

The end of apartheid

We have now explained the various forces at work that led to the end of the apartheid system. Not just the diplomatic pressure but the very real militant force that was applied, and the many lives lost in the process.

We discussed the protests, strikes, and armed struggle led by the African National Congress (ANC) and other anti-apartheid organizations, such as the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and of course Umkhonto Wesizwe (MK)

Don't forget mass revolts, such as the Soweto Uprising in 1976, led mostly by students, as well as the Township revolt.

And of course there was the international pressure- the various economic sanctions, cultural boycotts, and diplomatic pressure from international government bodies like the United Nations. And the divestment movement, particularly in the United States and Europe, which pressured companies to withdraw investments from South Africa.

These sanctions and boycotts severely impacted South Africa's economy, making it increasingly difficult for the apartheid regime to sustain itself.

In the end, the cost of maintaining apartheid, including military and police operations, became unsustainable.

The oppressed people also became literally ungovernable.

Notable things that DID NOT end apartheid:

Individualist acts of violence or assassinations, even of wealthy or powerful people

Others who were fans of such adventurism, commenting that assassin's name online every time there's another example of oppression mentioned

Now of course there were political reforms and negotiations:

For example, in the late 1980s, then-President F.W. de Klerk began dismantling apartheid laws, recognizing the need for change.

In 1990, he lifted the ban on the ANC and other anti-apartheid organizations and released Nelson Mandela after 27 years in prison

Negotiations between the apartheid government and the ANC, led by Mandela, resulted in the 1994 democratic elections, in which all races could vote for the first time.

So we are not at all discounting the democratic and peaceful processes, merely stressing this was a struggle that took place on ALL fronts

The 1994 elections resulted in a landslide victory for the ANC, and Nelson Mandela became South Africa's first Black president

A new constitution was adopted in 1996, enshrining equality, human rights, and the rule of law, formally ending apartheid

'Formally' does a lot of work here, because there is a legacy of racial segregation and inequality that lasts still today, and is currently a hot topic as the government attempts to correct this with land reform, and Boer farmers are seeking refugee status from Trump and Elon Musk, who are of course sympathetic.

But we will talk more about the legacy in just a bit

I'd like to talk more about the new government and the changes made when Apartheid ended. Interestingly, several individuals who had been labeled as criminals or terrorists by the apartheid regime became key members of South Africa's new government. This transition reflected the recognition of their roles as freedom fighters in the struggle against apartheid. Here are some notable examples:

Of course Nelson Mandela:

-imprisoned for 27 years (1962–1990) for his involvement in the ANC's armed struggle against apartheid. He was labeled a terrorist by the South African government and Western countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom.

- After his release, Mandela became the first president of post-apartheid South Africa in 1994, serving as a symbol of reconciliation and unity.

Walter Sisulu:

- A close ally of Mandela, Sisulu was also imprisoned for his role in the anti-apartheid struggle. He was a key leader of the ANC and was sentenced to life imprisonment during the Rivonia Trial in 1964.

- After his release in 1989, Sisulu played a significant role in the negotiations to end apartheid and became a respected elder statesman in the new government.

Govan Mbeki:

- Mbeki was a senior ANC leader and a defendant in the Rivonia Trial. He was imprisoned for 24 years (1963–1987) for his involvement in the armed struggle.

- After his release, he served as Deputy President of the Senate in the new democratic government.

Ahmed Kathrada:

- Kathrada was another Rivonia Trial defendant and spent 26 years in prison (1963–1989) for his anti-apartheid activities.

- After his release, he served as a parliamentary counselor to Mandela and later as a member of parliament.

Joe Slovo:

- Slovo was a leader of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and a key figure in the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). He was labeled a terrorist by the apartheid regime.

- After apartheid ended, Slovo served as Minister of Housing in Mandela's government, playing a crucial role in addressing housing shortages.

Chris Hani:

- Hani was the leader of the SACP and a prominent figure in MK. He was assassinated in 1993, just before the first democratic elections, but he was widely regarded as a hero of the struggle.
- His death galvanized support for the ANC and highlighted the urgency of the transition to democracy.

Thabo Mbeki:

- Thabo Mbeki, the son of Govan Mbeki, was active in the ANC's external mission and was involved in mobilizing international support against apartheid. He was often labeled a terrorist by the apartheid regime.
- He served as Deputy President under Mandela and later as President of South Africa (1999–2008).

Jacob Zuma:

- Zuma was a member of MK and spent 10 years in prison on Robben Island for his anti-apartheid activities.
- After apartheid, he held various government positions, including Deputy President and later President of South Africa (2009–2018).

These individuals, once vilified by the apartheid regime, were celebrated as heroes in the new democratic South Africa. Their inclusion in the government symbolized the triumph of justice and the rejection of apartheid's oppressive policies. However, their legacies remain complex, with some later facing criticism for their actions or policies while in office.

The end of apartheid marked a significant turning point in South Africa's history, transitioning the country to a non-racial democracy. However, the legacy of apartheid continues to affect South African society, particularly in terms of economic inequality and social divisions.

[From a CNN

article:<https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/11/africa/south-africa-land-aid-freeze-trump-intl/index.html>(6 days ago as of this recording)]

For instance the 1913 Natives Land Act limited Black ownership to just 7% of the land, later revised to 13%.

Now, more than 100 years later, Black people make up 81% of South Africa's population of 63 million, yet only own 4% of private land, according to a government land audit conducted in 2017.

- The government's land redistribution and restitution programs have been criticized for inefficiency, corruption, and lack of funding.
- The debate over expropriation of land without compensation remains contentious, with concerns about its impact on food security and investment.

(once again the audacity {the caucasity even} to demand compensation for land stolen and held for generations while used to build wealth)

Speaking of wealth:

South Africa has one of the highest levels of income inequality globally, with a Gini coefficient of around 0.63 (where 0 represents perfect equality and 1 represents perfect inequality).

- The wealthiest 10% of the population owns more than 85% of the country's wealth, while the bottom 60% owns less than 7%.
- Racial disparities persist, with the majority of wealth still concentrated in the hands of the white minority, who make up about 7% of the population.

Unemployment is extremely high, at around 32% (as of 2023), with youth unemployment exceeding 60%.

- Poverty disproportionately affects Black South Africans, with over 55% of the population living below the national poverty line.

Disparities in Access to and Quality of Education:

- The apartheid education system was deliberately designed to disadvantage Black South Africans, and its effects persist

- Schools in predominantly Black areas are often underfunded, overcrowded, and lack basic infrastructure, while historically white schools remain well-resourced.
- The matric pass rate (or high school graduation) is often used as a measure of success, but critics argue that it masks low-quality education and high dropout rates, particularly in rural areas.
- Higher Education:
 - Access to higher education remains unequal, with Black students facing financial barriers and limited spaces at universities.
 - Protests, such as the #FeesMustFall movement in 2015–2016, highlighted the struggles of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

(If we want to take a sidebar on the #FeesMustFall movement)

It was a student-led protest movement that began in South Africa in October 2015, in response to proposed increases in university tuition fees, which students argued would make higher education even more inaccessible, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The movement quickly grew into a broader campaign addressing systemic issues in South Africa's education system, including inequality, underfunding, and the legacy of apartheid.

The protests began at the University of Witwatersrand (or Wits) in Johannesburg after the government announced a 10-12% fee increase for 2016.

- Students argued that the increases would exclude poor and working-class students, perpetuating racial and economic inequality.

The immediate demand was for a freeze on tuition fee increases.

- Broader demands included free decolonized education, increased government funding for universities, and an end to the outsourcing of university workers (e.g., cleaners and security guards).

The movement quickly spread to other universities across South Africa, including the University of Cape Town (UCT), Stellenbosch University, and Rhodes

University. (again all these names sounding very familiar as hotbeds of political unrest)

- Protests involved marches, sit-ins, and clashes with police, leading to arrests and injuries.

In October 2015, then-President Jacob Zuma announced a 0% fee increase for 2016, temporarily calming the protests.

- However, the movement reignited in 2016 as students pushed for more comprehensive reforms, including free education.

(so they won, but they still pushed for more...take note, kids)

So in December 2017, the government announced that it would provide fully subsidized higher education for students from households earning less than R350,000 per year. (so its means tested, but they almost got free college)

And of course despite this, challenges remain, including underfunding, overcrowding, and debates over the decolonization of curricula.

But back to the legacy of apartheid

The healthcare system is highly unequal, with a two-tier system: a well-resourced private sector serving the wealthy (mostly white and middle-class Black South Africans) and an underfunded public sector serving the majority (mostly poor Black South Africans).

- The public system is overburdened, with shortages of staff, equipment, and medicines.

South Africa has one of the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in the world, with 7.8 million people living with HIV (2023).

- Life expectancy and infant mortality rates have improved since apartheid, but disparities remain, particularly between urban and rural areas.

- The economy remains dominated by industries (e.g., mining, finance) that were historically controlled by white-owned corporations.

- Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policies have sought to address this, but critics argue that they have primarily benefited a small Black elite, rather than the broader population.

Spatial Inequality:

- Apartheid's spatial planning, which segregated communities by race, continues to affect access to jobs, services, and infrastructure.
- Many Black South Africans still live in townships and informal settlements far from economic opportunities.

So this is all to emphasize that even when you have a very militant and committed movement, and one that actually WINS, you still have an immense amount of work to do reversing the structures and effects of that oppression. Not to put a damper on the end of apartheid and the very real accomplishments, again just to make sure everyone understands you have to have realistic sober expectations about what this kind of change looks like and what your role in it would have to be before, during, and after. That's the point of this whole show

The economic legacy of apartheid is deeply entrenched, and while South Africa has made significant strides in building a democratic society, inequality remains a defining feature of its economy. Addressing these disparities requires sustained efforts in land reform, education, healthcare, and economic transformation. However, progress has been hindered by corruption, inefficiency, and the sheer scale of the challenges inherited from apartheid.

And this is the conclusion from the MK statement we read from the last two episodes:

In the course of war life is lost. The challenge before us was to avoid indiscriminate killing of civilians, which MK certainly had the capacity to carry out. Although it is possible that entirely accurate statistics will never be known beyond any doubt, it is evident that MK acted with great restraint.

This record should be compared with the many thousands of deaths of civilians at the hands of successive apartheid regimes - with this continuing right until April 1994 - in countless massacres, assassinations, and executions. In addition there have been millions of civilian casualties - bloodshed of holocaust proportions - in wars waged by surrogate forces in neighbouring states.

We also register our deep regret for the deaths of innocent civilians killed in the course of the struggle for justice and freedom. We extend our condolences to the families of all those who were killed or injured, **including the soldiers and police who fought against us**. The taking of life is not an easy thing; to us all life is sacred, and we have never been callous in our struggle.