

HISTORYMAKERS Nelson Mandela

Fighting for Freedom for All

"When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both. . . . For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."— Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom (1994)

Telson Mandela lived an improbable life. Born V in a tribal culture, he became educated in Western ways. A leader of his people, he spent nearly 30 years in jail. Four years later, he was elected president of South Africa.

Mandela's father was a wealthy and influential chief of the Thembu people. Born in 1918, Mandela was still a young boy when his father defied a British judge. Believing that English law had no power in tribal affairs, he refused the court's summons. The judge then stripped Mandela's father of his title, his herd of cattle, and, as a result, his wealth. Young Mandela was taken by his mother to another village, where she raised him with the support of relatives.

Mandela received his law degree in 1942. He then joined the African National Congress (ANC). It had been founded in 1912 to fight for blacks' rights in South Africa. The ANC used the principles of nonviolent protest developed by Mohandas Gandhi in India. Within the ANC, Mandela and other younger members formed the African Youth League. They wanted to take more aggressive actions toward winning their rights.

After World War II, the white minority leaders in South Africa refused to grant any rights to blacks. Instead, the government enacted a system of apartheid, the policy of racial separation and discrimination. The Youth League began a long struggle in protest. In 1952, Mandela took a leadership post in the ANC. He masterminded a series of demonstrations in which volunteers deliberately broke apartheid laws. This work won him a government ban on further activity.

Mandela did not appear at a public protest until 1955. It was then that he spoke at a meeting that joined the ANC and other protest parties in a common cause. The groups adopted a program of reforms known as the Freedom Charter. It called for a nation without racial divisions and a more balanced distribution of wealth. He and several other leaders were quickly arrested, but their trial lasted from 1956 to 1961. All were finally released, as the

government lacked enough evidence to convict them of a crime.

In the later years of the case, events took a bloody turn. A massive protest in Sharpeville ended in a massacre that left 69 blacks dead. The white leaders cracked down on all anti-government groups and arrested many people. Mandela was held for a while and then released. He lived as a fugitive while he formed a military unit within the $\ensuremath{\mathrm{AN\check{C}}}$ called Spear of the Nation. Its goal was to attack places that had symbolic or economic value but not to harm people. He was captured in 1962. The next year he was convicted of working to overthrow the government and sentenced to life in prison.

Mandela spent nearly 30 years in jail. His release became an international cause. In 1984, the South African government offered him his freedom if he would agree to live in one of the "homelands," the living areas that had been set up for blacks.

Mandela refused.

Other countries put increasing economic pressure on South Africa. Finally, in 1990 President F. W. de Klerk released Mandela from prison and legalized the ANC. The legislature passed laws that ended apartheid. In 1994, in the first elections to include voters from all races, Mandela won the presidency of South Africa.

Mandela's victory was bittersweet. He separated from and later divorced his wife, Winnie. In 1997, he suffered the embarrassment of her facing charges that she murdered other black Africans.

Questions

- 1. Evaluating Judgments What do you think of Mandela's idea that it is necessary to free both the oppressor and the oppressed?
- 2. Making Inferences Did Mandela ever abandon the reliance on nonviolent protest? Explain.
- 3. Predicting Outcomes Based on what you have read about independence in Africa, what challenges do you think face Mandela?

