

Jabavu John Tengo

1. Journalist , politician and one of the most influential Africans of his day, Jabavu was a controversial figure who played an important part in public life in the Cape from the mid 1880's until the time of World War I. As editor of Imvo Zabantusundu he contributed much to the political education of Africans.
2. Born in 1859 near Fort Beaufort in the Cape , son of Fingo Methodists he attended Healdtown Missionary Institution where he qualified as a teacher in 1875. From 1876-1881 he taught at Somerset East working as a printer's assistant on a local newspaper. X
3. Newspapers fired his interest and he contributed a number of pieces to the Cape Argus published under a pseudonym. In 1881 he was invited to Lovedale to edit 'Isigidimi Sama Xosa' a Xhosa version of the Missionary newspaper 'Christial Express'. While there he became the second African in South Africa to obtain a matriculation certificate. X
4. Jabavu's interest in politics led him to work as a canvasser for James Rose-Innes, then running for a first term in Parliament. He won with the help of African votes marshaled by Jabavu and the Native Electoral Association which Jabavu had helped to form. When? X
5. Jabavu enlisted white Liberal support to finance a newspaper for Africans 'Imvo Zabantusundu' published weekly in King William's Town under Jabavu's editorship from 1884 onwards. Jabavu used his position of leverage to argue against many pieces of anti African legislation. Though never a proponent of full citizenship rights for all Africans , Jabavu did hope that the qualified African franchise of the Cape would be extended to Africans in the rest of the country. In 1909 he accompanied the deputation to London to voice objections to the Union's proposed colour bar. X
6. He held aloof from the SANNC because of personal rivalry with some of the initiators eg Rubusana and because he regarded the formation of an all-black national organization as too extreme and he focused his energies on his own South African Races Congress founded in 1912 and centred on his supporters who were mainly Fingoes in the Eastern Cape. X
7. Two unpopular steps dealt a blow to his prestige. He supported the Native Land Act of 1913, (though he condemned it 4 years later in Imvo) and he split the native vote in Tembuland by standing against Rubusana thus allowing the seat to go to a white contestant. X
8. He was a prime mover to establish a University for Africans and he served on the governing council of Fort Hare from its founding until his death in 1921. X

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Reference

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