

NELSON MANDELA: PRISONER TO PRESIDENT

Narration: In the sports stadium of Soweto, Zindzi Mandela is honored for the name she bears.

Crowd chants: Nelson Mandela!

Narration: Nelson Mandela's words may not be quoted...his image may not be displayed...he is a prisoner serving a sentence of life behind bars... yet he is the supreme symbol of black liberation.

Narration: Through the long years, the South African government has tried to turn Mandela into a non-person. Yet his name is known throughout the world.

It is said that you can kill a man, but not an idea. Nelson Mandela is a man who has become an idea.

(Music: "Welele, Mandela")

Narration: The man Mandela was born in 1918 in that part of South Africa called the Transkei.

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela is of the royal blood of the Tembu. His roots go deep into the soil of Africa.

Arthur Mandela: Then there are two fields beyond the hill which belong to (in Xhosa) Rolihlahla's family. There are also grandfather's fields on the other side of the hill.

Narration: In Gunu, the village where Mandela was born, his house is no longer standing. There was no-one to look after it.

Arthur Mandela: This is his family plot. The cattle pen was over there. Just (in Xhosa) beyond the garden you can see the family graves. The tombstones are over there. The boundary line runs this way and over there - what you see here was the garden, the fence was right here. He used to write to me, but since he went to prison, he hasn't written.

Mabel Notamcu: I noticed that many people realized he was a bright kid. (in Xhosa)

Narration: Mandela's sister lives on a farm not far from Nelson's birthplace.

Mabel Notamcu: Father's health began to fail him. But father, as he was aware how (in Xhosa) bright his son Nelson was, invited Paramount Chief Jong'intaba to a consultation. As a result, Chief Jong'intaba took on the responsibility of raising Nelson. This is how father put it: "Sir, I place this your servant Rolihlahla in your hands." I understand what father wanted.

He knew that Rolihlahla would be of great service to his nation. Chief Jong'intaba said to father, "It is very well, grandfather. I am going to take him with me to the Great Place, and I am going to send him to school." Chief Jong'intaba took Rolihlahla with him to the Great Place, where he lived himself.

Narration: At the Great Place of the Paramount Chief of the Tembu, Mandela was taught the duties of a chief.

Mabel Notamcu: As father was old, and had died, his clothes were given to my brother, and he wore those at school. The other kids used to laugh at him, but my brother took no notice - he was determined to get an education. It was Chief Jong'intaba who came to his rescue and bought him new clothes that made him look presentable.

Narration: At school, Mandela was taught as if he were an English schoolboy. At home, he was taught traditionally. He absorbed both worlds: but what he learned of Western culture he would put to the service of Africa.

Feeling he could best serve his people by studying law, Mandela went into partnership with his friend Oliver Tambo in Johannesburg. This was to be a partnership that would last for life.

Chief Mtikrakra: Everyone came to know about them, and black people were very enthusiastic - (in Xhosa) Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana, all were proud to see a black man who was a lawyer. They were so popular that their offices were always crowded. Even at home, after work hours, Mandela found many of his clients waiting for him. They always preferred to be defended by the Mandela and Tambo law firm.

Narration: Mandela and Tambo had more work than they could handle. The white men's laws, intended both to exploit African labor and to prevent it from competing with whites meant that black workers were always in trouble with the police. Practising law meant trying to defend them from the system in which they were trapped - the system known as apartheid.

Adelaide Tambo: Nelson has always been a very forthright person, a very strong leader, and a man with a very sympathetic ear towards other people's difficulties, and he'll listen to everybody, and he devotes time to everybody, it doesn't matter how small a man, he always has time for everybody.

Narration: Brought up in the countryside, Mandela was appalled by the social conditions in the townships where blacks were forced to live. Always impeccably dressed, unfailingly courteous, it was basic to Mandela's beliefs that everyone was entitled to respect - even whites, who as a group were responsible for the misery.

Paul Joseph: I can tell you of an incident where, in the heart of the city of Johannesburg, he was driving his car and in front of him there was a white woman motorist whose car was stalling. Well, Nelson got out of his car and helped push this car onto the side of the kerb. The white woman got out of her car -

Adelaide Joseph: But you must remember his immaculate suit, all dressed up, you know, looking very, very smart.

Paul Joseph: The woman got out of the car, opened her purse and gave Nelson a sixpence, and Nelson stood there smiling and said, No, thank you. And the woman persisted, and he said, No, thank you. And she said, Oh, look at him, what does he expect, a shilling?
Nelson was that sort of character, he was that sort of person, the man had this dignity about him, he was a caring person.

Narration: Mandela's concern for his fellow South Africans led him inevitably into politics. He had early on joined the African National Congress, the leading black organization, and he now showed his organizational genius in the great civil disobedience campaigns of the 'Fifties.

Oliver Tambo: The apartheid system came with such a forceful, violent impact that it threw virtually everyone into the struggle. And we decided to resist by non-violent means. And it involved people breaking laws in order to get arrested by way of protest at this horrible system. Nelson Mandela had a very leading role running that campaign.

Narration: This was the most serious threat to white power the century had so far seen.

Jackson
Nkosiyane: We wanted the ordinary system of government, government of the people, by the people, and for the people.
We said, it is useless to discuss this amongst ourselves with these white men, who are misleading us. We must go and consult with our leader, Nelson Mandela. He was a strong inspiration, in whatever we thought of and whatever we did, because whenever we did anything politically, we said, No, we must see him first, get his advice, and after doing it, we must go and report to him.

Narration: Mandela's leadership qualities made him a marked man. In 1956, along with 155 other activists, he was arrested and accused of High Treason, a charge which carried the Death Penalty.

Paul Joseph: When we used to exercise in the prison yard, the warders would come around and talk to Nelson Mandela. But they would refer to him as "Mr. Mandela", he had this tremendous respect from them, that he wasn't just referred to as "Nelson", or "a nigger", but "Mr. Mandela".
I think they realized that here was a man who was considered perhaps the leading person in South Africa. His presence in jail was really a challenge to their authority, and I think this is what really frightened them.

Narration: As a lawyer, Mandela won respect for his defense even from the prosecution.

Paul Joseph: And there were occasions when he had to go into the Prosecutor's Office to talk to them, and the moment he'd enter the Prosecutor's Office, everybody jumped up to give a chair to "Mr. Mandela, please take this chair to sit down." And Nelson never sat down on the chair, he would always sit on the desk. And one day, one of our colleagues said to him, "Nelson, these guys are being so nice to you, why don't you accept their hospitality and sit down on the chair?" And he said, "No way. This is one time where I sit on the desk and I will talk

down to them, because I'm in a commanding position. And the psychological effect is this, when you've got your oppressor looking up to you, he tends to respect you."

Narration: Together with Paul Joseph among the accused was the Englishwoman Helen Joseph.

Helen Joseph: When we finally pleaded after 3 years of argument, we all stood up in court and each of us said, "I am not guilty of the charges as preferred against me." When I came to mine - everybody said it in their own language - when I came to mine, I said that, which I'd been told to say, and afterwards, Nelson was roaring with laughter, he said, "Helen, centuries of British imperialism rang through the court as you said "I am not guilty of the charges preferred against me." And it was that kind of love and laughter that really sort of stamped our relationship.

Narration: At the end of the trial, which lasted 5 years, all the defendants were found Not Guilty. But the African National Congress was now a banned organization, and in order to fight for democracy, Mandela had to go underground. Mary Benson had a rare meeting with Mandela in hiding.

Mary Benson: He was disguised as a chauffeur, with a peaked cap and long white sort of overall coat, and he offered me a ride home. So he was the chauffeur in the front, and I was the madam in the back of the car, but it was a most terrible, rickety old car, which was I suppose the most the ANC could afford at the time. I was terrified that we were going to break down, and here, Mandela, the most wanted man in the country, would be discovered. But he seemed completely unaware of this danger. And to have such courage, and a rather light-hearted approach. I had this impression of a man so full of vitality and optimism and ebullience.

Narration: With police seeking him everywhere, the elusive Mandela was dubbed by the newspapers "The Black Pimpernel".

Mary Benson: He told me of one event where he was due to meet somebody on some street corner in Johannesburg, and he was waiting for this person, and he saw coming towards him a black member of the Security Police who he actually knew by sight he thought, My God, this is it! And he could see that the man had seen him, and was approaching, and then suddenly the man was going on by, and as he did so gave the ANC thumbs up salute. So Nelson, when he told that story, just great gales of laughter. He has a very optimistic nature, I think, it was something Oliver Tambo said of him, that he couldn't remember the time when Nelson was really depressed, which is extraordinary, when you think what he has gone through.

Narration: A hunted man, Mandela ranged from one end of the country to the other, talking to people in the townships and villages. He was busy organizing a general strike, a stay-at-home. This was called for the end of May, 1961. Throughout the country, factories closed down as workers stayed at home. Whites had to do the menial jobs. Although the stay-at-home was peaceful, the government called out its military might to crush it. Strikers were arrested or forced back to work. For Mandela, this show of force marked a turning point.

Nelson Mandela: There are many people who feel that the reaction of the government to our stay-at-home, ordering a general mobilization, arming the white community, arresting ten thousands of Africans, a show of force throughout the country, notwithstanding our clear declaration that this campaign was being run on peaceful and nonviolent lines, close a chapter as far as our methods of political struggle are concerned.

Narration: The government's reaction to the stay-at-home was not the only proof of its preference for force over debate - a year earlier, 1960, had seen the Sharpeville Massacre.

Oliver Tambo: This was the climax, this was the biggest single massacre. The whole country was shocked. We knew that the whole period of non-violent struggle in which we had been engaged for some 50 years was coming to an end. So this was a tremendous change, because until then the policy had been one of deliberate, conscious non-violence. Now we had to be deliberately, consciously violent.

Narration: Mandela and others now formed the underground resistance Umkhonto-we-Sizwe - Spear of the Nation. Mandela was commander-in-chief. Their aim was to answer the violence of the state with sabotage. Their objectives were power lines, government offices - the symbols of apartheid power. As he knew he must be, sooner or later, Mandela was caught by the police. Ultimately, in 1964, together with other leaders of Umkhonto he was charged with sabotage and revolution.

Joel Joffe, Defense Counsel: Under the Sabotage Act and the legislation under which the Accused were charged, you could be sentenced to death for throwing a stone through a window. So where you'd actually plotted a revolution, a death sentence was almost inevitable. And we knew that the state would prove this revolution had been plotted, and that the key accused were the people who had actually led the thinking and would lead any revolution which emerged, and therefore it was essential, in order to save their lives, to try to find a legal basis which would enable the judge, if he wanted to, to spare their lives. And the whole defense was designed, and our strategy was designed to achieve this, but the accused made it clear to us that this strategy was secondary, the death sentence could not be avoided, and they were not interested in avoiding a death sentence if in any way it meant their apologising to the South Africans, in any way it meant them going back on their basic principles, which were to achieve democracy in South Africa.

Narration: The trial offered the only chance to make a political statement to the South African people. The Accused did not deny the charges. Instead, Mandela decided to attack the authority of the white court, and the legitimacy of the police state.

Joel Joffe: If he gave that speech, he was convicting himself, he had to be convicted. And as he went on - it went on for about 1½ hours, as I recall - the tension in the court grew more and more. And there was a silence, and in it you could hear a pin drop right through it, which was unusual, in fact, unique, in a speech of this sort, and Nelson read gently and softly, but firmly, right through to the end, he had glasses on at this stage, and then he came to the last sentence, and he took off his glasses, and the famous ending to his speech

was, "I've dedicated my life to achieving harmony in this country, and to fight for the rights of all persons, it is a belief which I hope to see achieved -" and then he looked the judge straight in the eye, and he said, " - but if needs be, it is a belief for which I am prepared to die." And then he sat down, and there was a tremendous silence in the court, for about 30 seconds, not a word, and then it was as if - all the Spectators' Gallery were crammed - as if they started breathing again. And then you heard a couple of women in the gallery burst into sobs. And the judge, who was not a very pleasant man, almost gently turned to Counsel, and said, "Next witness, please." It was a very remarkable scene.

Chief Mtikrakra: Before he was sentenced, he asked me to call together all the Dlomo people (in Xhosa) It was his wish that they attend the trial which was taking place in Pretoria. He wanted all his friends to attend. Most of us were dressed in traditional dress whenever we attended the trial. It was a moving affair. I still remember I told him that whenever it would be, on his return from prison, I would slaughter a cow in his honor. I said to him, "Go to prison, but we expect you back. Go, but we want you back."

Narration: But the government intended no return. The Accused were sentenced to prison for life. The condemned patriots were sent to the notorious Robben Island. For the first ten years, conditions were appalling. Prisoners toiled in the limestone quarries and slept on thin mats. They were brutalized by the guards. Nevertheless, they profoundly influenced the other prisoners.

Fikile Bam: Through the years I spent there with them and with Nelson, I developed a very strong liking and respect for them, which will last till the end of my days. He is naturally a polite person, with great tolerance, he really gives everyone an ear, and he himself is slow in expressing an opinion, and even slower to criticize the positions of others unless he is absolutely sure he understands what it is they want to put across. We would work together discussing legal topics, because he would study overnight and then the following morning come and test out both his memory and his understanding on me as a sounding-board, and in the course of that of course, we would break off from discussing law to discussing other things, to discussing politics, to discussing ordinary domestic situations, and I learnt a tremendous lot from him, even about life in general, because I had gone into the Island as a very young person, 23, and so when I was going to stay there another 10 years I would come out at 33, and he did a lot to fill in the years, as it were, in between for me by relating to me his own young life and his own personal life, anecdotes.

Narration: As a lawyer, Mandela led the fight for prisoners' rights, not least to an education denied to most of them in South Africa. He is fiercely committed to learning.

Winnie Mandela: He concentrated a great deal on the upliftment of the youth there, from an academic point of view and from a political point of view. He turned Robben Island into Mandela University.

Narration: Together with a handful of other visitors, Winnie Mandela is Nelson's only contact with the outside world. Even though she herself is constantly persecuted, for more than 25 years she has fought to make sure her husband is not forgotten.

Winnie Mandela: ...there is absolutely nothing new Mandela has said. Fatima Meer visited Mandela on Robben Island after not seeing him for 10 years. She had last seen him just before his arrest.

Fatima Meer: At that stage, he was a very robust man, very broad-shouldered, you know. And now, he was very, very thin. So my immediate reaction was to say, "You've grown very thin." Well, his recollection of me was of a young woman, slim, so he said to me, "You've grown rather fat." (Laugh.) But then we talked, you know, and he wanted to pick up on all the details, what had been happening outside, what had been happening to people he knew. He wasn't - he was also very interested in sort of getting from me to the extent that he could - because we were highly supervised by a policeman on each side - he was also trying to get from me as well as he could my impressions of what the situation was outside the sense of freedom, the sense of the time drawing near when he could be out, and he could be with the people was uppermost in his mind, and that was in the 1970s.

Fikile Bam: You see, you've got to understand that once you've put a man in prison, then there is nothing else you can do to him, except kill him, of course, that could act as a brake on his activities or on his beliefs, and that he ceases to be afraid. And I think the fact of his incarceration for a long time has just strengthened him more, kept him younger, kept his mind alert, and made him have no interest and no fears, and no interest in anything other than the struggle.

Narration: Mandela could have left South Africa before he was caught. Instead, he chose to stay with his people - even though he has not seen them for over a quarter of a century. This choice gives him a power not measured in tanks or battalions.

Mandela may not be quoted in his own country - yet what he thinks is of vital interest even to the white rulers. Cut off from his people, Mandela could have been forgotten. But he kept faith with his people, and his people have kept faith with him. The man has become the idea...

Winnie Mandela: He is the symbol of Resistance, he is the symbol of the African National Congress, he is the symbol of the hope of this country.

Demonstrations with chants of "Free Mandela!"

Zindzi Mandela in Soweto Stadium.

Narration: To break Mandela's power, the South African government offered him a restricted freedom that would drive a wedge between him and the African National Congress. To a packed stadium in Soweto, Zindzi Mandela reads her father's reply:

Zindzi Mandela: My father says, "I am a member of the African National Congress. I have always been a member of the African National Congress, and I will remain a member of the African National Congress until the day I die. I am in prison as the representative of the people, and of your organization, the African National

Congress, which was banned. What freedom am I being offered whilst the organization of the people remains banned?
I cherish my own freedom dearly. But I care even more for your freedom. I am no less life-loving than you are, but I cannot sell my birthright, nor am I prepared to sell the birthright of the people to be free."
My father says, "I can not, and will not, give any undertaking at a time when I and you, the people, are not free. Your freedom and mine cannot be separated I will return!"

Amandla!

Crowd: Avetu!

Crowd sings Mandela song.

Text: Zindzi Mandela delivers her father's speech on February 10, 1985.
After 5 more years of needless strife, the South African Government gave in.

On February 11, 1990, Nelson Mandela was released from prison. He had been behind bars for 27 years.

In 1994, in fully democratic elections, Nelson Mandela becomes South Africa's first black President.

The beginning...

CREDITS

This film was made with the help of:

Amandla Group
American Committee on Africa
Carol Bernstein Perry
Sam Greenwald
International Defence & Aid
Sindiso Mgweni
Kenneth Mima
David Mowbring
Thandi Mkhambane
Mthlato Mtsheanele
Calvin Phe Ka Sia

and others unnamed.

Produced by: Peter Davis

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