

Rainbow Nation

19 May 2004



South Africa and its ex-President Nelson Mandela have been receiving a great deal of attention in the UK media during the past few weeks.

Reports have been marking the tenth anniversary of the transition to "Majority Rule" in South Africa. Ex-president Nelson Mandela has said the award of the 2010 World Cup is an 'ideal present for South Africa' celebrating 10 years of democracy.

Until 1994, South Africa was ruled by a white minority of European descent which considered itself superior to the indigenous black population. This dominance was achieved through a series of laws known as *Apartheid*. However, although freedom has now been won for all people in South Africa, the nation continues to face on-going economic challenges as it attempts to modernise,

despite its well-established diamond trade and tourism sector. It is also experiencing a more severe HIV/AIDS crisis than any other nation in the world.

South Africa at a glance

- Population: 45 million (16 Million in 1960)
- Capital: Pretoria
- Languages: 11 official languages; whites speak English and (Dutch-derived) Afrikaans while blacks speak Sesotho, Setswana, Xhosa and Zulu (amongst others)
- Religion: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, indigenous beliefs
- Life expectancy: 45 years (men), 51 years (women); figures much higher for whites than blacks
- Monetary unit: 1 Rand = 100 cents
- Main exports: Gold, diamonds, metals and minerals, cars, machinery
- Income per capita: US \$2,500 (2002)

What was Apartheid and who is Nelson Mandela?

In 1948, the ruling white National Party of South Africa formulated a set of policies known as Apartheid. Since 1923, successive laws had denied blacks political and land rights. The policies of Apartheid took things a step further by attempting to remove almost all social contact between South Africa's four main ethnic groups – whites, blacks, Indians and Coloureds (the term they used for people of mixed race). Millions of non-whites were forced to migrate to new homes to ensure that different parts of cities and rural regions only contained permanent residents sharing the same ethnic origin. Mixing of races remained necessary in the workplace, of course, and so non-whites were allowed to commute into white areas to work in factories and stores.

It took political activists such as Nelson Mandela many decades to succeed in their fight to get rid of Apartheid and extend full voting rights to the rest of the population. Mandela was a member of the African National Congress (ANC), a political organisation that the ruling white National Party branded as terrorists. The ANC worked within South Africa to disrupt Apartheid and gained much popular support from the outside world. During the 1980s, many countries began to boycott South Africa's agricultural and industrial products. Pop acts and sports teams also increasingly refused to make visits.

In Britain, customer protests led to banks such as Barclays investing less in South African businesses at a time when its government was becoming desperately short of money due to the rising costs of policing Apartheid.

Under this mounting internal and external pressure, the 1990s finally brought an end to Apartheid. Nelson Mandela was released from jail 27 years after he had first been imprisoned as a so-called "terrorist". His freedom was approved in 1990 by F.W. de Klerk, leader of the ruling white National Party. In 1993, the major political parties approved a new constitution for the nation. *Majority Rule* – giving non-whites the power to vote for the first time – was peacefully established, with democratic elections held during April 1994. Since then, the nation has been governed by the ANC party under Nelson Mandela and later Thabo Mbeki. Following a landslide general election victory for the ANC, Mbeki was re-elected for a second five-year term last April.

Is sustainable development possible for South Africa?

The economy of South Africa has faltered in recent years. Left with huge debts by the National Party, the transition to post-Apartheid has also been costly. South Africa's economy remains sluggish, with the unemployment rate remaining at nearly 30%. Economic disparity is also a problem; the poorest 50% of the population receive just 11% of South Africa's total annual income whereas the richest 7% of the population receive over 40% of the country's income.

Economic growth depends heavily upon exports of diamonds, gold and metals. However, *ecotourism* is one area where real new successes are being achieved. In the KwaZulu-Natal region, for instance, revenues from foreign tourists are rising while progress has been made in boosting the numbers of the previously-dwindling white rhinoceros. A Tourism Levy is used to generate a Trust Fund that oversees the distribution of funds to those communities adjacent to the protected areas in which the money is collected. Every tourist is thus contributing to help communities build local schools and clinics as part of a local multiplier effect. Around £2 million is collected this way each year.

It is widely hoped that the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, mooted to be worth \$550m (£313m) to the economy (without contributions from FIFA and the other millions from football tourism) and would create 150,000 jobs, will boost the country's image as an emerging and safe country for inward investment and tourism. One specialist on the African economy said:

"There will be a fiscal stimulus, and it will affect GDP in the short-term. It would also help countries like South African, heavily based on mining, and Morocco, which depends a lot on agriculture, to develop their service economies. Hotel bookings, travel, and personal consumption by visitors will all stimulate that side of things. The fear is the winning country may be tempted to divert cash away from projects set up to tackle illiteracy or unemployment, or to provide social housing, and into stadium building. Both Morocco and South Africa have set up worthwhile projects, and there is a danger they may move money from these to grandiose stadiums that are not needed after the tournament."

However, even more money is desperately needed for development purposes in South Africa, as it attempts to move out from under the shadow of Apartheid. With the decline of the militaristic Apartheid-era government, crime in South Africa has risen rapidly in recent years and the leading cause of death for males aged 15 to 21 is homicide. An even greater concern is that, like much of Africa, South Africa is in the midst of the AIDS epidemic. A new survey suggests that 700,000 children have the condition ([The Guardian, 14 May 2004](#)). In total, 5.7 million of South Africa's 45 million people are now infected with the virus, giving it the largest HIV-positive population in the world. The new survey also showed that 3.3% of children between two and 18 had lost one or both parents to AIDS. The UN estimates the disease has now orphaned 660,000 South African children. Black youngsters are the hardest hit, especially those living in shanty towns (known as "townships") on the outskirts of the major cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Government response to the epidemic has been inconsistent, with President Mbeki actually denying any scientific basis for AIDS and actively fighting legal efforts to provide free antiretroviral medication to HIV-infected individuals. Mbeki appears to believe that poverty, not HIV, is the cause of AIDS; and that antiviral medication is created by scientists in the employ of pharmaceutical companies that wish to experiment on Africans ([The Guardian, 14 May 2004](#)). Meanwhile, the scale of the AIDS crisis clearly threatens sustainable economic and social development in South Africa. For now, it remains the single

largest concentration of industrial power on the African continent. It is also the only state in Africa with nuclear power of any form, symbolising its relatively advanced state of industrial development. Yet crime, lawlessness and health desperately need to be addressed by the ANC as South Africa enters its second decade of freedom.

Useful applications for GCSE and AS geography

1. What is the population structure of South Africa and how is it changing?

The national **population pyramid** is broadly stationary (triangle-shaped), with an overall rate of increase of 1.7%. However, there are marked differences between the major ethnic groups. The whites now have a **regressive structure** (**Demographic Transition Model**: stage 4) and show little overall natural increase, whereas the blacks are growing at 1.8% (although the urban black fertility rate of 2.3 is much higher than the rural figure of 5.5). As a result, the black population **structure is stationary** in character (**Demographic Transition Model**: stage 2).

South Africa's dynamic population pyramid

In the space of a generation, black numbers have therefore doubled, whereas white numbers have remained the same. Indeed, the demography of South Africa had a significant role to play in hastening the end of white power. Although the final abolition of Apartheid reflected changing views towards human rights amongst liberal white South Africans, it was also clearly becoming impossible for whites to withhold power from blacks for much longer by the late 1980s, given the diverging growth rates for blacks and whites.

South Africa's population can also be structured according to several different cultural criteria. Around 78% are black, 11% white, 9% coloured and 2% are of Asian origin. Superimposed on this racial classification are further ethnic divisions. There are nine entirely distinct black ethno-linguistic groups (one of which is the famous Zulu people), plus a twofold division of the whites (into English and Dutch Afrikaans) and a threefold division of the Asians (into Tamil, Hindi and Urdu).

2. What kind of migrations did Apartheid generate?

Under Apartheid, two important pieces of legislation were created. Firstly, with the creation of the Homelands (or Bantustans), black South Africans were allocated ten designated reserves to live in. These regions represented only 13% of the national land area and contained few resources and little infrastructure. Secondly, the Group Areas Act (1950) ordered complete residential separation for the four main ethnic groups – blacks, whites, Indians and coloureds (mixed race). Different parts of cities were allocated to the different groups, with the most accessible and desirable areas inevitably going to the whites. Combined, these two pieces of legislation were responsible for up to 4 million forced removals, as families were forced to migrate into different areas in compliance with the new rules of separation.

As few urban areas of employment were to be found in their new homelands, blacks were now forced to live at a considerable distance from the main centres of employment and needed to commute to work each day. These daily *circulatory movements* could take up to three hours. Perched on the edge of the Bophuthatswana Homeland region, 600,000 blacks lived in an area of shanty towns known as Winterveld. They were being forced to live some 30km away from their workplaces in Pretoria. Known as "frontier commuters", they lost up to one fifth of their wages meeting travel costs.

The most notorious example of forced migration under Apartheid occurred in District Six of Cape Town. This event came to symbolise all that was wrong with the Group Areas Act. Located on the Atlantic Coast just to the south-east of the CBD of Cape Town, District Six was home to 60,000 people of all races when it was designated as white-only in 1966. Dutch and English farmers, Asian labourers, Lithuanian Jews, native Africans and so-called coloureds (the product of mixed-race unions) had intermingled in Cape Town for centuries. Yet over the next two decades, District Six was emptied of non-whites and their homes were demolished. Replacement accommodation – mere shacks, in many cases – was built in new townships on the windy and remote Cape Flats for the unhappy migrants.

3. What made urban settlement patterns so unusual in Apartheid-era South Africa?

The Group Areas Act was also responsible for the creation of the Apartheid City. Like the famous urban model designed by Hoyt, clearly defined residential sectors became visible in cities such as Pretoria and Johannesburg. However, instead of being income based ("high-class" or "low-class") these sectors were labelled according to the *ethnicity* of the residents! By law, whites, Indians and coloureds could now live only in certain designated areas. Blacks could not live in the main cities at all but were expected to commute to work from adjacent rural areas known as Homelands.

As a result, a typical city structure consisted of an extensive white residential core encircling the CBD and expanding outwards in sectors into the most accessible and environmentally desirable suburbs. Coloured and Indian sectors were created in the less desirable suburbs. Blacks were forced to live some distance away on the edges of their own Homelands. Shanty towns thus developed many miles away from the major cities, as in Bophuthatswana's Winterveld and Geographers labelled this process "displaced urbanisation". Only in exceptional circumstances were *townships* allowed to be built for black migrant workers closer to the edges of major cities. Soweto, originally a large shanty town on the outskirts of Johannesburg, is the most famous example of this. It was given a community council and basic services after riots in the mid-1970s, despite not lying within one of the official black Homelands.



4. How and why are settlements now changing?



South African cities are starting to lose their highly segregated character. Last October, for instance, plans for new housing in Cape Town's notorious District Six were announced. Former residents, displaced by the Group Areas Act in 1966, are to be given priority should they want to return. So far, 1,700 have applied for places. The rest of those who were evicted are either dead or chose cash compensation instead ([The Guardian](#), 29 October 2003).

Yet more generally, after only ten years of social reforms, education and skill levels between blacks and whites are sadly still quite evident. Income disparities continue to support segregation in the housing market throughout South Africa's major cities. In

Johannesburg, the exclusivity of majority white districts such as Parkview, Parkhurst and Sandton remains pronounced. Most blacks remain poor and while there is now some black presence in the white northern suburbs, very few can yet afford the rents outside of black neighbourhoods such as Yeoville, Hillbrow, Brixton and peripheral townships such as Soweto.

Some progress has, of course, been made. Black people have moved from zero to 10% of company ownership and now occupy 15% of all skilled positions. The richest black people's incomes have risen by 30% and small numbers are now counted amongst the nation's most wealthy. Symbolic of this, Johannesburg City Auto, the first wholly black-owned BMW dealership, opened last year and sells top-range models for as much as £95,000. Yet, according to [The Guardian](#) (13 April 2004), such a business will most likely be catering for "a handful of mega-rich tycoons with ANC links", such as Tokyo Sexwale and Cyril Ramaphosa, who have made recent fortunes from mining operations and communications.

These individuals may be geographically mobile, but the majority of black South Africans, as yet, are not. Therefore the basic structures of the Apartheid City are kept largely in place, maintained by market forces. Many black people, especially in rural areas, remain in desperate poverty, in common with much of the African continent. In Johannesburg's Alexandra township, 400,000 Blacks share one square mile of shacks ([The Guardian, 13 April 2004](#)). It will take a generation until significant numbers of black South Africans have gained the education and skills needed to make real economic advancement and to consequently gain entry at the higher end of the housing market.

Many more still live in the "displaced" shanty towns that developed under Apartheid along the frontiers of the Homelands, adjacent to yet physically cut off from the major cities. Positive changes are thankfully now taking place in these informal settlements. Writing in [The Guardian \(14 April 2004\)](#), local journalist Justice Malala remembered the shanty town of New Eersterus as a barren piece of land 45 minutes' drive north of the capital city, Pretoria. The first villagers were dumped there back in the early 1960s when the Apartheid regime removed blacks from the racially mixed suburbs of Pretoria in accordance with the Group Areas Act.

New Eersterus originally lacked running water or electricity and the houses were corrugated iron shacks. Today, ten years after the end of Apartheid, the electricity network is fairly reliable, some roads have been tarred, new schools have been built and a water supply has been installed. Nationwide, the number of people in shanty towns with access to water has increased by nine million since 1994. More than 70% of households are now electrified, and nearly 1.9m new houses have been built for the poor. Yet there is still a yawning gap between life in New Eersterus and in the affluent white-dominated suburbs of neighbouring Johannesburg.