Musical Protest and the Downfall of Apartheid
South Africa

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In 1948, the South African government implemented the system of apartheid. For forty-three years, whites ruled by force to achieve complete separation of whites and blacks. Hoping for a better life, many campaigned for equal rights through protest and violence, subjecting themselves to torture and death. Simultaneously, many demonstrated disapproval in other ways. While scholars suggest apartheid was abolished by force, the narrative at a personal level proposes music as a key to success. 1950s popular music altered the social landscape by showing the world that blacks could be equal to whites. Success of black artists in America was a symbol of freedom and motivator for South Africans. Government officials banned controversial songs from radio and stage to prevent social unrest; this caused the music written and sung in the streets to have the most significant impact. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed social alteration as songs of mourning and disappointment turned into songs of rage as South Africa’s youth rebelled against the system. Music in the 1980s was animated by the dramatic dance, Toyi-Toyi, as blacks took to the streets to express disapproval. Music contributed greatly at funerals, union workers meetings, and inside the walls of prisons. The purpose of this project is to show that music was essential to lift morale, build hope, and incite a feeling of responsibility. As a mode of psychological liberation, lamentation, notification and most commonly political protest, music was used as a key weapon in native South Africa’s defense.