# General Information

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# Description

NBC's Brian Williams looks back at the history of Apartheid in South Africa.

# Keywords


# Citation

MLA

Transcript

History of Apartheid in South Africa

BRIAN WILLIAMS reporting:
Tonight we have a look back at the policies and politics that this election is meant to erase. In this election, this nation of 31 million people whites make up only 5 million yet for over 300 years whites have ruled South Africa going back to the first Dutch settlers. In the policy called apartheid which means apartness in the language of Africans became law a half-century ago.

1948, the formal apartheid era begins when the National Party assumes power. New laws classify South Africans by race and ban marriage between races. In response the African National Congress formed in 1912 to fight racism leads a campaign of defiance throughout the 1950s. In 1960 at a demonstration in Sharpeville, 69 unarmed protesters are shot to death. The incident, a turning point, becomes known as The Sharpeville Massacre. The government continues its get-tough policy. The ANC is banned. Its leader a lawyer named Nelson Mandela is considered an outlaw. The ANC begins a campaign of sabotage and plans a guerilla war. But Mandela is captured by the government, tried and sentenced to life in prison.

More than a decade passes before another mass uprising, this time Soweto. Students protesting inferior education are gunned down, 600 are killed in less than 6 months.

STEVEN BIKO: Non-violence means…

WILLIAMS: Steven Biko, leader of the black consciousness movement dies in jail. There is clear evidence he has been tortured, the government denies it, but the spotlight is now on South Africa and the international community is alarmed.

P.W. POTHA: In negotiations…

WILLIAMS: In the 1980s a new president P.W. Potha tries a new approach, the appearance of moderation. Mixed race South Africans are given a place in the legislature but no power. Meantime the army hunts down and kills ANC guerillas inside and outside South Africa. In the 1980s huge rallies and strikes make the country almost ungovernable. A nationwide state of emergency follows, as do international sanctions against the government. This pressure prompts more reform. Public facilities are open to all races. The hated pass laws controlling the movement of blacks are abolished. But blacks
demand full political rights, a new president F.W. de Klerk hopes to preserve some white power but realizes the era of total domination is over. He accelerates reform.

Voice: There’s Mr. Mandela.

WILLIAMS: The ANC is legalized. Mandela is freed after 27 and a half years behind bars. Apartheid laws are repealed. Two old enemies share a Nobel peace prize.

And now both men face each other in the first ever all race elections in South African history. History of course is being made here each day, for example the voters guide in today’s paper for the nation of first timers, and there’s an ad below it for the Metro, urging the voters to take the train to the polls. And at 12:01 Wednesday a first in a series of symbolic milestones here, the current South African flag introduced in 1928 inspired by symbols of European countries from which the white settlers came, will be replaced. The new flag here features six colors, black for the majority, gold for the nations mineral wealth, green for the land, red for liberation, the white and blue representing peace.

Finally the head of the election process here in South Africa called this election quote ‘awkward but necessary and enjoyable.’ Barring further violence that is all true.