



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

Published on *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>)

---

## Yale students campaign for divestment from apartheid South Africa, 1985-1987

- South Africa Apartheid Divestment Movement (1970s-1980s)

*Time period notes:* Begun in 1985, the campaign reached its height in 1986, but slowed in 1988 as student enthusiasm and interest declined. It's unclear whether the campaign continued on a smaller scale up until 1994 when the system of apartheid was dismantled

1985

to:

1987

**Country:** United States

**Location City/State/Province:** Connecticut

**Location Description:** Yale University campus

**Goals:**

Primary: To have Yale University withdraw all of its investments from companies doing business in apartheid South Africa.

Secondary: (Ultimate goal) To put pressure on the South African government to end its system of apartheid.

## Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 034. Vigils
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 026. Paint as protest
- 034. Vigils
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 162. Sit-in

**Methods in 5th segment:**

**Methods in 6th segment:****Notes on Methods:**

Although the campaign continued until 1987, it is unclear what methods were used as the student support for the campaign became more sporadic after the 4th segment.

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Economic Justice

Human Rights

**Group characterization:**

- students

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Yale Divestment Campaign (student group)

**Partners:**

Students at other American universities, including UCLA and Rutgers, urged their administrations to withdraw university funds from companies operating in South Africa.

**External allies:**

Not known

**Involvement of social elites:**

Not known

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Students

**Groups in 2nd Segment:****Groups in 3rd Segment:**

- Faculty
- Members of New Haven community

**Groups in 4th Segment:****Groups in 5th Segment:****Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** 6 months

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

### **Opponents:**

Yale Administration

### **Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not known

### **Campaigner violence:**

Not known

### **Repressive Violence:**

Students were arrested during their multiple sit-in protests.

## Success Outcome

### **Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

2 points out of 6 points

### **Survival:**

0 points out of 1 point

### **Growth:**

2 points out of 3 points

### **Notes on outcomes:**

The student campaign was partially successful in achieving its divestment goals. The pressure students put on the Yale administration did not immediately result with complete divestment, but their insistence that the administration hold the companies it invested in accountable to the Sullivan Principles (ethical purchasing guidelines) helped lead to Yale's eventual divestment from 17 companies operating in apartheid South Africa by the early 1990s.

Because student enthusiasm and interest in the campaign declined in 1987, the student group "The Yale Divestment Campaign" did not survive.

The number of Yale and New Haven participants grew considerably during the campaign, but the campaign itself was not sustained for a long period of time

---

The student-led Yale Divestment Campaign that began in 1985 sought to pressure the Yale administration into withdrawing its shares in companies that operated in apartheid South Africa. Although in 1978 the administration had incorporated the Sullivan Principles (an ethical purchasing guideline) into its purchasing policies, application of these principles was slow. By the mid-1980s, Yale still had over \$300 million invested in South Africa, 1/3 of which was invested in companies whose practices violated the Sullivan Principles and 1/4 of which was located in banks that loaned money directly to the South African government.

In order to speed up the process of divestment, Yale students attempted to engage Yale's Advisory Committee on Investor Responsibility in a dialogue by attending its meetings throughout 1983, 1984, and 1985. They urged the committee to uphold the Sullivan Principles and withdraw the university's funds from the violating companies, but they were met with resistance.

In order to put pressure on the ACIR, as well as on the Yale Corporation (Yale's governing body consisting of the university president, trustees, and alumni), Yale students staged a Divestment Campaign. On 30 April 1985, nearly 200 students staged a rally in front of the university's administration offices. Following the rally, 40 students began a 24-hour vigil outside the offices. Despite growing student and community support for complete divestment, the Yale administration was reluctant to withdraw all of its shares in South Africa. This was partly due to the fact that "...at least four members of the Yale Corporation had

significant financial ties to companies that operated in South Africa” (Responsible Endowment Project).

To counter this resistance, the Yale students staged a series of protests outside administration buildings in the spring of 1986. Over 322 people (including students, faculty, and New Haven community members), participated in these protests and were promptly arrested with charges of public disturbance. Symbolic protests were staged all over campus during the spring of 1986. In April, students constructed a mock shantytown on the Beinecke Plaza to mimic those in South Africa. The shanty was named after Winnie Mandela, yet the administration considered the mock-shanty to be such an “eye-sore” that it demanded its removal and had several protesters arrested. This response generated much more protest from students, and their demand that the shanty be recreated was eventually met by the reluctant administration.

The Divestment Campaign remained strong throughout the spring, and the students used the 1986 commencement ceremony as a forum to further protest the administration’s slow pace at divesting from South Africa. During the ceremony, graduating seniors held up signs on which were written “Yale Divest” and “Oppose Apartheid”, and several students painted the word “Divest” on the backs of their gowns.

However, during the fall of 1986, student involvement in the Divestment Campaign began to wane as interest in the campaign declined. To curb this declining interest and to continue its pressure on the Yale administration, 12 protesters staged a sit-in in Yale’s investment office on 22 September 1986. They demanded the administration to withdraw its South African investments immediately, but the protesters were promptly arrested as were 9 other protesters who were staging a sit-in on the sidewalk outside of the investment office.

Throughout the rest of the semester and in 1987, student involvement in the divestment campaign became more sporadic. The shanty-town that had been resurrected in 1986 was burned down by an alumnus in 1988, thus erasing the ultimate symbol of the divestment campaign.

Despite its end, the student campaign was partially successful in achieving its divestment goals for it publicly exposed Yale’s financial support for a regime that was becoming increasingly unpopular. Although the pressure students put on the Yale administration did not immediately result with complete divestment, their insistence that the administration hold the companies it invested in accountable to the Sullivan Principles (ethical purchasing guidelines) helped lay the groundwork for Yale’s eventual divestment from 17 companies operating in apartheid South Africa by the early 1990s.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

Not known, but it’s possible that the emerging divestment movement on other American university campuses helped encourage students at Yale to spearhead a divestment campaign of their own.

### Sources:

Associated Press. “Yale Students Rally Against Apartheid”. Register-Guard. May 1, 1985.

“Global Sullivan Principles”. Sullivan Foundation. February, 2010. <<http://www.thesullivanfoundation.org/gsp/default.asp>>.

Hays, Constance L. “Yale Shanty Burns and Alumnus is Held”. New York Times June 6, 1988.

Muskus, Jeff. “Yale’s investment chief shares some strategies”. Yale Daily New September 30, 2005.

“Policy of American Universities Towards Divestment in South Africa”. Minerva. Volume 24, Number 2-3, 1986. Pp. 246-343.

“Responsible Endowment Project”. The Responsible Endowment Project. February, 2010.

<<http://www.responsibleendowment.com/south-africa.html>>.

Solomon, James. "Yale Protest Charges Dropped, Judge Dismisses Four Cases; D.A. To Review Rest". The Harvard Crimson. July 3, 1986.

Special Contributor. "12 Protestors Are Arrested in Yale Sit-In". New York Times September 23, 1986.

"Yale Anti-Apartheid Protest". Jet Magazine. June 1987. Pp. 16.

**Additional Notes:**

Sullivan Principles (provided by the Sullivan Foundation)

- 1.) Express our support for universal human rights and, particularly, those of our employees, the communities within which we operate and parties with whom we do business.
- 2.) Promote equal opportunity for our employees at all levels of the company with respect to issues such as color, race, gender, age, ethnicity or religious beliefs, and operate without unacceptable worker treatment such as the exploitation of children, physical punishment, female abuse, involuntary servitude or other forms of abuse.
- 3.) Respect our employees' voluntary freedom of association.
- 4.) Compensate our employees to enable them to meet at least their basic needs and provide the opportunity to improve their skill and capability in order to raise their social and economic opportunities.
- 5.) Provide a safe and healthy workplace; protect human health and the environment; and promote sustainable development.
- 6.) Promote fair competition including respect for intellectual and other property rights, and not offer, pay or accept bribes.
- 7.) Work with governments and communities in which we do business to improve the quality of life in those communities — their educational, cultural, economic and social well-being — and seek to provide training and opportunities for workers from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- 8.) Promote the application of these Principles by those with whom we do business.

**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

Aden Tedla, 05/02/2010

**A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.**

Copyright Swarthmore College.



Global Nonviolent Action Database is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/) .

Original website design and artwork created by [Daniel Hunter](#).

Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu> .

Registered users can [login](#) to the website.

---

**Source URL (retrieved on 02/17/2020 - 15:28):** <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/yale-students-campaign-divestment-apartheid-south-africa-1985-1987>

**Links:**

[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/wave-campaigns/south-africa-apartheid-divestment-movement-1970s-1980s>

[2] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/mainly-or-initiated-student-participants>

[3] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/example-paradox-repression>