

SOUTH AFRICA: 1652- MID 20TH CENTURY

Early European Settlement

European settlement in the area that today is South Africa began in 1652, with the Dutch occupation of Table Bay, now Cape Town, South Africa's parliamentary capital. These early colonists, later known as Boers, meaning farmers in Dutch, came as part of an expedition led by Jan van Riebeeck, representing the Dutch East India Company. Many other Dutch settlers followed these early colonists, as well French Huguenots and Germans who worked the land and established a settlement to serve as a European way station for the Dutch East Indian fleets. Over the course of settlement black South Africans were dislodged and slaves were imported from other parts of Africa and Asia. The descendants of the early Dutch settlers became known as Afrikaners.

In 1795, as a result of the Napoleonic Wars which threatened the Boers with possible French expansion, they put up little resistance to the British seizure of the Cape. The area became a British colony and naval base. Under this early British rule, the colony grew in size and prosperity. The Boers, however, viewed themselves as the rightful "settlers," and resented the British regime and its policies, particularly after slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1833. As frictions with the British intensified, the Boers left the colony for rural northern regions of Southern Africa, mainly the Transvaal and the Orange Free State - areas not yet colonized by the Europeans. The Boers declared these areas the South African Republic and refused to grant political rights there to "foreigners," including native Africans, the British, and all others not of Dutch origin. Opposed to this policy and eager to gain a foothold in the gold-rich northern territory and the diamond mines of the Orange Free State, the British expanded their garrison northward toward the Transvaal where continuing tensions with the Boer settlers ultimately led to the Boer Wars between 1899 and 1902.

The Union of South Africa

The British emerged the victors in May 1902, which gave them control of the former Boer provinces of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. In 1910, following eight years of negotiations, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State were granted independence by enactment of the 1909 South Africa Act which linked them to the British colonies of the Cape and Natal under the self-governing Union of South Africa. The South Africa Act also institutionalized long-standing, but unofficial policies of racial segregation and the domination of the Black majority and other ethnic groups through the creation of an all White government, and called for the repression of South African Blacks in every conceivable form.

The Institutionalization of Apartheid

Over the following decades, successive laws widened the gulf between the black majority and white minority, making South Africa one of the most brutally repressive regimes of this century. These laws and others determined where Blacks and other ethnic minorities could live and work; who they could marry, what levels of education they could obtain, and so on. Soon after 1948, when the white Nationalist Party came to power, a multitude of such regulations were passed, mandating into South African law a totally segregated society - a system known today as apartheid, meaning "apartness" in Afrikaans.

Apartheid

South Africa, like many nations, has a long history of racism, dating back to the arrival of the first European settlers to the continent in the 17th century. In the course of the last three centuries, the black majority populations were segregated and subjected to all forms of political and economic discrimination. In 1948, when the Nationalist Party came to power, white minority domination in South Africa was officially entrenched. Once in power, the new, all white government enacted numerous laws to ensure a system of total racial segregation known as apartheid.

The Group Areas Act of 1950 mandated geographic separation in business and residences between people of different colors and races. Likewise, the Population Registration Act classified the population into four racial categories - White or European, Colored, Asiatic and Bantu. Apartheid laws and policies such as these intensified in subsequent years. In 1960, following the massacre at Sharpeville, the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) were outlawed. ANC leader, Nelson Mandela, was jailed and sentenced to life in prison in 1964. Resistance to Apartheid policies by those within the country, and those members of banned organizations working underground abroad continued until Apartheid was dismantled in 1992. In the 1980s, ongoing protests, combined with international efforts such as trade sanctions and boycotts, gradually moved the government toward modifying apartheid policies. By 1990, many of the restrictive laws had begun to be dismantled. That same year, the ANC was legalized once again and Mandela, after 27 years in prison, was let free.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/mandela/teach/>

1. Why did the Dutch begin to colonize South Africa?
2. What are two names the Dutch settlers are known by?
3. How did the Afrikaners respond to British colonization?
4. What discovery led to further conflicts between the British and Boers?
5. What was the result of the Anglo-Boer War?
6. What is the connection between apartheid and colonization?
7. How was apartheid institutionalized?