

South Africa (3)

Gold Diamonds and Cecil Rhodes

Nineteenth century South Africa was marked by three significant influences: the great "cattle-killing" the discovery of diamonds and gold, and Cecil Rhodes. These events shaped its demographic, social, and economic future.

The "Cattle-Killing"

The "cattle-killing" took place after the Xhosa had been defeated in the Kaffir Wars. One morning in 1856, a fourteen-year-old Xhosa girl went to draw water from a stream, and returned to report that she had been in touch with the spirits of the dead. She took a relative to the stream, where he also met and spoke with the spirits, who said that they were the enemies of the white race and wished to see all white men driven into the ocean. They promised that if the people killed all their cattle, destroyed their crops, and left the land untilled, they would return at the head of a great army containing all the tribal heroes, and regain for the conquered tribes all their former possessions, and more. The dead cattle would be replaced by great herds of celestial cattle, the grain-pits were to be miraculously replenished, and the land would be covered with splendid crops. The day that the prophecy would be fulfilled was February 27, 1857. The great day was awaited with intense excitement. When nothing happened, the Xhosas were devastated. They lost all hope, and thousands advanced upon the Cape colony, not as conquerors but as famished people begging food. Although the government and missionaries tried to help the starving people, their resources were insufficient. It is said that sixty-seven thousand Xhosas perished by this ordeal caused by blind faith in a false prophecy. The areas abandoned by them were quickly settled by colonists. The great "cattle-killing" was not only a tragedy for the Xhosas but also for the establishment of the church in their midst.

The Discovery of Diamonds

Modern Africa is known for its huge mineral wealth, which overshadows all its other resources. In 1868 diamonds were discovered. The name De Beer became associated with the diamond find. De Beer was a Boer farmer whose barren farm had suddenly revealed that diamonds were beneath it. He soon sold his land and the diamond rush was on. H.V. Morton described it as the strangest looking trek in South African history. "Sailors deserted their ships, soldiers their regiments, merchants their shops, clerks their offices, farmers their land, and the weirdest crowd ever seen in South Africa, good and bad, came over the mountains on horseback, on foot, in Cape carts, ox wagons, stage-coaches - anything that would take them to the biggest lucky dip in history."

Kimberley became the world's diamond capital. The place was named after the first earl of Kimberley (1826-1902), who was a British statesman and colonial secretary. The early years at Kimberley were a chaos of individual miners. The thousands of men who had rushed there from all parts of the world each bought little claims and began to sink shafts.

Not God, the "Rock of Ages", but the new source of hope became the rock "diamond." When the newly discovered 83 carat diamond, which would subsequently be known as the

"Star of Africa," was held up before the House of Assembly in Cape Town, the colonial secretary declared, "Gentlemen, this is the rock upon which the future success of South Africa will be built." But the diamond industry didn't bring peace and happiness. Instead, it established the future pattern of white employment in South Africa as surely as it was done for the blacks. Poor whites would always be protected from the competition of even poorer blacks by formal job discrimination.

The Discovery of Gold

In 1886, the world's largest gold strike was made on the Witwatersrand in Transvaal. It brought about the birth of Johannesburg, South Africa's largest city and known to most Africans as eGoli - place of gold. It led not only to wealth but also to an influx of uitlanders - foreigners. In a few years the gold rush created such a rapid demographic change that by 1896 the little village, Johannesburg had become a city with 102,000 inhabitants who had come from nearly every country on the face of the earth. The Boers were now outnumbered. The gold discovery also widened South Africa's racial divide. Social/political segregation was applied by means, which later would be known as "petty apartheid."

British Interference

With the discovery of gold, economic power had shifted from the Cape Colony to Transvaal. England believed that the conquest of Transvaal, after a short war, would transform it into a British colony, in which the Boers would be swamped by British immigrants. Consequently, England started new difficulties for the two small Boer republics and began to interfere with their internal affairs while making unacceptable demands. These actions led to the second Anglo-Boer war, which began in 1899.

Cecil (John) Rhodes (1853-1902)

No one man had a more powerful impact on British and South African history for either good or ill than Cecil Rhodes. He was born in Bishop's Cleeve, England, the sixth surviving child of the Rev. Francis William and Louisa Rhodes. Suffering from a lung weakness, he was sent for his health to a brother's cotton farm in South Africa. The youthfulness of South Africa's first millionaire is an astonishing fact.

Rhodes was only eighteen when he arrived at Kimberley. He left the crowded sites of Kimberley to study at Oriel College, Oxford, England. He would interrupt his studies of Roman history to buy a pumping engine and to be sent to the diamond mines. He returned to Kimberley more materialistic and idealistic than ever. Cecil Rhodes achieved a near-monopoly of the world's diamonds by manipulating the money markets, by audacious takeovers and the secret purchase of shares. He had a perfect understanding of public relations and the power of the press, acquiring newspapers, both openly and secretly in the belief that "the press rules the minds of men." He also managed to amass a far greater fortune out of Witwatersrand Gold Mines than he ever got out of diamonds.

Rhodes was a driven man. At the age of 19 he suffered his first heart attack. The obsession with death would continue throughout his life. He was a ruthless operator, who used his fortune to fund mercenary armies to murder, steal, bribe, cheat and corrupt in a

headlong rush to secure as much of Africa's land and mineral wealth as he could lay his hands on. At the age of 38 he was already a prime minister of the Cape Colony.

He was a conspicuous figure during the Boer War, when he organized the defenses of Kimberley. He was also the chairman of Consolidated Gold Fields and managing director of the De Beers Mining Company, which held and still holds a virtual monopoly of the world's diamond production and distribution. In his brief but spectacular 30-year career Rhodes not only monopolized the world's diamonds and a fair share of the world's gold, he also carved a personal empire out of the heart of Africa. His railways and telegraph lines straddled the continent. He had given his name to vast countries, Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Nyasaland (Malawi). His Chartered Company claimed exclusive mineral rights over a territory of nearly one million square miles (2.6 million square kilometres).

Rhodes was an agnostic and often a fierce critic of missionary activity in Africa. "Modern research," he wrote, "had pulverized the authority of the Bible," and besides, he said, "he had already experienced enough in the diamond fields to question the Christian faith." Rhodes was also a racist. Strongly influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution, he considered the white race as the stronger and it had to prove its superiority by subjecting other races. He believed that the Anglo-Saxons were the master race which was destined to dominate the world. In a blatant racist speech in support of the Voter's Registration Act he said: " Does this House think that it is right that men in a state of pure barbarism should have the franchise and the vote...? Treat the native as a subject people...Be lords over them... The native is to be treated as a child and denied the franchise."

Rhodes' Legacy

When Rhodes died, South Africa and England mourned and eulogized him. But in the town of his birth, he is barely acknowledged. His only monument is a simple brass plate in St. Michael's Church, which reads: "In Memory of Cecil John Rhodes, Premier of Cape Colony, Founder of Rhodesia, Fifth Son of the Vicar." The Rhodes scholarship fund, which was established to instill into young minds the advantage "of the retention of the unity of the Empire" and the "union of the English-speaking throughout the world," is his only lasting memorial. He was a brilliant man whose life story is an extraordinary mixture of high adventure, deception and betrayal on an unimaginable scale.

G. K. Chesterton said of Rhodes, "Rhodes had no principles whatever to give the world...What he called his ideas were the drags of Darwinism which had already grown not only stagnant, but poisonous." In his book *Rhodes: The Race For Africa*, Anthony Thomas describes Rhodes as a man who trusted no one and thought that everyone could be bought. He used his great gifts to pursue ends that were pragmatic and in the end a disaster for southern Africa. He observed that when Rhodes was at the height of his power, men and women of vision were already sounding warnings of a terrible future for their country unless power and wealth were shared; unless black and white, Afrikaner and Englishman were made to feel part of the same nation.