

The African Independence Movements

The African road to political independence began with decolonization, but most African countries remained economically dependent on the West.

Democracy and constitutionalism occupied a fragile position in African countries, which had neither political experience nor the national identity and unity to make a liberal political government work.

Certain countries in Africa were attracted to the Marxist ideas of Russia and China. For example, Ghana found in communism a program for fast economic development, a reason to run the nation under a dictatorship and a flag by which they could become politically and economically independent. However Marxism often failed and civil wars broke out followed by repressive (brutal) dictatorships. Between 1947 and 1962 almost every African country was a subject in the Cold War. It was Marxism versus democracy and the United States. Sometimes the United States was in the uncomfortable position of backing dictatorships just to stop the spread of communism.

The Western European nations assisted American containment by creating a system of neocolonialism in the nations susceptible to falling into communist hands.

Neocolonialism is a system designed to undermine political independence and perpetuate (be responsible for) economic dependence. This system often carried racial overtones. **Racial neoimperialism** became the cause for wars of national independence. These wars were fed with anti-capitalist and pro-socialists ideas.

The belief for independence actually started after World War I. Educated Africans who had studied in Western countries had become acquainted with both Marxist and Liberal thought. In the 1920's and 1930's black and white intellectuals formulated the idea of **negritude**, or blackness, meaning racial pride, self-confidence and black creativity. When the Great Depression took place many of these intellectuals lost their jobs to whites and the masses suffered as their dependence on foreign markets for raw materials almost disappeared. This economic state made them call for outright independence.

World War II both interrupted and strengthened the movement. African mines and plantations gained from wartime production. The old colonial masters were too occupied to worry about countries such as Ghana. New African leaders of the 1940's came from humble backgrounds, former schoolteachers, union leaders and government clerks. They accepted the existing boundaries that the Europeans had draw up avoiding border disputes. Instead they focused on solidifying their own power positions.

Ghana: The first African state to emerge from colonial rule. **Kwame Nkrumah** led the nation by building a mass party, injecting it with religious revival sentiment and indigenous historical forms. His party staged strikes and riots and in 1957 Nkrumah's government took over. In 1964 the government fell to Marxism. Chinese and East German technology helped Nkrumah set up a one-party socialist state where he claimed dictatorial powers. In a very short period of time Ghana's government was deep in debt from building hospitals, schools and developing projects like the Volta River hydroelectric and aluminum plants. In 1966 he was overthrown by a police-army coup. Since then Ghana has had coups in 1972, 1978, 1979 and 1981 and remains somewhat unstable, though democratic today.

Nigeria: The same sequence of events took place here. Nigeria is a mix of **Yoruba** in the West (military minded) and the **Ibos** in the East (business and independent villages). In addition there is a religious mix, Muslims in the North and Animists in the South. After independence Nigeria adopted a federal system but by 1965 ethnic rivalries caused the law and order to break down. When the Ibo-led army took over they were massacred by a counter-group. When this happened a new country emerged in the east of the region - **Biafra**. Biafra lasted only three years, becoming the site of genocide and starvation. During the 1970's and 1980's more coups took place which were accompanied by military dictatorships. Ironically these wars were aided by both Soviet and American weaponry depending on who was running for control. Today Nigeria is a member of OPEC and a hotbed of political unrest.

Zaire: The Congo, Kenya and South Africa were no different in their struggle for independence. Belgian rule in the Congo was so dictatorial that when they left only 16 African college graduates were left in the country. There were no organized national movements and no mechanism for any sort of rule; the Belgians made certain that no uprisings would ever take place under their control.

When independence came to the **Congo in 1960 (now called Zaire)**, a series of rulers, one after the other, came to power. In 1964 leftist rebels set up a People's Republic causing U.S. paratroopers to become involved rescuing thousands of whites and hostages. In 1971 the "republic" of Zaire was formed by **General Joseph Mobuto** who created a military rule.

Kenya: In the 1950's an independence movement called Mau Mau, led by Jomo Kenyatta. However the movement still existed underground and in 1963 a multiracial Kenya won its independence. Kenyatta sought the broad support of both blacks and whites. He encouraged Asians and Europeans to remain in Kenya as long as they accepted African rule. However Kenyatta's leadership became more repressive and autocratic. His successor, Daniel Arap Moi, has maintained political power despite debt, inflation and disputes with neighbors. Recently there has been a wave of corruption within the government exposed in Western Europe and many nations, including England are placing economic sanctions on the country.

Angola and Mozambique: No states in Africa suffered more from the Cold War than these two nations. Originally controlled by the Portuguese they were offered independence in 1974. Immediately violence broke out.

In **Angola** **The National Front** (based in Zaire) were Soviet-Backed using Cuban troops who faced **The National Union** who were backed by the United States and South Africa. A bloody civil war lasting sixteen years finally ended in 1991. It ended when Jonas Savimbi, the leader of **UNITA – National Union for Total Independence of Angola** negotiated for Cuban and South African troops to leave.

In **Mozambique** the war only lasted ten years. It came to an end there when Maoist president Samora Machel promised gradual transition to a communist system. Many emigrated, especially whites. As a result Mozambique became economically dependent on South Africa and became deep in debt.

South Africa: the Afrikaans (Dutch) won control from the British in 1948. To cement their rule they instituted a policy of **Apartheid (legal racial segregation)**.

Nonwhites—classified as Bantu (black), colored (mixed), or Indian—did not share full rights of citizenship with the white minority (for example, black people could not vote in parliamentary elections), and many public facilities and institutions were until 1990 restricted to the use of one race only. The establishment of Black National States was another manifestation of apartheid.

The term “apartheid” was coined in the late 1930s by the South African Bureau for Racial Affairs (SABRA), which called for a policy of “separate development” of the races. It was first legislated 1948, when the **Afrikaner National Party** gained power.

The legislature gave certain tribes “homelands” – much like the American Indian reservations but reserved the best jobs and lands for whites and made political participation for blacks impossible. Internally, organizations opposed to apartheid—for example, the **African National Congress (ANC)** and the **United Democratic Front (UDF)**—were banned, and some leading campaigners for its abolition were, like Steve Biko, killed, or, like Archbishop Tutu, harassed. Anger at the policy sparked off many uprisings, from Sharpeville 1960 and Soweto 1976 to the Crossroads squatter camps 1986. Key nationalist leaders such as **Nelson Mandela** were jailed.

Abroad, anti apartheid movements sprang up in many countries. In 1961 South Africa was forced to withdraw from the Commonwealth of Great Britain because of apartheid; during the 1960s and 1970s there were calls for international sanctions, especially boycotts of sporting and cultural links; and in the 1980s advocates of sanctions extended them into trade and finance.

The South African government’s reaction to internal and international pressure was twofold: it abolished some of the more hated apartheid laws (the ban on interracial marriages was lifted 1985 and the pass laws, which restricted the movement of nonwhites, were repealed 1986); and it sought to replace the term “apartheid” with “plural democracy”. Under states of emergency 1985 and 1986 it used force to quell internal opposition, and from 1986 there was an official ban on the reporting of it in the media.

In general Soviet Arms went to the blacks and U.S. arms to the whites. Only after Berlin fell in 1989, ending the Cold War did the white president of South Africa, F.W. de Klerk, begin discussions with Nelson Mandela. This paved the way for an end to apartheid and the beginning of rule based on racial equality. In Oct 1989 President F W de Klerk permitted anti apartheid demonstrations; the Separate Amenities Act was abolished 1990 and a new constitution promised. In 1990 Nelson Mandela, a leading figure in the African National Congress, was finally released.

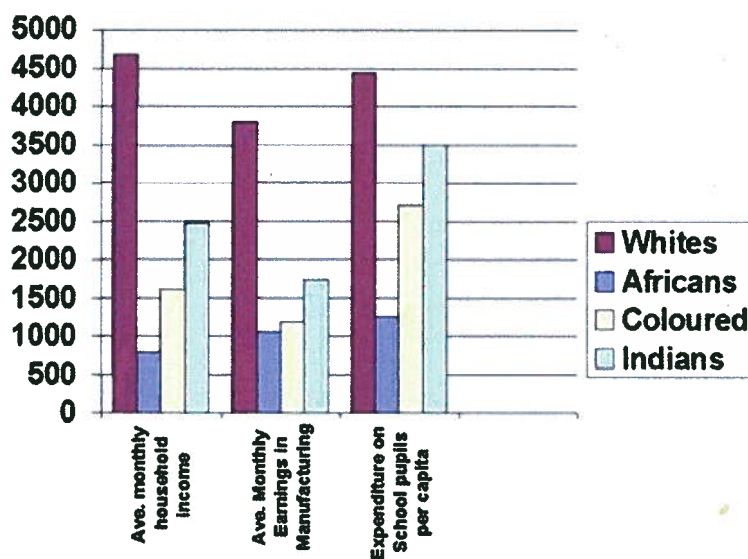
In 1991 the remaining major discriminating laws embodied in apartheid were repealed, including the Population Registration Act 1950, which had made it obligatory for every citizen to be classified into one of nine racial groups. Finally, multiracial elections were held for both the state presidency and the new nonracial assembly April 1994.

Apartheid

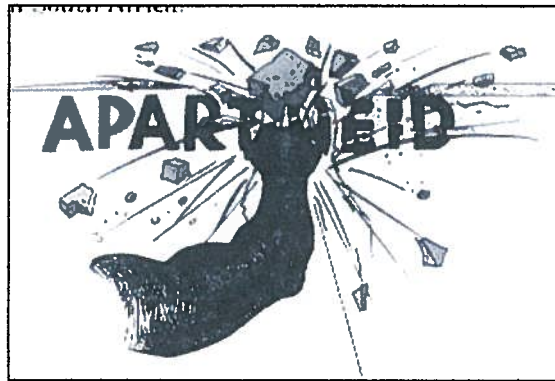
The official policy of racial segregation practices until the 1990's in the Republic of South Africa, involving political, legal, and economic discrimination against nonwhites.

After the Boer War, Britain granted the area of South Africa its independence in 1910. The white-controlled government then instituted apartheid. The 1913 **Native Land Act** provided that the Bantus (native people) could own land only on reservations which usually contained poor soil. Bantus were required to carry passes. Later, Bantus found themselves barred from the best mine jobs. In 1912 the middle-class, urban-based professionals and chiefs organized the **African National Congress (ANC)**, the foremost South African nonviolent civil rights organization. The ANC tried to use legal means to bring about change but without success. Two major leaders of this organization were **Bishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela**.

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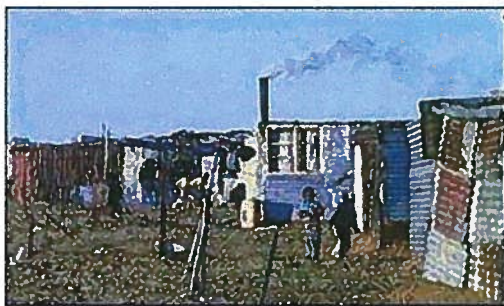
The legislature gave certain tribes “homelands” – much like the American Indian reservations but reserved the best jobs and lands for whites and made political participation for blacks impossible. In 1950 the **Group Areas Act** created ten homelands for blacks, but they contained only 20% of the land for the Blacks who were 80% of the population. This restrictive legislation led to the Sharpeville Massacres in 1960. Peaceful demonstrators were fired upon and over sixty died. In response Mandela formed the “**Spear of the Nation**” movement, an underground military command. It campaigned against the symbols of apartheid.



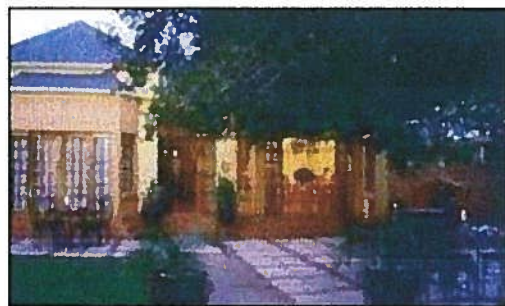
Anti-Apartheid poster

In 1964 the government sentenced Mandela to life imprisonment. He became the symbolic leader of the nationalist movement. A 1976 protest in Soweto over the required use of Afrikaans (the language of the Afrikaners) touched off months of racial violence which drew international attention to the apartheid issue.

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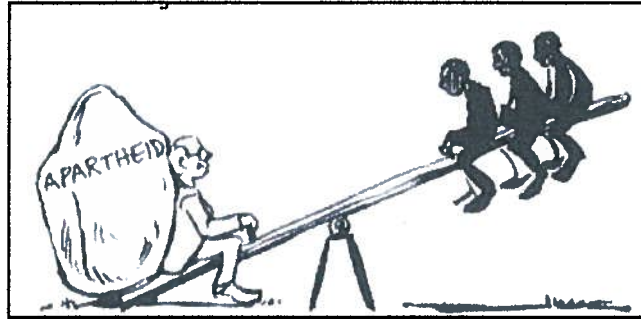


A typical squatter camp



A typical white, middle-class house

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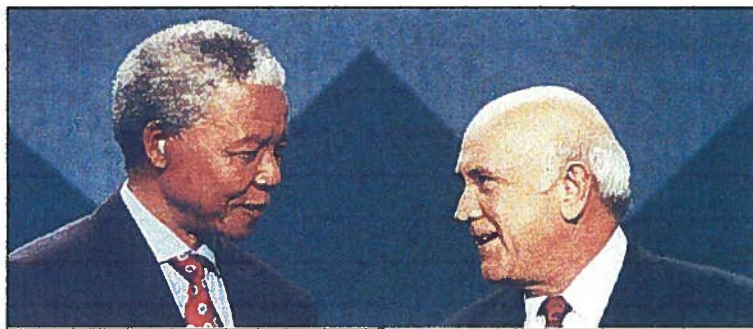
Apartheid Cartoon

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Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk

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