

The students rebellion in soweto history essay



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Apartheid in South Africa caused many problems for the Africans. Soweto was affected by Apartheid in the hardest ways that can be imagined. Soweto is an urban area south west of Johannesburg. Soweto started out as township for Africans that were increasingly being evicted. The Bantu Education started causing problems for the Afrikaans. Bantu Education is an Educational system for Africans designed to fit them for their role in apartheid society. Designed by H. F. Verwoerd and made law with the Bantu Education Act of 1953, Bantu Education placed the apartheid government in control of African education. Financing for Bantu Education was removed from the general government budget and linked instead directly to the taxes paid by Africans, which resulted in far less money spent on educating black children than white children. Though this system was put in place to isolate Africans and keep them from “ subversive” ideas, indignation towards the inferior educations they received led to large-scale resistance to Bantu Education, the most notable example being the Soweto Revolt. (Soweto Student Uprising). The riots and violence in Soweto over apartheid resulted in many wounded citizens and a few of the citizen dead, the event became known as the Soweto Uprising.

The history of Soweto Uprising is an interesting story to say the least. Bantu education was the main cause for the uprising. The Bantu Education imposed Afrikaans as the medium of instruction. Afrikaans is a language derived from Dutch that developed among the white, Khoisan, and slave populations of the Cape Colony. Afrikaans was recognized as an official language in 1925 and was further developed with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid. (Soweto Student Uprising). The Soweto Uprising came after a

decade of relative calmness also known as “ Silent Decade” (Soweto Student Uprising). During the “ Silent Decade” a new sense of resistance was becoming hard to hold back.

Some of the people involved in the Soweto uprising became famous from this incident. One person in general became the most famous from the Soweto Uprising. Hector Pieterse was shot and killed during the uprising. He was taken a photograph named Sam Nzima, he was in a picture being carried dead in the arms of a fellow student. He became an iconic image of the 1976 Soweto Uprising in apartheid South Africa. Another boy was shot and killed during the uprising. The boy’s name was Hastings Ndlovu. He was shot and killed around the same time as Pieterse, but Ndlovu didn’t get as famous as Pieterse (Soweto Student Uprising). Most of the other students say they never heard of any outside organizations before the uprising.

Though the school children may have been influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970s, many former students from Soweto do not recall any involvement of outside organizations or liberation movements in their decision to protest the use of Afrikaans at their schools (Soweto Student Uprising). In his memoir, Sifiso Ndlovu noted that him and his fellow classmates at Phefeni junior secondary school all looked forward to their studies in school, but he also noted that the use of Afrikaans significantly lower their grades because they didn’t fully understand the language (Soweto Student Uprising).

On the morning of June 16, 1976, thousands of students from the African township of Soweto, south west of Johannesburg, gathered at their schools to

participate in a student-organized protest. Many of them carried signs that read, ' Down with Afrikaans' and ' Bantu Education - to Hell with it. Others sang freedom songs as the unarmed crowd of schoolchildren marched their towards the Orlando soccer stadium where the peaceful rally had been planned. The crowd grew to well over 10, 000 students. En route to the stadium, it is estimated fifty policemen stopped the students and tried to turn them back. At first, the security forces tried non-lethal attempts to try and disperse the crowd. With the police unsuccessful in their attempt to disperse the students with tear gas and warning shots, the policemen fired directly into the crowd of protesters. Many students responded by running for cover and shelter, while others retaliated by throwing any objects the protesters could find at the police such as stones. During those shots fired in the crowd Hector Pieterse and Hastings Ndlovu were killed by stray bullets. (Soweto Student Uprising).

The Soweto riots of 1976 were the most brutal and violent riots that had taken place against the South African apartheid administration and the Bantu education. It was also amazing in how far the riots reached and how fast it spread to other regions. Its significance of the Soweto Uprising would go way beyond the violence on the streets. The police actions during the riots would be part of what instigated a world-wide boycott of South African produce and signaled the increased militancy of the black population of South Africa (1976: The Soweto riots). During a reorganization of the Bantu Education Department of the government, the South African Apartheid Government decided to start enforcing a forgotten law requiring that secondary education be conducted only in Afrikaans, rather than in English

or any of the native African languages. This was taken with very high anger by both teachers and students. Many teachers themselves did not speak Afrikaans (an extremely difficult language to learn) and so could not teach the students. The students hated being forced to learn a language that their oppressors made and saw it as a direct attempt to cut them off from their original culture and try to keep them from becoming educated, powerful, and wealthy.

By 1976, many teachers were not enforcing the directive and were fired, which triggered a staff resignations. The tensions grew between the Teachers and as well as the students against the Bantu education and also the Afrikaans language created by their oppressors. Students refused to write papers in Afrikaans and were kicked out of their school. Students of one school after another went on strike and protested the Bantu Education. The government response was to simply shut down all schools that went in strike and likewise expel the striking students (1976: The Soweto riots). A protest march that was organized in the black Soweto Township just outside Johannesburg was to take place on June 16 1976. Over 10, 000 students showed up to the march, followed closely by the police. The regular day from day tension between the blacks and the apartheid regime's police force was directed now with the anger aimed at the recent passing of the education act. Conflict began almost immediately after the protest formed, as police fired shots after shots of tear-gas and then shot their warning shots into the air the group of people showed little effect. The police showed no mercy by attacking students of all ages, armed or unarmed. In the book, Kaffir Boy, a young man named David described the police's actions on the first day of

the riot during the uprising: “ They opened fire. They didn’t give any warning. They simply opened fire...And small children, small defenseless children, dropped down like swatted flies. This is murder, cold-blooded murder”. (1976: The Soweto Riots).

The Soweto Uprising was of riot created as a rising anger towards Apartheid and the Bantu Education. The event could have easily been avoided if the bantu education would have just allowed the natives to speak their own languages instead making it mandated to speak Afrikaans. Do you think the action took by the students and teachers were justified? How would you have handled the situation back in that day and time?