

# White Consolidation and Red Panic: Cold War Racial Tensions in Southern Rhodesia

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*Excerpt*

## II. A Brief Colonial History

In 1889, the British South Africa Company, administered by Cecil Rhodes, received its charter to administer an area in the southern horn of Africa known to European explorers as Zambesia. This expedition marked the last time that a private company, using a private army, embarked on the military takeover of a foreign territory.<sup>1</sup> As the sun set on the nineteenth century and on Rhodes' distinct manner of colonization, the segregational system that would last for the next seventy years was established. The most obvious aspect of this system was its split administration, in which the affairs of blacks and whites were governed by two totally separate governmental entities.<sup>2</sup> Though the two governing bodies would eventually be unified, the theory behind their separation remained, and until 1980 Euro- and Afro-descendant populations were kept highly segregated in virtually all aspects of public life.

A second aspect of the unique personality of the territory, renamed Southern Rhodesia after its patriarch in 1895, can also trace its roots back to the early days of its settlement by Europeans. The area remained a property of the South Africa Company until 1923, at which point it joined the British Commonwealth as a self-governing colony. To put the timing of this late transition to colonial status into perspective, Southern Rhodesia joined the British colonial system just eight years before South Africa won its postcolonial independence. Additionally, Southern Rhodesia held a curiously independent position as one of Britain's colonies, straddling

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<sup>1</sup> Eliakim M. Sibanda, *Zimbabwe African People's Union 1961-87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005), 19.

<sup>2</sup> Miles Hudson, *Triumph or Tragedy? Rhodesia to Zimbabwe* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981), 14.

the line between a true colonial possession and an independent member of the Commonwealth.<sup>3</sup> In fact, a 1949 Colonial Office memorandum described the British Empire as comprising: “(a) The States which are fully sovereign members of the Commonwealth, i.e. the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, ... (b) Southern Rhodesia, and (c) Colonial Territories,” indicating the trouble that even the British government had in classifying Southern Rhodesia’s legal status.<sup>4</sup> The late entry into the British colonial system and the somewhat murky bounds of the colony’s independence meant that Southern Rhodesian ties to Great Britain were comparatively less powerful than Britain’s ties to many of its other colonial possessions. In many senses, these weak links can help explain the independent—or as the British would later argue, rebellious—streak that developed in the white settler culture of Southern Rhodesia.<sup>5</sup>

After making the transition from a company holding to a British colony, Southern Rhodesia found considerable economic success. By the 1960s, the colony was well developed and thriving, with the British-descended ruling class enjoying, as a rule, a life of ease and comparative wealth.<sup>6</sup> This prosperity was in large part the result of the colony’s exclusionary economic policies. White settlers had been seizing prime lands since the time of Cecil Rhodes, but the process was codified shortly after Southern Rhodesia became a colony in the Land Tenure Act and the Land Apportionment Act, both of 1930. These laws established the areas of the colony that would be subject to black and white citizens’ ownership or purchase, with the African majority population receiving just 21.1 million acres as compared to the whites’ 49.1 million.<sup>7</sup> The 21 million “native” acres were also, generally speaking, considerably less well suited for agriculture than those areas allotted to the white population. With more people crowded into smaller, less arable plots of land, many Africans were forced by necessity to

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<sup>3</sup> Josiah Brownell, *The Collapse of Rhodesia: Population Demographics and the Politics of Race* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 8.

<sup>4</sup> “Themes of Publicity about the Commonwealth,” 1949, CO 875/52/6, quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Gerald Horne, *From the Barrel of a Gun: The United States and the War Against Zimbabwe, 1965-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 4; “Worried Europeans Mix Politics And Talk Of Violence in Rhodesia: Africans and Their Rights Are a Staple Topic of Conversation as the Curse Of Race Rivalry Comes Into Open,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1961; Hudson, *Triumph or Tragedy*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Sibanda, *Zimbabwe African People’s Union*, 42.

abandon their own small properties in the countryside and seek work either in an exploitative agricultural system (which in many ways mirrored the American sharecropping system) or as unskilled urban workers, in which context career advancement was often legally prohibited.<sup>8</sup>

This inequality was further exacerbated by the system of franchise enumerated in the 1961 constitution, in which no formal color barriers existed, but income and education requirements served to render the black population essentially removed from the political process. Out of a population of over 3.5 million Africans, less than 13,000 were registered voters in 1962.<sup>9</sup> In response to the electoral exclusion, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), a fledgling Black Nationalist group in Southern Rhodesia, demanded that all eligible black voters boycott the 1962 elections in order to call attention to the colony's discriminatory political system. This boycott, perhaps predictably, helped allow for the election of a government dedicated to the further cementation of white political power.

It is in this context that the events of the late 1950s and early 1960s unfolded. In the aftermath of World War II, Britain and the world at large was engaged in a general process of decolonization—a sometimes peaceful but often violent process. On the part of Great Britain, though, there was a general willingness by 1960 to structure a negotiated independence for many of its African colonies, including Southern Rhodesia, which was already largely self-governing. The newly free Southern Rhodesia, it was posited, would have total control over its internal and external affairs, but remain a part of the greater British Commonwealth, thereby retaining Great Britain as an important ally and trading partner. This negotiated independence, however, would bring with it a major and, to the white Southern Rhodesians, largely unpalatable demand—in order to establish their own, national government, they had to extend (or, at least, take the first steps towards extending) full political participation to the black African population. Like their European neighbors in South Africa and other African colonies and former colonies,

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<sup>8</sup> Annie Barbara Chikwanha, "The Trajectory of Human Rights Violations in Zimbabwe," *Institute for Security Studies*, Paper 202, October, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Brownell, *Collapse of Rhodesia*, 29; Kenneth Young, *Rhodesia and Independence: A Study in British Colonial Policy* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons LTD, 1969), 60.

white Southern Rhodesians retained control of the government only through extraordinarily prejudicial and exclusive legislation and a strict and hard-lining use of state force. The British majority rule stipulation was highly unpopular.

That is not to say, however, that the white populations of the Africa constituted a homogenous bloc. This fact is perhaps best demonstrated by the infamous Boer-British hostilities in South Africa, but these kinds of rivalries existed across the continent. Within Southern Rhodesia, there existed a considerable distinction between the majority-British-descended population and Boer immigrants from neighboring South Africa. Similar divisions also existed between the aforementioned groups and the small but existent southern European immigrant population. In fact, even recent British immigrants were regarded as different in character and status than those British-descended settlers whose families had been living in Rhodesia for many generations. Despite comprising a small minority (generally estimated at less than six percent) of the colony's population, whites still placed a strong emphasis on the cultural and ethnic differences between these groups for the first several decades of Southern Rhodesia's short colonial life.<sup>10</sup> In the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, the understanding of "whiteness" in Southern Rhodesia became increasingly all-encompassing as this time period saw the radicalization and solidification of white political and social thought, a development that culminated in the passage of the UDI, and, relatedly, the proliferation of the Southern Rhodesian red panic of the 1960s.

### **Bibliography**

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<sup>10</sup> Brownell, *Collapse of Rhodesia*, 3, 14.

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*Author Commentary*

Kellen Heniford

Structure and transitions in a paper can often be tricky. At least for me, getting them right takes a good deal of forethought. I always begin by asking myself what I seek to accomplish in the paper or chapter that I’m working on. What is it that I’m looking to prove, and what arguments will I use to prove it? My next step is a broad outline, which displays, on the most basic level, the logic of my paper. Point one leads to point two, and, knowing point two, we can surmise point three; point two and three suggest point four, and so on. Without getting into the nitty-gritty of my evidence—although it is important to keep evidence in mind, so I know I can make the broader arguments—I make sure the chunks of my paper flow logically from one to the next. From there, I flesh out this skeleton of an outline with supporting evidence, all the while trying to arrange it in a logically coherent fashion. There is no absolute rule to this kind of organization. Sometimes, particularly in a discipline like history, chronology will be important to the paper and will provide a kind of built-in structure. Other times, it may make more sense to group evidence or arguments more thematically. The primary thing to consider while going along is whether you have laid the groundwork for the claims that you are making. Your evidence and arguments should build upon the ones that came before them. For me, it is often easiest to visualize this kind of building when my argument is in outline form; different strategies may work better for other people, however.

My piece in this journal is a section from my fall semester Junior Paper for the History Department, which focused on the white separatist movement in the British colony of Southern Rhodesia in the 1960s. This piece of writing in particular outlines the development of the colony and is the second section in my JP, meaning that this selection itself serves as a building block for the arguments I make later in the paper. Within the section, however, there is also a logical flow. In this case, chronology provides much of the structure—in describing the history of a colony, it makes sense to start at the beginning of the colonization period. There is also an argument imbedded in this structure. A discriminatory state had been in place for as long as white people had run Southern Rhodesia, and this section advances the claim that early discrimination laid the groundwork for the tensions the rest of my paper explores. The last two paragraphs zoom out a bit, themselves working as a transition point for the next section of the paper, which focuses on the consolidation of a white political bloc in Southern Rhodesia. Outlining was a central strategy in arranging the structure not just of this section, but of my JP in its entirety. Mapping out the logical connections you want to make and planning out your writing before you begin makes crafting transitions, one of the hardest parts of writing a paper, that much easier.

*Fellow Commentary*

Conor Dube

Kellen’s structure in this paper is a good example of the way a clear and cogent structure can help the reader to understand an argument, and how the use of macrostructure can free up microstructure to focus on individual parts of the argument. The excerpt here is part of one section (A Brief Colonial History) of a larger paper, Kellen’s Junior Paper. By explicitly denoting the content of the section, Kellen frees herself to let her subsequent paragraphs to center on the same subject.

The microstructure in this section is a good example of how strong transitional sentences can carry the reader through an argument. This technique, which also relates to the tone adopted by a writer, is especially effective in historical writing that seeks to build a narrative – although transitions can also be used to indicate gaps or breaks in the story. Looking at Kellen’s transitions shows why they are so effective: she reminds the reader of their position within her argument (“A second aspect of the unique personality of the territory...”), indicates the passing of time (“After making the transition...”), connects causes and effects (“This inequality was further exacerbated...”) and provides background (“It is in this context that the events of the late 1950s and early 1960s unfolded...”). Each of these kinds of transitions links where her argument will go with where it has been.

Effective structure makes a paper cohere. Well-structured papers do not let their readers step back and wonder, “Wait, how did I get here?” By providing continual signposts a strong microstructure acts as the backbone of a paper, the central thread from which all other arguments branch off.