

Socioeconomic Class and the History of South Africa

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In any historical account gender, race, socioeconomic class and many more issues are closely interwoven. In fact, to try and separate them would be not only onerous but also a specious task because the resulting account, although perhaps straightforward, would be at best only partial. However, when considering the history of Southern Africa, the most encompassing account would be that of socioeconomic class. The motives behind the historical events of Southern Africa have been strongly socioeconomic, even if the motives then evoked racial or gender based issues. Thus, if one had to choose a way to understand South African history, it should be socioeconomically.

The motivation for colonization was economic. It eventually became more economically efficient for the Dutch East India Company (VOC) to build its own port than to continue trading with Africans on its way to Eastern Asia (Ross, 21). Dealings between [settlers](#) and Africans were based on socioeconomics, whether the interaction was buying and selling [cattle](#) and sheep or a conflict over the amount of land that settlers were taking from the Xhosa. For Africans, using a large amount of land for grazing one's cattle was a symbol of high status because it meant that you had many cattle to graze and that you could protect

a large amount of land (Ross, 22). The settler's invasion was an economic blow.

Also, the Great Trek was caused because Afrikaners felt that they did not have the socioeconomic status they desired. Their land was being divided into small pieces, so they decided it would be better to go out and find other land than to continue to live as they were in the lower class. This was no mass movement of the "Afrikaaner People," but only a number of small groups setting out to claim "free" land for themselves (Ross, 39). The wars between the Africans and Trekkers at these times were fought as the Africans realized that these people were coming to stay on their territory, and as the Trekkers realized that they would have to kill to keep the land they needed to secure wealth (Ross, 40).

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