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Apartheid: the Custom that must Change

Edward Hindson

Liberty University, ehindson@liberty.edu

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Apartheid— The Custom That Must Change



Government housing outside Johannesburg.

Many people have no idea what the word *apartheid* means, even though apartheid (racial separation) lies at the crux of the South African dispute. Confusion abounds. But this confusion does not negate the importance of the South African debate.

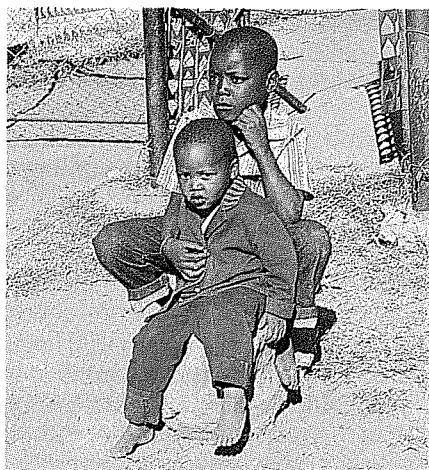
Throughout South Africa's history the white minority lived as an enclave unto itself, coexisting with the various black tribes who remained settled in their "homelands" under the rule of various tribal chiefs. As more blacks moved to the cities, seeking employment, social intercourse between blacks and whites increased. Prompted largely by fear of an overwhelming black and nonwhite population, the government began to pass racially restricting laws. In an effort to protect the black homelands from white encroachment, the Native Trust and Land Act was passed in 1936, providing for the purchase of additional land to be held in trust for the blacks and to guarantee more living space for their growing population. The law also forbade whites to purchase land that was held in trust for blacks. Initially this step was viewed as a humanitarian effort to benefit all peoples of South Africa.

But a new wave of Afrikaner patriotism and nationalism swept the country during the voortrekker centennial in 1938 and continued through the World War II years. The Afrikaners held a clear majority of the white population

and reacted strongly against British influence after the war. In 1948 a new government headed by D. F. Malan came to power and began a program of legislative reform to perpetuate the separateness ("apart-ness") of the population. In an effort to protect the political rights and control of the white minority *apartheid* was made an official government policy. Separation of whites, coloreds, blacks, and Indians was enforced by the courts. The blacks were subject to "pass laws" restricting their movements, to limited taxation, and to other checks on their liberties.

Among other things, apartheid laws denied nonwhites the right to vote for white representatives; made marriages and unions out of wedlock between whites and nonwhites unlawful; reserved particular types of jobs for whites; enforced segregation in buses, trains, post offices, and other public places; and divided towns into zones in which members of only one race could own or conduct business.

As a result, whites and nonwhites rarely met—except as masters and servants. For the next 30 years the National Party continued its *apartheid* policies despite objections from blacks and whites alike. During the sixties and seventies violence erupted and spread to the industrialized cities as blacks began to assert their racial identity.



The election of P. W. Botha as Prime Minister in 1978 brought about a drastic change. In a 12-point plan, Botha rejected the concept of the white supremacy and promised to promote the acceptance of a multinational society, consolidation of the black national homelands, abolition of discriminatory measures, and the creation of a constellation of South African states. He canceled the town of Soweto's \$9 million debt to the government and initiated an immediate government-funded building program for black townships.

The government created separate houses of Parliament for coloreds and Indians, abandoned its law forbidding interracial marriages, and relaxed its "petty apartheid" practices, such as segregation in parks, post offices, and bars. Despite the image created by the international media, Botha is the most progressive and moderate leader the government has had in recent years.

Shortly after his inauguration as president in September 1984, Botha said, "My government will continue to create, on the basis of consultation and negotiation, a framework within which cooperation with Black States, both independent and self-governing, can take place. Furthermore, means will have to be found to enable black communities outside the independent and self-governing states to participate in political decision-making in matters affecting their interests. Thus we must continue to build on the foundations which were laid by the establishment of black local authorities."

The South African government fears that by moving too fast the country will fall into the hands of the nation's black majority—a majority that is undereducated, unskilled, hostile toward whites, and influenced by Marxist-Communist organizations. Such a move, the government maintains, would destroy the nation's political, social, and economic stability. The nation would then fall into the hands of Communist aggressors.

But if the South African government moves too slowly, the results could be the same.

Ed Hindson