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SMU HISTORY, HUMAN RIGHTS EXPERTS REMEMBER FREEDOM FIGHTER & HUMANITARIAN NELSON MANDELA

DALLAS (SMU) — As the world [commemorates](#) the remarkable life of [Nelson Mandela](#) (1918-2013), two SMU scholars of history and human rights offer their unique perspectives on his legacy. Mandela’s revolutionary work to end South Africa’s racial segregation system of apartheid led to his spending 27 years in prison beginning in 1963. After his 1990 release, he memorably noted, “The march toward freedom and justice is irreversible.” On Dec. 10, 1993, Mandela was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and after South Africa’s first democratic and multiracial election, he became the country’s first black president, serving from 1994 to 1999. After devoting his life to humanitarian causes, Mandela, 95, passed away at his Johannesburg home Dec. 5, 2013.

South African History Expert Jill E. Kelly: ‘MADIBA’: BELOVED REVOLUTIONARY AND RECONCILER

“As condolences and memories pour in from around the globe, one thing is clear. Madiba (his clan name, used to denote respect) has been an inspiration. But the reasons why Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela has inspired are multifaceted.

To many, Mandela was a saint, a leader who reconciled and forgave, who negotiated a peaceful transition to democracy for South Africa. But to countless others, Mandela was also a revolutionary hero, a member of the youthful vanguard of the liberation struggle who recognized that the violence of apartheid would not end if not met with armed resistance. Before his incarceration, he traversed the African continent to garner support for an armed struggle against white minority rule in South Africa and trained in Ethiopia to lead the African National Congress’ military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (‘Spear of the Nation’).

The unwavering militancy and resistance of Mandela and his comrades served as an inspiration to anti-apartheid activists who took to the South African streets or left the country for military training. When the revolution in the townships and international pressure forced the end of apartheid, Mandela's diplomacy inspired South Africans as they moved into a new democratic era.

Mandela was a tactical leader who chose revolution when it was required and negotiation when the time arose. He went from a revolutionary—or as some parts of the world deemed him, a 'terrorist' (the United States included him on its terrorist watch list until 2008)—to beloved international icon. Madiba has inspired as both revolutionary and reconciler.

While many fear what his passing might mean for a country still dealing with its history of colonialism and apartheid, those that do so fail to understand that it is not only his revolutionary and diplomatic life that inspires us. As long as South Africa's constitution lives, so will Madiba."

— [Jill E. Kelly](#) is an assistant professor of history in SMU's Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences; her expertise is in African / South African history. Contact her at jillk@smu.edu, 214-768-2971 or @jekjek19 on Twitter.

**Human Rights Leader Rick Halperin:
MANDELA TOOK 'VERY DIFFERENT' APPROACH THAN GANDHI;
CREATED CONSTITUTION 'FULLY COMMITTED TO HUMAN RIGHTS'**

"In his quest to lead South Africa out of the horrors of apartheid, Nelson Mandela certainly symbolized the triumph of good over evil. But while some have likened him to Mahatma Gandhi, it should be remembered that those two men took very different approaches to seeking independence from their country's oppressors.

Gandhi was a proponent of non-violent civil disobedience in helping India achieve independence from Britain. He went to prison and was released when the British could not conquer his pacifism. The fact that he was assassinated only accentuates his life of non-violence, making him an enduring inspiration to pacifists the world over.

Mandela went to prison for advocating violence to bring about change, and was left to watch from his prison cell as the world helped overthrow the regime he couldn't topple through armed resistance. That he died peacefully in bed is in stark contrast to the ideology of violence he supported as a young activist.

What many don't know about Mandela, however, is that he helped create one of the most progressive constitutions in the world—one fully committed to human rights. When ratified in 1996 after the country's first non-racial elections, the constitution abolished the death penalty, guaranteed socio-economic and environmental protections, and upheld the right to human dignity, privacy, sexual orientation and more. That remains a remarkable accomplishment.”

— [Rick Halperin](#) is director of the [Embrey Human Rights Program](#) in SMU's Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences and has served three times as board chair of Amnesty International USA. Contact him at rhalperi@smu.edu, 214-768-3284 or [@EHumanRightsSMU](#) on Twitter.

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