

## **Introductory Essay: The Anti-Apartheid Movement and the Congressional Black Caucus**

Apartheid means separateness. Apartheid was a system of legal racial segregation enforced by the South African National Party government between 1948 and 1994. This system created a society of enormous repression for black South Africans.

These policies of racial separation began long before 1948. In 1910, a series of laws were introduced to limit the rights of the black majority. Laws like the Mines and Works Act of 1911, limited the kind of jobs that black workers could have, reducing them to exclusively doing menial work, while securing the better job opportunities for white workers. Laws were also introduced to restrict land ownership and use by the black majority. The Native Land Act of 1913 set aside less than 10% of South African territory as reservations for black people and barred them from buying land outside these areas.

Policies like these also limited the political influence of black South Africans by depriving them of the right to vote or to protest unfair labor practices. Despite these political, economic, and social challenges, groups like the African National Congress (ANC) formed to stage resistance and liberation movements to free black South Africans from these atrocities. The conflicts intensified and, out of fear, white South Africans rallied great support behind the National Party to win the 1948 election in South Africa, thus ensuring the opportunity to put into place an even greater repressive government against the majority black population.

The National Party immediately passed a series of new laws that established the separation of races and suppressed political dissent. In 1950, the Population Registration Act was created to establish racial classifications based on skin color and ethnic backgrounds. Discriminatory laws were also established to hinder the voting process, target black businesses and property owners, as well as continue removing and resettling black South Africans on reservations. The labor bureau and trade unions also discriminated against black workers and thus weakened the urban African working class.

The anti-apartheid movement was spearheaded by the black community in the United States. As leaders of this community, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) was instrumental in organizing and supporting activities that brought national and global attention to the racist and inhumane treatment of blacks in South Africa. The CBC's efforts to raise awareness about South Africa's apartheid system ultimately led to the passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986.

Representative Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA) introduced the CBC's first bill concerning apartheid in 1972. Over the next 14 years, CBC members sponsored more than 15 bills concerning apartheid. Members sponsored hearings, organized rallies, and participated in protests in Washington D.C., as well as in their home districts. Their efforts, in conjunction with the efforts of community activists, students and other organizations, brought widespread attention to the racist and inhumane treatment of blacks in South Africa.

Prior to 1986, CBC members, along with students and other community activists, brought widespread attention to South Africa through a number of rallies and protests in Washington, D.C. and their home districts. The CBC was also involved in the establishment of TransAfrica in 1977. TransAfrica is a foreign policy advocacy organization designed to increase awareness of issues concerning Africa and the Caribbean. TransAfrica, with the support of the CBC and several other grassroots organizations, led the movement to dissociate from South Africa. As a result of these efforts, scores of universities and businesses withdrew investment dollars from South Africa.

In 1984, in the face of escalating violence and repression in South Africa and the refusal of the Reagan administration to take measures against the Botha regime, a group of Washington-based anti-apartheid and civil rights leaders launched the Free South Africa Movement. Randall Robinson, then director of TransAfrica, along with Mary Frances Berry, U.S. Delegate and CBC Member Walter Fauntroy, and Eleanor Holmes Norton, arranged a meeting with the South African ambassador. During that meeting, Norton left to call the media to announce that the other three would not leave the embassy until their demands—that the South African government release all political prisoners immediately and dismantle apartheid—were met. The media and supporters were there to capture the removal of Robinson, Fauntroy, and Berry in handcuffs, and the daily protests outside the embassy began. The protests spread from the embassy in Washington, D.C., to South African consulates and other symbols of the South African government around the United States. Over the next two years, at least 6,000 people would be arrested at embassy and consulate protests including major figures from the civil rights movement, members of Congress and other political figures, and many artists and entertainers.

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