

Doornfontein railway station in rush hour. South Africa. 1960s.

This picture shows the reality of apartheid without the need for any words.

This black and white photograph in landscape format shows an outdoor, segregated railway platform. Seen from a viewpoint above the platform, the tracks snake away from us towards the top right-hand corner of the image, with a raised bridge linking the platforms and a small brick-built office in the centre of the platform. The far end of the platform is completely packed with black passengers, pressed together to the very edges – hundreds of people, with more waiting to get onto the platform, standing on the bridge and the stairs down from it. Two officials in white solar topee hats seem to be policing the crowd. At the end of the platform nearest to us, seven white passengers stand spaced out in an expanse of empty platform.

The text explains: 'Getting to or from Johannesburg by railroad is a nightmare if you are black. Trains are too few, too full, too slow. Some African commuters must leave home as early as 5am to be sure of reaching their city jobs by 7.30. Some are unable to catch a train back to their black township before 7 at night. These people may never see their homes in daylight, except on holidays. Twice each day, at the morning and evening rush hours, the segregated station platforms are a bizarre sight. At one end, a few white travellers stand about, surrounded by space. At the other, a dense mass of Africans is congregated, crowded and compressed. No physical barrier separates the black and white zones. At some of the larger stations uniformed police may stand at the boundary and muscle back the crowd. But elsewhere what keeps the blacks from spilling into the white preserve is the unseen power of apartheid.'

