

# IT IS THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE AND TEACHING OF HISTORY THAT SOUTH AFRICA'S DEMOCRACY CAN FLOURISH AND SUCCEED

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## **Introduction**

With history being made all the time, every day seems to be the first anniversary of something awful (Anonymous).

If we fail in this most important area provided by the constitution to seize the opportunity and run with it we would have not this only fail this generation, but many generations to come. Many institution help to develop citizens' knowledge and skills and shape their civic character and commitments: family, religious institutions, the media, and community groups all exert important influences. Schools, however, bear a special and historic responsibility for the development of civic competency and responsibility (Dayton, 1995: Dewey, 1916). Quoted from SASHT Newsletter, 9 May 2005. In the article educating Democratic minds in South African Public Schools: history and hidden curriculum, the author Sonja Schoeman argues for the role of hidden curriculum in addition to formal curriculum in the citizenship development:

“Education is about reasoning, criticizing and taking value from mistakes and attitudes of the past and evaluation. Discovery and learning from mistakes enrich critical thinking. Our next generations of leaders deserve this “balanced diet” the debate must be about choice, diversity and experience.”

Unless this potentially vital area of school life is managed and explored in South African public schools, opportunities for citizenship education will be lost ( Sonja Schoeman). In this paper, Chapter 9 Institutions which supports democracy are going to be analysed and their intended benefit to democracy explored and that history is best suited to do just that. The curriculum, teaching, methods and textbooks at all levels and in all programmes of education and training, should encourage independent

and critical thought, the capacity to question, enquire, reason, weigh evidence and form judgements, achieve understanding, recognize the provisional and incomplete nature of most human knowledge, and communicate clearly ( Transforming Education and Training in South Africa : White Paper 1. 1995). If all these elements are not obtainable in history, which other school subjects is best positioned to live up to the aspirations of the education system?

The core values in history are those of the South African constitution. These values are vital for understanding and addressing human rights in South Africa. History should make a crucial contribution to transforming society by helping learners to apply the values that are embodied in the constitution to their lives and those around them. History explores issues of gender, race class, xenophobia and genocide and the impact that these have had in the past and present. We must challenge these critical issues as part of the process to transforming society (History for all 2004

The Greek historian Herodotus coined the word 'history'. He asked questions wherever he went. The word 'history' comes from the Greek word 'historia' which means "knowledge acquired through investigation" whatever is taught should promote critical thinking, questioning and reflection. Knowledge of facts has no value.

History should contribute to the realization of the vision for South Africa "a prosperous, truly united, democratic and internationally competitive country with literate, creative and critical citizens leading productive, self fulfilled lives in a country free of violence, and prejudice.

### **How does the teaching of history supports democracy?**

The first answer to the question comes from the Preamble of the South African constitution: "We, the people of South Africa, Recognise the injustices of our past: Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land: Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country: and Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity."

We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to:

- Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights.
- Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law;
- Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free potential of each person; and
- Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.

May God protect our people.

Nkosi Sikelel' I Afrika. Moreno boloka setjhaba sa heso

God seen Suid – Africa. God bless South Africa.

Mudzimu fhatutshedza Afurika. Hosi katekisa Afrika.

The following address by Governor Harry Smith in 1948 to Xhosa chiefs comes to mind:

Your land shall be marked out and marks placed that you may all know it, bearing English names, you shall learn to speak English at the schools which I shall establish for you. You may no longer be naked and wicked barbarians, which you will ever be unless you labour and become industrious. You shall be taught to plough. You shall have traders, and you must teach your people to bring gum, timber and hides to sell, that you may learn the art of money, and buy for yourselves. You must learn that it is money that makes people rich by work, and help me make roads I will pay you.

(In search of history 2005)

When thinking about the cause of the Anglo Zulu war of in 1879, Zululand stood on the way for the fulfillment of British policy in South Africa. To achieve this aim Frere looked for a way to start a conflict with the Zulus, he took up the disputed issue of the blood river Territory and submitted it to an arbitration court appointed by the Natal Government. Frere 's expectations were shattered when the court found the Transvaal's claim unsubstantiated and gave the Zulu even more than Cetshwayo had asked for.

Frere was determined to extricate himself from his difficult position and had to force the Zulu kingdom to war by any means. He found an excuse in a minute incident of frontier violation. Frere treated the case as major one and used it as the justification for an ultimatum to the Zulu king. Frere demanded not only the surrender of Sihayo's brother and sons together with a substantial fine, but the demobilization of the

Zulu army and the permanent abandonment of the military system. Cetshwayo had to agree to accept a British diplomat resident who would see that these demands were carried out in full. Frere was well aware that it would be virtually impossible for Cetshwayo to agree to these demands. They meant the destruction of the political system of his kingdom and the surrender of its independent sovereignty. In spite of repeated warnings from London not to provoke war with the Zulu, Frere was determined to do so

( Omer Cooper,1980) Both these illustrations point to the clause in the preamble of our constitution which speaks of injustices of the past. This bear testimony to Carl von Clausewitz's often quoted phrase that war is " a continuation of political activity by other means" Basing from Frere's first step, Von Clausewitz might as well have said that law is a continuation of political activity by other means( City Press 18/9/05).

Further to this episode we can also look closely at what has become known as the Trekkers; why did the mainly Dutch – speaking Eastern Cape farmers migrated out of the cape? Several theories are advanced for the cause of the migration; which are:

The trekkers objected to the social implications of freeing the slaves. They wrote that placing freed slaves and Khoikhoi servants on, as they put it "an equal footing with Christians, is contrary to the laws of God and the natural distinction of race and colour. The second theory is cites economic reasons. The trekkers had not benefited from the growth of commercial wool farming. Many of them, including one of the leaders, Piet Retief were heavily in debt to the government and to banks. Leaving the colony seemed to be a solution to their financial problems. The third theory is that some of the trekkers hoped to claim profitable land in Natal before the Cape merchant companies could do so.

(In search of history 2005)

The Cape Times of 6 September 1847 had this story...

Let the war be made against Kaffir (Xhosas) huts and gardens. Let all these be burned down and be destroyed let there be no ploughing, sowing ,or reaping if you cannot conveniently, or without bloodshed prevent cultivation of the ground, take care to destroy the enemy' crops before they are ripe and shoot all who resist. Shoot their cattle too wherever you see any. Tell them that the time has come for the white man to show his mastery of them. Knowledge of where we are coming from is important in leaving an indelible mark to our future generations. The period of

migration seems to have occurred simultaneously with slavery as John Saffin wrote in Winthrop papers that 'God hath ordained different degrees and orders of men, some to be high and honourable some to be low and despicable, others to be subjects and to be commanded... Yea some to be born slaves, and so remain during their lives.

## **What are the constitutional guarantees that such injustices will never occur?**

Chapter 9 of the constitution establishes state institutions supporting constitutional democracy. A number of them are established but for the purposes of our discussion we will limit ourselves to the following:

South African Human Rights Commission, Commission for the Promotion and protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities, Commission for Gender Equality and lastly the Electoral Commission.

Section 181 deals with the establishment and governing principles. Sub section (2) state that these institutions are independent, and subject only to the constitution and the law, and they must be impartial and must exercise their powers and perform their functions without fear, favour or prejudice. (3) Other organs of state, through legislative and other measures, must assist and protect these institutions to ensure the independence, impartiality, dignity and effectiveness of these institutions. (4) No persons or organ of state may interfere with the functioning of these institutions.

(5) These institutions are accountable to the National Assembly, and must report on their activities and the performance of their functions to the assembly at least once a year.

## **Functions of the aforementioned state institutions**

*South African Human Rights Commission must:*

1. Promote respect for human rights and a culture of human rights;
2. Promote the protection, development and attainment of human rights; and
3. Monitor and assess the observance of human rights in the republic.
4. Commission for the promotion and protection of the Rights of

Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities;

5. Promote respect for the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities;
6. To promote and develop peace, friendship, humanity, tolerance and national unity among cultural, religious and linguistic communities, on the basis of equality, non discrimination and free association;
7. Recommend the establishment or recognition, in accordance with national legislation, of a cultural or other council or councils for a community or communities in South Africa.

Lastly the commission has the power, as regulated by national legislation, necessary to achieve its primary objects, including the power to monitor, investigate, research, educate, lobby. Advice and report on issues concerning the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities.

*Commission for Gender Equality:*

1. Must promote respect for gender equality and the protection, development and attainment of gender equality it has the power to report on issues concerning gender equality.

*Electoral Commission must:*

1. Manage elections of national, provincial and municipal legislative bodies in accordance with national legislation;
2. Ensure that those elections are free and fair;
3. Declare the results of those elections within a period that must be prescribed by national legislation and that is as short as reasonably possible.

*The section dealing with education and training in the Interim constitution of 1993 states:*

The government is bound to interpret the meaning of individual sections of the constitution in a manner which

- Is balanced and reasonable;
- Takes into account other relevant provisions of the constitution;
- Affirms the constitutional goal of a new order of our society;

- Is consistent with the spirit of an open society based on democracy and equality;
- Protects the fundamental rights freedoms and civil liberties of all persons;
- Upholds the collective rights of persons to language, culture and religion based on non – discrimination and free association.

At this stage we might compare our constitution with that of the United States of America especially American preamble which reads as follows:

We, the people of the United States in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity do ordain and establish the constitution for the USA.

Knowledge of events and laws of the past became more important as societies grew larger and more complicated. Kings wanted to know who their ancestors had been and what brave deeds they had done. Other people wanted to know how land had been divided and how taxes had been paid so they would not be cheated. In most of Africa, however, local languages were not written. Although the Arabic language was both written and spoken in Africa, most of Africa's people did not use it. As a result, history and laws were memorized. In West Africa, a special group of people called griots were the professional record keepers, historians, and political advisors to chiefs. Griots were living libraries of information about their societies past. To become a griot, young men underwent a long careful education. He traveled from village to village, studying under famous griot, learning all they had to teach, memorizing everything. Kings and other important people in West Africa always had griot attached to their families. He was given food, clothing, and shelter in exchange for poems about the family. Having a griot ensured that the family's name and deeds would be remembered. The griot also entertained the family with poems and stories of the tribe's history. If a noble family fell on hard times, the members often would sell their horses and all their belongings before they would dismiss the family griot.

Through grits, history has been passed on from generation to gene-

ration for at least the last eight centuries. Some griots today can remember detailed family histories that go back more than 200 years and can recite the brave deeds of famous kings who lived 700 years ago (Pre Colonial History, 1975)

In conclusion we may confirm from the analysis that History is the discipline most suited to promote democratic values, tolerance, good citizenship and nation building

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