

# Historical Consciousness and Historical Culture – the views of Afrikaner adolescents

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## Introduction and context

After the National Party came to power in 1948 large scale changes were implemented to the educational system. These changes included the introduction of mass education and the enforcement of Apartheid in all spheres of life, including schooling. Most importantly, in the context of this paper, the National Party Government took firm control of History education and, until 1994 with the end of pigmentocracy, History school textbooks were written, curricula were devised, and the subject was generally taught from an Afrikaner-Nationalist perspective which, in crude terms, portrayed whites in general, and Afrikaners in particular, as heroes and people of colour as villains. Likewise History at certain universities was dominated by the agenda of the state. In Orwellian terms it was a case of he who controls the present controls the past, and he who controls the past controls the future. Consequently all South African learners were taught a History in which the struggles of the Afrikaner against both the Africans and the British were glorified. In turn the History of people of colour was portrayed as not so glorious. This changed after 1994 when History education, like all other aspects of South African society, was transformed. The new curricula envisaged, and eventually implemented, was a paradigm shift away, both in terms of content and methodology, compared to the Afrikaner Nationalist-orientated curricula of the past. As a result, Afrikaners in a reversal from their previous position of dominance and power, found themselves on the fringes of History. This did not go unnoticed and recently a lively debate took place between Professor Fransjohan Pretorius of the University of Pretoria and Doctor Fanie du Toit the project manager of the *Turning Points* History series in the pages of the

Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, *Rapport*. Pretorius felt Afrikaners and their History were being marginalised, while Du Toit denied these accusations and argued for a broader inclusive South African History.

In the context of the above, more than a decade after all South Africans have gained their freedom, it is necessary to ask: Where does this leave Afrikaner adolescents and History, especially in the light of the History of History education in South Africa and the positions of power and dominance Afrikaners had in the past? This is a pressing question especially since none of the Afrikaner adolescents currently at school were ever exposed to the ideology of Afrikaner Nationalist-orientated History as the previous generations had been simply because they have undergone all their schooling in the post-1994 period. Instead, over the past decade, they had been exposed to the ideology as enshrined in the very liberal South African constitution which guarantees rights and freedoms for all - a philosophy which is embodied in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and the History Curriculum. The NCS, in turn, is supported by a range of new generation textbooks screened by a national committee, and in some instances published with the full support of the National Government.

The purpose of this study is therefore to investigate, against the backdrop as outlined above, the Historical Consciousness and Historical Culture of Afrikaner adolescents in 2006.

### **Conclusion**

If a profile had to be compiled of the Historical Consciousness and Culture of Afrikaner adolescents surveyed have created it would possibly look something like this:

Someone that is Afrikaans speaking; very religious; shows no interest in politics; acknowledges the existence of democracy but does not embrace it at all; attaches great importance to History and views it as important in understanding

of the past, the present and the future; enjoys Historical novels, films, museums and stories adults tell about the past; distrust History textbooks, and their teachers while preferring to trust Historical documents, documentaries and museums. In addition, they enjoy the study of Meta narratives of World and South African History and specifically themes around Apartheid, the Great Trek and the Boer Republics. Otherwise they enjoy learning about the History of their families, celebrities, famous people and royalty. Their view of the New South Africa is a paradoxical one – although they recognize the democracy, good economy and the justice and freedom it brought, they also view it as a place where affirmative action is a negative presence and where the language and History of the Afrikaner is oppressed. As a result Mandela is not embraced as an idol and they would exert no energy at all to save the statue of an ANC leader. Instead they would rather expend energy on environmental matters while they treasure freedom of speech and want peace. However, at the same time they are actually aware of being Afrikaners. Finally they view the South African past, from their present position in time, as an undemocratic but unpolluted, relatively prosperous place with a low population density. In contrast the South African future is anticipated as a democratic place that is severely polluted and overpopulated. Finally in their view, like in the past, the future will be characterized by conflict between rich and poor and the various ethnic groups.