



**NELSON MANDELA**

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**A Biography**



**PETER LIMB**



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# NELSON MANDELA

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## A Biography

Peter Limb

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*For Nicole, and all those who,  
like Nelson Mandela, opposed apartheid*

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## SERIES FOREWORD

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In response to high school and public library needs, Greenwood developed this distinguished series of full-length biographies specifically for student use. Prepared by field experts and professionals, these engaging biographies are tailored for high school students who need challenging yet accessible biographies. Ideal for secondary school assignments, the length, format, and subject areas are designed to meet educators' requirements and students' interests.

Greenwood offers an extensive selection of biographies spanning all curriculum-related subject areas including social studies, the sciences, literature and the arts, history and politics, as well as popular culture, covering public figures and famous personalities from all time periods and backgrounds, both historical and contemporary, who have made an impact on American and/or world culture. Greenwood biographies are chosen based on comprehensive feedback from librarians and educators. Consideration is given to both curriculum relevance and inherent interest. The result is an intriguing mix of the well known and the unexpected, the saints and sinners from long-ago history and contemporary pop culture. Readers will find a wide array of subject choices from fascinating crime figures like Al Capone to inspiring pioneers like Margaret Mead, from the greatest minds of our time like Stephen Hawking to the most amazing success stories of our day like J. K. Rowling.

Although the emphasis is on fact, not glorification, the books are meant to be fun to read. Each volume provides in-depth information about the subject's life from birth through childhood, the teen years, and

adulthood. A thorough account relates family background and education, traces personal and professional influences, and explores struggles, accomplishments, and contributions. A timeline highlights the most significant life events against a historical perspective. Bibliographies supplement the reference value of each volume.

# INTRODUCTION

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Nelson Mandela is the most famous African today. His amazing roller-coaster ride to freedom after 27 years in apartheid prisons to become president of the new “rainbow nation” of South Africa is now legendary. Equally impressive is his successful reconciliation of a deadly conflict seen by many commentators as intractable.

In the period of transition from apartheid to democratic rule, and again as South Africa’s first black president from 1994 to 1999, Mandela brought together bitter enemies and unified a nation. He did this by leading from example with a lack of bitterness at his own long years of imprisonment under the apartheid system, and by patiently listening to all sides of the political spectrum, a trait typical of the wise African ruler that he was.

How and why was Nelson Mandela able to carry out such major achievements? What was the secret of his “Madiba Magic”? What were his motivations? What was the impact on his personal life and his family? What is his legacy today?

To understand Mandela one needs to appreciate the rich context of his life and times. One needs to appreciate his culture, the influence of family, friends, and schools, and the power of the white settler society of South Africa and the regime of apartheid it spawned. Important too are the peoples he worked with and the movement to which he dedicated his life. To all this, insights into his character and personality, strengths and weaknesses, and the national and global forces of his time are needed finally to gain a comprehensive appraisal of his life’s work.

Mandela sacrificed much to the struggle for freedom in South Africa, including his very liberty as well as his private life. The goal of African

freedom always was his inspiration. His political movement, the African National Congress, was his support base and vehicle throughout his very long political career of more than 50 years. In this regard, he was the quintessential “organizational man,” able to build on earlier African political structures to achieve impressive gains. He also was an innovator, an initiator of bold new directions, willing to take political risks. However, in many ways Mandela does not resemble the stereotypical political leader. Like an earlier subject of this Greenwood Biographies series, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Mandela is a humble man of great dignity and humor, example, tolerance, and forgiveness. Both men won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Yet even more than Tutu, Mandela in his enforced prison seclusion of 27 years was *the* living legend, *the* symbol of African resistance to apartheid. For decades, people at home and abroad could neither hear his voice nor see his image; such was the power of his personality and message that the apartheid regime banned even his photograph and voice.

Mandela would be the first to agree that he and many, many other anti-apartheid leaders and supporters *combined* to remove the apartheid regime, but Mandela stood at the apex of this resistance: the general, the organizer, the African King, the “Father of the Nation” capable of realizing momentous social change. Mandela, with his tremendously physical presence, was a man of action willing to take up armed struggle in defense of the freedom and liberty of his people. Even Mandela’s enemies and jailers admired his unflinching courage and dedication. He won a national and global stature equal to none in a period when political leaders have disenchanting many people.

Mandela was able to rise above the rigid constraints of the virulent racism of apartheid and the intense bitterness it engendered in many people, but he also was a product of his time and had to face apartheid’s equally bitter social and economic legacy. He faced this head-on and laid down a democratic constitutional and political framework seen by many as the most progressive in the world today, and which set a new path for South Africans. Although global and national forces delayed the realization of some of his dreams, Mandela (or “Madiba” as many South Africans affectionately know him), even after his term as president, remained remarkably active in his late 80s, speaking out for human rights and for action against acute social problems.

In the pages to follow, a well-rounded, balanced view of Mandela set squarely in his time and place is presented. Woven into the biographical narrative are cultural, social, political, and personal forces to let the reader see Mandela in his full complexity, even majesty, and also to share his hopes, his victories and defeats, his despair, and his joy, through his own words and deeds and those of his closest companions and compatriots. Nelson Mandela is quite simply one of the greatest leaders, and personalities, in world history.

# TIMELINE OF EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF NELSON MANDELA

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- July 18, 1918 Birth of Nelson Mandela in Mvezo, the Transkei, South Africa
- 1920 Family moves to Qunu village
- 1926 Starts elementary school; given the name “Nelson” by teacher
- 1927 Death of father; Mandela moves to royal court of Thembu Chief Jongintaba Dalindyebo at Mqhekezweni
- 1934 Initiation
- 1935 Starts secondary education at Clarkebury school
- 1937 Higher schooling at Healdtown prep school
- 1939 Studies at University College of Fort Hare
- November 1940 Is forced to leave Fort Hare after student protests
- April 1941 Leaves for Johannesburg to avoid arranged marriage
- 1941 Works in Johannesburg; lives in Alexandra; meets Walter Sisulu
- 1942 Makes contact with the African National Congress (ANC)
- December 1942 Receives Bachelor of Arts degree from Fort Hare
- 1943 Begins legal studies; joins Alexandra bus boycott
- 1944 Marries Evelyn Mase
- April 1944 Congress Youth League is formed; Mandela is a founder
- August 1946 African mine workers’ strike

## TIMELINE

- 1947 Elected to Transvaal ANC executive committee
- 1948 National Party government elected and starts to implement apartheid
- 1949 ANC adopts Program of Action
- 1950 Joins ANC National Executive
- 1951 Elected Youth League president
- 1952 Defiance Campaign; Mandela arrested, then banned; becomes president of Transvaal ANC, deputy president of ANC; qualifies as attorney
- 1953 Opposes Sophiatown forced removals; opens legal practice
- 1955 Congress of the People adopts the Freedom Charter
- December 5, 1956 Charged with treason
- January 1957 Evelyn and Mandela separate
- June 14, 1958 Marries Nomzamo Winifred Madikizela
- March 21, 1960 Sharpeville Massacre of 69 Africans by police
- April 8, 1960 ANC and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) banned
- March 29, 1961 Mandela and others accused of treason acquitted
- May 1961 Organizes “stay-at-home” protests
- December 16, 1961 Launches sabotage campaign
- January–July 1962 Travels widely in Africa and to England to gain support
- August 5, 1962 Arrested inside South Africa
- November 1962 Sentenced to three years prison
- 1963–1964 Rivonia Trial
- April 20, 1964 Delivers famous speech from the dock
- June 12, 1964 Sentenced to life imprisonment; sent to Robben Island
- 1969 Winnie Mandela held in prison for 491 days
- 1976 Refuses conditional release
- June 16, 1976 Student protests in Soweto; countrywide revolt develops
- May 17, 1977 Winnie Mandela banished to rural town of Brandfort
- March 31, 1982 Transferred to Pollsmoor Prison
- August 20, 1983 United Democratic Front (UDF) formed

- January 1984 Refuses conditional release, and daughter Zindzi reads his defiant response at rally; allowed first contact visit with Winnie
- 1985 State of emergency; initiates secret talks with government
- May 1986 Meets Commonwealth Eminent Persons' Group
- October 2, 1986 U.S. Congress passes Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act
- 1987–1988 Meetings with government representatives
- December 9, 1988 Transferred to Victor Verster Prison
- August 14, 1989 F. W. de Klerk succeeds P. W. Botha as state president
- February 2, 1990 F. W. de Klerk lifts ban on ANC
- February 11, 1990 Released from prison after 27 years
- March 2, 1990 Reappointed ANC deputy president
- March 1990 Visits Zambia and Sweden to meet ANC's exiled leadership
- May–August 1990 ANC–government talks lead to suspension of armed struggle and release of some political prisoners
- June 1990 Tours Europe, North America, and Africa
- July 5, 1991 Elected ANC president
- December 1991 Congress for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) opens
- April 1992 Separation from Winnie
- May 1992 ANC withdraws from CODESA after “third force” violence
- September 1992 Negotiations resume with government
- April 1993 South African Communist Party (SACP) leader Chris Hani assassinated; Mandela calls for calm
- December 10, 1993 Receives, with F.W. de Klerk, the Nobel Peace Prize
- April 26–28, 1994 ANC wins decisive 62.6 percent victory at first democratic elections
- May 10, 1994 Mandela inaugurated as South Africa's first black president
- December 1994 Autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, launched
- December 1995 Truth and Reconciliation Commission appointed
- 1996 New constitution adopted

- March 1996 Divorces Winnie
- July 18, 1998 Marries Graça Machel
- June 2, 1999 ANC wins second term; steps down as president
- December 1999 Diplomatic role facilitating peace talks in Burundi
- January 2005 Announces death of son Makgatho, from AIDS
- 2006 After voicing criticisms of government, retires from public life
- July 18, 2007 Aged 89, announces formation of the Elders group