

# The history of soweto uprising history essay



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What started off as a harmless demonstrational march, turned into a brutal, violent riot that spread all across South Africa. On June 16, 1976, police responded to a huge mass of protesting students and teachers, with tear gas and live bullets. The people referred to it as “ cold-blooded murder”. All they wanted was a better education that they weren’t getting. The education act that was passed by the Bantu Education Department is what sparked the fire in the people of Soweto, South Africa, which caused only the beginning of the huge conflict. Protests and riots started spreading rapidly. Most of the townships covering Southern Africa were involved. It even caused a world-wide boycott of South African produce. This historical event was known as the Soweto Uprising. The students were protesting against the South African apartheid administration. They ended up being the most violent riots that the administration had ever experienced.

The Bantu Education Department enforced a law requiring that the language, Afrikaans, be the only language that secondary education be taught in. Afrikaans was a really difficult language to learn and teach. Most of the teachers didn’t even have that good of an education themselves, so the teachers would just ignore the law and try to keep teaching in English. The students felt like it wasn’t fair at all that they weren’t allowed to learn English just because they were black. They would refuse to write and speak in Afrikaans. This resulted in the teachers being fired, and the students getting expelled. Some students even went on strike, but the apartheid government would just expel them and shut down their school.

The students that were still in school were forced to go back to school in their homeland, because the lack of teachers and proper classrooms.

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Basically, no one was getting an education because the teachers couldn't teach. Therefore, the teachers got fired, the students would just keep getting expelled, or they couldn't learn in the classrooms. The teacher ratio went up from 46: 1 to 58: 1. This angered the people. They felt like the government had crossed the line, and they had to do something about the lack of education.

A protest march was set up in Johannesburg, on June 16, 1976. Over 20, 000 students went to march. Conflict started almost immediately. There was the regular tension between the blacks and the apartheid regime's police force. On top of the frustration that everyone was feeling from the education act that was passed in 1953, that started the whole thing, a lot of anger seemed to be doubled and boiling over underneath all of the stress, and chaos of the protest. When things started getting kind of confusing, police showed no mercy. They open-fired into crowds of people, rounds after rounds of tear gas, and attacked students of all ages whether they were armed or not. Sixty-nine people were killed, while one hundred and eighty six were wounded. One student described young, defenseless children, "dropping like swatted flies," after being shot.

The students fought back hard with rocks, bricks, sticks, and even book bags. The police were outnumbered, and could no longer protect themselves from the violent students. The students were now even angrier than before. After the police were gone, the students started destroying government property and making barricades to keep the police out. The whole town was a huge mess.

After word got out about what happened, the riots began to spread all over townships covering South Africa. When the government realized how crazy the riots were getting, they reacted with organized violence. Government officials shut down activities of black and anti-apartheid groups. Meetings were forced to stop, and activists were harassed. An activist named Steve Biko was forced to stop making public speeches, and wasn't allowed to be quoted in print. He ignored the law and continued to give speeches in public. He ended up being killed by a brutal police beating.

The government couldn't stop all of the protests. Since the students kept getting kicked out of school, they caused a lot of trouble with all the time that they had on their hands. A quarter of a million students were out in the streets committing crimes and getting into all kinds of trouble all day, every day. They would express their anger at apartheid by protesting, rioting, marching, and even setting government property on fire. The government tried to use their full force against the students. More and more students just kept being expelled every day. Basically the government was just asking for more conflict. The riots just continued to grow and get worse.

After the government accepted that nothing they were doing was making any progress, they started changing things back around. It took a while for the people kind of calm down, and clean up all of the damage that was done during the riots. In 1972, they starting giving the people back some of their rights, and improved their educational system. They rehired the teachers, and allowed them to teach English. They had one in five students back in the schools, and improved the classrooms. The number of students in the secondary schools increased from 12, 656 to 34, 656. Forty new schools

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were built in Soweto between 1972 and 1976. Also, with all of the students being back in school, the crime rate in Soweto decreased dramatically. There was a lot less gang activity. There were also a lot less robberies, and vandalism.

The Soweto Uprising was revolved around years of built up anger and bitterness that everyone had built up toward the apartheid government that just exploded all at once. It also signaled the beginning of the end of apartheid and racism in South Africa. Apartheid still exists in South Africa in a different way. Now it's more controlled, and not as upfront and brutal.

Even though over 360 blacks were killed during the Soweto Uprising, in the end everything ended up in its place. It happened for the good of the people. The apartheid government got what they deserved, and everything worked out for the students not only in Soweto, but it made a huge impact on the rest of South Africa as well. All of the schools and classroom environments started changing through the other townships in South Africa. The Soweto Uprising was a big turning point in the anti-apartheid struggle. After everything was all over and time passed, June 16th is now an official holiday in South Africa. It is called, Youth Day, and it was created to be a day they would remember all of the teachers and children that lost their lives, or lost everything that they had trying to fight for their right to a better education.