



## **The Association of Black Psychologists' Tribute to Elder Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela**

The Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi), led by its eminent President Taasogle Daryl Rowe, board of directors, Elders, and members share with the world the mourning of the transition of modern South Africa's first Black president, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. However, in the African tradition, we celebrate the transition of our Elder and respectfully honor his contributions to the healing of a nation which had historically practiced mass injustice by the few upon the many.

Elder Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, also known by his tribal name "Madiba," had a storied history. He grew-up in rural South Africa, son of the Chief of the Thembu tribe, part of the Xhosa nation. He developed the ability at a young age to bridge South Africans' varied cultures, becoming a man who could change tactics to affect the best outcome. He brought his political activism and unremitting devotion to the struggle for human rights and dignity, paving the way for those who desire equality, justice, and freedom.

Elder Mandela epitomized the mission and goals of our professional organization - to advocate for a society of mentally healthy and free individuals. At the outset of his journey, this appeared to be insurmountable since the ruling Whites of South Africa represented 15% of the population and the majority Black population had no rights. The Whites ruled South Africa in a ruthless manner, enforcing violence, strict controls on non-Whites, and income disparity, to name a few of the injustices. This was an era that was undergoing a dismantling of more than a century of many White Westerners, subjugating others through colonialism, segregation, and disenfranchisement. This created decades of conflict between Blacks and brutal White rulers - first were British colonists and then a white system referred to as apartheid or "racial separation."

Elder Mandela joined the African National Congress (ANC) in 1943. The ANC was a multiracial group of liberation theorists and became the opposition party to the South African regime's National Party who came to power in South Africa in 1948. This organization imposed racist theories and separate development. Elder Mandela developed important relationships with other freedom fighters like Walter Sisulu, who became his mentor and Oliver Tambo, his law partner. The law firm comprised of the only Black lawyers in South Africa, practiced healing, justice, and freedom by providing free or low cost legal service to Blacks.

Elder Mandela's activism and attempts to heal and gain freedom for his people resulted in his first arrest in 1952 for organizing an ANC defiance campaign. This resulted in he and other freedom fighters having to go underground to avoid the ruling, ruthless, and racist National Party of South Africa. He and 155 others were arrested in 1956 for treason. The trial concluded in 1961 with not guilty verdicts. Elder Mandela was arrested again in 1962 for incitement and departing South Africa illegally. This arrest and conviction resulted in five years in prison. Elder Mandela and other freedom fighters were subsequently arrested in 1963 on charges of treason; however, the charges were changed to sabotage and conspiracy. The expected sentence was hanging, but the freedom fighters were sentenced to life in prison. Elder Mandela spent 18 of his 27 year incarceration at Robben Island prison in a small cell and was required to do hard labor.

The international community began to change its attitude toward the racist and oppressive government of South Africa and its ruling National Party during the 1970's. The American Congressional Black Caucus was at the center of this campaign. Then Congressmen Ron



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Dellums (D-CA) and Bill Gray (D-PA) were among the leaders in the United States Congress pressing for economic sanctions. Now Congresswoman Maxine Waters (D-CA), then a member of the California legislature, led the States' efforts to enforce economic sanctions such as preventing higher education institutions from investing in corporations and organizations that were doing business with South Africa. The American support to end apartheid became a major movement. This movement was not supported by then President, Ronald Reagan. He argued that America should not involve itself in the affairs of a sovereign state. The Congressional Black Caucus led by Congressman Dellums and with the support of other Blacks like Danny Glover and Harry Belafonte, to name a few, brought attention to Elder Mandela's illegal imprisonment. This also caused worldwide pressure to be brought on the ruling South Africans to seek a solution to its ruthless and unjust form of government.

The result of all of the worldwide attention to the unjust and brutal South African government reached a critical threshold in the late 1980's. Elder Mandela, still imprisoned, served as a healer as he became a confidant of the prison officials and the South African President P. W. Botha. President Botha offered Elder Mandela his release if he would renounce violence - even though, like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. he had been a student of Mohandas Gandhi. Elder Mandela refused the offer. Mr. Botha's successor, F. W. de Klerk, experiencing the international pressure, especially the economic sanctions by the American and other international governments, ordered the release of Elder Mandela in 1990 after 27 years of imprisonment.

Upon his release from prison and the subsequent lifting of the ban on anti-apartheid organizations, Elder Mandela became the leader of the ANC. He worked closely with then South African President de Klerk to form a democratic government. This resulted in Elder Mandela and Mr. de Klerk receiving the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize and the election of Mandela as South Africa's first Black president. Elder Mandela served with distinction for five years as president of South Africa. He spent his retirement years attending to issues such as education and health, with an emphasis on children.

During the height of South African apartheid, Elder Mandela brought Black America and Africa together in the fight for equality, justice, and freedom. He devoted his life and career to fighting apartheid and led the South African nation on a path to reconciliation. Although Elder Mandela was not seduced by power, he has been characterized as a shrewd and skillful politician; bridging the gap between moderates and militant radicals. Diplomacy became his life's work.

The ABPsi gratefully and humbly acknowledges this healer of African people and of the world. Even after spending decades in an unjust and cruel society that eventually led to imprisonment, he emerged to lead a country's struggle to democracy. Elder Mandela did not exhibit bitterness toward his oppressors after his release from prison, even after missing many valuable years of his life. He exemplified the ABPsi's creed that in order to heal, the healer has to be healthy and whole.

Elder Mandela encouraged in word and in deed the eradication of oppression of one by another. He spoke of the inevitability of death, the struggle towards mass action for equality, and the characteristics of leaders. He encouraged us to strive for peace operationalized as



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“creation of an environment where all can flourish... regardless of social markers of difference.” As we consider Elder Mandela’s words, life, and legacy, we must also consider our roles and the methods we utilize as we advance our mass action for equality. We must consider our collective willingness to sacrifice for our people and contextualize the meaning of when we opt to do otherwise. In this, it becomes necessary to embolden ourselves in the illumination of our collective and individual struggles and progresses.

The death of any elder, especially those who strove with all of their being to enact change, should continue to engender change. Yes, we have lost a great leader; however, we must celebrate Elder Mandela, his life, accomplishments, and legacy of vigorously challenging oppression and inequality which overshadows the sorrow of no longer having his physical presence. As members of ABPsi, we must continue to promote programs, policies, and ideals that encourage peace and social justice. In line with the spirit of our Mission, we must continue engaging our youth, speaking out against injustices of the oppressed and encouraging self-actualization of the disenfranchised. We must remain eternally aware of injustice, inequality, and oppression, so we can create balance with our collective effort for justice, equality, and freedom. We can continue to bring the Mission of ABPsi to life, while honoring the memory of President Nelson “Madiba” Rolihlahla Mandela.

In his Paninsie Address, Dr. Rowe challenged The ABPsi members to “stand up boldly, come forward and claim our personal and collective responsibilities to further the Mission” of ABPsi. Dr. Rowe asked that we work long and hard to:

- Counter the dehumanization of everyday Black people as we liberate minds, empower character and illuminate Spirit;
- Increase global initiatives by joining forces with other like-minded people, professionals and organizations around the world; and
- Promote organizational integrity by working to expand and extend our capacity as an agency to respond to challenges in the lives of everyday, ordinary people of African ancestry.

We celebrate the life and legacy of Elder Nelson Mandela, a peaceful warrior who taught the world about human compassion, binding us one to another and the enduring truth that living in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others is a clear challenge to the chains of oppression. To paraphrase South African president, Jacob Zuma, “although we knew the day of death was coming, nothing diminishes our sense of loss.”

We will honor the legacy of Elder Nelson “Madiba” Rolihlahla Mandela with the work ahead. He taught us to confront the regime where it was weakest - at the bargaining table - rather than where it was strongest - on the battlefield. In the words of Dr. Rowe, the major focus for ABPsi going forward will be to “animate and enliven our beloved ABPsi – to authorize and empower members to reclaim ownership of the ABPsi through initiating new efforts, and spreading our good news. ABPsi is only as strong as we make it – it is time for each of us to re-make it strong.”

**Power to the People**



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