

# Apartheid: Lingering Issues

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[Apartheid](#), governmentally enforced racial [segregation](#), was the official policy of [South Africa](#) from 1948 to 1994. The most famous among many courageous anti-apartheid activists was Nelson Mandela (1918–2013)— [human rights](#) icon, international hero, and the first black President of South Africa. Mandela, revered in South Africa as the father of his country, died on 5 December 2013. He had spent three months in the hospital with a lung infection. Mandela was convicted of treason in 1963 because of his efforts to rid South Africa of its apartheid government, and was held in the infamous Robben Island Prison. On the orders of South Africa's last white President, F. W. de Klerk, Mandela was released in 1990. He won the Nobel [Peace](#) Prize (jointly, with de Klerk) and become one of the world's most admired leaders for his strength of character, focus on racial equality, and his commitment to healing the divisions that had marred his country for decades.

In 1994, Mandela and his political party, the [African National Congress](#) (ANC), took over the government of South Africa, officially ending the apartheid era. The ANC instituted nationwide reforms to promote equality, [civil rights](#), and economic prosperity for all [South Africans](#) and in the years that followed many advances were made. The legacy of [racism](#), though, remained firmly entrenched in the nation's economy. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the majority of black South Africans were as poor, or poorer, than they had been under apartheid policies.

During the years of apartheid, the white South African government passed a number of laws that deprived [blacks](#), coloureds (people of mixed ancestry), and Asians of basic rights—taking away their property and political rights and restricting their movements and activities. Many black South Africans were moved to reserves called [homelands](#), where they were expected to develop their own self-governing societies. But the homelands consisted of poor quality lands with insufficient resources, and residents lived in extreme poverty.

The [adoption](#) of a new constitution in 1996 gave equal rights to all South Africans, but most of the nation's wealth and property was in the possession of the white population. In an attempt to compensate people who had been forced from their homelands during apartheid, the new government promised to carry out a policy of land redistribution that would eventually give some white-owned lands to black South Africans. Fearing racial conflict, though, the ANC decided not to seize land forcibly from whites, vowing to appropriate it only through negotiation. Almost no land redistribution occurred under this policy. According to the Southern African Regional Poverty Network, 96 percent of South Africa's farmland was still owned by whites in 2007.

Education had been strictly segregated during apartheid, with spending on white students ten times higher than for black students. When apartheid ended, whites, with more training and education than blacks, continued to dominate in the post-apartheid business world. Inferior education was a factor in the chronic unemployment experienced among poor blacks in the post-apartheid era, despite South

Africa's economic growth.

Analyses at the end of 2007 showed South Africa's unemployment rate at 40 percent. In the ever-widening gap between the poor and the wealthy, the wealthiest 20 percent of South Africans earned approximately 65 percent of the nation's total income, while the poorest 20 percent earned only about 3 percent. More than half of South African households lived in poverty in 2008 and the overwhelming majority of the poor were black. The rate of poverty was actually worse than it had been under apartheid.

The economy perpetuated racial segregation in important ways. Because few South African blacks could afford to live in them, wealthy suburbs remained mostly white in 2008, and many poor blacks continued to live in black townships. Though many of South Africa's universities had enrolled black majorities by the twenty-first century—a hopeful sign for the future—some university living quarters had remained segregated. Black students were the victims of racist threats and ostracization in several highly publicized incidents. Despite advances, the nation remained divided into two societies, one wealthy and mostly white and the other poor and mostly black.

In May 2009, Jacob Zuma (1942–) was sworn in as President of South Africa, the fourth President since the end of apartheid. As was the case with the first post-apartheid President, Nelson Mandela (1918–2013), Zuma was a prisoner during the apartheid era, spending ten years in incarceration. Zuma came to power with widespread support from South Africa's poor black population, but the middle class expressed misgivings about the leader, whose reputation was tainted by charges of corruption and cronyism. Nevertheless, following an inaugural address in which he pledged commitment to a fair and equal society, a majority of the country expressed approval of Zuma's leadership style.

Zuma was criticized by opposition leader and Western Cape premier Helen Zille after his election for allegedly being a womanizer. (Zuma is a polygamist.) Her remarks provoked an uproar in Cape Town, as pro-Zuma protestors called her "anti-African" and "racist." Zille, a white woman, has since apologized for her remarks, but the incident underscores the racial tensions that still operate within the South African government. Controversy continues to surround Zuma's personal life. Zuma, who has three wives, admitted in early 2010 to fathering a child out of wedlock. Opposition parties called for a vote of no confidence on Zuma in March 2010—the first no-confidence vote in South Africa's Parliament since the ANC came to power—but Zuma supporters prevailed.

The South African Constitutional Court banned the singing of an apartheid-era song with the lyrics "shoot the Boer" in March 2010, stating the song amounts to "hate speech." The ANC voiced outrage at the ruling. They claimed that the court had succumbed to pressure from white activist groups. ANC [Youth](#) League leader Julius Malema heightened the controversy over the song by singing it at a Johannesburg rally. The mainly white Freedom Front Plus party claimed he was inciting violence and should be prosecuted.

On 3 April 2010, outspoken white supremacist Eugene Terreblanche was found bludgeoned to death at his farm. Terreblanche was formerly the head of the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) paramilitary group. His death set off racial skirmishes across South Africa. Two black farm workers

were arrested and charged with the murder.

AfriForum, a [lobbying](#) group for white [Afrikaners](#), brought a hate-speech lawsuit against Malema in April 2011 over the March 2010 "shoot the Boer" incident. Hearings began on 11 April. Malema himself took the witness stand on 20 April, and stressed that the controversial apartheid-era song that he sang, which started the current hate-speech controversy, was historically important and "relevant to the current conditions of our [black South Africans'] struggle." As of June 2011, the Equality Court, which heard the case, had not made a decision.

U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama (1964–) visited South Africa in June, meeting with former President Mandela on 20 June. Two days later, she honored apartheid victims in a speech delivered in Soweto, likening the 1976 Soweto uprising to the struggles of civil rights activists in the [United States](#) in the 1950s and 1960s.

The ANC continued with disciplinary hearings of Malema despite sometimes violent protests by his supporters on 31 August. Malema, a critic of President Zuma, urged his supporters to show restraint. On 10 November, the ANC opted to suspend Malema from party activity for five years. He was ordered to step down as youth party president. Malema vowed to appeal. On 29 February 2012, the ANC Disciplinary Committee voted to expel Malema from the organization for "sowing division" in the party.

Mandela received another honor in March 2012: housed at the Johannesburg Centre of Memory, an extensive video digital archive of the activist's life is on display. The video is also available online at <http://archives.nelsonmandela.org/#!home>.

Zuma announced in February 2014 that a general election, South Africa's fifth vote since the end of apartheid, would take place on 7 May. Protests have increased against the ruling ANC over corruption charges and economic policies that have failed to lift much of the black population out of poverty or offer major improvements in the delivery of basic services to the townships. The ANC was expected to retain its control of government, but faced its most serious electoral challenge. The strongest opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, received a boost in late January when a prominent anti-apartheid leader, Mamphele Ramphele, agreed to join it. Malema also planned to mount an insurgent campaign with a new party called the Economic Freedom Fighters.

The ANC retained its substantial majority after the 7 May [elections](#), though the Democratic Alliance picked up some seats in Parliament. The ANC lost fifteen seats and the Democratic Alliance gained twenty-two.

In a move hailed by some South African leaders as proof of their country's progress toward reconciliation since the end of apartheid, Justice Minister Michael Masutha announced on 30 January 2015 that Eugene de Kock, a death-squad leader in the 1980s and 1990s, would be freed from prison. De Kock was serving two life sentences plus 212 years for murdering, torturing, and maiming anti-apartheid activists. De Kock had repeatedly expressed contrition for his crimes and had contacted the families of some of his victims to seek their forgiveness.

On 11 February 2015, South Africans marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of Mandela's release from prison. Fellow anti-apartheid activist Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1931–) spoke glowingly of the deceased President, asserting that Mandela came "as close as any human being ever has to personifying grace."

Cecil Rhodes (1853–1902) was one of the most successful colonialist businessmen in Africa during the nineteenth century. He founded extremely successful mining and fruit export businesses, and even named a country (Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe) after himself. A statue of Rhodes at the University of Cape Town became the subject of protest in March 2015 with the beginning of the "Rhodes Must Fall" campaign among students. Protesters view the statue as an unwelcomed reminder of the legacy of [colonialism](#) in South Africa, and as a symbol of the lack of economic opportunity for South Africa's black youth. Protesters noted that racial inequality persists in South Africa, even twenty years after the fall of apartheid. On 9 April, the university removed the statue of Rhodes amid cheers from protesters.

Anger over lack of opportunity, income inequality, poverty, and a planned tuition hike provoked the largest student protests in the post-apartheid era in mid-October 2015. The protest peaked on 21 October, as thousands of students entered the parliamentary district in Cape Town while South Africa's Finance Minister delivered a speech offering a grim account of the economy. Police repelled the protesters with stun grenades and batons, arresting six. South African unemployment stood at 25 percent, and official statistics showed that, on average, white South African families earned six times more money than black families. Protesters noted that free education had been a promise of the post-apartheid South African government. On 22 October, thousands of students marched to ANC headquarters in Johannesburg in peaceful protest.

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