

The Anti-Apartheid Movement

The institutionalized oppression of South Africa’s nonwhites came to an end in the 1990s—more than four decades after apartheid first became law—thanks to a tireless campaign of social, political, and economic activism.

For more than four decades, South Africa’s apartheid regime relied on segregation, repression, and violence to subjugate the majority black population. The regime came to an end through the tenacious efforts of the black South African nationalist movement—members of the African National Congress (ANC), Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), and other groups.

Local legal aid and educational groups, with foundation support, bolstered their work. Their efforts, along with international isolation and sanctions undermining the country’s global standing and economic health, led to the regime’s capitulation in the early 1990s. [This case study follows the anti-apartheid movement, with a particular focus on the role of philanthropy.]

What drove the dramatic political change in South Africa? Big steps backward preceded the positive leap forward. Indeed, the white Afrikaner National Party (NP) rose to power on a segregationist platform in 1948, in the wake of black South African miner strikes. Ironically, a Carnegie Corporation-funded inquiry into poverty among white South Africans and what they needed for advancement became part of the NP’s policy justification. Once elected, the NP quickly worked to formalize segregation into law, passing the Group Areas Act in 1950, which set aside specific zones for each racial group, and the Bantu Authorities Act a year

This case study is part of a series that accompanies The Bridgespan Group article “Audacious Philanthropy: Lessons from 15 World-Changing Initiatives” (*Harvard Business Review*, Sept/Oct 2017). See below for 15 stories of social movements that defied the odds and learn how philanthropy played a role in achieving their life-changing results.

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later, which created 10 “homelands” for black South Africans to live in as independent states. The latter effectively ended South African citizenship for blacks and required they carry a form of passport into white areas.

The ANC, inspired by Ghandi’s campaign of civil disobedience against British colonial rule in India, launched a decade of nonviolent opposition to the NP. In 1959 a disaffected group of ANCers broke off to form the PAC. At PAC-organized protests in Sharpeville in 1960, authorities killed nearly 70 marchers. The Sharpeville massacre led the ANC and others to conclude that nonviolent methods would not be effective against the apartheid regime. As a result, the ANC formed a military wing to target and sabotage government facilities, with Nelson Mandela as its first leader. Captured in 1962, Mandela and other leaders were sentenced to life in prison by South African authorities in 1964. Nonetheless, the campaign of resistance continued, directed by Oliver Tambo and ANC’s leadership in exile. In the midst of this turmoil, the Ford Foundation began substantial grantmaking in South Africa, initially focused on research and leadership exchange, and later moving toward a legal aid approach informed by the American civil rights movement.

During the 1970s, Carnegie re-engaged in South Africa after previously suspending operations in the 1950s, and the Rockefeller Foundation also began to invest more deeply, coordinating closely with Ford to codify evidence of apartheid’s effects and increase pressure that could help chip away at the regime. A number of other prominent US foundations such as W.K. Kellogg and Charles Stewart Mott joined the cause, helping to build local civil society organizations. Among these, foundation support helped to seed a public interest law sector, most notably the Center for Applied Legal Studies (CALS) in 1978 and the Legal Resources Centre (LRC) in 1979.

International pressure to isolate South Africa increased during this time as the government grew increasingly brutal—killing hundreds of protestors across the country following a youth uprising in the black township of Soweto in 1976. One year later, black student movement leader Steve Biko died in police custody after being arrested and beaten. Amid the brutality, the foundations’ close coordination with one another helped their teams make the case for continued investment in the black nationalist movement, despite the start (in 1977) of the movement among the United States, other Western nations, and Gulf States to cut all capital flows to South Africa, and divestment by foreign businesses.

During the 1980s, even as the South African government initiated modest reforms, such as legalizing interracial marriage and black trade unions (although prohibiting the latter from strikes), national and international pressure grew. Ford and other foundations increasingly invested in developing the local black leadership that would be needed in a post-apartheid South Africa. Philanthropists also produced two important reports: Rockefeller funded a report of the Study Commission on US Policy Toward South Africa, led by Franklin Thomas (who became the president of the Ford Foundation). Titled *Time Running Out*, the Thomas Commission report included candid, sharp denunciations by South African citizens of all races of their government’s human rights record, part of a wide-ranging effort to influence US business and foreign policy. The report had a significant public impact in the United States. For its part, Carnegie funded the *Second Carnegie Inquiry*, which attempted to unwind the impact of its first inquiry by highlighting the devastating impact of apartheid

upon black South Africans. This report, launched publicly at a week-long event at the University of Cape Town, helped to bolster domestic opposition to apartheid as well as the case for international sanctions.

Amid nationwide protests of the mid-1980s, President Botha (of the NP) declared a state of emergency that continued until the end of the regime. As political violence continued, the NP government clamped down on free speech and the media in an effort to quell national and international opposition. Here, US foundations helped to facilitate dialogue (on- and off-record) to benefit opposition leaders. They also helped to lobby successfully inside the United States for increased divestment and economic sanctions.

The country and the NP saw a leadership change just as the apartheid regime began to crumble. The new President, F.W. de Klerk, announced the gradual repeal and end of apartheid in his first speech after rising to party leader.

Philanthropy's Stake in Large-Scale Change

Our research shows that successful social change initiatives share a set of [five elements common to large-scale change](#). Here are some highlights of philanthropy's role across three of these elements, as modest yet helpful contributions to the broader anti-apartheid movement:

- **Build a shared understanding of the problem:** Much of the contribution of institutional philanthropy to the anti-apartheid movement focused on developing and disseminating a shared understanding of the problem. For example, the Carnegie Corporation's second paper on poverty in South Africa revealed devastating poverty among black South Africans at a time when sanctions prevented the World Bank from producing any similar research.
- **Design for massive scale at the outset:** A number of the philanthropic investments in this effort were made with an eye toward both strategically weakening the oppressive regime and helping lay the groundwork for a successful change, at scale. For example, in supporting the legal aid movement within South Africa, the Ford Foundation and others helped chip away at key elements of the policy regime holding blacks down. With their rigorous research reports in the 1980s, Rockefeller and Carnegie helped build support for international sanctions and divestment that increased economic and social pressure on the regime. And Ford's investment in black leaders helped to develop the talent base that would successfully lead the country after the apartheid regime finally deteriorated.
- **Drive demand, don't assume it:** One of the major successes of the anti-apartheid movement was in generating demand for change, both from inside the country and throughout the world. Foundation reports widely publicized the abuses in South Africa, and funding from foundations such as Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller helped to build grassroots organizations that called for international boycotts, divestment, and economic sanctions.

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