

## Nelson Mandela: Taking a Stand against Apartheid

Nelson Mandela was the first African president in South Africa, he took a stand because he stood up for what he believed and never gave up. Nelson Mandela was one of the greatest people on earth.

Nelson Mandela was born on July 18, 1918. In his lifetime he lived in jail for 27 years, became president, and won the Nobel peace prize.

Nelson Mandela started attending the African National Congress (ANC) meetings in 1942. Two years later, after he started going to the meeting regularly, Mandela and some other members started a group inside the ANC called "The Youth League." The Youth League helped the ANC challenge the government.

In 1948 the National Party (also called nats) became the government. To keep races apart, the government started a cruel system of segregation called apartheid. Apartheid was when everyone had to be labeled by their race, blacks had different areas, bathrooms, buses, and schools.

1952 was the year the ANC sent a letter to the prime minister saying that the ANC would start protesting if the government didn't cut back on the apartheid laws by Feb. 29. The complaints were not ignored but they were rejected by the government. The government said they would punish the people if they protested. Thousands of new members joined the ANC protesting against the white government. One of the ways Mandela and the ANC protested was by going into the middle of streets and burning their passes. The passes were the things blacks used to get a job and go out at night. If the police caught a black person without their pass, they could go to jail.

In 1960 the Sharpeville Massacre happened. The Massacre was on March 21, 1960, at a police station in Sharpeville. A crowd of about 5,000 black protesters was shot at, 69 Africans were killed. Nelson Mandela was arrested for five months because they thought he was a part of it. Finally, on March 29, 1961, Mandela was found not guilty, but Mandela could not speak in public. To avoid arrest, Mandela spent 17 months running around, using disguises like an errand boy, and the next day a chef. Mandela had many narrow escapes, but finally, on August 5th, 1962, his luck ran out and a police stopped him.

When Mandela was in prison, the police went out to find the other ANC leaders. Once they were all found, they went on trial again in October of 1962. This time Mandela was accused of 222 acts of sabotage. Finally in April of 1963, after five months of preparation, Nelson Mandela went up in front of a huge crowd at the courthouse and spoke. He gave no evidence in his defense, instead he made a statement: "We believe that South Africa belongs to the people who live in it, and not to one group, be it black or white."

After the trial, Nelson Mandela and the other leaders were sentenced to life in jail. Mandela would go to Robben Island (no ships were allowed one mile of the island) where he would stay for the next 18 years. While Mandela and the Black Africans were there, they never gave up: they sang protest songs and shouted things like "power to the people."

In the year of 1982, Mandela was moved from Robben Island to Pollsmoor Prison which was near Cape Town. While Mandela was at Pollsmoor, he heard that the president of South Africa, F.W. de Klerk was willing to free him. Mandela sent a reaction to this news to his daughter who read it at a crowded stadium in Soweto. This was the first time his words had been heard legally since he was sent to prison.

In the year of 1989, de Klerk was part of the nats party, but he promised that he would work with the ANC to figure out South Africa's problems

The 71-year-old Nelson Mandela stepped out of prison on Feb 11, 1990, with his wife Winnie Mandela by his side. Mandela spent 10 thousand days behind bars in jail. He was greeted by hundreds of reporters, T.V. cameras, and photographers. More than 50,000 people were there that day shouting "Amandia" which means "power to the people."

In August of 1992, the ANC led a strike to end apartheid; this was the largest strike in South Africa's history. People refused to go to work, and a month later the ANC held a rally and soldiers opened fire killing 28 people and over 200 were wounded.

Mandela and de Klerk started working on The Record of Understanding, they did not always agree on everything, but they did agree that the violence had to stop. Nelson Mandela and de Klerk signed The Record of Understanding on Sept. 26, 1992, and finally, in 1993, the government accepted it. The next year F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela won the Nobel Peace prize together.

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In April of the following year, South Africa had its first democratic election. That was the year that Nelson Mandela could run for president, and the first time blacks could vote. When the election came, there were more than two million new legal voters, people stood lines for hours every day to cast their vote, for the four days of the election.

Mandela ran against de Klerk in the election, when the results were counted and posted, Nelson Mandela won! It was the first time a white man had to be deputy president to serve under a black South African.

Nelson Mandela died December 5, 2013 when he was 95 years old. Even though he experienced lots of discrimination and was in jail for 27 year, Nelson Mandela never gave up, and took a stand for what he believed and led an amazing life.