



Nelson Mandela: A Biography

Martin Meredith

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From the prison, to the presidency, Meredith paints a vivid portrait of Mandela's inspiring life and times, providing fresh insight into the history of the anti-apartheid movement and new revelations about its most compelling figure.

Nelson Mandela: A Biography Details

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From Reader Review Nelson Mandela: A Biography for online ebook

Carisa says

This isn't a quick read, but it's a worthwhile one, especially if like me you're coming to it with little to no knowledge of South African history and the anti-apartheid movement. Meredith devotes a lot of space to the people and politics around Mandela, giving useful pocket histories of the ANC, the National Party, and the political environment out of which apartheid arose.

I was also very pleased to find this isn't a hagiography. Meredith clearly admires Mandela, but he doesn't gloss over the mistakes he made, not only in his personal life but as a politician (both before and after his imprisonment). The man presented here sometimes loses his temper, miscalculates and misses key opportunities to gain points against his political opponents, and his achievements seem that much more admirable because of it.

Lyndell says

Meredith's Mandela is one of the most detailed and thorough biographies written on the life of Nelson Mandela. Originally published in 1998, Mandela: A Biography was subsequently updated and republished in 2010. Martin Meredith is a British journalist and historian who has written extensively about Africa. In this exhaustive biography, Meredith traces Mandela's life starting from his early childhood years, through his young days in the movement, his imprisonment and subsequent release, his presidency and retirement right through up until he withdrew from public life in 1997.

We see the evolution of Mandela throughout the years, how his perspectives and thinking changed and how he interpreted and responded to changing events over the course of several decades. As a bonus this book also serves as a detailed chronicle on the history of South Africa and the ugliness of Apartheid.

In spite of Mandela's celebrity leader status, this book is not an adulatory work. Instead, Meredith provides a balanced perspective on the life and character of Mandela. This measured view makes this book particularly valuable as the reader gains insight into not just the accomplishments and outstanding positive traits of Mandela – but also, his weaknesses and his failures. This insight into his faults does not take away in any way from the standing and achievements of Mandela as a man and leader. In fact, they provide an important lesson that even the most exceptional leaders such as Mandela are far from perfect, but are flawed humans just like the rest of us.

Meredith's Mandela is necessarily lengthy at 688 pages, but it is at once readable and highly captivating. This biography will provide a potent source of inspiration for the leader who desires to make an impact in any domain.

David Meyer says

This book took me a bit of time to get through, but it was definitely worth the read. It's an extensive description of Mandela's life, from his childhood all the way to his post political struggles against AIDS. The author did a great job detailing who Mandela is as a person, and not just what he did. It was most interesting

to learn not just about his incredible strengths and positive attributes, but to see his weaknesses and the mistakes that plagued him during and after his time in office. His love life, while at times very sad, also helped to keep the book extremely interesting. Overall, the book portrays Mandela's amazing journey through life, and the ways in which he succeeded and failed in attempting to shape his country for the better.

Mohammad Yarahmadi says

I enjoyed reading about a man who set an example for all liberty activists. The very detailed description bored me at the start, but after sometime I got used to the Author's style. Although the book is about Nelson Mandela, it goes beyond a biography and tells the story of the South African nation with whom I was merely familiar. My discussions with my South African colleague while I was reading the book made it a more interesting read. I would definitely recommend this book.

Mads says

I have this **theory** – I know it is not a good theory – but here it is anyway!

We are all entitled to our own opinions!

All over the world there is - racism – racism between the rich and the poor, nationalities, boundaries etc.

But for one or other reason the South Africa's was classified as the biggest Racism countries that ever existed – maybe the statement is not true!

You see it on the news every day – in movies – heck even on documentaries

USA for Africa - We are the World

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9BNo...>

One day long – long ago a baby boy was born: →

Born Rolihlahla Mandela 18 July 1918

Died 5 December 2013 (aged 95)

Resting place Mandela Graveyard

Mandela began his studies for a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University College of Fort Hare but did not complete the degree there as he was expelled for joining in a student protest. “Naughty boy it seems”

Upon his return to the Great Place at Mqhekezweni the King was furious and said if he didn't return to Fort Hare he would arrange wives for him and his cousin Justice. They ran away to Johannesburg instead, arriving there in 1941.

BUT

He completed his BA through the University of South Africa and went back to Fort Hare for his graduation in 1943.

Meanwhile; he began studying for an LLB at the University of the Witwatersrand. By his own admission he was a poor student. He only started studying again through the University of London after his imprisonment in 1962 but also did not complete that degree.

A two-year diploma in law on top of his BA allowed Mandela to practise law, and in August 1952 he and Oliver Tambo established South Africa's first black law firm, Mandela & Tambo.

Mandela, while increasingly politically involved from 1942, only joined the African National Congress in 1944 when he helped to form the ANC Youth League (ANCYL).

Michael Jackson - They Don't Care About Us

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNJL6...>

The Treason Trial

He became involved in anti-colonial politics, joining the ANC and becoming a founding member of its Youth League. After the Afrikaner minority government of the National Party established apartheid – a system of racial segregation that privileged whites – in 1948, he rose to prominence in the ANC's 1952 anti-apartheid Defiance Campaign, was appointed superintendent of the organisation's Transvaal chapter and presided over the 1955 Congress of the People. Working as a lawyer, he was repeatedly arrested for seditious activities and, with the ANC leadership, was unsuccessfully prosecuted in the Treason Trial from 1956 to 1961. Influenced by Marxism, he secretly joined the South African Communist Party (SACP). Although initially committed to non-violent protest, in association with the SACP he co-founded the militant Umkhonto we Sizwe in 1961, leading a sabotage campaign against the government. In 1962, he was arrested, convicted of conspiracy to overthrow the state, and sentenced to life imprisonment in the Rivonia Trial

466/64

One of Mandela's prisoner numbers.

Release from prison

Mandela served 27 years in prison, initially on Robben Island, and later in Pollsmoor Prison and Victor Verster Prison. An international campaign lobbied for his release, which was granted in 1990 amid escalating civil strife. Mandela joined negotiations with President F. W. de Klerk to abolish apartheid and establish multiracial elections in 1994, in which he led the ANC to victory and became South Africa's first black president. He published his autobiography in 1995.

Dionne Warwick - That's What Friends Are For

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyTpu...>

"It is in your hands" – Mandela Day quote

He died at his home in Johannesburg on 5 December 2013.

To end this review – I have a huge respect for this man!

HE HAD A DREAM A BIG DREAM AND NEVER LET GO!

To the Author

And from me

Nelson Mandela - Best Ever Inspirational Video!!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1Ss3...>

Nelson Mandela speech that changed the world

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZTH77...>

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Steven Z. says

As the world has praised Nelson Mandela over the last few weeks there seems little to add concerning his importance to world history. A man of such magnitude deserved a biography that encompasses his entire life with an author who delves into all aspects of their subject including their flaws. I found two major biographies of Mandela, Anthony Sampson's MANDELA, and a book of the same title by Martin Meredith. I chose Meredith's work because Sampson's was the "authorized biography" and I wanted to read a book that appeared less likely to be hagiography. Meredith who has written a number of books on South African history is both a historian and a journalist and has written a book that is more than a biography of Mandela as a person and what he experienced, but a work that encompasses all major aspects of South African history from the introduction of apartheid through the election of Mandela as president and his term in office. The book itself is very detailed and explores Mandela's life beginning with his tribal upbringing and education in missionary schools and ending with his retirement from public life in 2007.

As a narrative history Meredith has presented a readable account of his subject, though at times his prose is somewhat wordy and trenchant. However, once the reader becomes used to Meredith's approach the material is worth exploring as the author provides important historical background to each aspect of his topic, and he is able to weave important analysis into each major subject. The reader is exposed to Mandela's personal development at the same time Meredith incorporates the history of the African National Congress (ANC) into the narrative. Meredith explores ANC policy as it tries to implement a strategy to deal with apartheid and presents the factions that developed within the party as the "party elites" pursued a more moderate approach when compared to the younger generation that emerged during World War II that wanted to pursue a more violent and radical program. Throughout the book Mandela appears to side with the "elites" and

except for a few burst of anger over the course of events he calls for a non-violent course of action.

Meredith provides details of the horrendous conditions that existed for Africans in Afrikaner society. The role of State Security and police in repressing opposition is ever present as violence, torture, and murder are employed to maintain the apartheid system. Meredith presents the evolution of Mandela from a young man pursuing a career in law to an activist who can no longer tolerate what is happening in his country. Meredith reviews the Rivonia Trial using court transcripts that results in Mandela's twenty-seven year imprisonment, most of which takes place in the notorious Robben Island prison. The evolution of Mandela's political thinking, his relationship with warders, other prisoners, and the prison hierarchy are revealed in detail. Upon his release we witness what Mandela has become and we follow the course of his career, renewed family life, and attempts to lead South Africa out of its period of darkness. The negotiations between Mandela and the ANC on the one hand, and P.W. Botha and F. W. de Klerk, the two Prime Ministers are presented. The years 1990-1994 are vitally important and provide insights in trying to understand the South African political persona, and why Mandela's achievement of a bi-racial democracy for South Africa was so important.

The areas I found most interesting dealt with the internal debates within the ANC and the different personalities involved. Aside from Mandela, individuals such as Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo emerge as important figures that deserve a great deal of credit for the evolution of ANC policy and resulting successes. Meredith does an exceptional job in discusses Afrikaner politics and policy maneuvering as the different Prime Ministers try and maintain a system that evolves into a worldwide pariah. The fractious nature of South African society is nicely explained as we see how the Indian, Africans, and Afrikaner populations exist within a segregated society. We witness the economic and societal implications of apartheid and the lengths that the white power structure went to maintain it. Throughout the narrative all aspects of the story return to Mandela, a man who is exceptional, but also somewhat flawed.

Meredith delves into Mandela's personal life and what emerge are an authoritarian father, a poor husband at times, a philanderer, and a person who could be very stubborn and dogmatic. Meredith offers examples to support his conclusions but his overall evaluation of Mandela is an exceptional individual who overcame enormous obstacles. Meredith captures Mandela best as he describes his survival strategy while imprisoned, "he became adept at concealing his emotions behind a mask, rarely letting any sign of anger or bitterness emerge and never betraying doubt or despair before others." (286) These traits allowed Mandela to develop his own "personality cult" while in prison and later as a politician and became a means for him to survive the personal and political crises that he was confronted with each day.

Mandela's political naiveté is an important component when dealing with his world view. Meredith is on firm ground as he discusses Mandela's relationship with his wife Winnie. Mandela's devotion to her blinded him to the fact that she is almost a sociopath in dealing with her own sense of self. The discussion of the Mandela United Football Club and the violence and murder she was involved with is important as Mandela constantly makes excuses for her actions and repeatedly supports her attempts to secure her own political power base. Meredith nicely documents their marriage, its failure, the court appearances, and the final break up as Mandela finally after making excuses for years comes to the realization of what his wife really is. When dealing with Winnie or negotiations with de Klerk and others Mandela develops rationalizations to justify his positions, it is as if he has tunnel vision when he confronts evidence that does not support his world view. Once Mandela becomes president of South Africa Meredith should be more balanced in describing "a benign patriarch, floating above the political hurly-burly and taking a broad-brush approach to government"(567) because of the problems that ensued after he left office and was replaced by Govan Mbeki. Meredith presents Mandela's flaws but he is correct in praising his subject in that without him apartheid would have witnessed a much more violent end than transpired under his leadership.

If there is an aspect of the book that might have enhanced the experience for the reader it would have been to use footnotes or endnotes. It is obvious that Meredith is on top of his material but his annotated bibliography designed to create a broad umbrella for citations is not very effective and leaves this reader to question where some of the information originates. Overall this is a work of history that is greatly needed for those who would like to understand what has transpired in South Africa in the twentieth century and gain insights as to where it is heading in the future. The audience for this book might appear narrow from my comments, but it is worth plowing through because of the story it tells.

Mary says

A different perspective on the struggle, compared to Nelson's autobiography, *Long Walk To Freedom* - lots of gritty details about those in Nelson's closest personal circles who may not have been as good to him as they should have been!

Definitely eye-opening and gives a clearer picture of his life through non-biased eyes, however *Long Walk To Freedom* remains the quintessential book about Nelson, and by the man himself...a MUST read ... this makes a good companion if you are interested in more about his life and legacy...

Marilyn Pronovost says

Very good book. The start is somewhat sluggish. Full of information but not told as crisply as the remainder of the book. Once the biography gets into Mandela's work for the rights of black citizens, it picks up. Also the author does not shy away from Mandela the hero for People's rights versus Mandela the flawed human being. This is what often makes this book so compelling.

He does not spare his contempt for Winnie Mandela and many of her misguided efforts that brought out her worst inner demons. There is a lot of sadness in the loss of three of his children. Also there is sadness for those children who survived; he was not part of their life and when he was freed, he still not belong to them, he belonged to the country of South Africa.

There is the part of Mandela that is shown to be a loyalist to others to the point of not being able to see their faults.

Despite all of this, he helped to harness a nation that was full of divisions and to mold it into a nation of various cultures that is growing in world influence. A tribute to a human being not a superhuman hero.

Madhushi Bandara says

A long read, but helped me to understand the world history and the nature of complex politics. Is it a tragic or a blessing to be able to sacrifice life for a noble course?

Matthew Smith says

Detailed, comprehensive, and honest retelling of this man's complex and extraordinary life. Meredith never portrays Mandela as more than he is--human--and relates his missteps along with his successes. If you're looking for light reading, this isn't for you. But if you want to begin to understand the life and times of Nelson Mandela and other anti-apartheid leaders, this is a good place to start.

Magdalena says

I love this book because it is very objective, but also very interesting and easy to read. I have had only limited knowledge about South Africa and Apartheid, even though I visited this country last summer, so I was glad that Mr. Meredith presented a big picture and explained overall culture and characterized each person thoroughly. The book is long, but it reads quickly. MUST-READ

Dylan Vieites Glennon says

An interesting read but is not as good as 'Long walk to freedom'

Mikey B. says

A comprehensive biography of a great figure of the 20th century. Mr. Meredith paints a picture of a man with great dignity and intelligence. A man who rose above the narrow-mindedness of his surrounding society and transformed his country from apartheid to near greatness (admittedly South Africa has a way to go before it can be qualified as “great”).

If one compares the South Africa of pre-1990 to today there are several obvious accomplishments and merits. The toppling of the white power infrastructure was done with a minimum of bloodshed – compare this with regime changes in other countries – Yugoslavia for instance. It is Mr. Mandela who deserves a lot of the credit for this. Mr. Meredith presents Nelson Mandela against the backdrop of a South Africa that was a racist police state which did not allow any people of “colour” to transgress its severe limitations. However one must acknowledge that its’ judicial system at least gave a semblance of a trial – with publicity that permitted the outer world and eventually some white South Africans to bear witness to the evil within their society.

Mr. Meredith does portray Mr. Mandela as oblivious to the ways of his second wife Winnie; perhaps having spent twenty-five years incarcerated in prisons did not give him the best interpretations of what his family members were involved in.

This is truly a stunning portrait of a man of dignity overcoming the restrictions of a hateful state and still believing in the inherent goodness of all his fellow men – regardless of the colour of their skin. With this he was able to re-invent and remould his country into a far better place. This accomplishment is rarely seen particularly in developing countries. South Africa is one of the few countries since the end of the Second World War (aside from Japan and Germany) that has altered itself so successfully.

When apartheid started to disappear in the mid-80's this could easily have become another civil war in Africa, but instead it was an overall peaceful transition. Mr. Mandela was an essential key to this and always presented peaceful and rational solutions – much like Gandhi did in India. Hopefully Mr. Mandela's legacy will live on in South Africa.

Carrie says

I enjoyed this biography, especially because I felt it a somewhat unbiased view of his life. It did not intentionally omit all his shortcomings, especially in relation to his family situation and his leadership. I appreciated that candor immensely especially since far too often historical figures are sanctified and viewed as having no human faults or shortcomings. Which aside from being totally inaccurate is also extremely misleading and unhelpful. Granted the book did glorify him to a degree, but I felt this was warranted considering his life experiences and his contributions. Overall I took from this that Mandela is as great a public figure and activist as I suspected him to be, but also a human with all the shortcomings that come with.

Tim says

With all the attention bestowed upon South Africa in recent weeks due to the global audience for the World Cup, we thought it to be a good time to spotlight the recent and very comprehensive updated reissue of Martin Meredith's "Mandela: A Biography."

Despite an unusually large number of books chronicling the life and struggle of the African continent's most famous 20th Century leader (including his own 1994 autobiography "Long Walk to Freedom"), Meredith's work covers perhaps the widest berth of information available on the lawyer turned revolutionary who finally prevailed on reversing years of injustice in the South African nation. Meredith, a Brit, has written extensively on the plight of the African continent – from the diamond mines to Zimbabwe, from Mugabe to the making of South Africa itself.

In "Mandela: A Biography", Meredith recounts the history of the man alongside the history of the nation. From tales of the nineteenth-century Xhosa-speaking peoples, to the rise of African nationalism, to the development of Johannesburg, and the influence of the Communist party, the story of South Africa and the story of Mandela are inextricably intertwined. No detail is left out in following Mandela from life as a barrister to his emergence as an anti-apartheid revolutionary and the way in which his work went on even as he was exiled to a life sentence in prison through his supporters (and the Free Mandela movement) and his wife Winnie Mandela.

A rich combination of stories make up the chapters of Mandela's own story, from the work of the African Resistance Movement (ARM) to various trials and protests, the actual plight of the many victims of various apartheid laws and conditions and their effect on everything from migrant workers to black-owned businesses, the imprisonment of deserters, to the final settling of differences between the ANC and the government. Even through accusations of Mandela's own improprieties and the leader's own divorce, Meredith covers every significant turn with extensive research and attention to detail.

What emerges is a tale, not just of struggle, but of a revolutionary overturning of rampant injustice; the golden age of a 'rainbow nation,' yet one that somehow still did not bring justice to all and over time created an opportunity for the emergence of a new black middle class, (as well as an ultimately re-corrupted ANC) while eventually – post-Mandela – reversing course through policies of self-enrichment that resulted in many of the most impoverished still left behind.

Based on both its breadth and research, as well as a very personalized portrait of the man himself, Meredith's 'Mandela' is a well recommended read.
