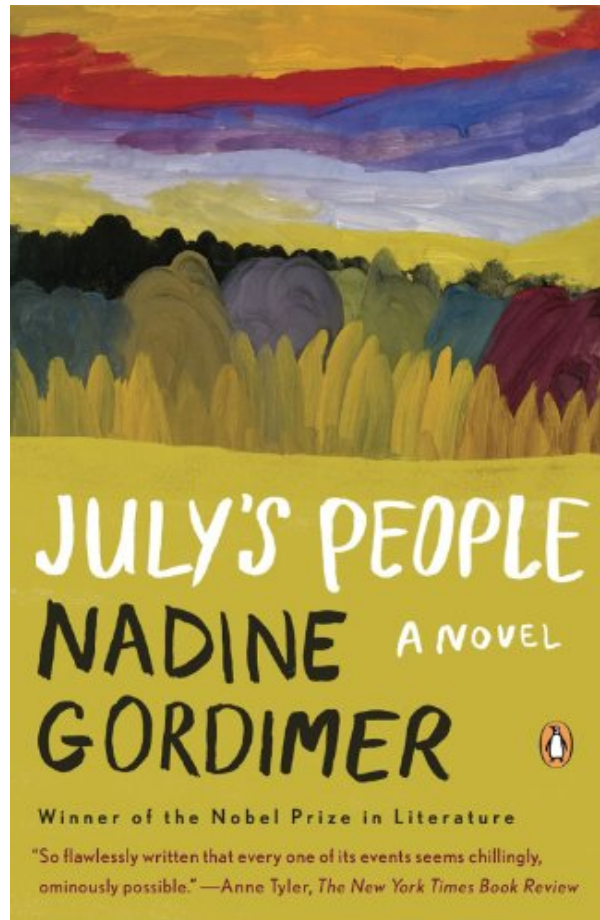
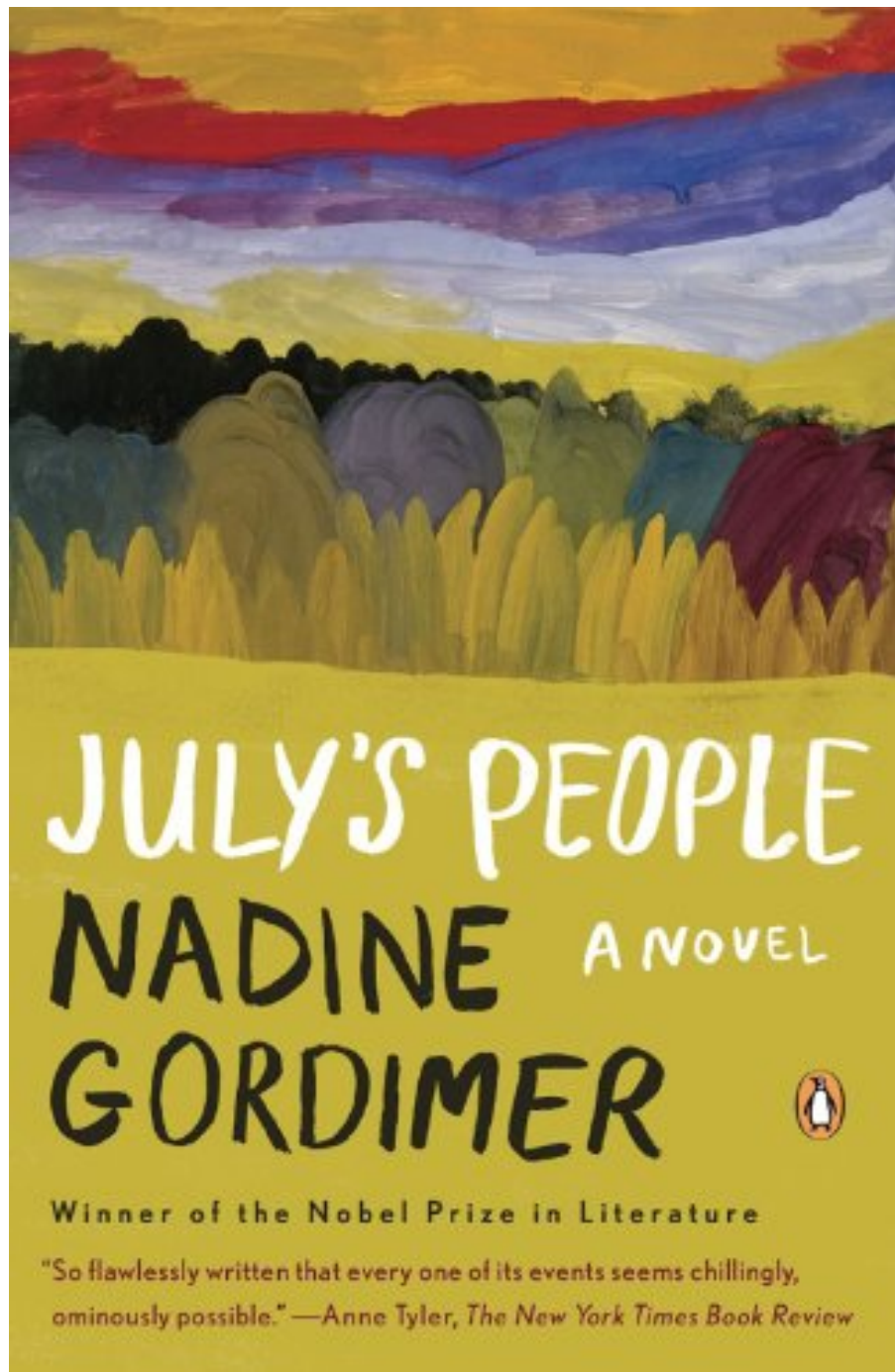


JULY'S PEOPLE BY NADINE GORDIMER



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Amazon.com Review

Not all whites in South Africa are outright racists. Some, like Bam and Maureen Smales in Nadine Gordimer's thrilling and powerful novel *July's People*, are sensitive to the plights of blacks during the apartheid state. So imagine their quandary when the blacks stage a full-scale revolution that sends the Smaleses scampering into isolation. The premise of the book is expertly crafted; it speaks much about the confusing state of affairs of South Africa and serves as the backbone for a terrific adventure.

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JULY'S PEOPLE BY NADINE GORDIMER PDF

Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature

For years, it had been what is called a “deteriorating situation.” Now all over South Africa the cities are battlegrounds. The members of the Smales family—liberal whites—are rescued from the terror by their servant, July, who leads them to refuge in his village. What happens to the Smaleses and to July—the shifts in character and relationships—gives us an unforgettable look into the terrifying, tacit understandings and misunderstandings between blacks and whites.

- Sales Rank: #20504 in Books
- Brand: Gordimer, Nadine
- Published on: 1982-07-29
- Released on: 1982-07-29
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.79" h x .44" w x 5.11" l,
- Binding: Paperback
- 176 pages

Amazon.com Review

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Most helpful customer reviews

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Role Reversal

By Rockefeller

From [...]

The racial tensions and possible societal disintegration that occupy the pages of Nobel Prize winning novelist Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* will most likely seem eerily familiar to Americans. The inferior status of blacks, the exploitative and domineering position of whites - these are American problems. Yet, Gordimer is not an American. She is South African and her novel deals not with the Civil Rights Movement or the legacy of slavery in the U.S., but rather with the disastrous consequences of Apartheid in her homeland.

Written in 1981, *July's People* is set in a future South Africa in which blacks have finally overthrown their white oppressors through the use of extreme violence. The society that cradled Apartheid has been destroyed, as black militias battle the white army for control. The novel centers around the Smales, a liberal white Johannesburg family and their flight from their war-torn home. But this story is not just about them - they are led from the mayhem by their servant of 15 years, a man they only know as July, who takes them to his tribal village in the nation's interior wilderness. This turning of the tables of dependency in the family and servant's relationship is what pushes this work forward.

Little "happens" as far as sustained action in *July's People*. The war, the fighting, the havoc is all kept on the periphery, heard through jumbled radio broadcasts, second-hand retellings, and pure speculation. What Gordimer focuses on is the interaction of her characters. Objects once meaningless, take on entirely new levels of symbolic importance in this post-Apartheid world. When they flee, July has to drive the Smales' family vehicle to avoid attracting combative attention. But once the keys are in his possession, July is hesitant to give them back, having acquired a new found power as the sole individual who has the skin color to pass in the new society. Predictably, the Smales' adaptation to this new dynamic, is less than smooth. Buried tensions come to the surface on both sides, as the characters struggle to accept their new lives. The Smales can only react and their passive response to powerless existences is provocative. The novel begs the reader to ask: What would you do if you were in this position?

What may be most interesting about *July's People*, is that for a novel localized around interracial relationships, none of the characters in the novel are complete, appearing as two-dimensional studies of people rather than genuine well-rounded individuals. Perhaps this is deliberate, as Gordimer wants us to focus more the issue of black-white relations than allowing our emotions to become involved. Readers might then take sides and the entire novel rotates on an axis of ambiguity, concerning everything from the motivations of the characters to what the future will bring. We are left in the same limbo as the characters and this achieves an alienating chill which overwhelms the reader. But while Gordimer succeeds in distancing our feelings from clouding our visions of the ideological conflict, this leads to some feelings of indifference. Nowhere does the reader sense the same panic as Maureen Smales as she watches July become less and less subservient and more independent over the course of her family's stay in his village. Nowhere does the reader see any shred of hope in the novel's pages. The open-ended conclusion of the work continues in this vein, leaving the reader wondering whether a situation as horrible as Apartheid can ever have a positive outcome. Strangely, as events played in reality, they did and yet this doesn't undercut the intellectual muscle of the work.

Much of this work is likely Gordimer probing her own conscious and anxieties, as a liberal South African white. The Smales' never supported Apartheid and pride themselves on how well they treated July while he

was in their employment. Yet, they never did anything to change the situation either. To thinkers like Foucault or Fanon, if one does not actively try to revolt against exploitive institutions, a person is therefore indicted in the institutions' injustices. The Smales' may feel liberal guilt, but is their guilt for the lower status of blacks in society or because they don't necessarily want to give up their privileges? These are the questions Gordimer wants us to ponder.

The most revealing aspect of *July's People* is how all of Gordimer's characters devolve into selfishness and greed, and act largely only on part of their own interests. Her portrayal of both races is far from one-sided, far from sympathetic. While the blacks have spent decades under foreign rule in their own land, once they gain a whiff of power, they begin to fight with one another. The future society Gordimer leaves us with is one of absolute chaos and unmitigated hatreds. Even reasons for potential optimism (like July so graciously trying to help his former employers despite the shade of their skin) are lost as time progresses and old foundations crumble. We all bear the guilt of the societies we create and the ramifications of iniquity seldom are solved through violence. Fortunately, in this case, life didn't mimic art, and Apartheid ended in a more beneficial manner than Gordimer had imagined. But her work still pertains - race relations, not just in South Africa, but worldwide remained fractured. Guns and bombs are still the path favored by governments and terrorists alike to end disputes. Gordimer shows us a world that is frightening because it is so possible. She reminds us that no change, no matter how needed or worthy, ever comes without consequences.

25 of 28 people found the following review helpful.

I am in awe of this book

By Jill

I don't understand the confusion over the writing. I've read other noted experimental novels that were much more difficult (ie Calvino) but writing can (and should) take so many forms, why does it always have to be predictable and follow convention? In this book the structure worked for me and I admire the way she manipulated language to create an intended mood.

What is interesting is that this is a book of conjecture or futurism, written when the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa was taking real shape and getting serious global attention, and when the white people were becoming more aware as to what was really happening in the townships (the news was heavily regulated by the apartheid regime).

Gordimer was working out what might happen if there was real violence and revolution in the streets. It must have been a very scary time, not knowing how it was all going to turn out and whether South Africa would go down the same road as other African countries where clashing clans exterminate each other on a regular basis. She had to consider what would happen if their lives would be in jeopardy to the point that they would have to flee and go in hiding. What a scary concept, one we have only recently had to contemplate after 9/11 woke us up to terror in our midst. (I personally had a fantasy of what I would put in the suitcase and which direction I would head if I felt that the attacks were going to continue).

While there was violence during the revolution in South Africa, it wasn't nearly as bad as the book projected. In reality, the revolution happened without a violent overthrow of the government but with a democratic and relatively (relative to other similar changes of government) peaceful election (thank you Mandela). The violence that occurred was sporadic, and there were bombings during the uncertain times while the government was de-stabilized. But white people weren't pulled from their homes or farms and killed in mass numbers. The way I gather it the "white flight" was from, for example, Johannesburg into the suburbs.

However, back to the novel. I thought it was a great character study and attempt to dissect what it might feel like to be forced into your worst nightmare, your world turned upside down due to civil war, how Gordimer, who likely had black servants in her household (and maybe still does?) would feel if this situation were to happen. It was her version of how one might handle the worst case scenario. Details like what she would do without tampons, and how her children adapted so easily, gave the novel depth.

People think that not much "happens" in this book, but in life things don't tend to happen with the rapidity

that they do in novels or movies. Life happens slowly, and people lose sleep trying to figure out how to decide what to do next, how to handle a situation, going through the "what ifs." The big thing has happened that set the plot in motion - they were forced to leave behind their entire material lives and start over in a strange place where everything was unfamiliar and they had to rely on their servant's kindness. One by one they lost even the smallest "things" they had left that made them feel safe and like they had choices. The car was gone. The gun was taken. Even their clothes were falling apart. What more was there to lose? What do you have left when your possessions are gone? Is a marriage enough to survive on? How do you fill the empty days? It is a fascinating topic and Gordimer only scratches the surface of this complex issue.

I only give this a 4 star instead of 5 because I am really frustrated with the ending. I want to know what happened. I don't like being left hanging after getting involved with this family. I wish there was more about this from other readers.

My thought is that since it was a novel based on conjecture, she left the ending open to speculation, indicating that the future can't be predicted, and she wasn't willing to bring her "what if" to a final conclusion, anything could happen.

18 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

A Clarification

By A Customer

Just thought I'd clarify that the "dashes" that reviewers have been referring to are in fact the standard for marking dialogue in South Africa and, I might add, many other countries.

Gordimer's novel is, I think, a great work of literature that deserves to be read as much for its style and attention to detail as for its touchy and still-applicable subject matter.

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