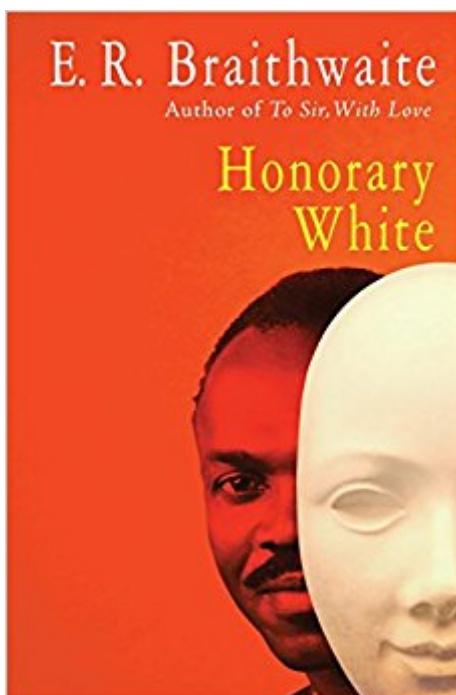


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# Honorary White



## Synopsis

Acclaimed author E. R. Braithwaite (*To Sir, With Love*) chronicles the brutality, oppression, and courage he witnessed as a black man granted "Honorary White" status during a six-week visit to apartheid South Africa. As a black man living in a white-dominated world, author E. R. Braithwaite was painfully aware of the multitude of injustices suffered by people of color and he wrote powerfully and poignantly about racial discrimination in his acclaimed novels and nonfiction works. So it came as a complete surprise when, in 1973, the longstanding ban on his books was lifted by the South African government, a ruling body of minority whites that brutally oppressed the black majority through apartheid laws. Applying for a visa and secretly hoping to be refused, he was granted the official status of "Honorary White" for the length of his stay. As such, Braithwaite would be afforded some of the freedoms that South Africa's black population was denied, yet would nonetheless be considered inferior by the white establishment. With *Honorary White*, Braithwaite bears witness to a dark and troubling time, relating with grave honesty and power the shocking abuses, inequities, and horrors he observed and experienced firsthand during his six-week stay in a criminal nation. His book is a personal testament to the savagery of apartheid and to the courage of those who refused to be broken by it.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A valuable, even unique perspective." —Kirkus Reviews

E. R. Braithwaite was born in British Guiana (now Guyana) in 1912. Educated at the City College of New York and the University of Cambridge, he served in the Royal Air Force during World War II. Braithwaite spent 1950 to 1960 in London, first as a schoolteacher and then as a welfare worker—experiences he described in *To Sir, With Love* and *Paid Servant*, respectively. In 1966 he was appointed Guyana's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations. He also held positions at the World Veterans Federation and UNESCO, was a professor of English at New York University's Institute for Afro-American Affairs, taught creative writing at Howard University, and was the author of five nonfiction books and two novels. He passed away in 2016 at the age of 104.

Though the term honorary white was used as a bureaucratic formality, Braithwaite sees it as a loaded term as if it was an attempt to whitewash and deny that Braithwaite is black. Braithwaite genuinely tries to remain objective but does not hold back his frustration with South Africa's institutionalized racism he experienced first hand. There are some topics I would have liked to see Braithwaite delve further into such as the poor conditions he witnessed of black immigrants to South Africa. I would have liked to learn how much worse it was living in a virtually entirely black society under a black government that someone would prefer to subject themselves to the humiliation of apartheid and seemingly insufferable living conditions but maybe that's a bit out of scope. I highly recommend reading this book in conjunction with Dr. Walter Williams's *South Africa's War Against Capitalism* who was also given honorary white status. Williams's empirical studies of the history and economics of apartheid is an excellent compliment to Braithwaite's personal narrative.

"Eendraag maak mag", old Dutch for Unity is Strength, is the motto of the South Africa that the author visits, presumably in 1974. An internationally known writer (*To Sir with Love*) and former President of the United Nations Council for Namibia, he was at first torn by the fear of being used for propaganda purposes when his books were unexpectedly unbanned and he was granted a visa to visit the country as an Honorary White. The pre-Mandela South Africa that he discovers and of which this book provides a gripping account turns that motto on its head. It is a country in which the races live in parallel and grossly unequal worlds - 4 million whites in the affluence created by the labor of 20 million blacks deliberately kept in dehumanizing conditions under the system of separateness or "apartheid". The pervasive fear, intimidation and seeming helplessness is captured memorably in the accounts of the ordinary blacks he meets in Soweto, the sprawling black township on the outskirts of Johannesburg, which, with great personal courage, he visits often at night and

without the knowledge of the ubiquitous Government Information Office. The author is in turn shocked, outraged and angry at the outward passivity of the black population which he compares, unfavorably, with the aggressive militancy of blacks in the United States of America. His meetings and conversations with white defenders of the system do little to stem his outrage. Only towards the end is a note of hope injected into the picture of unrelieved bleakness that he paints. He meets in his hotel room with a group of students from the University of Witwatersrand, at their request. Guarded at first, the students eventually share with him the doubts that plague them about the rightness of the white cause and their desire for the freedom to live in a just society. He hears of the courageous actions of many progressive white students and faculty and the personal price they were paying for their supposed "liberalism". The discussion is interrupted by a visit from the President of the University, who, at dinner at his home with his wife and other invitees, makes the author an offer for which he was totally unprepared. Join the faculty of the University on a three to six-month appointment as a guest professor to help bring about the change for which he had so eloquently advocated during dinner. The author equivocates and asks for time to consider the offer. The book ends without a decision, but it appears from the public record that the offer was never accepted. As a Guyanese who has also served at the United Nations and visited Soweto in that capacity under the apartheid regime, this book resonates with me in a personal way. I encountered the same urgency on the part of the white South Africans I met to explain to me the rationale for the system. Our blacks are not like your blacks in Europe, the United States or the Caribbean. But, like the author, I too encountered decent whites who knew that the system under which they enjoyed their affluence was an immoral one and were prepared to do something about it. E.R. Braithwaite, who will be celebrating his 102nd birthday this year and is reportedly working on his autobiography, must be gratified to see the new Republic of South Africa today

Great Book in great condition. I personally know the gentleman that is why I bought the book. He really is a remarkable and pleasant man.

This is about the author of "To Sir, With Love" going to South Africa while apartheid is still in effect. Again, as in "A Kind of Homecoming," he is a witness to history, and it's always more interesting to read a first-hand witness's accounts than just the usual media "sound bites"--especially a witness who's always so honest about his reactions and feelings (e.g. actual dismay at having his visa application APPROVED after he learned the South African government had UNbanned his writings--reminded me of when I asked my parents if I could go to my first dance in junior high &

was COUNTING on their "no" as an excuse for avoiding something I was scared to death of, and then they said "yes," leaving me having to either find another excuse or face my fears!) The title comes from how the South Africans considered him in order for him to get treatment and privileges that the resident blacks were denied.

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