

Nelson Mandela's Stand for Equality in South Africa

Matthew Dong

Junior Division

Historical Paper

Paper Length: 1,901 words

Through several peaceful movements and armed protests, Nelson Mandela and other civil rights activists took a stand against apartheid, a system of segregation, in South Africa during the mid-1900s to late 1900s. Before, South Africa was racially divided and segregated, and the minority white South African population controlled the majority of government. Mandela had to overcome many obstacles including government interference and several years of imprisonment. After many decades, apartheid was ended and Mandela helped improved race relations and established an equal, multiracial government in South Africa as president, creating an international image of peace and unity. This inspired people in other countries to fight for equality and human rights too and to follow Mandela's example later.

Rolihlahla Mandela (also known as Madiba) was born on July 18, 1918 in Mvezo, South Africa of the Thembu tribe. After Mandela's father died, Mandela was left to the Thembu Regent Jongintaba Dalindyebo to be looked after. Mandela attended a primary school in Qunu where he was given the name, Nelson. He continued with his schooling and went to the University College of Fort Hare but was expelled after participating in a student protest boycotting the university's policies along with a friend, Oliver Tambo, a year later. When he went home, his guardian had organized an arranged marriage, but Mandela fled to Johannesburg instead. He studied law and also began to become involved in politics and the anti-apartheid movement. In 1944, Mandela joined the African National Congress (ANC) and along with other members, including Tambo, formed the youth league of the ANC, called the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL).¹

¹ "Timeline." *The Nelson Mandela Foundation*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Jan. 2017. <<https://www.nelsonmandela.org/timeline#year-1918>>



In 1948, after the election of a new president, the Afrikaner National Party gained a majority of the governmental power and they passed a system of legislation known as apartheid, which enforced policies of racial segregation and discrimination. Nonwhite South Africans, which was a majority of the population, were forced to live in separate areas from the white people and used different public facilities. Under apartheid, marriage between people of different races was prohibited. Contact between the minority white population and the majority nonwhite South African population was limited. Nonwhites' rights were restricted and weren't allowed in government, thus maintaining the white minority rule in South Africa.² In 1952, the Defiance Campaign began and was the first large scale, multiracial resistance by people and led by the ANC. Also, in the same year, Mandela and Oliver Tambo established the first black law firm in South Africa, named Mandela & Tambo, and they gave counsel to the people affected by apartheid.

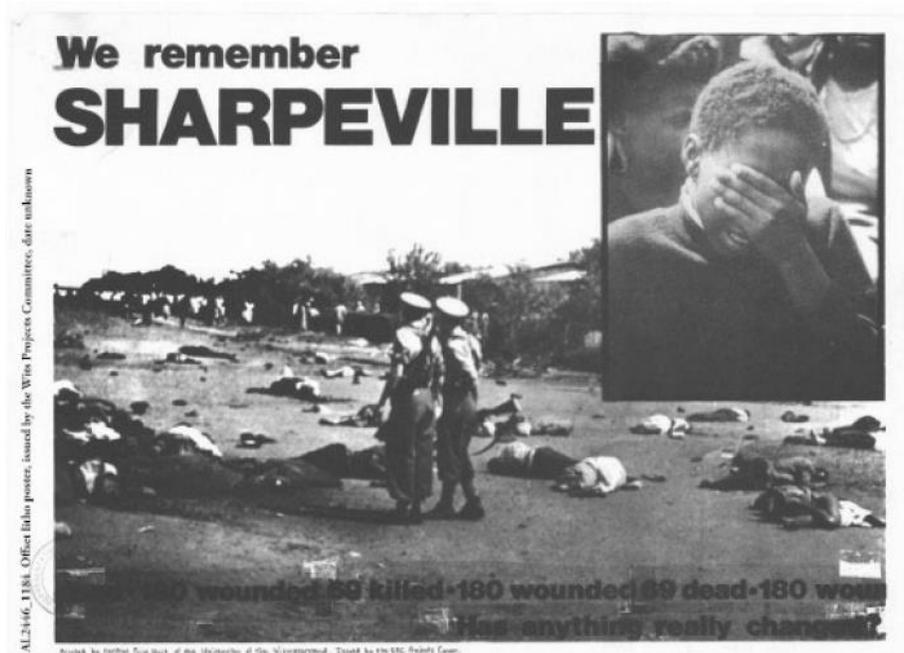
² History.com Staff. "Apartheid." History.com. A&E Television Networks, 2010. Web. 28 Jan. 2017. <<http://www.history.com/topics/apartheid>>

The ANC organized protests, boycotts, strikes, forms of civil disobedience, and also nonviolent methods of resistance to show opposition against apartheid and the unjust policies it proposed. Mandela once stated, “Defiance was a step of great political significance. It released strong social forces which affected thousands of our countrymen. It was an effective way of getting the masses to function politically, a powerful method of voicing our indignation against the reactionary policies of the government.”³ The protests allowed numerous people to stand up against the government policies. In 1956, Mandela and several other activists were arrested and put on trial for treason for their actions but were acquitted in 1961. Mandela took part in these movements for the ANC to take a stand against apartheid. Mandela demonstrated opposition to apartheid through armed protests but also nonviolent, peaceful protests.⁴ He disagreed with the system of legislation by the government and wanted to make a change for the better to establish racial equality and unity between the people of different races in racially divided South Africa.

Meanwhile, a group of people in the ANC split off and formed a military faction in 1959 known as the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). In 1960, however, in Sharpeville, police opened fire on a group of peaceful black protesters, killing 69 people and injuring several others. This incident sparked anger and riots across the country, and the government banned the ANC and PAC,

³ “Timeline.” *The Nelson Mandela Foundation*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Jan. 2017.
<<https://www.nelsonmandela.org/timeline#year-1918>>

⁴ “The O’Malley Archives.” Document 11: Second letter from Nelson Mandela to Hendrik Verwoerd, 26 June 1961 – The O’Malley Archives. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Jan. 2017.
<<https://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv01538/04lv01600/05lv01617/06lv01623.htm>>



causing them to go undercover for a while and to keep a low profile to avoid detection by the government. At this point, Mandela realized that it was time to proceed in a more aggressive manner, since the nonviolent methods of opposition weren't making any progress. In 1961, Mandela co-founded and led the Umkhonto we Sizwe ("Spear of the Nation", or MK) which was an armed wing of the ANC.⁵ Mandela had explained his reasoning for this armed approach, "[I]t would be wrong and unrealistic for African leaders to continue preaching peace and nonviolence at a time when the government met our peaceful demands with force. It was only when all else had failed, when all channels of peaceful protest been barred to us, that the decision was made to embark on violent forms of political struggle." Mandela and MK launched a campaign against the government, and in 1962, Mandela travelled abroad illegally for military training and to

⁵ "Timeline." *The Nelson Mandela Foundation*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Jan. 2017. <<https://www.nelsonmandela.org/timeline#year-1918>>

gather support for the ANC. Upon his return, he was sentenced to five years. Other activists were also sentenced to prison, for acts of sabotage, treason, and violence against the government.⁶

In 1963, during the Rivonia Trial in which Mandela and ten others were on trial for sabotage and illegally leaving the country, Mandela said in his speech to the court, “I have fought against 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 to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”⁷ Mandela firmly believed in his cause, and participated in several armed protests and nonviolent methods to demonstrate his views on apartheid. His speech showed his dedication and hope for the cause.

After the trial, which gained attention from some parts of the world, Mandela was sentenced for life in prison. He arrived at Robben Island in 1964 and was moved to Pollsmoor Prison in 1982. Although he was confined in a cell, he was still the symbol for the antiapartheid movement across the country. Mandela became widely known and popular as a common household name. The government offered Mandela his release in exchange for renouncing his violent ways but Mandela refused. However, on February 11, 1990, newly elected president F. W. de Klerk lifted the ban on the ANC and ordered the release of Nelson Mandela after 27 years of imprisonment. In 1993, the two men jointly won the Nobel Peace Prize and in May 1994, Mandela became the first black president of South Africa.⁸ During his presidency, Mandela created the Truth and

⁶ “Timeline.”—Nelson Mandela Foundation. N.p., n.d. Web. 28 Jan. 2017.
<<https://www.nelsonmandela.org/content/page/timeline>>

⁷ “Nelson Mandela’s Five Most Memorable Speeches.” Firstpost.com. N.p., 6 Dec. 2013. Web. 29 Jan. 2017.
<<http://www.firstpost.com/world/nelson-mandelas-five-most-memorable-speeches-1270759.html>>

⁸ “Timeline.” *The Nelson Mandela Foundation*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Jan. 2017.
<<https://www.nelsonmandela.org/timeline#year-1918>>

Reconciliation Commission which investigated peoples' rights and violations by supporters and protesters of apartheid. Many social and economic programs were created to improve the living standards of the black population in South Africa. In 1996, a new constitution was written and it founded a strong, central government that prohibited discrimination.⁹ In this way, blacks could hold a position in government and the government could be multiracial.

Nelson Mandela took a stand against apartheid, meaning he believed it was unjust and took the necessary actions, through nonviolent methods and also armed protests, to bring about the change he wanted. Mandela is remembered throughout history for his actions in South Africa and his story inspires other people to follow in his footsteps. Mandela's opposition to apartheid started as a grassroots movement but then blossomed into a full sized group across the country. Mandela and others apart of the ANC faced the government, overcoming obstacles such as the ban of the ANC or the imprisonment of key leaders like Mandela to eventually achieve their goal. Although it took almost fifty years, apartheid was finally abolished and ended by 1994.

During his single term as president, Nelson Mandela accomplished a lot for South Africa and for future generations. The government repealed the legislation that apartheid was mainly based on and a new constitution that was fair to all races was established. Nelson Mandela was able to create a multiracial government where whites were not the majority of the people present. This sign improved race relations in South Africa and the people were able to get along with each other peacefully. With no more legalized discrimination for the most part, racial equality steadily improved. South Africa was no longer legally racially divided and the different population groups would not be based on their skin color. Although the black and white population were

⁹ History.com Staff. "Nelson Mandela." History.com. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 28 Jan. 2017. <<http://www.history.com/topics/nelson-mandela>>

still at odds with each other, race relations improved gradually over several years. Mandela once said that South Africa was a “rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.”¹⁰ Now, South Africa was a new nation, and it had started out peacefully, trying to give off the impression to the other countries that they had changed dramatically. South Africa became a better place over time, and Nelson Mandela and his accomplishments became well recognized. Mandela’s actions were important because they helped the people of South Africa in general and also inspired other activists and people to take a stand for what they believe in. Mandela shaped South Africa’s history and has become an inspiration to many activists and also to those simply looking to take a stand against something. Mandela (below) is with President Bill Clinton at an awards ceremony, showing an example of global peace and unity among different nations. In 2009, July 18 (Mandela’s birthday) was declared as Mandela Day, an international day to promote peace and to remember Mandela’s accomplishments. Mandela is still a great source of inspiration and the symbol of global peacemaking across the world today.



¹⁰ Mandela, Nelson. “Mandela's Inaugural Speech, May 1994.” Council on Foreign Relations. N.p., 10 May 1994. Web. 29 Jan. 2017. <<http://www.cfr.org/south-africa/mandelas-inaugural-speech-may-1994/p31036>>

Nelson Mandela made many contributions to the world, helping to abolish apartheid and also setting an example of standing up for one's beliefs. In South Africa and throughout the world, there are many civil and human rights activists. Mandela not only helped South Africa, but also became nationally known and recognized for his accomplishments for helping others. Even after retiring from politics and public life, Mandela continued to promote peace and help others through setting up foundations and organizations to create support for those in need. Mandela will always be remembered in history for his accomplishments and contributions to South Africa and throughout the entire world.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

- Mandela, Nelson. "Mandela's Inaugural Speech, May 1994." *Council on Foreign Relations*. N.p., 10 May 1994. Web. 29 Jan. 2017.
<<http://www.cfr.org/south-africa/mandelas-inaugural-speech-may-1994/p31036>>
This source is just Nelson Mandela's inauguration speech, as delivered in May 1994. Using the website's information, I inserted a couple excerpts from Mandela's speech and included them as quotes.
- McNeely, Robert. "Photograph of President William J. Clinton with Nelson Mandela at the Philadelphia Freedom Festival." *DocsTeach*. N.p., 4 July 1993. Web. 29 Jan. 2017.
<<https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/photograph-of-president-william-j-clinton-with-nelson-mandela-at-the-philadelphia-freedom-festival>>
This source is a photograph of Bill Clinton and Nelson Mandela, who are participating in an awards ceremony. The photo gives an example of how famous and important Mandela was, being invited to attend a ceremony such as this.
- "The O'Malley Archives." *Document 11: Second letter from Nelson Mandela to Hendrik Verwoerd, 26 June 1961 – The O'Malley Archives*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Jan. 2017.
<<https://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/031v01538/041v01600/051v01617/061v01623.htm>>
In this letter, Mandela writes to the prime minister of South Africa at the time and requests for the government to be multiracial instead of just consisting of the white minority, create a nonracial and democratic constitution, and to stop all racial oppression by the government or else the ANC would have to resort to noncooperation and country-wide demonstrations to stand against the government. This source gives an example of what Mandela and the ANC wanted and how they would achieve their goal.
- "Timeline." *The Nelson Mandela Foundation*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Jan. 2017.
<<https://www.nelsonmandela.org/timeline#year-1918>>
This website is a timeline of events in Mandela's life but includes images and quotes related to Mandela. I used some of the primary source quotes on the page in my essay to show Mandela's thoughts and experience.
- Keller, Bill. "Mandela is Named President, Closing the Era of Apartheid." *The New York Times*. The New York Times. 9 May 1994. Web. 29 Jan. 2017.
<<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/big/0509.html>>
On this website, a picture and written text of the newspaper can be seen and shows newspapers headlines announcing Mandela's presidency. I used this in my project to understand and describe what it was like when Mandela became president.

Secondary Sources:

- History.com Staff. "Apartheid." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2010. Web. 28 Jan. 2017. <<http://www.history.com/topics/apartheid>>
The article provided information about the history of apartheid, and taught me what it was, how and why it was formed, and how people reacted to it. This information was

used mostly to write the paragraph that introduces apartheid and gives a general overview of it.

- History.com Staff. “Nelson Mandela.” *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 28 Jan. 2017. <<http://www.history.com/topics/nelson-mandela>>

This website taught me almost everything I needed to know about Nelson Mandela from his birth to death, including major events during his lifetime. I used the source consistently through the essay but mainly to help structure the first couple body paragraphs and also the last few body paragraphs (childhood/ early education and near term of presidency). The information also helped me to write the impact and significance of his actions.
- “Nelson Mandela.” *Biography.com*. A&E Networks Television, 25 May 2016. Web. 28 Jan. 2017. <<http://www.biography.com/people/nelson-mandela-9397017#death-and-legacy>>

This secondary source shows Nelson Mandela’s biography. However, this biography went more in depth into Mandela’s legacy after his death. I used the information to help write the Impact and Significance paragraph.
- “Nelson Mandela’s Five Most Memorable Speeches.” *Firstpost.com*. N.p., 6 Dec. 2013. Web. 29 Jan. 2017. <<http://www.firstpost.com/world/nelson-mandelas-five-most-memorable-speeches-1270759.html>>

The website listed excerpts from five speeches by Nelson Mandela, giving small passages from Mandela’s top five speeches. The excerpt from one speech is used in a paragraph of the essay and supports the thesis of the paper.
- “Timeline.”—*Nelson Mandela Foundation*. N.p., n.d. Web. 28 Jan. 2017. <<https://www.nelsonmandela.org/content/page/timeline>>

The website stated above was a simple timeline organized into a chart and had key events and moments of Mandela’s life. I used this throughout the essay mainly to write the dates of when certain events happened, such as what year the ANC was banned.