

WAS SOUTH AFRICA RACIALLY SEGREGATED IN 1948?

THE CORE OF this book begins in 1948, when a new government took over in South Africa, determined to put into practice a policy called 'apartheid', which means separateness. They planned, as you will see in Chapter 4, to separate black and white South Africans as much as possible. But separation, or SEGREGATION, of black and white people did not begin in 1948. This chapter looks at the extent to which South Africa was racially segregated before apartheid began, and why.

You have already seen, in Chapter 1, that the white rulers of South Africa, Dutch and British, treated black people unequally. They fought them, took their land, forced them to work, enslaved them and regarded them as inferior human beings. However, separation of the races had not yet taken place.

- South Africa was still an agricultural country, with black and white farmers, often on neighbouring farms.
- Rich whites had black servants, but poor whites and blacks lived and worked alongside one another.
- After the problems of the *difaqane* (see page 17), having lost wars against white rule, black Africans had begun to settle down as small farmers. They were good at it: they knew the land and the climate. Men and women worked on the land together. In areas near to towns they sold their produce to the growing urban population.

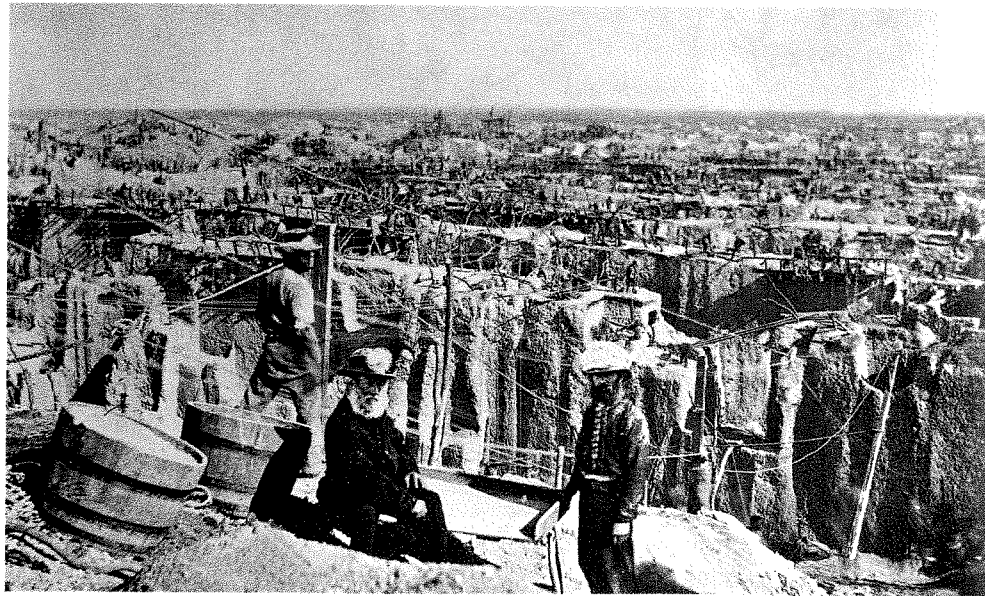
At the end of the nineteenth century the discovery of diamonds and gold – usually called the 'Mining Revolution' – changed South Africa and the lives of its people utterly.

How did the Mining Revolution increase racial segregation?

TASK

The Mining Revolution made South Africa rich, but it totally changed the lives of black Africans. As you read about how minework became organised, look for evidence of:

- how different miners' lives were from their lives back in their home villages
- how the lives of their relatives were changed by minework
- how racial segregation became part of the mining industry in South Africa.



SOURCE 1 The 'Big Hole' at Kimberley, in the Orange Free State, where diamonds were discovered in 1867. It is the biggest man-made hole in the world. This picture was taken 12 months after the start of the digging. PROSPECTORS dug for diamonds in their tiny claims – less than two metres square – and carried the soil out on hundreds of lines to the edge of the 'hole'. But as the mine grew deeper they needed pumps and other equipment. Only those with money could keep going and rich businessmen bought out individual miners

MINING DIAMONDS WAS an expensive business but mining gold cost even more. There was plenty of gold, but it was very deep, about 1 km down. It was also of poor quality: two tonnes of ore produced only 21 grams of gold. This meant that huge investments had to be made in equipment, labour and time spent digging. It was estimated that it cost 60 million RAND just to start a mine, before any gold had been extracted.

This meant that the mine-owners (the 'Randlords', as they were called) had a problem. The mines were tremendously expensive to set up and operate; the price of gold was fixed internationally.

■ How could the mine-owners increase their profits?

Answer: by hiring cheap labour.

■ And where could they find cheap labour?

Answer: from the black Africans in the villages.

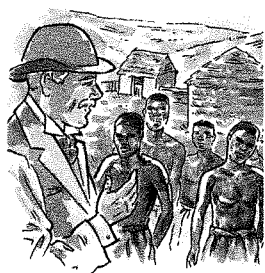
But to bring workers and their families to Johannesburg would involve huge, expensive housing schemes. They would have to pay high enough wages to keep the miner and his family alive. And the blacks didn't want to come anyway.

So the mine-owners developed the MIGRANT LABOUR SYSTEM.

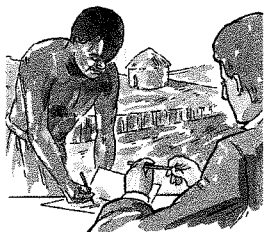
The migrant labour system

The system worked like this.

The attraction



1. Agents were sent out into the countryside to attract young, unmarried men to work in the mines.



2. At first it seemed quite a good offer: the young man signed a contract to work for a few months.



3. He went to the Rand, where he was housed in a compound with other men from his ethnic group.



4. His contract done, he returned home. He needed cash to pay the parents of the girl he wanted to marry the 'bride-price'.



5. Cash was also useful because some black Africans had begun to abandon their SUBSISTENCE lifestyle and wanted to buy manufactured goods.

The reality



1. Mine-owners paid low wages because they were providing housing and food.



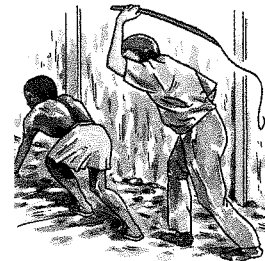
2. They also paid low wages because the miners' families were back home living off the land.



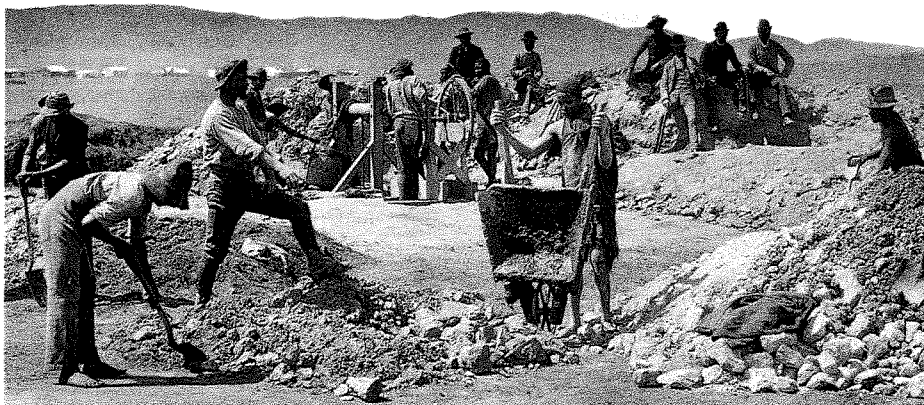
3. The work was hard: miners worked 1 km underground, in tough, dangerous conditions.



4. They were housed in squalid compound blocks.



5. They were harshly treated by their overseers.



SOURCE 2 Gold was discovered on the Witwatersrand (usually called 'the Rand') near Johannesburg in 1886. This picture was taken in 1888

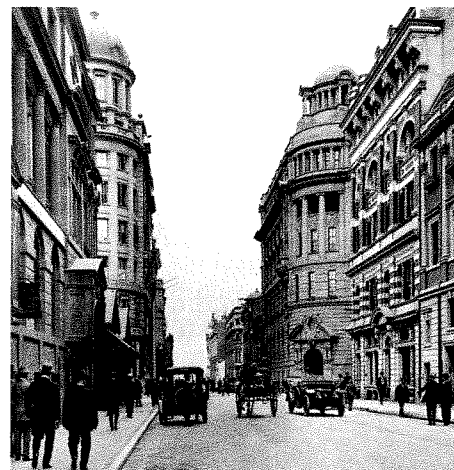
Black workers were not willing to come in enough numbers to satisfy the mine-owners' needs. Mine-owners found they had to pay higher wages than they wanted to. Agents were sent all over Africa looking for workers, bringing them hundreds of kilometres from the Portuguese colony of Mozambique and British colonies in central Africa.

Government help

The mine-owners turned to the government for help. The Boer governments of the Orange Free State and Transvaal found themselves in a strange position. The farmers who made up their population were not rich and not keen on paying their taxes. In 1884 the Transvaal was almost bankrupt. Then came this enormous flood of money and people into their farmers' republic. By 1887 the Transvaal had an income of 3 million rand. But the mine-owners wanted something in return for their money. They made the government pass a law to introduce a Hut Tax. This meant that every hut, every family, had to pay 1 rand each year in tax. But most blacks in rural areas still did not use money – when they needed goods, they exchanged some of their own goods in payment. How could they get cash? By sending someone to work in the mines, naturally.



SOURCE 5 Men leaving their homes to go to work in the Kimberley diamond mines



SOURCE 3 This picture shows Johannesburg around 1910. By 1913 the Rand was supplying 40 per cent of the world's gold

SOURCE 4 An appeal by the President of the Chamber of Mines to the government in 1912

“ We must have labour. The mining industry without labour is as bricks would be without straw or to imagine you could get milk without a cow ... The native cares nothing if industries pine for want of labour when his crops and home-brewed drink are plentiful. ”

SOURCE 6 This sign was put up in Lesotho in 1906

*“ NOTICE TO STRONG BOYS.
I wish to make it publicly known that I have stopped flogging at Picaninny Kimberley Compound. Today is your time to earn money. Wages are from 3 shillings to 10 shillings a day, according to your strength. I shall pay Hut Tax for you and railway fare to Picaninny Kimberley. Now, my friends, it is time for you to come. The cattle have udders, come and milk them. ”*



SOURCE 7 Women and children were left to look after the home and the land while the men worked away

1. What does the author of Source 4 find wrong with the situation he is describing?
2. What does Source 6 tell you about the migrant labour system?
3. What were the benefits of the migrant labour system for the mine-owners?
4. The mine-owners were rich and powerful. Why did they need the government to do something for them?
5. In what way was the government's help essential in getting what the mine-owners wanted?

Life for the miners

Life for the miners was grim. They lived in compounds which were cold, crowded and unhealthy. Their work underground was hard, dusty, noisy and dangerous. They were driven by the whips of the white supervisors. Gradually the length of their contracts was increased from six months to eight or nine months.

To stop the miners running away, each miner had to carry a passbook, showing who he was and where he worked. Any black male could be stopped by the police and asked for his pass at any time.

It was difficult to organise mineworkers into unions to fight for better conditions: they were not allowed to leave their compounds, they spoke different languages, and strikes were fiercely crushed by their employers.

SOURCE 8 J.H. Johns, in a speech to mine managers in 1894, justified conditions in the compounds

“ In their own kraals, natives live in a more or less backward state of civilisation, and there is, in my opinion, a danger that we may be going too far in our efforts to make them comfortable and I think that the natives far prefer those compounds which are not too well-ventilated and airy. ”

SOURCE 9 In 1918 a short-lived union called the Industrial Workers of South Africa called on workers to see that ethnic differences were becoming irrelevant

“ There is only one way to freedom, black workers: unite as workers, unite! Forget the things that divide you. Let there be no longer any talk of Basuto, Zulu, or Shangaan. You are all labourers: Let labour be your common bond! ”

SOURCE 10 A striker at the Knights Deep Mine complained in 1920

“ The white man goes below, does no work and gets big money. The African gets all the gold out of the ground and gets very little money. How is that fair? ”

TASK

1. In what ways did the growth of the mining industry in South Africa lead to a worsening of the position of black Africans?
2. Make a list of the grievances black mineworkers had.
3. Why was it so difficult for them to do anything about these grievances?

ACTIVITY

Working in pairs, look at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on pages 4–5. Discuss which of the rights were broken by the migrant labour system.