

1970S: SOWETO AND INCREASED PRESSURE ON THE APARTHEID STATE

Stricter apartheid laws were implemented in the 1960s. The Apartheid regime succeeded for a while in repressing resistance in the country. However, in 1973 a series of labour strikes erupted, followed by the emergence of a new movement called Black Consciousness or BCM. There was an increase in youth activism which led to renewed resistance. Women played a large role in the resistance of the 1970s.



University of the Witwatersrand students protest against Apartheid and the education system in the 1970s. Source: Frescura Collection.



University of Cape Town students protest against Apartheid and the education system in the 1970s. Source: Frescura Collection.

WOMEN AND LABOUR ISSUES: THE TRADE UNIONS IN THE 1970S

In the 1960s, the country's industrial economy had grown and by the 1970s black workers were becoming increasingly restless about exploitative working conditions. A number of strikes were held, particularly in Natal, and between 1973 and 1975 many new trade unions were formed.

Women such as Linda Komape and Emma Mashinini were prominent trade unionists. They fought for the rights of women in the workplace.



LINDA KOMAPE

1949-

Linda Komape was born in the Transvaal in 1949 and experienced Apartheid at a young age when her father's land and cattle were taken away.

She began work in a factory in 1975. She joined the Metal and Allied Workers Union and played an active part in the strikes of 1976. In 1977, she became an organiser for the Metal and Allied Workers Union, but spent the first months doing odd jobs for men rather than being given a proper role in the Union. She complained and, her activism yielded positive results. The system was changed so that menial tasks in the Union were equally divided between men and women. Komape later moved from organizing to recruiting.

Komape founded the Transport and General Workers Union around 1978. Here she worked to improve wages and conditions and by the time she left membership stood at about 24 000.

From here, Komape began working with a union concerned with the rights of female cleaning staff. She found out that many were sexually harassed at work and had no legal rights. Membership of the union grew to 3 000 and conditions were improved.

In 1984, Komape attended a workshop organised by the Federation of Transvaal Women (FEDTRAW) where she objected to the tradition of 'lobola' as she believed it objectified women.

Throughout her life, Komape campaigned for the rights of women in the workplace.

WOMEN AND THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT IN THE 1970S

The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was led by a man called Steve Biko. The BCM was supported by many female intellectuals, and also appealed to young people. BCM encouraged all black South Africans to recognize their inherent dignity and self-worth. In the 1970s, the BCM spread from university campuses into urban black communities throughout South Africa. A number of women, such as Baleka Kgositsile and Winnie Mandela were active in both the Black Consciousness Movement and the ANC underground.

The South African Student Organisation (SASO), formed in 1968 by Biko was largely responsible for spreading BCM among the youth. Women like Dr Mamphela Ramphele, Nkosazana Clarice Dlamini-Zuma and Sam Moodley were active in this organization.

Along with political action, a major part of the Black Consciousness Movement was its Black Community Programs. These Programmes included organizing community medical clinics, aiding entrepreneurs, and holding “consciousness”

classes and adult education literacy classes.

Biko was banned in 1973. This meant that he was not allowed to speak to more than one person at a time, was restricted to certain areas, and could not make speeches in public. It was also forbidden to quote anything he said, including speeches or simple conversations, or to otherwise mention him. In spite of the repression of the Apartheid government, Biko and the BCM played a large role in inspiring protests, which led to the Soweto Uprising on 16 June 1976.

The State suppression of the BCM after the Soweto Uprising in 1976, and Biko's death while in police custody in 1977, weakened the organizational base of the movement. In addition, all the black consciousness organisations were banned in 1977, including the women's organisations.

Many of BCM's supporters went into exile and the majority joined the ANC and MK in exile. The PAC's Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), the successor to Poqo, was also active in exile. However, the ANC's MK grew over the years in international and national stature and became the more powerful liberation movement.



Winnie Mandela talking at the launch Black Women's Federation in Durban, 1975. Source: Bailey's African History Archives.

BLACK WOMEN'S FEDERATION

In 1975, some of the women supporters of BCM formed the Black Women's Federation (BWF) under the leadership of Fatima Meer. The aim of the BWF was to bring black women together in a broad front to create opportunities for themselves. Another prominent member of this organization was Winnie Mandela.

A year after the formation of the federation, Fatima Meer was banned. The government also banned a meeting that was to be held by the BWF and other anti-Apartheid

organisations in Durban in protest of Meer's banning.

The women of the BWF also expressed solidarity with the youth and supported them in their demonstrations against inferior black education. The first student protests were peaceful, but in 1976, riots broke out in Soweto against the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in their high schools. The BWF members were actively behind the students, and when the police opened fire on the students and 13-year-old Hector Peterson was killed, they and others bitterly opposed the brutal police killing of young children.



Fatima Meer, Durban, 2002. Source: Gisele Wulfsohn.



FATIMA MEER

1928 - 2010

Fatima Meer was brought up in a family that was highly conscious of racial discrimination and she therefore became a tireless defender of the oppressed. She went to the University of Natal, where she completed a Masters degree in Sociology.

Fatima joined the 1946 Indian Passive Resistance Cam-

paign against Apartheid laws. After tension and rioting between Indians and Africans in Natal, she helped establish the Durban and Districts Women's League to improve relations between Africans and Indians. Her activities led to her banning in 1952.

In the 1970s, when the Black Consciousness Movement was at its height and Fatima Meer was the president of the Black Women's Federation (BWF), she was again banned and was subsequently detained for trying to organise a rally with Steve Biko.

Shortly after her release in 1976, Fatima survived an assassination attempt, when her house was petrol bombed. From the 1980s to the 1990s, she fought tirelessly for the rights of shack-dwellers and rural migrants. She also headed the Natal Education Trust, which built schools in Umhlanga, Port Shepstone and Inanda, and established a Crafts Centre and the Tembalihle Tutorial College in Phoenix.

Fatima Meer wrote more than 40 books on a wide variety of subjects and received many awards during her lifetime. She also worked with non-governmental welfare bodies and served in advisory positions for the new democratic government.

Meer died in March 2010 following a stroke which she had two weeks before her death. She was buried in Durban.



WINNIE MADIKIZELA - MANDELA

1936 -

In the mid-1950s Nomzamo Winfreda Madikizela became involved in the ANC and she met Nelson Mandela, who was then one of the Defiance Campaign organisers. They were married in 1958.

In 1962 Winnie Mandela was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act for her part in the struggle and was restricted to the Orlando Township in Soweto. Always a fiery woman she repeatedly flaunted this order and was charged on a number of occasions. In 1969 she was detained under the Terrorism Act and was placed in solitary confinement for 17 months. In 1970 she was placed under house arrest.

During the 1976 uprisings, she helped to establish the Black Women's Federation and the Black Parents' Association which were both allied to the Black Consciousness Movement. In 1977 she was detained under the Internal Security Act and banished to the small dusty town of Brandfort in the Orange Free State. There she helped set up a crèche and a clinic with Dr. Abu Baker Asvat.

Winnie Mandela returned to her home in Soweto in 1986 and resumed her ANC activities. She stood next to her husband, Nelson Mandela, when he was released from prison on 11 February 1990. However, the couple divorced in March 1996.

Since 1994 she has served the ANC and government in various positions.



The voices of the crowd rose in song outside the Palace of Justice as Winnie Mandela appeared on the steps and left the courtroom. Nelson Mandela's mother is behind her, having come all the way from Umtata to hear that her son had been found guilty of sabotage and sentenced to life imprisonment. The Rivonia Trial, 1964. Source: Pretoria News.

WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE 1976 SOWETO REVOLT AND MOUNTING PRESSURE ON THE APARTHEID STATE

The 1976 Soweto riots ushered in an era of increased confrontation between the State and political organisations fighting for liberation. A new generation of young people was committed to the struggle against Apartheid. They boycotted school, and adopted the slogan 'Liberation before education'. The youth became actively involved in politicising black communities.

After 1976 the Apartheid government's repression of the struggle increased in intensity. As a result, over 14,000 students left the country and went into exile, including many girls and women. They joined MK and APLA for military training in other countries. For example, Lindiwe Sisulu joined MK and underwent military training. She later specialised in Intelligence for MK.

This huge increase in the number of military trainees, and the increased resistance within South Africa, breathed new life into the liberation struggle for democracy.



Students in shock and mourning over the death of a fellow protester shot by police on 16 June 1976. Source: Bailey's African History Archives.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE 1976 REVOLT

Soweto stands for South-West Townships, and lies to the south west of Johannesburg. It was a township set up by the government for black Africans to live in. Today, the events in Soweto and around the country in 1976 are remembered in a public holiday called Youth Day every year on June 16 in South Africa.

Although he did not directly take part in the Soweto riots, Steve Biko's BC ideas motivated students. On the morning of 16 June 1976 twenty thousand school children in Soweto went on a protest march. They were protesting against having to use Afrikaans as one of the languages of instruction at school.

The issue of Afrikaans was just the spark that started the Uprising - the real issue was the oppressive Apartheid laws.

The march started off peacefully, but later the police opened fire on the protesting students.

Chaos then broke loose throughout the whole of Soweto. Within the following week, at least 176 had died. Within the next few months, the protests and clashes with the police had spread to 160 black townships all over South Africa. 1976 was a turning point in South African history.



Soweto Uprising of 1976. Marching children, protesting against the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction at their schools. They marched from the south western end of Soweto collecting others on their route to Orlando East. Here, the police set dogs on them and opened fire. Source: Mike Mzileni, Bailey's African History Archive.



CAESARINA KONA MAKHOERE

1955 -

Makhoere was born near Pretoria. When she was a very young, her family was forced to move in terms of the Group Areas Act and relocated to Mamelodi. After completing her education, she became active in politics.

She became involved in the students' resistance to Bantu Education, the campaign that was behind the Soweto uprising of 1976. In the immediate aftermath of the Soweto Revolt she was arrested under Section 6 of the Security Act of 1967, for attempting to undergo military training. It was

her own father who revealed her hiding place to the police.

Makhoere was convicted and imprisoned. During this time she was often moved between prisons. While at a prison in Silverton, Makhoere met Dorothy Nyembe, who taught her the history of women's resistance in South Africa. After her release in 1982 she began working for the Black Sash, another women's organisation which resisted Apartheid. Makhoere counselled victims of discriminatory laws and trauma experienced during detention, she also wrote a book about her experiences in prison, entitled *No Child's Play: In Prison Under Apartheid* (1988).

THE REACTION TO THE GOVERNMENT'S INDIAN COUNCIL

The Soweto riots of 1976 had prompted Vorster to make some limited concessions to the political position of 'coloureds' and Indians. In 1978, new laws created a body of 40 elected and five nominated members of the Indian community to be called the South African Indian Council (SAIC). This new council had limited support.

Progressive Indians, among them women such as Amina Cachalia, Fatima Meer and Ela Gandhi (who had been elected as Vice-President of the revived Natal Indian Congress) were opposed to this new form of Apartheid and anti-SAIC committees were formed to resist the measure.



From left: Dr. Jassat, Mrs. Luthuli, and Albertina Sisulu at an anti-SAIC conference in 1981 Durban. Source: Omar Badsha.



RUTH FIRST

1925 - 1982

Ruth First worked for the Johannesburg City Council, but soon left because she could not agree with the actions of the council. First then became an editor of the left-wing newspaper, 'The Guardian'. As a journalist her articles documented social conditions and events including the 1956 women's anti-pass campaign, migrant labour, bus boycotts and slum conditions. She wrote some of the finest pieces of social and labour journalism during the 1950s.

In 1949 she married lawyer, Joe Slovo. Like First, he was a member of the Communist Party. In 1953 First helped found the Congress of Democrats, the white wing of the Congress Alliance, and she took over as editor of 'Fighting Talk', a journal supporting the Congress Alliance. She was on the drafting committee of the Freedom Charter, but was unable to attend the Congress of the People at Kliptown in 1955 because of her banning order. In 1956 First and Slovo, were arrested and charged with treason in the infamous Treason Trial that lasted four years. The 156 accused were eventually acquitted.

In 1963 First was detained following the Liliesleaf arrests of the MK high command. She was detained in solitary confinement under the 90-day law. She attempted suicide during this time. She was later released and was not among the

Rivonia Trial accused, which included political leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, who were sentenced to life imprisonment.

After her release First left the country with her 3 children to join her husband, who was already in exile in the UK. The family settled in North London where First threw herself into anti-Apartheid politics in the 1960s and 1970s. She held talks, seminars and public discussions in support of the ANC and SACP. In 1977, she took the post of Professor and Research Director of the Centre for African Studies at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, Mozambique. It was in Mozambique that First was assassinated by a letter bomb which originated from military sources within South Africa.



Treason Trial, outside the court from left: J. Arenstein, Ruth First and Joe Slovo. 9 January 1957. Source: Museum Africa.

From what we have learned in this section, it is clear that during the 1970s the Apartheid state experienced increased resistance to its brutal laws. Women played a large role in this resistance.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Activity: Interpreting a photograph and writing a caption. Read the sources below and answer the questions which follow.

Source A

"In the confusion, Antoinette Pieterse searched for her younger brother Hector. She had seen him in the crowds earlier that morning ... now Hector, twelve and a grade six pupil, had melted away. Where could he be?...Then she saw a group of boys surrounding a youngster who lay injured on the side of a street...It was Hector! He was bleeding. He had been shot. She called him but he neither responded nor opened his eyes. She screamed hysterically. Mbuyisa Makhubo ... carried him in his arms while she walked alongside. The horror of the whole tragedy is mirrored on their faces as they walked down the street." - Source: Black South Africa: A People on the Boil by Harry Mashabela

Source B

"I saw a child fall down. Under a shower of bullets I rushed forward and went for the picture. It had been a peaceful march, the children were told to disperse, and they started singing Nkosi Sikelele. The police were ordered to shoot." - Sam Nzima, photographer

Source C

The photograph in the flyer in Source D was published all over the world. It has become an iconic image. An icon is an image that symbolizes something much bigger than the image itself. In this case, the picture of Hector Peterson symbolizes the whole liberation movement.

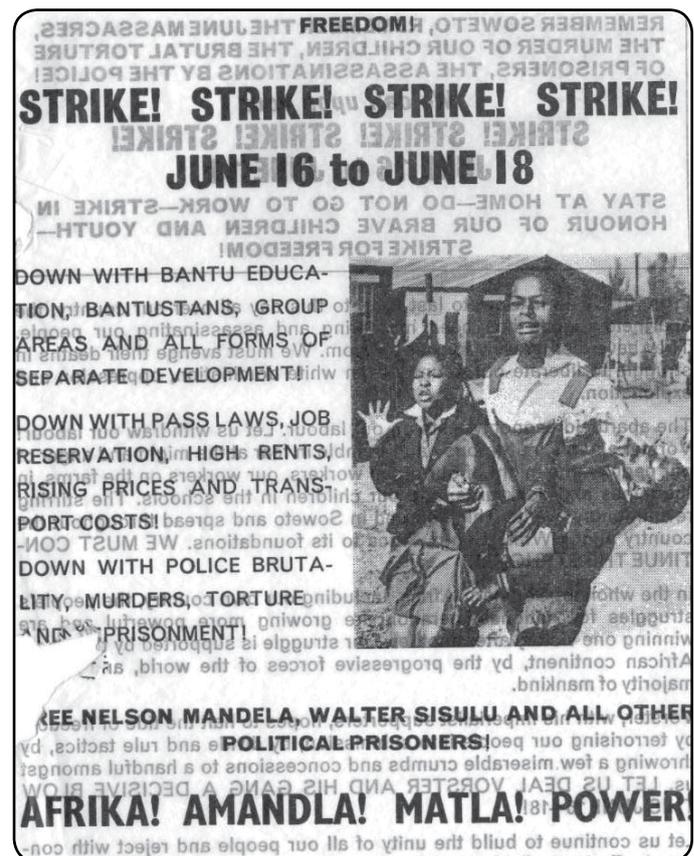
Use Source A and B to answer the questions about the photograph in Source C.

Questions:

1. Look at the photograph. On which day, month and year was the photograph taken?
2. Name the two boys in the photograph.

3. Name the girl in the photograph. What was her relationship with the dying boy?
4. Use three words to describe what you think she was feeling.
5. The words that are written to describe a picture are called a caption. Write your own caption for this photograph. The caption should focus on Antoinette Pieterse.
6. In what way do you think that the photograph in Source D symbolizes the whole liberation movement against Apartheid?

Source D



Source: South African National Archives.