Geoff Budlender, 25 July 2008, Cape Town. On Budlender and other Jewish lawyers at LRC, see Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, pp. 190-1; and Immanuel Suttner, *Cutting Through the Mountain: Interviews with South African Jewish Activists*, London, 1997, pp. 325-40.

56 'If the Health Department Keeps Its Promise'; 'Skin Lightening Creams: a Big New Problem', *Learn and Teach* 2: 5, 1982, pp. 1-3.

57 Interview with Marc Suttner by author, 22 May 2009, Johannesburg.

58 'The Learn and Teach Challenge', *Learn and Teach* 2: 5, 1982; Martin Feinstein, 'Drum to Ban All Ads for Skin Lightening Creams', *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 Sept. 1982.

59 Quotes from Murphy Morobe, 'Towards a People's Democracy: The UDF View', *Review of African Political Economy* 40, December 1987.

60 Bhengu, 'The Facts About Skin Lighteners'.

61 Vita Palestrant, Consumer Affairs Manager, Checkers South Africa Ltd, Johannesburg to Ellen Kuzwayo, President, National Black Consumers Association, Johannesburg, 30 March 1987; PPHC; "'White Skin" Creams Under Fire', *Sowetan*, 18 May 1987; 'Two Firms Ban Sale of Skin Lighteners', *The Citizen*, 25 June 1987.

62 Government Gazette no. R2892; a draft of the regulation was introduced the previous May. McGibbon, 'Blooming Trade'; Press Statement by Dr E. Kuzwayo and Dr Hilary Carman, 'Ban of Hydroquinone and Other Harmful Ingredients in Skin Lighteners', 9 March 1988; PPHC; J. Tatham, Vice President, Housewives' League of South Africa to Director General, Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act, 'Banning of Skin Lighteners', 16 March 1988; PPHC.

63 'Press Announcement: The Skin Lightening Industry', 26 June 1988; PPHC; Simpiwe Ncwana, 'Red Faces Over Skin Lighteners', *City Press*, 31 July 1988.

64 Mkgadi Pela, 'Skin Lighteners Do Damage', *Sowetan*, 27 April 1989; Grimbeek, 'Postponing of Skin Lighteners' Ban'; Tania Levy, 'Ban on Hydroquinone Surprises Twins', *Business Day*, 24 April 1990.

65 'Lipworth Profit Warning', *The Citizen*, 24 June 1987.

66 McGibbon, 'Blooming Trade'. On Tony Bloom as a member of the delegation of liberal businessmen who met with African National Congress leaders in 1983, Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, pp. 194-5.

67 'Press Announcement: The Skin Lightening Industry', 24 June 1988.

68 Mkgadi Pela, 'Skin Lighteners Do Damage', *Sowetan*, 27 April 1989.

69 'Cosmetics: Skin Lightener Sales Still Strong', 1989 (see n. 53).

70 Grimbeek, 'Postponing of Skin Lighteners' Ban'; Dr David Presbury, President of the Dermatological Society of South Africa, 'Hydroquinones: a National Disgrace!', *Diseases of the Skin* 2: 2, 1988: p. 1; 'Banning of Hydroquinone': PPHC.

71 Bhengu, 'The Facts About Skin Lighteners'; Asha Singh, 'Skin Creams Face Ban', *Sowetan*, 24 April 1990; Anthony Barker, 'End of a 10-Year Battle to Ban Skin Lighteners', *Business Day*, 30 Aug. 1990.

72 Republic of South Africa, 'Government Notice No. R. 1227 of 24 June 1988', *Government Gazette*, Pretoria, 1988; Republic of South Africa, 'Government Notice No. R. 1861 of 10 August 1990', *Government Gazette*, Pretoria, 1990; 'Venter Cracks Down on Skin-Lightening', *Daily Mail*, 14 Aug. 1990.

73 Barker, 'End of a 10-year Battle'; 'Battle Against Skin Lighteners Ends', *Sowetan*, 30 Aug. 1990.

74 'No Skin Lightener Sales', *The Daily Mail*, 23 Aug. 1990; 'Pharmacists Slam Reports', *Pretoria News*, 25 Aug. 1990.

75 Babalwa Shota and Dina Seeger, 'Smugglers Cash In on an Illicit Market,' *Sunday Times*, 12 Dec. 1999; Sam Mathe, 'Curse of the Cosmetic Creams', *Drum*, 10 Feb. 2000.

76 Interviews with S. Krok, 8 and 12 Aug. 2008.

77 '5 Krok' (see n. 9 above). On the Kroks' contributions to black charities, see photo of S. Krok at TEACH event, *Star*, 27 July 1973; and 'Money for the Needy', *Sowetan*, 10 Dec. 1991.

78 Marian Robertson and Mendel Kaplan, 'The Chevra Kadisha – Jewish Helping Hand and Burial Society: Johannesburg's First Organised Social Welfare Work', in *Founders and Followers*, ed. Kaplan and Robertson; Joseph Sherman, 'Serving the Natives: Whiteness as the Price of Hospitality in South African Yiddish Literature', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26: 3, 2000, p. 518.

79 Julia Cook, 'Aish Hatorah Raises Money at a Gala Dinner', *SA Jewish Report*, 13-20 Nov. 2009.

80 'Kroks Honoured for a Lifetime of Giving'; 'Winners All at Jewish Achievers Awards', *SA Jewish Report*, 1-8 Sept. 2006.

81 Peter Alegi, *Laduma! Soccer, Politics, and Society in South Africa*, Scottsville, 2004.

82 Beatrix Payne, 'Abe, the Semi-Retired Millionaire Who Loves Soccer', *Financial Mail*, 4 Aug. 1995; Stuart Graham, 'For Solly and Abe, Gambling with Business is Twice the Fun', [South African] *Sunday Times*, 13 Oct. 2002.

83 Graham, 'For Solly and Abe'; Heather Formby, 'Godfather Krok knuckles down', *Business Times*, 27 Feb. 2005.

84 Martin Hall and Pia Bombardella, 'Las Vegas in Africa', *Journal of Social Archaeology* 5: 1, 2005, p. 13; Philip Bonner, 'History Teaching and the Apartheid Museum', in *Toward New Histories for South Africa: On the Place of the Past in Our Present*, ed. Shamil Jeppie, Cape Town, 2004; Apartheid Museum official webpage [www.apartheidmuseum.org](http://www.apartheidmuseum.org).

85 Bauer, 'Speaking for Itself'; Sassen, 'Apartheid'; Graham, 'For Solly and Abe'.

86 Bauer, 'Speaking for Itself'. Interestingly, Mda in one novel condemned the Kroks by name for selling skin lighteners and earning huge profits (*The Madonna of Excelsior*, Oxford, 2002, pp. 80-2).

87 Bauer, "Speaking for Itself"; Sassen, 'Apartheid'.

88 Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, pp. 168 and 265-6; Annie E. Coombes, *History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*, Durham, 2003, pp. 83-95.

89 Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, pp. 261-3; JTA, 'South Africa and Australia Battle Over Jewish Immigration', *The Jewish Daily Forward*, 6 Feb. 2008; Sergio Della Pergola, *World Jewish Population, 2010*, Storrs, 2010, p. 55.

90 Interview with S. Krok, 12 Aug. 2008.