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| Paper I | Prescribed Subject 4: Rights and Protests (Apartheid South Africa)  Subsection: Background on Apartheid (needed for historical context, not a subject for documents) |

Background on South Africa

*The information in this handout should be used to provide historical context in discussing apartheid in South Africa. You will not be given documents that deal with this information, but you will need to understand HOW these events created the atmosphere for apartheid in South Africa after WWII.*

**VOCABULARY**:

*Boer, Trekker, Trekkers, Afrikaner, Transvaaler, Voortrekker* = ALL of these refer to descendants of the Dutch/French settlers from the 1600s.

*Boer War* - Fought between the White Boers and the White British for control of South Africa

*SAP* - South African Political Party of British and Boers, moderate, tend to be pro-British

*NP* - Afrikaner political party that is conservative and pro-Afrikaner

For over a thousand years there had been a vast migration of peoples from central Africa to Southeast Africa, called the **Bantu Migration**. As these peoples migrated they displaced the indigenous San and Khoikhoi populations. Thus, before the whites came, there were already tensions that existed between different tribes within the region. In 1652 the **Dutch East India Company** (VOC) created a settlement in modern day Cape Town as a refreshment post for VOC trading ships. These Boer settlers were mainly from French and Dutch descent, and eventually created their own language. They were also mostly protestant, particularly Calvinist. The French Calvinists had fled religious persecution in France. Some settlers moved east to escape the rigid colonial rules. They were called Trekboers. By the late 1700’s these Boer settlers had moved further east and encountered the Xhosa tribe. This resulted in the first **Frontier War** that lasted over 100 years and shaped the relationship between the White Boers and the African Xhosa.

In the 1800s the British set their sights on taking over Cape Town. The Netherlands were losing power and ceded Cape Town to the British in 1806. By the 1820’s the British established new settler towns in Port Elizabeth and in the Eastern part of the colony. Boer farmers were not happy at the British intrusion, and rejected their authority. They were especially upset over the British abolishment of slavery in 1833. In 1835, many Boer farmers packed up and moved north, into what would become the **Orange Free State** and the **Transvaal,** and south in **Natal**. This would become known as the **Great Trek** and the migrants would be called the Voortrekkers.

In the 1810’s the Zulu nation had settled in the Natal region and under Shaka’s leadership, attacked their neighbors. This set off a chain reaction of warfare and destruction as groups fleeing the Zulu, attacked each other. This constant warfare depopulated much of South Africa by the 1820s. By the time the Voortrekkers arrived in Natal, they encountered little resistance. When fighting did occur, the Boers had the technological advantage of having guns. This accounted for the Boers famous victory over the Zulu in the **Battle of Blood River** in 1838.

The Boers independence was short lived however, as the British annexed Natal in 1843. They agreed to recognize Afrikaner (Boer) sovereignty in the Transvaal and Orange Free State. The British then tried to force a federation of South Africa in 1877, when they sent in a force from Natal into the Boer states. The Transvaalers organized a force to fight back and won a victory at the Battle of Mujuba in 1881. This ended the First Anglo-Boer war.

In 1867 Diamonds were found, and in 1886 gold was discovered. Labor and capital flooded into the reef and the city of Johannesburg grew immensely. This was the first real migration of Africans into the cities, which would eventually lead to the segregationist laws to control black populations and reverse their migration under apartheid. There was also a flood of white migrants into the cities, which led to a political clash between the Afrikaner conservative government in the Transvaal and the community of English-speaking whites who were supported by the British authorities in Cape Town. In 1895, a failed “coup” of English speaking whites in the Transvaal failed. This sparked another Anglo-Boer war, simply referred to as **The Boer War** between the English and two Boer Republics (Orange Free State and the Transvaal). The Boers waged a guerrilla campaign but were finally brought to the negotiating table due to British Scorched Earth tactics and the internment of hundreds of thousands of Boer women and children in concentration camps.

The **Treaty of Vereeniging** offered lenient conditions to the Boers. The Boer Republics would be brought under British control, but would have some self-government. In 1909, the **South African Act** created the new Union of South Africa and was given full dominion status in the British Empire, in effect making it an independent state and part of the British Commonwealth. The Boers, who had fought the British, took political office under the British Commonwealth as the South African Party (**SAP**). Only Whites could vote.

Segregation laws had been around before, but now were enforced with more vigor. In 1912, educated Africans responded by forming the South African Native Nationals Congress (SANNC), a precursor to the African National Congress (ANC). Die-hard Afrikaner nationalists, who did not approve of the SAP (collaboration of the 2 White groups) created the radical National Party (NP) in 1914. The radical Afrikaners never wanted to be part of the British Empire, and part of the NP goal was to separate from Britain. The impact of WWI and a failed Afrikaner rebellion furthered the political divide between the 2 white populations.

In 1922, a revolt of white miners, the **Rand Revolt**, was put down by the SAP government with force. During this time there was also growing black agitation as African workers joined unions and pushed for their rights. The result was the SAP being swept out of power in 1924 and replaced with the NP. The NP furthered their discrimination of Africans through their “civilized labor” policies.

The Great Depression and WWII further divided politics as the radical Afrikaners did not support going to war for the British and harbored Nazi sympathies. However, South Africa did support the Allies in the war and economically benefited, as it created an industrial boom, and many people moved to the cities for industrial jobs. This would have the negative impact of strict segregation laws during apartheid to rollback this migration of black workers. The ANC and Communist Party were strong organizers of strikes for workers’ rights at this time. More blacks were living in the cities alongside whites and were increasingly vocal about ending discrimination...The whites gave them their answer in 1948 by voting in the NP and their policy of apartheid into power.

Political Makeup of South Africa

After the South African Act, South Africa was divided into four provinces: Cape Province, Natal, The Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Cape Province and Natal had been British colonies and mostly retained a British identity. The Transvaal and The Orange Free State had been Boer republics and retained a strong Afrikaner identity. (Although the city of Johannesburg in the Transvaal had a large British population). As a compromise for the South African Act, there were three capitals: *Cape Town* (in Cape Province) was the legislative capital, *Pretoria* (in Transvaal) was the administrative capital and *Bloemfontein* (In the Orange Free State) was the judicial capital.

The People

Apartheid divided society into racial classifications: White, Coloured and African Boer means “farmer” and is correct to use in the historical context, however if used to describe Afrikaners today would come off as offensive. Afrikaners make up 60% of the white population. They are descendants of the Dutch and French, and tend to be more numerous in the rural areas. The majority of Afrikaners are members of the protestant Dutch reformed Church (DRC), a Calvinist denomination. It is a more strict and conservative branch of Christianity, that many believe influenced ideological development of apartheid. They have a strict moralization code for society and government and believe that society is divided between the Elect (those predestined for salvation) and those condemned to eternal damnation. The Afrikaners tended to support the NP party

The English make up the rest of the 40% of the white population. They are descendants of the British colonizers after it was annexed by their government. They make up the majority of the population in the Cape Province and most of Natal, however there is a large population of English in Johannesburg after gold was discovered. They tended to support the United Party (UP), who was opposed to the Afrikaner favoritism of the NP. The UP was also against the extreme elements of apartheid...but still supported the system of segregation. Under apartheid, Whites were the only group allowed to vote, held the majority of the wealth and benefited from the system.

Of the non-white population, South Africa had 1.5 million Coloured. They were the descendants of interracial offspring from the Afrikaner farmers and their slaves. Most Coloureds speak Afrikaans and feel a strong cultural connection to their White co-linguists, despite apartheid. Most were Christian, and many belonged to the DRC. Some were Muslim. Half a million were Indian, descendants of indentured servants brought from India to work in Natal’s sugar plantations in the 1860s. Others came from India voluntarily to work as traders. Coloured occupied a middle ground in apartheid, they were subordinate to Whites but superior to Blacks. Most Coloureds were opposed to apartheid.

Most Black peoples in South Africa can be classified into two main ethno-linguistic groups: Nguni and the Sotho-Tswana. The largest Nguni groups are the Zulu and the Xhosa, though there are other groups too, such as the Tsonga, Venda, Ndebele and Swazi. The main Sotho-Tswana groups are: Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho and the Tswana. The Zulu were dominant in Natal and SE Transvaal, Xhosa dominate in the Eastern Cape, South Sotho and Tswana in the Orange Free State and the North Sotho, Tswana and Tsonga in the Transvaal. Cities tended to have more of a mixed group due to migrations for jobs. Most South African Blacks are Christians, due to the missionary work. However, it is a blended with their own traditional beliefs and cultural practices. The majority of Blacks opposed the apartheid system and supported the ANC liberation struggle.

Origins of Apartheid

Apartheid assumes that ethnic groups are inherently different with different physical characteristics. These differences create a “natural hierarchy” of races with some being inherently superior to others. This was supported with the late 19th century philosophy of Social Darwinism that proposed “survival of the fittest” in regard to human nature. People used this idea to say that some races were superior to others and should dominate the inferior ones. Coupled with the fact that Afrikaner groups were mostly Calvinist and the idea of the Elect, some believe the Afrikaners felt they were predestined by God to rule South Africa.

The history of Afrikaners also explains where apartheid came from. Their frontier life isolated them from Europe and progressive ideas. They cultivated an Old Testament worldview that created links between their experiences and the Israelites. Slavery was a part of everyday life, so they took for granted racial inequality. Their skirmishes with the Xhosa and Zulu created feelings of animosity. Their victory at the Battle of Blood River reinforced their beliefs that they were the chosen people and had promised to bring “civilization” to Africa. This all culminated in the belief that to keep the white race safe and pure, all races should be kept segregated.

The African National Congress (ANC)

The ANC would become the dominant force in opposition to the apartheid system. It was originally founded in 1912 as the South African Native National Congress (SANNC). After the Union of South Africa was created in 1910, there was a need to form an organization that represented the interests of Africans, since it was obvious the union meant the exclusion and subordination of Africans. The SANNC was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi’s efforts in India. The delegates of the SANNC were a small group of elite middle class Black professionals. Politically they favored moderation. Initially they assumed that Africans had benefited from British colonial rule and education. They appealed to the true British traditions of liberalism and paternalism. They believed the best action to take was to persuade White opinion that Black people were civilized, respectable and worthy of greater political inclusion. Their initial strategy was to work with White politicians to reverse the tide of segregation and petition London politicians that the Union government was betraying the British traditions of promoting welfare and decency. This strategy did not work.

After failing to get support from London, the SANNC began to stagnate. Its leadership was dominated by traditional conservatives. In 1922 the SANNC changed its name to the **African National Congress (ANC)** and saw a brief revival of spirit in the late 1920’s, only to revert back to dormancy during the Great Depression. The ANC was viewed by poor Africans as elitist and out of touch, and its membership shrank. This image problem followed them into the 1950’s.

*Information has been adapted from the following sources:*

Clinton, Peter and Mark Rogers. *Rights and Protest: Course Companion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Bottaro, Jean and John Stanley. *History for the IB Diploma Paper I: Rights and Protest.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2015.