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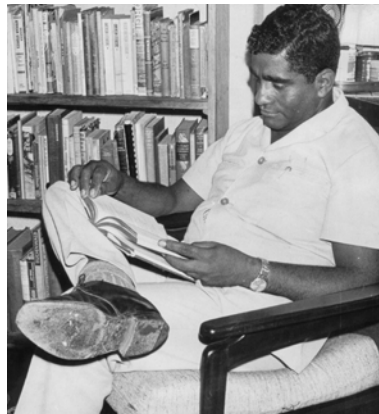
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BEFORE WE BEGIN

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE NOVEL

About the author

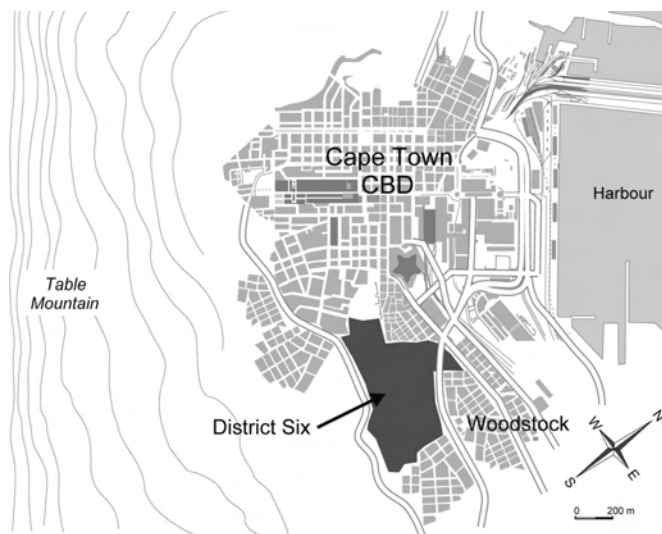
Richard Rive was born in District Six and attended Trafalgar High School. He studied extensively and obtained a doctorate from Oxford University (his thesis was on Olive Schreiner). His work centred on apartheid – through protest literature to black consciousness. He is chiefly known for his short stories (22), and his three novels, *Emergency*, *'Buckingham Palace'*, *District Six* and *Emergency Continued*. For many years he was head of the English Department at Hewat Teachers' Training College. On 4 June 1989 Rive was brutally murdered at his home.



Richard Rive, 1931-1989

Setting

Cape Town was developed as a halfway station for passing ships by the Dutch East India Company from 1652. After operating for some time as a trading outpost, it developed into a colony with the arrival of the British in the 19th century. An area immediately to the east, at the foot of Table Mountain, was first named Kanaladorp, then District Six in 1867.



The location of District Six in Cape Town

District Six absorbed immigrants from all over the world and became home to an enormously diverse population, mainly from the working class but also consisting of professionals. It grew naturally from the port town's origins as a significant economic trading place. The Coloured population, people of mixed race, came to predominate in the area, especially as black Africans were removed to Ndabeni in 1901 and later to places such as Langa and Guguletu.

In 1948 the National Party was elected to govern South Africa, and introduced its policy of apartheid. Among many pernicious laws, the Group Areas Act reserved urban areas exclusively for whites. In 1966 District Six was declared a white area, and bulldozers razed houses to the ground. Evacuations, evictions and resettlements of the population were instituted. District Six was richly heterogeneous, and the sheer concept of an area inhabited by all races and creeds on the city's doorstep posed a threat to the apartheid state. The District had to be eliminated, so 60 000 inhabitants were relocated to Cape Flats townships, such as Hanover Park and Manenberg, over the next 15 years.

By 1982 the only buildings left untouched were the District's mosques and churches. Today, the only additional building of note is the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (built with government funds in the 1980s) completely surrounding St Mark's church.

SUMMARY OF THE PLOT

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The novel is divided into three parts, each of which has an introductory section that is autobiographical. Rive draws upon his own memories here, and in the fictionalised sections that follow you must bear in mind that he filters everything through his own stay in the District. Each introduction sets the tone for what is to follow. 'Morning 1955' is mellow, stable and secure. 'Afternoon 1960' contains hints of coming change and insecurity, but still celebrates the special quality of the District. 'Night 1970' deals with the dissolution of the community, and the people's feelings of anger and disbelief.

Looking at the text

Check your knowledge of the plot by filling in the blanks in the summary below. You will find the answers on page 42.

In the introduction to Part One, Rive highlights the feelings of (1) _____ and (2) _____ within the community. He lived in a row of cottages called (3) _____. The first cottage (number 201) where (4) _____ and The _____ lived was called the (5) _____ and was a (6) _____. (7) _____ and The Boys lived next door in 203 and it was called (8) _____. The Jungles lived in (9) _____ and the (10) _____ lived in number 207. Number 209 was occupied by (11) _____. The Jewish landlord of the cottages was named (12) _____.

Mary's father was (13) _____ from the (14) _____. When she came to District Six, Mary showed a strong interest in (15) _____ but this led her into trouble so she left her (16) _____ house and established a brothel whose inhabitants were (17) _____. Mary kept her respectability by (18) _____.