

Summary: South Africa Today

Geography and History of South Africa

South Africa is at the southern tip of Africa. Because it is south of the Equator, winter is in July and summer is in January. South Africa has the world's largest and richest gold field. Most of South Africa is on a plateau. Much of it is grassland called the veldt, where farmers raise cattle and crops.

In 1652, the Dutch started the Cape Town colony. Today, their descendents, called Afrikaners, make up most of South Africa's white population. Over time, the Dutch settlers left Cape Town to become pastoral farmers. They came to be known as the Boers.

In the early 1800s, Cape Town came under British control. In the 1850s, Boers created two independent states and followed a policy of apartheid. In the second half of the 19th century, diamonds and gold were discovered in South Africa, renewing European interest in the area. Between 1899 and 1902, the British fought the Boers in the South African War. The British won, and the Boer states came under British rule.

A Nation of Apartheid

In 1910, the British colony became the Union of South Africa. Apartheid continued. Nonwhites were not allowed to have the same housing, jobs, education, or right to travel as white people. Many were forced to leave their homes.

In the 1950s, Nelson Mandela led an anti-apartheid movement. The government arrested protesters, including Mandela. In 1985, the U.S. and Great Britain imposed sanctions against South Africa. Willem de Klerk, a white South African, became president in 1989. He helped end apartheid laws. In 1993, a new constitution gave all adults the right to vote. In 1994, Mandela was elected president.

South Africa has the strongest economy in the region, but most black South Africans remain very poor. The government is working to provide better housing and to bring electricity and water to poor communities. South Africa is a diverse nation, with 11 official languages. Its art and music are examples of its diversity.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

veldt *noun*, flat grassland
sanction *noun*, a measure taken by nations against a country violating international law

After You Read

REVIEW What drew Europeans to South Africa? Underline the sentence that explains why Europeans came to South Africa in the second half of the 19th century.

REVIEW What were the main ways in which apartheid affected the lives of black South Africans? Circle the sentences that tell how apartheid affected nonwhites.