

Special Report Race & Politics



Children are pictured in a 'resettlement' village in the former province of Natal, South Africa in January 1982. Millions of Black South Africans were forcibly resettled in such villages called Black 'homelands' as of 1948. The Bantu education system presented Blacks as 'sub-human beings incapable of assimilating civilization,' thereby excluding them from mainstream political, economic, and social life and advancement. *Photograph courtesy of the United Nations*

Out of nothing, nothing comes: the lingering effects of racism in politics

The many implications of apartheid seriously maimed not just the physical bodies, but the souls of many South Africans. This is what happens when the people in power do not reflect the people they represent.



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Opinion

OTTAWA—"Out of nothing, nothing comes." If this saying is true, as once asserted by former South Africa president Thabo Mbeki when giving an address in Ottawa on Historical Injustice in 1979, "then, it must follow that the future is formed and derives its first impulse in the womb of the present."

Today, the world watches, somewhat numbed, as South Africa reaps the bitter fruits of years of apartheid policies on race, gender, and human rights, amongst others. The much-cherished rainbow nation continues to experience apartheid's long shadow on the country's efforts at building not just a modern democratic society, but one embracing diversity, inclusion, and a better life for all citizens.

This year, South Africa celebrates 25 years of freedom. Though a significant milestone, a quarter of a century is definitely too short a time to erase the scars of 360-and-some-odd years of institutionalized apartheid and its unethical, immoral, cruel, and discriminatory practices by a minority race over the majority. All South Africans must delve into their souls for the courage and commitment needed to heal themselves and their land. However, it must be recognized that the ramifications of apartheid atrocities did not spare the souls of the Black majority. This is best illustrated in the area of education.

It is widely accepted that education is the future. It follows that for countries to grow their economies they first have to invest in the education of their citizens.

In keeping with the logic of "out of nothing, nothing comes," the apartheid regime

deliberately disinvested in the education of Black South Africans, introducing and promoting the so-called Bantu education system. This was the most debilitating and deadly act of South Africa's apartheid policy on the soul of a people. It sought to suppress whatever glimpse of hope or dream there was for a Black child to fulfil their potential. Bantu education stultified the minds and crippled the future of Black children, training and equipping them only for servitude in the lower echelons of the labour market.

Hendrick Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid, who was South Africa's minister of native affairs from 1958 to 1966, addressing parliament on government's education policies in the 1950s said: "There is no place for Bantu in the European Community above the level of certain forms of labour What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? Education must train people in accordance to the sphere in which they live."

The system also presented Blacks as "sub-human beings incapable of assimilating civilization," thereby excluding them from mainstream political, economic, and social life and advancement. The oppression of the Indigenous people was deeply systemic and entrenched. If the "future is formed and derives its first impulse in the womb of the present," one can easily understand why a country endowed with natural resources, an ocean covering an area greater than its land territory, excellent climate all year round, soil so rich anything grows is struggling to lift itself out of the morass of poverty. It is in understanding how apartheid was enforced that the enduring legacy of this intolerable system, 25 years on, can be fully appreciated.

South Africa's history is one that should never be repeated. The political, economic, and socio-cultural implications of apartheid seriously maimed not just the physical bodies, but the souls of many South Africans. While the doors to equality have now been opened, the damage following political and racial-based decisions by the apartheid government have failed South Africa and remain blight on its future. This is what happens when the people in power do not reflect the people they represent.

We have now reached the "kairos point," a critical and opportune time when we have to go beyond addressing the physical and obvious consequences of a stultifying past, but must embrace the inner world of the mind, to nurture in our souls the seeds of our common humanity and dignity irrespective of race, gender and other circumstances that divide and separate us one from the other.

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