

# “Class D coloureds”: The establishment of Noordgesig, 1939-1948

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## *Abstract*

Noordgesig Township is situated on the edge of Soweto, bordering the better known Orlando Township. This article pieces together the history of the township and its residents from the late 1930s to the beginning of the apartheid government in 1948. This is the first academic study of Noordgesig, and the first to include the township in the historical analysis of Soweto. The article is a contribution to the under-researched history of coloured townships in the Johannesburg area. It explores the heterogeneous categories of class and race that influenced government policies and propelled some urban township dwellers into a vaguely defined group termed “Class D coloureds”: those classified as “near native”, “families of mixed race as cannot be classified as either coloured or native” or “racially mixed coloureds” were considered for housing in Noordgesig and regarded as “Class D coloureds”. Furthermore, the article highlights the various class, race and skin colour distinctions used at the time the township was established to decide who could reside there. This complex politics of identification was further complicated by the then current idea that coloureds should not live close to blacks. This notion of racial proximity as a factor governing the relationship between the coloured inhabitants of Noordgesig and the black township residents of Orlando was put to the test with the construction of the township. In the article it is argued that these spurious distinctions based on class, race and skin colour were used to justify the placement of Noordgesig next to Orlando, which had lasting implications for both the state and residents. It is further contended that the perceived differences between the types of coloured people housed in Noordgesig influenced the creation of a unique identity experience among so-called “Class D coloureds” which problematises the grand narrative of coloured identity based largely on experiences from the Cape region.

**Keywords:** Noordgesig; Coloured Identity; Urban History; Johannesburg; Soweto; Class; Skin Colour.

## **Introduction**

Identity – who we are, where we come from, what we are – is difficult to maintain ... we are the “other”, an opposite, a flaw in the geometry of resettlement, an exodus.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E Said (1986), P Ahluwalia & A Zegeye, “Between black and white: Rethinking coloured identity”, *African Identities*, 1(2), 2003, pp. 253-280.

The original plan was to put the so-called class D coloured people at Schoongezicht. The deputy town clerk had shown ... a map which showed that this township was adjacent to Orlando, but on the town side. IT WAS NOTED that representations might be made to move this township further away from Orlando and native influences.<sup>2</sup>

Image 1: The general location of Noordgesig (grey dot) in the greater Johannesburg region



Source: Available at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noordgesig#/media/File:Greater\\_Johannesburg\\_OpenStreetMap\\_small.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noordgesig#/media/File:Greater_Johannesburg_OpenStreetMap_small.svg), as accessed on 23 March 2017.

This quotation from the minutes of a meeting of Johannesburg European Coloured Council (JECC) in 1939 regarding housing at Orlando, with reference to Noordgesig, shows how ingrained was the notion of both a class difference and social distance between coloureds and blacks prior to apartheid.<sup>3</sup> Significantly, class and proximity to ill-defined black “influences”

2 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, Joint European Coloured Council (hereafter JECC) meeting minutes ‘Housing at Orlando’, 23 June 1939. Emphasis in the original. Noordgesig was known by a number of names at its establishment; see the later discussion of some of these.

3 Johannesburg Joint Councils were mixed-race committees that discussed various aspects of housing, urban planning, and other social and economic aspects of the city. They were quite successful in putting some of their recommendations into effect. However, even though they were supposed to be neutral bodies they were ultimately controlled by their white members, who adopted a paternalistic role in relation to the ‘non-white’ population they had power over. Thus, most ideas they recommended were very close to state policies. For example, they were early proponents of turning parts of the western areas of Johannesburg into a coloured and white living area in the 1950s by removing blacks and Indians living there to segregated group areas. For pre-apartheid notions of class and its impact on housing, see also O Crankshaw, “Class, race and residence in black Johannesburg, 1923-1970”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 18(4), 2005, pp. 353-393.

were sufficiently compelling reasons to persuade authorities that the removal of Noordgesig residents was necessary. For the purpose of this article the term “class” is used as a basic marker of economic differentiation to categorise people according to their economic standing in society, their access to power or means of production and their efforts to stake claims to their own identity or engage in a class struggle. It will be shown throughout the article how the early inhabitants of Noordgesig fitted the description of “Class D coloureds”.

In the JECC document cited above, “Class D coloureds” were defined as the poorest type of coloured people. This document is the only one in which the term was used in reference to the type of people to be housed in Noordgesig. It is unclear where the term “Class D coloured” originates, and whether it was a term commonly used by the Joint Councils. In other documents relating to the establishment of Coronationville (the coloured township established in 1937, two years prior to the establishment of Noordgesig), “class D” was used to designate the cheapest type of housing to be built.

The project to house “Class D coloureds” adjacent to the Orlando “native” township reflected the incoherence of the application of race and class policies in a segregationist state. Noordgesig would not have been approved as a township for coloured occupation if these people had been similar in class and skin colour to those relocated to Coronationville, where class A, B and C housing was proposed and built for the coloureds.<sup>4</sup> It was darker skinned and poorer coloureds who tended to be regarded as “near native” and assigned “Class D coloured” status.

Nonetheless, housing even the lowest class of coloureds close to blacks remained problematic for the authorities and contradictory to what they imagined to be best for coloured people. However, for the people who actually moved to Noordgesig, the geographical proximity to the blacks of Orlando was not a major concern in the 1940s. Yet, because the authorities worried about these “politics of proximity”, the location of Noordgesig remained problematic in light of segregationist objectives. The politics of proximity sought to limit the interaction between different race groups by establishing segregated residential areas that were suitably far apart. Housing coloured people at Noordgesig was thought to be a temporary measure, and the

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, documents that describe who would be housed at Coronationville and Noordgesig: WITS, AD843/B: SAIRR, 1908-1962, Report of the commission of inquiry regarding the Cape coloured population, 1937; WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, 23 June 1939.

prospect of its becoming part of Orlando remained very real until its late and unclear proclamation as a coloured township on 2 December 1988.<sup>5</sup>

The present article relies on both archival documents relating to the establishment of Noordgesig and oral memory. It reveals links between various authors of coloured identity and urban segregated housing in an effort to contextualise the coloured experience in Noordgesig. The provision of an alternative view of coloured identity formations in a particular segregated township of Johannesburg adds to the existing literature, which includes the work of Adhikari, which emphasises identity stability through the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Adhikari argues that coloured identity remained remarkably constant throughout the twentieth century, with a real shift in its construction occurring only at the end of apartheid. The complex applications of class, race and colour in the establishment of Noordgesig disallow one-dimensional constructions of coloured identity experiences in the townships of Johannesburg.

Moreover, this local history is the most recent study of a coloured township in Johannesburg, and it is hoped that it will stimulate more research on coloured townships in the city and fill the gap in urban and coloured history studies in South Africa outside of the Cape region.<sup>7</sup> There is no comprehensive history of coloured people or their housing in Johannesburg, let alone Noordgesig, the only coloured township within the much better known Soweto. In South African urban history considerable attention is given to the townships created and destroyed by the 1950 Group Areas Act, but there is only limited discussion of the coloured townships formed prior to and after this Act. As Adhikari points out,

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5 *Government Gazette*, 208: Declaration of a Group Area in terms of the Group Areas Act, 1966, at Noordgesig, district of Johannesburg, province of the Transvaal, 2 December 1988 (available at <http://0-discover.sabinet.co.za/ujlink.uj.ac.za/webx/access/loadrgazettes/1988/Gov/gg11596.pdf>) Johannesburg, as accessed on 14 April, 2015). Why the township was eventually proclaimed a coloured township is unclear, as this occurred when apartheid was almost at an end. One wonders why a township for coloureds was proclaimed when the system of racial classifications was evidently not going to continue and had already been abandoned in most parts of South Africa by 1988.

6 M Adhikari, *Not white enough, not black enough: Racial identity in the South African coloured community* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2005); M Adhikari, “Contending approaches to coloured identity and the History of the coloured people of South Africa”, *History Compass*, 3, 2005, pp. 1-16.

7 The many histories of black townships include P Bonner & N Niefertagodien, *Alexandra: A history* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2008); P Bonner & L Segal, *Soweto: A history* (Cape Town, Maskew Miller Longman, 1998); N Mandy, *A city divided: Johannesburg and Soweto* (Johannesburg, Macmillan, 1984); N Niefertagodien & S Gaule, *Orlando West, Soweto: An illustrated history* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 2012). The histories of coloured people in the Cape include M Adhikari, *Not white enough...*; P Ahluwalia & A Zegeye, “Between black and white”, 2003; Z Erasmus (ed.), *Coloured by history, shaped by place: New perspectives on coloured identities in Cape Town* (Cape Town, Kwela Books, 2001).

in South African history writing, coloureds are often “written out of the narrative and marginalized to a few throwaway comments scattered through the text”.<sup>8</sup>

This article will show how class, race and the politics of proximity were key features of pre-apartheid urban housing considerations, and that all had a part to play in the establishment of Noordgesig. The “desirability” of Noordgesig for coloured occupation raises important questions about how racial boundaries were constructed by the state and how coloured identity formations in South Africa can be understood. The history of Noordgesig highlights the complexities of the categories of race and class that made the “scientific” distinction between different classes of coloureds an uncertain practice. The deep economic, racial and skin colour variations within coloured communities baffled authorities and made distinguishing “Class D coloureds” an impossible task.

### **Class, race and the politics of proximity**

The complex politics of proximity between races that arose in the 1930s, combined with class, determined why certain people could reside in certain places. Even though only a road divides the boundaries of Orlando and Noordgesig, Noordgesig is an extraordinary example of a township designed to create distance between coloureds and blacks in an effort to limit their interaction. Setting restrictions on the proximity of coloured to black housing represented an attempt to prevent the intensification of coloured identities that bordered on blackness. Nonetheless, early efforts at housing coloureds were really about identifying and separating them by creating a perceived difference among coloureds themselves and between coloureds and blacks, which was a far from simple task to accomplish.

Coloured people in South Africa have a long history, which has its roots in the slave period at the Cape in the seventeenth century. They are unified by the fact that they are a mixed-race people with identities that are indescribably heterogeneous and contested.<sup>9</sup> The term “coloured” has been used in many parts of the world to refer to all “non-whites”. In South Africa the term was first used to designate an official category of people neither black nor white as recorded in the 1904 government census. However, the fact that the state was able to include a separate category of coloured people distinguishable from other “non-whites” suggests that there were people identifying themselves as coloured

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8 M Adhikari, *Not white enough...*, p. 33.

9 Important works on coloured people and identity include: M Adhikari, *Not white enough...*; Z Erasmus (ed.), *Coloured by history...*; RE van der Ross, *Myths and attitudes: An inside look at the coloured people* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1979).

or outsiders identifying communities and people as coloured prior to 1904.<sup>10</sup> “To be sure, interracial people exist within whiteness as well as blackness”.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, defining any racial group is no easy task, and no definition is able to encapsulate all those who identify themselves as belonging to a particular race. This ultimately was the problem in all South African segregationist efforts, particularly during the interwar period.

The long history of segregated settlements in South Africa and their political trajectory have been covered by a wide range of authors.<sup>12</sup> However, according to Bickford-Smith this historiography has tended to focus almost exclusively on the black urban experience, which has created what Parnell and Mabin describe as histories marked by a “racial fetishism”.<sup>13</sup> Even Beavon’s excellent history of Johannesburg does more to show “constructed space and built environment” than how people experienced their lived spaces.<sup>14</sup> This article strives to highlight the experiences of the inhabitants of Noordgesig in relation to how bureaucratic actors classified the people to be moved to the township. An alternative view of this kind gives credence to “creolisation” and “cultural creativity” as important characteristics in the appreciation of colouredness not just as an identity, but as an experience.<sup>15</sup> This is particularly useful in understanding identity formations in segregated communities.

Historical analyse of Soweto have to date ignored Noordgesig altogether, even though it is the fourth oldest township there, established in 1939 and the first neighbour to Orlando.<sup>16</sup> The expansion of segregated townships in

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10 C Hendricks, “‘Ominous’ liaisons: Tracing the interface between ‘race’ and sex at the Cape”, Z Erasmus (ed.), *Coloured by history...*, pp. 29-44.

11 W Moore, *A history of Noordgesig to 1994: Changing coloured identity*, MA dissertation, University of Johannesburg, 2012, p. 29 (available at file:///C:/Users/moorewe/Downloads/A%20history%20of%20Noordgesig%20to%201994-%20%20Changing%20coloured%20identity%20(7).pdf, as accessed on 23 February 2017).

12 See for instance V Bickford-Smith, *The emergence of the South African metropolis: Cities and identities in the twentieth century* (Cambridge & New York, Cambridge University Press, 2016); P Bonner, “African urbanization on the rand between the 1930s and 1960s: Its social character and political consequences”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21(1), 1995, pp. 115-129; S Dubow, *Racial segregation and the origins of apartheid in South Africa, 1919-1936* (Basingstoke, Macmillan in association with St. Antony’s College, 1989); PB Rich, *White power and the liberal conscience: Racial segregation and South African liberalism, 1921-1960* (Johannesburg, Rowan Press, 1984). For the colonial experiences of other African cities see B Freund, *The African city: A history* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007).

13 V Bickford-Smith, “Urban history in the New South Africa: Continuity and innovation since the end of apartheid”, *Urban History*, 35(2), 2008, pp. 288-315.

14 K Beavon, *Johannesburg: The making and shaping of the city* (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 2004); V Bickford-Smith, “Urban history in the New South Africa...”, *Urban History*, p. 300.

15 Z Erasmus (ed.), *Coloured by history...*, pp. 13-28.

16 For instance, see P Bonner & L Segal, *Soweto: A history...*; E Hellmann, *Soweto: Johannesburg’s African city* (Johannesburg, South African Institute of Race Relations, 1971); N Niefertogdien & S Gaule, *Orlando West* and WITS, AD1433: Joint Council 1924-1954, JECC meeting minutes ‘Housing at Orlando’, 23 June 1939.

the south-western part of Johannesburg from the early 1930s was an effort initiated to limit the increasing numbers of black people who were moving to overcrowded interracial slums in the city.<sup>17</sup> Orlando Township was created in 1932, but its establishment did not prevent black people from moving into the city. The expansion of segregated living areas in the south-western parts was also the result of a national policy of segregation strongly encouraged by then Prime Minister JBM Hertzog. This policy was then implemented by provinces and municipalities. However, because there was no structured and coordinated national effort at segregation, unlike in the apartheid state after the Second World War, the implementation of the segregationist policy in the interwar years was unclear and ambiguous.

What is certain is that in the study of South African history race and class are inseparable. However, Crankshaw notes that for both residents and the state, class played the greater part in the establishment of pre-apartheid locations in Johannesburg.<sup>18</sup> Class distinctions had a central place in segregation efforts because prior to the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, which gave the Governor-General the power to enforce the residential segregation of blacks from other population groups, no law existed to separate or differentiate between black and coloured residential areas. Therefore, from the late 1920s, the interwar government began to embark on a process of buying property throughout Johannesburg with the expressed vision of creating racially segregated residential areas.<sup>19</sup> For example, farm properties were purchased in the south-western areas, where Orlando West and Moroka were later developed. The ideal of segregated living areas was given further support by the passing of the Slums Act of 1934. This enabled the Johannesburg City Council (JCC) to remove people from the interracial city areas they had been living in to segregated black and coloured areas, and led to the establishment of Orlando in 1932 and Noordgesig and Coronationville in the late 1930s. Segregation was also a way of solving the 'poor white problem' of white citizens residing in the interracial living areas of the interwar period.

Nonetheless, black and coloured people, as well as Indians and poor whites continued to live side by side in Johannesburg, as noted by the 1937

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17 Klipspruit had been developed in 1905 further to the south, but in the vicinity of Orlando Township. Up until 1918 Klipspruit was almost the only attempt by the municipality to house the 'non-white' population of Johannesburg. N Mandy, *A city divided...*, p. 174.

18 O Crankshaw, "Class, race and residence...", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 18(4), 2005, pp. 353-393.

19 For discussion of the geography of racial separation, see A Christopher, *The Atlas of changing South Africa* (London and New York, Routledge, 2001).

Commission of Inquiry into the Coloured Population of South Africa.<sup>20</sup> Coloured people lived predominantly in the interracial inner city slums and previously established locations such as Alexandra and Sophiatown up until the large-scale forced removals initiated by the apartheid government from the 1950s.<sup>21</sup> For example, the population of Alexandra township in 1938 included 30,000 "natives" and 4,000 coloureds. This was one of the largest concentrations of coloureds in Johannesburg.<sup>22</sup> There was a major housing shortage for all black people in South Africa by the late 1930s, and the 1937 Commission of Enquiry estimated that nationally, only 5% of coloured people had adequate housing. By 1960, only 33% of coloured people had been satisfactorily housed.<sup>23</sup>

The need to construct residential areas for coloureds, separate from blacks, was based on the essentialist premise that coloured people had a closer affinity to white rather than to black culture.<sup>24</sup> Reverend Mullineux, a prominent member of The South African National Council of Young Men's Christian Associations, in his address to the Joint Council in 1939, noted that while there was a need for more housing, "[p]utting coloured people in native locations had a demoralizing effect".<sup>25</sup> This position was held most notably by organisations interested in the welfare of coloured people, particularly the Joint Councils of Johannesburg. However, socially and economically coloured people have always related to and continue to relate to black people, and Council views ignored the reality that the majority of coloureds lived with blacks in freehold locations and inner city slum yards. Furthermore, there is little evidence that less well-off coloured people felt vulnerable living in mixed areas; in fact, the opposite may have been true. Yet, the coloured elite, some of whom were Joint Council members, hoped for assimilation into white South African society and prompted something akin to a "civilising mission" extended to other coloured people to equip them to fit in with the cultural norms of the dominant society.<sup>26</sup> Many of these elite coloureds viewed separate housing as a necessary step towards achieving their aspirations of integration into white society.

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20 WITS, AD843/B: SAIRR, 1908-1962, Report of the commission of inquiry into the coloured population of South Africa, 1937.

21 K Beavon, *Johannesburg: The making and shaping of the city...*, p. 100.

22 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, The Alexandra Coloured Associated Association and the Joint Council, 6 September 1938.

23 WITS, AG2703: Institute of Administrators of Non-European Affairs, Annual conference minutes, 1957-1962.

24 For more on the schools of thought regarding coloured identity see M Adhikari, "'God made the white man, God made the black man...': Popular racial stereotyping of coloured people in apartheid South Africa", *South African Historical Journal*, 34, 2006, pp. 142-164.

25 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954: Reverend J Mullineux's address to the Joint Council, 14 December 1939.

26 M Adhikari, *Not white enough...*, p. 84.

The establishment of segregated townships may also have given coloured people the impetus to cultivate their identity even further.<sup>27</sup> The incentive to do so was further advanced during the 1930s when the classification of “non-European” was sub-divided into “Bantu”, “Asiatic” and “coloured”.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless it is coloured people themselves, rather than official classifications of the state, who must be credited with creating, understanding and defining their own identity.

Yet even in the early 1940s, in the northern provinces of South Africa, no obligation was placed on municipalities, provincial councils or government to provide housing for coloureds separate from that of blacks. Therefore, although segregated living areas for blacks continued to be established throughout the south-western parts of Johannesburg during the Second World War, spearheaded by the squatter movements, no other coloured townships were established until after the Group Areas Act of 1950.

The ideal of segregation was premised among other things on the perception that coloureds should not be exposed to the degrading influence of black township dwellers. Social distance and geographical separation were seen as the only method to protect coloureds from exposure to the “swart gevaar” (black peril). The close proximity of Noordgesig to Orlando “native location” meant that this separation from “black influences” and “threat” was inadequate and piecemeal for “Class D coloureds”. The “infiltration” of black ideals and people into Noordgesig remained an influential factor in the state’s decision to regard the township as a temporary solution until a more suitable location could be found for its inhabitants to be moved to.

Thus, Noordgesig was created ‘for the type of coloured people who are near-native in their standard of living’ and appearance, and as a place where housing of a “slum type” could be built.<sup>29</sup> The classification of the inhabitants of Noordgesig as “near-native” implied that they did not need protection against blacks, and in consequence attempts to improve the living conditions at Noordgesig were abandoned. However, the housing of “Class D coloureds” at Noordgesig was disputed in a memorandum concerning the granting of the franchise to coloureds in the Transvaal in which it was argued that this excuse made by the municipality was a smokescreen for the poor conditions and housing provided in Noordgesig. The memorandum pointed out that while

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27 Z Erasmus (ed.), *Coloured by history...*, pp. 13-28.

28 WITS, AD843/B: SAIRR, 1908-1962, s.a.

29 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, Memorandum concerning the case for granting franchise privileges to the Cape coloured people in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, s.a.

Noordgesig in the early 1940s housed former slum dwellers, “these people were of the average type of Cape Coloured ... apart from a few families where there is definitely an African partner to the marriage, there is not one coloured family to be found in Noordgesig that is near native in its habits”.<sup>30</sup>

However, there remained a strong sense of ambiguity about the race of people to be housed at Noordgesig. Thus in 1949 the City Council, with regard to the planned re-zoning of the western area complex, noted that: “Noordgesig [should] be reserved for such families of mixed race as cannot be classified as either coloured or native”.<sup>31</sup> They were regarded as “black coloureds” or “Class D coloureds” – those people whom even apartheid classifications of the next decades could not cater for. Perhaps they were coloureds too close to black, or even blacks too close to coloured.<sup>32</sup> Still, somehow, they were considered close enough to black (yet differentiated from them) and located next door to Orlando.

While it is possible to attribute this classification of the residents of Noordgesig as neither coloured nor black as an apartheid era construction, it has been shown that even at the establishment of the township in 1939 the City Council had struggled to define those to be housed there and as a result opted to include class and skin colour as distinguishing features of race group classification. The heterogeneous and fluid nature of the identity of “so-called coloureds” and “Class D coloureds” meant that the categorisations designed for classifying these people were simply untenable during the interwar years and continued through the apartheid era.

## **Establishing Noordgesig**

There is sufficient evidence that by 1937-1938 there was a coloured township planned for establishment adjacent to Orlando.<sup>33</sup> The establishment of Noordgesig was approved by the Town Clerk of Johannesburg on 25 June 1940.<sup>34</sup> “The need or desirability of establishing the township” in particular was noted, but it was nonetheless recorded that “Abramstad” was “required

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30 WITS, AD1433 Joint Council, 1924-1954.

31 SAB, TPB, 2262, Ref. TALG18323: Memorandum: Western areas Johannesburg, 31 October 1949.

32 For examples of mixed racial identities in Southern Africa in comparison with the coloured identity existing in South Africa see M Adhikardi (ed), *Burdened by race: Coloured identities in Southern Africa* (Cape Town, UCT Press, 2009).

33 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, JECC, July 1937.

34 SAB, CDB, 3318, Ref. TAD 4/8/PB 4/2/2 2106 – TAD 4/8/PB 4/2/2 2110: Application for permission to establish a township under the provisions of the townships and town planning ordinance of '93, 25 June 1940.

for slum clearance purposes as a coloured housing scheme”. Abramstad was the name given in the Townships Board’s letter to the Town Clerk with regard to what would become Noordgesig. They noted that:<sup>35</sup>

... it is necessary to advise you that the designation ‘Rusoord’ is not available and that the name ‘Mooigesit’ is likely to be confused with ‘Mooizicht’, a railway station in the Orange Free State. ‘Noordgesicht’ is not acceptable as it is a hybrid. Its Afrikaans equivalent ‘Noordgesig’ is, however, available and will be recorded in respect of the proposed township.

Other proposals for the name of the new township included Kleurstad, Afgunsville, and Sonopstad.

The key institutions involved in establishing townships for blacks included the Non-European Affairs Department (national), Townships Board (provincial and national), and the Johannesburg City Council (municipal). Although they were to work together, they did not always agree. This is clearly evident in the case of Noordgesig, a coloured township to be established in an undesirable location. The urgency of establishing the township was quite possibly attributable to the fact that the Joint Coloured Council, which played an influential part in municipal affairs, wanted to provide shelter for a number of coloured people already living in makeshift accommodation in the vicinity of Noordgesig. However, the Townships Board in October 1940 endeavoured to have the application to have construction proceed withdrawn.<sup>36</sup> Despite this, the City of Johannesburg, under pressure from the influential Joint Coloured Council, forced through the establishment of Noordgesig to overcome the dire housing shortages for coloureds, which had worsened with the escalation of slum clearances in the city. With support from the Non-European Affairs Department construction at Noordgesig continued in earnest in 1941, regardless of the application by the Townships Board to halt construction.

There were a number of other delays in the construction of the first phase of the township. These were attributable to limited funds, rapid urbanisation that led to a serious housing shortage throughout Johannesburg, the manufacturing restrictions during the Second World War and the inadequacy of the tender companies building Noordgesig.<sup>37</sup>

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35 SAB, CDB, 3318, Ref. TAD 4/8/PB 4/2/2 2106 – TAD 4/8/PB 4/2/2 2110: Townships Board, coloured housing scheme: near Orlando: letter to town clerk, 13 June 1940.

36 SAB, CDB, 3318, Ref. TAD 4/8/PB 4/2/2 2106 – TAD 4/8/PB: Government Gazette no. 84 of 1940: Proposed establishment of Noordgesig (coloured) township, 4 February 1941.

37 For more about the development of Johannesburg see K Beavon, *Johannesburg...*

Early construction efforts had begun by late 1940, but according to a letter from the City of Johannesburg explaining the establishment of the township, the first resident of Noordgesig moved into his house only in 1942.<sup>38</sup> In this letter to George Rorke (Bra Georgie), who had requested that the council provide clarity regarding reports of a decision concerning the possible removal of Noordgesig residents taken by the Soweto Council on 27 June 1985, it is stated with regard to the establishment of the township:<sup>39</sup>

Noordgesig was established in 1939 primarily to house those approximately 300 homeless coloured families who were squatting in tents and iron shacks in a church yard Vrederdorp and in an open veld next to Orlando, which at that time was enclosed by an iron fence. To relieve the situation, the council erected out of own funds houses and subsequently, coloured families from other areas were moved to Noordgesig. It is interesting to note that Mr. Keyser was the first applicant to be accommodated in Noordgesig from a waiting list ... which was allocated to him on 21 June 1942.

The oral history of the township reveals that Oupa Keyser (Grandfather Keyser), as he is popularly referred to, was indeed the first person to take occupation of a newly completed home in Noordgesig.<sup>40</sup>

The fact that people had been living in Noordgesig prior to the completion of the first municipal houses made it possible for the Coloured Welfare Association to direct a request for the establishment of a school to the Secretary of the Transvaal Educational Department as early as 19 July 1940.<sup>41</sup> From the early 1940s the first school was housed in the Ebenezer Congregational Church, which provided

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38 Private collection of Oom Georgie: City of Johannesburg, Housing department letter to G Rorke, a resident of 468 Modder St, Noordgesig, 27 June 1985. Titles such as Oom (uncle), Auntie and Mrs were used during the interviews and in reference to interviewees as a sign of respect.

39 Private collection of Oom Georgie: City of Johannesburg, Housing department letter to G Rorke, a resident of 468 Modder St, Noordgesig, 27 June 1985. Italics mine. The proclamation of Noordgesig as a coloured township in December 1988 provided security of tenure for the residents. However, this late proclamation needs more investigation in light of the changing political climate of the country at the time See note 5 above. The term 'Bra' (with their first name spoken immediately after) is used in South Africa as a sign of respect and acknowledgment of a male elder. Usually some quite highly respected in the community but not necessarily a 'comrade' as used in liberation parlance.

40 See for instance W Moore (Researcher), interview, Auntie Freeda (Noordgesig Soweto), 4 September 2014; W Moore (Researcher), interview Auntie Poppie, (Noordgesig Soweto), 4 September 2014; W Moore (Researcher), interview, Mrs Williams (Noordgesig Soweto), 4 September 2014. It is not known, however, whether Oupa Keyser was dark skinned or poor.

41 SAB, TOD, 2240, Ref. E39/1684/6 – E35/1700/37: Letter from the Coloured Welfare Association to the Secretary Transvaal Education, 19 July 1940. See, for instance, the many documents pointing out that people lived in Noordgesig prior to 1942: SAB, TPB, 2494, Ref. 25/11057 – 27/110057: Johannesburg City Council, Sub-economic Housing Loan: Coloured Township Adjoining Orlando, 10 March 1939; SAB, CDB, 3318, Ref. TAD 4/8/PB 4/2/2 2106 – TAD 4/8/PB 4/2/2 2110, 25 June 1940; SAB, CDB, 3318, Ref. TAD 4/8/PB 4/2/2 2106 – TAD 4/8/PB 4/2/2 2110, 4 February 1941.

several educational premises for coloureds in Johannesburg prior to apartheid.<sup>42</sup> The Ebenezer Church is the oldest religious institution in Noordgesig, and was officially opened on 24 September 1942.<sup>43</sup> By the early 1930s the Ebenezer Congregational Church had already established “25 fully-fledged schools for Coloureds across the reef”. In fact, for one member (not from Noordgesig), the Ebenezer Church was “the church of the Coloured people”. The housing of the school in a church was not unusual at the time because in the northern provinces education was not compulsory for coloureds, and most schools were housed “with rare exceptions in overcrowded halls ... tents, stables, [and] church buildings”.<sup>44</sup> The building of the municipal school began only in January of 1949, to accommodate the children of the 600 families living in Noordgesig.

Auntie Poppie has been living in Noordgesig since 1943. She was 13 years of age when she moved to the township and recalled that there were just a handful of “ou’ look” (old look) houses occupied (she stated, “about 10 homes”). This colloquial description was (and is) used to distinguish the first generation of 350 houses built at Noordgesig from all those that followed.<sup>45</sup> According to Auntie Poppie, the “rock and roll” section (the colloquial designation for the westernmost part of Noordgesig and the last section completed in the township) at this time was equipped with tents which people lived in while waiting for their houses to be built. Mrs Williams also remembered people staying in tents when she arrived in Noordgesig in the mid-1940s, and that these were still quite numerous by the end of the decade.<sup>46</sup>

According to Auntie Poppie a police officer controlled entry into and exit from Soweto at the intersection between Noordgesig and Orlando on the Main Road. The name given to this police officer was “ou double-up” (old double-up). In township slang, a “double-up” is a frequently used thoroughfare, and the term is often a reference to a shortcut. While it was easy to walk through the two townships if you were a resident, vehicles were scrutinised. In fact,

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42 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1925, D Nolte, “The educational needs of the Coloured people in the Transvaal”, s.a.; H Dugmore, “*Knowing all the names’: The Ebenezer Congregational Church and the creation of Community among the Coloured population of Johannesburg, 1894-1939*, 1992, pp. 64-81 (available at [http://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/4222/1/harry\\_dugmore\\_-\\_knowing\\_all\\_the\\_names.pdf](http://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/4222/1/harry_dugmore_-_knowing_all_the_names.pdf), as accessed 20 May 2015).

43 W Moore (Researcher), interview, Bra Georgie and guests (Noordgesig Soweto), 24 April 2014; Private collection of Oom Georgie’s wife: ‘Clinton memorial church Noordgesig, 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary’, Ebenezer Congregational Church – SOWESTRA. Oom Georgie’s wife passed away in June 2015.

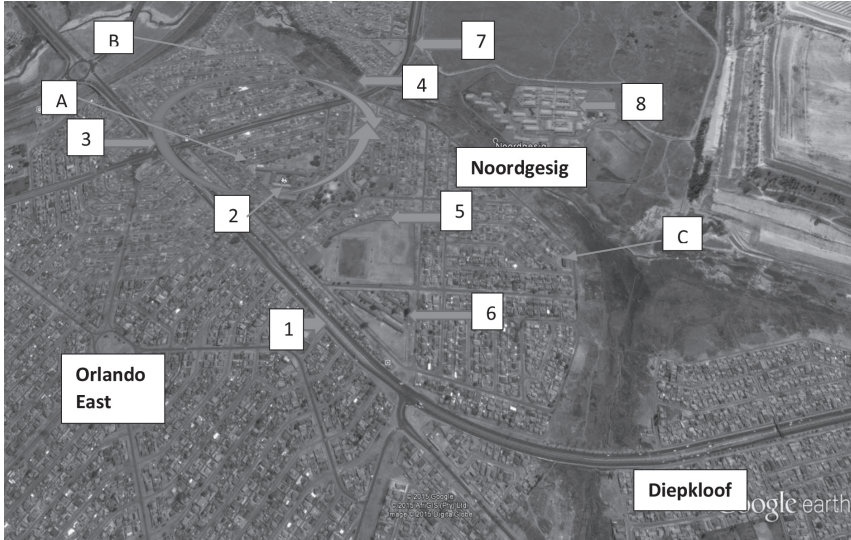
44 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, Memorandum regarding Cape Coloured people’s franchise in the Transvaal and Orange Free State (no date). WITS, AD843/B: SAIRR, 1908-1962, City of Johannesburg report of the manager of Non-European Affairs, 1948-1949.

45 See Aerial Image 2.

46 W Moore (Researcher), interview, Mrs Williams, 4 September 2014 (Mrs Williams passed away in October 2014).

during the 1940s Noordgesig residents frequently bought their groceries at the Vukapansi shop in Orlando because, according to early residents, there were no shops in Noordgesig at the time.<sup>47</sup> The Provincial Secretary’s Office noted that the shops at Noordgesig were constructed in the first construction phase of 1940/1942.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, by the late 1940s the shops at Noordgesig, housed in cramped quarters, were considered inadequate by municipal authorities.<sup>49</sup>

Image 2: The institutions, sites and surrounding townships of Noordgesig



Source: Google Earth (available at <http://census2011.adrianfrith.com/place/798026033>, as accessed on 29 January 2015. 1) Soweto freeway 2) high school 3) Vukapansi shop 4) police station, formerly also rent office 5) sports ground 6) primary school 7) New Canada Road 8) Walter Sisulu Home of Safety A) Ebenezer Church in the ‘ou look’ section (within encircling arrows) built 1940/1942 B) the ‘rock and roll’ section, the last section built at the end of the 1950s C) Old Apostolic Church.

The division between Orlando and Noordgesig was further marked by a fence that extended from Station Road up to the top half of the township. However, this barrier appears not to have existed at the lower western section of the township.<sup>50</sup> This physical barrier was an attempt to stop the “infiltration” of “natives” into Noordgesig that was noted by the Johannesburg JECC in 1943.<sup>51</sup> As a result, a council member of the Johannesburg JECC moved a motion on 23 March 1944 “[t]hat Noordgezic should be abolished as an

47 W Moore (Researcher), interviews, Auntie Freeda; Auntie Poppie; Mrs Williams, 2014.

48 SAB, TPB, 2494, Ref. 25/11057 – 27/11057: Provincial Secretary’s Office, 27 September 1941.

49 WITS, AD843/B: SAIRR, 1908-1962, Manager of the Non-European Affairs Department of the City of Johannesburg, 1948-1949.

50 W Moore (Researcher), interview, Auntie Poppie, 4 September 2014.

51 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, Johannesburg JECC, minutes of meeting, 5 April 1943.

area for coloured people” because of its racial proximity to the “negative” influence of Orlando.<sup>52</sup> It is unclear, however, whether the “infiltration” of blacks referred to here was a reference to blacks being housed at Noordgesig, or social contact between residents, either as they walked through each other’s townships or interacted socially by drinking together, engaging in romantic relationships, or participating in sporting or church events, for example. Moreover, proximity to a black area was not specific to Noordgesig alone, but also applied to Coronationville, which was built opposite Western Native Township, and Newclare. Coronationville, however, was not considered likely to be infiltrated by blacks, perhaps because it was designed to house “better class” coloureds rather than “Class D coloureds”. The chances of black culture exerting an influence on their colouredness may therefore have been considered less likely, or even impossible.

Auntie Poppie and Mrs Williams stated that interaction and social relationships with blacks were both common and necessary for Noordgesig residents in the 1940s.<sup>53</sup> However, Auntie Poppie made the observation that while a better relationship between coloureds and blacks existed in the 1940s and early 1950s, there was nevertheless a distinction between the two races.<sup>54</sup> This cultural distinction between blacks and “Class D coloureds” made by residents of Noordgesig did not automatically signify social and economic differences between the two townships, though. The houses built in Noordgesig between 1940 and 1942 were, according to the Provincial Secretary’s Office, “identical” to those built in Orlando West, so that “the rents should be fixed at the same rate”.<sup>55</sup>

What was deemed satisfactory housing for blacks also seemed reasonable for the poorest class of coloureds. The poor living conditions at Noordgesig prompted participants at a Johannesburg JECC meeting to state that residents there were living in much the same conditions as in the slums they had been removed from.<sup>56</sup> These poor and overcrowded living conditions existed throughout the south-western living area and were ultimately the cause of the squatter movements of

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52 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, Johannesburg JECC, minutes of meeting, 23 March 1944. This motion was agreed to by the council with Reverend Clack of the Noordgesig Ebenezer Church, who had been approached by the government in 1943 to establish a school at the church, being the only member dissenting.

53 W Moore (Researcher), interviews, Auntie Poppie; Mrs Williams, 2014.

54 W Moore (Researcher), interview, Auntie Poppie, 4 September 2014.

55 SAB, TPB, 2494, Ref. 25/11057 – 27/110057: Provincial Secretary’s Office, 29 March 1943.

56 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, Johannesburg JECC minutes of meeting, 22 March 1943; TRH Davenport, “Historical background of the apartheid city to 1948”, M Swilling, R Humphries & K Shubane, *Apartheid city in transition* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 1-18.

the 1940s. The inhabitants of Noordgesig did not therefore in socio-economic terms enjoy a much higher status than blacks in the view of officials.

Mrs Williams elaborated on the poor conditions at Noordgesig in its early years. She remembered the dirt roads and the lack of electricity when she first arrived in the mid-1940s. The toilet, she recalled with humour, was a “drie bene” (three-legged) chamber pot with a tap right next to it outside. The collection of waste was a messy affair that sometimes resulted in partial spillage in the yard. Additionally, Mrs Williams pointed out that the coal stoves in use at the time filled the house with smoke; residents had to clean their houses from top to bottom in order to get rid of the soot.<sup>57</sup>

Even though Noordgesig residents lived in conditions similar to those experienced by the inhabitants of Orlando, as the state pressed ahead with more aggressive segregation policies in the 1940s, relations between blacks and coloureds began steadily to weaken in Johannesburg. For example, in 1944 the Johannesburg Council of Europeans and Africans (JCEA) noted the deterioration of relations between blacks and coloureds, particularly after the establishment of a coloured living area in the predominantly black Western Native Township was proposed.<sup>58</sup> The history of coloured racism and black racism needs further interrogation if a better comprehension of the relationship between coloured and black people in South Africa is to be gained. What is more certain is that government policies had begun to play a role in creating tensions between blacks and coloureds in the city prior to apartheid.

However, before the establishment of the apartheid government there was no legal framework to segregate coloured living areas from black areas in the 1940s, nor any means to force coloureds to live in Coronationville and Noordgesig.<sup>59</sup> In an aggressive show of the powers possessed by the Joint Councils they proposed solving this problem by zoning the whole of Johannesburg into areas for “Europeans” and areas for “non-European” populations. For the “non-European” section, the council asked for further

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57 W Moore (Researcher), interview, Mrs Williams, 2014.

58 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, JECC, letter received from the Johannesburg Joint Council of Europeans and Africans (JCEA), 17 August 1944. For a discussion of this racism, see M Brindley, *Western coloured township: Problems of an urban slum* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1976); S Field, “Fragile identities: Memory, emotion and coloured residents of Windermere”, Z Erasmus (ed.), *Coloured by history...*, p. 105; E McKaiser, *A bantu in my bathroom! Debating race, sexuality and other uncomfortable South African topics* (Johannesburg, Bookstorm & Macmillan, 2012); WITS, AD843/B: SAIRR, 1908-1962, s.a.

59 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, Joint Council meeting, February 15, 1944.

differentiation into coloured, “native” and Indian areas. This was argued to be a necessity for South African urban planners if the desired segregation of residential areas was to be achieved.<sup>60</sup> Post Second World War cities therefore began to apply racial zoning with “the idea of planning racially distinct, well-separated zones”.<sup>61</sup> Essentially this also required a “national” policy for racial zones in cities, which at the time did not exist legally but was put into place with the passing of the Group Areas Act of 1950.<sup>62</sup> Thus the Joint Councils were closely involved in designing this cornerstone policy of apartheid and one of the largest group area removals.

It is not surprising, considering the poor conditions at Noordgesig and strained racial relations, that some of the Noordgesig residents found solace in alcohol. The manager of the Non-European Affairs Department of the City of Johannesburg warned that the fact that the 600 families that occupied Noordgesig by 1949 had no recreational facilities was “making itself felt in increased drunkenness and lawlessness amongst the older boys and men”.<sup>63</sup> Alcohol consumption and alcoholism have been stereotypically considered a coloured phenomenon in South Africa. Alcoholism has existed and does exist in Noordgesig, as in any other South African township or suburb; what is unclear is whether or not this is a problem associated with colouredness in a cultural sense. Nonetheless, the South African government’s virtually prohibitionist attitude towards supplying alcohol to coloureds and more especially to blacks created an unusual interaction between black and coloured people based on the common production of illicitly brewed liquor to circumvent alcohol laws in South Africa (“White liquor” became available to blacks only from 1962). Colloquial Afrikaans names were frequently given to the products of these illegal activities.<sup>64</sup> for example, the drink “Choppers” was also called “so skerp soos ’n byl” (sharp as an axe), and a brew called “Motubane” was also known as “hy maak mal” (it makes a person crazy).<sup>65</sup> This is an important indication of the direct link between such slang and the lengthy historical interaction

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60 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, Joint Council meeting, February 15, 1944. See also P Bonner, “African urbanization on the rand between the 1930s and 1960s...”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21(1), 1995, pp. 115-129; O Crankshaw, “Class, race and residence...”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 18(4), 2005, pp. 353-393; D Posel, “Curbing African urbanization in the 1950s and 1960s”, M Swilling, R Humphries & K Shubane, eds, *Apartheid city in transition...*, pp. 19-32.

61 A Mabin & D Smit, “Reconstructing South Africa’s cities? The making of urban planning 1900-2000”, *Planning Perspectives*, 12, 1997, pp. 193-223.

62 A Mabin & D Smit, “Reconstructing South Africa’s cities?...”, *Planning Perspectives*, 12, 1997, p. 204.

63 WITS, AD843/B: SAIRR, 1908-1962; 1948-1949.

64 N Mandy, *A city divided...*, p. 187.

65 SAB, HKW, 1/1/3, Ref. 17/1/15 – 17/4/1: The native commissioner, circular to all chief native commissioners in each region, 1958.

between blacks and coloureds, as well as black people’s nostalgic relationship with the Afrikaans language.<sup>66</sup>

### **A comparison with Coronationville**

The class, colour and racial differences between Noordgesig and Coronationville were apparent in Councillor LV Hurd’s descriptions of the two townships. He stated that Coronationville “was designed for the better type of coloured”, while Noordgesig was meant to “cater for the poorer type of coloured and mixed families, i.e. coloured men married to African women”.<sup>67</sup> Although this report was made during the early years of apartheid in 1952, it bears many similarities to previous pre-apartheid conceptions for Noordgesig and its “Class D coloured” inhabitants.

Living conditions were better in Coronationville, built just two years before Noordgesig. However, there were contradictory reports about why people were moved to Coronationville. For instance, on 31 August 1937, it was noted in the Johannesburg JECC year-end report that the evictions from slum areas at Bertrams had required a speeding up of the construction of Coronationville.<sup>68</sup> Yet, in another Johannesburg JECC meeting in September 1939, those placed in Coronationville were recorded as being from the Malay location.<sup>69</sup> In later correspondence, dated November 1939, the housing problem for persons evicted from the Malay location seemed to have been solved because the council had “erected temporary accommodation for these people at Schoongezicht”.<sup>70</sup> This further suggests that although Noordgesig was officially established in 1939, there were conceivably people living there before there were people living in Coronationville. Auntie Poppie was adamant that Noordgesig was older than Coronationville, and many residents assert that Noordgesig is the oldest coloured township in Johannesburg.<sup>71</sup>

Nonetheless, Class A (superior to sub-economic European housing), Class B (houses similar to European sub-economic housing) and Class C (inferior to

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66 J Dlamini, *Native nostalgia* (Auckland Park, Jacana, 2009).

67 WITS, AG2703: Non-European Affairs, 1952-1956, Report of Councillor LV Hurd, 1952. LV Hurd became mayor of Johannesburg between 1955 and 1956.

68 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, JECC, 31 August 1937.

69 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, JECC, 22 September 1939. The total membership of the Johannesburg JECC as of October 1941 was 37 Europeans and 150 coloureds.

70 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, JECC, November 1939. It is unclear whether these people moved out of Noordgesig once houses were built at Coronationville.

71 W Moore (Researcher), interview, Auntie Poppie, 2014.

European sub-economic housing) homes were planned for Coronationville. The coloureds of Coronationville were graded as being culturally more similar to “Europeans” because of their middle-class characteristics such as better paying jobs and lighter skin. Darker skinned “Class D coloureds” were more likely to be housed in Noordgesig. The ‘class D’ housing was discussed in July 1937 at a JECC meeting:<sup>72</sup>

... i.e., housing for those people whose standards of living nearly approximate to that of the natives was to be provided in another township probably to be called Jubilee or Schoongezicht near to Orlando.

In comparison with Coronationville, Noordgesig was clearly being designed as a township for “the poorest class of coloured”, as bluntly stated in a later meeting of the Joint Council in July 1939.<sup>73</sup>

The Johannesburg City Council added with regard to class divisions among coloureds and their similarity to black people: “there is a third class who are no better off economically than the natives, and for this class, ‘which we believe constitutes the majority’ [of coloureds], provision is to be made in a township being established adjoining Orlando”. Furthermore, the council stated that “if the scheme proves a failure the township could be added to Orlando and made available to natives”.<sup>74</sup>

Sub-economic housing at Coronationville would “give escape” to those coloured inner-city slum dwellers who only lived there by “economic compulsion”.<sup>75</sup> However, for the lower grade, “Class D coloured”, “the real slum dweller”, the Joint Council stated, “Schoongezicht ... [would] rehabilitate them in the eyes of their fellows and rescue the children from continued or deeper degradation”. Housing, therefore, was seen as also having the healing and uplifting purpose of restoring the dignity of poorer coloureds and preventing them from spiralling into black status and away from coloured and white societal norms. The defining feature of these “true slum dwellers” housed at Schoongezicht and seen as being in need of rescue was their very colouredness. Coloureds were perceived as belonging to a higher class and being of a higher level of development than blacks, which meant they should not live in conditions comparable with those of blacks.

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72 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, JECC, July 1937. The layout of Noordgesig was approved as early as 23 March 1937; SAB, TPB, 2494, Ref. 25/11057 – 27/110057, 10 March 1939.

73 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, JECC, 19 July 1939.

74 SAB, TPB, 2494, Ref. 25/11057 – 27/110057: Johannesburg City Council, Sub-economic Housing Loan: Coloured Township Adjoining Orlando, March 10, 1939.

75 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, JECC, 12 June 1939.

The class difference between the two townships was further discussed in terms of the need for increased transport services in and around Coronationville because transport was necessary “when providing for the needs of a community which lives at a European standard”. However, for Schoongezicht, “[t]he rail service from such a place as Orlando is designed to meet the urgent needs of the wage earner, not his family”.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, while housing was seen as a way to improve the status and respectability of the poorer coloureds, poor public transport for Noordgesig residents was deemed adequate for this labouring class.

There was also a significant discrepancy between the rents paid by Noordgesig residents and those paid in Coronationville. By the mid-1950s the highest monthly income recorded in Noordgesig was £69.1.10. Between 1956 and 1957 only 112 households in Noordgesig had a monthly income above £20. In comparison, between 1957 and 1958 the highest monthly income received by a resident in Coronationville was £98.13.4, with a large percentage of residents earning more than Noordgesig’s highest income earner. Moreover, the average household monthly income of £40 for Coronationville residents was double what most Noordgesig residents lived on.<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, it was possible in the early 1950s for residents from Noordgesig to be offered accommodation in Coronationville when they required premises better suited to their family. For instance, Auntie Poppie, who had been staying as a sub-tenant in Noordgesig after getting married, applied for a home and was offered residence in Coronationville.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, by the 1950s class and colour were no longer preeminent determining factors in deciding where coloureds could reside. The apartheid government began to emphasise race rather than class and skin colour distinctions as the basis for allocating housing in the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s.

The inhabitants of Noordgesig have not dismissed the class status afforded them by the state and “other” coloured people, nor the way in which they have experienced their colouredness in the township, but have rather chosen to interpret these in their own ways. Thus, Auntie Poppie noted that by the 1950s Coronationville was not for higher class or lighter skinned coloureds per se, but if you were from Noordgesig, then “they didn’t recognize you”

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76 WITS, AD1433: Joint Council, 1924-1954, JECC, 12 June 1939.

77 SAB, GEM, 759, Ref. H28/76/6 – H28/76/13: City of Johannesburg, schedule of dwellings occupied by tenants exceeding income limits. Noordgesig, July 1957-June 1958.

78 W Moore (Researcher), interviews, Auntie Poppie; Mrs Williams, 2014. Mrs Williams, like Auntie Poppie, chose to stay in Noordgesig rather than move to Coronationville after being offered a house there.

because the perception was that “Noordgesig is a bad place”.<sup>79</sup> “They”, the Coronationville inhabitants, did not “recognize” Noordgesig residents as their equals and assumed that poverty must be rife and the township a “bad place” for coloureds to live. The comparison of these two townships clearly involves perceptions of the “other”, squarely premised on class distinctions, skin colour and “proper” coloured experience developed by the state and more importantly, by coloured inhabitants themselves.

## **Conclusion**

The establishment of Noordgesig provides insight into the convoluted class and racial thinking of the 1930s and 1940s in South Africa. The resonance this has for other mixed-race societies of the world, such as in Brazil and the United States of America, lies in the fact that the interplay between class and race always has structural limitations that those who are categorised in these terms are able to overcome. This is because the distinction between people with darker skins and those with lighter skins, and between people of higher and lower classes, and even the distinction based on ethnic proximity are fragile and contested determinants of identity experiences.

The segregation efforts intended to stem the growth of Johannesburg’s multiracial living areas that intensified during the interwar period focused on determining where to place Johannesburg’s black, coloured and Indian populations. The segregationists’ casual definition of who was and was not a coloured person largely entailed distinguishing coloureds from blacks. This was problematic, especially in the case of those housed in Noordgesig, whose class, ethnicity and skin colour were close to those of blacks. Therefore, although class was a significant factor in the establishment of Noordgesig in 1939, there were other concerns, such as proximity to Soweto and the close affinity between the coloureds of Noordgesig and black people.

To be sure, the township’s proximity to Orlando and the racial identity of its inhabitants were problematic and a vexation to the municipal authorities. Nonetheless, it was convenient for the Johannesburg City Council to make Noordgesig a temporary township for coloured people and administer it as such, however contradictorily this may have been done. What is more,

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<sup>79</sup> W Moore (Researcher), interview, Auntie Poppie, 2014. It is unclear from Auntie Poppie’s interview what period she was referring to. However, this seems to be when she moved into the ‘rock and roll’ section in the 1950s after her marriage.

the proclamation of Noordgesig as a coloured township in 1988 provides evidence not only of the changing political climate in South Africa but also of how the state finally acknowledged the coloured people there. The identity experiences of Noordgesig residents were certainly shaped by the people of the township, but they were also influenced by state policy and the location of the township next to Orlando.

The first inhabitants of Noordgesig developed their own strategies to circumvent the generally deplorable standard of living in the township. It was possible to enjoy the spaces of Noordgesig and form relations with one's black next-door neighbours in Orlando, where shopping was done, dances were held and friendships made. Because so few studies have been conducted into coloured identities outside of the Cape, it is unclear what the similarities are to other urban neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, the conclusion that can be reached is that coloured identity experiences in Noordgesig were different not only from those in other coloured townships in Johannesburg, but from others elsewhere too. This article shows that coloured identities that bordered on blackness, such as the identity of the "Class D coloureds", have not been fully explored in South African historiography. What is more, black identities that bordered on colouredness, conceivably, are an area of inquiry that also merits scholarly attention.