

Long Walk to Freedom  
 INFORMATIONAL TEXT  
 Nelson Mandela  
 1994

Introduction



From prisoner to president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela was one of the most important political figures of the 20th century. In 1944, Mandela became a leader in the African National Congress, a political party that opposed South Africa's policy of racial segregation. In 1962, Mandela was jailed for his political activities, and after a widely publicized trial, was sentenced to life in prison. Over the years, Mandela became the world's best-known political prisoner, gaining international support for his fight against apartheid. He was released from captivity in 1990 and went on to become South Africa's first black president. The excerpt here is from Mandela's autobiography.

“The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”

from Part Eleven: Freedom

- 1 On the day of the **inauguration**, I was overwhelmed with a sense of history. In the first decade of the twentieth century, a few years after the bitter Anglo-Boer War<sup>1</sup> and before my own birth, the white-skinned peoples of South Africa patched up their differences and erected a system of racial domination against dark-skinned peoples of their own land. The structure they created formed the basis of one of the harshest, most inhumane societies the world has ever known. Now, in the last decade of the twentieth century, and my own eighth decade as a man, that system had been overturned forever and replaced by one that recognized the rights and freedoms of all peoples regardless of the color of their skin.
- 2 That day had come about through the unimaginable sacrifices of thousands of my people, people whose suffering and courage can never be counted or repaid. I felt that day, as I have on so many other days, that I was simply the sum of all those African patriots who had gone before me. That long and noble line ended and now began again with me. I was pained that I was not able to thank them and that they were not able to see what their sacrifices had wrought.
- 3 The policy of **apartheid** created a deep and lasting wound in my country and my people. All of us will spend many years, if not generations, recovering from that profound hurt. But the decades of oppression and brutality had another, unintended effect, and that was that it produced the Oliver Tambo, the Walter Sisulus, the Chief Luthulis, the Yusuf Dadoos, the Bram Fischers, the Robert Sobukwes of our time—men of such extraordinary courage, wisdom, and generosity that their like may never be known again. Perhaps it requires such depth of oppression to create such heights of character. My country is rich in the minerals and gems that lie beneath its soil, but I have always known that its greatest wealth is its people, finer and truer than the purest diamonds.

1. **Anglo-Boer War** a war fought between the British Empire and two Boer states, the South African Republic and the Orange Free State, over the Empire's influence in South Africa

NOTES

Skill: Informational Text Elements

Mandala compares the citizens of South Africa to diamonds in this analogy because they are the greatest wealth to the country, especially during times of oppression.

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that is not the case. The truth is that we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and **enhances** the freedom of others. The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning.

- 14 I walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibility, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not yet ended.

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