

MADIBA

Nelson Mandela raises his fist in solidarity with supporters at a presidential election rally on March 15, 1994.

NELSON MANDELA'S QUEST TO END APARTHEID



The story of the man who went from political prisoner to the first democratically elected president of South Africa—and a worldwide champion of equality and justice.

A Historic Election

On April 27, 1994, for the first time in South African history, voters of all races were allowed to cast ballots in the nation's first fully democratic vote. In this landmark election, Nelson Mandela was elected the country's first black president. This historic milestone was a fitting tribute to Mandela, who had helped drive the decades-long campaign to end apartheid, the system of racial segregation that had defined South African life since the 17th century.

Apartheid (literally meaning “separateness”) was similar to racial segregation in the United States. The white population controlled

Key Words

a•part•heid

(uh-PART-hate or uh-PART-hite) *noun*. A political policy in which people of different races are separated. Apartheid was the law in South Africa from 1948 to 1991.

seg•re•ga•tion

(seg-ruh-GAY-shun) *noun*. The act or practice of keeping people or groups apart.



Left: Anti-apartheid activist and lawyer Nelson Mandela in the Johannesburg law practice he set up with Oliver Tambo to provide free or affordable legal representation to blacks.

Above: Under apartheid, blacks could only live in specific areas, like this shantytown near Johannesburg.

every part of government and society, while nonwhites were banned from voting, were denied basic civil rights, and were forced to live in separate neighborhoods—many in substandard shantytowns. Enforcement of the system was rigid, and nonwhites had to carry identification passes that controlled and limited the places they could go. Violators faced fines, imprisonment, beatings, or torture. It was this system of oppression that Mandela would spend his life fighting.

Formative Years

Although he is now one of the most recognized political figures in the world, Nelson Mandela came from humble beginnings. Born Rolihlahla Mandela in the tiny village of Mvezo, which is about 500 miles south of South Africa's largest city, Johannesburg, Mandela grew up in a thatched hut and helped his family tend livestock. He was a member of an African clan called Madiba, named

after a chief who ruled the clan in the 18th century. The name Madiba means “father,” and was used by South Africans later in Mandela's life as a sign of their respect and endearment for him. Mandela's first name, Nelson, was given to him by a teacher when he was seven—part of a common colonial practice to give African children English names.

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After the death of his father, Mandela was adopted at age 12 by a local chief. After completing secondary school, he enrolled at University of Fort Hare, one of the few colleges open to blacks in South Africa at the time. There he met Oliver Tambo, who would become a lifelong friend. While he studied law and prepared for a career in civil service, Mandela became involved in campus politics. His political activity led him to participate in a protest, which resulted in his expulsion. Fearing Nelson was going down the wrong path, his guardian arranged a marriage for him but Mandela's time in school and his unfair expulsion had ignited his passion for activism. He fled before his arranged marriage took place and went to Johannesburg, where he would have a chance to get involved in political activism on a national level.

In Johannesburg, Mandela finished his law degree at another school and met Walter Sisulu, a black member of the African National Congress (ANC), an



South Africa has three capitals, one for each branch of government.

organization that was founded in 1912 to end apartheid. Mandela's political work began when he and Oliver Tambo started a law firm to provide legal assistance to blacks challenged by apartheid laws. However, he soon realized that fighting legal battles without changing the unjust laws of apartheid meant that the oppression black South Africans faced would go unchallenged. In 1944 he became a member of the ANC and cofounded the ANC Youth League for young activists like himself. That same year he married his first wife, Evelyn, with whom he had three children.

The Government Cracks Down

In 1948, the white supremacist South African National Party won the general election—in which blacks could not vote—and began to pass laws that further embedded apartheid into every aspect of life in South Africa. New laws not only separated South Africa's majority black population from the minority whites but also separated nonwhites from one another, as well as black South Africans along tribal lines and other nonwhite groups such as Indians and Asians. This was done in order to divide the majority and gain total control over social and political life.

In response to the new laws, Mandela, Sisulu, and Tambo, who had all become important leaders

of the ANC, created the Programme of Action. They adopted the nonviolent protest methods of the Indian independence leader Mahatma Gandhi—including boycotts, strikes, and civil disobedience—to protest government policies. As the government cracked down with more apartheid laws and brutal treatment of offenders, Mandela began to believe that cooperating with other opponents of apartheid would be more effective in fighting the racist policy. In 1952, the ANC formed the Defiance Campaign, collaborating with Indian and communist groups in acts of civil disobedience. Mandela's passionate involvement in the ANC made him one of the most popular leaders of the anti-apartheid movement and a target for the National Party. In 1958 he married Winnie Madikizela, who would also become a prominent ANC member.

The Turning Point of Sharpeville

On March 21, 1960, a peaceful protest turned tragic when police killed 69 black South Africans, including 8 women and 10 children. These killings were the Sharpeville massacre, and it marked a turning point in the anti-apartheid struggle. In response to the police violence, riots broke out all over the country. The government retaliated with its heaviest crackdown to date by implementing martial law, banning the existence of the ANC, and arresting many of the ANC's members. Mandela, Sisulu, and others were forced to go into hiding, which caused them to change their tactics and found the Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), a militaristic, guerrilla faction of the ANC. Though reluctant to abandon their nonviolent philosophy, Mandela and other ANC leaders felt they had no choice.



Nonviolent protests against apartheid (above) reached a turning point with the Sharpeville massacre (right) in 1960, in which 69 black South Africans were killed.



Photos: Protest march, © Popperfoto/Getty Images; Sharpeville massacre, © Universal History Archive/UG/Getty Images.

In August 1962, after two years of organizing and orchestrating guerrilla tactics, Nelson Mandela was found, arrested, and charged with treason, sabotage, and conspiracy to overthrow the government. At his trial, Mandela was an imposing figure, strongly defending his actions against the government's tyranny. He boldly stood before the judge and said, "I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

Eventually, after a year on trial, on June 11, 1964, Mandela and seven other ANC members, including Walter Sisulu, were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. They were sent to the notorious Robben Island Prison, where they experienced poor food and living conditions, as well as abuse by the guards. Mandela often feared for his life, and saw little of his wife and children during this time. Nevertheless, he continued fighting for equality within the prison walls. He convinced prison authorities to replace the khaki uniform shorts given to nonwhite inmates in a gesture of disrespect with long trousers. He also mentored younger prisoners, counseling them on how to effectively navigate the treacherous conditions in prison.

Negotiating With the Oppressor

During the period of Nelson Mandela's incarceration, the resistance movement gained momentum, and riots frequently broke out across the country. The government responded with even more brutal measures, including arresting and jailing more than 30,000 political prisoners. Television stations broadcast the violent scenes around the world, and international outrage grew. Soon, boycotts were organized against South African products, and several foreign governments imposed economic sanctions on South Africa.

In 1982, 18 years after his conviction and with pressure mounting from the international community to end apartheid, Mandela was moved to Pollsmoor Prison, where he had more privileges, including more frequent family visits, as well as visits by some foreign dignitaries. The South African government also began seriously talking to Mandela.

In 1988, Mandela was transferred again, this time to Victor Verster Prison, where he was housed

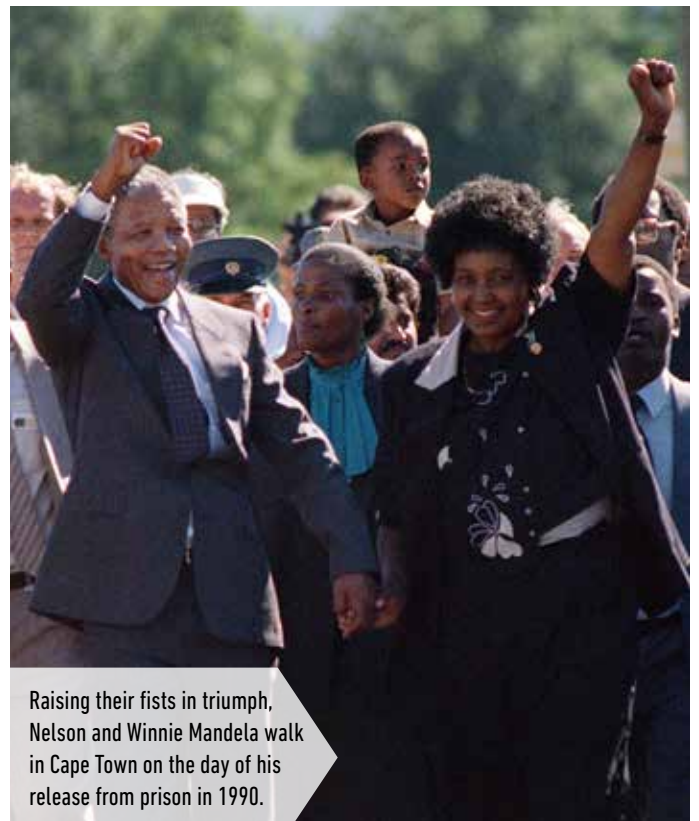
Books by Nelson Mandela

- **Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela**
- **Conversations With Myself** (personal recollections)
- **Favorite African Folktales** (story collection)
- **Nelson Mandela: In His Own Words** (speeches)

in much more comfortable quarters. By this time, the international economic pressure had increased, pushing the South African economy to the brink of bankruptcy. In 1989, National Party leader F. W. de Klerk replaced P. W. Botha as president and continued the talks with Mandela, who had become a world-renowned figure in the now-international movement to end apartheid.

Freedom and the End of Apartheid

The negotiations were difficult, but in February 1990, after 27 years, de Klerk announced Mandela's unconditional release from prison. De Klerk had also lifted the ban on the African National Congress. The entire world watched as, with Winnie by his side, Mandela walked out of prison on February 11.



Raising their fists in triumph, Nelson and Winnie Mandela walk in Cape Town on the day of his release from prison in 1990.

Photo: © ALEXANDER JOE/AFP/Getty Images.

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The actions by the government of South Africa were huge steps toward accepting the legitimacy of the anti-apartheid movement, but there was still work to be done.

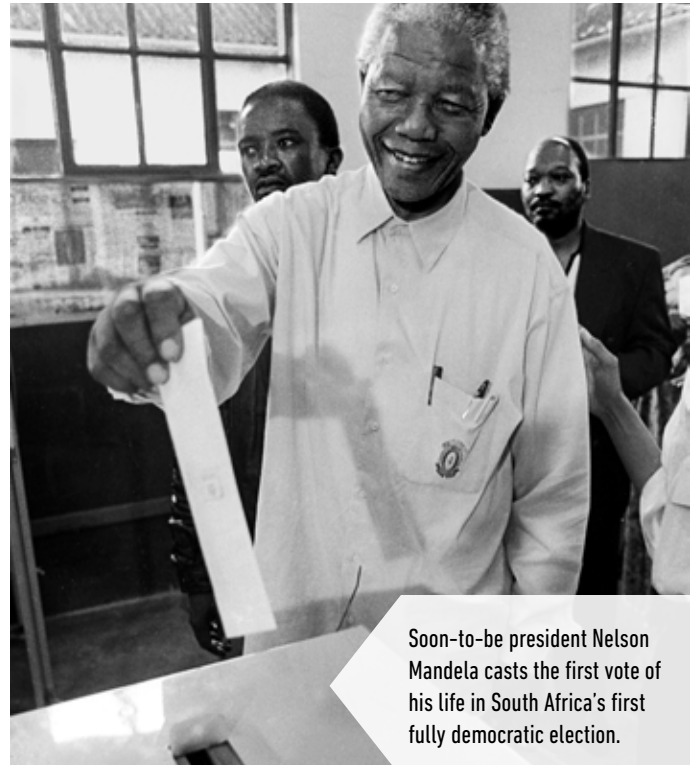
After his release, Mandela continued to lead negotiations with de Klerk, cherishing his freedom but refusing to give up until all South Africans could live free from oppressive laws. By 1992, Mandela and President de Klerk had reached an agreement paving the way toward democratic elections and the abolishment of apartheid laws, and in 1993 they were together awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for their work.

Nelson Mandela, President of South Africa

On April 27, 1994, South Africa held its first fully democratic election, in which both blacks and whites could vote. A few days later, on May 10, 1994, Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the country's first black president, with de Klerk serving as his first deputy. During his time in office, President Mandela worked to protect South Africa's economy from collapse. Through his Reconstruction and Development Programme, the South African government funded the creation of jobs, housing, and basic health care.

Nelson Mandela knew that if apartheid was going to be completely eliminated from South Africa, the rights of all citizens—including the minority white population—would also have to be respected. In 1995, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formed to recognize crimes committed by the National Party and the ANC and to provide amnesty for offenders of both sides. Mandela hoped to create a “Rainbow Nation” in which all South Africans would live freely and equally, and he had no interest in imposing any vengeful laws upon the white population that had oppressed blacks in South Africa.

In 1999, Mandela honored his promise to serve only one term. He was 80 years old and wanted to let others contribute to South Africa's prosperity and success. In the years that followed, he continued to work in public service, raising money through



Soon-to-be president Nelson Mandela casts the first vote of his life in South Africa's first fully democratic election.

his foundation to build schools and clinics in South Africa's rural heartland. He spent the rest of his life championing the rights and well-being of children and minorities all over the world.

Mandela died on December 5, 2013, and was remembered in tributes from around the world as a champion of equality. “I am one of the countless millions who drew inspiration from Nelson Mandela's life,” said U.S. President Barack Obama, who in 2009 became the first African-American president in the United States of America, 15 years after Mandela's groundbreaking achievement. “I cannot imagine my own life without the example that Nelson Mandela set.” ■

Watch

Video: “Born Free in South Africa,”

The New York Times, <http://tinyurl.com/zomjqvr>

Nelson Mandela left a legacy for improving South Africa and creating a free, equal, and progressive society. Today, the “born-frees”—the generation born after the end of apartheid in 1994, or just before it ended—have their own views on the future. Watch this video and find out about some of the successes and ongoing challenges facing South Africa.

Miniseries: *Madiba: The Definitive Story of Nelson Mandela*, BET, starts February 1, 2017.

Photo: © South Photography/Gallo Images/Getty Images.