

Time Travel event, Rudd House, Kimberley 1907

Goal

To understand life in Kimberley in early 1900s and the rapid change of living conditions for the Africans, inequalities and socio-economic differences.

To reflect on equal opportunities and equal rights, in terms of wealth, status, race, place of origin, gender etc, compare the past and today.

Facts

African groups of people had for centuries been living in the interior of southern Africa, as pastoralists, farmers and hunter-gatherers. Life changed considerably when the white settlers moved to these areas in the 19th century and even more when diamonds and gold were discovered in the interior. In a couple of decades many male Africans of various origin were forced to leave their villages to work as contract labourers in the mines. The families were dispersed and traditions lost.

In 1870 and 1871 diamonds were discovered at the dry diggings of Du Toitspan, Bultfontein and Vooruitzicht (later named Kimberley). It was the start of a huge diamond rush and within 50 years Kimberley had turned into a town of 50,000 people. Much of the mining was focused in an open pit mine, The Kimberley Mine (Big Hole), used until 1914, finally 240 meters deep.

In 1880 the De Beers Mining Company was formed by Cecil Rhodes and Charles Rudd. It was the forerunner of De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd established in 1888 when it became the leading diamond company, controlled the market of diamonds and accumulated an enormous fortune.

De Beers saw the need of a stable labour force and to control the migrant labours. In 1885 The French Company opened the first closed compound in Kimberley. There were migrant workers from many ethnic groups, (Pedi, Tsonga, Sotho, Zulu, Tlhaping and Griqua) not allowed to leave for six months. The workers experienced violent changes in their lives, brought about by separation from their rural homesteads, being treated as second-class citizens, working in very dangerous conditions, living in cramped compounds without any privacy and earning low wages. Black men were forced to leave their families and find work, to be able to pay for the taxes that was introduced. Much of the salary was paid in food, accommodation and cheap beer. The skilled jobs were given to the white immigrant workers. The compounds were notorious for disease and malnutrition. In 1906 a new hut tax was enforced, causing riots in KZN.

It was difficult to protest against the working and living conditions, other than maybe deliberately working badly, breaking the tools or not doing any more work than you had to. Anyway, in 1907 white miners went on strike in the Witwatersrand area in protest against importation of Chinese workers and a few years later African miners also went on strike, but over wages and the conditions in the compounds.

Rudd House

The house was built in c.1888 with four rooms. In 1896 it was bought by Charles Rudd who in 1898 passed it to his son Henry Rudd (b 1868). Henry Rudd was married to Mabel Blythe and they had four children. The Rudd family extended the house extensively, up to fifteen rooms finished in 1907(plan indicates 38—including all outbuildings). It was a home for the

wealthy with a large garden and about ten servants, working both indoors and outdoors. The house, because of the style it was built, was called the Bungalow.

Depression

In 1906 there was a decline in the demand for diamonds. De Beers cut production and laid off hundreds of workers. To offer at least some jobs, and maybe calm down the situation in Kimberley, they instituted relief work.

In spite of a slump, the wealthy families wanted to keep up the façade. The depression years of 1906 and 1907 were crowded with gala events and festivities. In September 1907 the Alexander McGregor Memorial Museum was opened with De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd as one of the donors.

Scenario, Final work of the Rudd House in the middle of a slump 1907

For almost ten years Henry Rudd and his family have extended their house. More and more rooms have been added. The residential house has become fancier and more impressive. And a lot of new outhouses have been built. But Rudd and his wife is tired of always having work on the house. Now, finally, it is almost finished. Henry Rudd has invited a few important business people next week for a small celebration.

It is important that the house look better than ever for the celebration. Henry Rudd has his permanent servants, but today he has ordered some extra workers to do the final work on the house and on the garden.

The situation in Kimberley is critical for the mine workers. They were forced to leave their families to be able to pay the new taxes, but life was not as they expected: bad working conditions, low wages and filthy compounds. As a migrant labour you are treated as a second class citizen. And now production decreases to keep up the prize on the diamonds. More and more workers are laid off. No job, no money. Many of the labourers are longing for home and their families and traditions, to the previous life as a free farmer. But is it possible to go back, without any money? How to survive? Many of the workers take this opportunity of temporary work to at least earn something.

Strange enough, the slump seems not to effect the wealthy. They have their gala events and even open a museum, to recognize their achievements.

The situation is a little bit tense when the workers are instructed what to do on the Rudd house. Henry Rudd is happy to see his investments on the house to be finished. And of course the workers will do what is expected of them, but at the same time they think about how they can improve their lives and become a free person with dignity as before. Is equality just a dream? Some have heard about a strike at the mines in Witwaterstrand. Will protest actions help? Or is it possible to go home to the village and family? Probably some of the workers will make plans today. Hopefully the Rudds won't notice...

Roles

Temporary workers, some of them migrant - Pedi, Tsonga, Sotho, Zulu, Tlhaping and Griqua

Indoor servants: Housekeeper, butler, kitchen girls,

Outdoor servants: head gardener, garden boys, stable boys

Foreman/ supervisor

Henry Rudd, wife

Key Questions

- Is it fair with this enormous gap in income and living conditions between different groups of people, mine workers and the wealthy? Will it cause instability and unrest?
As workers, what are our grievances? What are our actions? How will it contribute to a better society?
- How will I keep my traditions and dignity, so far away from my home and my family?
- What are the responsibilities of the employers?

Activities

Indoor activities led by the housekeeper

- Dust and clean
- Make buntings
- Cut the fruit

Garden activities led by the head gardener

- Clean the garden
- Clean the flower beds, trim the hedges
- Set up a croquet game
- Repair work on the house
- Do the laundry
- Singing (dances?)

All groups make designed/written protest plans for improved living conditions

Time plan

08.00 Preparations

09.00 Tea

09.30 Welcome, background, the house, scenario, roles
Dress up, rules

10.00 Initiation, instructions
Activities and discussions

11.00 Henry Rudd comes, makes an inspection. (He discovers hidden plans). Gathering,
arguments.
Song, (dance?)

11.30 End, Short reflection

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