

Chronology of Key Events in South Africa

1480s - Portuguese navigator Bartholomeu Dias is the first European to travel round the southern tip of Africa.

1497 - Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama lands on Natal coast.

1652 - Jan van Riebeeck, representing the Dutch East India Company, founds the Cape Colony at Table Bay.

1795 - British forces seize Cape Colony from the Netherlands. Territory is returned to the Dutch in 1803; ceded to the British in 1806.

1816-1826 - Shaka Zulu founds and expands the Zulu empire, creates a formidable fighting force.

1835-1840 - Boers leave Cape Colony in the 'Great Trek' and found the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.

1852 - British grant limited self-government to the Transvaal.

1856 - Natal separates from the Cape Colony.

Late 1850s - Boers proclaim the Transvaal a republic.

1867 - Diamonds discovered at Kimberley.

1877 - Britain annexes the Transvaal.

1879 - British defeat the Zulus in Natal.

1880-81 - Boers rebel against the British, sparking the first Anglo-Boer War. Conflict ends with a negotiated peace. Transvaal is restored as a republic.

Mid 1880s - Gold is discovered in the Transvaal, triggering the gold rush.

1899 - British troops gather on the Transvaal border and ignore an ultimatum to disperse. The second Anglo-Boer War begins.

1902 - Treaty of Vereeniging ends the second Anglo-Boer War. The Transvaal and Orange Free State are made self-governing colonies of the British Empire.

1910 - Formation of Union of South Africa by former British colonies of the Cape and Natal, and the Boer republics of Transvaal, and Orange Free State.

1912 - Native National Congress founded, later renamed the African National Congress (ANC).

1913 - Land Act introduced to prevent blacks, except those living in Cape Province, from buying land outside reserves.

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1914 - National Party founded.

1918 - Secret Broederbond (brotherhood) established to advance the Afrikaner cause.

1919 - South West Africa (Namibia) comes under South African administration.

Apartheid set in law

1948 - Policy of apartheid (separateness) adopted when National Party (NP) takes power.

1950 - Population classified by race. Group Areas Act passed to segregate blacks and whites. Communist Party banned. ANC responds with campaign of civil disobedience, led by Nelson Mandela.

1960 - Seventy black demonstrators killed at Sharpeville. ANC banned.

1961 - South Africa declared a republic, leaves the Commonwealth. Mandela heads ANC's new military wing, which launches sabotage campaign.

1960s - International pressure against government begins, South Africa excluded from Olympic Games.

1964 - ANC leader Nelson Mandela sentenced to life imprisonment.

1966 September - Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd assassinated.

1970s - More than 3 million people forcibly resettled in black 'homelands'.

1976 - More than 600 killed in clashes between black protesters and security forces during uprising which starts in Soweto.

1984-89 - Township revolt, state of emergency.

1989 - FW de Klerk replaces PW Botha as president, meets Mandela. Public facilities desegregated. Many ANC activists freed.

1990 - ANC unbanned, Mandela released after 27 years in prison. Namibia becomes independent.

1991 - Start of multi-party talks. De Klerk repeals remaining apartheid laws, international sanctions lifted. Major fighting between ANC and Zulu Inkatha movement.

1993 - Agreement on interim constitution.

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1994 April - ANC wins first non-racial elections. Mandela become president, Government of National Unity formed, Commonwealth membership restored, remaining sanctions lifted. South Africa takes seat in UN General Assembly after 20-year absence.

Seeking truth

1996 - Truth and Reconciliation Commission chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu begins hearings on human rights crimes committed by former government and liberation movements during apartheid era.

1996 - Parliament adopts new constitution. National Party withdraws from coalition, saying it is being ignored.

1998 - Truth and Reconciliation Commission report brands apartheid a crime against humanity and finds the ANC accountable for human rights abuses.

1999 - ANC wins general elections, Thabo Mbeki takes over as president.

2000 December - ANC prevails in local elections. Recently-formed Democratic Alliance captures nearly a quarter of the votes. The Inkatha Freedom Party wins 9%.

2001 April - 39 multi-national pharmaceutical companies halt a legal battle to stop South Africa importing generic Aids drugs. The decision is hailed as a victory for the world's poorest countries in their efforts to import cheaper drugs to combat the virus