

THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE:

SOUTH AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICA AS A COLONY

South Africa has a deep history of activism and injustice predating Nelson Mandela. Europeans arrived in South Africa by the late 1400s and began colonizing in the 1600s. In 1838, the “Voortrekkers” created a constitution for their stolen land that entrenched White legal superiority. In 1910, President Louis Botha made racial segregation official policy. The successful struggle to dismantle these White power structures illustrates the transformative power of collective action and Mandela’s leadership.

TRADITION



Traditional AbaThembu clothing. For the AbaThembu people beads symbolize purity, enlightenment, and connection to the ancestral spirit realm.

1990s



Nelson Mandela votes in South Africa’s first post-apartheid election, April 27, 1994.

PEACE



Replicas of the Nobel Peace Prizes awarded to Mandela and de Klerk.

LEGACY

Mandela officially retired from public life in 2004 at the age of 86, but maintained continued involvement in global peace and human rights initiatives and advocacy. In 2007, he witnessed the installation of his grandson Mandla as Chief of the Mveso Traditional Council. He passed away on December 5, 2013, surrounded by family at his home in Johannesburg. One of the most powerful pieces of his legacy is not only his incredible leadership and accomplishments, but its ability to inspire oppressed peoples to persevere in their own struggles for justice.

NELSON MANDELA BORN

July 18 - Rolihlahla Nelson Mandela is born in Mveso, a rural village in what is now the Eastern Cape, into the Madiba clan of the Thembu people. Madiba later becomes his preferred name.

1918

MANDELA EXPELLED FROM UNIVERSITY

Nelson Mandela is expelled from university after a student protest.

1940

MANDELA CO-FOUNDS ANCYL

Nelson Mandela co-founds the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), which calls for an anti-discrimination approach based on mass actions such as protests, boycotts, and passive resistance; he is elected ANCYL President in 1951.

1944

PEACEFUL DEFIANCE CAMPAIGN STARTS

The ANC launches the Defiance Campaign, a peaceful program where large groups of Black Africans purposefully break apartheid laws, hoping to flood prisons and reverse laws. The government bans the ANC as part of the Unlawful Organizations Act.

1952

THE FREEDOM CHARTER IS MADE

The Congress Alliance, made up of the ANC and other anti-apartheid groups, draws up the Freedom Charter, declaring, “South Africa belongs to all who live in it,” inspiring many principles of South Africa’s post-apartheid constitution.

1955

SHARPEVILLE MASSACRE

Black South Africans gather to hand in their passes at Sharpeville government offices in a peaceful protest against the Pass Laws; the police open fire on the unarmed crowd, killing 69 and wounding 148. Nelson Mandela burns his passbook in front of an audience of journalists.

1960

MANDELA IS RECONIZED AS A POLITICAL OUTLAW

Nelson Mandela and the ANC go underground. **Forced to live the life of a political outlaw, he leaves his family, job, and home.**

1961

RIVONIA TRIAL

Nelson Mandela and comrades appear in court for the first time during the Rivonia Trial.

1963

MANDELA SENTENCED TO LIFE IN PRISON

Nelson Mandela makes his famous “prepared to die” speech, widely believed to have saved him and fellow prisoners from the death sentence. Almost all are sentenced to life imprisonment. Nelson Mandela arrives on Robben Island on June 13, where he is imprisoned for 18 years.

1964

MANDELA SAYS NO TO EXILE

Vorster’s government offers Nelson Mandela release, on the condition he moves to the Transkei (a rural Bantustan in what is now the Eastern Cape region), which he rejects.

1973

SOWETO UPRISING

Thousands of students take to the streets in the “Soweto Uprising” to protest against compulsory use of Afrikaans in schools.

1976

MANDELA REJECTS ANOTHER OFFER OF FREEDOM

In the face of mounting civil unrest, Botha offers to release Nelson Mandela and his comrades if they renounce violence as a means to achieve democracy. Nelson Mandela rejects this and calls on him to dismantle apartheid.

1985

MANDELA LEAVES ROBBEN ISLAND

Nelson Mandela is transferred to the low-security prison Victor Verster. On December 7, he is moved and held in this prison in the Western Cape for 14 months.

1988

MANDELA RELEASED FROM PRISON

The ban on the ANC is lifted on February 3 and Nelson Mandela is unconditionally released from prison on February 11.

1990

MANDELA AWARDED NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

Leader of the South Africa Communist Party and anti-apartheid activist Chris Hani is assassinated, an attempt to tip South Africa into civil war. Nelson Mandela makes a pivotal speech calling for unity. He and South Africa President F.W. de Klerk are jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

1993

MILLIONS OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICANS VOTE

Nelson Mandela and millions of Black Africans vote for the first time. Nelson Mandela is elected President of the Republic of South Africa; F.W. de Klerk becomes his deputy.

1994

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission is set up, bearing witness to, recording, and granting amnesty to the perpetrators of crimes relating to human rights violations, as well as offering reparation and rehabilitation to the victims.

1995

SOUTH AFRICA BECOMES A DEMOCRACY

South Africa’s new democratic Constitution comes into effect.

1997

MANDELA’S PRESIDENCY OVER

Nelson Mandela steps down as President of South Africa.

1999