1 APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA (1948–1964)

In May 1948, the Whites-only electorate of the Union of South Africa voted the Herenigde Nasionale Party (more usually known as the National Party or the NP), led by Dr DF Malan, into power. The margin of the NP victory was exceptionally narrow. In fact, the ruling United Party (UP) of sitting Prime Minister Jan Smuts won the majority of the popular vote, but the electoral system was weighted in favour of larger, rural constituencies where the NP managed to out-perform its rivals. This meant that Malan was able to form a coalition government with the smaller Afrikaner Party (AP) of Nicolaas Havenga.

Despite the narrowness of the NP mandate, the decision of the White voters of South Africa was momentous. The NP would remain in power for more than four decades. During this period, it would implement an extreme version of racial segregation known as *apartheid*, a word which means "apartness" in Afrikaans. Malan and his successors enacted a series of legislative measures designed to reinforce the dominance of the minority White population over the other peoples of South Africa. They also sought to engineer the complete separation of the different racial groups in the country. Their actions resulted in an explosion of opposition to the apartheid system among the non-White peoples of South Africa, and growing disgust and opposition to the country from the international community, leading to diplomatic pressure and trade sanctions. In the 1980s, with South Africa in a state of deepening political and economic crisis, a section of the NP leadership made the decision to begin dismantling the apartheid system. The country completed its transition from apartheid to non-racialism with its first fully democratic elections in 1994. These were won handsomely by the African National Congress (ANC), the party which had been at the forefront of Black opposition to the apartheid system since the NP first won power in 1948.

Nelson Mandela, the ANC leader who had spent 27 years in apartheid prisons, became South Africa's first ever Black president.

The focus of the case study in this chapter is on the crucial early years in the history of apartheid South Africa. It begins with the NP triumph in 1948 and ends in 1964, when the state completed its crackdown on opposition and dissent by handing down terms of life imprisonment to Nelson Mandela and other leaders of the ANC. The apartheid system erected during these years amounted to an emphatic denial of the political and economic rights of the majority of the population by a small White minority. The story of this period is of the protest against this discrimination, first by peaceful means and later through armed struggle.

1.1 The origins of apartheid

The origins of apartheid

Note: The origins of apartheid is not included as a bullet point in the *IB History: Rights and Protest* syllabus, and it will therefore not be examined. However, it is indispensable to an understanding of the apartheid system and it is strongly recommended that it is studied by students. A country profile of South Africa and a discussion of its history prior to 1948 can be found on pages 118–128. Before proceeding with the rest of this case study, you may find it useful to gain some basic knowledge of South Africa and its pre-1948 history.

The idea of apartheid is based on one basic assumption about the nature of humankind. This is that the various ethnic groups, or races, that constitute humanity are essentially different from one another. Each ethnicity has a set of common physical characteristics that distinguishes it from other racial groups. The argument continues that there must be a natural hierarchy of the races, because some groups will possess certain biological traits which make them inherently superior to others. The apartheid theorists took it for granted that the evident cultural achievements of the White race were proof enough of its superiority, and that it therefore enjoyed a position right at the apex of the pyramid of the races in South Africa. They similarly believed that Black people had achieved nothing of any note and that they were therefore at the bottom of the racial pile. Other groups, including Coloureds and Indians, occupied the intermediate spaces in the hierarchy. According to the apartheid vision, government should acknowledge the reality of these fundamental racial differences. Fundamental racial inequalities should be reflected in its policies, which should be designed to promote the interests of the superior White race while keeping all of the races separate.

Expressed in this way, the idea of apartheid was in many respects similar to the various **social Darwinist** philosophies (such as Nazism) that were popular in Europe in the first part of the 20th century. What made it different is the way in which it sought justification in **Calvinist** scripture and reasoning as well as through science. According to the Calvinist logic, God created the different races and it was therefore his wish that they should remain separate. It was the destiny of his chosen people, the Afrikaners, to rule in South Africa and ensure that this divine will was enforced.

The manner in which this sense of Afrikaner exceptionalism developed is an issue that has long interested historians. The traditional account identifies its roots in early Afrikaner history, specifically in the experiences of the *trekboers* who lived on the colonial frontier. These pious Dutch colonists, cut off from Europe and therefore isolated from its modern intellectual currents, cultivated an Old Testament world view which led them to draw analogies between their experiences and those of the biblical Israelites. Slavery was a part of their everyday life and so racial inequality was taken for granted. They encountered powerful Xhosa kingdoms, and the ensuing clashes contributed to a growing feeling of animosity

Social Darwinism

A philosophy popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which applied Darwin's theories of natural selection to human society. Social Darwinists argued that "survival of the fittest" is a basic law of human nature and that "superior" races should aim to dominate "inferior" ones.

Calvinism

The austere theology of the sixteenth century religious reformer John Calvin, who argued that humankind is divided between the elect, or those who have been chosen (or pre-destined) by God for salvation, and those who have been condemned to eternal damnation. Calvin advocated a stern and moralizing approach to society and government.

between the Boers and the Black people of the region. Afrikaners grew to equate Africans with the biblical "sons of Ham", condemned by God to be "hewers of wood and drawers of water" (Joshua 9:21). The British decision to abolish slavery in 1833 led some Boers to undertake the famous Great Trek to their "promised land", where they would be free of the interference of the foreign, ungodly British. The fortunate coincidence that many of the lands where they settled had been extensively depopulated as a result of the Mfecane earlier in the century reinforced this sense of divine deliverance. The famous victory of the Boers against the Zulu at the Battle of Blood River in 1838 affirmed that the Boers were indeed "God's chosen people". Following this battle, they made a solemn covenant with God which, if honoured, would allow them to triumph over their enemies. The Blood River victors vowed to bring civilization to Africa in return for God's favour and protection. Their subsequent history – the establishment of the two Boer Republics; the struggle with the British culminating in the South African War; the establishment of the Union of South Africa and the introduction of a segregationist system by Smuts and Hertzog; and finally the NP victory of 1948 – may be interpreted in this way as the slow unfurling of Afrikaner destiny. Apartheid would be the final triumph, the fulfilment of the Blood River pact between God and his chosen people.

TOK connections

Constructing historical myths and reading history backwards

Some historians, most notably André du Toit, have challenged the so-called Calvinist myth about the origins of apartheid. Du Toit argues that the assumption that the 19th-century Boers had a sense of their own special destiny is a fiction generated by Afrikaner nationalists in the 1930s. They did this in order to rally Afrikaners around the cause of nationalism and help the NP gain power. Du Toit points to the activities of the Afrikaner Broederbond (a semi-secret organization with close links to the NP) in organizing the centenary celebrations which commemorated the Great Trek and the Battle of Blood River. Popular re-enactments of these events were used to project the attitudes and values of modern Afrikaner nationalists onto the historical *Voortrekkers*. Du Toit argues that those who took part in the Great Trek were in fact poorly educated frontier farmers with little interest in theology. They were simply escaping the unwelcome interference of a foreign power and had little sense the journey that they were undertaking held any religious significance.

The supposition that Afrikaners had regarded themselves as "God's chosen people" from a very early point in their history, and that the apartheid system was a natural outgrowth of this collective self-image, is a good example of how easy it can be to fall into the trap of "reading history backwards". Considering that du Toit argues that this so-called Calvinist myth is a 1930s Afrikaner construction, it seems quite odd that many pro-British historians of the liberal school (such as CW de Kiewiet) were just as keen as Afrikaner nationalists to lend their authority to this train of thought. The explanation is quite simple, however. The "Calvinist myth" suggests that racial discrimination in South Africa, and ultimately the apartheid system itself, had uniquely Afrikaner roots. However, recent research indicates that the firm foundations for a system of segregation had already been put in place in South Africa by the late 19th century, if not earlier. Moreover, it was not the Afrikaners who were responsible for this, but the British.

Segregation in early practice

There is an alternative view of the origins of racism and segregation in South Africa. This argues that it can be found not in the Calvinist mentality of the Afrikaners but in the character of early British rule in the Cape. The position runs contrary to the frequently held assumption that British administration in South Africa was paternalistic and liberal, the paramount concern being to protect the

interests of Africans. The history of the Cape Colony tells a rather different story. Following the establishment of British rule, new urban settlements were built on the far eastern frontier. The largest of these towns were East London and Grahamstown. Contact with the Xhosa was fairly frequent, as Africans travelled to farms and cities in search of work. As time passed, the attitudes of the newly settled British became increasingly racist. Their mindset was reflected in the 1853 constitution of the Cape Colony, which distinguished between two types of people, "civilized" and "uncivilized", without referring specifically to their racial identities. However, the latter category obviously referred to the Xhosa population, who would henceforth be subjected to certain punitive laws. These included the requirement that they should carry passes. These were documents they would be obliged to produce when travelling outside the immediate vicinity of their residence or employment. Passes would be used to regulate the movement of Black people, but could also prevent them from leaving their jobs and seeking work elsewhere. From an early point in time, then, the connection between segregationist laws and economic forces was obvious.

Residential segregation, which was supported by the imposition of curfews on Blacks to prevent them from entering White areas at night, was also practised in municipalities across the colony. In the 1890s, with the rapid expansion of Cape Town, moves towards a more rigid system of segregation were accelerated. Large-scale African migration into the city from as far afield as Mozambique heightened fears among the White population of racial swamping and a deterioration in the standards of sanitation. Following the outbreak of bubonic plague in Cape Town in 1901, legal residential segregation was introduced for the first time with the establishment of the Blacks-only township of Ndabeni, located far away from the city centre.

Racial discrimination was also widely practised in the two Boer Republics in the interior, the Transvaal (officially known as the South African Republic) and the Orange Free State. The British recognized the independence of the republics in the Bloemfontein and Sand River Conventions, but the terms of these republics' treaties forbade them from reviving the institution of slavery. Nonetheless, slavery was still widely practised, and the constitutions of the republics were quite explicit in declaring the supremacy of White over Black. The discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886 led to the sudden and dramatic transformation of the Transvaal. Johannesburg soon emerged as the largest city in the region following a huge influx of mainly English-speaking White workers into the city. In addition, capital became concentrated in the hands of a small number of fabulously wealthy, mainly English-speaking, mining magnates who became known as the Randlords.

The dispute between the so-called *uitlander* population and the Randlords on the one hand, and the Afrikaner government of Paul Kruger on the other, over the issue of whether to extend the right to vote to all White people in the republic, was one of the main causes of the South African War of 1899–1902. However, one of the

few things that all parties agreed upon was the need to ensure the perpetuation of White domination over Black in politics and in the wider economy. The Afrikaner farmers who supported the Kruger government required a ready supply of cheap and pliable African labour. It was also imperative that this workforce was rendered as immobile as possible so that Africans could not leave their farms in search of employment elsewhere. The Randlords obviously shared these objectives with regard to African labour working in their mines. The *uitlanders* sought labour protection against Black competition, an objective that could only be attained through the further erosion of the political rights of Africans. For all of these groups, the best means of securing these goals was through the entrenchment and extension of a system of racial segregation. While the economic effects of the South African War were devastating, the speed of the reconciliation between the British and the Afrikaners in the first decade of the 20th century was remarkable. One of the most important factors in this rapprochement was surely the recognition by all of the parties that the economic development of the region was ultimately dependent on a full political union between all four of South Africa's territories. The logic here was simple. Growth could only be promoted through economic and infrastructural planning on a national level and, crucially, through the rigorous and systematic implementation of a segregationist system. The concord between the recently warring White peoples of South Africa was thus achieved, but at a terrible cost to the non-White majority of the country.

The system of segregation

One of the main objectives of the new South African Party (SAP) government led by Louis Botha and Jan Smuts was to entrench in law a comprehensive system of racial segregation. The Act of Union, officially known as the South Africa Act, itself restricted all voting rights to the minority White population, with the exception of the very small number of Coloureds and Blacks who had previously met the narrow franchise qualification in the Cape Province and Natal. Elsewhere, all non-Whites were excluded from the voters' roll. More legislative measures soon followed. The Mines and Works Act of 1911 reserved all semi-skilled positions in the mining industry for Whites, meaning that Blacks had no option but to accept poorly paid unskilled jobs in the cities or on rural farms. The Natives Land Act of 1913 was a landmark piece of legislation. The forerunner of the homelands system of the apartheid era, the Natives Land Act prohibited Africans, who made up over two-thirds of the population, from owning or renting land anywhere outside certain parcels of territory that would be designated as native reserves. The native reserves made up roughly 7.5% of the total area of the country, and they were to be set aside for the exclusive use of Africans. The areas selected, which were economically marginal to begin with, soon became horribly overcrowded and even more impoverished. The act further stipulated that Africans could reside outside the reserves only on the condition they were employed by Whites. This brought an official end

to the practice of rural sharecropping, where White farmers allowed Africans to cultivate some of the farmers' land independently in return for a share of the crop, and deprived many Africans of their livelihoods. In practice, the authorities turned a blind eye to an institution that clearly benefited White landowners, and it was to survive for decades until brought to an abrupt end by the apartheid system after 1948. The Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 was another cornerstone of the segregationist system. It decreed that the cities were principally for the use of the White population, and that any Africans residing there would be required to carry passes. Any Black person found without a pass was liable to be arrested and expelled to the reserves. An Industrial Conciliation Act passed in 1924 allowed for the legal registration of Whites in a trade union, but not their Black counterparts. Blacks were therefore denied the opportunity to negotiate better pay and conditions.

In 1924, the SAP was swept from power and replaced by an NP-led coalition government under JBM Hertzog. Hertzog's approach to segregation, embodied in his "civilized labour" policy, was more strident and ambitious than that of his predecessors. His Wage Act of 1925 permitted the government to instruct private firms to grant preference to White workers in hiring, while the Mines and Works Amendment Act of 1926 further entrenched the colour bar in the mining industry. The economic devastation of the Great Depression led to the merger of Smuts' SAP and Hertzog's NP, and a new United Party (UP) government took office in 1934. The risk that the government might be outflanked by the more radical racialism of Malan's breakaway Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party (also known as the Purified National Party or GNP) led to a spate of further discriminatory legislation later in the decade. The Representation of Natives Act of 1936 removed Africans (but not Coloureds) from the electoral roll in the Cape. It also established an advisory Natives Representative Council, made up largely of traditional African leaders, which lacked any real power. The Native Trust and Land Act, also passed in 1936, extended the area of the native reserves to 13% of the total land area of the country (although this was never achieved in practice), but it also enhanced the power of the authorities to evict Africans who lived illegally in White areas. Finally, the 1937 Native Laws Amendment Act allowed for the stricter enforcement and tighter regulation of the existing pass laws.

The end of the 1930s saw a dramatic resurgence of the Afrikaner nationalist spirit. The semi-secret group the Afrikaner Broederbond, an extreme wing of populist Afrikaner nationalism, worked with the NP to organize centenary celebrations of the Great Trek and the Battle of Blood River. These events involved hundreds of thousands of participants.

By now, the GNP and the Afrikaner Broederbond were supported by the majority of poorer Afrikaners, who felt alienated by the perceived elitism of the UP and its inability to deliver a better standard of living for all Whites. They demanded an even more radical system of racial discrimination and segregation.

South Africa's entry into the Second World War on the side of the allied powers had a major impact on the country. Hertzog resigned from government over Smuts' support of the war, and his subsequent reconciliation with Malan led to the renaming of the nationalists, who now became known as the Herenigde Nasionale Party (Reunited National Party) or simply the National Party (NP). Many Akrikaners felt an affinity with Nazi Germany and this led to a surge in support for the Nationalists and a steady undermining of the Smuts government. Meanwhile, wartime economic demand led to a rapid expansion in manufacturing industry and a sharp increase in the number of urbanized Africans. Squatter camps mushroomed on the outskirts of the major cities as the Black labour force grew in confidence and militancy.

Trade unions were formed in defiance of the law. Foremost among these was the African Mine Workers' Union (AMWU), which organized a strike of nearly 100,000 gold miners in 1946. This was defeated when the police intervened and killed nine protesters. The 1946 miners' strike was a key event for many reasons, not least because it alerted the government to the urgency of the labour situation. Smuts's response was to set up the Fagan Commission. Fagan's report concluded that the tide of African urbanization was irreversible, and that it was in the best economic interest of the country for the government to bring about a partial normalization in the status of Blacks who lived in the cities. His recommendation included a relaxation of the pass laws. The Fagan Report formed the basis of the UP's policy manifesto going into the 1948 general election. This only served to heighten the racial anxieties of many White voters. The NP reacted by forming its own Sauer Commission. This body concluded that the survival of the White race in South Africa was dependent upon the preservation of the country's exclusively White identity. According to Sauer, this could only be achieved through policies designed to reverse the trend of Black urbanization and engineer the complete separation of the races.

The NP's ability to articulate a clear apartheid vision contrasted sharply with the uneasy complexity of the UP's position. It was a message which resonated with many Afrikaner voters in a fearful and embattled White electorate. The party's slogans of *swart gevaar* ("black peril") and *rooi gevaar* ("red peril") raised the twin spectres of White cities overwhelmed by migrant Black workers on the one hand, and the civilized Afrikaner way of life threatened by a godless, revolutionary communism on the other. This was enough to see Malan's NP triumph over its UP rival.