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Nelson Mandela: The Man Who Saved South Africa

“I have fought against the white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die” (“Nelson Mandela,” *Contemporary*). Moments before being escorted from the courtroom to serve a life sentence starting in 1964, Nelson Mandela uttered these words. He was tremendously dedicated to the cause of true racial equality and would stop at nothing to accomplish it. Nelson Mandela, despite the many predicaments and obstacles he had to overcome throughout his life, became known as the man who saved South Africa from racial segregation.

Nelson Mandela was born into a large, royal, and atypical family. He was born into the Madiba clan on July 18, 1918 in Transkei, South Africa. Mandela was the son of a highly placed tribal advisor in the his clan (“Nelson Mandela,” *Contemporary*). His father, Galda Henry Mphakanyiswa, had four wives and thirteen children. Mandela was the youngest. Although Mandela is commonly known as Nelson Mandela, he was originally named Rolihlahla Mandela which means “one who brings trouble upon himself” (“Nelson Mandela,” *Contemporary*).

Although Nelson Mandela did not have a typical family, he still had a normal education at which he was very diligent. When he was only twelve years old, Mandela’s father died and Jongintaba at the Great Place in Mphekezweni became his guardian (“Nelson Mandela Biography”). He went to a Christian elementary school and there he was given the Christian

name Nelson (“Nelson Mandela,” *Contemporary*). After graduating from his elementary school he went to Clarkebury Boarding School at Engcobo (“Nelson Mandela,” *African*). Then, he attempted to get his bachelor's degree from the University of Fort Hare but was expelled after joining a student strike (“Biography of Nelson Mandela”). He later earned his law degree from the University of South Africa (“Nelson Mandela,” *Contemporary*).

Despite Mandela's good education, he had a difficult young adult life with a low-paying job. When Nelson Mandela was twenty-three, Chief Jongintaba arranged a marriage for him. He did not want to marry the woman that Chief Jongintaba wanted him to marry, so Mandela fled to Johannesburg in 1941 (“Nelson Mandela,” *African*). In Johannesburg he worked as a mine security officer (“Nelson Mandela Biography”). This job did not pay him much, and he did not have much money. Later, in 1943, Mandela joined the African National Congress or ANC. At this time he became friends with some of the Indian leaders and observed their way of peaceful resistance and learned from it (de Zayas). The next year Nelson Mandela married a nurse named Evelyn Mase. They could not afford a traditional wedding or a house so they lived with Evelyn's sister and her family (Pogrud 23). Mandela and his new family were all living in a very small house and it was extremely crowded. At this time, he and his good friend Oliver Tambo made the first ever South African black law firm (“Nelson Mandela,” *African*). Later that year, 1944, Mandela became the leader of the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League. As the leader of the Youth League, he helped plan multiple strikes and campaigns to defy unfair laws (“Nelson Mandela,” *Contemporary*).

Nelson Mandela's career was not only extremely difficult, it was also rebellious and illegal. Early on in his occupation Mandela became the president of the ANC. The ANC continued to protest against the South African Government. In 1952, he and a number of other protesters were beaten and jailed (“Nelson Mandela,” *Contemporary*). He was given a

suspended sentence and was ordered to resign from being leader of the ANC. Mandela refused to resign. Instead, he worked secretly and did not attend meetings (“Nelson Mandela,” *Contemporary*). Later, in 1960, the ANC was outlawed and Mandela was unsuccessfully tried for treason (“Nelson Mandela,” *African*). He realized that his way of peaceful protesting was no longer working. So Mandela created Umkhonto We Sizwe which is translated as Spear of the Nation or MK. This was the new military wing of the ANC. Later, in 1962, Mandela illegally left South Africa for six months to gain financial support for his cause (de Zayas). While outside the country he got military training in both Morocco and Ethiopia. He finally returned to South Africa in July of 1962 (“Nelson Mandela Biography”). On August 4, 1962 Mandela was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison for organizing illegal demonstrations (“Nelson Mandela,” *Contemporary*).

While Mandela was serving his sentence, the police connected him to the Umkhonto We Sizwe and charged him with even more serious crimes of treason and sabotage (“Nelson Mandela,” *Contemporary*). He was sentenced to life imprisonment in June 1964. While Mandela was in prison his mother and son died. He was not allowed to attend either of their funerals (Biography). During his life imprisonment he spent eighteen years at Robben Island as prisoner number 466/64 where he worked in a lime quarry (de Zayas). In 1982 Mandela was moved to the maximum security Pollsmour Prison. Most observers agree that it was because he was influencing the other prisoners at Robben Island (“Nelson Mandela”, *Contemporary*). Fearing a civil war between blacks and whites, Mandela was allowed negotiations with the president of South Africa, president F. W. de Klerk (Harwood 24). Mandela was released from prison on February 11, 1990. Mandela, in the end, spent a total of twenty-four long years in prison (de Zayas).

After his release Mandela negotiated with de Klerk to establish a democracy in South Africa (“Nelson Mandela,” *African*). A couple of years later Mandela won his fight with apartheid, and became the first ever black president of South Africa on April 27, 1994. He retired in June 1999 at eighty years old. Mandela’s ANC protege, Thabo Mbeki, then won the next election in 1999.

Throughout his life Nelson Mandela had many achievements and all were helpful and charitable and all were for the greater good of South Africa. He helped form the ANC Youth League. He also became the first black president of South Africa. Even with all the stress of leading South Africa, Mandela managed to raise millions of dollars for charity (“Nelson Mandela” *African*). Mandela and de Klerk, who helped Mandela after his release from prison, were awarded the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize (“Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela”). After he was retired, Mandela created a group called the elders. This was a group of retired political figures who would work together to try and solve global problems. Mandela also created 46664 to help fight against AIDs. He named it 46664 after his prison number at Robben Island (“Nelson Mandela”, *Contemporary*). Lastly, Mandela received honorary degrees from both Harvard University and St. Bartholomew’s Church in New York (“Nelson Mandela”, *African*).

Despite being anticipated it was sad when this well known man died. Mandela had many recurring lung infections, and he was hospitalized for most of 2013. His death was anticipated for a while because of this. Mandela died in his house in Johannesburg on December 5, 2013. As the news of his death spread, news outlets and social media became filled with sorrow and remembrance for Mandela (“Nelson Mandela”, *Contemporary*). Mandela was given a state funeral on December 15, 2013.

Nelson Mandela has a very famous, inspiring and incredible legacy. In honor of Mandela, an international Mandela Day was established by the Mandela Foundation and 46664.

On this day, people do sixty-seven minutes of charitable work to represent the sixty-seven years Mandela was active in human rights (“Nelson Mandela”, *Contemporary*). When Mandela died, President Zuma had a ten day mourning period for all of South Africa. However, not just South Africa mourned. The entire world was filled with sorrow and remembrance (“Nelson Mandela”, *Contemporary*). On December 10, 2013 a memorial service for Mandela was held at FNB Stadium in Johannesburg. His legacy was so powerful that in March 2012 hundreds of articles and documents about the life of Nelson Mandela were posted on archive.nelsonmandela.org (“Nelson Mandela”, *Contemporary*). Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Google Cultural Institute also made a digital archive that has pictures and versions of Mandela’s diaries. Barack Obama stated, “Like so many around the globe, I cannot fully imagine my own life without the example that Nelson Mandela set” (“Nelson Mandela”, *Contemporary*). Also, the United States secretary, General Ban Ki-moon said. “What lessons he [Nelson Mandela] has taught us! How inspiring has he been, across the world, across the generations! Millions of people are better off thanks to his contributions; many have been moved to pursue lives of service in his image; many, facing tribulations of their own, have found both solace and fortitude in his example. Above all, he has shown the difference one person can make in the face of injustice, conflict, poverty, and disease. Nelson Mandela has made a lasting imprint on our lives” (“Nelson Mandela”, *Contemporary*).

Nelson Mandela, despite the many conflicts throughout his life, earned the title of the man who saved South Africa. Through his royal childhood and rough young adult life, Mandela’s personality and morals formed. Through his arduous career and time of death, Mandela worked through the tough times, accomplishments, and failures. In the end, because of his dedication, Nelson Mandela accomplished his goal and changed the lives of millions worldwide.

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