

Name _____ Date _____

Apartheid

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

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Notes

In 1652, the Netherlands' preeminent trading company decided to establish a permanent settlement on the southwest coast of South Africa. Sometimes referred to as the world's first multinational corporation, the Dutch East India Company was a trading colossus that brought porcelain, spices, and other foreign goods from Asia to Europe. Traders often sailed around the southern tip of Africa on their trade routes, so setting up an outpost where ships could be serviced and restocked seemed like a practical idea.

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While some company officials had settled in the area as agricultural producers, the Dutch still did not have enough labor to provide for their ships. To address this, they began to import enslaved people from West Africa and India before eventually turning to the local population. Captives were forced to work as farmers, hunters, animal herders, and domestic servants as Dutch settlers sought to grow the colonial economy and maintain racial supremacy for the minority White population.

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In 1834, under British rule, South Africa's enslaved population was emancipated. But even today, the legacy of slavery remains visible throughout the country. The diversity of language, culture, and religion that characterizes South Africa today stems directly from this history. So, too, does the rise of apartheid, another system of racial hierarchy that dominated South African life in the 20th century.

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Rolihlahla Mandela was born in 1918 in a small village on South Africa's Eastern Cape. His parents were Thembu, a tribal group of the Xhosa people, and his father was the village chief. The first of his family to receive a formal education, Mandela was given the first name Nelson by a teacher in adherence with the custom of assigning students English names.

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In 1941, Mandela moved to Johannesburg, South Africa's largest city. Here he experienced the injustice of racial segregation for the first time. Three years later, he joined the African National Congress (ANC), a Black liberation movement and political party, and founded the group's youth wing. Over the next two decades, Mandela became a prominent anti-apartheid activist, forming a militant ANC branch called Umkhonto we Sizwe in response to the state's violent actions against protesters. In 1962, he was arrested and charged with treason, and two years later, he was sentenced to life imprisonment.

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In total, Mandela spent 27 years of his life in prison. He became a symbol of resistance who fueled the growing global anti-apartheid movement. As international outrage intensified during the 1980s, the still-incarcerated Mandela negotiated with politicians to dismantle the regime. In 1990, he was released from prison. Over the next decade, he drafted a new federal constitution, won the Nobel Peace Prize, and became the first Black president of South Africa. Though he retired from public service in 1999, he continued his work as a humanitarian until his death in 2013.

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More than 30 years after the fall of apartheid, South Africa today is the most unequal country in the world, according to the World Bank. This result comes from the Gini coefficient, which measures income inequality on a scale from 0 (perfect equality, in which everyone has the same amount of wealth) to 1 (maximal inequality, in which one person has all of the wealth). South Africa scores between 0.63 and 0.7.

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Race remains a major component of South Africa's economic inequality. Under apartheid, Black South Africans were systematically denied land, education, and employment. The legacy of these conditions is visible throughout the country today. White South Africans own 72% of agricultural land, despite making up less than 8% of the population. They also earn about three times the average wage made by Black South Africans. While a select few Black South Africans have managed to accrue wealth in the post-apartheid era, these gains have not narrowed the overall gap between the country's richest and poorest. In a population of 60 million, a 2021 study found, just 3,500 South Africans own more than the bottom 32 million combined.

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How might South Africa begin to address these problems? By prioritizing the needs of its poorest, experts say. Higher minimum wages, increased support for small-scale farmers, and greater rural access to social services and employment may all help to dismantle the economic order created by apartheid.

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