RACIAL SEGREGATION OF PASSENGERS ON THE CAPE AND NATAL COLONIAL RAILWAYS*

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Racial integration on trains and railway stations excited anxiety for the first time in Natal in the 1880s and in the Cape in the next decade. In both colonies there were white passengers who complained about sharing facilities with dirty, uncivilized and sickly blacks. Some blacks complained about discrimination. Train officials were ordered to separate whites and blacks whenever possible. In both colonies parliament approved motions for more effective racial segregation on trains. Passengers were therefore to a certain extent accustomed to segregation when stricter measures, of Transvaal origin, were applied after Union in 1910.

Rassevermenging op treine en spoorwegstasies het vir die eerste keer openbare ongerustheid in Natal in die 1880s en in die Kaap in die volgende dekade opgewek. In albei kolonies was daar blanke passasiers wat gekla het dat hulle fasiliteite met vuil, onbeskaafde en sieklike swartes moet deel. Sommige swartes het oor diskriminasie gekla. Treinbeamptes is aangesê om blankes en swartes wanneer moontlik van mekaar te skei. In albei kolonies het die parlement mosies vir meer doeltreffende rasseskeiding op treine goedgekeur. Passasiers was dus in 'n mate gewoond aan segregasie toe strenger maatreëls afkomstig van die Transvaal ná Uniewording in 1910 toegepas is.

The story of a nation's transport infrastructure and transport services forms a crucial and colourful thread in the tapestry of its past. In South Africa, as elsewhere, this point was demonstrated first, and has been underscored most often, in investigations conducted largely within the framework of economic and political history.[1] By comparison, studies of railway social history began relatively recently, are few in number and are limited in scope. Only now are railway labour practices and the lives of railway employees beginning to be researched. The same applies to passenger transport arrangements and to the experiences of train travellers.[2] In this last connection one of the most obvious themes to address is the making of

*Acknowledgement: Grateful thanks to the HSRC for supporting the research financially.

1. See, for example, P J Winter, *Onder Krugers Hollanders* (Amsterdam, 1937); D J Coetzee, *Spoorwegontwikkeling in die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek* (Cape Town, 1940); J van der Poel, *Railway and Customs Policies in South Africa, 1885-1910* (London, 1933); A J Purkis, "The Politics, Capital and Labour of Railway Building in the Cape Colony, 1870-1885", Unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 1978; K E Wilbur, "The Climax of Railway Competition in South Africa, 1887-1899", Unpublished DPhil thesis, Oxford University, 1982; J J van Helten, "German capital, the Netherlands Railway Company and the political economy of the Transvaal, 1886-1900", *Journal of African History*, 19 (1978), pp. 369-390; D H Heydenrych, "Railway development in Natal to 1895", In: B Guest and J Sellers (eds.), *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony* (Pietermaritzburg, 1985), pp. 47-70; G H Pirie, "The decivilising rails: railways and underdevelopment in southern Africa", *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 73 (1982), pp. 221-228.
2. See D H Heydenrych, "Indian railway labour in Natal, 1876-1895: the biggest Indian work force in the colony", *Historia*, 31 (1986), pp. 11-20; R Ellsworth, " 'The simplicity of the native mind': black passengers on the South African Railways in the early twentieth century", In: T Lodge (ed.), *Resistance and Ideology in Settler Societies* (Johannesburg, 1986), pp. 74-95; V Hogbin, "Railways, disease and health in South Africa", *Social Science and Medicine*, 20 (1985), pp. 933-938. B A Edwards, "Die Spoorbond's Struggle for Supremacy. Afrikaner Trade Unionism on the South African Railways, 1933-1948", Unpublished MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1987; R B Mulholland, "White Labour and Politics: Railway Workers on the Witwatersrand, 1910-1924", Unpublished MA

train apartheid.

More than a century has elapsed since railway officials, politicians and white train users first made an issue of boarding black people as passengers on trains. Before the creation of a unified national railway organisation in 1910, and prior to the legislation of train segregation nationwide in 1916,[3] the three regional railway enterprises responded individually to the question of whether and how to regulate train seating as regards white and black passengers. In the Transvaal, racial segregation on trains was debated most vigorously and was formalised soonest.[4] The rights and privileges of train users having different skin colours was treated with less frenzy and despatch in the Cape and Natal colonies. This was so even though it was in those two territories that passenger trains were operated first and where the question of racial segregation on Government-owned and operated trains had to be confronted first.

Natal Government Railways

After the start of train service in Natal in 1860 it was almost twenty years before the railway served more than just a localised travel market within Durban. To begin with, most, if not all, passengers on the infrequent, small-capacity, town service were white. Explaining, a contemporary commentator implied strongly that if blacks had wanted to use the train, racial segregation would have been inevitable: "no provision was made for third class, as it was never expected that the natives could pay for a ride".[5] Certainly, few black people would have wanted to pay for a slow train journey over a distance which they could walk easily. It was not until the dawn of long distance rail travel to and from the Natal interior in the late 1870s that the problem arose of whether and how to accommodate black people without offending white travellers on what, by then, had become a state-owned railway. The difficulty was tackled first in 1877 by means of Law no. 3 on the management and working of the Natal Government Railways (NGR). There it was stipulated that train passengers would be divided racially. In the terminology of the day, instructions were that special carriages were to be provided for the conveyance of "natives or coolies". No indication was given whether Africans and Indians would be physically directed and confined to designated carriages, or whether they were to be enticed there solely by cheaper fares.

Whatever the intention, the 1882 Natal Railway Commission noted with distaste that "the better classes" of black people, together with the occasional white passenger, were "huddled up with naked or half-naked Natives redolent from their kraals".[6] Searching for ways to remedy the situation, the Commission invited opinion from whites in Natal as to the desirability of refurbishing third class carriages and providing a fourth class for Africans.[7] The re-

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dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988; G H Pirie, "The Cape Colony's 'Railway Protector of Natives', 1904", *Journal of Transport History*, 7 (1986), pp. 80-92; G H Pirie, "Sleepers beside tracks: housing in South Africa's state railway corporation, 1910-1980", *South African Geographical Journal*, 64 (1982), pp. 144-154; G H Pirie, "White railway labour in South Africa, 1873-1924", Unpublished manuscript.

3. G H Pirie, "Racial segregation on South African trains, 1910-1928: entrenchment and protest", *South African Historical Journal*, 20 (1988), pp. 75-93.
   G H Pirie," 'A most difficult and delicate question': racial segregation on the Central South African Railways, 1902-1910", *Journal of Transport History*, (in press).
5. G Russell, *The History of Old Durban* (Durban, 1899), p. 464; A F Hattersley, *More Annals of Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, 1936), pp. 100-101; A F Hattersley, *Portrait of a Colony* (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 175-177.
6. Natal (Colony), *Report of the Natal Railway Commission*, 1882, Government Printer, Pietermaritzburg, p. 11.
   Ibid, p. ii.

sponses which were received addressed the financial and technical viability of an additional class, and the need for graded accommodation for black people as well as white people. Technically speaking, one respondent observed that a fourth class was infeasible if it meant coupling more carriages to trains. The curvature, grade and permissible loading of railway track established clear limits to train weight. If it could be made economic, lower revenue earning fourth class accommodation could be substituted for other seating classes of course. Even if it was not economic, there were those who argued that the NGR had an obligation to keep a third class for whites who could not afford train travel otherwise, and who wished to avoid contact with "dirty" Africans. This did not imply need for a fourth class, as enforced racial division within the third class would have sufficed. Another view was that there might be some merit in a racial barrier that was not entirely impermeable to black people "of a better sort". As if anticipating such an odious suggestion, one respondent stated flatly that it was "extremely undesirable" that black people should be allowed to travel in whatever fare-class they could afford.[8]

Guided in some measure by public opinion, the 1882 Railway Commission drew to the attention of the NGR the possibility of dividing third class carriages along racial lines. Whether or not this particular step was taken immediately, the Commission was firm that train officials should be instructed to isolate "unclothed" African passengers as far as possible.[9] The desire for even unspoken racial separation within the various fare-classes did not go unnoticed, and by at least 1885, station masters and train staff had been instructed to use "as much discretion as possible" when seating black passengers. The aim was to minimise friction with white passengers.[10] Apparently, a good deal of tact and sensitivity was required to avoid unpleasantness among black and white passengers who had paid the same fare. For, as General Manager D Hunter told the Select Committee on Railways in 1886, the travelling public would really only ever be satisfied with five classes, three for whites, and two for blacks.[11] The sole exception to otherwise rigid separation of black and white people on trains arose in respect of the black domestic servants who sometimes accompanied their white employers. The stipulation that this kind of travel would be permitted only if servants were clean, was a singularly odd condition for the NGR to consider making, let alone policing. It was also somewhat impudent to suppose that white ladies would employ personal assistants who were dirty![12]

Racial separation on Natal trains may have begun surreptitiously but, as the practice took hold, it became more blatant. Indeed, using Hunter's own description, a colour bar of sorts had become "routine" by 1890. In the third class, for example, special provision had been made to seat white passengers in compartments at either end of third class carriages, or alternatively, to seat them in second class.[13] However, this flexibility diminished as the railways stretched further inland and as the number of people wishing to travel increased commensurately. In 1897 the number of passengers conveyed on the NGR exceeded one million for the first time, thereby doubling the 1884 total.[14] More than sixty percent of the passengers held third class

8. *Ibid*, submissions by R Jameson, p. iv; G Sinclair Smith, p. vi; James and Son, p. vii; Beningfield and Son, p. x; A Fass and Co., p. xiv, C J Saner, p. xviii; J Stanton, p. xxi.
9. *Ibid*, p. 11.
10. South African Transport Services Library Archives, Johannesburg (hereafter, SATSLA), *General Appendix to the NGR Working Time Tables*, no. 3, 21 Dec. 1885.
11. Natal (Colony), *Sessional Papers of the Legislative Council*, (hereafter, *Sessional Papers*), LC 34, 1886, p. 209.
12. *Sessional Papers*, LC 34, 1891, question 1176. Later, the NGR was to boast in glowing prose about the cleanliness (also deference and honesty) of African waiters who served white passengers in dining cars. *South African Railway Magazine*, vol. 3, Apr. 1909, p. 8.
13. *Sessional Papers*, LC 20, 1890, questions 399-404.
14. Natal (Colony), *Statistical Yearbook*, 1909, Government Printer, Pietermaritzburg.

tickets, although many spilled over into the second class so as to avoid the crush. On occasion, overcrowding in third class was relieved by the train guard giving passengers space in his coach; a more permanent solution might have been to revive the idea of a fourth class. On the longer journeys a new difficulty which arose was how to deal with the increasing numbers of black passengers who wanted overnight sleeping accommodation. Another inevitable outcome of increased train travel was the pressure which mounted for the provision of separate station platform toilet facilities for black and white train users.[15] Not least important, the commencement of train services into the Transvaal in the second half of the 1890s created the problem of meshing NGR practices with those on Transvaal railways where black passengers had only restricted choice in their use of trains and in the class of accommodation.

In this environment of intensifying racial consciousness, well-informed black passengers took greater notice of their travel rights. Hardships experienced by Indians in particular were given prominence in the 1890s by M K Gandhi, then a young barrister and later the famous Indian nationalist leader. In 1893 Gandhi himself had the ignominious experience of being ordered out of a first class compartment on an NGR train; the incident was to become the most widely known and most infamous in the long history of railway segregation in South Africa. Holding a first class ticket, Gandhi refused to leave his place and was then forcibly evicted and dumped on Pietermaritzburg station platform. According to one biographer, a lengthy telegram to Hunter secured him a reserved compartment on a subsequent train.[16]

Also in 1893, after a little known incident, a case came before the Natal courts involving an Indian who, when travelling in second class, was obliged to reseat himself on two occasions. Evidence was that he was asked to leave his compartment first by the District Superintendent of Railways at Newcastle. On having his authority queried, the official threatened to "knock hell" out of the Indian and to evict him forcibly. Later, in the compartment to which he had been removed, the Indian passenger awoke to find himself sharing with a white man, a white woman and a white child. At Pietermaritzburg a shunter saw this group and, despite protest from the white man, said he was not going to allow "coolies" to travel in the same compartment as whites. Anticipating another ugly scene, the Indian removed himself a second time. Shortly, after he had been joined by another white passenger, the same shunter offered to find the white man another seat if he objected to travelling with "that stinking coolie". Unimpressed by both the verbal abuse and the denial of rights to the Indian passenger, the judge in the case awarded the man £10 damages. His decision was applauded by news editors who agreed that incivility, annoyance and affronts to individual dignity were unacceptable.[17]

It is unlikely that many instances of racial discrimination on the NGR were resolved as satisfactorily as these two in 1893. Gandhi's angry, exaggerated outburst in an open letter to the Natal Legislative Council and Assembly at the end of 1894 ought to be seen in this light. Railway officials, he claimed, could treat Indians as "beasts". Continuing, he argued that no matter how clean Indians were, their very sight was so offensive that every white man in the Colony objected to sitting in the same compartment even for a short time. These assertions were swiftly repudiated by Natal's Agent-General. Undaunted, Gandhi continued his campaign with a letter of protest in October 1896 to *The Times of India*. He wrote that it was not unusual to see respectable Indians being "kicked, pushed, and sworn at" by station masters. Durban station, he noted, was "the dread" of his countrymen, and it was not the only station where they felt like "footballs". Inconsiderate treatment of Indian passengers was annoying enough but as Gandhi remarked, it was especially infuriating to encounter crude racialism in

15. Natal (Colony), Third Report of the Select Committee on Railway Matters, *Sessional Papers*, LC 34, 1891, p. 260, item 67; minutes of evidence to the Select Committee, LC 34, questions 305, 2155.
16. C F Andrews (ed.), *Mahatma Gandhi: His Own Story* (London, 1930), pp. 97-99.
17. *Natal Advertiser*, 22 Nov. 1893; *Natal Mercury*, 24 Nov. 1893.

Natal where there was no law against black people purchasing second or first class train tickets.[18]

Public debate about racial separation on the Natal trains faded in the final years of the nineteenth century. Concern over the 'batch' transport of contracted African migrant labourers by rail came to eclipse questions about the niceties of seating arrangements among passengers travelling on their own account. It was only as an adjunct that the proposal was made to divide the third class such that Indians could sit away from the African migrants who were "not always cleanly".[19] The idea gained further impetus in 1904 when the all-white Natal Legislative Assembly was told that on the Richmond line Indians refused to share third class facilities with Africans; that the Griqua population would not travel among Indians; and, inevitably, that whites "ought not to be expected to ride with either".[20] There was no compulsion to do so, of course, even though protest could be costly. In at least one instance, a white third class traveller who declined to sit with Africans and switched to second class was made to pay the excess fare.[21] In all likelihood a similar penalty would have been paid by the white farmer who, in 1899, declined to use his second class ticket on account of the "nauseating stench" evidently from an Indian passenger.[22]

Discussion about Natal's railways in the rurally-dominated Legislative Assembly in 1904 was extraordinary in that, for the first time, a motion calling for formal racial separation on trains was approved. The debate took place amid continued anxiety about inadequate racial restrictions on the NGR. One white man's disbelief at seeing a train guard usher an African into his second class compartment prompted his plea for racial segregation on the basis of the 'overpowering effluvia' emanating from black passengers. Similar representations had been made earlier by the Inanda Agricultural Society and the Natal Farmers Conference. In both 1900 and 1901 the latter organisation resolved unanimously to ask the NGR to set aside compartments for people "of European descent".[23] As was to be the case often in the future, the proposal for sharp racial divisions was held to be in the interest of all racial groups, none of which liked to travel "mixed up", it was alleged. More to the point was that the Legislature agreed it was "a most painful sight" to see white women and children travelling with Indians, not to mention Africans. Racial mixing aboard trains was perceived to undermine white superiority and the Legislature endorsed the view that, as such, it was "a standing disgrace". The Colonial Secretary's caution that Natal could not become embroiled in the hopeless task of trying to legislate racial discrimination was overridden roughly. The point was not to prevent black people travelling in superior classes, but to give them their own facilities, and not merely their own compartments, but their own carriages, in all fare-classes. This wish was embroidered to encompass the request that white porters attend to white passengers on railway stations. Putting a stop to theft was one consideration. Sidestepping implied intimacies was another: "to see the filthy coolies gathering up the wraps and shawls and rugs of (white) lady passengers is anything but becoming".[24]

The motion for racial segregation on NGR trains would appear to have borne fruit for, in 1905, Hunter was congratulated on "the separation of Asiatics and the labelling of carriages".[25] If the 1908 NGR handbook may be taken as a guide, the arrangements which were

18. M K Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. I, p. 30, 160; vol. II, pp. 85-86.
19. Natal (Colony), *Legislative Assembly Debates* (hereafter, *Debates*), 1900, p. 28.
20. *Debates*, 1904, p. 65.
21. *Ibid*, p. 62.
22. *Natal Witness*, 24 Apr. 1899.
23. Natal Archives Depot, Pietermaritzburg, MJPW 84 (LW 2726/1901): enclosure in letter from Minister of Lands and Works to Hunter, 29 May 1901; MJPW 111 (LW 2112/1904): JHJ King to Minister of Lands and Works, 25 Apr. 1904.
24. *Debates*, 1903, p. 60; 1904, pp. 232-235, 349, 354.
25. *Debates*, 1905, p. 60.

put in hand were that Indian and African third class passengers were separated from one another "whenever practicable", and that compartments marked "reserved" were specifically set aside for black second class passengers.[26] Despite these changes, fault was still found with NGR's service. It surely wasn't only one Indian whose ticket was effectively downgraded by a station master so as to make room for white second class passengers.[27] For their part, whites found other aspects of the NGR service to gripe about. They protested about being jostled at railway stations by African women carrying beer pots and by Indians slung about with baskets. They reported "itching all over" after sitting in second class carriages recently vacated by black passengers, and they complained about passengers of different race using the same bedding.[28] Not only white superiority, but now also sanitation and public health were portrayed as being threatened by lax attention to racial details.

Cape Government Railways

In the early 1890s, the Cape Government Railways (CGR) operated passenger trains with three fare-classes. There was no explicit racial segregation, but CGR staff had instructions to separate black and white passengers.[29] However, it was not always easy to put a stop to racial mixing. When trains were full, prospective travellers accepted whatever place they could get, even if it meant sitting alongside blacks.[30] Some white passengers felt within their rights to ask black passengers to give up their seats. Seniority was a trifling consideration. Railway General Manager C B Elliott himself narrated a "very amusing incident" in which he intervened to prevent two barely teenaged white girls ejecting "a very old respectable coloured man" from a third class compartment.[31]

As had been the case in Natal, the key question was how to prevent racial intermingling without resorting to discriminatory ticket sales. Ideally, black and white passengers should have had the opportunity to travel in any of the three classes they chose. However, duplication of all facilities would have been out of the question financially. Whereas in Natal the suggestion had been made that one solution to the dilemma was to add a fourth and cheaper class to trains, in the Cape the proposal was that second class be abolished. To the extent that there were few black people who could afford to pay for a first class or even a second class ticket, this suggestion may have been an effective way of engineering racial segregation. As Elliott intimated, it was precisely their limited means which made black people undesirable travel companions; which was responsible for their offensive clothing; which meant that they could not "attend a little more to their toilet";[32] and which meant that they would not travell in the first class. Abolishing second class would have raised the problem of how to accommodate white passengers who would have preferred to pay fares lower than were applicable in first class. Accordingly, the suggestion was made that third class coaches be divided into sections, one each for exclusive use by black and white passengers.[33] Not altogether coincidentally, one suspects, a white third class would have nourished the monied whims of the white elite who wished to distance themselves from humbler fellow colonials in a less congested, more comfortable and more sumptuous setting. Even though poor white passengers might be refined, as

26. SATSLA, *General Appendix to the NGR Working Time Tables*, no. 17, 1 Jan. 1908.
27. *Indian Opinion*, 26 May 1906.
28. *Debates*, 1905, p. 116; 1906, p. 210.
29. Cape (Colony), *Report of the Select Committee on Railway Management*, (hereafter, *Select Committee*), (C1-1893), Government Printer, Cape Town, p. 130, para. 676.
30. *Ibid*, p. 409, para. 2502.
31. *Ibid*, p. 533, para. 3343.
32. *Ibid*, p. 74, para. 332.
33. *Ibid*, p. 119, paras. 594, 597.

CGR's Assistant General Manager conceded,[34] it was pointless denying the existence of (or the lucrative pickings from) travel snobbery.

An 1893 parliamentary Select Committee attended not only to racial segregation on Cape trains but also to racial separation at railway station bars, ticket kiosks and refreshment and waiting rooms. After all, racial distinctions on trains did highlight racial mixing elsewhere and make it appear an aberration. As the House of Assembly was told, the Government "should not expect first and second class passengers to mix with the lowest coloured persons in one general waiting room".[35] Steps had already been taken toward segregation at certain stations (for instance at Stellenbosch), but this was by no means widespread. Explaining, Elliott commented that the expense of segregation meant that it could only be achieved "by degrees". More pointedly, he noted that whereas passengers could be channelled into different fare-classes, divisions according to skin colour were more problematic: "we have first, second and third class waiting rooms, but of course we cannot deal with colour".[36]

The reasons for wanting segregation at stations were like those for wanting blacks and whites to be separated in train carriages. Fear of overcrowding and dislike of social customs were chief among these. As concerned railway stations, there was the additional desire to control the presence on public platforms of black people who were not themselves travelling by train or even meeting or seeing off passengers. White passengers and CGR officials disapproved of the way black people loitered about stations making a nuisance of themselves by offering their services as porters, and by smoking, drinking and spitting. Efforts to confine liquor sales at railway bars to *bona fide* black train users were directed at curbing this behaviour.[37] A second motive for railway station segregation had to do with public health. As the Chairman of the CGR Medical Board observed, erection of partitions in refreshment halls (as at Port Elizabeth) may have forced black and white passengers to stand apart, but it did not prevent them sharing utensils. Certainly it did not protect whites drinking from cups which might have been used previously by diseased Africans.[38] For that matter, there was little other than precautionary hygiene that could prevent transmission of infection between passengers of any skin colour, and it was crass racialism to suppose that only black passengers could be diseased.

In June 1896 the CGR staff were instructed to seat black and white passengers apart in whichever fare-class they were travelling. Public officials as senior as the Commissioner of Public Works and the Superintendent of Native Affairs took the view that blacks and whites objected mutually to racially mixed travel.[39] As it was explained to train staff, the indiscriminate jumble of passengers whose skin colour and whose way of life were different made everybody uncomfortable because they were "made to feel out of place".[40] White passengers, at least, had a very firmly developed sense of propriety on trains. One can only guess at the whispered advice and the meticulous observation which made one lady declare in her account of late nineteenth century Cape trains that third class was "for the natives" and comprised a "superior cattle box which, of course, no white person will deign to enter".[41] At the time,

34. *Ibid*, p. 121, para. 605.
35. Cape (Colony), *House of Assembly Debates*, 1893, p. 53.
36. *Select Committee*, p. 76, para. 339.
37. *Ibid*, p. 72, para. 322; Cape Archives Depot, Cape Town, (hereafter, CAD), CGR 2/1/370 (276/9/36587): Traffic Manager (Port Elizabeth) to Chief Traffic Manager, 23 Dec. 1897; CGR 2/1/503 (585/30/22771): Acting Chief Traffic Manager to General Manager, 20 May 1897; CGR 2/1/288 (122/123/27559): Chief Traffic Manager to General Manager, 15 May 1900.
38. *Select Committee*, p. 127, para. 650; p. 171, para. 928.
39. Cape (Colony), *House of Assembly Debates*, 1896, p. 319; CAD, CGR 2/1/171 (A48/26456): Superintendent of Native Affairs to General Manager, 1 Jul. 1898.
40. SATSLA, *Appendix to the CGR Working Time Tables*, no. 1, 1897, clause 116.
41. B M Hicks, *The Cape As I Found It* (London, 1900), pp. 21-22.

another writer explained that it was not only the primitive travel conditions which were repellent. There was, in addition, the 'disagreeable' company of black men and women whose 'incessant' pipe-smoking gave off 'an assortment of perfumes which are not of Araby". The body odour of Africans was also said to be offensive, driving sensitive white travellers into the preferable company of "hardy, dried-up Dutch farmers" in the second class.[42] There, as one news correspondent discovered, racial prejudice flourished.[43]

Of course, not all white people could afford to indulge themselves in second class, and at least twice, elected political representatives raised this point in the Cape Legislative Council. In 1896 more than one hundred inhabitants of Somerset East petitioned for more effective racial divisions on trains. Independently, a Councillor also advised that he would urge "better and more satisfactory regulations".[44]In the long term these initiatives amounted to little and in the early 1900s (by which time a first class compartment for black people had been squeezed into at least some third class carriages),[45] CGR staff were reminded to place black and white first class passengers, and also second class passengers, in different compartments. Conductors were also asked to see that black passengers did not sit in the luggage vestibules located adjacent to first class compartments.[46]

However well-intentioned these instructions were, white passengers continued to fault the CGR's elastic seating arrangements and to object to inadequate segregation at railway stations. As one tart letter to the press revealed, there was a strong feeling among some white people that they should be able to board and alight from trains "without having to rub shoulders with the raw Kafir and other undesirables whose clothing and persons are often none too clean".[47] As concerned train accommodation, one important objection was that the fare-classes which doubled as race-classes suited the prejudices but not the pockets of poor whites. This point received due recognition when, in 1907, the Legislative Council approved a motion calling on the Cape Government to provide racially exclusive train accommodation for financially hard-pressed white third class passengers.[48] The following year, a deputation representing white residents of Maitland, Elsies River, Parow, Fairfield and Bellville requested the Commissioner of Railways to reserve compartments for white passengers holding third class as well as second class tickets. Not to be outdone, coloured people in the Cape publicised their opposition to racial differentiation among passengers who paid the same fare. The CGR traffic manager himself did not favour rigid segregation. He was not only reluctant to let racial slurs erode black ticket sales, but with keen foresight he also foresaw difficulties of racial classification and predicted the underutilisation of some coaches at the very moment that others were overcrowded by people whose skin colour prevented them sitting elsewhere.[49] Evidently, train segregation would not be straightforwardly cost-effective, nor would it pass uncontested.

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42. X C (pseud.), *Everyday Life in the Cape Colony* (London, 1902), pp. 91-92.
43. *The Christian Express*, 1 Jun. 1906, 'The second class railway passenger'.
44. Cape (Colony), *Legislative Council Debates*, 1896, pp. 92, 118.
45. This was the case on the Walmer and the Avontuur branch lines near Port Elizabeth. S M Moir, *Twenty Four Inches Apart: the Two-Foot Gauge Railways of the Cape of Good Hope* (Kempton Park, 1981), pp. 35-36.
46. SATSL, *Appendix to the CGR Book of Rules and Regulations and to the Working Time Tables*, no. 2, Jul. 1904, item 133; CAD, CGR 2/1/87 (A48/25163), vol 2: Chief Traffic Manager's circular no. 277, 24 Aug. 1903, item 3. It was the phrasing of item 3 to which Solomon Plaatje objected because of the insinuation that Africans were offensive to whites. CGR AG 1416/2961: Plaatje to Attorney General, 13 Feb. 1904.
47. *Cape Times*, letter to editor, 28 Aug. 1903.
48. Cape (Colony), *Legislative Council Debates*, 1907, pp. 192-193.
49. SATSLA, Minutes of Meetings of Heads of CGR Departments, 26 Jun. 1908.

Conclusion

Not long after the establishment of railways in the Cape and Natal colonies, and well before the turn of the century, racial intermingling on trains aroused public concern. Having been aired, this anxiety did not melt away only to reappear in the 1950s and be addressed anew by apartheid policies. On the contrary, railway managements tackled racial intermingling continuously from the first. In Natal the first step toward train segregation was taken in 1877, and by at least 1893 in the Cape, some effort had been made to seat passengers within the various fare-classes according to their pigmentation. In the same year the infant private railway company in the Transvaal formulated regulations to provide a distinct travel class for black train users there. By the time its successor state railway organisation devised its severe racial regulations in 1904, train passengers in the Cape and Natal had already experienced years of discomfort and official intervention as regards use of train and platform facilities by black and white people. And before the Transvaal railway ordinance was amended in 1908 to legalise racial segregation on trains, formal proposals for some measure of passenger segregation had already been put to the Cape and Natal governments by their parliaments.

Resembling the racial incidents that occurred on the trains, the public and parliamentary mood was less fiery in the Cape and Natal than inland. Similarly, there was variation in the severity of the proposals made and in the actions taken. In relation to the concerted racial segregation which was to follow political unification and railway amalgamation in 1910, these discrepancies in intensity and style were relatively unimportant. The language of racial segregation was already spoken on all railway systems in South Africa. Whether it was with the wide vocabulary and crips intonation of the Transvaal, or whether it was enunciated in the more limited lexicon and less distinct tones of the Cape and Natal, racial consciousness had been translated into some kind of restriction on all black passengers. The more stringent Transvaal-based train segregation procedures which the Cape and Natal were obliged to adopt after 1910 were not dumped on unsuspecting black passengers, nor were they imposed on an ill-disposed white public: the seeds of racial segregation on trains and railway stations had been sown long since in the nineteenth century.