

10.

Global comparison

Note: This overview provides a background to the policies and practices that affected Indigenous people in South Africa. It is not intended to be used as a comprehensive historical document.

Early settlement

In 1652, Jan van Riebeeck of the Dutch East India Company arrived at the Cape of Good Hope after receiving instructions to set up an outpost en route to Asia for trade. Although privately owned, the Dutch East India Company was given authority by the Dutch Government to colonise territories and enslave the Indigenous people as workers.

Initially, the Dutch established good relations with the Khoikhoi and San, Indigenous people living in South Africa. Most of the settlers were simply traders, so they never built permanent settlements. Even so, many of the Khoikhoi and San were used as cheap labour, in addition to slaves brought over from India and West Africa.

However, it was not long before settlers migrated from Holland and set up their own community (the Boers). This migration was the first step in years of oppression and racial violence that would be a large part of South Africa's history.

The most immediate result of this settlement was disease and dispossession. The Europeans brought new diseases to the Cape, such as smallpox and measles, which caused the deaths of many Indigenous people. Those that remained were forced into labour. The growing European population also demanded more land for agriculture and development. By the early 1700s, the Khoikhoi had lost most of their land to the Boer settlers.

In 1814, the British were granted the Cape Colony as a result of a treaty ending the Napoleonic Wars. After 1820, thousands of British colonists arrived in South Africa, demanding land for development and that British law be imposed. For the Khoikhoi and San people, this meant more dispossession of land. However, there were two positive consequences of British colonisation. Slavery was abolished and laws were brought in to protect Khoikhoi workers.

The British settlement also brought a new turn to the racial conflict in South Africa. The Dutch settlers (now Afrikaners) insisted on maintaining their own independent culture and community. The British were also a new force in the conflict between Indigenous people and Europeans, particularly as the colony looked to expand.

Expansion and racial wars

With increased British migration to the Cape, Dutch settlers embarked on a search for new territory to set up their own independent colony. The Great Trek, as it became known, saw vast numbers of Afrikaners migrate north into Zulu and Xhosa land.

This migration, combined with later expansion by Britain, led to a series of major conflicts and frontier wars with Indigenous peoples. Nine frontier wars spanned 100 years. For example, in 1838, the Afrikaners fought and defeated the Zulus at Natal in the east (Battle of Blood River).

In 1854, the Afrikaners tried to establish an independent colony called the Orange Free State. This could only be achieved by removing the Indigenous Basotho people by force. The Basotho had no other option but to call on the British for support, even though they had fought against them as well. Britain responded by establishing a 'protectorate' – an independent state under Britain's protection.

During this early period, the British were not interested in getting too involved in these conflicts. They wanted to maintain stability in the Cape Colony. This was to change by the late 1800s as European countries began to compete for colonies in Africa. Colonial leader, Cecil Rhodes, was hoping to build a railroad from Egypt (also British) right down to the horn of Africa. Of even more importance, was news of large gold and diamond deposits in the north.

The British now looked to expand their colony northwards. Of course, this meant conflict with both the Afrikaners and Indigenous people north of the Cape Colony. After an ongoing campaign, the Zulus were defeated in 1879 at Ulundi. The British and Afrikaners then fought over Afrikaner settlements in the north in what became known as the Boer Wars. These wars lasted until 1902. The British set-up concentration camps for Afrikaner and black men, women and children. It is estimated that some 14,000 blacks died in these camps.

The British success against the Indigenous populations and Afrikaners promised stability and control in South Africa. In 1910, the *South Africa Act* was passed by the British Parliament, establishing the Union of South Africa as a British dominion.

However, this came at a cost. Most Indigenous communities, such as the Zulus and Xhosa, were removed from their lands. Those that did not die in the conflicts were used in the mining industries as cheap labour. This would set the stage for yet another century of racial violence, segregation and oppression enforced by laws and government policies.

Apartheid

Since colonisation, racial separatism had always characterised relations between Europeans, Indigenous people and imported slaves in South Africa. In the twentieth century it became enforced by law under the policy of 'apartheid'.

One of the first acts of apartheid as government policy came in 1913 with the *Native Land Act*. Under this law, Indigenous people were forbidden to buy land outside the reserves. Since reserve lands amounted to seven percent of all land in South Africa, this excluded them from owning land in 93 percent of the country. This law also prevented them from living off the land, forcing Indigenous people to earn a living from labour. This satisfied the mining industries who profited from cheap Indigenous labour.

Segregation then moved to employment, following the Rand Revolt in 1922. This was an armed uprising of white workers who were outraged by the use of cheaper black labour in preference to whites. They demanded that white workers be protected and that black workers be excluded from particular industries. After the Revolt was stopped, with 200 people dead, the government passed a law banning black workers from certain mining jobs and managing positions.

After World War II, apartheid was declared a formal government policy under the ruling National Party. A range of discriminatory laws were introduced, including:

- *Groups Areas Act* – this created separate living areas for whites, blacks, 'coloureds' (people of mixed blood) and Asians. Blacks needed passes to enter white areas, otherwise they would be imprisoned. Millions of arrests were made as a result of this law.
- Marriage between whites and blacks was illegal.
- Separate education for black and white students, with black schools receiving very little money.
- Promotion of the *Bantu Self-Government Act* – this law ended black representation in the Parliament.

Overall, many Indigenous people lost their lives or were imprisoned. At the same time, the European population was rapidly developing land for mining or residential use. The apartheid policy attracted criticism from the United Nations (UN) and the international community.

Resistance and Violence

In 1912, the South African National Congress was formed. Later changing its name to the African National Congress (ANC), it became the main resistance organisation to apartheid. Decades later, one of its members, Nelson Mandela, became the first black leader of South Africa.

One of the ANC's first actions was to put together the Freedom Charter. Signed in 1955, the Charter sought equality and rights for all in South Africa regardless of race. The ANC also wanted the loss of Indigenous land and community to be recognised by white South Africa.

The government responded with violence to the ANC's calls for peace, equality and freedom. Black resistance was forced to become much more militant because of the government's response. In March 1960, the Pan-Africanist Congress (a more militant group) organised a protest in a town near Johannesburg. The police opened fire killing 67 people and seriously wounding 180. The Sharpeville Massacre, as it became known, resulted in the arrests of many blacks and a ban on the ANC.

Soon after the successful referendum making South Africa a republic, the government gave police more powers to arrest and imprison people without a warrant. The *Terrorism Act* of 1967 allowed people suspected of terrorism, or knowing about terrorist activities, to be imprisoned without trial for an indefinite period of time. Of course, the main targets of these laws were black South Africans, particularly those involved in protests.

Many children were imprisoned and tortured as well. This was often done to get information from them about the activities of other members of their families.

By this stage, South Africa was attracting immense criticism from the United Nations and the international community. During the 1970s, South Africa attacked neighbouring Angola – an action condemned by the UN. However, it was the internal policy of apartheid that concerned the UN most. In 1974, South Africa was suspended from the UN General Assembly, and which by the 1980s, was referring to apartheid as a crime against humanity.

This did not deter the government. On 16 June 1976, the conflict reached crisis point. Thousands of high school students demonstrated in the black township of Soweto. They protested in response to a government law requiring that high school subjects should be taught in Afrikaans (similar to Dutch), which was seen as the language of oppression. Again, the police responded with violence killing at least 575 people. Rioting and conflict spread quickly across the country.

This pattern of black protest and white violence continued into the 1980s. A state of emergency was declared in 1986. During the following two months, some 3,000 children were detained. Gradually, however, the combination of black protests and international pressures led to reform. In 1990, the ruling National Party government lifted the ban on the African National Congress, and released Nelson Mandela from prison after twenty seven years. Apartheid legislation was gradually removed, and the first multi-racial elections were held in 1994, which the ANC won by an overwhelming majority.

In 1995, the South African Government set up a Truth and Reconciliation Committee to bear witness to, record and in some cases grant amnesty to the perpetrators of crimes relating to human rights violations, reparation and rehabilitation.

Links

- South African Human Rights Commission: <http://www.sahrc.org.za/>
- Children Rights and Law Reform in South Africa – An update from the Juvenile Justice Front: <http://www.dci-au.org/html/sa.html>
- The Story of Africa – BBC World Service: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/index.shtml>
- South African History Online: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/>
- Embassy of South Africa – The Hague: <http://www.zuidafrika.nl/>