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### **Nelson Mandela: Advocacy, Presidency, Freedom**

Nelson Mandela's undisputed influence on the South African political status quo was solidified by his principled nature, political fervor, and unfettered desire to foster independence in South Africa. His resistance towards colonialism, oppressive institutions and inequality manifested in his political involvement and presidency. Prior to this, however, Mandela was born a Xhosa in Mvezo -- a village in Eastern Cape, South Africa and was inculcated into the political realm at an early age because his father worked for the government and ensured that he be raised amongst royalty.<sup>1</sup> With this privilege at his disposal, natural leadership abilities and the world at his fingertips, Mandela became immersed in the political and educational lives that would later allow him to have a profound influence on the status quo of South Africa and the lives of many through his elected presidency.

Nelson Mandela's political agendas in the latter part of his activism were centered around the ideas of peace, resistance, absolute devotion to the cause, and humanism -- all of which were representative of his highly charismatic and empathic nature. His election to the presidency in the latter part of his life and political presence was defined by his unyielding desire for justice. Mandela was the first-ever black democratically-elected South African president in history. He was elected as President of the Republic of South Africa on May 9th, 1994. He accepted his

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995)

election with gratitude and honor, and his determination to reconcile differences between anxious whites, blacks and others who feared racial tension made itself evident -- “From the moment the results were in and it was apparent that the ANC was to form the government, I saw my mission as one of preaching reconciliation, of binding the wounds of the country, of engendering trust and confidence...At every opportunity, I said all South Africans must now unite and join hands and say we are one country, one nation, one people, marching together into the future.”<sup>2</sup> In his inaugural address, Mandela indirectly cites Apartheid as the regime that was responsible for ravaging the nation in all its divisive and unforgiving history -- “...we saw our country tear itself apart in a terrible conflict...precisely because it has become the universal base of the pernicious ideology and practice of racism and racial oppression.”<sup>3</sup> Both Southern Africa and Mandela were plagued by its existence, and the latter sought to eradicate and its ramifications in the years prior to his presidency, with great success. Nevertheless, Mandela’s ascension to the presidency was met with impassioned attitudes and triumph, given that the events preceding his ascension were fraught with hardship in the form of political suppression, imprisonment, and the grueling experience of being a black subordinate in a white-dominated world and homeland.

In discussing Mandela’s rise to presidency, it would first be prudent to talk about the incarceratory strife he faced, which elicited a public reaction and would eventually become one of the principal factors in his election due to affirmation of Mandela as a respectable “rugged individual”. Prior to his assumption of the presidency, he was thrown into jail because of his cooperation with the African National Congress, a radical group aimed at liberating, uniting and defending South Africans and their rights. He stayed in prison on Robben Island for

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<sup>2</sup> Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 382

<sup>3</sup> Nelson Mandela. “Inaugural Speech.” *Inaugural Speech*. Accessed December 13, 2019. [https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Inaugural\\_Speech\\_17984.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Inaugural_Speech_17984.html).

twenty-seven years, sentenced for life. Much of his time was spent in solitary confinement. His release was met with international fame and coverage, providing him with the overdue respect and recognition he was sheltered from in the years past while in prison. Despite this, the fight for revolution would continue despite Mandela's temporary absence in the anti-apartheid effort. The next few years of his life would alter South African history for decades to come, as he served as the President of South Africa from May 1994 to June 1999 -- "stand[ing] as a lasting example of good governance, tolerance and solidarity."<sup>4</sup>

During the course of his presidency, Mandela governed benevolently and democratically, with the goals of the black liberation movement in mind -- "From 1994 until June 1999, Mandela worked to bring about the transition from minority rule and apartheid to black majority rule."<sup>5</sup> Naturally, this was done in an attempt to dismantle the workings of an oppressive institution. The radicalism of his younger, angrier years was being channeled into reparative efforts in alleviating the anxieties of post-Apartheid race relations. According to his friend Archbishop Desmond Tutu, "Prison mellowed him wonderfully. As you know, he went to prison a very angry, youngish man. I mean, the commander-in-chief of the military wing of the ANC, so he was pretty aggressive...Suffering either embitters you or, mercifully, ennobles you...When he came out, only someone like him could have said – especially to these young angry types – that no, we've to go for negotiations."<sup>6</sup> His ambition to do so was expressed in his inaugural address, pointing to a much greater aim of unification. This was most clearly evidenced in his use of the nation's

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<sup>4</sup> Maanga, Godson S. "The Relevance and Legacy of Nelson Mandela in the Twenty-First Century Africa: An Historical and Theological Perspective." *African Journal of History and Culture* 5, no. 2141-6672 (July 2013): 96–113.

<sup>5</sup> "Nelson Mandela Biography." *Sun Reporter*, Dec 12, 2013.

<https://search-proquest-com.proxy.wexler.hunter.cuny.edu/docview/1477210619?accountid=27495>.

<sup>6</sup> Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. "From a 'Terrorist' to Global Icon: A Critical Decolonial Ethical Tribute to Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela of South Africa." *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 6 (July 2014): 905–21.

enthusiasm for sports as a way to promote reconciliation between whites and blacks. The controversial rugby team was hated by black South Africans, and in 1995, “South Africa came to the world stage by hosting the Rugby World Cup, which brought further recognition and prestige to the young republic.”<sup>7</sup> This was a major stepping stone in the reconciliatory efforts of Mandela’s presidency -- after their momentous victory, Mandela was seen congratulating and hugging the white captain of the team. This televised interaction was explosive in that positive change within the South African socio-political sphere was becoming more actualized with Mandela’s assumption of the presidency. His reconciliatory efforts were also exemplified by his creation of the the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” in 1995 which illuminated the human rights abuses during Apartheid, aided in the creation of tolerance between the nation's white minority and black majority.<sup>8</sup> In addition to this, Nelson Mandela founded a children’s fund which sought to combat the AIDS crisis while aiding orphans who were neglected and left to suffer with the disease, which he was deeply affected by given that it had taken the life of his son. Mandela introduced housing, education, medical/clinical and economic initiatives which were designed to improve the living standards of the country’s black population through the Reconstruction and Development plan, especially in rural areas. This plan funded the creation of jobs, which would also protect South Africa's economy from collapse. In 1996, Mandela helped draft a new constitution, “establishing a strong central government based on majority rule, and guaranteeing both the rights of minorities and the freedom of expression.” All of these policies would aid the budding nation in its transformation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>"Nelson Mandela Biography."

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Many did take issue with Mandela's executive decisions while in office given his adoption of a more passive and reparative approach in handling race relations after his time in jail and election to the presidency -- "According to many black South Africans, undue concern for the white minority has been Mandela's greatest undoing."<sup>10</sup> Arguably, the momentum of his revolutionary force had been stymied given his racially-motivated reconciliatory efforts. Such efforts would prove strategic but also imply a wavering of Mandela's belief in complete intolerance and resistance towards systems of oppression contributed to by white South Africans. Many felt betrayed as a result and were inclined to criticize this side of him, including his ex-wife, who acknowledged this duality within him. His "siding with the enemy" in his participation in negotiations was, in Mandela's eyes, a means that is necessary to achieve an end goal of black liberation. Mandela addressed the oft-uttered claim of "not having accomplished enough" as President by stating that the black masses and majority should "not expect to be driving a Mercedes the day after the election.... Life will not change dramatically, except that you will have increased your self-esteem and become a citizen in your own land.... You might have to wait five years for results to show."<sup>11</sup> This retort perfectly encapsulates his idealism. Nevertheless, Mandela's success as a figure who revolutionized African history is subject to contestation -- but his influence would indubitably linger and alter the course of events in his paving-the-way towards South African liberation.

Mandela did not seek re-election after his first term, and stepped down from the presidency in 1995, disrupting a lineage of president-for-lifers. Mandela could have chosen to

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<sup>10</sup> Masiza, Zondi. "Mandela's legacy." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 55, no. 2 (1999): 21. Gale General OneFile (accessed December 13, 2019). [https://link-gale-com.proxy.wexler.hunter.cuny.edu/apps/doc/A54062193/ITOF?u=cuny\\_hunter&sid=ITOF&xid=71ae1f23](https://link-gale-com.proxy.wexler.hunter.cuny.edu/apps/doc/A54062193/ITOF?u=cuny_hunter&sid=ITOF&xid=71ae1f23).

<sup>11</sup> Zondi, "Mandela's legacy"

remain in power for another term because of his popularity, but his wish for a simple retirement and time to spend in his rural home with his grandchildren superseded any presidential fervor left in his 80-year old self. Perhaps Mandela was also trying to send out a message about the chain of presidencies that preceded him -- “Mandela has set a remarkable example in Africa, where presidents often become presidents-for-life--either dying in office or forcing the opposition to mount a coup or even a civil war to get rid of them.”<sup>12</sup> He sought to change this system of governance in his setting of such a precedent, which wholly embodied his democratic values. He governed by principle rather than power and expressed his devotion to his country in the best way he knew how, through the ideologies of Pan-Africanism and the spirit of nationalism. Despite his emphasis on these two facets of the South African mode of post-apartheid existence, his contribution to the democratic status quo of South African governance was central to its success.

Mandela’s remarkably effective leadership as evidenced through his presidency was unlike any other figure’s in South African history. His stark opposition towards hegemonic institutions and practices prevailed over the forces of authoritarianism, control, and inequality. His tireless involvement in the realm of political affairs renders him both a iron-willed leader and soulful humanitarian. Even in the years following his presidency, Mandela was active in his pursuit of political and worldly betterment. His lasting influence as a spearhead for peace in African history is immortalized through our remembrance of him -- and with good reason.

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<sup>12</sup>Zondi, "Mandela's legacy"

## Bibliography

Maanga, Godson S. "The Relevance and Legacy of Nelson Mandela in the Twenty-First Century Africa: An Historical and Theological Perspective." *African Journal of History and Culture* 5, no. 2141-6672 (July 2013): 96–113.

[http://www.academicjournals.org/app/webroot/article/article1381858725\\_Maanga.pdf](http://www.academicjournals.org/app/webroot/article/article1381858725_Maanga.pdf).

This source was not as relevant to my discussion of Mandela, it mainly just elucidated the information regarding the dates of Mandela's swearing into office. The source was a reliable one as it illustrated the details of his governance, which was argued as being positive and impactful. I only used this work to gather the details surrounding the logistics of Mandela's presidential reign period and a general opinion of it. This source was part of a journal so its accuracy and reliability would be helpful in relaying a verifiable, researchable series of events, much like the rest of my research.

Mandela, Nelson. "Inaugural Speech." *Inaugural Speech*. Accessed December 13, 2019.

[https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Inaugural\\_Speech\\_17984.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Inaugural_Speech_17984.html).

This primary source was helpful in transcribing the contents of Mandela's speech. My use of this source was limited, but it was central to a discussion of Apartheid and the culture of animosity surrounding it. The speech illustrated the divisiveness found between both black and whites during the era. The inaugural address was given by Mandela when he was sworn in during his presidency, in its very inception. This source was appropriate to use because it did Nelson Mandela justice by including in it the nuances of emotionality and diction within his speech. This source was reasonably accurate, given that it transcribed his speech word for word.

Mandela, Nelson, 1918-2013, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1995.

Nelson Mandela's autobiography was central to my discussion about his life for the reason that it provided me with a foundation for speaking about the rest of his presidential and political life. This primary source is essential to any discussion of Mandela himself, because of its intricate detail and captivating language. It frames Mandela as a natural-born humanitarian with a knack for political leadership. It was important to know the circumstances surrounding his birth and early life in order for me to be able to transcend into a discussion of the latter part of his life. In addition, his recounting of being elected to the presidency is critical in understanding his attitude towards his ethical, moral, national and presidential missions.

Masiza, Zondi. "Mandela's legacy." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 55, no. 2 (1999): 21. Gale General OneFile (accessed December 13, 2019).

[https://link-gale-com.proxy.wexler.hunter.cuny.edu/apps/doc/A54062193/ITOF?u=cuny\\_hunter&sid=ITOF&xid=71ae1f23](https://link-gale-com.proxy.wexler.hunter.cuny.edu/apps/doc/A54062193/ITOF?u=cuny_hunter&sid=ITOF&xid=71ae1f23).

This source was essential in my presentation of a contrasting consensus regarding Mandela's presidency. It was a reliable source given that it did not only present Mandela in a favorable light -- rather, it elucidated a variety of opinions regarding his impact, some of which were negative in nature. In addition, it illustrates the political climate at the time and provides the reader with insight about Mandela's shifting positions in the grand scheme of politics and later, his presidency, and his reasons for doing so -- to reach an end goal in the struggle for liberation. It also paints a historical picture about the radically shifting status quo of South African presidencies, given that Mandela chose not to run for a second time instead of declaring himself president for life. This source was especially helpful in outlining the opinions surrounding his presidency and putting his presidency into perspective as compared with others.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. "From a 'Terrorist' to Global Icon: A Critical Decolonial Ethical Tribute to Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela of South Africa." *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 6 (July 2014): 905–21. doi:10.1080/01436597.2014.907703.

This source was helpful in helping to contextualize Mandela's attitudes post-release from prison, according to a friend of his. This source offered a sound analysis of the interpretations of Mandela's presidency. It delved into a discussion of the nature of his politics and their relevance to his existence and fight for the cause. It discussed his approaches to politics and put into perspective his shifting political attitudes in regard to carrying out these same practices. It was not major to my discussion of Mandela, but the source seemed to be reliable, given that it was part of a journal.

"Nelson Mandela Biography." *Sun Reporter*, Dec 12, 2013.

<https://search-proquest-com.proxy.wexler.hunter.cuny.edu/docview/1477210619?accountid=27495>.

This source was extremely helpful in describing the actual details surrounding Nelson Mandela's policy-making during his presidency. This source relayed his actions and plans in a decently objective, chronological manner, in a timeline-like fashion, which was both easy to gather information from because of its accessibility and conciseness. The author, however, was anonymous and it led me to question the credibility of the source, thus I could not list them in my citations. However, this source was still part of a journal so its accuracy and reliability would be helpful in relaying a verifiable series of events, much like the rest of my research.