

THE LANGUAGE OF COLONIZATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Many languages are spoken in South Africa. English coexists with Afrikaans, a Dutch dialect, as well as African-originating languages such as isiNdebele, isiZulu, Sesotho, siSwati, Xitsonga, isiXhosa, Sepedi, and Setswana. Understanding the country's history explains why these languages are spoken there.

As its name suggests, South Africa is located at the southern tip of Africa. Historically, its location was important for trade. European mariners benefitted from travel around the southernmost part of Africa because there was no easy passage to reach the New World of the Americas. As a result, South Africa has a patchwork history as a European colony

for both the Dutch and then later, the British, mixed with regional communities and peoples. This history helps explain why contemporary South Africa is a multilingual nation. It has numerous ethnic groups speaking different languages

The first Europeans in South Africa were Portuguese. They arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in A.D. 1488 but they did not establish settlements there. They were simply exploring the continent. The Portuguese were interested in taking advantage of the trading opportunities in Africa that already had been established in the north by Arab peoples. The Portuguese had little contact with the Africans at the Cape and interacted with them only when shipwrecked. Even then, the Portuguese did not stay long in the south. Instead, they trekked north to the established settlements in the region that is today Mozambique.

By 1652, the Dutch established a settlement in southern Africa. The Dutch East India Company, a company based in the Netherlands whose purpose was to explore new territory, colonize, and establish trade, set up a fort at Table Bay. At first, this fort was to provide provisions, or supplies, for ships that passed by the Cape. Eventually, the Dutch needed more farmland to feed the settlers at

the fort and began settling in the region. While they did not enslave the local people, they instead transported slaves from Africa's west and north as well as from India and the Malay Peninsula to provide the labor needed for settlement. The Dutch census records of 1707 show that by that time 1,779 Dutch settlers and an additional 1,107 slaves lived in Cape Colony. The city of Cape Town became the colony's major urban center. The Africans, who were agricultural-based groups, were not powerful enough to unite to force out the Europeans. Instead, they moved to marginalized areas, or less desirable land, that was not well-suited for farming.

The Netherlands was not the only country with interest in southern Africa. Both France and Great Britain wanted to capture the Cape to control this sea route to Asia. Control of the area changed hands when a series of wars among countries in Europe broke out in the late 1700s. These wars are known as the Napoleonic Wars. At one point, the British occupied the Cape but lost it back to the Dutch. However, by 1809 the British again gained control of southern Africa, ending the Dutch East India Company's role in the region. The British-controlled colony now became a market for British-made goods. It also became a source of raw materials and a new destination for emigration from Britain. By 1820, a large number of British settlers arrived at the colony, furthering British interests in the land and the resources there.

After the British gained control, the administration of the colony was conducted in English, not Dutch. The Dutch currency was replaced with the British pound sterling. Like the Dutch had done, the British excluded Africans as citizens. Also excluded from British citizenship were the Dutch descendants in Africa, known as Boers (or Afrikaners). Although the British were the minority, they created the laws, and as such they, and not the local people, benefitted most from the region's wealth.

Soon the British exploited new sources of wealth, creating tensions in the area. First, diamonds were discovered in 1867, creating a mining boom. Even though the diamond mines were located in Boer lands, the British invaded these areas. The British colony expanded as more and more settlers arrived to benefit from the diamond industry. By the mid-1870s, the European population in the Cape was 240,000 strong. Interestingly, even

A Legacy of Divisions



from previous page >

though two-thirds of the settler population spoke Dutch or Afrikaans, a local Dutch dialect, the political power, however, was controlled by English-speaking landowners, merchants, and lawmakers.

Next, in 1886 prospectors found land in Africa that contained gold. The area was 40 miles wide (60 km). This discovery furthered the growth created by the diamond boom, resulting in even more immigration to and urbanization in the area.

The tensions in the region between the English-speaking colonists and the Afrikaans-speaking Boers, especially as a result of the diamond mining boom, led to the South African War (1899–1902), also known as the Boer War. In the end,

the Boers were unsuccessful in winning their independence. Many black Africans had supported the British cause during the war, believing that the British would institute equal laws and equal rule when the Boers lost.

However, on May 31, 1910, the Union of South Africa was born with a constitution that excluded all blacks from political power and segregated them from the white minority. The war's treaty allowed the white minority to decide the political fate of the black and mixed-race majority. In 1948, apartheid laws fully institutionalized the racial segregation of South Africa. *Apartheid* is the policy to maintain racial segregation.

Through protest, international pressure, and the efforts of anti-apartheid

leaders—including the imprisoned Nelson Mandela—apartheid was abolished in 1990. In the general elections held in 1994, a freed Mandela became the first black president of the country.

South Africa's complicated history is revealed by the many languages spoken in the country. The history of colonization is shown in the types of languages, and the segregation of people is still evident in the linguistic patterns of different locations in the country. Today, while apartheid is no longer law, people still remain grouped together—and separated from other groups—by race, revealed by language.

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SOURCES:

- <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/10/an-amazing-dizzying-map-of-all-the-languages-and-races-in-south-africa/280210/>
- <http://www-cs-students.stanford.edu/~cale/cs201/apartheid.hist.html>
- <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/555568/South-Africa>

QUESTIONS

1. The history of South Africa is intertwined with the history of European colonialism. First, answer why control of the Cape was important to European countries. Then, write a paragraph to explain why countries in Europe were interested in expanding their empire through colonization.
2. Based on what you read in the article, what is *apartheid*? Although not stated directly, infer what the purpose of apartheid was in South Africa. Hint: Think about the distribution of population and which group was the minority.
3. Make a timeline of the key events in the history of South Africa. In the timeline, conclude with the abolishment of apartheid. Then, research to learn who Nelson Mandela was and what his role was in the anti-apartheid movement.
4. Look at the map. Are most of the languages spoken in the area mixed within urban centers and towns or are they distinctly grouped together? What conclusion can you draw about the distribution of language in South Africa? How does language relate to the country's history?

COMMON CORE STRANDS:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. [Question 1]
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content. [Questions 1 and 2]
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation. [Question 3]
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. [Questions 2 and 4]
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts. [Question 4]
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.3 Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them. [Question 3]

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>

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