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"Social hot spot": a youth center in Hillbrow.

So-owuna,Douglas Reginald.

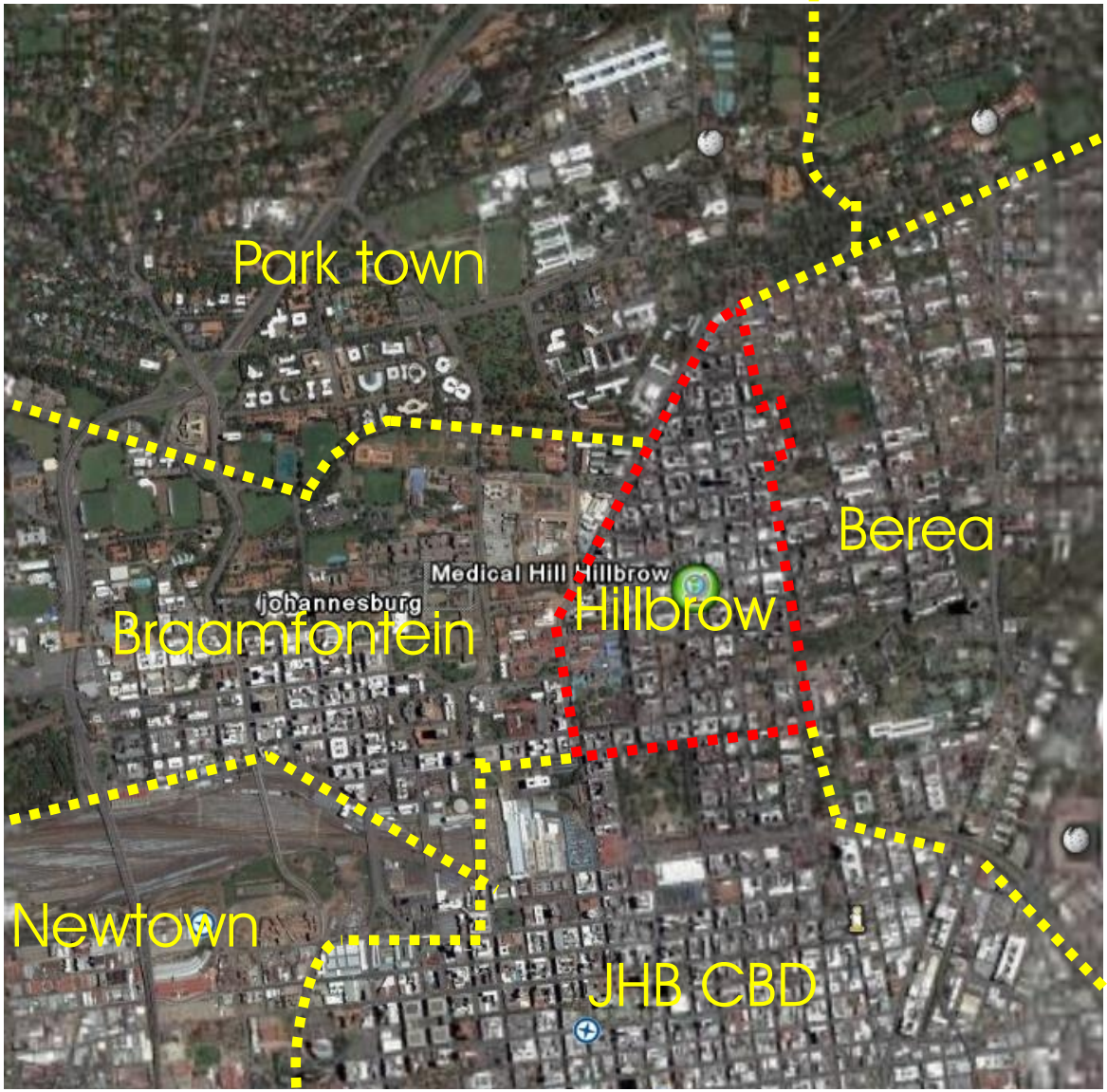
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Chapter 2

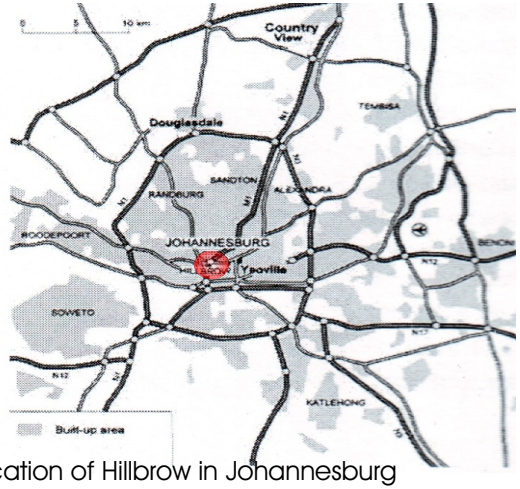
.Historical development of Hillbrow

Historical development of Hillbrow



Courtesy Google Earth

Hillbrow is a suburb located in the inner city of Johannesburg, in Gauteng province. Gauteng is a province of South Africa. The province was formed from part of the old Transvaal province after South Africa's first all-race elections on 27 April 1994. It was initially named Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (or PWV) and was renamed Gauteng in December 1994 [www.joburg.org]. Gauteng is one of South Africa's nine provinces. Land-locked, it is the smallest province in the area, occupying only about 1.4% of the country's land mass. It is the most densely populated province by a large margin, with 17% of all South Africans living within its boundaries. Statistics SA, (2001) described the province as the most urbanised in South Africa.



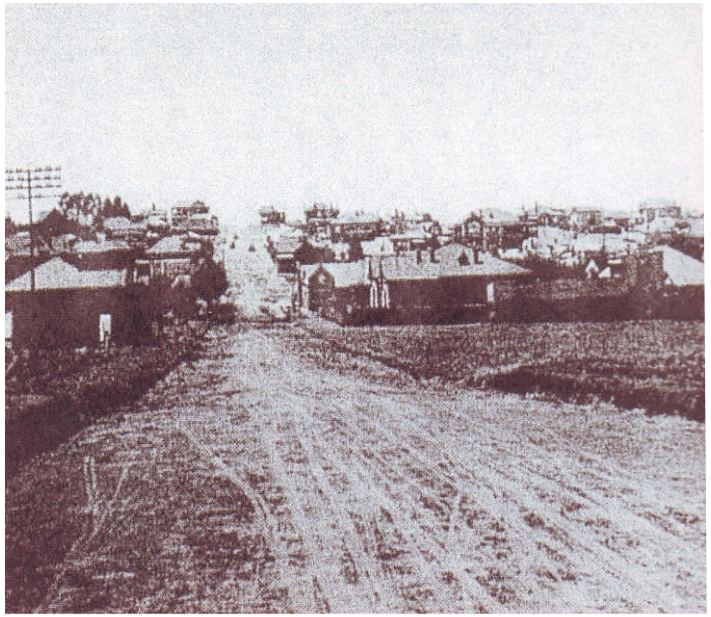
Location of Hillbrow in Johannesburg
Www.joburg.org.za 2007/hillbrow.stm

Hillbrow is the most Northern point of the "Uitvalgrond" (Surplus land), an area owned by the Government, located between a number of farms (Chipkin, 1993). It is considered South Africa's most densely populated area with dozens of high-rise blocks on the ridge above the city centre. It is predominantly a Manhattan-style residential area, with plenty of shops and an entertainment strip crammed with nightclubs. Hillbrow makes up the Northern area of the tight square grid of the original city. Further north are the larger blocks of wealthy Parktown and Houghton. To the East the grid staggers and stretches into Berea. The success of Berea gives birth to Hillbrow. The change in building typology and staggered grid create a transition, a border dividing Hillbrow and Berea. This historical section can be split into four main time periods for proper appreciation of the problems to be solved by the thesis intervention. They are as follows:

The late 1800 - World War II (WWII)

Hillbrow started as a pioneering town, dusty with negligible services and improvised shops and hotels, in the late 1800 encouraged by increasing demand for middle to high income housing. Residential suburbs sprang up on the periphery of the town, offering greener and more peaceful living environments to the towns' privileged (Clay 1982). With the establishment of Joubert Park by 1887, residential suburbs began to emerge around it. By 1890, Berea was laid out. Due to the overwhelming success of Berea, the land adjacent to it was bought by the Transvaal Mortgage and Loan Company for development in 1894. With this purchase, Hillbrow residential estate was proclaimed and marketed as 'the wealthiest and most fashionable' portion of Johannesburg (Clay 1982:18). The suburb was initially zoned as residential only, and developed as detached housing with gardens. This remained for twenty years; a clean air suburb where the children had plenty room to play (Ibid: 20).

Technological developments in the building industry allowed for the erecting of multi storey buildings. And Hillbrow ideally located between the inner city and booming northern suburbs, proved to be the ideal location for the developments of flats. Five to six storey blocks of flats provided reasonably priced flats. Aided by the fact that Hillbrow was in close proximity to the Johannesburg station made it an even more ideal point of entry into the city. And by the 1940s Hillbrow had become a place of transit, a springboard to better housing somewhere else in the city. (Clay 1982).



Hillbrow 1896
Www.joburg.org.za 2007/hillbrow.stm



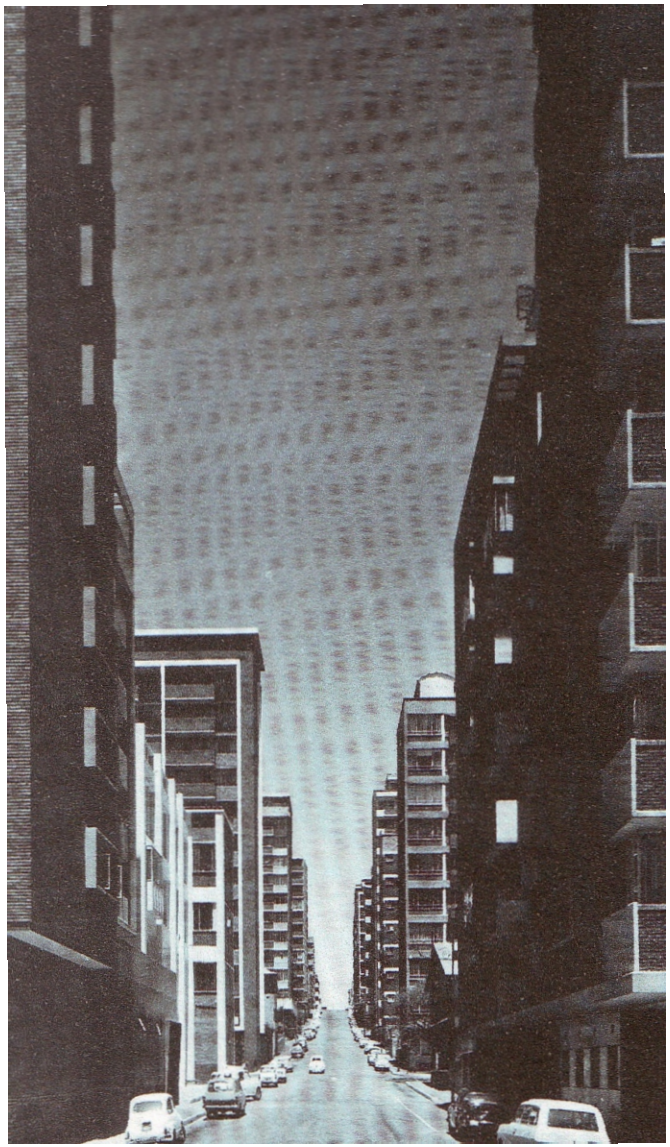
Hillbrow 1906: Courtesy Museum Africa

Accommodation in Hillbrow was mainly detached housing before the Second World War. By 1946, Johannesburg city council passed a revised town planning scheme for Hillbrow, which removed building height restriction, paving the way for high rise development (Morris 1999: 6)

Post WWII - mid 1970s

In the 50s and 60s a surge of development took place in Hillbrow and the areas surrounding it, driven by the economic boom and political stability which resulted from the strict enforcement of apartheid and the repression of opposition. Residents were according to Morris (1999) "…predominantly young, upwardly mobile people who were either single, living alone or with friends and relatives and young married couples" (Ibid: 7). A number of immigrants, mostly Europeans [English, German, French, and Dutch] and a large Jewish community used Hillbrow as a transitory home, before moving elsewhere in the city (Morris, 1999 :6). By the 70s, '… blacks were housed in rooftops flats or "locations in the sky" (ibid).

In accordance to the 1923 Urban [Native affairs] Act, domestic workers could only reside on the employers' property if the employer provided accommodation. In the 1930s and 1940s an increase in the urban African population created a demand for housing. Roof top flats provided easy access to work opportunities, entertainment, shopping and transport. In 1955, a law was passed which restricted the number of Africans living on roof tops to five per building. 1956 saw the removal of these residents from roof tops and by 1962, an estimated 8000 - 10000 people had been removed. [Morris 1999: 6]. By the early 1970s most detached houses in the area had been replaced with high rise block of flats, but by 1973 the supply of flats in Hillbrow exceeded demand



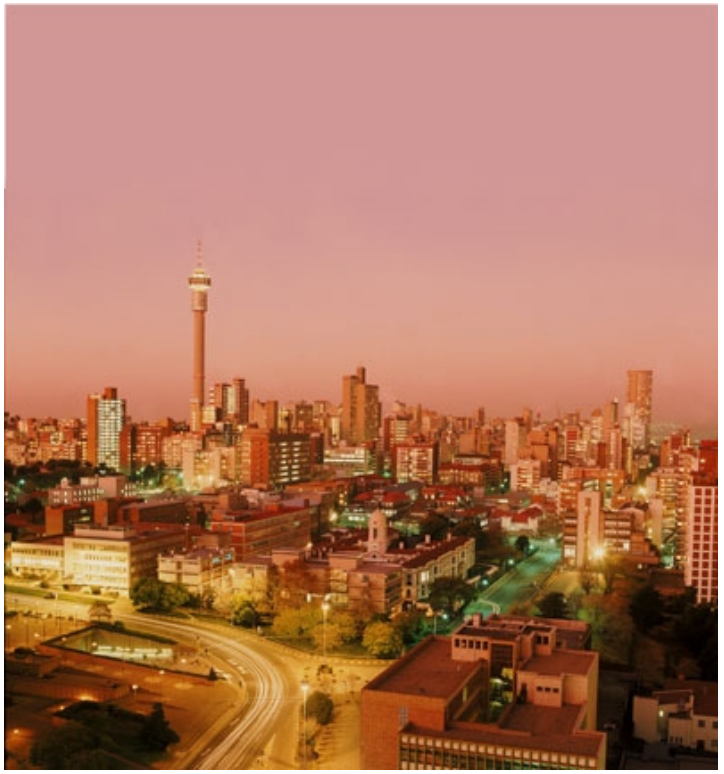
Banket Street looking south from Paul nel Street. (Chipkin 1993:222)

Mid 1970s - mid 1980s

The emigration of foreigners due to the uprisings left a high vacancy rate, which was heightened by a drop in suburban house prices. The high vacancy rate in Hillbrow set the stage for the multi-racialisation of the area. The exodus of whites from the area coincided with a shortage of people classified as 'coloured', 'Indian' and 'black' under the apartheid laws. Landlords were able to exploit this situation by charging high rentals to 'illegal' tenants. These 'illegal tenants' were able to avoid the provisions of the Group Areas Act through the ruse of white people signing lease agreements, while the actual tenants were 'Indians' or 'Coloured'.

The process of de-racialisation was spurred by the changes to rent control regulations in 1978, and the introduction of sectional title. Many residents could not afford to buy their homes or pay rapidly increasing rent, were forced out of the area, while landlords were able to charge higher rents to 'illegal tenants'. Morris (1999:9) relates that these tenants were vulnerable to police raids and lived in constant fear of discovery and evictions. 'Illegal tenants' organized themselves into Actstop, a legal body which provided representation to tenants charged with contravening the Groups Areas Act in 1979.

In 1982, the ruling of a landmark court case, declares that tenants could not be evicted without the provision of suitable alternative accommodation. This hastened the segregation of Hillbrow. Since the Apartheid government lacked the financial capacity to provide alternative housing. They also faced political dilemma, as it would be difficult to conduct mass evictions in a neighbourhood prominent in the media, while trying to woo 'Indian' and 'Coloured' representation into the tri-cameral parliament [Morris 1999: 6]. Hillbrow came to represent the government's unwillingness or inability to enforce strict racial segregation



Hillbrow 1986
Www.joburg.org.za 2007/hillbrow.stm

The mid 1980's to present

Until the mid 1980's there were relatively few Africans in Hillbrow, as they faced potential prosecution under influx control laws, which required they carry a pass. Violence in Johannesburg's African townships, an acute housing shortage, and scraping of pass laws in 1986, resulted in a dramatic shift in the neighbourhood's population. According to Statistics SA, by 1985, approximately 10% of Hillbrow's population was African. By 1993, the figure had risen to 62% and by 1996 over 80% of Hillbrow's population was African.

Conclusion

Hillbrow to this day is still an entry point into the city, the population is still made up of predominantly young people with the major population of people who are either single, living alone or with friends and relatives and young married couples. According to the report by the department of Finance and Economic Development (2004) on the Hillbrow Berea Economic regeneration strategy, majority of these 50,000 residents are between the ages 15-34 54% of the population is male. IsiZulu is the most common language (42%), followed by Sepidi (10%) and then English (9%)



Hillbrow 1939
Source: Courtesy Museum Africa



Hillbrow 2004
Source: Author's own