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Essence of A Land: South Africa and its World Heritage Sites.
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Introduction to South Africa's World Heritage Sites

By Max du Preez

It is no wonder South Africa has seven World Heritage Sites – the story of the southern tip of the African continent and its peoples is a spectacular one that speaks to all humanity. When one explores these sites and their histories, the stories of the land, from two billion years ago to the present, and of all its peoples and their ancestors, unfold in all their drama and complexity.

South Africa is a young country: it only became a state in 1910. It is an even younger democracy: the first election for all citizens was held in 1994. But in terms of geology and of human settlement it is an ancient land.

South Africa's plains and rocks mostly date from the era when Africa was part of the super-continent of Gondwanaland, comprising of Australia, India, Madagascar, Africa, Antarctica and South America. The continents only started "drifting" about 140 million years ago, long before humans or even their earliest ancestors existed.

But much further back, about two thousand million years ago, an asteroid the size of Table Mountain struck the earth right in the centre of South Africa. It was a cataclysm of true catastrophic proportions: it hurled so much earth into the

atmosphere that the sun's rays didn't reach the earth for years. Never before or after, scientists believe, had so much energy been released in one moment. It left a crater about 300 km in diameter and even after the erosion of two billion years the impact site can still be clearly seen from space.

The Vredefort Dome, as the crater is called, is situated near the Free State towns of Vredefort and Parys and was declared a World Heritage Site in 2005.

The planet today is very different from those days. Ice ages came and went, the continents shifted dramatically, oceans became deserts and deserts became oceans, the dinosaurs ruled for a period until their extinction, probably after another asteroid hit the earth.

If we imagine that the time since our planet formed until the present is a period of 24 hours, then the last split second is probably the most crucial. In that last second, a species developed on earth that became the very first to occupy the entire globe and dominate all other species, to conquer the seas and the skies and to develop the capacity to destroy all life on earth.

About 25 million years ago, the first primates appeared in Africa. Some twenty million years later, some members of this family started to walk upright – a development that eventually led to a radical acceleration of the evolution of these beings.

Much of what we know about these early hominids we learnt from fossils found at the Cradle of Humankind near Johannesburg and Pretoria, declared a World Heritage Site in 1999. First, in 1947, an almost complete skull of a 2,1 million years old bipedal hominid was found. It was named Mrs Ples by the man who found it, Robert Broom, thinking it was a woman of the kind then classified as *Plesianthropus*. It later turned out to be the skull of a young man, and it was reclassified *Australopithecus africanus* – the southern ape of Africa. Much later,

an almost complete skeleton of *Australopithecus* which was determined to be about three million years old was discovered at the Cradle. It was named Little Foot.

More than a third of the total record of human evolution in Africa was found at the different caves making up the Cradle complex. This includes stone tools used more than two million years ago, and fossils of the first of the species *Homo*. *Homo erectus*, who had brains larger than the australopithecines but still smaller than modern humans, was probably the first to control fire – evidence that these beings were beginning to adapt the environment to suit their requirements.

The oldest evidence of the controlled use of fire was also found at Swartkrans, part of the Cradle of Humankind, and dates about a million years old. It is believed that the use of fire significantly sped up the development of complex social behaviour – there were more hours in the day; sitting around a fire encouraged conversation and storytelling and thus social interaction; and more foods became available when cooked.

Between 200 000 and 100 000 years ago, modern human beings, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, start appearing in the fossil record: big-brained, social beings with language and small teeth and noses – and the first hominids with chins! (This created space below the tongue to make sophisticated speech possible.)

While it is now generally accepted that all human beings originated in Africa south of the Sahara, not many know that there is strong evidence suggesting that South Africa has the longest continuous habitation of humans and their ancestors in the world.

Apart from the fossils of early “ape-men” found at the Cradle’s Sterkfontein Valley and Taung in the North-West Province (also incorporated in the World Heritage Site), the cranium of Florisbad Man, an archaic human who lived 250 000 years

ago, was found outside Bloemfontein. Fossils and other evidence of modern humans more than 100 000 years old were found at Klasies River on the Eastern Cape coast, at Blombos Cave near Stilbaai, De Kelders near Hermanus and a cave outside Montagu (all three in the heart of the Cape Floral Kingdom World Heritage Site), at Border Cave on the edge of the St Lucia Wetland Park World Heritage Site, and elsewhere. Middle and Late Stone Age fossils and other evidence of human settlement have also been found across South Africa, including the Stone Age cave at Thabela Thabeng in the Vredefort Dome.

All the available evidence suggests that the Cape coastal region, most of it part of the Cape Floral Kingdom, could have played a special role in the development of culture among the first modern humans around 70 000 years ago, a fundamental rearrangement of human behaviour that then slowly spread to other human populations. In their book *The Story of Earth and Life – A Southern African perspective on a 4,6 billion-year journey* Professors Terence McCarthy and Bruce Rubidge of the University of the Witwatersrand even go as far as stating that cultural modernity originated there. The evidence is of activities that went beyond simple survival, such as producing art, decorating the human body, rituals suggesting spirituality, the modification of living spaces and manipulating of the environment.

The first evidence of humans producing art was found at Blombos Cave near Stilbaai: tablets decorated with ochre more than 70 000 years ago and shell beads used for personal decoration. Sophisticated bone tools, including awls, were also found.

The fynbos flora of the Cape is the richest, most varied and concentrated floral kingdom in the world, but it grows in poor soil and most plants are not very nutritious to humans. With one exception: geophytes (bulbs, tubers, roots). Unusually plentiful carbonized residues of the inedible parts of geophytes were excavated by archaeologists at Klasies River Mouth covering a substantial period

around 70 000 years ago. The only conclusion is that those early humans practiced controlled burning of the vegetation, the only way to regenerate the plant material quickly. If this was indeed the case, it would be the very first evidence of humans directly manipulating their environment to produce food. We call this agriculture nowadays.

But one can't live of bulbs only. Because fynbos didn't provide much other food and didn't support large numbers of game, the people who lived on the Cape coast turned to the sea, or at least the beach and shallow waters, for shellfish. Extensive shell middens from the Last Interglacial Age more than 100 000 years ago have been found at Klasies River, De Kelders and elsewhere along the coast. Evidence that these people also ate seals (mostly pups, because they were easy to catch) was also found.

All this evidence points to the likelihood that the people who lived on the Cape coast about seventy millennia ago were the first humans to exploit marine resources for food. During the Late Stone Age they also learnt how to catch birds and fish. Extensive fish traps, stone walls built during low tide in the shallow water to trap the fish during high tide, can still be clearly seen at Arniston/Waenhuiskrans. (In the northern part of the St Lucia Wetland Park, the Kosi community still operate similar fish traps originally built more than seven hundred years ago.)

The humans of Klasies River and Blombos, the ancient peoples who lived on the southern coastline of South Africa, can be seen as the ancestors of what was later termed the Khoisan: the San or Bushmen and their cousins, the Khoikoi (also sometimes referred to as Khoekhoen). In the standard "handbook" of archaeology in the region, *The Archaeology of Southern Africa* published by Cambridge University Press in 2002, Oxford professor Peter Mitchell declares, "Genetic evidence points to a recent African origin for the genome shared by modern human populations, with most estimates placing this within the range 25

000 – 100 000 BP. Khoisan populations may have diverged from other African groups by 150 000 years ago and contain a surprisingly high degree of genetic diversity, perhaps indicating that the modern genome evolved in the southern part of the continent.”

The ancestors of the Bushmen or San probably never left southern Africa. (These people didn't have a name for themselves as a group. The first Dutch settlers called them Bosjesmannen, men of the bush, while the Khoikhoi called them San or Sonqua, indicating people who own nothing. Their remaining ancestors in the Kalahari prefer the term Bushman.) Because of their isolation, their environment and their needs, they didn't develop technology beyond bows and arrows and animal traps – and, of course, long-lasting paint. The Bushmen lived in small, nomadic groups and were essentially hunters and gatherers until long after other groups of people started moving back into the subcontinent.

The Bushmen's vast knowledge of nature's secrets, of animal behaviour and the medicinal and other values of plants, has not even been surpassed by modern, Western science.

But the Bushmen were not only supreme naturalists; they were deeply spiritual and artistic people. Since very few Bushmen survived by the time other people started studying their art and culture, our knowledge of them is very limited. Our appreciation of their art, of which many thousands of examples are still to be seen on rock faces all over southern Africa, and are especially abundant in the uKhahlamba/Drakensberg Park, has only blossomed during the last two decades or so.

Observers first thought rock art represented pretty pictures of their environment by a primitive people. Later, the myth was created that the Bushmen painted animals in the belief that it would make it easier to kill them. Only recently have researchers realised that most, if not all, of the artists were shamans, spiritual

and medicine men and women. They probably only painted after coming out of a trance, induced by rhythmic dancing and breathing, which was their way of entering the spiritual world. Their art was about their rich spiritual life, about symbols and metaphors we still don't fully understand.

Only a few small groups of Bushmen survive today in South Africa, Namibia, Angola and Botswana. Although large numbers were killed by early European settlers, the Bushmen did not really become "extinct"; instead they merged over centuries with other populations through intermarriage.

It is commonly accepted in the world today that all human beings are the descendants of the early modern humans who developed in sub-Saharan Africa around 200 000 years ago. In fact, Stephen Oppenheimer, one of the world's top experts in the synthesis of DNA studies with archaeological evidence, states in his book published in 2003, *Out of Africa's Eden – The Peopling of the World*, that "the genetic heritage of modern humans may be derived from a core of 2 000 – 10 000 Africans who lived 190 000 years ago". According to Oppenheimer and others' research, a group of humans left Africa about 85 000 years ago and travelled through the southern Arabian peninsula towards India. All non-African people in the world are descended from this group. It took some of them almost 50 000 years to get to Europe – and it wasn't until 500 years ago that some of them rediscovered the continent they came from.

But of course not all humans left Africa 85 000 years ago. The hunters and gatherers of the south never left the subcontinent, and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa other populations started growing and developing.

The first group of people who came from further north in Africa to live in what we today know as South Africa, called themselves the Khoikhoi (or Khoekhoen), meaning "men among men". Researchers believe they were a people descended from the Bushman populations in the northern parts of what is today Botswana,

who changed their lifestyle thousands of years ago from hunters and gatherers to keepers of fat-tailed sheep. More than two thousand years ago, these pastoralists started drifting further south, probably in search of better grazing. Some groups moved through central South Africa to the Gariep River region; others moved towards the west coast and down to the western and southern Cape. Wherever they went, they found their Bushman cousins already living there. Their relationship was sometimes one of conflict, but more often of trade, cultural exchange and intermarriage.

The second group of people to move into South Africa came from much further north than Botswana. Linguists and ethnologists have concluded that the majority of people in sub-Saharan Africa today, about 400 million, belong to a language family that started in the Benue valley of eastern Nigeria and the neighbouring savannah of western Cameroon many thousands of years ago. About 5 000 years ago, these farming people started dispersing and by 2 500 years ago they dominated the Great Lakes region.

By 2 000 years ago, some of the groups were entering southern Africa. That means in just over 3 000 years they had colonised virtually the entire land mass of Africa south of the Sahara. The language they share, by now divided into hundreds of dialects, was later called Bantu – they all share the root *-ntu* for human being, and *Ba-ntu* thus means “people”.

John Reader puts it this way in his book *Africa – a Biography of a Continent*: “The suffusion of Bantu languages and settled farming throughout sub-Saharan Africa was an event unmatched in world history. Bantu-speaking peoples changed the human landscape of sub-Saharan Africa dramatically, from a region thinly populated by groups of hunter-gatherers to one that was dominated by farmers living in villages.” These people did not only bring a new language and agriculture to the areas they populated, but a new technology that made their impact that much more powerful: they were expert iron workers.

Around AD 900 groups of these farmers formed a kingdom in the Limpopo Basin in the north of present-day South Africa. Due to successful agriculture and increasing trade with countries such as India, China and Egypt via the Indian Ocean coast, the kingdom grew in power and sophistication over the following four hundred years.

The successive capitals of the kingdom are known as Schroda (AD 900 – AD 1000), K2 or Bambandyanalo (AD 1030 – AD 1220) and Mapungubwe Hill (AD1220 – 1290 AD). Together they form the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape that was declared a World Heritage Site in 2003. Due to climate change and other circumstances, the centre of power in the region moved further north from Mapungubwe to Great Zimbabwe around AD 1300.

Another group, not part of the Bantu-speaking family, also arrived in the region around these times. They are called the Lemba, the Black Jews of Africa. About 2 500 years ago, their ancestors left Judea and settled in Yemen. A thousand years ago some of them, apparently only males, left Yemen and travelled to East Africa – how nobody knows. We know some of them lived in present-day Mozambique for some time, but some moved west and, according to Lemba oral history, helped to construct Great Zimbabwe. The Lemba men took local African wives and in South Africa they live today among the Venda people. Many of them still live according to strict Jewish custom.

The Lemba have been telling everybody over the centuries that they were really Jews, but few believed them. It was only during the last twenty years that extensive genetic testing of the Lemba and people from Yemen has proven that the Lemba's version of their past is actually correct: their distant ancestors were Jews from Israel who moved to Yemen. It was further found that 53 percent of the Buba clan of the Lemba, the oldest and most senior clan, carry the Cohen genetic signature. This is as high or higher than the known Jewish priestly castes.

It is seen as likely that the Lemba ancestors travelled to the African east coast in the dhows operated by Muslim traders, who by the end of the first millennium of the Christian calendar had established trade connections with coastal settlements in Kenya, Tanzania, Zanzibar and as far south as Inhambane in Mozambique and eventually Delagoa Bay, now called Maputo.

It was just before and during these times that some of the new farming groups gradually started drifting into South Africa. There were broadly three language groups, all part of the Bantu language family: the Nguni-speakers moved down the east coast, the Sotho-Tswana speakers down the centre, while the Tsonga/Venda-speakers remained in the central northern regions. Eventually they occupied the entire South Africa, with the exception of the arid west coast and the winter rainfall areas of the Western Cape, where their crops wouldn't grow.

These farmers kept cattle, sheep and goats and grew sorghum and millet. They had an advanced culture and complex social and legal structures, and lived mostly in large semi-permanent settlements.

We know the early Muslim visitors traded with the kingdoms of Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe, but the farmers of what is today called the KwaZulu/Natal coast must have partaken in this trade, probably selling ivory and animal skins. Some of these trade routes went through what is today the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, declared a World Heritage Site in 1999. Glass beads made in India and Italy more than a thousand years ago and pieces of eighth-century pottery were found in the region as far south as Durban. (In 1414 the king of Malindi in today's Kenya gave two giraffes as a present to Chinese emperor Yong'le. It was taken to China by a huge Chinese fleet under commander Zheng He who was exploring the African coast.)

By the 1500s the Arab traders were joined by the Portuguese on the east coast – it was the Portuguese seafarer Vasco da Gama who gave the name Natal to the coastline he was passing on Christmas Day 1497.

Da Gama wasn't the first seafarer to sail around the southern tip of the African continent. In February 1488, his countryman Bartholomew Dias rounded the magical Cape of Good Hope and became the first European to set foot on South African soil when he arrived in Mossel Bay.

Dias' party was met by the Khoikhoi who lived in the bay. When the sailors went to the fresh water hole off the beach, the Khoikhoi defended their precious asset. Dias' men killed one of the Khoi men with a crossbow. Some regard this incident as the first act of resistance by the indigenous people of southern Africa against European colonialism and the beginning of the struggle for land. Others believe the first "political" act of resistance happened eleven years later, when Vasco da Gama planted a padrao or commemorative pillar and a cross on the Mossel Bay dunes. As the Portuguese sailed away, they saw the Khoikhoi men defiantly push the cross and the padrao to the ground.

After the first visits by Dias and Da Gama, many European ships on route to the East stopped at the Cape of Good Hope, so named by Dias, to take in fresh water, meat and vegetables. Antonio de Saldanha was the first to anchor in Table Bay itself and to climb – and name – Table Mountain. He named Table Bay after himself and it was known as Saldania until a Dutch fleet commander renamed it Table Bay in 1601.

All the crews from these visiting ships encountered the Khoikhoi. Some visits were very unpleasant for the visitors, as was the case with Portuguese admiral Viceroy Francisco de Almeida who was killed by the Khoikhoi when his soldiers attacked a Khoi settlement. Other visits were more unpleasant for the Khoikhoi, as it was for a Table Bay chief, Coree, who was kidnapped by English sailors in

1613 and taken to London. They wanted to teach him English and turn him into a liaison with his people, but he refused to cooperate and was brought back a year later.

It took until 1652 for the first Europeans to establish a presence at the Cape. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) ordered Jan van Riebeeck to establish a halfway refreshment station for its ships on the route between Europe and the East.

One of the first Khoikhoi chiefs Van Riebeeck met, was Autshomato, chief of a cattle-less clan called the Strandlopers (Beachrangers). Harry, as the Dutch settlers called him, spoke some Dutch he learnt from earlier Dutch visits, and he spoke English fluently, because he spent a year with an English ship traveling to India. He became Van Riebeeck's chief interpreter.

Autshomato had a close connection with Robben Island, declared a World Heritage Site in 1999. He was taken to the island on request by an English ship in 1632, where he lived with a group of his people for a number of years. But he was also the first aboriginal man to be imprisoned on the island by Van Riebeeck when he fell out of favour. Robben Island was used on and off for more than three hundred years as a place of imprisonment for people who opposed the regime of the day.

Although the Dutch had at first not planned a permanent settlement at the Cape, the VOC soon allowed a number of its employees to establish private farms around Cape Town. When more farm labourers were needed, the Dutch brought in slaves. Most slaves came from Mozambique, Angola, Dahomey, Madagascar, India and the East Indies. Altogether about 60 000 slaves were brought to the Cape.

Within thirty years groups of French Huguenots and German immigrants joined the Dutch settlers, and the number of “free burghers” grew substantially. The Dutch, the French and the Germans were all of staunch Calvinist stock. They were the ancestors of the white people who later dominated South Africa, the Afrikaners, although they also have a fair smattering of slave and even Khoikhoi blood.

Slavery had a strong impact on the social and political character of the Cape. By the end of the 18th century, most Cape burghers and farmers owned slaves – “property” to be included in their inventories with their cattle and sheep. In the view of some historians, this negative image of black-skinned people and the fear most whites had of rebelling slaves helped to shape white attitudes toward black people which culminated in the infamous apartheid ideology a century and a half later.

The expansion of commercial agriculture in the Cape soon posed a major threat to the traditional lifestyle of the Khoikhoi pastoralists and bred a deep resentment that spilled over into violent resistance at times. Van Riebeeck himself recorded in his diary the words of a Khoi chief, Doman, who attacked white farms in 1659: “As for your claim that the land is not big enough for both of us, who should rather in justice give way, the rightful owner or the intruder?”

Khoi society largely disintegrated under settler pressure. Some became farm labourers, others fled further north and large numbers died during a smallpox epidemic in 1713.

By the time the British took the Cape Colony from the Dutch at the end of the 18th century, the settler farmers or “trekboers” had expanded their agricultural operations all the way to the Eastern Cape. Here they met with the other agriculturalists of southern Africa for the first time: the Nguni people who had moved furthest down the east coast and spoke Xhosa.

Conflict was inevitable – the trekboers wanted more land, and the Xhosa farmers wanted to hang on to theirs. The biggest struggle in South Africa's history, a struggle some say is still not over, began in all earnest: the struggle for land.

The trekboers had firearms, but the Xhosa had the numbers and the resolve. Once the British Army weighed in against the Xhosa, the battle was largely lost. In 1820, the British settled some four thousand of their citizens in the Eastern Cape.

By 1835 the trekboers on the eastern frontier, who by this time spoke a creolised, simplified Dutch dialect later called Afrikaans, started planning to move further north. They disliked the British administration, they were angry at the abolition of slavery and they needed more land for their cattle.

During the next ten years about fifteen thousand of them left the colony in convoys of oxwagons and on horseback, heading for the interior. They called themselves Voortrekkers. This process was later called the Great Trek and was much romanticised by Afrikaner historians. Many see it as the beginning of a new Afrikaner nationalism that would dominate the country a century later.

The Trek brought the Afrikaner farmers into contact with the other Bantu-speaking agriculturalists who had long been settled in the interior and on the east coast. The migrants took with them the European convictions and conventions of white superiority and applied these when structuring their relationships with the black communities. Conflict was inevitable.

The Voortrekkers' arrival in the central, eastern and northern parts of South Africa could not have come at a worse time for the established black communities. Many of these communities were involved in a process of political and social restructuring during the early 1800s, some even say the beginning of state and nation forming among them.

The pressures of colonialism from the south and of the slave and other trade to the north combined with a crippling drought and the rise of particularly strong leaders among especially the Zulu speakers on the east coast and the Sotho and Tswana speakers of the interior, brought about a widespread disorder and bloodshed out of which nations were forged. In this way Shaka became known as the father of the Zulu and Moshoeshe the father of the Basotho – two nations that didn't exist as such before. The formation of modern-day Botswana and Swaziland as separate countries also had its roots in this process.

This period of social upheaval meant that the black groups were destabilised and disorganised when the white farmers arrived in their land. It not only meant that some areas were temporarily not occupied at the time of the whites' arrival, but also that their resistance to the occupation of their land was weakened.

A remarkable piece of history played itself out during this time. Moshoeshe was the chief of a minor clan living along the foothills of the Maluti Mountains on the fringes of the uKhahlamba/Drakensberg World Heritage Site. Forces disturbed by Shaka's rise to power among the Zulu further east, fled to the interior and attacked his people. Moshoeshe ensconced himself and his people on a virtually impenetrable mountain fortress near today's Maseru in Lesotho, Thaba Bosiu, from where he attracted fleeing and traumatised groups and individuals, offering them stability and food security. Within a few years, he established the prosperous, wealthy kingdom of the Basotho. His sophisticated diplomatic style and system of participatory democracy were quite revolutionary for the early 19th century any place in the world. This visionary statesman is credited for stabilising the South African interior at its most tumultuous time.

The Voortrekkers declared the Republic of Natalia in 1838, but Britain annexed it in 1843. Most of the Voortrekkers then moved to the interior where they declared the South African Republic with Pretoria as its capital 1843 and the Republic of

the Orange Free State with Bloemfontein as capital eleven years later. The entire South Africa as we know it today was now occupied by white people.

From 1860 onwards another group was added to South Africa's ethnic diversity. Indentured labourers from India were shipped to Natal to work on the sugar plantations. They were later joined by Indian traders and entrepreneurs who came to South Africa on their own initiative. An Indian lawyer who came to South Africa on a legal assignment in 1893, Mohandas Gandhi, stayed on to fight racial discrimination. He later became one of the most powerful moral influences in the world.

When diamonds were discovered near the confluence of the Gariep and Vaal Rivers in 1867 and gold 60 km from Pretoria in 1886, it made the two Boer Republics suddenly more attractive to the British. A fierce but uneven war between the British Empire and the two republics raged between 1899 and 1902. The British soldiers followed a scorched-earth strategy and kept Boer women and children and black people who worked on the farms and in other ways associated with the Boers in inhumane concentration camps, where more than 50 000 people perished.

The two republics lost the war, but claimed to have "won the peace" when they negotiated self-government in a Union of South Africa which came to be in 1910. Despite the fact that there were four times more black people than whites in the four regions that now became provinces of the union, black people were only given a very limited franchise in the Cape only.

The reaction of black intellectuals and community leaders to this exclusion from power in the land of their birth was to form the South African Native National Congress in 1912 – the first national body of indigenous people and the first countrywide coordinated resistance to white domination. It later changed its name to the African National Congress.

White Afrikaners also formed their first national political party in 1912, the National Party, and 36 years later won the whites-only election in the Union. They immediately set about formalising the centuries-old practices of racial discrimination into a myriad of laws and formulated their ideology of racial separation, called apartheid. They declared the Union a Republic in 1961.

The ANC and, after 1957, the Pan Africanist Congress, continued their resistance to black people's exclusion from power, to the Land Acts, which gave whites ownership of 87 percent of the country's land, and to the law which stipulated that blacks had to carry "pass books" if they wanted to move around outside the traditional black areas.

It was at a demonstration against the pass laws in Sharpeville in 1960 that the resistance took a new turn. Police shot and killed 69 people, and shortly afterwards banned the two liberation movements. Both organizations went underground and changed their policies of peaceful resistance to armed struggle.

The key leaders of the ANC, including a firebrand young lawyer named Nelson Mandela, were arrested in 1963 and jailed on Robben Island, while other ANC leaders went into exile. This was followed by a hiatus in the opposition to apartheid, but in 1976 the flame of resistance was re-lit when learners at Soweto schools rose up and their revolt quickly spread throughout the country. The apartheid state became increasingly isolated internationally and in the early 1980s introduced some "reforms" to apartheid, like giving "Coloured" and Indian South Africans their own houses of parliament. It merely served to anger the majority of South Africans and the United Democratic Front was born.

Political and armed resistance continued until the then State President, FW de Klerk, unbanned the liberation movements and released Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners in 1990. The subsequent negotiations lead to the

adoption of a constitution and in April 1994 South Africa held its first elections for all citizens. The ANC won with a landslide and Nelson Mandela became the first president of a democratic South Africa.

To celebrate South Africa's seven World Heritage Sites is to celebrate this dramatic story of a special land with special people.

I regard it as a very special privilege to have been born in South Africa and to be a tiny part of this remarkable story. I am sometimes concerned that not all my fellow citizens share my enthusiasm. It is also true that people outside South Africa and Africa don't always appreciate that this ancient land and this story of the resilience of the human spirit, of refusing to accept anything but freedom and dignity, do not belong to South Africans only. The whole country should actually be a World Heritage Site. It does not matter where you were born, if you believe in the freedom of humankind, if you care about the health of our planet, if you believe we should know and respect our ancestors, then you too can stand up and declare: I am a South African....

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