

Nelson Mandela, father of the new South Africa, dies at 95

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Nelson Mandela and his wife, Winnie, walk hand-in-hand with their raised clenched fists upon Mandela's release from Victor Verster prison, near Cape Town, South Africa, on Feb. 11, 1990. Photo: AP Photo/Greg English, File

JOHANNESBURG — Nelson Mandela became one of the world's most beloved leaders and a hero of the 20th century when he emerged from 27 years in prison to arrange the end of white-only rule in South Africa. On Thursday, Dec. 5, Mandela died. He was 95.

South African President Jacob Zuma made the announcement at a news conference late on Thursday. "We've lost our greatest son," he said.

As South Africa's first black president, the ex-boxer, lawyer and prisoner No. 46664 paved the way to racial reconciliation with well-chosen gestures of forgiveness. He even lunched with the prosecutor who sent him to jail.

He had been convicted of treason and sentenced to life imprisonment in 1964 for leading a campaign of sabotage against the government. He was sent to the notorious Robben Island prison. It was forbidden to quote him or publish his photo, yet he was able to smuggle out messages to help guide the crusade against apartheid, the system that kept non-whites living separately and with fewer rights.

"You Learn To Look Into Yourself"

As time passed, international awareness of apartheid grew. By the time Mandela turned 70 he was the world's most famous political prisoner. Relying on his mental toughness, he turned down conditional offers of freedom from his jailers and even found a way to benefit from being in jail.

"People tend to measure themselves by external accomplishments, but jail allows a person to focus on internal ones; such as honesty, sincerity, simplicity, humility, generosity and an absence of variety," Mandela said. "You learn to look into yourself."

Thousands died, were tortured and were imprisoned in the decades-long struggle against apartheid. When Mandela emerged from prison in 1990, smiling and waving to the crowds, the image became an international icon of freedom.

South Africa's white rulers had portrayed Mandela as a communist revolutionary. They insisted that black rule would lead to the same chaos and bloodshed that had beset many other African countries as they shook off colonial rule.

Yet since apartheid ended, South Africa has elected three presidents, always peacefully. The country has set an example on a continent where democracy is still new and fragile.

"We have confounded the prophets of doom and achieved a bloodless revolution. We have restored the dignity of every South African," Mandela said shortly before stepping down as president in 1999 at age 80.

Umkhonto We Sizwe

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was born July 18, 1918, the son of a tribal chief. Growing up at a time when virtually all of Africa was under European colonial rule, Mandela attended Methodist schools before being admitted to the black University of Fort Hare in 1938. He was expelled two years later for his role in a student strike.

He moved to Johannesburg and worked as a policeman at a gold mine, boxed as an amateur heavyweight, and studied law. He married and had four children.

Mandela began his rise through the anti-apartheid movement in 1944, when he helped form the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League.

He organized a campaign in 1952 to encourage defiance of laws that segregated schools, marriage, housing and job opportunities. The government retaliated by barring him from attending gatherings and leaving Johannesburg.

After a two-day nationwide strike was crushed by police, Mandela pushed to form the movement's guerrilla wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, or Spear of the Nation.

He was arrested in 1962 and sentenced to five years of hard labor for leaving the country illegally and inciting blacks to strike.

A year later, police uncovered the ANC's underground headquarters on a farm near Johannesburg and seized documents outlining plans for an attack. Mandela and seven co-defendants were sentenced to life in prison.

"I do not deny that I planned sabotage," he told the court. "I did not plan it in a spirit of recklessness, nor because I have any love of violence. I planned it as a result of a calm and sober assessment of the political situation that had arisen after years of tyranny, exploitation and oppression of my people by whites."

Wins Country's First All-Race Election

From the late 1960s South Africa gradually became an international outcast. It was expelled from the U.N. and banned from the Olympics. In 1973 the government offered to release Mandela on condition he agree to stay in his native land of Transkei. He refused. In 1982 he and other top ANC inmates were moved off Robben Island to a mainland prison. Three years later, Mandela was again offered freedom, and again he refused unless segregation laws were scrapped and the government negotiated with the ANC.

In 1989, F.W. de Klerk became president. This Afrikaner recognized the end was near for white-ruled South Africa.

On Feb. 11, 1990, inmate No. 46664, who had once been refused permission to leave prison for his mother's funeral, went free and walked hand-in-hand with Winnie, his wife. Blacks across the country erupted in joy — as did many whites.

Mandela took charge of the ANC. He shared the Nobel Peace Prize with de Klerk in 1993. In the following year he was elected president by a landslide in South Africa's first all-race election.

With his fellow Nobel prize winner, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, he set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Commission allowed human rights offenders of all races to admit their crimes publicly in return for a lighter punishment. It proved to be a kind of national therapy that would become a model for other countries emerging from prolonged strife.

He increasingly left the governing to Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, who took over when Mandela's term ended in June 1999. He declined to seek another term — a rarity among African presidents.

"I must step down while there are one or two people who admire me," Mandela joked at the time.

Quiz

- 1 Which of the sentences from the article BEST supports the central idea of the article?
 - (A) South African President Jacob Zuma made the announcement at a news conference late on Thursday. "We've lost our greatest son," he said.
 - (B) Relying on his mental toughness, he turned down conditional offers of freedom from his jailers and even found a way to benefit from being in jail.
 - (C) He organized a campaign in 1952 to encourage defiance of laws that segregated schools, marriage, housing and job opportunities.
 - (D) They insisted that black rule would lead to the same chaos and bloodshed that had beset many other African countries as they shook off colonial rule.

- 2 What information is LEAST important to be included in a summary of the article?
 - (A) As South Africa's first black president, the ex-boxer, lawyer and prisoner No. 46664 paved the way to racial reconciliation with well-chosen gestures of forgiveness.
 - (B) He had been convicted of treason and sentenced to life imprisonment in 1964 for leading a campaign of sabotage against the government.
 - (C) "We have restored the dignity of every South African," Mandela said shortly before stepping down as president in 1999 at age 80.
 - (D) In 1973 the government offered to release Mandela on condition he agree to stay in his native land of Transkei.

- 3 Why was South Africa banned from the U.N. and the Olympics in the 1960s?
 - (A) because the nation wanted isolation from the rest of the world
 - (B) because the European government was hesitant to release Mandela
 - (C) because of the human rights violations that were prevailing in the nation
 - (D) because the rest of the world was against the extremist campaign led by Mandela

- 4 Which paragraph from the section "You Learn to Look Into Yourself" shows that the European rulers were afraid of the possibility of black rule in South Africa?

Answer Key

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- Paragraph 7:**
South Africa's white rulers had portrayed Mandela as a communist revolutionary. They insisted that black rule would lead to the same chaos and bloodshed that had beset many other African countries as they shook off colonial rule.