

APARTHEID: THE MANY FACES OF RACIAL DOMINATION

There were multiple faces to the Apartheid system. What were they?

1) Denial of Political Rights

Only those officially classified as “white” – the minority of the population - could vote in Apartheid South Africa. This meant that whites exclusively controlled the law-making process, and through this they imposed an extended system of race-based domination that came to be referred to under the general term ‘apartheid’.

After 1956, separate representative structures were set up for coloureds and Asians. This “parallel development” policy culminated in the establishment in 1984 of the Tricameral Parliament, with separate chambers for whites, coloureds and Asians. This gave a limited political voice for the latter two groups, but real political power remained in the hands of the white minority.

2) Denial of Citizenship

Apartheid turned most South Africans into foreigners in their own land. Blacks were denied the right to become citizens of the country in which they resided for purely race-based reasons. Instead, they were consigned to a putative citizenship of a small, usually distant and invariably impoverished “independent homeland”. These were specific areas within the country designated for black settlement, amounting to only 13% of the total land area.

A key purpose of the homelands (aka ‘Bantustans’) was to justify denying black people their citizenship rights on the grounds that they were no more than temporary migrant workers, even those (by far the majority) who were living outside the borders of those territories. The homeland governments, even those nominally independent, were in practice heavily under the sway of the central government and were characterised by widespread corruption and repression.

3) Restrictions on Movement

Few measures in apartheid South Africa caused as much hardship and resentment as those that imposed draconian restrictions on the freedom of movement of the black majority. These laws turned black people into unwanted aliens inside their own country, subject to unending threats of police harassment, prosecution, imprisonment and deportation. Blacks exclusively had to carry a “Pass Book” at all times on pain of imprisonment. Employers had to sign the passbooks monthly. At one time, some 600 000 blacks were being arrested every year for pass law offences.

Blacks were excluded from living or working in white areas, unless they had a pass. Only those with “Section 10” rights (those who had migrated to the cities before World War II) were excluded from this provision. A pass was issued only to a black person with approved work. Spouses and children had to be left behind in non-white areas, which impacted disastrously on family life.

4) Economic Discrimination

Apartheid labour policies were justified by the perceived need to uphold "civilized standards for European workers". Labour laws mandated discriminatory treatment in favour of whites over non-whites. This impacted on rate-for-the-job rules, benefits, entry qualifications, work rules, minimum wage laws and union certification, amongst other crucial industrial relations areas. The result was that blacks were overwhelmingly restricted to menial or at best semi-skilled positions in the labour market, and their wages were fixed at levels well below those of their white counterparts, even when performing the same tasks. Black people were not even allowed to employ white ones.

Black trade unions existed, but were only accorded official recognition in the late 1970s and were handicapped by restrictions on industrial action by their members. Strikes by black unions were banned and strikers severely repressed.

Blacks who wanted to bypass the discriminatory job market by setting up their own businesses or professional practices could only do so in the "independent homelands". Outside the homelands, they blacks needed special permits to operate as businessmen or professionals in what was deemed to be "White South Africa".

Under the statutory job reservation system, certain jobs (many of them in government at both the national and local level, and the administration) were available to whites only. Preferential treatment was given to companies that adhered to the "civilized labor" policy by favoring white applicants. Blacks received only half the pension allocated to whites.

5) Land Ownership and Living Areas

13% of South Africa was divided into ten 'homelands' for blacks (over 70% of the population). The homelands were a crazy patchwork of territories scattered across the face of the country. Few could be described as viable as independent territories. Some were pitifully small and others were not contiguous. Not only could blacks not live in areas outside the homelands except as temporary migrant workers, but they were forbidden to purchase property there as well.

Residential segregation in urban areas was underpinned by the Group Areas Act (1950), one of the cornerstones of the apartheid policy. In terms of this, the country was partitioned into different areas that were then allocated to different racial groups. Those classified as "non-white" were restricted to specially designated living areas in every urban centre. The enforcement of the Group Areas Act led to some of the most notorious episodes of ethnic cleansing in South Africa's history. Particularly infamous were the forced removals of blacks from the previously multi-racial Johannesburg suburb of Sophiatown and of coloureds in Cape Town's District Six.

6) Public Health

Hospitals and ambulances were segregated. Hospitals for whites were of a far higher standard than black ones, with well-educated staff and ample funds. Black hospitals were seriously understaffed

and under-funded, with many black areas not having a hospital at all. In 1985, the infant mortality rate was 78 per 1,000 live birth: Whites 12, Asians 20, coloreds 60, blacks 94-150.

7) Education: Separate and Unequal

Children were forced to attend racially segregated schools according to their particular racial classification. In the 1970s, an estimated ten times more was spent on a white child's education than on a black one's. There was free education for whites till matriculation, but not for blacks, large numbers of who were therefore forced to leave school before matriculating.

Black education was governed by the Bantu Education Act (1953), a law that brought all black schooling under government control and closed even the option of private or mission-run schools for those seeking to evade the system. Bantu Education was aimed at teaching blacks only the basic skills they would need in working for whites.

In 1954 Minister of Native Affairs Hendrik Verwoerd famously summarized the aim of Bantu Education:

... natives will be taught from childhood to realize that equality with Europeans is not for them. There is no place for him [the black child] in European society above the level of certain forms of labour...What is the use of teaching a Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice?

Higher education was provided in separate universities and colleges under the Extension of University Education Act (1959). This Act created separate universities for Blacks, Coloureds and Indians, but also forced the existing universities to accept only white students. In terms of the quality of education provided, the 'white' universities far outranked those set up for non-whites.

8) "Watch out who you sleep with!" – Sex and Marriage

Sexual apartheid, which had obvious parallels to the notorious Nuremberg Laws of the Nazi regime, was based on two main pieces of legislation, the Amendment to the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Amendment to The Immorality Act (1950). These laws prohibited marriages across the colour line and made it a criminal offence for a white person to have any sexual relations with a person of a different race.

9) "Reserved for Whites Only" - Public Amenities

The separation of public amenities to keep the races apart were amongst the most demeaning, and certainly amongst the most visible, of the apartheid laws. Pedestrian bridges, drive-in cinema parking spaces, queues in public buildings, graveyards, parks, pedestrian crossings, public toilets, swimming pools and libraries, trains, buses and taxis were amongst the many aspects of daily life that were racially segregated. Cinemas and theatres in "white areas" were not permitted to admit blacks, nor were most restaurants and hotels (except as staff). Public facilities reserved for blacks were few and inferior, with the best being reserved for the exclusive use of the white minority.