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Dedicated to Nelson Mandela and to all those who died in the struggle for freedom in South Africa.
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<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>AZAPO</td>
<td>Azanian People’s Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COSAS</td>
<td>Congress of South African Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COSATU</td>
<td>Congress of South African Trade Unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DA</td>
<td>Democratic Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRELIMO</td>
<td>Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICU</td>
<td>Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFP</td>
<td>Inkatha Freedom Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MK</td>
<td>Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP</td>
<td>National Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUSAS</td>
<td>National Union of South African Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>Pan Africanist Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACP</td>
<td>South African Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SADF</td>
<td>South African Defence Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SASO</td>
<td>South African Students’ Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWAPO</td>
<td>South West Africa People’s Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>TAC</td>
<td>Treatment Action Campaign</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRC</td>
<td>Truth and Reconciliation Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>UDF</td>
<td>United Democratic Front</td>
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Contemporary South Africa. University of Wisconsin Cartography Lab.
Introduction

Few events in recent history have captured the world’s imagination as South Africa’s first democratic elections in 1994. Over the course of three days in late April, nearly twenty million people voted, most for the first time in their lives. In cities and in small villages, lines a mile long snaked to polling stations as people waited patiently to cast their votes and begin creating a democracy at Africa’s southern tip. On a bright day in Pretoria a few weeks later, the newly elected president, Nelson Mandela, spoke to millions of South Africans and to the world. “We are moved by a sense of joy and exhilaration when the grass turns green and the flowers bloom,” he began, recalling the country’s earlier international pariah status and the deep trauma its people experienced:

That spiritual and physical oneness we all share with this common homeland explains the depth of the pain we all carried in our hearts as we saw our country tear itself apart in a terrible conflict, and as we saw it spurned, outlawed and isolated by the peoples of the world, precisely because it has become the universal base of the pernicious ideology and practice of racism and racial oppression. We, the people of South Africa, feel fulfilled that humanity has taken us back into its bosom, that we, who were outlaws not so long ago, have today been given the rare privilege to be host to the nations of the world on our own soil. . . . We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity—a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world. . . . Let freedom reign.¹

A mere five years earlier, the country had teetered on the edge of political collapse: internationally isolated, its economy in shambles, Nelson Mandela languishing in prison, many urban townships occupied by the military amid extraordinary violence with thousands dead and more than thirty thousand arrested for political offenses, and the entire country under a state of emergency. Many believed that South Africa was inexorably heading toward
Introduction

civil war and bloody revolution. In the space of just a few months, however, the
government unbanned the outlawed African National Congress (ANC) and other organizations and released Mandela from prison after more than twenty-seven years in captivity. Negotiations followed. Violence continued, indeed some of the worst the country ever experienced occurred in the four years leading to the elections. But somehow South Africa dismantled more than fifty years of racial laws known as apartheid (“apartness”) and took tentative steps toward creating a democratic society.²

Two decades after the 1994 elections, much has changed. The country remains Africa’s economic powerhouse, producing more electricity than the rest of the continent south of the Sahara Desert. The transition from apartheid, particularly the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1995, has become a model for politicians and international transitional-justice experts seeking peaceful transitions from societies that have experienced civil wars and dictatorial regimes.³ Accepted into the broader international community, South Africa’s leaders play important roles in regional and international politics. South Africa’s culture, scenic beauty, and rich history attract millions of tourists annually. The works of the country’s artists, writers, and musicians have garnered increasing international attention. In 2010 South Africa successfully hosted the soccer World Cup.

South Africa enjoys political stability. In addition to the ruling ANC, there is a spirited opposition party. Except for the world economic recession in 2008–9, the country has enjoyed solid annual increases in GDP. South Africa’s currency remains relatively stable. The country, however, has persistently high levels of poverty and inequality. Indeed, South Africa may be the most unequal society in the world.⁴ While a notable black elite rapidly emerged after 1994, whites still maintain a very high level of income compared to the vast majority of South Africans, who face stubbornly high rates of unemployment and shortages of housing and access to adequate education and medical care, in addition to a severe HIV/AIDS crisis. Nearly six million people are HIV positive, approximately 12 percent of South Africa’s population of forty-eight million. The official unemployment rate is at least 25 percent. There are very high levels of sexual violence, with upward of five hundred thousand women raped yearly. Racial and ethnic relations remain tense, and the politics of identity volatile. Xenophobia has led to outbreaks of bloodshed, notably the deaths of more than sixty people in May 2008. There have been many worrisome incidents of corruption and theft of public resources, including charges of corruption as well as rape against the country’s current president, Jacob Zuma. Many of the world’s most press-
ing problems—from poverty and inequality to gender and race relations—reside in one of its most beautiful lands.\(^5\)

South Africa, with its fraught, contentious society and a public culture of near constant spectacle and debate, has long captured the fascination of foreigners. It is home to exotic flora and fauna. The Western Cape alone contains more than eight thousand species of plants. Some of our earliest ancestors lived in South Africa; scientists continue to unearth important material from archaeological sites across the country. South Africa’s natural history powerfully shaped the study of evolution and human ancestry, influencing thinkers such as Carl Linnaeus, Georges Cuvier, and Charles Darwin. In the seventeenth century, Europeans settled in a region with a Mediterranean climate around what is today Cape Town because of its strategic location as the maritime gateway between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. There Europeans established a slaveholding society. The discovery in the nineteenth century of what was then the world’s largest supply of diamonds and gold attracted investors and brought immigrants and laborers from countries such as England, Russia, and India, as well as from across the wider region of southern Africa.

It is South Africa’s extraordinarily complex modern history of inequality and race relations and the political movements this history has spawned that has engrossed the attentions of the country’s own peoples and riveted the outside world. Beginning in the 1950s, the National Party government instituted a massive experiment in social engineering that came to be known as apartheid. Every level of society came to be ordered around race and ethnicity, from sexuality, housing, and education to the very territorial organization of the country. The government destroyed entire neighborhoods, forcing black residents into new townships, such as Soweto (which means Southwest Townships). Tens of millions of people found themselves caught in a web of legislation that controlled where they could live, work, and be educated. Beginning in the 1960s, the government forcibly removed more than three million people to one of the so-called homelands (Bantustans), invariably impoverished areas of the country designated on the basis of tribal affiliation. Apartheid defined blacks as “temporary sojourners” in “white” South Africa, though whites were never more than 20 percent of the population.\(^6\)

“Petty apartheid” concerned racially discriminatory laws that gave whites privileged access to housing, beaches, schools, and public facilities such as toilets, as well as to certain jobs. People whom the government defined as black or Bantu suffered the worst. Other groups, such as Indians
and Coloureds (people of mixed-race descent), also endured discrimination. Petty apartheid bears similarity to racial legislation found in many other areas of the world, particularly the southern United States in the era of Jim Crow. Grand apartheid or “separate development” meant something else altogether, a set of policies aimed at depriving black people of citizenship within the republic and the creation of ten separate Bantustans. These were meant to become ostensibly self-governing, independent states. The policy failed miserably, though, at massive human cost.

Apartheid grew out of an earlier era of discriminatory legislation rooted in white settlement and imperial conquest. For much of its modern history, many South Africans were also colonial subjects within the British Empire. This complicated history—of disenfranchised racially persecuted citizens, exploited workers, colonized peoples, and a small group of highly privileged elites—spawned kaleidoscopic political movements: anticolonial revolts, passive-resistance campaigns, labor struggles, nationalist movements, and armed resistance, to name just a few. Scholars, politicians, and the general public continue debating the meaning and content of the antiapartheid struggle, since it contained aspects of decolonization and nationalism, the quest for civil rights, and the demands of exploited workers.7

South Africa is remarkably diverse, its modern history one of trauma and resilience. In Johannesburg or Cape Town one can hear the nation’s eleven spoken languages; meet millionaires while many people beg in the street; pray at a church, mosque, or Hindu shrine; or seek the help of a traditional healer (sangoma). The very definition of what it means to be South African is debated in newspapers, on television, and on the street. South Africans are fiercely nationalistic, but the lineaments of their history remain enormously contested. There is very little consensus on the most basic aspects of a past that they share but that tears them apart.8

The South Africa Reader brings together in a single volume a wealth of materials that offer entry into the past and present of this complex, conflicted, cacophonous society. Taken as a whole, the selections eschew any single argument. Instead, they show the remarkable diversity of South Africa and the ways its people have shaped the country’s development. The selections offer the reader the opportunity to listen in, as it were, to people debating their present and past and imagining what the future might be.

In political terms, South Africa is a young country, barely a century old. Its origins lie in the fiercest and costliest colonial conflict of the imperial age, the South African (Anglo-Boer) War of 1899–1902. In 1910, what had been two British colonies, two Boer republics, and a number of recently conquered African territories became the Union of South Africa; in 1961 it
became the Republic of South Africa. Even the territorial limits of South Africa were subject to debate. At different points in the twentieth century, politicians discussed incorporating Bechuanaland (Botswana), Basutoland (Lesotho), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), and South-West Africa (Namibia) into the union. Any of these developments would have profoundly altered the course of modern South African history.

Acknowledging the country’s diversity is essential for developing a deeper appreciation of its history, culture, and politics. Large areas of South Africa were similar to other parts of British colonial Africa. There officials governed African communities, whose people spoke one of a number of Bantu languages, through a system of “indirect rule” and customary law administered by chiefs and headmen. These conquered territories became native reserves and, in the apartheid era under the policies of separate development, the Bantustans. Ethnicities such as Xhosa, Zulu, Pedi, and Tswana, as well as contemporary debates over the role of “traditional rulers,” are a direct result of this history.9

The Western Cape could not be more different. In the precolonial era, this region was settled by Khoesan-speaking peoples who lived by herding cattle and sheep or by hunting and gathering. Europeans typically referred to these groups as either the Hottentots or the Bushmen, derogatory terms that also failed to appreciate the rich histories of both groups. The salubrious environment and strategic position of Cape Town led to the formation of a small colony founded by the Dutch East India Company in the middle years of the seventeenth century. Colonial agriculture controlled by settlers, or boers (farmers), would come to depend on imported slaves, many of them from diverse areas across the Indian Ocean and as far away as Indonesia. The colony’s labor force would also include subjugated Khoesan peoples. Out of this mixture of people would emerge new ethnicities, particularly the Afrikaners (defined as white) and the Coloureds (at times referred to as “Brown Afrikaners”), who spoke a Dutch patois later known as Afrikaans.10

Beginning in the late 1700s and accelerating in the nineteenth century, South Africa fell within the orbit of British imperialism. In the interior, the discovery of diamonds in 1867 and the world’s largest supply of gold in the 1880s led to a rapid industrial revolution as well as to conflict among Africans, Britons, and Boers. The transformation of South Africa’s economy from one dependent largely on agricultural produce to the mining of precious minerals and secondary manufacturing had profound implications for the country’s history: the rise of industrial cities like Johannesburg, the making of a massive black working class, and the emergence of vibrant cultural styles, to name just a few.
One can write the history of twentieth-century South Africa through its racially discriminatory laws that controlled everything from race and sexuality to employment. But South Africa was always more than oppressive legislation. It was an exuberant society of township culture, religious change, and political life with consequences for the rest of the continent and the world. The themes explored in the selections allow readers to enter into discussion and debate on South Africa’s obstreperous past and contentious present—of oppressed and oppressor, white and black, women and men, histories shaped by forces inside and outside the country. *The South Africa Reader* does not attempt to offer a totalizing view of the country, nor a mere grab bag of original texts. It seeks rather to show the interaction of peoples and the intersection of forces that, combined, have shaped South Africa’s development.

This anthology comes at an important moment. Municipal elections in May 2011 saw a small but significant decline in support for the ruling ANC and a surprising increase for the Democratic Alliance, a party historically associated with white liberals. South Africans have begun expressing increasing discontent with the ANC, the organization long associated with the struggle against oppression and with bringing democracy to the country. The ANC’s “tripartite” alliance with trade unions and the Communist Party remains tenuous. More generally, the tumultuous years of struggle, repression, and democratic change have begun the transition from present politics to recent history. South Africans are beginning to develop new perspectives on their modern past. And they are continuing historic conversations with themselves and others about South Africa’s place in the world. *The South Africa Reader* is produced to join in with these ongoing conversations.

The book contains eight parts, beginning with African stories of the past. Throughout *The South Africa Reader*, the politics of the past and the emergence of various groups are central themes, whether the recalled memory of a once indentured worker in the nineteenth century, the complaints of a trekboer (migratory cattle rancher) heading into South Africa’s interior, or a widow’s testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Parts II and III examine South Africa’s history from the seventeenth century to the development of slavery and the expansion of European empire, in addition to the emergence of new forms of identity and ways of understanding the world. Parts IV and V take up South Africa’s economic and political revolutions, the rapid emergence of a labor-hungry industrial economy, and the consolidation of white domination. The final three parts are dedicated to South Africa after 1948, when the National Party took control of the state and began introducing its policies of apartheid. These parts chart the often
violent confrontations between the government and black South Africans, but they continue themes introduced in earlier parts, such as religion, the politics of ethnicity, and the creation of vibrant cultural styles. Part VIII, exploring the tentative creation of a postapartheid society, is intended to provoke discussion about the “new” South Africa.

South Africa is a terminological nightmare. Many of the selections deploy terms and contain ideas that readers will find offensive. The words people have used to describe themselves and others have had the most profound consequences. Many historical terms today are repugnant, such as *Kaffir* and *Hottentot*, and have been abandoned in contemporary official usage. *Kaffir*, for example, began as a term to refer to the Xhosa people and became a generalized epithet applied to all Africans. Other terms remain fraught and publicly contested. South Africans argue over the terms *white* and *black*. When an Afrikaner identity first arose is still debated, although the Afrikaans language was codified along with the formation of a political party in the late nineteenth century. *Boer*, which means “farmer,” has recently become tinged with racist overtones. *Coloured* emerged as a formal category after the ending of slavery in the context of British attempts to describe people of mixed racial descent involving the Khoesan, Europeans, and Asian and African slaves. There continues to be wide disagreement as to whether this term should be cast into the historical dustbin, an unfortunate relic of South Africa’s racist past, or whether it can be reclaimed for a different future. These debates form part of wider and ongoing conversations that South Africans have about who they are and how they see themselves in the modern world.

**Notes**

8  Introduction