

Teacher's Information Sheet: Apartheid in South Africa

"Apartheid" comes from the Afrikaans word for "Apartness", or, as it is generally defined "separateness". What it came to mean in practice was a social and political policy of racial segregation implemented by minority white governments from 1948 -1994. From 1910-48 the franchise to the vote was given to whites and "Cape Coloureds" (people of mixed race) only and the Cape Coloureds were knocked off the register after the ascent of the Afrikaner National Party to government. Not until 1994 was the vote granted to people of every racial group. This doomed the vast majority of the population to institutionalised racism for the next 36 years.

Initially, the aim of apartheid was to maintain white domination over the political, economic and social systems of South Africa while extending racial separation, in the 1960s a plan of "Grand Apartheid" was executed, meaning territorial separation and police repression.

The enactment of race laws in 1948 touched every aspect of social life, including the sanctioning of "white-only" jobs and the *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act* of 1949. In 1950 the *Population Registration Act* led to the creation of a national registrar in which every one's race was recorded as one of three categories: white, black (African) or coloured (of mixed descent). A fourth category for Indians and Asians was added later. Classification was based on appearance, social acceptance and descent. A white person was defined as "in appearance, obviously a white person or generally accepted as a white person" and determination that a person was "obviously white" would take into account "his habits, education, and speech and deportment and demeanour". All blacks had to carry "pass books" which contained fingerprints, photo and information on access to non-black areas

The system of racial segregation was formalised through a series of laws from 1950 onwards. The *Group Areas Act* of 1950 created different residential and business areas for each race and meant forced removals for those living in the "wrong" areas such as coloureds living in District 6 in Cape Town. The *Land Acts* of 1954 and 1955 restricted non white residence to specific areas. These reinforced minority white control over 80% of the land in the country while additional laws forbade most social contact between races and separated public facilities and educational standards and created race specific jobs while the *Suppression of Communism Act* of 1950 was so broad it included any individual or group calling for radical change.

The *Bantu (Black African) Authorities Act* of 1951 furthered these divisions by creating 10 Black African "Homelands", independent states to which each individual was assigned according to the record of origin of 1950. The *Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act* of 1970 made every Black African a citizen of one of these homelands. People in these homelands couldn't vote anywhere other than their designated homeland or have any involvement with the South African Parliament, despite the hegemony that institution held over the homelands. By being citizens of the homeland, they therefore did not have the right to be citizens of South Africa. From 1976-81 four of these homelands were created, effectively designating nine million South Africans as aliens in their own country who needed passports to leave their homeland and enter South Africa. These homelands were not economically viable, nor did they have the natural resources to enable their citizens to survive as an independent state, had they wanted to. As it was, homelands administrations sought constantly to be recognised as part of South Africa and engage with national politics.

The enforcement of apartheid was managed through incredible oppression and suppression. The *Public Safety Act* and *Criminal Law Amendment Act* of 1953 empowered the government to declare states of emergency with increased stringency. Penalties were made more severe for any one protesting against a law. These included fines, imprisonment and whippings. Despite all this however, opposition to apartheid was continual throughout the regime. Black Political Parties, supported by white sympathisers campaigned continually for justice. Tactics included strikes and widespread violence. All of which met with heavy oppression. In 1960, a large group of blacks in Sharpeville refused to carry their passes. The government declared a state of emergency which lasted for 156 days. By the end of it 69 people were dead and 187 wounded. Through the Public Safety Act anyone could be detained without a hearing for up to 6 months. Many people died in prison. If you were tried, you were often sentenced to death, banished, or imprisoned for life, like Nelson Mandela.

Where was the International Community? South Africa was forced to leave the British Commonwealth in 1961 after members denounced those actions carried out under apartheid. In 1985 the United States as well as Britain put in place economic sanctions for South Africa in protest of its racial policies. By 1990 pressure from within and outside South Africa had mounted and F W de Clerk led his government to the first stages of dismantling apartheid. His government was dedicated to reform and 1990 saw the legalisation of banned black political parties and the release of political leaders. In 1994, the first free elections in South Africa's history took place and the constitution was re-written. With the election of Nelson Mandela as the country's first black president the apartheid system finally broke apart.

The consequences of apartheid are not easily forgotten. The informal dual racial system is still an accepted part of society today, as are the struggles of those descendants of the blacks forced to move into "homelands", subsistence farmers who toil on unfertile land. Poverty, prejudice, crime and disease having been born out of a legalised racial system will not so easily be eradicated in a democratic one.

For more info

- <http://www.africanaencyclopedia.com/apartheid/apartheid.html> (General)
- <http://africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/blsalaws.htm> (Lists of apartheid legislation)
- <http://www-cs-students.stanford.edu/~cale/cs201/apartheid.hist.htm> (General)
- <http://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/gallery> (Films and Media clips from the UN – search for apartheid)
- <http://www.apartheidmuseum.org/> (Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg)
- <http://www.districtsix.co.za/frames.htm> (District 6 Museum, examining the history of the District 6 area through memories of resettlement)
- <http://www.cvet.org.za/> (The Community Video Education Trust (CVET) in Cape Town is building a digital archive of videos taken in South Africa in the later 1980s and early 1990s. This primary footage documents the anti-apartheid movement including demonstrations, speeches, mass funerals, celebrations and interviews with activists. Videos capture the activism of trade unions, students and political organisations. Videos include women from Lavender Hill talking about the removals and the hardships suffered as well as the release of Mandela. Invaluable resource.)

Links and Discussion

- Consider the South African experience of apartheid with Nazi Germany, only 15 years its predecessor, or, more currently, the situation in Palestine.
- Explore poetry, music and literature as a record of experience.
 - Tutamkhulu Afrika's "Nothing's Changed". Showing the legacy of apartheid and present day impact.
 - Alex La Guma's short story "A Walk in the Night", 1962
 - Richard Rive's novel "Buckingham Palace, District 6" which has also been adapted into a play.
 - South African Jazz Musician Basil Coetzee is best known for his song "District 6" which he wrote from experience having lived there until its destruction.
- Consider the different ways of opposing a regime such as apartheid. Pianist Abdullah Ibrahim was a frequent visitor to District 6 in the 1950s, In a 2001 article published in The Guardian he described District 6 as **"a fantastic city within a city...[W]here you felt the fist of apartheid it was the valve to release some of that pressure. In the late 50s and 60s, when the regime clamped down, it was still a place where people could mix freely. It attracted musicians, writers, politicians at the forefront of the struggle. We played and everybody would be there."**
- Look at modern representations of apartheid. Why is something like this interesting to us? District 9 is a 2009 film, based in an alternative Johannesburg. Directed by Peter Jackson, it is based on the events of District 6.