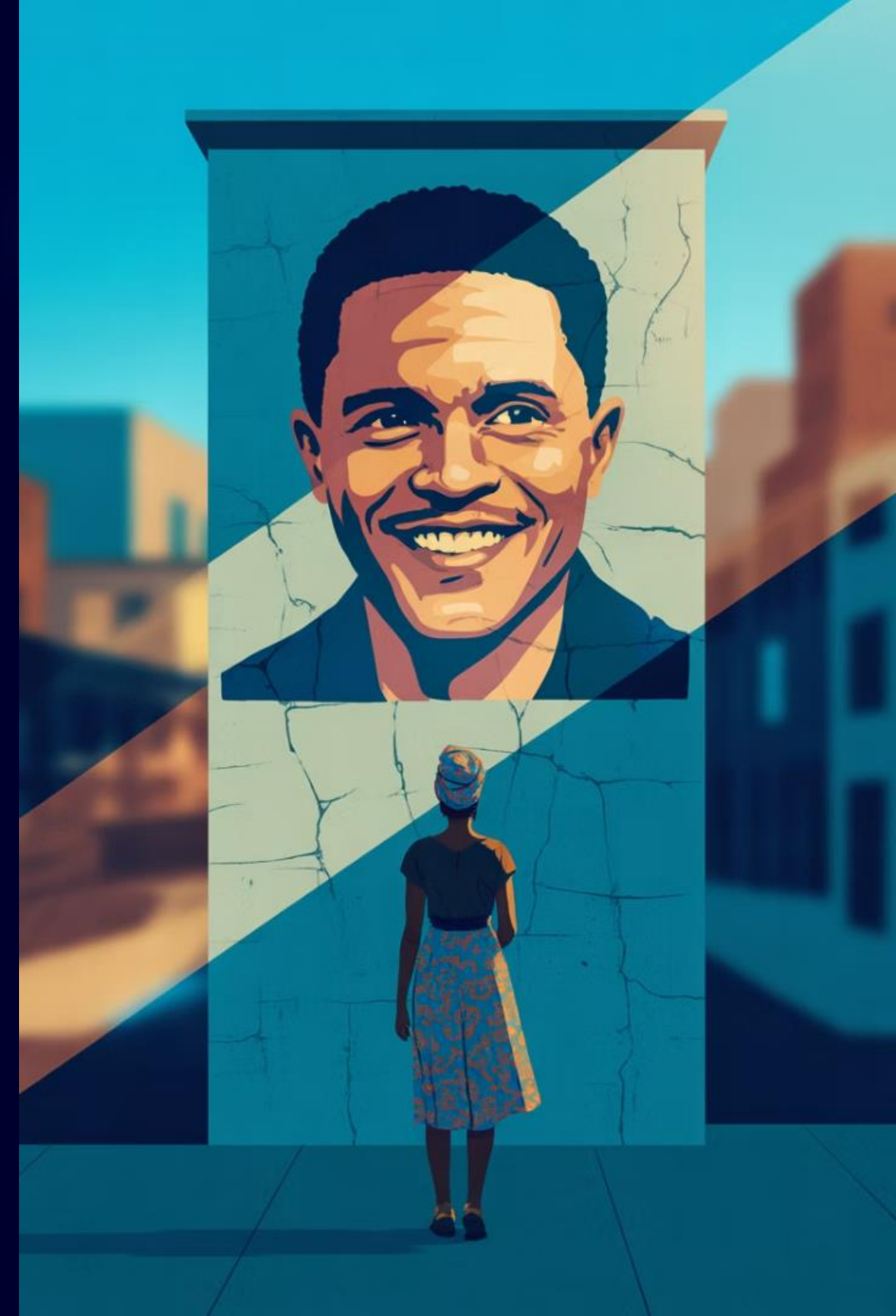


# Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood

Trevor Noah's memoir "Born a Crime" chronicles his childhood in apartheid South Africa, exploring his mixed-race identity, relationship with his mother, and overcoming poverty and violence.



# Brief Biography of Trevor Noah

## Noah



### Early Life and Education

Born in 1984 in Johannesburg during apartheid, Trevor's mixed-race status made his existence technically illegal until 1994. He attended Catholic school before moving to government schools, where he navigated complex racial dynamics.



### Career Beginnings

After high school, Noah began his entertainment career as a DJ and CD seller in Johannesburg suburbs. He gained popularity hosting a youth radio show called "Noah's Ark" and doing stand-up comedy.



### Rise to Fame

Noah hosted major South African television shows before moving to the United States in 2011. By 2014, he landed a role on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show," taking over as host in 2015, which propelled him to international fame.



# Historical Context of South Africa

## 17th-19th Century

1

Dutch settlers establish colony at Cape of Good Hope, taking natives as slaves and creating mixed-race "Cape Coloureds" population. British later take over, forcing Dutch settlers (Afrikaners) inland.

2

## Early 20th Century

1913 Natives' Land Act makes it illegal for blacks to own land. South Africa gains independence from UK in 1931. Afrikaner-led National Party wins 1948 elections.

3

## Apartheid Era (1948-1994)

Population divided into four groups: whites, Indians, coloreds, and blacks. Apartheid guarantees white minority most land, wealth, and political power while forcing blacks into townships and bantustans.

4

## Post-Apartheid (1994-Present)

Nelson Mandela elected president in first democratic elections. Truth and Reconciliation Commission established. Despite political changes, South Africa remains one of world's most unequal countries.

# Plot Summary



## Childhood Under Apartheid

Noah recounts his early years with his religious mother Patricia, who takes him to three different churches every Sunday. As a mixed-race child, he must often remain hidden indoors to avoid being taken by authorities.



## Education and Identity

Trevor navigates various schools, learning multiple languages to bridge different communities. He struggles with his identity as someone who doesn't fit neatly into any racial category in post-apartheid South Africa.



## Entrepreneurial Ventures

After high school, Trevor builds a "mini-empire" selling pirated CDs, DJing, and trading in Alexandra township. He experiences run-ins with the law, including a brief jail stint for driving one of his stepfather's cars.



## Family Crisis

The memoir culminates with Trevor's abusive stepfather Abel shooting his mother Patricia in the head. Miraculously, she survives, demonstrating her extraordinary resilience and unwavering faith.

# Major and Minor Characters



**Patricia Nombuyiselo Noah**

Trevor's devout, fearless mother who defies apartheid laws to create opportunities for herself and her son. She teaches Trevor to think independently and shows him a world beyond their circumstances. Her name means "She Who Gives Back" in Xhosa.



**Robert (Trevor's Father)**

A Swiss expatriate and restaurateur who disdained apartheid. Though reclusive and distant, he secretly collected clippings of Trevor's performances, revealing his pride in his son's accomplishments.



**Abel**

Trevor's abusive alcoholic stepfather and Andrew's biological father. Outwardly charming but privately violent, his attempts to control Patricia ultimately culminate in him shooting her in the head.

Other important characters include Andrew (Trevor's younger half-brother), Frances Noah (Trevor's grandmother), Mlungisi (Trevor's protective cousin), and friends like Teddy, Tim, and Sizwe who shape Trevor's experiences growing up.

# Themes in Born a Crime



## Identity, Belonging, and Community

Noah navigates his existence as a mixed-race person in a racially divided society



## Racism, Apartheid, and Cycles of Poverty

The systemic oppression that shapes South African society



## Love and Personal Growth

How relationships foster development and resilience



## Resilience Through Religion, Education, and Humor

Tools for managing uncertainty and creating perspective

Throughout his memoir, Noah explores how these interconnected themes shaped his understanding of himself and his country. His unique position as someone who didn't fit neatly into any racial category allowed him to observe how apartheid's divisions perpetuated cycles of violence and poverty while also giving him tools to bridge different communities.

# Symbols and Motifs



## Secondhand Volkswagen

The secondhand Volkswagen represents Trevor and Patricia's growing freedom despite poverty. It allows them to explore places they would never otherwise see, symbolizing their escape from township life while also reminding readers of their economic struggles.



## Languages

Languages serve as Trevor's primary tool for bridging different communities. By speaking six different South African languages, he navigates potentially dangerous situations and connects with people across racial and ethnic divides.



## Churches

The three churches Patricia takes Trevor to every Sunday represent different aspects of South African society: integrated, white, and black. They symbolize both religious devotion and the family's ability to create community on their own terms.



## Fufi the Dog

Fufi represents unconditional love and the unpredictability of relationships. Trevor's bond with the dog highlights his need for connection and acceptance.



## Abel's Gun

Abel's gun symbolizes the threat of violence that permeates South African society and the Noah household specifically, representing how power can be violently abused.

# Contemporary Relevance and Legacy

## Racial Identity and Belonging

Noah's experiences as a mixed-race person in a racially segregated society offer insights into contemporary discussions about racial identity, colorism, and belonging in multicultural societies worldwide.

## Post-Colonial Inequality

The memoir illustrates how formal equality after apartheid failed to address deep-rooted economic disparities, a pattern seen in many post-colonial societies where legal changes haven't translated to economic justice.

## Resilience Through Humor

Noah's use of humor to process trauma and navigate difficult circumstances demonstrates how comedy can function as both a coping mechanism and a tool for social critique.

## Media Impact

As of 2018, *Born a Crime* was slated for a film adaptation with Lupita Nyong'o set to play Patricia. Noah's continued success on *The Daily Show* has brought international attention to South African history and culture.