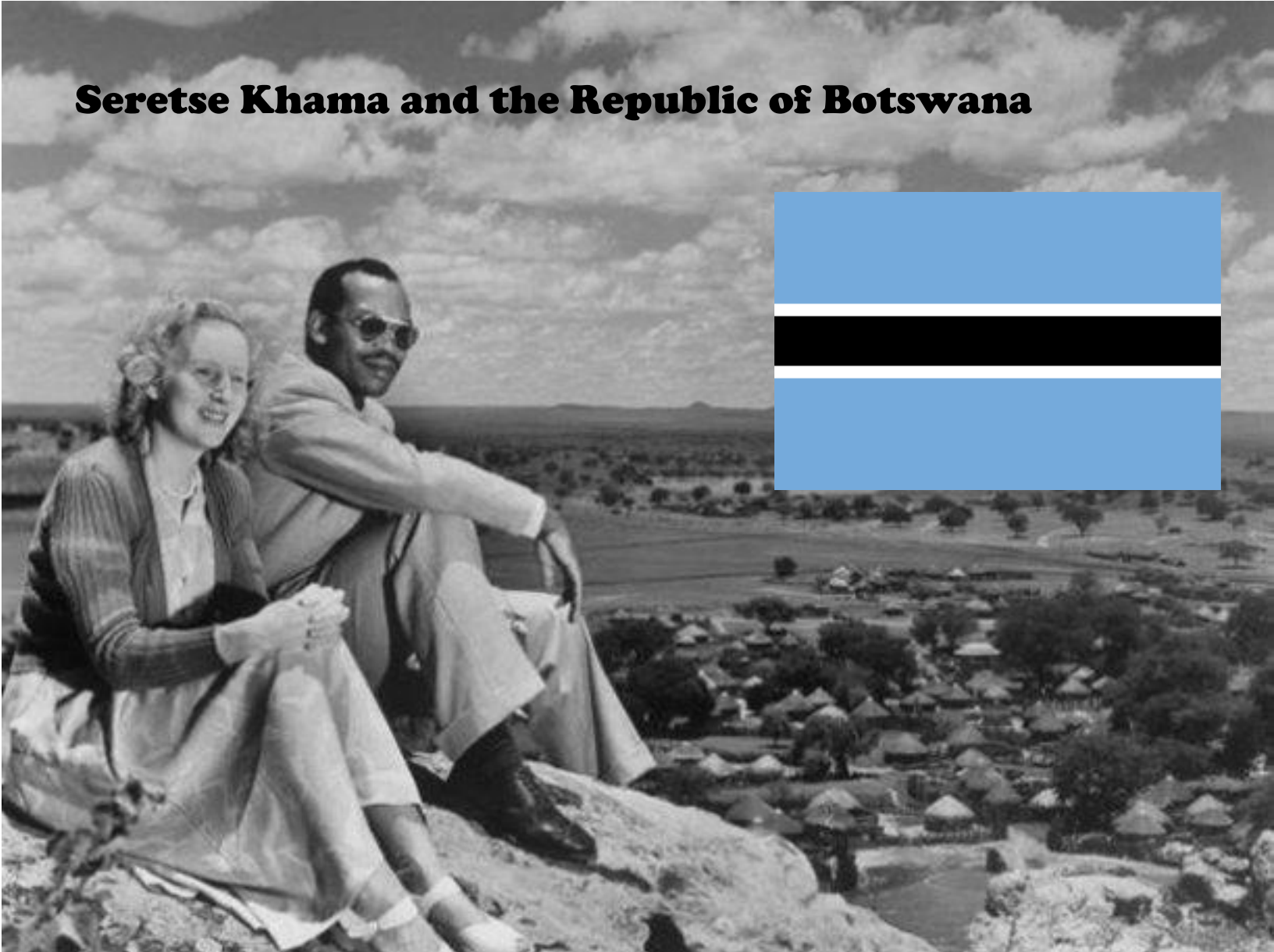


Seretse Khama and the Republic of Botswana

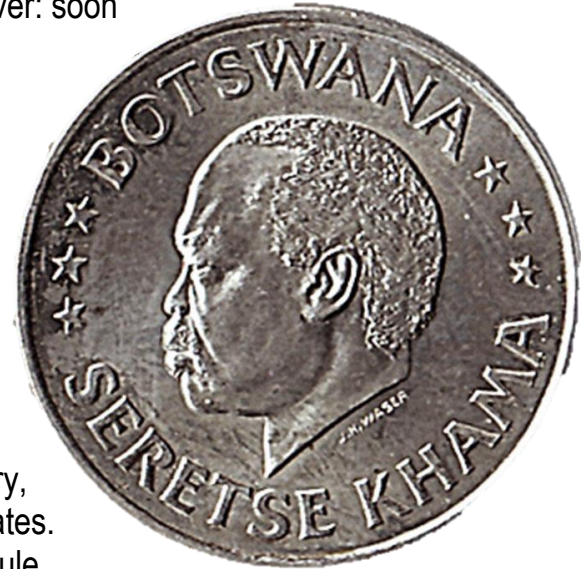


From *South African History Online* (www.sahistory.org.za):

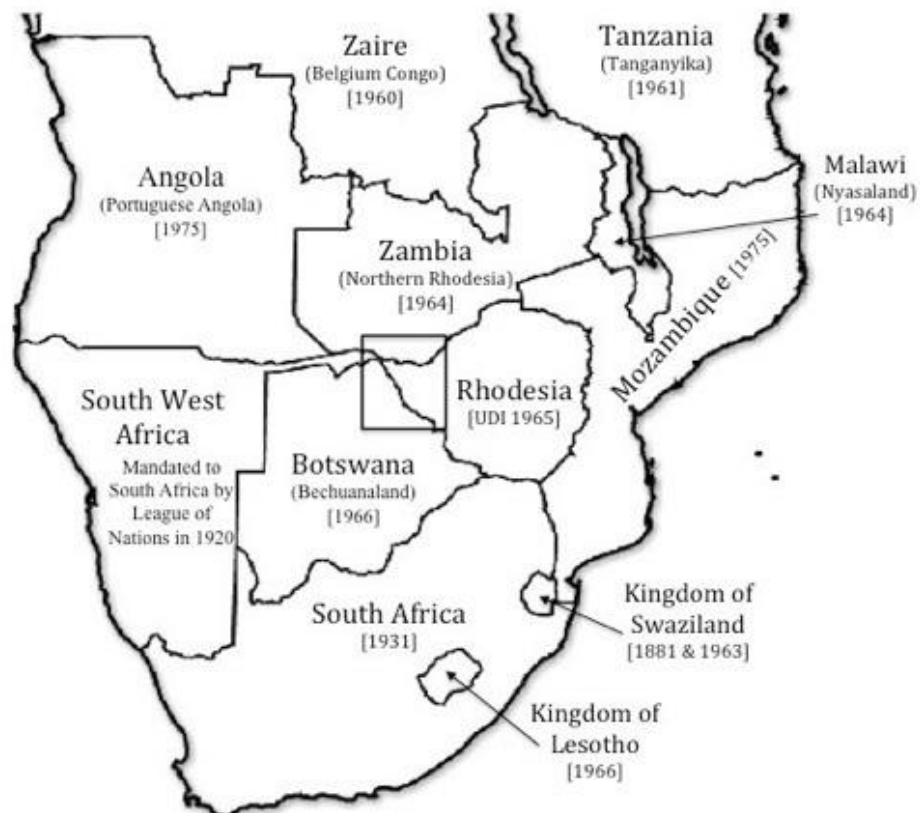
- Seretse Khama was born on 1 July 1921 at Serowe, Bechuanaland (Bec-u-a-na-land). His grandfather was Kgosi (King) Khama III, known as Khama the Good, the ruler of the Bangwato people. Under his rule and with his approval, Bechuanaland had been put under British protection in the 19th century. Seretse's name means 'the clay that binds', and referred to the reconciliation after a rift between his father and grandfather. In 1925 Seretse Khama succeeded his father to the throne, but his uncle Tshekedi Khama became the new four year-old Kgosi's regent and guardian.
- Seretse was sent to South Africa for his education, and in 1944 he graduated with a BA degree from Fort Hare University College. He then left to further his studies in law in England, first at Balliol College, Oxford, then at Inner Temple, London. In 1947 he met Ruth Williams, the daughter of a retired army officer. They were married in September 1948. Seretse's Uncle Tshekedi ordered him to come home so that he could rebuke him for his marriage to a White woman. He wanted Seretse to get a divorce, but Seretse managed to win the people's favour. He was recognised as Kgosi, and Ruth as his wife.



- South Africa was not prepared to accept this in an area that was so strategically placed between them and Rhodesia, and bargained with Britain not to allow Seretse's chieftaincy. Consequently, he was exiled to England in 1951. But five years later a new Commonwealth minister decided to distance Britain from South Africa's racist policies, and Seretse and Ruth were allowed back into Bechuanaland, but only as normal citizens. Here he tried his hand at cattle farming and local politics, but many saw him as out-of-touch with current affairs. His health, which had bothered him as a child already, was growing worse and in 1960 he was diagnosed with diabetes. This setback did not prevent him from making a political comeback, however: soon afterwards he became the leader of the Bechuanaland Democratic Party (BDP), which drew large support from both progressive and conservative circles. In 1965 the BDP won the elections, and Seretse Khama became Prime Minister. **The next year, Bechuanaland gained its independence from Britain. The new republic's name was changed to Botswana, and Seretse Khama became its first President.**



- The country inherited by President Khama was riven with problems. At the time, it was probably Africa's poorest country, greatly indebted to Britain and surrounded by White-ruled states. But Khama refused to submit to their control, and under his rule Botswana's economy, administration and relations with other Black African states were repaired and developed. During his time as President Botswana had the fastest growing economy in the world. It was a period of much civil strife in Africa, but Botswana remained free from war and corruption.



- In his last years he played an important role in southern African politics when he negotiated the future of Zimbabwe and South West Africa/Namibia and developed a vision of a southern Africa post-colonialism and post-apartheid, seen to be a key part in the development of the Southern African Development Community that has since been founded.
- Khama's health continued to bother him. He received frequent and intensive medical treatment, and on 13 July 1980 he died in Gaborone, Botswana. Before his death, however, he did see Zimbabwe's independence and the launching of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) in April 1980. 1 July (his birthdate) is celebrated as a public holiday in Botswana, Sir Seretse Khama Day.
- Below is Seretse Khama's view on history, quoted from a speech at the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland in 1970:

"We were made to believe that we had no past to speak of, no history to boast of. The past, so far as we were concerned, was just a blank and nothing more. Only the present mattered and we had very little control over it. It seemed we were in for a definite period of foreign tutelage, without any hope of our ever again becoming our own masters. The end result of all this was that our self-pride and our self-confidence were badly undermined.

It should now be our intention to try to retrieve what we can of our past. We should write our own history books to prove that we did have a past, and that it was a past that was just as worth writing and learning about as any other. We must do this for the simple reason that a nation without a past is a lost nation, and a people without a past is a people without a soul".



Ian Khama, second child of Seretse and Ruth Khama, was the 4th President of Botswana (2008-2018).