

Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela, born in 1918, South African activist, winner of the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize, and the first black president of South Africa (1994-1999). Born in Umtata, South Africa, in what is now Eastern Cape province, Mandela was the son of a Xhosa-speaking Thembu chief. He attended the University of Fort Hare in Alice where he became involved in the political struggle against the racial discrimination practiced in South Africa. He was expelled in 1940 for participating in a student demonstration. After moving to Johannesburg, he completed his course work by correspondence through the University of South Africa and received a bachelor's degree in 1942. Mandela then studied law at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. He became increasingly involved with the African National Congress (ANC), a multiracial nationalist movement which sought to bring about democratic political change in South Africa. Mandela helped establish the ANC Youth League in 1944 and became its president in 1951.

The National Party (NP) came to power in South Africa in 1948 on a political platform of white supremacy. The official policy of apartheid, or forced segregation of the races, began to be implemented under NP rule. In 1952 the ANC staged a campaign known as the Defiance Campaign, when protesters across the country refused to obey apartheid laws. That same year Mandela became one of the ANC's four deputy presidents. In 1952 he and his friend Oliver Tambo were the first blacks to open a law practice in South Africa. In the face of government harassment and with the prospect of the ANC being officially banned, Mandela and others devised a plan. Called the "M" plan after Mandela, it organized the ANC into small units of people who could then encourage grassroots participation in antiapartheid struggles.

By the late 1950s Mandela, with Oliver Tambo and others, moved the ANC in a more militant direction against the increasingly discriminatory policies of the government. He was charged with treason in 1956 because of the ANC's increased activity, particularly in the Defiance Campaign, but he was acquitted after a five-year trial. In 1957 Mandela divorced his first wife, Evelyn Mase; in 1958 he married Nomzamo Madikizela, a social worker, who became known as Winnie Mandela.

In March 1960 the ANC and its rival, the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), called for a nationwide demonstration against South Africa's pass laws, which controlled the movement and employment of blacks and forced them to carry identity papers. After police massacred 69 blacks demonstrating in Sharpeville (see Sharpeville Massacre), both the ANC and the PAC were banned. After Sharpeville the ANC abandoned the strategy of nonviolence, which until that time had been an important part of its philosophy. Mandela helped to establish the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), in December 1961. He was named its commander-in-chief and went to Algeria for military training. Back in South Africa, he was arrested in August 1962 and sentenced to five years in prison for incitement and for leaving the country illegally.

While Mandela was in prison, ANC colleagues who had been operating in hiding were arrested at Rivonia, outside of Johannesburg. Mandela was put on trial with them for sabotage, treason, and violent conspiracy. He was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment in June 1964. For the next 18 years he was imprisoned on Robben Island and held under harsh conditions with other political prisoners. Despite the maximum security of the Robben Island prison, Mandela and other leaders were able to keep in contact with the antiapartheid movement covertly. Mandela wrote much of his autobiography secretly in prison. The manuscript was smuggled out and was eventually completed and published in 1994 as *Long Walk to Freedom*. Later, Mandela was moved to the maximum-security Pollsmoor Prison near Cape Town. Mandela became an international symbol of resistance to apartheid during his long years of imprisonment, and world leaders continued to demand his release.

In response to both international and domestic pressure, the South African government, under the leadership of President F. W. de Klerk, lifted the ban against the ANC and released Mandela in February 1990. Soon after his release from prison he became estranged from Winnie Mandela, who had played a key leadership role in the antiapartheid movement during his incarceration. Although Winnie had won international recognition for her defiance of the government, immediately before Mandela's release she had come into conflict with the ANC over a controversial kidnapping and murder trial that involved her young bodyguards. The Mandelas were divorced in 1996.

Mandela, who enjoyed enormous popularity, assumed the leadership of the ANC and led negotiations with the government for an end to apartheid. While white South Africans considered

sharing power a big step, black South Africans wanted nothing less than a complete transfer of power. Mandela played a crucial role in resolving differences. For their efforts, he and de Klerk were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. The following year South Africa held its first multiracial elections, and Mandela became president.

Mandela sought to calm the fears of white South Africans and of potential international investors by trying to balance plans for reconstruction and development with financial caution. His Reconstruction and Development Plan allotted large amounts of money to the creation of jobs and housing and to the development of basic health care. In December 1996 Mandela signed into law a new South African constitution. The constitution established a federal system with a strong central government based on majority rule, and it contained guarantees of the rights of minorities and of freedom of expression. Mandela, who had announced that he would not run for reelection in 1999, stepped down as party leader of the ANC in late 1997 and was succeeded by South African deputy president Thabo Mbeki. Mandela's presidency came to an end in June 1999, when the ANC won legislative elections and selected Mbeki as South Africa's next president.