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### Colonialist Disinformation in Apartheid South Africa

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# South African Apartheid: Upholding White Supremacy Through Disinformation Campaigns

Presented by Iris DeFino

## BACKGROUND:

The South African Apartheid began in 1948 under the National Party (NP). It was characterized by the **geographical and socioeconomic segregation of races**, fueled by White supremacy and economic interests (Beck 126)—but under the guise of a beneficial initiative for all (Vandenbosch 518-36). In the **effort to justify the regime**, the government employed various disinformation campaigns, **spreading false information** about apartheid conditions, silencing BIPOC voices, threatening and deporting journalists, **censoring portrayal of apartheid reality in media and education** (Leonard et. al 33-40), and detaining and abusing dissenters. These efforts were driven by colonialist sentiments and enabled systems of racial **oppression** in South Africa for decades.

# Disinformation was a colonialist strategy employed to perpetuate systemic racism in Apartheid South Africa



Dissenters protest apartheid initiatives following the implementation of “pass laws”.



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## METHODS:

1. Collected archives of political cartoons, parsing their claims and racial implications (Lockman)
2. Studied personal accounts of journalists facing government intervention (Davis 6-27)
3. Consulted scholarly papers on misrepresentation of apartheid and propaganda in schools (Randolph-Robinson 24-33)
4. Analyzed the NP’s efforts to gain international support, particularly from the U.S. and Canada
5. Applied theories of critical disinformation studies (Kuo and Marwick) to articulate strategies of disseminating these false claims

## CONCLUSION:

The South African apartheid worked to ensure White power and reap further economic and social privileges at the expense of BIPOC populations. Despite the overt systemic abuses and human rights violations under the apartheid, the NP worked to disseminate a more favorable image of the regime through multifaceted disinformation campaigns that were driven by colonialist sentiments, and that perpetuated these systems of racial oppression. A historical analysis of this era reflects the racist ideals that have long been rooted in our sociopolitical culture, and that remain present today (Freelon et. al). **It is with this awareness that we must recognize our own role in fighting back against systems of oppression.**

*Apartheid* (in Afrikaans), literally means “*apart-ness*”. It is defined as “A crime against humanity committed with the intent of maintaining a cruel system of control by one racial group over another” (Amnesty International).

