



South Africa Evolves!

By Katrice L. Mines

THE YEAR 1987 WAS ONE of the most repressive periods during the South African Apartheid era; a time when the country's National Party took drastic measures against all non-white people dubbed the "black menace." Today, 20 years later, South Africans "have experienced a miracle democracy," says Dr. Felicia Mabuza-Suttle, president of South African Tourism USA.

For nearly 40 years prior to the mid-'80s and in the years following, there was not only a separation of the races in the economic sector, but the private domain of all non-white people was increasingly regulated and controlled as well. Liberation, however, came for the oppressed people of South Africa in February 1990 when just months after taking office, Frederik Willem de Klerk rang in the end of Apartheid during a historic speech in Parliament. He declared himself in favor of a democratic South Africa and freed Nelson Mandela, the President of the African National Congress, from prison on Robben Island, after 27 years behind bars.

Mandela's freedom symbolized broken shackles for many South Africans as well.

"Twenty years ago I had to heed the signs that read "whites only" and "blacks only," Suttle recalls. "Today, I can walk into any place I want to or should I say, I can afford to. We have progressed and overcome the humiliation and pain of apartheid."

After years of negotiations under the auspices of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), a constitution was drafted in July 1993, containing concessions towards all sides: a federal system of regional legislatures, equal voting-rights regardless of race, and a bicameral legislature. And

from April 26-29, 1994, the South African population voted in the first universal suffrage general elections. Mandela, whose leadership cemented his reputation as one of the world's most intuitive and fair statesmen, was elected president. He retired in 1999, and was succeeded by Deputy President Thabo Mbeki.

Unfortunately, according to Dr. Saba Jallow, associate professor of African Studies at Georgia Southern University, even with a new political landscape the crippling effects of apartheid will take time to reverse.

"When Mandela became President and the ANC formed the majority in the South African Parliament, the African majority were delighted that the end of apartheid was near and that for the first time they would be active participants in a multi-racial democracy. However, we have to understand that the wealth created during the apartheid era was shared by a small white minority population," he explains. "With majority rule and the high expectations of the African majority, education, housing, employment and health became critical issues for the new ANC government. The South African government has done very well in addressing these issues, but now it had to deal with the demands and expectations of 45 million people compared to the apartheid period, when the basic needs of Africans were ignored and their labor was exploited to make the apartheid state wealthier for the few."

In the midst of the country's political transformation, an increasing amount of attention is being paid to the South African HIV/AIDS crisis. The National Health Department reported that recorded HIV

infections had increased by 60 percent every two years between 1990 and 1994. Therefore, in 1998, Mbeki launched the Partnership Against AIDS, admitting that 1,500 HIV infections were occurring every day. South Africa is home to the highest number of HIV-positive people in the world – reaching 6.5 million by 2005.

Today, the detrimental effects of HIV and AIDS in South Africa impact the development of the country's social and economic policies.

"Economic growth can only be sustained with a healthy work force, and the increasing health burden will require government and private resources," stresses Jallow. "The South African economy is growing at a rate of five percent and there is optimism that this trend will continue up to 2015."

According to the CIA's World Fact book,

Africa that you understand why Afrikaners held on for so long. South Africa boasts modern infrastructure, first-world hotels and a booming economy."

Suttle reports, this year, the number of American visitors to South Africa has increased more than 12 percent from March 2006. "With more Americans owning passports, 27 percent so far, we will definitely see more visitors."

Delta Air Lines and South African Airlines have direct flights from Atlanta, New York, and Washington, D.C., and other connections through Europe, allowing easy access to South Africa, she adds.

Amongst attractions of notoriety is The Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls – South Africa, which was built as the result of a partnership with South Africa's Ministry of

Where Are They Now?

South Africa is a middle-income, emerging market with an abundant supply of natural resources; well-developed financial, legal, communications, energy, and transport sectors; a stock exchange that ranks among the 10 largest in the world; and a modern infrastructure supporting an efficient distribution of goods to major urban centers throughout the region. However, growth has not been strong enough to lower South Africa's high unemployment rate, and daunting economic problems remain from the apartheid era - especially poverty and lack of economic empowerment among disadvantaged groups.

"Africans comprise 79 percent of the South African population, whites about 10 percent and coloreds and Asians the rest. South African blacks have achieved political rights, but their economic rights are still way behind those of whites," Jallow explains.

Nonetheless, South Africa has experienced positive growth in its tourism industry in the past ten years, with more than six million people visiting the country in 2005. And one person who has played a key role in building a platform for continued growth is Suttle. The former host of "The Felicia Show" – South Africa's first talk show on television, oversees tourism for South Africa in America.

"My crusade as a president of Tourism for South Africa in America is aimed at getting many Americans to go to South Africa and enjoy the fruits of their labor in one of the most beautiful countries in the world," she says. "It is only until you visit South

Education. The school opened at Henley-on-Klip in Meyerton, south of Johannesburg in January 2007 and has attracted a widespread attention throughout the country.

In light of criticism concerning the school's extravagant layout and the make-up of its student body, Winfrey offered that her vision for the Leadership Academy was to provide disadvantaged girls with opportunities to "change the face of a nation," and make a difference in the world by becoming future leaders of South Africa.

The interest brought to the country by Winfrey and other American celebrities has helped to change the Western perception of South Africa in a positive way, Suttle contends.

"Coverage of Africa, including South Africa, in the Western media has been one sided – portraying a dismal picture of a potentially rich continent," she explains. "It has been about devastation, destruction, disease, disaster, dictators and death. Many Americans, for example, who visit South Africa come back overwhelmed. Stars like Tyler Perry, Oprah Winfrey, Alfre Woodard, Samuel Jackson, Danny Glover, Elton John; you name them, all come back having had a memorable experience. Oprah saw the potential of our people."

A well-rounded view of South Africa's is now available, Suttle says.

"The media is now showcasing South Africa's scenic beauty, historical music and the reconciliatory spirit of our people. A more cosmopolitan South Africa is now being portrayed, away from the images of Tarzan in the jungle that were so prevalent in the past."

South Africa

FORMER MAYOR ANDREW YOUNG, an ambassador to the United Nations, has helped make human rights a central focus of American Foreign Policy and argued that economic development in the Third World, particularly in Africa, was in the best interest of the United States. Young was also among the first to call for sanctions against the Apartheid regime in South Africa

THE LATE MRS. CORETTA SCOTT KING, who was renowned in the civil rights movement of the United States, proved that she was also committed to justice and equality worldwide with her outspoken opposition to the apartheid system in South Africa. She participated in a series of sit-in protests in Washington, D.C., that prompted nationwide demonstrations against South African racial policies.



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