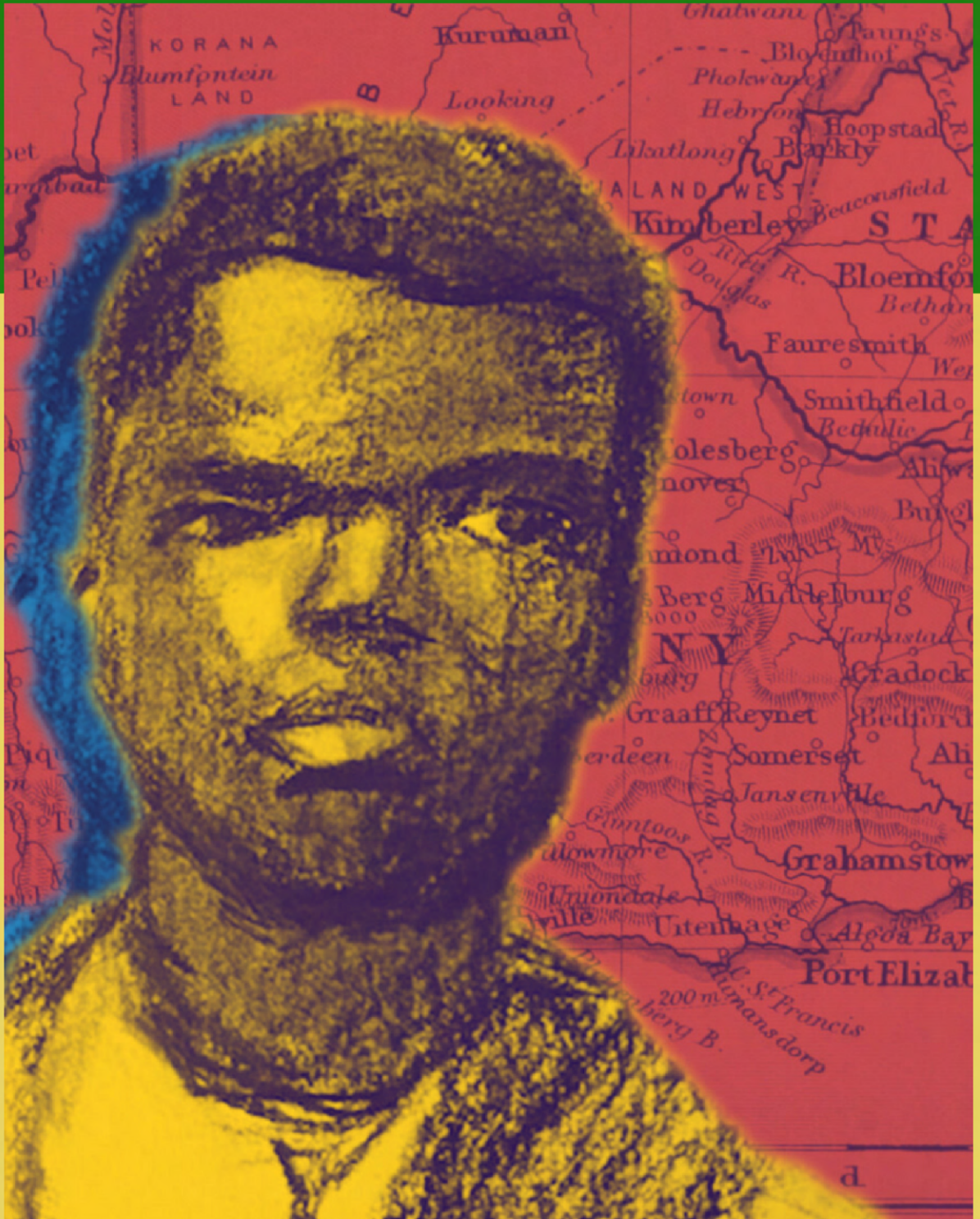


SOLOMON PLAATJE



LIFE & LEGACY

Celebrating the Life and Work of Solomon Plaatje

Celebrating the Life and Work of Solomon Plaatje was delivered as part of the Make it Happen Grant, kindly funded by the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

This visual learning resource provides a snapshot of the life and work of South African writer Solomon Plaatje, one of the founding fathers of the African National Congress (ANC). He visited London in the early 20th Century and spent time living in Leyton.

This collection is suitable for anyone over 11 years old and who is interested in photography, drawing, archival images and local history.

Images

All images have been attributed where possible, but we can make amendments or corrections if we have unintentionally made errors. Please get in touch with trisha.curates@gmail.com if you have any information to help us identify the owners of any of these images.

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Trisha McCauley

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With special thanks to

Claudette Purville of Udetta Arts and workshop participants.



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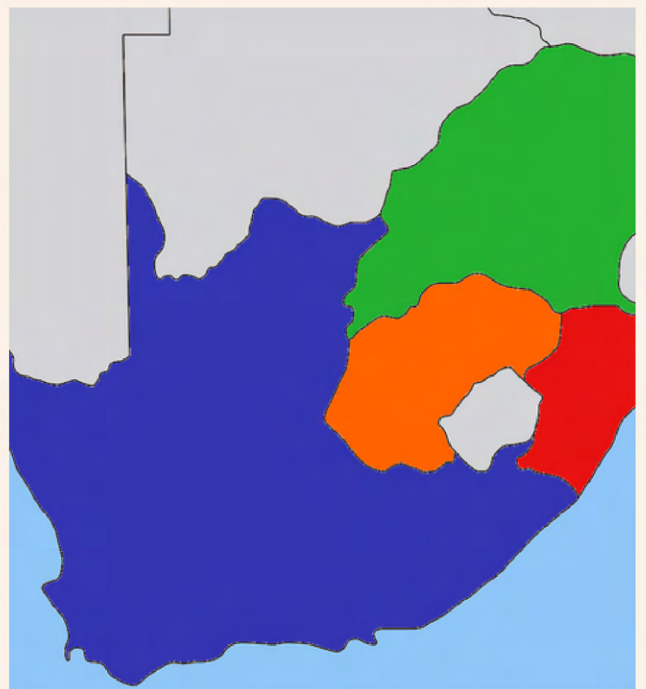
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EARLY YEARS

Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje was born on October 9, 1876, to Lutheran Christian parents and spent his childhood in Orange Free State, which is now the Free State Province of South Africa. He was a proud member of the Barolong clan and always cherished his African identity and culture. Solomon attended the Berlin Missionary Society School and later became a student teacher. After completing his education, he moved to Kimberley, where he worked as a telegraph messenger in the Post Office.



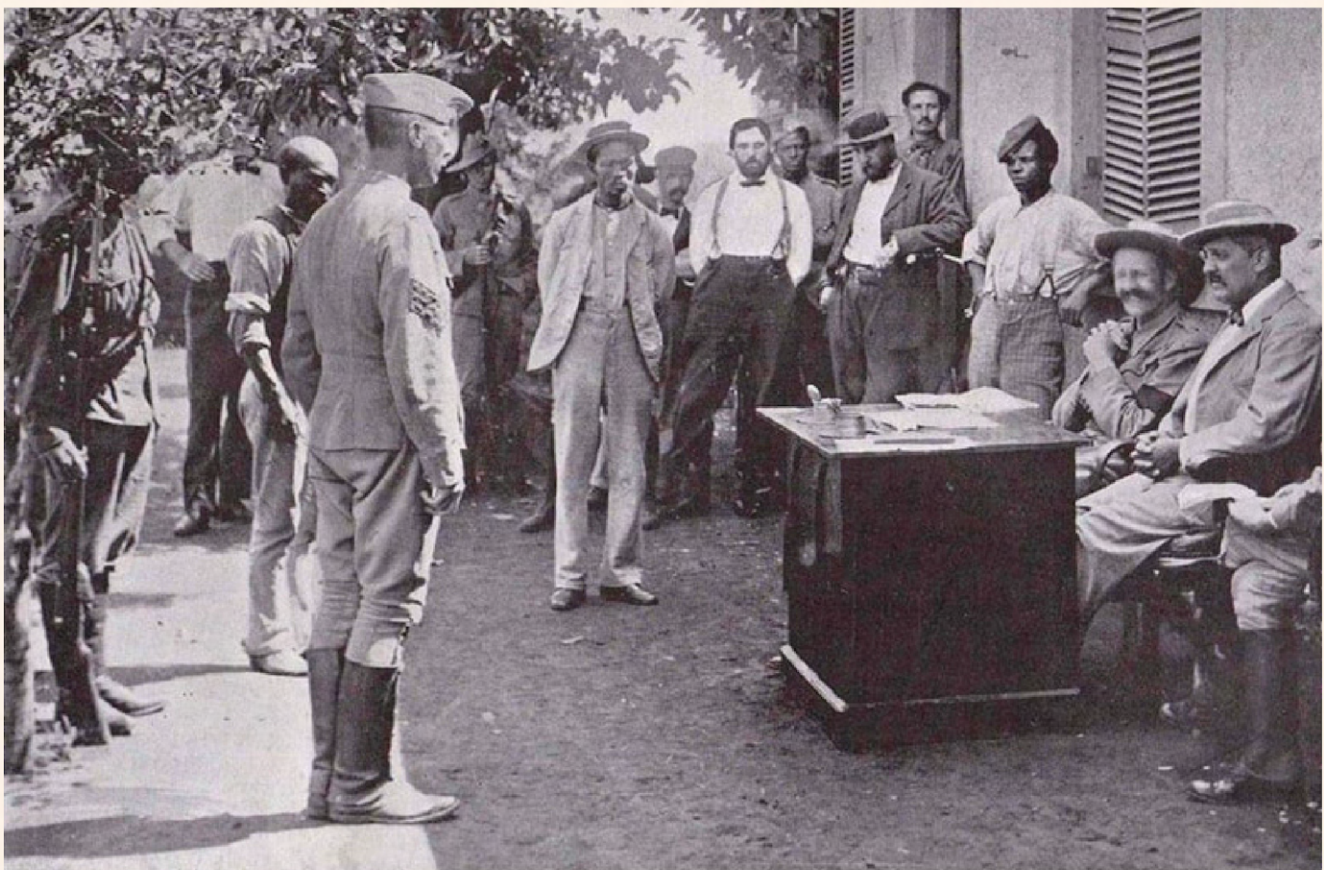
Drawing of Solomon Plaatje by Claudette Purville of Udetta Arts, 2023.



Solomon was fluent in six languages, including several South African dialects, English, Dutch and German. In 1898, he began working as an interpreter at the Kimberley Magistrates Court.



Photograph of Solomon Plaatje from his 1915 book *Native Life in South Africa*, circa 1900.



Solomon Plaatje, Sol Plaatje stands alongside seated Lord Edward Cecil and magistrate Charles Bell during a court session for which he acted as an interpreter. (Image courtesy of Edward Ross, *Mafeking: Siege Views* (Eyre and Spottiswood, London, 1900).



Solomon Plaatje was a committed Christian and organised a fellowship group called the Christian Brotherhood at Kimberley. He was married to Elizabeth Lilith M'belle, and they had six children.

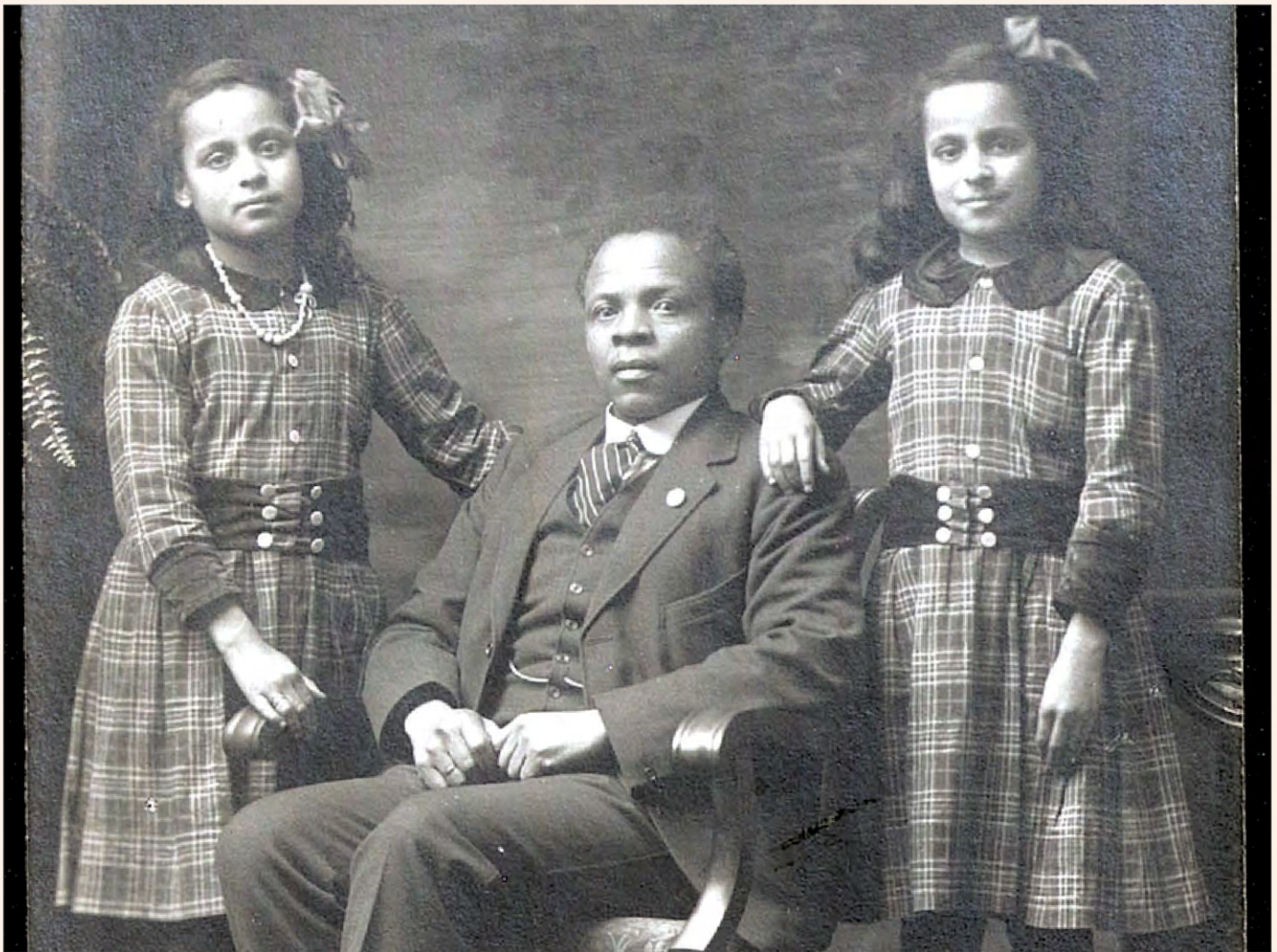


Image: Solomon Plaatje sitting between his two standing daughters, Violet and Olive, Circa 1920 (SOAS Archives, University of London, SOAS, University of London. All rights reserved)



LIFE IN LONDON



The South African Native National Congress delegation to England, June 1914. Left to right: Thomas Mapike, Rev. Walter Rubusana, Rev. John Dube, Saul Msane, Sol Plaatje.



Image: 25 Carnarvon Road, Leyton, 2014.

Solomon was part of a delegation from the South African Native National Congress (which would later become the African National Congress) that first visited the UK in 1914. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of the First World War and lack of funds, the delegation failed to achieve its objectives. Three delegation members returned to South Africa, but Solomon stayed in England until 1917.

The Native Land Act 1913

The Act restricted black people from buying or occupying land except as employees of a white master. It opened the door for white ownership of 87 percent of land, leaving black people to scramble for what was left.

<https://www.gov.za/news/events/commemorative-events/1913-natives-land-act-centenary#:~:text=The%20Act%20restricted%20black%20people,scramble%20for%20what%20was%20left>

Solomon experienced financial problems and moved from Bloomsbury in Central London to 25 Carnarvon Road in Leyton. Here, he rented a single room from Alice Timberlake through his connection with the National Brotherhood Movement, a Christian organisation.

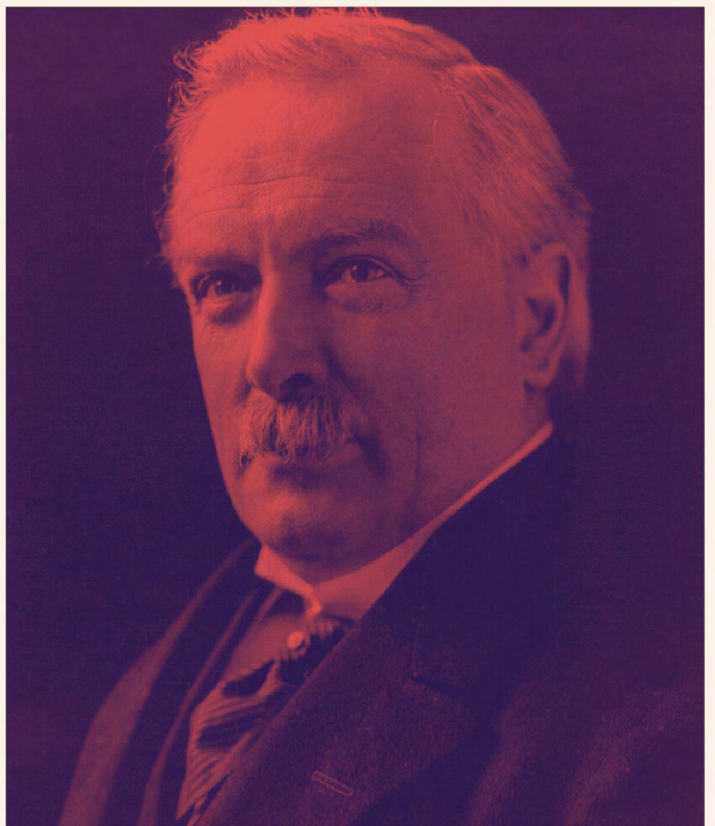


Solomon presented a talk on Christian work in Bechuanaland (Botswana) at Shern Hall Brotherhood, United Methodist Church in Walthamstow on July 11th, 1915.

The cold British winter began to affect Solomon's health, and he became ill for a while. Nevertheless, with the support of Alice Timberlake and her family, Solomon recovered and managed to complete his book, *Native Life in South Africa*, which was published in 1916.

Solomon left England in January 1917 but returned to the UK in 1919-20 and 1922-23 to address public meetings and work as a language assistant at London University. During this period, he also travelled across Europe, Canada, and the United States, using public platforms to raise awareness about the appalling situation of Black South Africans.

In late 1919 Solomon met with the British Prime Minister Lloyd George.



Image, Lloyd George c. 1919

LEGACY



Statue of Solomon Plaatje, Kimberly, Photograph by Flowcomm, 2014.

While he was in England, Solomon faced financial difficulties, poverty, a lack of support from the South African Native Congress, and ill health. Despite these challenges, he persevered and completed his book *Native Life in South Africa* and attended over 300 meetings.

Solomon passed away at the age of 55 in Pimville, Johannesburg, on June 19, 1932, due to pneumonia. Unfortunately, it was not until decades after his death that Solomon finally received the recognition he deserved. His notable writings include *Mhudi, An Epic of South African Native Life a Hundred Years Ago* (1930), translations of four Shakespeare plays in Setswana, and *The Boer War Diary of Sol T. Plaatje: An African at Mafeking*.



Sol Plaatje Museum and Library, housed at Plaatje's former residence 32 Angel Street opened in 1991, photograph by Manthatisi Mosia, 2013.

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

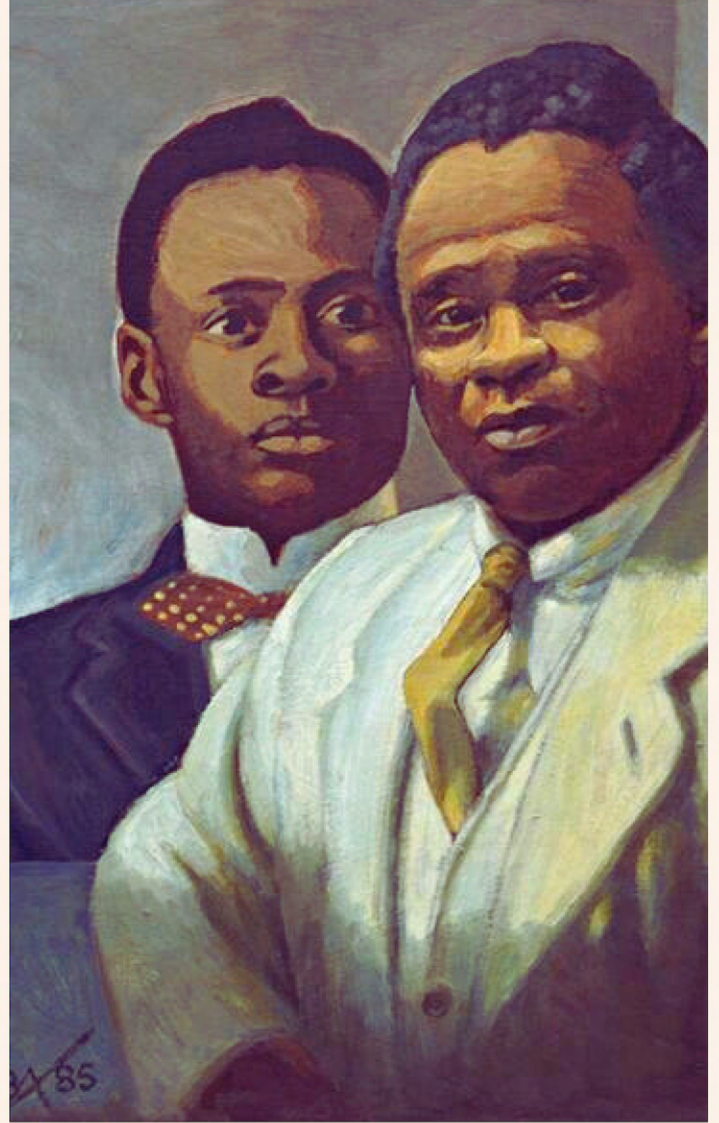


Image: Portrait of Solomon Plaatje, by George Pemba, 1985.



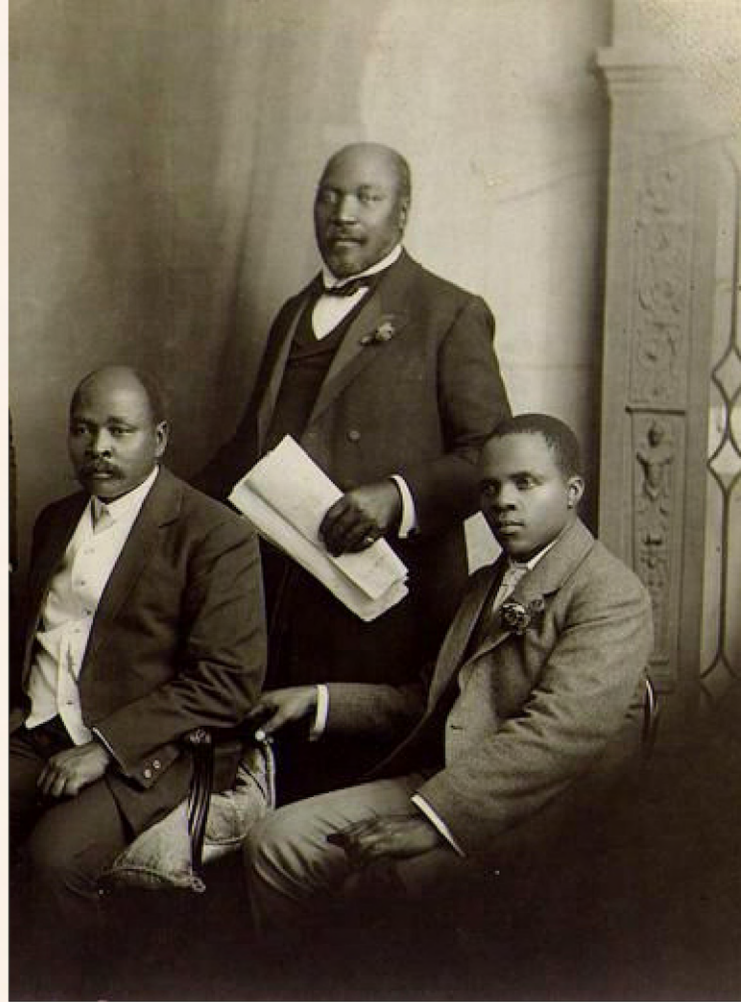


PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY

Portraiture is a type of photography aimed at capturing the personality of a person, or group of people, using natural lighting, studio lighting, backdrops, and various poses.

Create six photographs three in black and white and three in colour, inspired by the archival images in this resource.

Compare your colour and black and white images. Which photographs do you prefer and why?



Sol. T. Plaatje with members of the South African Native National Congress delegation to Britain, 1909-1919

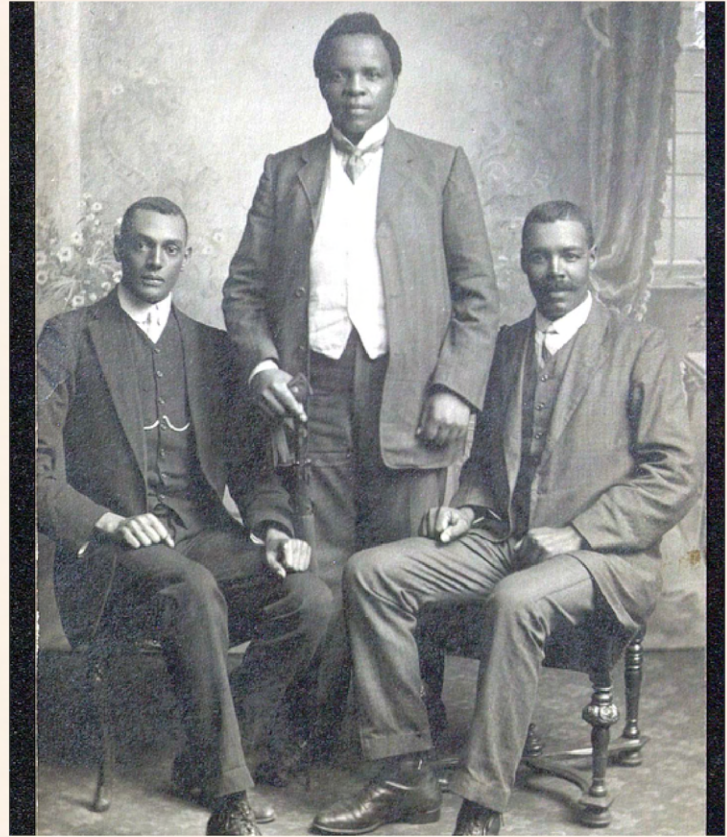


HOW TO READ A PHOTOGRAPH

A photograph is a great source of historical information. When we 'read' a photograph carefully, we can extract information that is often overlooked by just a glance.

Look at the images on this page:

- Observe: What do you see? Identify the elements - describe what is in the image.
- Think: What do you think of this image?
- Wonder: What do you wonder about this image? What questions do you have?



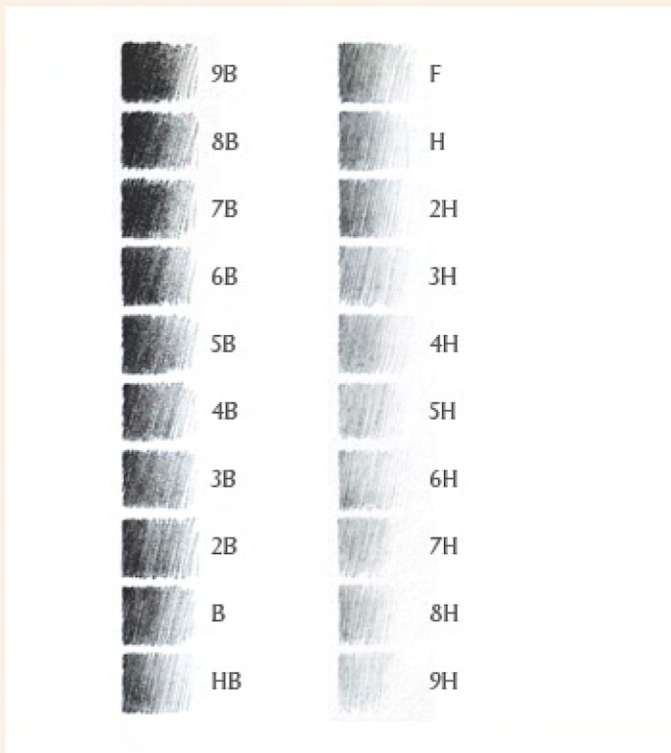
Sol. T. Plaatje standing between members of the South African Native National Congress delegation to Britain. c. 1909-1919.



Sol. T. Plaatje joining a family in their car, author A. D. Hellier Co, circa c. 1909-1919, (SOAS Archives, University of London SOAS, University of London. All rights reserved)

CREATE A CHARCOAL DRAWING

Charcoal is an art medium that has stood the test of time and has been used for over 20,000 years. It is versatile, easy to use, and comes in various types, with willow and compressed being the most commonly used.



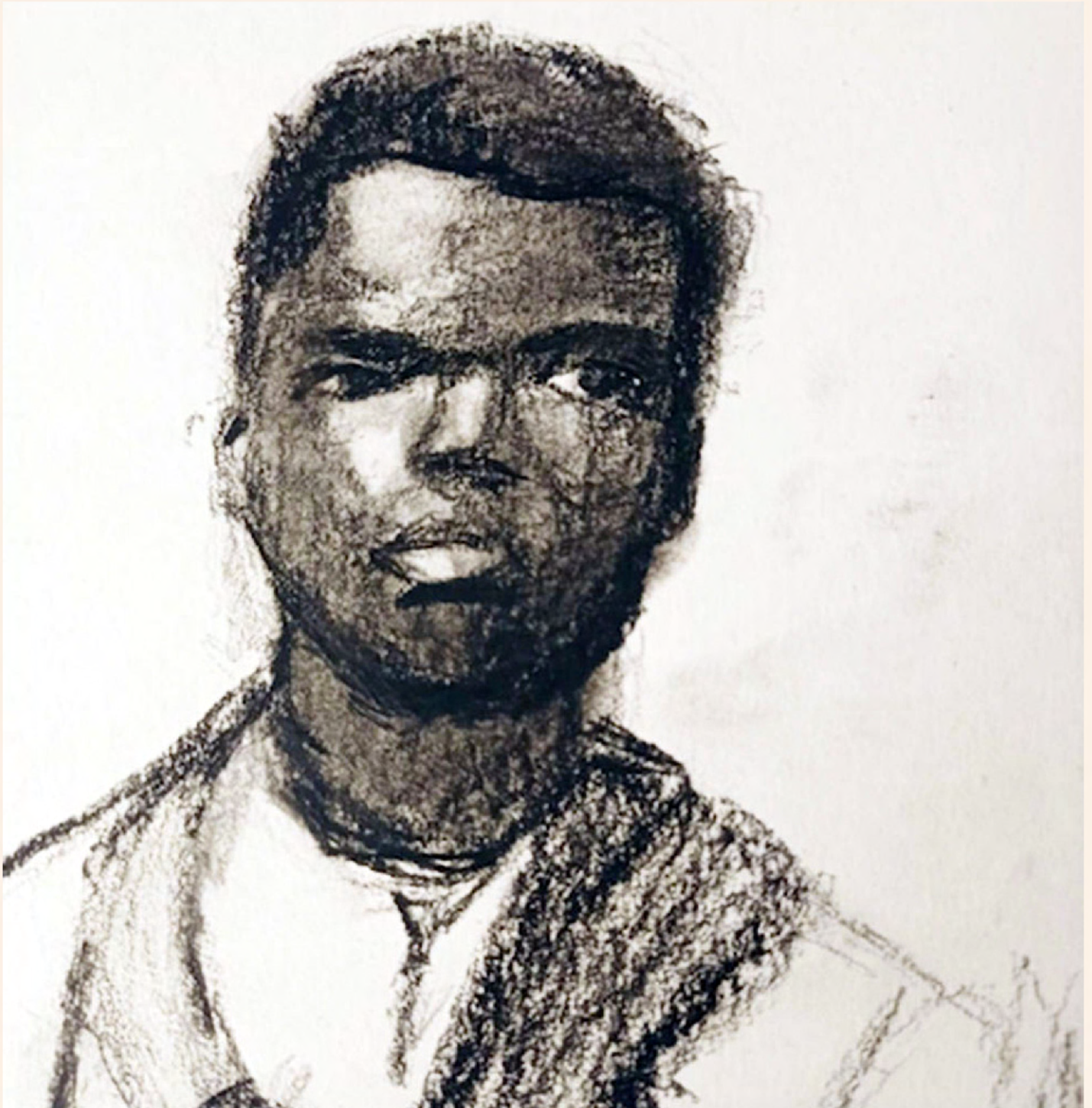
Charcoal can produce a wide range of shades, enabling artists to create stunning art pieces with depth and contrast.

Using charcoal can be a lot of fun, but it can also be messy. Fortunately, mistakes can easily be erased using a soft rubber.

Materials:

- Cartridge Paper
- Various types of hard and soft charcoals
- Putty rubber
- Fixative

To create a charcoal drawing, start with a rough contour sketch to map out the main areas and details. Begin by applying the lighter mid-tone areas and gradually move toward the shadows to create a range of tones. Experiment with the effects of charcoal by varying the pressure you apply. Once the drawing is complete, apply a fixative to hold the charcoal in place.



SOCIAL JUSTICE ART

Social justice art raises questions and commentary on injustices such as racism, war, or poverty that impact the community and the world at large.

Research:

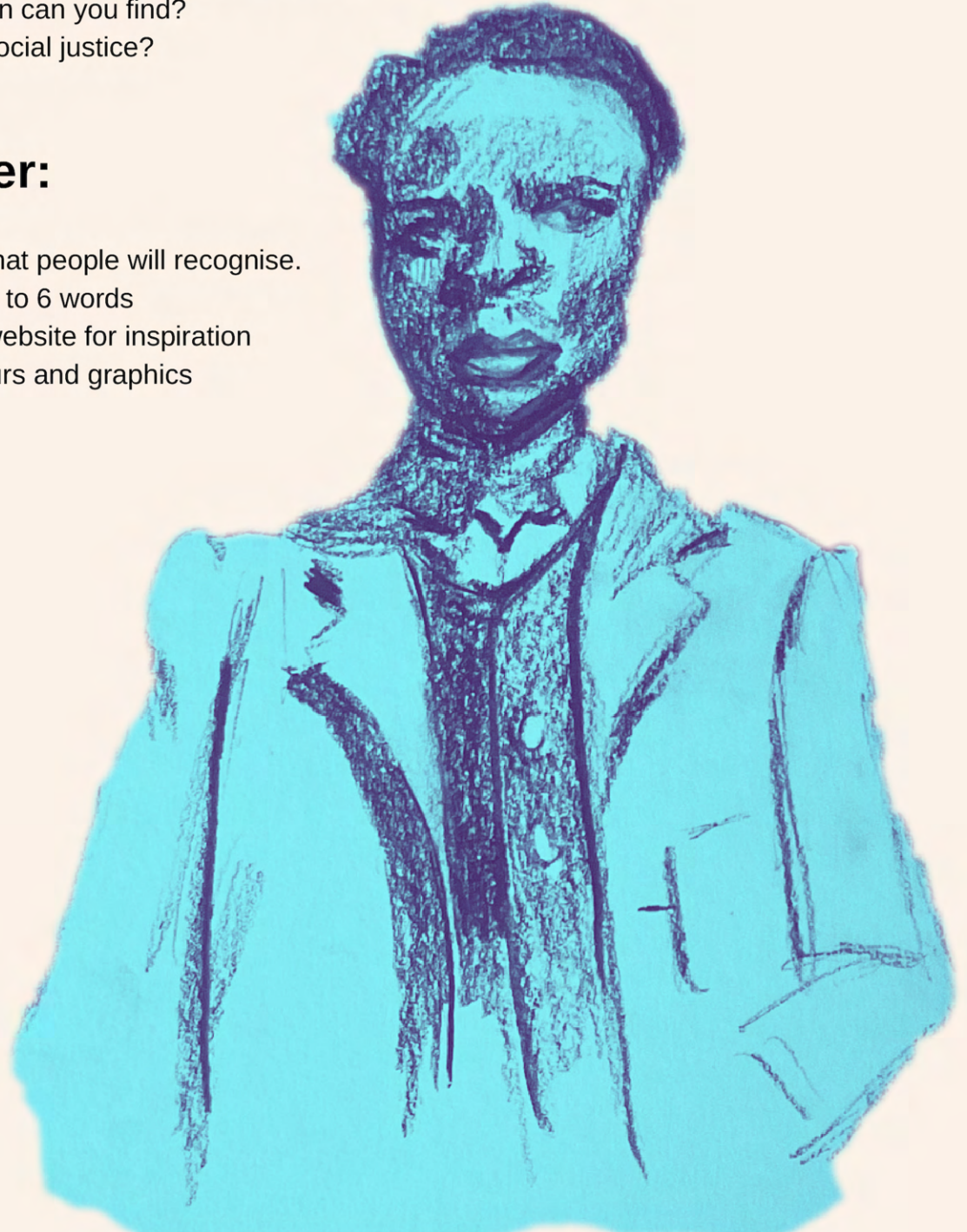
- Research the Native Land Act of 1913 click this [link](#) and read page 4 & 5.
- What do you think about it? What have you learned?
- What further information can you find?
- How can art promote social justice?

Design a Poster:

- Use popular symbols that people will recognise.
- Keep it simple - use up to 6 words
- Visit the [Smithsonian](#) website for inspiration
- Use collage, bold colours and graphics

Materials:

- Cartridge paper
- Magazines
- Felt tip pens
- Scissors
- Colouring pencils
- Rubber
- Glue stick



No to The Native Land Act!



SOURCES

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