

COMMENTARY

South African structure resembles distorted racial pyramid

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Part two of a three part series from Cape Town, South Africa

South African society is shaped like a distorted racial pyramid. There is a huge, impoverished black community representing nearly 75 percent of the country's total population. The whites, who comprise 12 percent, perch themselves at the pinnacle. Just below most whites, but above nearly all black Africans, are the people in between: "the coloureds."

Cape Town is located in the Western Cape province, on the extreme southwest corner of the African continent. It is the only major African city south of the Sahara that does not have a black majority.

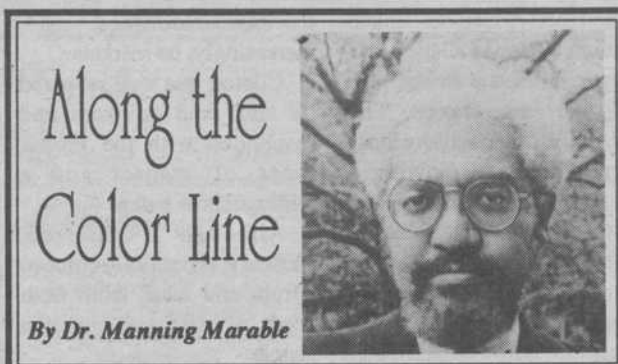
When the Dutch and later the English invaded and colonized southern Africa centuries ago, they initially encountered the Khoi and San peoples.

The Dutch East India Company imported tens of thousands of slave populations from India, Madagascar, Indonesia and Malaysia. These multiethnic slave populations brought into South Africa their own distinctive cultures, foods, music and ways of life.

European males forcibly violated nonwhite women sexually, producing, after several generations, a substantial mulatto or mixed racial group. In the late 1800s, black Africans were imported as slaves from east and central Africa, and they were also largely incorporated into the coloured group.

Coloureds acquired Afrikaans, the language based primarily on the Dutch spoken by early white colonizers, as their own. To distinguish themselves from the overwhelmingly black population, most coloured cultivated cultural and sexual links with Europeans.

Dr. Wilmot James, the executive director of the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, who is also coloured, said that early



trade unions of coloured artisans "went out of their way to keep blacks out of their ranks."

The coloureds developed "an aesthetic that deeply aspired toward whiteness, European culture and the ways and mores of the master," James observed. "Dark-skinned children were not as loved as the European-looking ones. They were kept out of sight, reduced to the lower ranks of the family hierarchy. Blackness was a curse, a source of sexual shame." Thus the coloured group acquired many of the racist stereotypes and prejudices against black people that whites held.

The coloureds' status was turned upside down with the initiation of apartheid in 1948. Racial segregation had always existed, but apartheid took racial separation to new extremes.

Rigid racial categorizations and the geographical isolation of various ethnic groups tore apart thousands of mixed raced families.

"The monsters from Pretoria, aided by their local counterparts and the police, imposed a fictional racial purity and rigid boundaries between people they wished, in their madness, to be

ethnic groups," James said.

In Cape Town, a largely integrated, ethnically diverse urban community called District Six was marked by the apartheid regime for termination.

District Six had been a pleasant neighborhood for coloureds, Malays, Portuguese, Muslims and many others. The people were forcibly removed from their homes; bulldozers flattened entire city blocks.

Today, the former district appears like a vast empty space in front of the city's skyline. Hundreds of thousands of coloureds were transferred to the Mitchell's Plain township, miles from the central city. In Cape Flats, an estimated 80,000 young men are gang members, frequently armed with machine guns and various automatic weapons.

The coloured leadership as a whole finally concluded that apartheid had to go. Thousands of coloureds joined the United Democratic Front, a mass anti-apartheid coalition, in the 1980s. Many coloured activists were jailed, tortured or banned by the government. Finally, when Nelson Mandela was freed from his prison cell on Robben Island, thousands of coloureds joined their black sisters and brothers to share in the victory.

But barely after apartheid had ended, the coloureds of the Western Cape began complaining that "the blacks" might "take over." They had long played a comfortable buffer role between whites and blacks. Now, they feared that their relative privileges could be taken away.

So on election day in 1994, the coloured electorate voted overwhelmingly for the National Party, the "monsters" that created apartheid and had destroyed many of their own homes in District Six. Over two-thirds of all coloured voters supported the Nationalists, while less than 30 percent endorsed the African
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Woods paying price for fame

By Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Could Tiger Woods repeat as this year's Augusta National Master's Tournament champ? No.

Many were hoping that he would and some were hoping that he wouldn't.

In April 1997, Woods had barely donned the green jacket that symbolizes the Master's crown when he got a rude jolt: he was not everyone from American golf's favorite son.

Wisecracking golf ace Fuzzy Zoeller referred to Woods in a TV interview as a "little boy." He also fired off a couple of other racially-loaded slurs.

Zoeller was criticized by some in the sports world, and promptly canned by the company for which he served as a spokesperson. A perplexed Zoeller quickly apologized, and Woods, still basking in adulation, shrugged off the incident.

Unfortunately, much of the public did not. Sports announcers nationwide reported that pro-Zoeller sentiment was building fast. Most thought he was persecuted by the politically correct crowd for making a humorous remark that meant no harm and blamed the media (and Blacks) for making a big deal out of it.

They were outraged not at Zoeller, but at how he was treated.

A quick look around the green and the club house at the Augusta National the day after Woods triumphed showed a large number of Blacks. But they were not golfers. They were caddies, waiters and trash collectors. For years these were the only roles that golf pros like Zoeller had been accustomed to seeing Blacks in. A year later not much has changed in Augusta.

Golf legend Jack Nicklaus has waved away

the avalanche of death threats, hate mail and special security details that Woods has needed at every tournament as the price of success, not racism. When Tiger bombed in several major tournaments following Augusta, some sportswriters, fans, and golf insiders seemed to take special glee in noting that he was in a slump.

Few bothered to add that Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer, Ben Crenshaw and many other legends of golf, like stars in any sport, often bomb in their play.

Woods was blasted for supporting sweatshop labor by endorsing Nike products and encouraging Americans to get into debt by endorsing American Express, assailed as arrogant for not always acknowledging fans, accused of having an exaggerated ego for talking about his value to sport and society, and attacked for having temper tantrums on the course.

While many Whites sincerely cheered Tiger for his triumphs, many others twisted his success into final proof that America is not a color blind society.

Some publicly, and many more privately delighted in proclaiming that Tiger got where he got without preferences or set asides.

Whether Woods won or lost at this year's Master's Tournament, the saga would have continued.

Black sports heroes are especially fragile icons. Said Woods, "People are taking offense to things I'm trying to do and accomplish in golf."

The problem is it's not just in golf. It's in American society too.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is the author of "The Assassination of The Black Male Image."

Carl Rowan's Commentary

Clinton correct on U.S.' inaction on slavery, Africa

Special to Sentinel-Voice

I have never been among those who demanded an official apology for the institution of slavery in these United States.

Yet, I have no quarrel with President Clinton over what he said about slavery in Uganda, or about U.S. neglect of Africa in other sub-Saharan countries.

In fact, I am incensed that some right-wing politicians and publications are pretending that Mr. Clinton committed heresy, or some kind of traitorous act, when he expressed his shame about slavery and U.S. inaction during times of horrible genocide in Africa.

I see in some of the attacks on the president's comments in Africa a thinly-veiled contempt for Africa and black people in general, a yearning for the old days of colonialism, and even a suggestion that slavery was good for the slaves. Pat Buchanan, who laced his presidential campaign with rhetoric about his angst over seeing the sons of slaves "playing bongo drums on street corners ... in my city (Washington, D.C.)," now accuses the president of "groveling" before Africans because he dared say that "the U.S. has not always done right by Africa."

You see where Buchanan is coming from when he writes:

"When Europeans arrived in sub-Saharan Africa, the inhabitants had no machinery and no written language. When the Europeans departed, most of them by 1960, they left behind power stations, telephones, telegraphs, railroads, mines, plantations, schools, a civil service, a police force and a treasury.



CARL ROWAN

"After Europe let its colonies go, many descended into chaos within a decade."

Why doesn't old Pat just flat out say that the "superior" Europeans did "inferior" Africans a favor by imposing colonialism? Then he can extend that "logic" by arguing that all of the slaves brought to the U.S.,

and their progeny, were and are blessed to endure servitude beneath the superior white slave-masters, because slavery gave us black people a chance to absorb some European intelligence and civilization.

The *Washington Times* takes umbrage at Mr. Clinton's statement that "the American government for many years, in effect, was complicit in the apartheid of South Africa." The president spoke the truth. The *Times* tries to justify U.S. support for or condoning of apartheid with the argument that "Mr. Mandela's African National Congress was dominated by communists, and therefore was a part of the Cold War ... At the time, they were no friends of the United States."

The "communist dominated" line has been debunked by both President Nelson Mandela and the passage of time. And it is odious to suggest that the U.S. was right to stand against people who suffered the most brutal oppression, including murder, because of the color of their skin just because right-wingers thought those victims were not friends of the U.S. during the Cold War.

These strident critics of the president's remarks in Africa are making Bill Clinton look like a saint.

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