Topics liable to be censored in apartheid South Africa (1948–90) included: contemporary history; the emergence of African nationalism (including the history of the various political organizations involved) in South Africa, South West Africa (Namibia), and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa; the development of Black Power organizations in the United States; and the history of communism and communist parties in Europe. Due to the absence of many historical documents, academic research on South Africa’s history could often be more successfully pursued outside than inside the country.

1950 In 1950 history student Mangosuthu Buthelezi (1928–), a descendant of Cetshwayo (last king of independent Zululand, ruled 1872–79, 1883–84), was expelled from Fort Hare University for his role in the protest against a visit by the governor-general of South Africa. In 1951 Buthelezi received a degree in history from the University of Natal, Durban. He was officially appointed chief of the Buthelezis in 1957. In 1976 he became chief minister of the KwaZulu homeland with the approval of the African National Congress (ANC), but he refused to accept independence for KwaZulu. Heading the cultural and political Inkatha movement (1975–), he increasingly followed his own political strategy.

1952– The two-volume Three Hundred Years: A History of South Africa (Cape Town 1952), written by the white left-wing author Hosea Jaffe (1921–), appeared under the pen name Mnguni. The book, banned until [1984], was published as part of an opposition campaign against the celebration of three hundred years’ white settlement in South Africa and looked at South Africa’s history as a struggle between oppressors and oppressed. The author, who had asserted as early as the 1940s that segregation was connected with the capitalist system, went into exile in Europe. In 1980 a new and expanded Italian edition of the book was published. Another, Marxist-inspired, book, The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest (Johannesburg ?1952), by Dora Taylor (died in the late 1970s), was published under the pen name Nosipho Majekela. The book presented the missionaries as agents of British imperialism. Taylor went to London in the early 1960s. Both books anticipated the work of the radical historians of the 1970s.

1953– In 1953 British socialist historian of Africa Basil Davidson (1914–), then a foreign correspondent for the New Statesman and Nation (1950–54), became a “prohibited immigrant” (1953–794) because in 1951–52 he had written articles and a book against apartheid. Trying to return in 1953, he was allowed only transit rights to Swaziland. In 1954 he was dismissed from the New Statesman and Nation because of his strong criticism of the then controversial policy of German rearmament. The prohibited immigrant order in South Africa also prompted Davidson's banning by the Central African Federation (the two Rhodesias and Nyasaland) and from East Africa (Tanganyika, Uganda, Kenya). After a 1954 visit to Angola, he criticized forced labor and racial discrimination in the Portuguese colonies, which earned him a banning order there too. In 1967–74 Davidson undertook several trips to those areas of the Portuguese colonies under control of liberation movements.

1953 The South African government banned Silas Molema (1891–1965), ANC treasurer (1949–53), inter alia because he had condemned the apartheid view of history in a speech during the 1952 celebrations. His Bantu Past and Present: An Ethnographical and Historical Study of the Native Races of South Africa (Edinburgh 1920) had reportedly been scarcely distinguishable from the accounts of his white contemporaries, but gradually he had changed his views.

–1958 In December 1958, the ban on Slavery to Freedom: A History of American Negroes (second edition 1956), by John Hope Franklin, an Afro-American historian of the South at Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, N.Y. (1956–64) and later the University of Chicago (1964–82), was lifted.

1959– Several critical and radical historians left South Africa, often (but not always) as exiles, and lived in the United Kingdom, where much of the new work on South African history first appeared: Shula Marks (1936–), lecturer (1963–76), reader (1976–84), and director (1983–93) at the London Institute of Commonwealth Studies and professor in Commonwealth History and Southern African history (1993–) at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, cofounder (1974) and chair (1998–) of the Journal of Southern African Studies, and specialist in class, race, ethnicity and gender aspects of Zulu history. Marks left in late 1959 but was always able to go back to South Africa to do research. She was subjected to constant scrutiny in the archives, however, especially after 1976 when archivists...
were warned to watch her research; Harold Wolpe (1926–), tutor at Oxford University (1965–66), lecturer at Bradford University (1966–69), principal lecturer and head of sociology at the Polytechnic of North London (1969–73), lecturer (1973–76), senior lecturer (1976–87) and reader (1987–) at the sociology department of the University of Essex; Stanley Trapido (1933–), lecturer in politics at Durham University (1966–70), lecturer in the government of new states (1970–) and senior research fellow in African Studies, Lincoln College, Oxford University (1987–); historian Frederick Johnstone (1944–), who became a lecturer in sociology; Marxist historian Martin Legassick (1940–), exiled in [1974], became a lecturer in sociology at Warwick University. In 1979 he was one of those suspended from the ANC for advocating stronger links with the proletariat. In 1996 he worked at the University of the Western Cape.

1960– In August or September 1960, two South African security officials reportedly attended a lecture on South African historiography given by historian Leonard Thompson (1916–), history professor at Cape Town University (1946–61), at a conference on African history organized by the University College of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland in Salisbury. In 1961 Thompson emigrated and worked as a professor of African history at the University of California, Los Angeles (1961–68), and as a history professor and founder-director of the Southern Africa Research Program at Yale University, New Haven CT (1968–85).

1960–90 Among the banned historical works were Leo Kuper (1908–94), An African Bourgeoisie: Race, Class and Politics in South Africa (Princeton 1965); Hans Kohn (1891–1971) and Wallace Sokolsky, African Nationalism in the Twentieth Century (1965); K. E. Lloyd Hooper, Landmarks of South African History, and Gideon S. Were, A History of South Africa (the ban of this last book was lifted in April 1985). Also banned were History and Class Consciousness (originally German 1923; Cambridge Mass. 1971), by Hungarian cultural philosopher György Lukács (1885–1971); Marks [q.v. 1959–] and Trapido [q.v. 1959–] eds., The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century South Africa (1988); Mzala [q.v. 1984–91], Gatsha Buthelezi: Chief with a Double Agenda (1988); Wolpe [q.v. 1963–], Race, Class and the Apartheid State (1988); all paperback editions of the novels I, Claudius and King Jesus by Robert Graves (1895–1985). Among the works on a list of banned books, compiled by the United Nations Center Against Apartheid in [1973], and not already mentioned, were the following: Chapters in the History of the March to Freedom (Cape Town 1959) by Lionel Forman (1927–59); Marxism in the Twentieth Century (originally French 1966; London 1970) by French communist philosopher Roger Garaudy (1913–); A History of Postwar Africa (London 1965) by John Hatch; South Africa: A Political and Economic History (London [1966]) by Alex Hepple; The Idea of Racialism: Its Meaning and History (Princeton 1962) by Louis Snyder (1907–); and History of the Twentieth Century: Race and Colour. In 1990 many publications were unbanned, including South Africa Belongs to Us: History of the ANC (Harare 1988) by Francis Meli (1942–90), an exile working for the ANC (1963–), and Unity in Action: A Photographic History of the African National Congress. In 1991 the works of Simons [q.v. 1965–90] and Wolpe [q.v. 1959–] could be quoted and disseminated again.

1963– From June 1963 staff of the State Archives Service (SAS) collaborated with the security police in spying on reading room users. SAS was denied membership in the International Council on Archives and suffered from isolation, particularly during the cultural boycott of the 1980s. In the same period (the 1980s), SAS was also forced by the apartheid government to withdraw unrestricted access to certain previously accessible records in its custody. Various bantustan (or homeland) archives services reportedly neglected public records.

1963–79 In 1963 Neville Alexander (1936–), educator and political activist with an M.A. in history and German (1957) and a doctorate in German literature (1961), was arrested. In 1961 he had formed the Yu Chi Chan Club to study guerrilla warfare and founded the National Liberation Front, which advocated the violent overthrow of the state. In 1964 he was convicted of conspiracy to commit sabotage and sentenced to ten years’ imprisonment at the penal Robben Island. After his release in 1974, he was banned and put under house arrest for five years.

1963–85 Late in 1963 Kwedi Mkalipi (1934–), member of the banned Pan-African Congress, was arrested and charged with unlawful activities. Released in April 1964, he was rearrested in November under the ninety-days detention law. Charged with sabotage in March 1965, he was sentenced in February 1966 to twenty years’ imprisonment. On Robben Island, he obtained a B.A. in history and Xhosa. He was released in December 1985.

1964–90 In 1964 Trotskyist Baruch Hirson (1921–99) was convicted of sabotage and sentenced to nine years’ imprisonment for his part in the activities of the armed African Resistance Movement. In prison he became a historian. An exile in the United Kingdom after his release in 1973, he wrote several books about the history of the South African black working class.

1964– In 1964 Sylvia Neame (1937–), a historian studying the national liberation movement (notably the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union), was imprisoned for her CPSA membership in several jails.
In April 1967, she went into exile and worked at her Ph.D. first at the University of London, and from [1971] at Leipzig University, German Democratic Republic. After obtaining her degree in 1976, she worked as a historian at Leipzig University specialized in theoretical questions of national liberation. Her writings were censored.

1965–90 In January 1965 antiapartheid activist Edward [= Eddie] Roux (1903–66) was forced to resign as professor of botany at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (1946–64), after which he was allowed neither to teach nor to publish. Almost all his works, including Time Longer Than Rope: A History of the Black Man’s Struggle for Freedom in South Africa (London 1948, 1964) were banned until 1990 because he had been a prewar member of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA). At the time, he spent several terms in prison (1930, 1934, 1936).

In May 1965 Jack Simons (1907–95), Marxist lecturer in African governmental law at Cape Town University (1937–), and Latvian-born Ray Alexander Simons (1914–), trade union organizer, both CPSA members, left South Africa. In 1954 Alexander had been elected as a member of Parliament but was prevented from taking her seat because she was listed as a communist. In December 1964 Simons had been barred from teaching and conducting research under the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act. In the United Kingdom, where Simons got a fellowship at Manchester University, Simons and Alexander completed Class and Colour in South Africa 1850–1950 (1969), a book banned but read clandestinely in South Africa. They finally settled in Lusaka, where Simons became professor of sociology at the University of Zambia (until 1975) and Alexander worked for the International Labor Office. Later Simons became a member of the ANC’s constitutional committee. In 1990 both returned from exile.

1966–73 During his years as a foundation professor at the University of Zambia, Lusaka, South African historian John Omer-Cooper (1931–98)—author of a work on the Mfecane or “Time of Troubles” during the reign of Zulu King Shaka (?1787–1828); first president of the Historical Association of Zambia; and pro-vice-chancellor (1971–73)—was nearly killed with a letter bomb because of his opposition to apartheid. In 1974 he accepted a chair in the history department at Otago University, New Zealand.

1971–72 In February 1972 Benjamin Pogrund (1933–), assistant editor at the Johannesburg Rand Daily Mail and the first African affairs reporter on a white South African newspaper, was found guilty of possessing written notes and copies of the banned publications New Age, Guardian, and Fighting Talk, which he needed for doctoral research on the history of African nationalism in South Africa. Many of the documents were twenty years old and had only just been banned. The materials apparently included information dealing with the ANC in the 1940s (before the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act proscribed the ANC). At the trial (started November 1971 but adjourned), Pogrund received nine months’ imprisonment suspended for three years, reduced on appeal to one month suspended for three years on the grounds that the material had been acquired for study purposes only. In an earlier case (1965–69), he had been intimidated and harassed because of his involvement in a three-part Rand Daily Mail series on prison conditions.

1975 In September Jenny Curtis, archivist at the South African Institute of Race Relations, was arrested and detained under the 1967 Terrorism Act. She was released in November.

1975–91 In May 1985 John Pampallis started writing a history textbook for the last two years of the secondary Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, near Morogoro, Tanzania, an ANC school for young South African exiles. The textbook’s emphasis was on the history of national liberation and labor movements. In 1991 a revised version, Foundations of the New South Africa, was also distributed within South Africa. After fifteen years’ exile, eight of which he had spent as a history teacher, Pampallis returned to South Africa to become director of the Center for Educational Policy Development, University of Natal.

1978 A lawsuit was initiated against distribution of a pamphlet entitled Heroes of Yesterday, Martyrs of the Struggle, published by the Black People’s Convention, for “fomenting feelings of hostility between different population groups”. The pamphlet called upon people to observe a week of mourning in commemoration of the victims of the 21 March 1960 Sharpeville uprising and other incidents, including the 1976 events in Soweto. The appellants were acquitted on appeal.

1978–2002 From 1978 to 1996, many state records, especially on the inner workings of the security apparatus, were destroyed in an attempt to remove incriminating evidence and, in the words of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), “to sanitize the history of the apartheid era”, particularly in 1990–94 when deliberate destruction occurred systematically and massively. In June 1993 the destruction was explicitly sanctioned by the cabinet and designed, according to the TRC, “to deny a new government access to apartheid secrets through a systematic purging of official memory”. In mid-1993 archivist Verne Harris disclosed the destruction to the press, then to Lawyers for Human Rights. The latter challenged the authorization in court. In 1997–98 Harris represented the National Archives in a TRC investigation into the destruction of records by the apartheid state In 1997 he became deputy director of the National Archives of South Africa. The National Intelligence Agency destroyed records as late as
November 1996, in defiance of two government moratoria on the destruction of public records. Before 1990 “sensitive” records were routinely destroyed by state bodies, particularly those within the security services. Records confiscated from the antiapartheid resistance were apparently completely destroyed. In April 2002 thousands of TRC documents were declared confidential by the National Intelligence Agency.

1979–87 During his imprisonment (1964–87), Govan Mbeki (1910–2001), teacher, journalist, former CPSA member, former national ANC chairman, and one of the founders of the ANC military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe, established a program of political education at Robben Island. In the years after 1979, he wrote two syllabi: a detailed history of the ANC and a materialist history of the development of human society. Both were based on material drawn from newspapers and texts he received as part of correspondence courses in economics from the University of South Africa, Pretoria. In December 1987, after his release, Mbeki was formally banned and restricted to Port Elizabeth. After the 1994 elections, he became vice-president of the Senate. Having been arrested in July 1963 and then tried with other ANC leaders in 1964 on charges of conspiracy to overthrow the South African government, Mbeki had originally been sentenced to life imprisonment.

1979

In March, during a conference lecture at the University of South Africa, Floris [= Floors] van Jaarsveld (1922–95), history professor at the Afrikaner University of Pretoria, attempted to demythologize the Battle of the Blood River where the Boers defeated the Zulus on 16 December 1838, an event annually commemorated. After about five minutes of reading, a thirty-person contingent of the far-right Afrikaner Weerstands Beweging (AWB; Afrikaner Resistance Movement) burst into the hall and poured tar and feathers over van Jaarsveld. AWB leader Eugene Terre’Blanche was quoted as saying: “As young Afrikaners we have reached the end of our tether. Our spiritual heritage and everything we consider holy to the Afrikaner are being trampled underfoot and desecrated by... ‘stray’ academics and false prophets who hide under the cloak of learning and false religion like Professor Floors van Jaarsveld. In this symposium they defile the holiest of holies of the Afrikaner being. This attitude is blasphemous and annuls the meaning of Afrikaner history.” Around the same time, van Jaarsveld’s house was shot at. In 1991 van Jaarsveld publicly apologized for the distorted way in which he had for four decades depicted South African history.

1984–91

After 1984 Buthelezi [q.v. 1950] publicly attacked historians who did not share his view of history. In a September 1984 speech, he attacked Thomas Karis (1919–), professor of political science at City College, City University of New York, and Tom Lodge, lecturer and later professor of politics at the University of the Witwatersrand for their “histories of the ANC”. In 1987 he allegedly threatened with prosecution Gerhard Mare and Georgina Hamilton for their book An Appetite for Power: Buthelezi’s Inkatha and South Africa (Braamfontein/Bloomington 1987). In 1988 he threatened with prosecution distributors and libraries selling or lending Gatsha Buthelezi: Chief with a Double Agenda, by Mzala, a member of the ANC Research Department in Lusaka. On 21 September 1991, Shaka Day, he attacked Marks [q.v. 1959–] in his speech.

1984–85

John Laband wrote the manuscript of a study commissioned by the KwaZulu government, Fight Us in the Open: The Anglo-Zulu War through Zulu Eyes (Pietermaritzburg 1985). After historian Oscar Dholomo (1943–), minister of education and culture of KwaZulu (1978–) and Inkatha secretary-general (1978–90), had read it, Laband had to excise evidence that Mnyamana, grandfather of Buthelezi [q.v. 1950], had displayed poor generalship in the 1879 war.

1985

In 1985, John Marincowitz (1950–) lived in exile in London, where he completed a Ph.D in history at the School for Oriental and African Studies, Rural Production and Labour in the Western Cape, 1833–1888, with Special Reference to the Wheat Growing Districts (1985).

1986–

In mid-1986 Annica van Gylswyk, archivist at the Documentation Center for African Studies at the University of South Africa and activist for the women’s organization Black Sash, was detained. As she was closely involved with the antiapartheid movement, security police interrogations focused on her travels as a collector of archival material. She was put under severe pressure for some weeks and her employers placed her on unpaid leave. Imprisoned without trial, she elected to be deported to Sweden. She was a Swedish citizen, although she had lived in South Africa for thirty years.

1986

In December Philip Bonner, British historian at the history department, University of the Witwatersrand, expert on labor history and History Workshop coorganizer, was served with a deportation order. He had been a trade union adviser and editor of a labor magazine. He was later allowed to stay after giving an “unequivocal undertaking that he would employ only lawful means in the pursuit of bona fide academic activities”.

1989

An author writing on the artificial historical legitimation of President Lennox Sebe’s Ciskei government preferred to remain anonymous.

On 1 May David Webster (1945–89), lecturer in social anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand, editor of Essays in South African Labour History (1978), and History Workshop
member, was shot dead in Johannesburg by three unidentified gunmen believed to belong to a hit squad of the Civil Cooperation Bureau, a secret wing of the South African Defence Force. As an anthropologist, Webster conducted research into the culture of the Thembe-Tonga people of the Kosi Bay region, Natal. As a human-rights activist, he opposed population removals as a result of conservation policies in the region; he was also interested in the covert South African aid to Mozambican Renamo rebels based in northern Zululand. As a member of the Detainees’ Parents Support Committee (an organization publicizing the plight of thousands of detainees held without charge or trial, itself banned in 1988), he was engaged in research into death squads. Because his killing was condemned by the minister of law and order, a high-level police inquiry was opened. In May 1996 his partner Maggie Friedman, testifying to the TRC, denounced the fact that the numerous investigations and inquiries into Webster’s death had remained without results and also denounced the destruction or disappearance of some of the documentation. In June 1998 a former Civil Cooperation Bureau agent was sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder.

1991 On 21 March Cape Town police fired tear gas and rubber bullets at crowds commemorating Sharpeville Day. A similar incident took place at Uitenhage.

1993 People Making History was a four-volume work (Harare 1985–93), the first two volumes of which (1985, 1987), written by Peter Storr Garlake (1934–) and André Proctor, were banned until 1993.

1997 In 1997 writer Gertrude Fester, who spent two years in prison for ANC activities before 1990, was writing a history of the ANC women’s movement.

1998–2002 The 1998 release of the five-volume TRC report in October provoked strong reactions. Former State President F.W. de Klerk challenged the report in court and was successful in having a short section removed (namely that he had been an accessory after the fact to the Khotso House bombing of August 1988). The ANC claimed that its own abuses were justified because it was fighting a national liberation war against an abusive regime. The ANC’s court injunction, intended to delay the disclosure of some of the TRC’s findings on ANC human rights violations, such as the targeting of civilians and indiscriminate use of landmines, failed. In March 2002, the TRC was formally dissolved. Publication of its final volume was, however, delayed when the Inkatha Freedom Party obtained a court order to prevent this. The army denied accusations that it had failed to turn over thousands of documents to the TRC. There was also concern that TRC documents relating to the previous government’s chemical and biological weapons program had “disappeared” after having been handed to the National Intelligence Agency. Volume six of the TRC report, published in 2003, contained a version of the deleted passage about De Klerk after De Klerk had approved it.

2000 In January the South African government introduced a controversial “equality and prevention of unfair discrimination bill” banning the use of “hurtful and abusive” words such as “kaffir”, “boer” and “coolie”. It was feared that the law would ban history books quoting speeches by apartheid-era leaders.


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