



South Africa

The Second Republic: Race, Inequality and Democracy in South Africa

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*Laws are always of use to those who possess and harmful to those who have nothing;
from which it follows that the social state is advantageous to men only
when all have something and none too much.*

– J J Rousseau

Introduction

South Africa belongs to a class of societies in which Brazil and the United States of America are also included: countries which are products of the wave of expansion unleashed in Western Europe from the 15th century onwards. It has in common with Brazil and the United States interesting population diversity, immigrants from all continents and a dynamic urban, industrial life. Unlike the USA, the majority of the South African indigenous population did not succumb to the combination of force of arms and an army of germs, but survived and flourished.¹ South Africans today are in a large majority indigenous. By the end of the 20th century, a sophisticated modern economy had brought millions of people of diverse origin into the closest of contact and, after much suffering, had created the only industrial democracy on the African continent.

South Africa shares also with Brazil and the USA a history of White supremacy that endured and hardened into the 20th century.² Under the name of apartheid, it only gave way to democratic government in 1994. A liberation struggle supported by increasing levels of international support in the 1980s led to the undoing of White supremacy in government and public affairs, leaving, first, Nelson Mandela and his government between 1994 and 1999, and, second, Thabo Mbeki and his government elected on June 2, 1999, with the task of building a decent society out of a history where the progress of a White minority depended on the deliberate regression of a Black majority.

The difficulties and challenges of this historical undertaking are born of the unusual combination– for Africa and the Global South– of having democratic institutions and strong elements of an advanced technical base resting upon very uncertain social foundations. The benefits of economic and scientific advance have spread only to the minority. An urban industrial society has arisen which resembles a 19th century Dickensian squalor. As in the England of that time, there is talk of “two nations,” one rich, one poor.³ Unlike England, each nation bears the badge of its economic status on its outward appearance, for the rich nation is White and the poor nation Black– in crude outline that is.

A closer look reveals more complex patterns and a demographic profile of great intricacy, albeit submerged under gross racial typologies that come down from the country's and its people's tempestuous history.⁴ Racial and ethnic designations do not neatly or consistently coincide with class, gender and lifestyle inequities, nor does the meaning of “race” or what it is people understand by “ethnic” remain untouched by history.

South Africans and Their Labels

The categorization of the South African population has undergone a number of changes since population censuses were first introduced in the 19th century. From the beginning, classification on the basis of ethnic labels has been the rule. These categories reflected patterns of settlement and immigration that have constituted the current South African population. In their matter-of-fact usage they imply rigidity regarding the population structure which belies a fluid process of population formation. The use of these categories is unavoidable given the fixity that they have come to acquire both in popular consciousness and official business.

The most recent population count in 1996 came up with an unexpectedly low figure of 38 million inhabitants.⁵ Of these, it is estimated some 29 million are "African", 5 million "White", 3 million "Coloured" and nearly 1 million "Indian". Here then are South Africa's four "racial groups", otherwise referred to as "population groups", "ethnic groups" and even "national groups". The African majority section of the population comprises the descendants of Iron Age farmers speaking eleven variants of the Bantu language family that dominates the linguistic map of sub-Saharan Africa east of Cameroon.⁶ Formerly known under various labels (the awful "Kaffir"⁷, "Native", "Bantu" or the more benign "Black") by the European settlers, today it is this African majority which by virtue of electoral dominance and economic deprivation is the focus of developmental aspirations. Here the issue of racial inequality is most acutely posed.

The country's Whites (formerly "Europeans") descend from a melange of Dutch, German and French speakers who fused to comprise the country's Afrikaner population by the 19th century, and from a conglomeration of Britons, continental Europeans and Jewish people. The Britons as the dominant political power in the region placed the stamp of the English language on the country's economic, educational and governmental life.

It is questionable whether one can speak of the Coloured population at all. In this essentially residual category are to be found people of the most diverse descent, including the remnants of the area's most truly indigenous groupings: the pastoral Khoi-Khoi ("Hottentots" and the hunter-gatherer San ("Bushmen").⁸ To be "Coloured" in South Africa today is merely to say that one can trace some ancestry from Africa or Asia, or both, and speaks either English or Afrikaans as a home language. That the very notion of a "Coloured people" exists is due to the complex sociology of three centuries of European domination and more recently the classificatory mania of the apartheid regime.

Finally, South Africa's Indian population, established first in the region around Durban, derives from the importation of labor for the sugar fields of Natal in the 19th century from the Indian sub-continent. This population was however drawn from several corners of India and came to comprise both Hindu and Moslem sections. Their seeming outward homogeneity (to the other South Africans) was a myth. It is as appropriate to call these South Africans of Indian descent a "racial group" as it would be to conceive of the variegated peoples of India as likewise one race.

Nevertheless, the broad differences of descent patterns, of partial endogamy (enforced by law for some of the nation's history) and the linguistic variety of the contemporary South African population make continued "racial" consciousness inevitable for the near-term future.⁹ The four-fold path of South African racial demography is both a biological fiction and a social reality. That it could have been otherwise is at least conceivable. The introduction of compulsory group categories as part of the apartheid program of the National Party government both entrenched and further reinforced the myriad of social processes by which populations sort and label themselves. Introduced in 1950, the Population Registration Act deepened the ethnicization of the South African population by bestowing an obligatory category on all South Africans. One became perforce after this date a "White", a "Coloured", an "Asiatic", a "Native", with numerous sub-categories appended to allow for the developing, if depraved, ethnic sophistication of government ideologues wishing to conceal a colonial-type domination under a welter of culturalist terms.

In response, major opposition groupings in the apartheid era promoted various conceptions of a de-ethnicized South African nation. Most prominently, the African National Congress adopted the stance of "non-racialism".¹⁰ A future South Africa rid of apartheid was to consist of juridically equal citizens whose descent and appearance would be a matter of at most private concern. By the 1980s, when even the National Party declared its opposition to continued racial discrimination, it was clear that a future political dispensation could not rest on the enforced "racial" classification of the country's population. In July 1991, the Population Registration Act was repealed as part of the wholesale destruction of racially based legislation. All new South Africans would cease to have a racial category endorsed on their certificates of birth. The ensuing years of negotiation and constitution making proceeded accordingly upon a consensus expressing revulsion regarding official ethnic classification.

In this climate it could be expected that South Africa's democratic Constitution would contain no reference to the

population categories which had been inflicted upon the nation previously. Finished in 1996, the Constitution is devoid of the old apartheid terminology.¹¹ The Bill of Rights included in the Constitution declares that “everyone is equal before the law” and that “the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race.”¹² Yet pressing political realities, as the last clause hints at, could not altogether ignore the group contours of South African society. “Unfair” discrimination was outlawed, but not discrimination per se – thus making possible policies of affirmative action and redress on group grounds. Various provisions of the Constitution allude to the reality of population divisions within the wider society: terms such as “communities” and “race” appear here and there. Most notably, the phrases “reflect broadly the racial and gender composition of South Africa” [Section 174(2)] and “broadly representative of the South African people” [Section 193(2)] indicate fleetingly a deep-seated concern with patterns of “racial” inequality bequeathed to the new order by the old regime.

The Constitution also contains, in chapter nine, provision for an elaborately named Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities.¹³ Though yet to be established in practice, the formulation assumes – some argue reinforces and politicizes¹⁴ – a division of the population into nomenclatures reminiscent of a sociological cultural pluralism. The nature of the transition, where White social power remained while their political power diminished, created sufficient insecurity in these and other quarters to warrant a body that would mediate the results of a racial past and, it is presumed, smooth a route toward a nonracial future.

As in other societies, therefore, the transition to democracy has not led to the complete submergence of the need to name and classify. With the design of new legislation to hasten processes of occupational mobility on behalf of the previously subordinated population, explicit definitions of the segmented South African population are reappearing. The notion of historically disadvantaged is being given more pointed content: official documents now include for example such appendices as: “Glossary of terms ... Black is a generic term that refers to African, Coloured and Indian.”¹⁵ Opposition parties to the ruling African National Congress have decried what they call a “re-racialisation” of the South African scene.¹⁶ But with the current drive to audit, in order to address and eliminate racial inequality, it seems likely that such racial naming will remain prominent in a society constitutionally committed to nonracialism.

Colonial Conquest and the Land Question

By the end of the expansion of Anglo-Afrikaner power at the turn of the 19th century, the descendants of the European settlers had engrossed almost the total surface area of what became in 1910 the Union of South Africa. Some 7.3 percent of the land remained formally reserved for the African majority. The pastoral Khoi-Khoi and the nomadic San had fared worse. The latter had been altogether excluded from formal land occupation. The Khoi-Khoi's descendants, amalgamated to a considerable degree with other elements of the South African population as part of the Coloured group, retained scattered land holdings in the Cape, some of which were officially held by one or other missionary society. The largest of these holdings consisted of the five Namaqualand reserves in the semi-arid northern Cape Province. While their area was considerable – around two and a half million acres – their carrying capacity was minimal, with around 25,000 persons inhabiting them by the second half of the 20th century.¹⁷ Finally, the immigrant Indian population had managed to buy a limited area of agricultural land around Durban and by the 1930s were owner-farmers of some 105,000 acres.¹⁸

The alarming implications of a society in which a physically and culturally distinct minority owned or controlled, by way of the state, almost all the land in the country were not lost upon the political leadership of the White section. The central problem was clearly the relationship between the numerically preponderant African population – till largely rural and involved in agriculture – and the dominant White landowners. The history of South Africa in the 20th century was to be shaped by the search for a master-policy that would combine land and politics in one grand plan. Land and space were so to be configured that the White minority could retain the lion's share of occupancy while disposing the rest of the population around it in ways which would combine White material advance with Black fragmentation.¹⁹

The result was, as it were, foreordained. Short of an equitable, mutually agreed partition such as that compelled by India and Pakistan in the late 1940s, there was no way to bring about a semblance of justice and stability on the land question. Every effort of the White minority to bring about a spatial reordering worsened rather than ameliorated the situation. Inequality deepened while the problems became ever more intractable. In both town and country, whole communities were abruptly disrupted, dispossessed, relocated and embittered as a result. Systems of land and housing tenure proliferated, counter-productive to any rational form of agricultural advance or small-scale

capital accumulation for the masses of the people. The cities attracted and repulsed in equal measure, heightening a pervasive sense of relative deprivation. Clinging to bankrupt policies, the country's political elites bequeathed a land issue whose resolution remains difficult in the extreme.

The steps to this colossal failure were many and complex. The 1903-1905 Native Affairs Commission met in the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War, when the unification of the four South African territories into one political entity was imminent. A common line on the "Native Question" was highly desirable for the colonial elites, whose delegates formed the membership of the Commission. There an uneasy consensus emerged around the notion of "segregation". The "basis of Native policy should be the territorial separation of the races."²⁰

The slender reed on which this massive outgrowing of populations was to lean was the remaining areas reserved for African occupancy—a few large blocs of land such as the Transkei and many scattered areas consisting in cases of not more than a handful of conjoined farmlands. In part these were areas historically the residence of the African indigenes under the wilting system of traditional authorities. Their survival was a matter of great moment for the ideology of segregation—and later of apartheid. Here were authentic "homelands" of Black people that the White polity generously was to preserve and indeed extend.

Much of South African history for the 20th century can be written around the story of the homelands, also variously known as the reserves or Bantustans. They provided the single consistent justification for the elaboration of the order of racial inequality under successive White regimes.²¹ In 1913 the Native Land Act decreed that no African could henceforth purchase land outside these African reserves. In order to enhance their viability, they would be extended. This enlargement of the reserves took more than 70 years to come to fruition and resulted in the increase in the area of South Africa allocated to exclusive African ownership from some seven percent in 1900 to around 13 percent by the late 1970s.

The Land Act has rightly been seen as a watershed for the country, reverberating at many levels, both symbolic and concrete. In the famous words of the African writer Sol Plaatje, an eyewitness to these events, "[A]waking on Friday morning, June 20 1913, the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth."²² The first and most severe consequence of this Act was to evict hundreds of thousands of African

dwellers on White-owned land, without any compensatory measure. These people were forced to surrender their tenure of such land based on various arrangements ranging from outright renting to sharecropping and labor tenancy—in return for the unasked right to occupy land in the now "scheduled" Black areas.

The 1913 Land Act set a pattern of dislocation and deprivation that was to characterize all succeeding decades until the 1990s. The Act, for example, had not touched over 300 small freehold areas owned by Africans outside the reserves. These "black spots," as they came to be known, were largely to disappear under a persistent assault by the

National Party government after 1948. More immediately, however, the Act set in train processes which led to the destruction of both informal African tenure in the White rural areas, and to the further

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overcrowding and degradation of the land held by Africans within the reserves themselves.²³ Later measures set the seal on these processes: the Native Land and Trust Act of 1936 made all new land bought for African occupation in the reserves the possession of the state, indirectly under the control of traditional authorities rather than the household occupants.²⁴ The result has been the sustained fossilization of a land tenure system, which has allowed neither for private ownership and capital formation nor for vigorous promotion of viable small-scale farming.

The Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 finalized the size of the land which White rulers were prepared to surrender to the majority of the population, but not its eventual location. Under the policy of the National Party after 1948, continuing attempts were made to re-configure the outlines of the African reserves and, in the process, to relocate massive numbers of people. It has been estimated that around 2.7 million African people were forced to leave homes in a variety of urban and rural settings to relocate in the areas to which the White government consigned them. In addition to various urban removal measures, these "forced removals"—from White farms (the single largest category), former African freehold areas ("black spots"), and official reserve areas that had shifted to White ownership—figure prominently in the sordid annals of this period of South African history.²⁵

Overshadowed by the dimensions of the White-Black land struggle, the smaller Coloured and Indian populations were not allowed to escape unscathed as White politicians and bureaucrats strove to order the map to the tastes of their White constituents. Here the drama was to played out mostly, if not altogether, in the nation's urban areas.

Official urban segregation in South Africa began again with the African population, who from the later 1800s were subjected to various town ordinances establishing "locations" or "townships" where they might reside while in the city milieu.²⁶ The urban Indian population was next. Successive steps beginning before 1900 (in the Transvaal) began to restrict urban tenure by Indian South Africans to segregated neighborhoods. Various measures culminating in the Pegging Act of 1943 and the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act of 1946 sought to prevent an increasingly prosperous stratum of Indian traders and professionals from buying land in central business districts and traditionally White-occupied suburbs.²⁷ Directed against the smallest and in a sense most politically isolated group in South Africa, these measures were to wreak immense harm on the fortunes of Indian South Africans. But their historical import is probably to be found in the fact that they had established a precedent and a model which could be taken further after 1948 when the National Party government came to power with a program of sweeping urban segregation, including the ghettoization of Coloured and Indian people.

The passage of the Group Areas Act in 1950 began a drawn-out process of dispossession and relocation. By the time the process had almost exhausted itself in the 1980s, it is estimated that 860,000 people had been forced out of their homes in the nation's towns and cities, the majority of them Coloured.²⁸ (This Act was also used to remove an estimated 80,000 Africans from areas where they had enjoyed at least a tenuous urban status).²⁹ For the tens of thousands of Indian and Coloured owner-occupiers, traders and tenants involved, the measure was an economic and personal disaster whose consequences are still with us today.

The sharpest edge of apartheid segregation began to blunt from the late 1970s onwards. Various factors contributed to this reversal. Increasingly turbulent African urban masses forced upon a reluctant government a measure of liberalization that resulted in more secure urban tenure through such schemes as 99-year leasehold arrangement in African townships. Squatter settlements, a pervasive feature of urban South Africa, no longer were bulldozed as soon as erected. Coloured, Indian and Black South Africans began in various ways to settle in White areas despite official harassment. In 1985 the government bowed to the inevitable and formally abolished the control over the movement of the African population embodied in the so-called pass laws.³⁰

In land and settlement, therefore, the reversal of apartheid began under apartheid. Spatial integration speeded up from the 1980s onwards in the face of an official rear-

guard action. Nevertheless, these movements in the interstices of society could not undo the work of decades. An active program of positive land and tenure reform awaited the 1990s. In 1991 the de Klerk government repealed the most important land segregation laws with the passage of the Abolition of Racially Based Land Measures Act. Henceforth all South Africans could in principle now work, reside and own land wherever they chose. It was however only with the accession to power of the African National Congress-dominated Government of National Unity in May 1994 that the full weight of the state was thrown behind a major land reform program.

A new Ministry of Land Affairs assumed the responsibility of what on paper was quite radical land reform. The broad objectives of the policy were threefold: redistribution, restitution and land tenure reform.³¹ Within these parameters, the policy aimed at achieving the ANC's pre-election promise in its Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) manifesto—to convert 30 percent of South African land holding to Black ownership.³² Redistribution entailed the purchase of White owned land or the disposal of public land to the targeted Black constituencies. Restitution intended to restore or compensate the victims of the major land dispossessions of the 20th century, in particular the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts, the removal of "black spots" and the Group Areas Act. Land tenure reform aimed at bestowing secure tenure on the millions of South Africans in the former homelands, on White owned farms and in the huge number of informal settlements around the urban areas.³³

The program has proved complex and frustrating. The Department of Land Affairs itself is understaffed and inexperienced. Its incapacity to proceed with due haste is widely considered the major obstacle in the way of a more effective implementation of the policy. But other major obstacles also loom large: public authorities either have good reason to hold onto land under their control or are loath to cooperate for a variety of reasons. The principle of "willing-buyer, willing-seller" and the acceptance of market prices put land out of reach for the majority of would-be individual purchasers.³⁴ In these circumstances only very limited gains have been registered. Some 26,000 group and individual claims have been made for restitution to the newly formed Land Claims Court; only a handful have as yet been disposed of. Redistribution has run up against very limited budgets and the small size of the state subsidy which may be granted to households for land purchases (R15,000 - the same amount households in the urban areas may claim). The hopes that had been nourished for the large-scale release of public land have proved more or less illusory. The Director-General of the Department of Land Affairs recently stated that

"[A]lthough the state owns 19 percent of the entire surface of the country, most of it is made up of military bases, nature reserves, dams, coastal zones and land in the former homelands ..."³⁵

By mid-1998, it was estimated that less than 1 percent of South Africa's land had been redistributed. More promising had been the progress on the housing front— a separate program under a different Ministry than land policy, but obviously a related issue. Although burdened by administrative incapacity, bureaucratic quagmires and limited state funding, significant progress is being made on fulfilling the ANC's promise to build one million homes by 1999. By February 1998, the government had awarded some 778,000 housing subsidies (at a maximum of R17,500 per household) since 1994. Of these, 600,000 awards had been converted into completed houses. With a delivery system now clearly in place, low-income housing could only but improve.³⁶ The main beneficiaries have been the poorer, urban African households; their ranks however are estimated at around three million.

The nation remains thus under-housed, with the majority of the African population and a sizeable section of the Coloured population either in shacks or in altogether sub-standard dwelling conditions. Private land ownership outside of the urban areas remains a largely White affair and the legacy of racial inequality in this sphere seems likely to prove one of the most intractable to solve, short of wholesale appropriation of land. The latter, radical option is supported only by the Pan Africans Congress (PAC), which received about one percent of votes cast in the 1999 general election. Zimbabwe's route of radical land reform measures has demonstrably disabled that country's economic progress, leaving a deep impression on South African policy-makers. We have settled, therefore, for better or for worse, on the slow road of market-oriented land reform.

State and Social Inequality

With the transfer of power to the Government of National Unity (GNU) in May 1994, the ownership of the state itself moved to new hands under the title deeds of a democratic election. This state had accumulated great assets: in land, industry, buildings and a manifold of commodities. Its taxation power, public service jobs and powers of spending through tenders, contracts and agreements were also under new ownership.

The state's immense wealth— for which there appear to be no figures at all— was still only a limited slice of the country's accumulated riches. A protectionist state had overseen the heaping up of wealth in private hands— which

were mostly whited. Here again there are no figures generally agreed upon. A recent government document states:

*The highly unequal distribution of assets contributes to differences in incomes along race and gender lines. Apartheid prevented Africans from owning land. It limited the access of Black people, and especially Black women, to loans, markets and infrastructure, making capital accumulation difficult. Unfortunately, no definitive evidence exists on the ownership of assets by race, gender or class. Estimates suggest that Whites own over nine tenths of all assets in South Africa.*³⁷

The figure of nine-tenths may be too high if we take into account the issue of state assets and the increasing indirect participation of Black South Africans in asset ownership through pensions and similar investments. Nevertheless, few will question that this estimate reflects an underlying reality. Private property has accumulated massively for the White minority and modestly for the Black majority. It is worth noting that within the White minority, ownership itself is quite highly concentrated and control of the country's major enterprises even more so. The number of White farm owners, for example, has declined by half since the mid-century, from around 120,000 to 60,000 in 1985— and of these reduced numbers, a mere 18,000 produced nearly 70 percent of the nation's agricultural produce at that time.³⁸

Similarly, the ownership and control of the nation's industrial and commercial enterprises are remarkably concentrated, so much so that South African scholars saw it as conclusive evidence of the monopoly capitalist nature of the South African economy.³⁹ Depending on the criteria applied, it has been estimated by a leading business analyst that the country's major conglomerate, the Anglo American Corporation, may control as much as 45 percent of the shares on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, although the corporation itself has put the figure at 30 percent.⁴⁰

Precisely how this accumulation and concentration of White wealth came about in the 20th century after the completion of colonial conquest has been the subject of an extended debate in South African social science.⁴¹ On the one side, Marxist-inclined analysts argued that capitalism— and by implication the White business community— sustained or even called forth the racial order, which culminated in apartheid.⁴² In the words of a recent labor document indicative of this thinking: "employers collaborated with the apartheid regime from the outset, supported apartheid in all its manifestations and benefited from apartheid capitalism with its exploitative and oppressive nature."⁴³

In truth, South African economic progress in the 20th century has been a compound of oppressive exploitation and rational-technical advance. The country's deep-level gold mines, worked until recently by over half a million Black migrant laborers, but with one family, the Oppenheims, dominating the structure of ownership and control, are a telling example with deep underground operations grafted on to primitive labor and repressive social organization.⁴⁴ In a crude but valid sense, White wealth is a product of White political power over land and African labor.⁴⁵

And yet it is much more also. That liberal orthodoxy claims apartheid was economically irrational and set the country on a sub-optimal growth path may be in part a self-serving dogma. But it is also the case that "[C]apitalist economic growth in South Africa has been 'development', not 'underdevelopment'". It has laid the material basis for a large-scale modern state.⁴⁶ Unlike one cousin, Portuguese colonialism, South Africa's developmental drive has been brutal but, it happened to leave a worthwhile legacy of material and infrastructure. Unlike another cousin, Stalinist forced industrialization, South Africa's racial development resulted in the growth of strong, if partial, economic institutions like banking and monetary systems.

What is lacking in South African social science is a detailed grasp of not just the overarching structures but the myriad of micro-processes by which the White and, to a more limited extent, the Indian business strata and allied professionals have both accumulated and developed. The latter indeed are remarkable in their persistence: hounded from central business districts and forced into the Group Areas ghettos, the South African Indian business community has yet survived and expanded.

Their more fortunate White counterparts were able to capitalize on numerous opportunities which White control of the state itself made possible. The colonial enterprise constituted a whole series of programs of affirmative action of a special kind. With the accession to power of the National Party in 1948, nascent Afrikaner elites were able to pursue a two-fold program of occupational advance in the public service and financial advance in the private sector.⁴⁷ The Afrikaner component in the civil service doubled in the two decades after 1948. In the private sector,

the special relationship of the Afrikaner businessman to political control was of great importance. The Handelsinstituut [trade institute] is, for instance, consulted on legislation pertaining to economic matters and is

represented, along with other interest groups, on government commissions, tender boards, and marketing boards. Afrikaner capital also benefited occasionally from government favoritism through the allocation of fishing quotas and mineral concessions and the award of government contracts and accounts. In 1977, for instance, 98 percent of the Department of Information publishing budget of 3 million dollars went to the Perskor group, an Afrikaans publishing house that had several cabinet ministers, including the Minister of Information, on its board. Afrikaner firms have also been aided by a system of interlocking directorates between the state corporations and Afrikaner private capital.⁴⁸

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Within the wider White community, the tax regime for most of the century has enabled the successful to pass down their wealth to their children and often, by use of generation-skipping trusts, to their grandchildren. There are no land taxes on farming land, no capital gains

taxes, and an "inadequate system of estate duty... Estate duty has never been taken seriously by Inland Revenue in South Africa."⁴⁹ A recent, official commission of inquiry into the taxation system has found a "huge disparity of income and assets between the various groups in South Africa," but has stopped short of recommending any radical, new wealth taxes in the face of international evidence of their apparent ineffectiveness.⁵⁰

The democratic state also inherited an apparatus that skewed one of modernity's greatest assets—education and training—in favor of Whites. Compulsory schooling for Whites to secondary level education had been introduced in the 1920s, whereas the same step for Africans was taken only in the 1990s. Intervening in this period was Bantu Education, introduced by the apartheid government in the 1950s, having the brazenly articulated intention of subjecting all African children of school-going age to an education that trained them only to be unskilled, servile labor. Mission and private schools for Africans, from whence the educated elite of Nelson Mandela's generation came, were closed down. Mixed schools were not an option. Mathematics and science, when they were offered, was by exception under unusual circumstance.

A racial hierarchy of schooling emerged, with Whites as recipients of the best education, equivalent to first world standards, followed by Indians, Coloured people and

Africans last, below even third world standards. Each group had their education administered separately; teachers trained at their respective racial colleges and universities, financed by apartheid's wicked formula of providing the best for those who already had and the worst for those who had little. In 1994, when matters had already improved some, government was spending R5,403 per White school pupil but R1,053 for every Black child in the Transkei, a former homeland now part of the Eastern Cape, the poorest of South Africa's nine provinces. (In 1999 about R6 equaled \$1). The cumulative consequence of this unequal system was a desperately undereducated African population.

Table 35: Education of Persons over 20, 1995

	African	Coloured
No Education	2 640 000	182 000
Some Primary	4 495 000	690 000
Some Secondary	7 413 000	1 001 000
Some Tertiary	822 000	102 000
TOTAL	15 370 000	1 975 000

Source: CSS October Household Survey, 1995.

The figures are as unsurprising as they are alarming. Africans make up 92 percent, Coloreds 6, Indians 1 and Whites 0.2 of South African adults who have no education at all. In turn, most of the undereducated Africans are to be found in the more rural and poorer provinces of the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, the Northwest and the Northern Province. The majority— 61 percent— of the formally uneducated is women.⁵¹ On the other hand, Whites and Africans are fairly even in the percent that have some level of higher education, though obviously the former are in a demographic minority and the latter in the majority.

Of the challenges facing the democratic government, education is probably the most formidable. A more equitable and better performing system had to be created out of a desperately unequal, segregated and inferior legacy. The scale of required reforms was staggering. Access for African children especially in rural areas had to grow exponentially; new schools needed to be built; teacher pre-service and in-service training improved; new curricula and teaching materials developed; and a single administration crafted out of 14 separate administrations— one for each of the four "racial" groups and the ten homelands— that made up the geo-political legacy of apartheid.

There is no question that matters have improved greatly. Access to schooling for African children has jumped beyond expectations. Since 1994, 2,500 schools have

been renovated and 1,000 new ones built.⁵² Curriculum 2005 lays the groundwork for improved content, new materials and revised teacher training. The entry of African matriculants at colleges and universities is spectacular. A recent study by University of Cape Town sociologist David Cooper argues that change at the university level is nothing short of revolutionary, with Black students entering universities and technical colleges at a rate that will mirror the demographic ratios of society.⁵³ A single administration now exists, though the old bureaucracies and their staff have not entirely disappeared.

A recent report of the President's Education Initiative Research Project shows, however, that the good ideas and initiatives are trapped in a system that fails to work properly, compromising quality on a large scale.⁵⁴ The first democratic ministry of education failed to rise from the admittedly regressive weight of the past. The growth in sheer numbers should not conceal the fact that the schooling system, nevertheless, struggles to enroll all eligible pupils, fails to retain the majority of them to secondary level and offers them a quality of schooling which varies from excellent for a minority to abysmal for the majority. The rapid expansion of tertiary educational involvement by Africans has meant their enrollment in the less technical directions since most schools for African pupils fail to qualify them in mathematics and science. The technical and commercial elite remains predominantly White and Indian as a result.

It is not surprising to find that the racially based endowment of the nation rears its head in other places, as in the jobs people tend to hold and the personal income they receive. As the main allocation mechanism of current income, the country's occupational structure, together with unemployment rates, is perhaps the most telling single datum for assessing racial inequality. In some ways the reconfiguration of South Africa's occupational and employment hierarchy is the most pressing issue facing the country, as current legislative moves suggest. Table 36 indicates how the most remunerative positions requiring the more advanced skills were distributed in each group in 1995.

As can be seen, Whites and Indians dominate the upper levels of the occupational hierarchy, while Coloreds and Africans are found mostly in the bottom rungs. Respectively, 40.1 percent and 38.8 percent of those who fall into the category "elementary occupation" are African and Coloured.

The need to raise the skills of the South African workforce, and in particular its majority African segment, is urgent, and government is taking a hand (beyond the formal educational sector) with such measures as a Skills

Table 36: Distribution of Race Groups by Selected Occupational Levels, 1995

	African	Coloured	Indian	White
Senior management	2.9%	2%	10.7%	14.6%
Professional	2	1.7	6.7	8.4
Technician/related	9.6	6.6	11.9	18.5
Clerical	7.8	10.8	20.9	22.5
Service	11.2	11.6	13.3	10.6
Craft	10.2	14.3	16	15
Operators	14	12.3	12.7	3.8
Elementary Occupation	40.1	38.8	6	1.6

Source: Adapted from CSS, October Household Survey, 1995, Table 2.1.

Development Act. Even this problem pales in comparison, however, with the unavailability of jobs at lower skill levels. Unemployment figures vary according to the criteria applied and the specific survey involved. Again, one of the most trusted sources, the Central Statistical Services 1995 October Household Survey, came up with unemployment rates for those 15 years and older and willing to work of nearly 37 percent for the African population (compared to over 22 for the Coloured, 13 for the Indian and 5.5 for the White groups). These figures are probably valid as orders of dimension and relative size, though their absolute accuracy has not gone uncontested. Many job-seekers in the formal economy find low-paid and often very irregular work in the country's large informal sector – just whether such persons should qualify as unemployed is debatable. But both the size and ethnic complexion of this sector is yet another indicator of the country's vast material inequalities, with an estimated 78 percent of the 1.7 million persons active here found to be African in the 1995 CSS Household Survey.

About 38 percent of people employed in the formal and informal sectors are women. In the formal sector, 37 percent of women are found in unskilled positions, 20 percent in clerical work and 16 percent in technical and other professions. However, in the informal sector women outnumber men by a ratio of two to one.⁵⁵ This sector is the principal source of livelihood for the African majority, and it is women who keep up the roof of life's cave both by being the principal source of income and by taking up the social welfare slack when government does not reach the rural areas of South Africa's poorest provinces where most African women tend to be.

The distribution of skill and employability has been affect-

ed by historical emigration and immigration tendencies. On the one hand, White English-speakers who could more easily assimilate in the countries of the Commonwealth, the United States of America and Canada, led skill emigration. Draft-dodgers, conscientious objectors, exiles and those seeking a better life elsewhere made up an impressive list of South Africans who added their value to others' progress, representing as it were apartheid's brain drain. Since 1994, White emigration has proceeded apace, prompting politicians of the democratic regime to both despair and exclaim their anger at how those who benefit from South Africa's relatively low-cost training and development leave at precisely the time when they are needed most and when the going is tough for all and not just for them.

On the other hand, South Africa has had a declining ability to replace skilled emigrants with skilled immigrants. In the 1950s and 1960s, apartheid's racist and anti-Semitic assisted immigration schemes brought Anglo-Saxon and Protestant Europeans in numbers large enough to maintain

some balance in population size and skill figures. After the Soweto revolt of 1976 and the unraveling of apartheid in the 1980s the figures began to fall, leaving a net loss of skill, which even the turn to Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s could not reverse.

... it is women who
keep up the roof
of life's cave ...

Indeed, immigration in the late 1980s and 1990s swelled the ranks of the unskilled and semi-skilled. South Africa has always had the benefit of Africa's unskilled and semi-skilled labor in the form of coal and gold mine employment that reached a peak of close to 350,000 foreign workers from Lesotho, Mozambique, Malawi and elsewhere in the 1960s, but the dismantling of apartheid and the introduction of democracy in 1994 attracted a high number of Africans who slipped into the country without proper documentation. There are no proper figures of the scale of this phenomenon. The Central Statistical Services arrived at a figure of 500,000 while the Department of Home Affairs, the ministry responsible for immigration, used a figure of 6 million based on a study conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council, which subsequently has been challenged for its methodological veracity.⁵⁶

Whatever the real figure, African immigration has created tension and in some instances havoc in the employment market. In their various studies, the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) documented that many African immigrants are itinerant, female, entrepreneurs who add economic value as small-scale traders by creating rather than taking away jobs and by performing jobs South Africans have little interest in doing.⁵⁷ But there is little

doubt that pockets of intense competition over access to jobs and the social services that South Africa does provide are the cause of heightened xenophobia and outright conflict in places where particularly visible cultural differences and language make foreign Africans in South Africa conspicuous.

Beyond employment and unemployment, income differentials have a class and racial character. Income data are notoriously difficult to collect on an accurate and comprehensive basis. South African figures are no exception. However, it is well known that South Africa shares with Brazil the dubious distinction of having one of the highest Gini co-efficients— a measure of income inequality between the richest and the poorest— in the world.⁵⁸ The measure is higher than that of India or Russian Federation and, as in other areas of South African life, thoroughly racialized. While the share of national income earned by the Black population has been increasing with time, the White minority still secures the larger portion of the earnings potential of the nation.

In class terms, the top 10 percent of the population earned 50 percent of national income while the bottom 10 earned less than 1 percent. The poorest half of the population, almost entirely African, earned a mere 8.9 percent of national income.⁵⁹ Development Bank economist Stephen Gelb observed recently that the South African Gini co-efficient has been falling and that the income differentials within “racial” groups has been rising.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the growing importance of class differentials does not yet alter in any substantial fashion the racial character of inequality or the concentration of deep levels of poverty in African households.

Table 37 provides the latest available overviews by race and is probably as accurate as any. These figures confirm the expected fourfold hierarchy in material inequality. They also indicate the distribution of household income by province; for Africans, the highest income is achieved in Gauteng (where Johannesburg is located) and the lowest in the Northern Cape; for Coloureds, Gauteng is

Table 37: Average Annual Household Income by Race, 1990 and 1995 (R000s)

	African	Coloured	Indian	White
1990	20	38	45	117
1995	48	64	87	113

Source: CSS: Earning and spending in South Africa for 12 main urban areas; Rand expressed in thousands; 1990 figures adjusted to 1995 values.

highest and the Free State lowest; for Indians, Gauteng again is highest and the Northern Cape lowest; and for Whites, the Northern Province has the highest and the Free State lowest. Of course, these averages are a mix of population density and the strength of regional economy, as in the case of Whites who have a mix of low population density and a strong, large agricultural economy in the Northern Province.

Racial inequality in household incomes is further illustrated by these facts: 22 percent of households earning R500 (\$60) per month are African, in contrast to three percent for Coloured, Indian and White combined; the average White household income is six times that of the average African household income; the poorest 40 percent earned a mere nine percent of the nation's income while the richest 20 percent earned 19 times that of the poorest. South Africa not only has one of the highest income disparities between rich and poor but the disparity also cuts along racial lines, posing the problem sharply.⁶¹

It is not surprising that household incomes are lower for female-headed compared to male-headed or dual-parent ones. This is particularly the case for African households. Idasa's Shirley Robinson writes, “African female-headed households are generally poorer than urban households are. Non-urban households are likely to be the most vulnerable to poverty as 37 percent as represented in the lowest income quartile and 28 percent in the second lowest income quartile.”⁶² South Africa's notorious Gini coefficient is buried in the heads of women, particularly African women in the rural areas of the poorest provinces.

Table 38: Average Annual Household Income by Race and Province, 1995 (R000s)

	E Cape	Free State	Mpumalanga	North West	Northern Province	N Cape	Kwa-Zulu-Natal	W Cape	Gauteng
African	17	14	20	21	26	13	24	22	37
Coloured	24	16	30	25	43	18	41	33	53
Indian	58	-	781	-	-	34	61	54	111
White	90	72	82	93	140	79	98	98	118

Source: CSS: Earning and Spending in South Africa: selected findings of the 1995 income and expenditure survey, 1997; Rand expressed in thousands.

Finally, health and welfare indicators, though sometimes highly variable, confirm the general trend— with some significant exceptions where conditions among the poorer section of the Coloured population may be worse than among Africans. Health provision is skewed toward the richer section of the population, as Table 39 indicates. For example, over half the nation's qualified doctors are in the private sector, while medical aid schemes cover only some 20 percent of the population. Health patterns are themselves in great part a function of living conditions, and here again the picture displays the usual marked racial inequalities.

Table 39: Some Key Health Indicators

	African	Coloured	Indian	White
Life Expectancy Age	64	64	70	73
Infant Mortality				
Study A	53	52	29	17
Study B	49	36	11	10
Distribution of TB patients	70%	28%	1%	1%

Source: South Africa Survey 1996/1997, Life expectancy: p.14; Infant mortality data is per 1000 births in two studies, pp.450-1, TB rates: p.454.

Table 40: Indicators of Living Conditions

	African	Coloured	Indian	White
Indoor Water:				
Urban	56%	80%	98%	99%
Rural	12%	44%	81%	78%
Indoor Sanitation:				
Urban	42%	70%	97%	99%
Rural	5%	38%	72%	98%

Source: Adapted from South Africa Survey 1996/1997, pp. 803-4; 806-7; 779.

As we know, health indicators are direct products of living conditions. Life expectancy is linked to the quality of nutrition and habits of lifestyle; infant mortality to maternal health and nutrition; and the incidence of tuberculosis, the one disease incidence noted in Table 39, to quality of housing and the nutritional status of populations. Indeed, exposure to life-threatening disease is mediated by critical factors such as access to fresh water supplies, sanitation and primary health care. As Table 40 indicates, these resources are distributed racially and spatially, leaving Africans and African women in particular in the worse position of all. It is in recognition of this that the democratic government gave priority to these items and has already made considerable inroads in altering the balance. For

example, progress in swamp clearing and clean water supplies have benefited 3 million people, most of whom reside in rural areas.

It is in the area of infrastructure that the democratic government has made the greatest strides. Beyond water, sanitation systems, new road networks, telephone and electricity connections have incorporated more and more of those excluded in the past. Nearly 2 million electricity connections had been made by 1998, up from 100,000 in 1991 and a million new connections to households by the mid-1990s. It is perhaps safe to conclude that, under even modest economic growth, improvement in infrastructure and basic living conditions is one of the more tractable issues facing the democratic regime, as the electrification program demonstrates.

Racism and Democracy

With the abolition of most racially based laws in 1991, racism in South Africa was officially de-institutionalized. What remains is the phenomenon that some scholars have referred to as "modern racism": sporadic, everyday incidents and rearguard actions in association and community life.⁶³ Just how pervasive this racism may be is hard to ascertain given its protean and now furtive existence in a formally nonracial state. At the public level there is an ideological consensus on the old ways of racial discrimination. Even the White right wing (except for its most die-hard remnants) concedes that its former dreams of an orderly White paradise in which Blacks will appear only as docile work-hands are now both impractical and illegitimate. But it would of course be naïve to conclude that racism (construed as objectionable treatment on grounds of one's "racial" membership) and racial hostility have disappeared. Formal juridical equality has in some ways inflamed grass-roots "racial" consciousness under circumstances of continued material inequity and new forms of resource competition. Affirmative action policies necessarily drive home the relevance of ethnic background, particularly for those, mainly the "minorities," who feel aggrieved by them.

In view of the country's history, perhaps most remarkable is the absence of sustained mass-based racial conflict. The symbolism of a united nonracial population, so aptly projected by the country's first democratically elected President Nelson Mandela, has worn more than a little thin recently. Yet, it retains basic ascendancy. Amongst the most visible incidents of what might be called communal racism on the part of the formerly dominant White population have been clashes at a small number of high schools, mostly in the smaller towns or in the poorer, lower-middle

class suburbs of the major cities. Here however racist resistance has been interwoven with issues of the language (with Black pupils preferring English to Afrikaans), the ability to pay school fees and adolescent tensions. Likewise, some tertiary campuses have experienced racial flare-ups as White students have opposed against Black campaigns on matters such as fees. The latter, however, have also been features of campus life at the almost exclusively Black tertiary institutions.

It seems fair to suggest that consciousness of race remains high in South Africa, but that overt racism has declined considerably. There are continuing reports of rather anomic outbreaks of inter-personal violence, such as the shooting of a Black child by a White farmer early in 1998. This incident, in turn, had to be viewed against a spate of killings of White farm occupants that took on worrying dimensions in 1997. It is an open question to what extent high levels of crime (as in the farm-killings) are in some sense racially based or at least racially justified in the minds of perpetrators. Similarly, the extent to which the economically dominant White section practices informal racial exclusion of an odious kind is not easy to gauge.

Democracy has brought to the fore perhaps the most dangerous, communal cleavage of a racial kind that may shape future South African society. This division is constituted by the political, cultural and economic realities that separate the majority African section from the three minority groups, the Whites, Coloured and Indian segments. Public opinion surveys consistently reveal an almost stable pattern of differences on social and political matters.⁶⁴ The two most prosperous sections—Whites and Indians—have increasingly convergent (and conservative) political views, with Coloured people in a middle position. The division is exacerbated by one of the least debated but most consequential social inequalities: the problem of language. Under the constitutional camouflage of equal treatment for the country's 11 official languages, there is a decided advantage in education and business for those with high English-language competence. In this regard, many, perhaps most, home-speakers of one or other of the nine southern Bantu languages (in other words, the African majority) suffer an almost automatic handicap which the country's poor schooling system seems unlikely to eliminate in the medium term.

The historic compromise forged in the pre-1994 negotiations has resulted in both a cultural and economic

accommodation to the prevailing contours set by generations of White dominance. In the economic sphere the decision to accept pro tem the pattern of asset ownership—forswearing the ANC's well-known pledge in its key visionary document, the Freedom Charter of 1955, to nationalize the country's "monopoly industries"—has meant that the new regime had to shift its fundamental strategy of socio-economic transformation. If assets could not be transferred at one fell swoop to the people, then other means had to be devised to undo racial inequalities. Since 1994 the efforts of the new government in this regard have largely crystallized around four major goals: poverty alleviation, a steady move to the equalization of state social spending, and, probably of most import, the state-supported restructuring of the occupational

and ownership structure of the economy. Given the limited public funds available, the scope for dramatic changes in the profile of racial inequality by way of the first two is anyway limited.

By 1994, the African National Congress had replaced its former

quasi-socialist rhetoric with more endearing phrases for both international and local business elites: the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) and Affirmative Action. Conceived as a kind of super-ministry of development coordination, the RDP as institution has suffered the fate of similar ventures elsewhere. The RDP Ministry closed down in 1996 and the RDP has all but disappeared as an overarching blueprint of socio-economic transformation.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the reform process in the economic arena is far from dead, although transmuted into a host of business plans whose nature does lend them to high-profile political marketing.

By mid-1998 the most compelling slogans with more than symbolic import for the continued siege on White economic dominance were those of affirmative action and Black empowerment. The ANC policy-makers early on had adopted affirmative action as a useful concept to promote its goals of Black advancement while appearing as less than militant revolutionists. In 1994 the ANC activist and Constitutional Court Judge Albie Sachs lucidly sketched the policy dilemmas facing the ANC prior to its assumption of power. A middle way had to be found between a mere political transition to universal franchise and the strategy of a revolutionary confiscation of White-owned assets in a post-apartheid South Africa. "The solution we chose was that of affirmative action" Sachs wrote. "The phrase had no Cold War associations. It was sufficiently open to take on a specific South African content and meaning and yet concrete enough to have an unmistakable thrust in favor of the oppressed. Whatever form might emerge or whatever definition be given,

In view of the country's history, perhaps most remarkable is the absence of sustained mass-based racial conflict.

everyone knew what the essence of affirmative action was: it meant taking special measures to ensure that black people and women and other groups who had been unfairly discriminated against in the past, would have real chances in life."⁶⁶

The idea of affirmative action was of course no newcomer to South Africa. Many firms had been paying at least lip service to such a policy since the 1980s, in a form of "anticipatory socialization."⁶⁷ Particular emphasis had been placed on the rapid creation of a Black managerial stratum through various company training and advancement programs. The success of these ventures had been very limited, as a penetrating analysis of the 1980s by sociologist Blade Nzimande, (elected in 1998 as General Secretary of the South African Communist Party) demonstrated.⁶⁸ Progress in the 1990s had not been markedly better, and a survey in 1997 claimed that "in the three-year period to 1997, the number of black senior managers increased by only 2.3 percent, with a paltry 1.6 percent increase among middle managers."⁶⁹

Skeptical of the capacity of the normal hiring and promotion processes to move towards demographic representativeness, and with the data to back up its beliefs, the ANC-dominated government has increasingly focussed on how to engineer Black occupational advancement through affirmative action policies. Matters will no doubt be more easily arranged in the public sector. A recent White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service envisages affirmative action programs for all civil service departments that will mandate plans including numeric targets for the increased employment of the "historically disadvantaged groups."

More controversial is a similar scheme to be implemented in the private sector through the provisions of an Employment Equity Act, described as the "first major piece of race-based legislation to enter the statute books since our country became democratic."⁷⁰ The measure seeks to achieve "employment equity" for "designated groups" (Blacks, women and handicapped people) in all private enterprises employing more than 49 workers. Employers will be required to submit employee profiles together with plans to increase representation of the designated groups at all levels to the Ministry of Labour, which will have wide powers to monitor and induce compliance. No specific quotas are stipulated, but employee representatives such as trade unions will have the right to negotiate and register complaints on the process.⁷¹

On paper a measure of major import, the Employment Equity Act may of course fall far short of its goals in a system where governmental ambition outreaches its current capacity. In any case, Black economic advancement that

rests upon jobs alone cannot be considered in any sense adequate in a modern industrial society. The ownership structure of private property, and especially of productive assets, cannot be sustained in the long run if it is largely monopolized in White hands. Few deny the necessity of change; the question remains as to who will pay the price, and how. Land reform will contribute to this transformation, but only to a limited extent. And for an increasingly urbanized population the demand is for the widening of human and economic capital in the nation's cities and towns.

Dramatically higher rates of participation by Black people in the nation's modern business sector have thus emerged as a priority with much greater clarity than ever before. The means to this goal are at hand: the promotion of Black entrepreneurial investment in the equity market is the most publicized of them. Since 1994 Black-owned or controlled enterprises have increased their share in the capitalization of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange from one percent to around five.⁷² The growth of Black business will benefit greatly from the new form of the state: "affirmative procurement" means that Black-owned firms receive preference from the state regarding tenders, procurements and licenses. White-owned firms are encouraged to seek Black partnerships and government policy induces the private sector to look where possible to the use of Black sub-contractors.

To what extent these new developments will lead to the fulfillment of the economic aspirations of the emerging Black elites is by no means clear. It is unlikely, for example, that the leading Black business pressure group, the National African Chamber of Commerce, will see its "3-4-5-6" formula— 30 percent Black representation in directorships, 40 percent in Black equity ownership, 50 percent for Black external procurement and 60 percent of Black representation in management— fulfilled by the its target year of 2000.⁷³ The progress registered by Black business firms on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange must be qualified by the fact that "most Black economic empowerment deals are little more than investment syndicates taking small equity in firms, only a handful of which are start-ups."⁷⁴ Black participation is most evident in the media and publishing sector, but lacking in major manufacturing. The operational capacity of Black-owned firms remains heavily dependent on White management, and much of the money made by empowerment deals has ended up enriching White advisers and brokers. In short, a numerically significant Black entrepreneurial stratum outside of the small business sector has yet to consolidate.

South Africa thus approaches the new millenium with its profile of racial inequality on the material level that was

built up over three centuries of White domination largely intact. But the relative success in installing a modern urban industrial economy— for Africa— has meant that the floor on which this inequality rested is subject to shifts over time. Significant segments of the wider Black population have moved upwards and the political transition of 1994 has accelerated this trend. Politically the White minority is now for the first time a true minority group, and economic transformation is now more feasible under a regime of juridical equality and a broad integrative social thrust.

For the medium term, much depends on the ability of the economy to grow and create jobs. South Africa's growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was three percent in 1996/7, 1.5 percent in 1997/8 and is estimated to be one percent for 1998/9.⁷⁵ While these growth figures are considerably higher than those achieved in the early 1990s, they fall well below that required by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macro-economic framework accepted by government if not the trade unions as the guiding light of economic and fiscal policy. It is a matter of debate for economists why it is that South Africa is under-performing and why a loss— and not a growth in jobs— are accompanying even modest growth. It seems as if the so-called fundamentals for growth are not yet in place.

Much, too, depends upon the relative stability of political and social life, at present subject to the battering of crime, an economic downturn and the material discontent of broad layers of the population. Short of the mass exodus of the dominant White group, a sharp and sudden reversal of racial inequality was always an unrealistic prospect. The issue remains the extent to which the system can generate business optimism and the economic competence that will attract investment and increase growth. If in the process the state can pursue its current reforms while maintaining a reasonable measure of efficiency, then the diminution of racial inequality becomes feasible.

The Second Republic

When the Government of National Unity came into power in 1994 it embarked on a massive and ambitious agenda of social change. Crudely put, we could say that one part of the agenda was to create and entrench— by constitutional and other means— rights-protection of individual citizens and the other part, to deal with the socio-economic inequality bequeathed by apartheid. On balance, the first period of democratic government was necessarily devoted more to rights-protection, though these noble and important checks against the abuse of apartheid became increasingly in question as government struggled to enforce a

human rights regime in the face of a seeming explosion of criminal conduct, much of it rooted in apartheid's other legacy, Black poverty.

Nelson Mandela's leadership gave additional emphasis to reconciliation between the "racial groups," and he appeared particularly concerned about Afrikaners and their place in the new democratic order. The extreme expression of Afrikaner anxiety was the demand for a Volkstaat, made both by the extra-parliamentary paramilitary group named the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (Afrikaner Resistance Movement) and by the parliamentary Freedom Front. The latter was willing to wait a hundred or so years to achieve its goal. A less extreme view is to seek some form of "group" protection through the recognition of so-called minority language and cultural rights.

Though Mandela in his presidential conduct made many— some say too many— overtures to the Afrikaner community, he and his government were insistent that every South African were juridically equal and that no concessions on a group basis were to be made. The presumption of jurisprudence was that strong and enforceable protection of individual rights was enough of a check against potential abuses against a group, particularly one that was seen to be historically responsible for the abuses of apartheid. But the insistence on individual rights required a reading of South African history on the basis of individual and not group responsibility.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established by Nelson Mandela in 1994 to find individual causes for egregious human rights abuses committed during apartheid. Its origins were rooted in two important conferences organized by Alex Boraine under the auspices of the what was then known as the Institute for a Democratic Alternative in South Africa (IDASA) and the thinking of some members of the ANC, in particular that of Kader Asmal, Dullah Omar and Albie Sachs.⁷⁶ South Africa's Interim Constitution contained a clause, negotiated at Kempton Park, which compelled the granting of amnesty to those who committed serious human rights abuses on both sides of the struggle. A law passed in 1994 established the commission and defined its brief and the final constitution passed in 1995 confirmed its role as one of the many commissions established to support democratic consolidation in the country.

While the TRC was one of many rights institutions— including the Electoral, Gender, Human and Youth commissions— its work dominated South African public life until 1998, when its voluminous report was submitted to then President Nelson Mandela.⁷⁷ Over a period of four years South Africa heard the evidence of the many victims of apartheid's atrocities (much less so from victims of the

ANC, PAC and the other liberation organizations' war against apartheid) and the confessions of the perpetrators, again mostly, if not entirely, from the apartheid security machinery side.⁷⁸ The unflinching premise of the TRC's work was that amnesty was to be granted on the basis of individual responsibility and truth telling, which is why the cause of blanket amnesty was rejected. On the other hand, by virtue of South African history, most perpetrators were Afrikaners, a fact leading some commentators to mistakenly proclaim the TRC was an Afrikaner witch-hunt, and alienating some leading Afrikaner establishments.

The point of the TRC was to establish individual culpability and so confirm a central principle of the rule of law. It was also to collate a South African memory and so present and cultivate new values of what were to be tolerated as proper, decent public and private conduct among citizens and officials of the state. Beyond that, the TRC was part of a larger set of initiatives designed to promote democratic values and practices, the observance of human rights and the rights of women, and the setting in place of properly functioning democratic institutions. More than anything else, these initiatives were the mark of the Mandela Presidency, the creation and consolidation of what in some quarters are called the democratic "software," reinforced doubly by Mandela's concern with reconciliation between the former enemies and the peaceful co-existence of South Africa's main population groups.

Barely under the surface lurked, now seen, now unseen, the question of the political economy of racial inequality. The issue clearly and increasingly occupied the mind of South Africa's deputy-president Thabo Mbeki who, in becoming South Africa's second democratically elected president, made it a recurring theme of public policy. On becoming president he elevated the delivery of social and public service to a position of pre-eminence. He linked Black poverty to White wealth; and he declared that social and political stability could be achieved only by growth. Finally, he insisted that South Africa's future is part of a putative Renaissance of the African continent.⁷⁹

The complex problems of South Africa belie easy answers. The challenge— to find an appropriate fit between democracy and durable social and economic institutions— is as old as Alexis de Tocqueville, but in a new setting with its own peculiar racial heritage.⁸⁰ And yet, as the other chapters in this collection demonstrate, we are not alone in grappling with what WEB DuBois once described as the major problem of the 20th century, the problem of the color line. As we also began this essay, it is an effort to undo centuries of the imprint of colonialism and White supremacy. We hope that somebody will one day describe the 21st century as the end of color lines.

END NOTES

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- ² See Anthony Marx, *Making Race and Nation: a Comparison of South Africa, the United States, and Brazil* (New York, 1998); also Stanley Greenberg, *Race and State in Capitalist Development* (New Haven, 1990); Gay Seidman, "Oppositional Identities in Brazil and South Africa: Unions and the Transition to Democracy" in Ran Greenstein, ed., *Comparative Perspectives on South Africa* (London, 1998); Steven Friedman and Riaan de Villiers, eds., *Comparing Brazil and South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1996).
- ³ Thabo Mbeki, *The Time Has Come* (Johannesburg, 1998).
- ⁴ One of the better single-volume histories of South Africa is Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1990).
- ⁵ Census '96, Preliminary estimates of the size of the population of South Africa. Prior to this Census it had been thought that a figure of around 41 million was likely. Some population surveys continue to report 41million.
- ⁶ Martin Hall, *The Changing Past: Farmers, Kings and Traders in Southern Africa, 200-1860* (Cape Town, 1986).
- ⁷ Originally a neutral term from the Arabic for the Xhosa-speakers of the Eastern Cape, this word was later generalised to all black people and became a term of abuse which is now "offensive in all senses and combinations" (*A Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles*, p.342).
- ⁸ Richard Elphick, *Kraal and Castle: Khoi-Khoi and the Founding of White South Africa* (New Haven, 1977).
- ⁹ See Neville Alexander, *One Azania, One Nation* (London, 1979), a work of early significance on the durability of racial and ethnic consciousness.
- ¹⁰ Thomas Karis and Gwendolyn Carter, eds., *From Protest to Challenge: a Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882 – 1990* (Bloomington, 1997)
- ¹¹ The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996
- ¹² The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ See Neville Alexander "Prospects for a Non-Racial South Africa," *Same Beneath the Skin* (forthcoming).
- ¹⁵ From the White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service, 1997, Appendix.

- ¹⁶ "The Death of the Rainbow Nation: Unmasking the ANC's Program of Re-racialisation," *Democratic Party*, 4 February 1998.
- ¹⁷ Emile Boonzaier, *The Cape Herders: A History of the Khoi-Khoi of Southern Africa* (Cape Town, 1996) pp.123-5.
- ¹⁸ Ellen Hellman, *Handbook of Race Relations* (Johannesburg, 1949) p.172
- ¹⁹ M Brown, J Erasmus, R Kingwill, C Murray, and M Roodt, *Land Restitution in South Africa: a Long Way Home* (Cape Town, 1998)
- ²⁰ C M Tatz, *Shadow and Substance in South Africa: A Study in Land and Franchise Policies Affecting Africans 1910-1960* (Pietermaritzburg, 1962), p.9.
- ²¹ See Stanley Greenberg, *Race and State in Capitalist Development*.
- ²² Sol Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1982) p.21.
- ²³ For an extended account of how this affected an individual and his family, see Charles van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, A South African Sharecropper 1894-1985* (Cape Town and New York, 1996).
- ²⁴ L Platzky and C Walker, *The Surplus People: Forced Removals in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1985) p.89.
- ²⁵ Platzky and Walker, *The Surplus People: Forced Removals in South Africa*.
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