

SOLOMON THEKISHO PLAATJIE
DOCTOR OF LITERATURE, D. LITT
18/04/1998

Solomon Thekisho Plaatje was born near Boshof, Orange Free State (now Free State Province, South Africa). He received a mission-education at Pniel. When he outpaced fellow learners he was given additional private tuition. In February 1892, aged 15, he became a pupil-teacher, a post he held for two years.

As an activist and politician he spent much of his life in the struggle for the enfranchisement and liberation of African people. He was a founder member and first General Secretary of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), which would later become the African National Congress (ANC). As a member of an SANNC deputation he would travel to England, Canada and United States to protest the Natives Land Act.

Plaatje grew to become a polyglot, fluent in at least seven languages and ended up working as a court interpreter during the Siege of Mafikeng, and translated works of William Shakespeare into Tswana. His language talent lead to his career in journalism and writing becoming an editor and co-owner of *Koranta ea Becoana* (Bechuana Gazette) in Mafikeng, and in Kimberley *Tsala ea Becoana* (Bechuana Friend) and *Tsala ea Batho* (The Friend of the People). Plaatje was the first black South African to write a novel in English - *Mhudi. Plaatje* in 1919, but it was only published in 1930. He also wrote *Native Life in South Africa*, which was described as "one of the most remarkable books on Africa by one of the continent's most remarkable writers" and *Boer War Diary* that was first published 40 years after his death.

Plaatje was a committed Christian and organized a fellowship group called the Christian Brotherhood at Kimberley. He was married to Elizabeth Lilith M'belle and had five children.

Plaatje died of pneumonia at Pimville, Johannesburg on 19 June 1932 and was buried in Kimberley.

His legacy includes the changes he made in the South African Post during his tenure there. The Sol Plaatje Municipality in South Africa's Northern Cape Province is named in his honour.

In Kimberley, the house at 32 Angel Street, where Plaatje spent his last years, was declared a National Monument in 1992 (as was his grave in West End Cemetery, in

1997), when it became the Sol Plaatje Museum and Library, run by the Sol Plaatje Educational Trust, with donor funding.

A statue featuring Plaatje, seated and writing at a desk, was unveiled in Kimberley by South African President Jacob Zuma on 9 January 2010.. By sculptor Johan Moolman, it was erected at the Civic Centre, formerly the Malay Camp, and situated approximately where Plaatje had his printing press in 1910-13.