

To what extent was violence necessary for the end of Apartheid in South Africa?

Violence was important to a certain extent in ending apartheid but it was not a necessity. On one hand, violence directed towards the resistance to apartheid was necessary as the violent acts brought attention to the oppressive nature of Apartheid. However, peaceful diplomacy between the government and the African National Congress (ANC) and internal pressure from the citizens were more important factors in ending Apartheid.

The violence which had played the greatest role in ending apartheid was actually the violence perpetrated by the Apartheid regime itself. Indirectly, the violent attacks on apartheid-resistors would draw attention to the oppressive and brutal nature of the regime. The Sharpeville massacre, in which police opened fire on a crowd protesting pass laws, brought international attention to South African human rights violations. 69 were killed and it sparked international uproar and a UN condemnation of the apartheid government. The UN also encouraged a voluntary economic boycott of South Africa, although it was not fully implemented. Similarly, around 600 non-violent protestors would be killed in the Soweto massacre of 1976 in which students were protesting laws requiring only Afrikaans or English to be taught in schools. Soweto's international attention would parallel that of Sharpeville as even more negative attention was drawn to South Africa and international pressure was amplified. Images of Soweto would be seen by the world and eventually, as a result of Soweto and the conditions within South Africa became better understood, the country would be faced with economic pressure and isolation as sanctions and boycotts would be placed upon them. The destabilized economy and international disdain would become key factors in ending the regime.

There are, however, many other factors in the abolition of apartheid that had little at all to do with violence. Namely, the pressure the government faced domestically. Disrespect grew within the nation as international boycotts made the economy unstable. People grew increasingly dissatisfied with the regime and public opinion of the government grew less and less favourable, particularly amongst young people. Trade unions gained the right to bargain and they were hugely opposed to apartheid and eventually the politicians had to acknowledge that the nation had outgrown apartheid. By the time the government had

began negotiations with the ANC, public opinion had turned so strongly against them that an all-white referendum on whether to continue this movement towards democracy concluded that they should by a strong majority. Thus, violence within south Africa did play a role in the ending of apartheid but internal pressure and public opinion played an even more significant role.

Finally, peaceful diplomacy and a policy of “forgiveness” from Mandela and the ANC were hugely significant in ending apartheid. Mandela assured the apartheid government that vengeful action would not be taken against those who were in power before democracy was implemented, much to the dismay of many members of the ANC. However Mandela was aware that severe punitive measures wouldn’t allow the country to transition into an “undivided” south Africa. Moreover, the transition would likely not have been done willingly if government that allowed suffrage for the black south african feared that they would be violently oppressed after elections were held. Mandela explained “[he has] fought against white domination, and [he has] fought against black domination” and his peaceful approach would be the driving factor in getting rid of apartheid.

Although violence was significant in ending apartheid in particular because it drew attention from all over the world to the state of South Africa, peace would be a far more powerful force in stopping apartheid once and for all and, when all the factors which brought the end of apartheid are examined, violence was relatively unnecessary. Sharpeville and Soweto, in addition to many other forms of violence used to oppress South Africans and used against the apartheid regime, would be important in placing pressure on the South African government to end apartheid. However, internal pressure from the South African people, both black and white, in their desire to progress as a nation and, most importantly, Mandela’s leadership in a peaceful and forgiving transition to democracy would be the absolutely necessary factors leading to the end of apartheid.