



Summary of the Novel

Richard Rive's, 'Buckingham Palace' is a dingy row of five 'mouldy cottages' in the **District Six** area, at the foot of Table Mountain, Cape Town. Ironically, it is the neighbourhood of a marginalized community: prostitutes, thieves, imposters, gang members. Their living conditions are characterised by their poverty. Rive narrates each character's life with humour, making the reader less judgmental of their lifestyles.

Number 201, nicknamed Casbah, is the residence of Mary and her girls. It is a brothel: a 'House of Pleasure', a place of ill-repute. Mary sets up her business after being deserted by her husband Knight-Before -Last. "The Girls" who seek refuge with Mary, are escaping from abusive fathers or husbands. Mary, the daughter of a pastor, attends church weekly and takes communion monthly, despite the condescending looks of some members of the community.

In Number 203 live Zoot and The Boys. Number 203 has a painted name: Winsor Park. The incorrect spelling draws attention to their neglected education. He becomes Mary's "bouncer" for lack of other opportunities. He has a huge capacity for language but expresses himself profanely. He "persuades" Katzen, the landlord, to "rent" the house to him. He claims to be protected and guided by "guardian angels." Pretty Boy is a friend of Zoot's from reform school and has spent some years in prison in Pretoria. He acquires items for Zoot's cottage "at a bargain price" and is very resourceful.

The Abrahams, a Muslim family with their sons and daughter live at 205. The sons, the Jungle Boys, are so named because of their method of settling disputes. The boys are known to "hunt in a pack."

The narrator, who is ten years old when the story starts in 1955, lives in 207 with his family.

Mr Joseph Knight, the Barber, lives at 209 with his wife and 3 daughters, Faith, Hope and Charity.

The book is divided into three parts: Morning 1955, Afternoon 1960, Evening 1970. Through these three parts, Richard Rive follows this close community through its moments of triumph and despair, and he describes the uprooting of the community. District Six was located much too near the city center to suit apartheid's urban planners. It was declared a "White Group Area" in 1966 in terms of the Group Areas Act. The inhabitants were forced to leave for the bleak wastelands of the Cape Flats.

Katzen, the Jewish landlord of Buckingham Palace, reveals that he narrowly escaped the Holocaust and announces his solidarity with the embattled "untermenschen" of Buckingham Palace. While some stand in solidarity, others succumb to the Government's threats. Last-Knight returns to the district with a terrifying tale of the miseries in the grim new townships outside the city.

But then Katzen dies, and his son, a heartless Johannesburg lawyer, sells Buckingham Palace to the authorities. The community is shattered by the bulldozers. People are scattered, carrying with them the memories of a community that cannot be replaced. Zoot September is the only character who clearly resolves to join the freedom struggle, vowing, "This is not the end. It is only the beginning."

Adapted from: <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/10/04/books/growing-up-in-one-big-apartheid.html>
<https://semperaliquidnoviafricamadferre.com/2017/04/04/buckingham-palace-district-six/>