

# How Mandela and S. Africa Were Freed

**From the Archive:** One of the great battles of Danny Schechter's life was the fight to end apartheid in South Africa, but he never soft-pedaled the challenges the country continued to face nor did he accept the revisionist history minimizing the role of millions in that global campaign for justice, as he wrote last year.

By Danny Schechter (Originally published on April 28, 2014)

This is probably the worst time to write and release a book about one's involvement in a struggle to free South Africa. It's a bad time because even as South Africa celebrates its twentieth anniversary as a democracy, there has rarely been more rancor and anger in a land we all wanted to see as a Rainbow nation, a model for the world because of how it achieved a relatively peaceful transition from white rule and promoted racial reconciliation.

My new book, *When South Africa Called, We Answered: How Solidarity Helped Topple Apartheid* about the global solidarity movement has been published by a Canadian website and online publication run by Tony Sutton, a former editor of Johannesburg's classic Drum Magazine, often spoken of as the Life Magazine for the black communities during the glory days of resistance.

As I hunt for an American and South Africa publisher, this 300-pager is available in the PDF format as an e-book and can be downloaded for free at <http://coldtype.net>. I wrote it and released it quickly, after a serious health scare because I wanted to be sure that the history of the projects I have been associated with over the decades, from the all-star album "Sun City" by 58 Artists United Against Apartheid, the TV series "South Africa Now," and my work with Nelson Mandela whose story I tell in the book, *Madiba A to Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela* (Madibabook.com)

As I was writing about Mandela heroic life, I thought there might be value in writing my own story, too, by compiling the many essays I wrote alongside the media work I have done about South Africa for decades as a form of solidarity. And I know, as is all too often the case with a lot of my work, the timing may be very problematic if not totally off.

The global anti-apartheid movement is long gone, and now, so is Madiba, the leader who largely inspired it. With all the memorializing, many confess to be "Mandela-ed out." His life has been feted in print, and on the big screen, most recently by the epic movie, "Mandela: Long Walk To Freedom."

The press has mostly moved on. In South Africa, the news media is now more focused on the drama of the trial of Oscar Pistorius, South Africa's high-profile disabled runner accused of intentionally shooting his girlfriend in a tragic and bloody late-night confrontation.

Britain's *The Financial Times*, reflecting the interest and interests of its readers, did send their editor, Lionel Barber, on a 12-day safari to Southern Africa to key in on today's challenges.

He notes that "twenty years after the end of apartheid [sic, it's been 24 years] South Africa and its neighboring states, Namibia and Angola, face a second great struggle for progress, prosperity and a better future for all."

Barber spent a day on the campaign trail with President Jacob Zuma, observing, "he can jive like a man half his age to the old liberation favorite, *Umshini Wami*," ("Bring me my Machine Gun.") FT doesn't mention that this is an oft-repeated recycled act for JZ, as he's known, because he beat that song to death in his first campaign five years ago.

In the end, Barber is upbeat about South Africa's economy, perhaps because it is still dominated by a multinational privately controlled Mineral Energy Complex, many based in London. "If you believe in Africa," he writes. "You have to be positive about South Africa." This is hardly the message of Zuma's many detractors.

Soon, as the South African election in early May comes into focus, the rest of the world media will descend and give local events their attention for a day or two. They love conflict and this story is perfect, complete with bitter charges of corruption, defections by long-time supporters of Mandela's party, the ANC, and frustration in every community as the economy seems unable to eradicate poverty and distribute wealth fairly.

The FT hints at this downside, but features the positive hopes of investors and financiers. The truth is that 20 years after the country's first multiracial election in which the ANC promised "A Better Life For All," many there are living worse lives with poverty today as deep as it was then.

It's not all the fault of South Africans, but reflects a globalized world economy that benefits the 1 percent, far more than the 99 percent, especially in traditionally poor and colonized countries.

At the same time, activists in West have also moved on or moved off this political stage as economic failures erupt in Europe and America, and as young people are stuck in student-debt bubbles, with social for global economic justice movements losing visibility.

Global problems today may be even more serious, with inequality and climate change topping the list, but the sense of widespread moral outrage that fired the anti-apartheid movement seems on the decline.

At Mandela's funeral, that international movement in a way, a successor to a similar crusade against slavery a century and a half earlier was barely referenced.

The focus was on the utterings of heads of state with a great-men-make-history subtext on display.

Even the ANC as a people's movement was pushed aside by all the government dictated protocol and media led deification of Mandela by politicians. Only the aging "Arch," Desmond Tutu criticized the organizers for not inviting leading whites and activists from abroad.

Even as the event celebrated the history of South Africa's greatest son and his "long walk to freedom," it also rewrote history, leaving out the mass global force responsible for generating pressure for sanctions and demands for Mandela and Co.'s freedom.

Perhaps that's why I felt compelled to write this book, to add my small voice and the memory of worthy, if relatively, notwell-remembered contributions to this important history. As been said many times: the past is never past.

South Africans also need to be reminded of the debt they owe to a world that responded to their call for support and stood with them in the dark years. In an interdependent world, that movement played a crucial role. When South African politicians ride the "gravy train," they are betraying their friends abroad.

Unfortunately, the media that lionizes change-makers from above and ignores movements from below will always downplay that lesson, lest they encourage similar struggles on today's global issues.

As a friend once told me when I went to South Africa at age 25 to enlist in that then against-all-odds freedom struggle, "it's not the ship that makes the waves, but the motion on the ocean."

**News Dissector Danny Schechter is a New York based blogger, (NewsDissector.net), editor of Mediachannel.org, author of 16 books, and director of more than 30 documentaries, including six with and about Nelson Mandela. Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org.**

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History often recounts events through the tales of “great men,” but that is rarely the complete story. South Africa’s overturning of white supremacy is a case in point, not just the personal triumph of Nelson Mandela but the victory of a global movement, as Danny Schechter recalls.

By Danny Schechter

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# South Africa's Murder Trial Distraction

Despite South Africa's transition into a multiracial democracy, profound economic inequality remains, a backdrop to both the high-profile murder trial of athlete Oscar Pistorius and the splintering of Nelson Mandela's ANC, as Danny Schechter notes.

By Danny Schechter

With Nelson Mandela's death, news from South Africa seemed to have died along with the world's most famous ex-political-prisoner-turned-president. It was as if the people there don't deserve to be covered unless there is a larger-than-life celebrity or scandal to focus on.

Happily for the media industry there is now an anti-Mandela in the public eye, an athletic celebrity who is now less famous for his achievements than infamous for killing his girlfriend in what was either a tragic accident or the act of an angry lover.

Oscar Pistorius's trial is getting far more coverage than the one that Mandela and his co-defendants went through in 1962 leading to his life sentence for acts of sabotage against South Africa's white-supremacist government.

That's partly because of today's celebrity culture. Pistorius was a medal-winning athlete dubbed the "blade runner" because he had been a double amputee since childhood and overcame adversity to win races while wearing prosthetic devices. His late live-in lover, Reeva Steenkamp, was a stunning blonde model well known to local media.

This story is being given the full tabloid treatment with cover stories in People Magazine and lots of hype by the networks. Unlike the days of apartheid, a black judge is hearing this case with race rarely alluded to, although it is part of the back story because of Pistorius's claims that he thought he was shooting at an intruder.

Pistorius lived in a pricey gated community where fear of black burglars is legion, all an unstated reflection of the dramatic inequality that remains in the country. If Pistorius had killed an unknown black intruder, instead of his celebrity paramour, this trial wouldn't be news (if there would even be a trial).

The coverage of him has been mostly negative although he has fought back with his own communications team with a Twitter feed, [@OscarHardTruth](#), designed to

give “factual updates” on the trial. Its profile reads, “Truth Shall Prevail. Innocent until Proven Guilty.” <http://www.oscarpistorius.com>. In just 24 hours, it had over 16,400 followers, but only follows 28 mostly international media outlets.

South Africa’s media monitor, Media Tenor, said the local media is trying him as well as the court. According to researcher, Minnette Nieuwoudt, “my instinct tells me the media likes a damsel-in-distress type of story. The outright victim is something that resonates with a lot of people. The fact that she was very beautiful, it made her a bit of an icon. Pistorius, on the other hand, started getting increasingly negative coverage over the months after the shooting.

“There seemed to be a slight change in the tonality. Also, with regards to Oscar, he was initially compared to fallen sport heroes, then this changed to a more the general criminal comparison. First, he was an athlete who stumbled. Now, he’s a criminal, who used to be an athlete.”

But even as the world focuses on his courtroom tears and the aggressive and often bungled prosecution that aims to show the dark side of this Olympic hero, other issues of perhaps worst crimes in South Africa draw little interest from the global media machine.

The year 2014 is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of South Africa’s “freedom” and the coming of democracy. It is an election year with national campaign underway pitting President Jacob Zuma, who was once part of the African National Congress’s armed struggle and is now a popular if controversial/detested politician seeking reelection, against a number of challengers.

Zuma is carrying lots of baggage because of a current theft-of-public-mones-for-private-use scandal involving lavish improvements on his home compound and an earlier rape case.

The ANC has a serious political challenge as well. On the center-right, there’s the DA, the Democratic Alliance, now transitioning from its roots in all-white politics into a multi-racial party that holds power in the Western Cape Province with Cape Town as its capital.

And, then there are two new outfits, among other players, contesting for seats in this parliamentary democracy. Businesswoman and educator Mamphela Ramphele, best known as the anti-apartheid icon Steve Biko’s girl friend, and her Agang Party is focusing on corruption and attracting women, while former ANC Youth League Leader Julius Malema has set up a militant radical sounding youth-oriented party, the Economic Freedom Fighters, and says the ANC died with Mandela.

South Africa's powerful labor unions that have been in an alliance with the ANC for decades were expected to organize a worker's party but they have been persuaded not to. None of these political divisions fall on strict left-right differences.

Many on all sides have strong disagreements with the ANC's neo-liberal economic policies and complain about pervasive poverty and low growth. Outside the traditional political party structure, dissent is heard daily in noisy press stories exposing corruption and the "politics of concealment" by the ruling ANC party.

Long-time activists and ANC members are incensed by the lack of transparency and the arrogance of a political elite that seems more focused on enriching itself than serving the public.

Now, a former minister, Ronnie Kasrils, and supporters have launched a new Vote No campaign to put the issues of the ANC's betrayal and corruption on the agenda. They have just issued this release:

"A one-time minister and a deputy minister in ANC governments are among a group of former anti-apartheid activists who are backing a campaign calling on voters to come out and vote by either spoiling their ballots or to voting tactically in protest against corruption and current government policies.

"Former intelligence minister Ronnie Kasrils and former deputy health minister Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge are among a number of prominent figures who have endorsed a statement headed: Sidikiwe! (We are fed up) Vukani! (Arise/Wake up), Vote 'NO' that will be released at the Press conference."

It criticizes the economic policies of both the ANC and the main opposition, the DA, for supporting a system that has caused such alienation. Many participants are veterans of the struggle against apartheid and most of the signatories have supported the ANC throughout the years since the 1994 transition, but are appealing to the wider range of disillusioned voters. Their statement concludes:

"The ANC needs to know that it can no longer take for granted its traditional support and we would be failing South Africa and our democracy by not voting. After the elections efforts will be intensified to build an inclusive and transformative political program premised on social justice, redistribution, clean governance and democratic principles."

All of this textured opposition politics does not meet the celebrity smell test that seems to motivate international media to pay attention. Corruption stories in Africa are widely covered although the focus is rarely ever on the corruptor, just the *corruptee*. It is virtually never on the disastrous impact of western

corporations, banks and international financial institutions.

Years ago the anti-government song “Marching on Pretoria” was well-known. Today, with the media “marching on Pistorius,” the deeper, critical issues of a deepening economic and political crisis have been supplanted by another distraction what looks to all the world like another OJ Simpson trial for audiences relishing more “newstainment.”

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## Mandela Movie Faces Long Oscar Odds

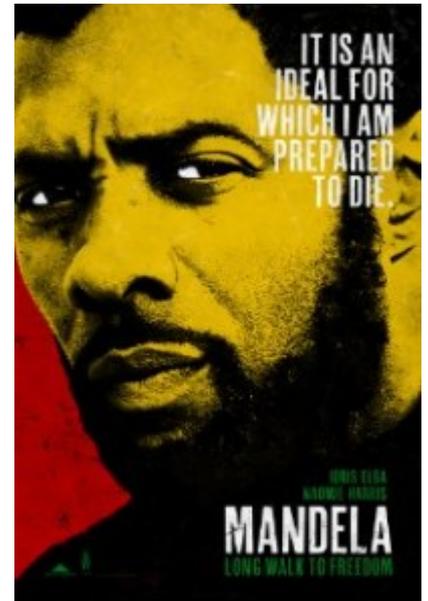
Only a month ago, Nelson Mandela’s death brought much of the world together to honor his legacy in overturning South Africa’s white supremacist regime. But the new film about his life may get short shrift as the movie-award season opens, says Danny Schechter.

By Danny Schechter

The whole world recognized and paid tribute to South African icon Nelson Mandela when he died at age 95 on Dec. 5, 2013. Ninety-one heads of state attended his funeral. The UN General Assembly organized a special tribute. Mandela’s legacy is secure in official circles, and in the hearts of South Africans, but will there be recognition in the place that seems to matter to the media even more: Hollywood?

The Oscar nominations are due on Thursday, and early on, it seemed, as if “Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom,” the epic movie about the world’s most revered icon was a sure thing for Oscar consideration. Most of the big newspaper reviewers loved it and its American distributor Harvey Weinstein has specialized

in influencing Academy decisions.



But of late, it lost its buzz and appears to be treated as an also-ran, buried by the hype machine for other movies. The entertainment media no longer seems to take the movie seriously, as Oscar-worthy. All the focus is on other films and the big U.S. stars.

The producers of the movie, made in South Africa, albeit with a British director, Judson Chadwick, and Oscar-celebrated screenwriter William Nicholson, were earlier hopeful that they had a good chance of winning at least one of the statuettes that quickly translate into a place in cinema history and more bang at the box-office.

For them, however, making this film was always far more than a commercial endeavor. In my book, *Madiba A to Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela*, producer Anant Singh shares his passion for the subject and explains that it took 16 years and as many as 50 versions of script to put together the money and the cast.

He was making it not only to honor Mandela but also tell the story of his country's liberation. His team worked as independents with no major studio behind them.

They were also very commercial in their calculations, doing what they felt they had to do to get it made and get it out, also conscious of deferring to Hollywood formula, by focusing on the love story between Nelson and Winnie and, in effect, depoliticizing the story of a very political figure once known for saying, "The Struggle Is My Life."

On the Left, there was disappointment as the review in Britain's *Counterfire* expressed this way: "This absence of ideological perspective is probably to be

expected but the concluding effect of the film is to produce a sanitized and depoliticized Mandela that does not help us comprehend his massive impact. The apolitical Mandela in the film is the one neoliberal warmongers like Blair, Bush and Obama are happy to eulogize.”

I am sure if the filmmakers had tried to please ideologues on all sides, the movie probably wouldn't have even been made, much less released, with the small fortune in marketing monies required to be considered competitive. That said, it did make news with lots of star-studded attention grabbing premieres and some media write-ups, especially, after Mandela died while a Royal screening was underway in England.

The movie itself got less attention than its stars and its connection with a well-known leader. Some say that's because of the movie format, as in this review by Wamuwi Mbaob in South Africa:

“The biopic genre further restricts the possible creative directions the narrative can take, and the result is a movie that tries to do a lot but ultimately does not succeed in rising above the textbook facts to give us the story of this larger-than-life man. At every point, the discerning audience member feels dissatisfied, goaded by annoying inaccuracies, and manhandled by soaring strings doing their frenetic best to convince us that this is the story as it should be told. It isn't.”

Most of the South African reviews were positive, but this reviewer found the film not South African enough, unhappy that it was made for a global audience.

Other critics were even less enamored, putting it down as too conventional. Writes reviewer John Beifuss, “a no-show in best-of-2013 year-end critics' polls, ‘Mandela’ is not vivid, daring or passionate enough to exploit, for better or worse, the unexpected current-events context of its arrival. It is not an adequate tribute to South Africa's first black president nor is it a disgrace to his memory. It is a rather conventional and pious movie biography that misses the opportunity to be more to use art and imagination to bring insight to a life history that otherwise might be better served with a straight documentary.”

That was a comment that raised my eyebrows because I made six documentaries about Mandela and had been documenting the making and meaning of the movie. Dramas and documentaries can rarely be fused. Terms like “might be better served” are vague and often pretentious.

What these critics rarely do is to get specific and say what they wanted to see, or how they felt the story could have been handled differently. Perhaps that's not their job but vague prescriptions are often a cop-out. There is often no

substance in their calls for more substance.

Also, the Academy voters are hardly hostile or naive about the topic. Mandela was a big hit when he visited Los Angeles on his national trip in 1990. A reception drew every major black star in town, including many pols, liberal luminaries and sports icons such as Muhammad Ali. Mandela received the key to the city and a rally packed the old Los Angeles Coliseum. The Artists for a Free South Africa has been based in Los Angeles and kept some public attention focused on the "beloved country's" artists and needs.

Years ago, one of my Mandela documentaries was passed over for Oscar consideration, but the Academy, out of interest I am sure, hosted a screening in L.A. under their auspices. I was pleased to be there and got lots of positive comments from the audience. That was the closest I got to the Oscar people.

So, yes, there is sympathy in Tinsel Town, but, perhaps, not much more because commerce, celebrities and movie grosses not newsy issues are always topic #1 in the industry city. Movies about the great and the good have an uphill battle in challenging Hollywood product that, this year again, seems more mesmerized by big-time crime dramas like "American Hustle" and "The Wolf of Wall Street" that make con men appear cool and groovy. Their only morality is amorality.

Those movies feature better-known stars and more made in the USA storylines, aided and abetted by even bigger and more recent advertising budgets. "Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom" didn't have the deep pockets to compete with the blitzkrieg of new ads when the film went into "wide release" on Christmas Day. By then, it was already considered old.

The Golden Globes did give "Mandela" three nominations, one to Idris Elba, the male lead, and two for music, one to the Irish band U2 for the hardly political upbeat end song, "Ordinary Love," which did win the award for "best original song."

Getting the band to the awards ceremony enhanced that show's appeal, but everyone knows the Globes reflect the picks of many self-styled foreign correspondents, not died-in-the-wool movie industry Americans.

The NAACP image awards also honored Elba. In Britain, the film academy nominated "Mandela" for the best *British* film of the year, even though it was primarily made by Videovision, a South African company. The director, screenwriter and a producer did hail from England. Curiously, the nationalism and racial identity embedded in those awards represented the very values that the real Mandela rejected.

"12 Years a Slave," which won the Golden Globe for best drama, is the "black"

movie that seems to have the best chance to win an Oscar. In that drama, a white man played by superstar Brad Pitt took action to free one African-American who had been kidnapped into slavery. There was no people's revolt overturning an unjust system.

The movie's major appeal may be its careful depiction of slavery and the lack of attention this historic human rights crime has received in the land of slavery. Recall black activist H. Rap Brown once observing "violence is as American as cherry pie."

"Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom" features violence too, but oppressive state violence, more than individual bad guys whom you can hate. Apartheid may be a more recent crime than slavery but the latter is part of a U.S history that some Americans not all, for sure are ashamed of. We know more about it than what happened in faraway Africa albeit with U.S. support. (Apartheid was modeled partially on our brutal system of relocating Indians to reservations.)

Slavery as a subject is also presented only as American, while Mandela dramatizes a freedom struggle in Africa that has not been front and center much lately in a news system that routinely treats Africa as a backward continent of wars, massacres and coups.

Mandela was one of the few African leaders even reported about in the U.S. news media and the fact that his death occasioned considerable coverage may have reinforced the idea that his story has been over-exposed. Why see a movie version when the real man was on TV, etc.?

That's a perception that certainly cut into the film's ticket sales. If "Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom" is not on the Oscar list, it will be gone from theaters quickly, probably to return on TV movie channels and video. See it while you still can. You will be glad you did!

**Danny Schechter made documentaries about the making and meaning of the movie "Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom." He also wrote the book, *Madiba AtoZ: the Many Faces of Nelson Mandela* (Madibabook.com) Comments to [dissector@mediachannel.org](mailto:dissector@mediachannel.org)**

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## Making Nelson Mandela 'Safe'

The great tragedy of Nelson Mandela's life was that his revolution only passed political power to South Africa's black majority, not economic power, which remained in the hands of the old white ruling classes, both domestic and global. That is a reality now lost, writes Gary G. Kohls.

By Gary G. Kohls

“Now That He Is Safely Dead” is a poignant poem that was written by black poet/musician Carl Wendell Hines soon after Malcolm X was assassinated in 1965. The poem has since been appropriately associated with the death of Martin Luther King Jr. and his legacy of nonviolent struggle for black liberation, freedom, equality, economic justice and the pursuit of happiness for all.

The poem reads: “Now that he is safely dead let us praise him, build monuments to his glory, sing hosannas to his name. Dead men make such convenient heroes. They cannot rise to challenge the images we would fashion from their lives. And besides, it is easier to build monuments than to make a better world.”

And now the same thing is happening to Nelson Mandela, the latest black liberation activist-hero whose name has been exalted (but by lip service only) by the very international ruling elites who once tried to obstruct everything that Mandela stood for.

Ever since the frail Mandela became mortally ill a year ago, those same powers-that-be have been “exalting” the man who, we are told by media elites and their paymasters, courageously and almost single-handedly overcame the fascist Apartheid system in South Africa. Those powers have made Mandela into another safely dead prophet who will never be able to contradict the hype that hides much of the real story of Mandela.

### **Mandela as Barbie Doll**

Greg Palast wrote [a recent article](#) titled “The Mandela Barbie,” stating: “I can’t take it anymore. All week, I’ve watched Nelson Mandela reduced to a Barbie doll. From Fox News to the Bush family, the politicians and media mavens who body-blocked the anti-Apartheid Movement and were happy to keep Mandela behind bars, now get to dress his image up in any silly outfit they choose.

“Poor Mandela. When he’s not a doll, he’s a statue. He joins Martin Luther King as another bronzed monument whose use is to tell us that apartheid is now ‘defeated’ – to quote the ridiculous headline in the Times. It’s more nauseating than hypocrisy and ignorance. The Mandela Barbie is dressed to serve a new version of racism, Apartheid 2.0, worsening both in South Africa – and in the USA.

“The ruling class creates commemorative dolls and statues of revolutionary leaders as a way to tell us their cause is won, so go home. For example, just months ago, the US Supreme Court overturned the Voting Rights Act, Dr. King’s greatest accomplishment, on the specious claim that, ‘Blatantly discriminatory evasions are rare,’ and Jim Crow voting practices are now ‘eradicated.’

“‘Eradicated?’ On what planet? The latest move by Florida Republicans to purge 181,000 voters of color – like the stench from the shantytowns of Cape Town – makes clear that neither Jim Crow nor Apartheid has been defeated. They’re just in temporary retreat. Nevertheless, our betters in the USA and Europe have declared that King slew segregation, Mandela defeated apartheid; and therefore, the new victims of racial injustice should just shut up and stop whining.”

### **‘Pained Legacy’**

Palast then discusses the unspoken reality of Mandela’s “pained legacy,” which is “a corroded South Africa still ruled by a brutal economic apartheid. Today, the average white family has five times the income of a black family. Welcome to ‘freedom.’

“The US and European press have focused on Mandela’s saintly ability to abjure bitterness and all desire for revenge, and for his Christ-like forgiving of his captors. This is to reassure us all that ‘good’ revolutionaries are ones who don’t hold anyone to account for murder, plunder and blood-drenched horror – or demand compensation. That’s Mandela in his Mahatma Gandhi doll outfit – turning the other cheek, kissing his prison wardens.

“Mandela’s circle knew this: You can’t forgive those you defeat until you defeat them. And, despite the hoo-hah, Mandela didn’t defeat apartheid with ‘nice’ alone. In the 1980s South African whites faced this reality: The Cubans who defeated South African troops in neighboring Angola were ready to move into South Africa. The Vietnamese who had defeated the mighty USA were advising Mandela’s military force.

“And so, while Mandela held out a hand in forgiveness – in his other hand he held Umkhonto we Sizwe, a spear to apartheid’s heart. And Mandela’s comrades tied a noose: an international embargo, leaky though it was, that lay siege to South Africa’s economy.

“Seeing the writing on the wall (and envisioning their blood on the floor), the white-owned gold and diamond cartels, Anglo-American and DeBeers, backed by the World Bank, came to Mandela with a bargain: black Africans could have voting power . . . but not economic power.

“Mandela chose to shake hands with this devil and accept the continuation of economic apartheid. In return for safeguarding the diamond and gold interests and protecting white ownership of land, mines and businesses, he was allowed the presidency, or at least the office and title.

“It is a bargain that ate at Mandela’s heart. He was faced with the direct threat of an embargo of capital, and taking note of the beating endured by his

Cuban allies over resource nationalization, Mandela swallowed the poison with a forced grin. Yes, a new South African black middle class has been handed a slice of the mineral pie, but that just changes the color of the hand holding the whip.

“In the end, all revolutions are about one thing: the 99% versus the 1%. Time and history can change the hue of the aristocrat, but not their greed, against which Mandela appeared nearly powerless.”

### **Racist Inequality**

So I expect that the core of Mandela’s legacy (his decision to reject the violent overthrow of the state, the healing potential of the Truth and Reconciliation commissions and the obtaining of the vote for blacks) will continue to be minimized while the fascist economic system of racist inequality continues to thrive.

With powerful resistance from white conservatives, America did posthumously award Dr King a number of monuments and a national holiday that never seems to go beyond King’s admittedly powerful, anti-racist “I Have A Dream” speech. But it seems to me that the annual commemorations usually ignore King’s powerful antiwar, anti-fascist, economic justice themes of the later movement.

Those post-1963 messages have been watered-down, subverted and ignored by governments, the media and the churches (with some exceptions). Even the King Center in Atlanta seems to minimize the Jesus-inspired core principles of Christian nonviolence that were so central to King’s black liberation movement.

Officialdom tolerates the re-enactments of King’s Dream speech (and the fact that Mandela became South Africa’s first black puppet-president), with the assurance that the memorial events will remember (falsely) a “less militant” and more benign King rather than the aggressive Christ-like prophet who had to be “disappeared” in both word and deed.

So we can expect that the upcoming 2014 MLK Anniversary Day will safely pass into memory with very little attention being paid to the radical gospel source of King’s inspiration, the nonviolent social justice movement invented, taught and faithfully practiced by Jesus of Nazareth.

### **The Dark-Skinned Palestinian Jew**

I believe that it is useful at this point to acknowledge that Jesus was just as dark brown/“black”-skinned as was the Asian Indian Mohandas Gandhi, although he was not as deeply brown/black as King or Mandela.

Jesus was a First Century Palestinian Jew who, anthropologists tell us, probably looked more like a short Yasser Arafat than a tall Barry Gibbs (of BeeGee "fame"). For more on the skin color issue, see:  
<http://jesuswasblack.wordpress.com/was-jesus-a-black-african-israeli-palestinian/>.

Jesus, Gandhi, King and Mandela were all, at one time or another, feared and then demonized by white-ruling elites who ordered them hunted down and neutralized by white racist soldiers and white civilians who were beholden to their white paymasters.

There are hundreds of monuments and statues dedicated to Gandhi as there are to King all over the world. Most of the national governing bodies – even India's Hindu temples – pay only lip service to the messages and mission of Gandhi.

Similarly, America's governing bodies and churches, with few exceptions, ignore the radical antiwar messages of King and Jesus (who also has no lack of monuments, buildings, crucifixes and other objects of adoration that immortalize his name but evade his central teachings).

Peace and justice-seekers who have read the Hines' poem feel that it applies also to all the other martyred, left-wing champions of the down-trodden. And that includes the whistle-blower Jesus, who taught and practiced the sacred obligation to relieve human suffering.

Jesus's teachings of the unconditional, nonviolent love of friends and enemies was largely responsible for the dramatic growth of the early church that occurred despite the terrible persecutions that it suffered for the two or three centuries after his political assassination. Sadly, today, the implementation of the Sermon on the Mount ethics can only be found in a few remnants of the original form of Christianity.

Dr. King was in the stream of one of those remnants that echoed the original voice of Jesus and had the courage to both preach and practice those dangerous revolutionary truths that ruling elites seem to fear so deeply. Dr. King had a deep faith in the power and practicality of the radical good news about love that was so clearly articulated in the Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule.

### **Purging the Prophets**

But the voices of the prophets always seem to get silenced in racist, militarized, corporatized societies – and it isn't by accident. Both ancient and modern powers-that-be recognize dangerous whistle-blowers when they see them, and they usually don't waste much time ordering contingency plans to be set up for their disappearances or "silencing."

Initially, the tellers of inconvenient truths are just ridiculed (or ignored) until the messenger gains a following; then they and their followers are violently opposed; and then (rarely, it seems to me), the prophetic truths are ultimately accepted as self-evident (as per the 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Schopenhauer who famously wrote: "All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.")

In our more complex era, Schopenhauer's dictum still holds, but now there are more sophisticated ways to discredit prophetic voices (by rumors; by infiltration of the prophet's movement by agents provocateur; by death threats to the victim or family; by subversion by cunning right-wing think tanks that spread disinformation to the media; by harassment; by arranging murders that look like accidents or suicides; or by extra-judicial assassination by some "deranged" patsy).

And so it goes. Being a prophet is hazardous duty. King characterized it as "a vocation of agony." Whistle-blowers such as Jesus, Mandela, Gandhi and King, while they were still alive, knew very well that they were going to pay a heavy price for their refusal to bow down to authority. They knew that they would have to endure the death threats, the character assassinations and the murder attempts if they didn't shut up.

Modern whistle-blowers like Wellstone, Ellsberg, Assange, Manning and Snowden probably recognized that they, like King, might not "reach the promised land" (where justice was always served and peace was always sought). These patriots, willing to have lover's quarrel with their nation, were simply, because of their intact consciences, trying to expose the fascism, racism, militarism, sexism, xenophobia and economic oppression that was slowly destroying the souls of their homelands.

Getting to the promised land is not up to the prophets; it is up to the followers and the true believers in the grand vision.

**Dr. Kohls is a retired physician who writes about peace, justice, militarism, religion and mental health issues.**

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## The World Unites Behind Mandela

President Obama's speech at Nelson Mandela's memorial service got the most attention, but the worldwide praise for the revolutionary leader who fought

South Africa's white supremacy was more significant, says Danny Schechter.

By Danny Schechter

Millions of South Africans mourned the death of Nelson Mandela as you would expect, but the rest of world also joined in an unprecedented display of the same international solidarity that for years helped South Africa isolate its enemies and overthrow apartheid.

Mandela was not the first Third World revolutionary to become so popular in the West just think of all the images of Cuba's Che Guevara that remain proudly displayed on T-shirts the world over. Yet, Mandela built an international community of supporters that transcended ideological/political differences, races and cultures.

Nations not known for being supportive of the liberation movement that Mandela headed want to be thought of as Mandela backers. Even Israel, whose Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu begged off an invitation to attend a memorial service in Johannesburg because he ostensibly "could not afford" to go other Israelis did attend is now floating claims that the Israeli intelligence service assisted Mandela through support from an intelligence operative in the Mossad back in 1962 who gave him a pistol. Israel later became an ally of the apartheid government, helping them develop a nuclear weapon.

The claim of Israel's largesse toward Mandela got a big spread in the Ha'aretz newspaper and was clearly targeted at Israeli critics who are now boycotting the self-styled "Jewish State," denouncing it for apartheid practices toward Palestinians, just as South Africa was boycotted with international sanctions for its persecution of its black population, including the 27-year imprisonment of Mandela.

With many South Africans including Mandela's closest prison comrade Ahmad Kathrada supporting the boycott of Israel, the Nelson Mandela Center of Memory, an institution he created as an objective source of historical information, looked into the Israeli report and said it cannot be confirmed.

Wrote the foundation, "The Nelson Mandela Foundation can confirm that it has not located any evidence in Nelson Mandela's private archive (which includes his 1962 diary and notebook) that he interacted with an Israeli operative during his tour of African countries in that year. Both the diary and the notebook were used as evidence against him in the 1963-1964 Rivonia Trial for sabotage."

What hasn't been reported is a fact shared with me by Kathrada who was asked by Mandela to procure books on armed struggles worldwide before he launched the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto We Sizwe (The Spear of the Nation.)

“Everything that Madiba did was well planned and thorough,” he told me for a documentary that I am making on the meaning of the movie, “Mandela Long Walk To Freedom.” He also said that among the movements Mandela studied was guerrilla warfare in Israel against the British. Mandela later spoke out supporting Palestinian rights.

### **Focus on Obama**

The world was focused on the speeches made by 91 presidents and heads of state at the memorial service in Johannesburg, but the longest and most publicized was given by President Barack Obama for consumption mostly on U.S. TV.

A South African government speech writer dissected Obama’s technique, explaining: “In particular Obama’s speech is very strong on word pairs, not alliterative pairs like ‘sense and sensibility’ or ‘pride and prejudice,’ but simple pairs like ‘a son and husband, a father and a friend.’ The use of pairs or the use of two words when one will do creates a sense of stability and authority (one word would have sufficed there, but two gives you the sense that I know what I am talking about).

“He warns against ‘too many of us’ paying lip service to Mandela’s principles while ignoring them in practice. He slips a ‘too many leaders’ variation into the triple, ‘who claim solidarity with Madiba’s struggle for freedom, but do not tolerate dissent from their own people.’ Of whom was he thinking?”

Commenting on the speech in the Readers Blog of Johannesburg’s Mail & Guardian newspaper, a reader who calls himself “George Orwell,” wrote: “[I] think you credit B.O. with too many literary skills. The praise goes to his speechwriter, Ben Rhodes. Rhodes is the man with the pen skills, he comes from a fiction writing background, which is just about the right experience for political persuasion, n’est ce pas? Rhodes penned all the stirring propaganda that Obama’s wealthy Wall Street backers required to oil their man’s way into high office.”

I was troubled by the extensive air time Obama was given, to the exclusion of other world leaders, at the memorial event in Johannesburg. Perhaps that’s why the United Nations General Assembly organized its own special tribute to Mandela so that every country could equally be heard.

I was delighted to be invited by the UN as a “special guest” to the event that took place in the Trusteeship Council because the “GA,” as it’s known is being physically reconstructed. I attended along with several anti-apartheid activists including actor Danny Glover and African-American journalist Herb Boyd.

I was told that the speeches were mostly for the domestic audiences in the various countries, many of whom were hardly high-profile supporters of Mandela

and the ANC. Said one former official, "It is important for everyone to know how remarkable Madiba was."

As you would expect, American and global television did not cover this international outpouring for Mandela. To hear the typical TV producer tell it, "we've done Mandela!" or "we are Mandela'd out!"

South Africa spoke first, thanking the many countries present for this meaningful tribute. The Russian Federation and China were represented as was Fiji, Algeria, Morocco, Jamaica, Cuba and Venezuela, 37 nations in all. UN speechmaking can be deadly but on this occasion there was a rare unanimity and passion among the nations of the world, especially from Africa, Asia, Latin America.

First, various regional entities, like ASEAN of Asia, the Group of 77, The Non-Aligned Movement based in Iran, CARICOM of the Caribbean, the EU of Europe, and the organization of South American states rose to praise Mandela and call attention to his global significance and impact on their peoples.

And then, one by one, UN permanent representatives rose to make speeches, express "Eternal Glory" and share anecdotes about his visit to their countries and what about the man and his values touched them. Some became more emotional than is common in diplomatic circles.

Some like the representative of Jamaica mentioned songs by their reggae stars, Bob Marley and Peter Tosh, that galvanized world opinion. Morocco praised Stevie Wonder. Algeria cited Mandela's support for their national liberation struggle in 1962, and the military training they offered him. They reported that there had been six days of official mourning.

The Algerian rep reminded the other countries that when it led the General Assembly, it got apartheid South Africa tossed out, just one of the many resolutions and act of solidarity with the then struggling people of South Africa. Significantly, although an African state, Algeria is an Arabic speaking country.

Zambia, the country that hosted the ANC in exile spoke of their prolonged national commemorations. Zambia was bombed by South Africa because of its support for the ANC. Cuba took pride in its active help for the fight against apartheid, it sent troops to combat the South African invasion of Angola. Bolivia praised him as a fellow socialist. Argentina hailed him for his humanism and persistence. Others spoke of his compassion and support for the fight against AIDs.

Each nation spoke with an almost personal sense of connection with this African

leader as if he belonged to them. China stressed the sincerity of its relationship with Africa as well. Britain was one of the few Western governments that praised Mandela but did not mention the remarks by former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher who had labeled him a terrorist.

These were all diplomats in a very formal setting controlled by UN rules but a sense of global support and even love came through much more directly than it did in the official South African funeral. It was a rare global moment that's showed how Mandela and the ANC had unified world opinion.

Yes, UN talkfests don't change the world, they can come off as a tower of babble, but events like this put countries on the record and reinforced a sense of support. Flawed as it may be, the General Assembly is a global Hyde Park, but rarely as emotional and positive. It is one of the few institutions open to all countries on an equal basis.

It was clear Mandela had become a hero for all, and a person who brought a problem-obsessed world with few such giants together, if just for a few hours and just in time for Christmas when the movie about him opens nationwide in the U.S.

**News Dissector Danny Schechter directed 6 documentaries with Nelson Mandela. His new book, *Madiba A-Z: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela*, offers a new unconventional biography. Comments to [dissector@mediachannel.org](mailto:dissector@mediachannel.org).**

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## Mandela, MLK and Jesus

The death of Nelson Mandela offers Christians a chance to reflect on the great protest leader at the center of their religion, the historical Jesus, with his anger at ostentatious wealth and his disdain for social inequality, as Rev. Howard Bess reflects.

By the Rev. Howard Bess

We are being reminded that Nelson Mandela was a man of protest, a protest fueled by his horror of injustice, leading him to spend many years in jail and to live one of the truly great lives of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Mandela himself was a privileged man, an educated and successful lawyer. His call for justice was not as much for himself as for the millions of his black brothers and sisters who were held in economic and political bondage.

The very same description fits Martin Luther King Jr., who was college- and seminary-educated and who had earned his PhD at a prestigious university. A black Baptist minister with those credentials could have been an elite American minister recognized for his preaching skills, if he never uttered a word of protest. But King protested injustice and became the protest leader who changed America. He paid the price of assassination.

Jesus of Nazareth was the great protester of his time and he was crucified by Roman soldiers as a result. The protests of Mandela and King were very public and well documented by reporters covering the anti-apartheid and civil rights movements, respectively. Mandela and King had the advantage of living in an age of radio, television, newspapers, magazines and books. Jesus carried on his protest work with the illiterate poor of a backwater section of Palestine called Galilee.

In Jesus's culture women were the carriers of the oral traditions of their clans. Yet, these recorders of his stories and sayings were illiterate women who listened, remembered and retold the stories (parables) and sayings (aphorisms).

Jesus did all of his teaching in Aramaic, the common language of his area. His parables and aphorisms were finally written down two generations later in Greek by literate men.

The Apostle Paul was the first writing Christian leader. He began writing 15 to 20 years after the death of Jesus, but he never mentions any of Jesus's parables or aphorisms. Paul did not understand Jesus as a man of protest but as a theological messiah who was sent to the cross by God as a sacrifice for sin. For Paul, the cross was an altar of sacrifice rather than a Roman tool of execution.

The earliest written records of Jesus's parables, aphorisms and other stories reflecting his concern for the poor and his opposition to injustice also were put down in Greek, but two and three generations after his death in a very different political and religious context. The Jesus, as recounted by these writers, was a theological Jesus, too, a man with a miraculous birth whose life on Earth ended with his resurrection from the dead. But their inclusion of his sermons and other teachings left behind clues of the historical Jesus.

For 2,000 years, with few exceptions, Christian churches have pursued the theological Jesus and have said little about his ministry of protest. Yet, with the help of persistent Bible scholarship, we are now able to consider the unadorned parables of Jesus and place them in the economic, religious and political context in which the stories were told.

When the teachings of Jesus are liberated from the theologies of Paul, Matthew,

Mark, Luke and John, a very different Jesus appears on our screen, a master teacher whose primary tools were the stories that he told.

His stories were discussion starters. They were vivid and often carried a high level of exaggeration. They were colorful. Typically they were stories without a stated conclusion. They were memorable.

Whenever a parable of Jesus is read, the reader rightfully asks who might have been in his listening audiences. They were rural, illiterate Jews who lived in Galilee in incredible poverty and under the cruelties of Roman rule. The crowds that listened to Jesus were the expendables.

The unadorned parables of Jesus cover a broad range of topics. They cover worker/employer relationships, wage rates, the obscene living style of the rich, the utter poverty of working people, the arrogance of religious leaders, the wealth gap between the rich and the poor, the social segregation of the rich from the poor, and the absurdity of ritual practices demanded by the ruling hierarchy that controlled the Jerusalem temple.

Today most every Christian minister who is a seminary graduate will or should know these glaring facts about the life and teachings of Jesus. Yet people in the pews often are ignorant of the things that the minister knows about the historical Jesus. A typical minister hides safely behind moral niceties and comforting clichés.

If American ministers took the Jesus messages seriously, they would be preaching about the urgent need to increase the minimum wage to a livable wage; they would be leading a fight to empty our prisons; they would be walking picket lines for immigration reform so that immigrants would again be welcomed rather than despised; they would join the call for equal rights for all minorities including gay and lesbian Americans; they would work for an education system that is free and open to all; and they would be urging their congregants to recruit and motivate people to vote for candidates who are committed to the common good rather than special interests.

Jesus was a protester against the social, economic and religious inequities of his day. He showed us a better way. Every disciple/follower of Jesus should do no less. Christians should be protesting injustice in every form. We should be protesting, knowing there are better ways.

**The Rev. Howard Bess is a retired American Baptist minister, who lives in Palmer, Alaska. His email address is [hdbss@mtaonline.net](mailto:hdbss@mtaonline.net).**

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# What Mandela Did and Didn't Do

While an inspiring tale of resilience and reconciliation, Nelson Mandela's saga also marked a failure of black South Africans to transform their hard-won political power into economic equality, as domestic and foreign whites retained the reins of money, as Danny Schechter writes.

By Danny Schechter

As the body of Nelson Mandela heads for its "final rest" in the rural community where he was born, reverential exhilaration is turning into emotionally draining reflection tinged with criticism and self-criticism. Mandela has moved from a person into a historical figure as in "now he belongs to the ages."

In the world at large, this final Mandela moment has been bathed in media attention as have earlier spectacular events like his release from prison and his inauguration as South Africa's first democratically elected president. This time, there were more than two billion social media references leading to a growing backlash of negativity from those who never supported him in the first place, as if the events were a distraction from the daily news parade of war, economic decline and political scandal.

Despite his death, this saga drawing lessons from his life and his efforts at racial reconciliation is largely considered "positive," good news in a sea of bad. You can be sure that once he is in the ground, all you will hear from media mavens is "We did Mandela. Next."

Wrote the Daily Mail in London, a newspaper that has over the years disseminated nasty and questionable criticisms of Mandela (even as in the Thirties the newspaper was worshipful of fascists): "While some reflected on the remarkable life of Nelson Mandela, some world leaders saw it as the perfect opportunity to grab a quick 'selfie' with their peers – prompting a backlash from web users accusing them of undermining the seriousness of the event."

Mandela's African National Congress was more upset that its leader, Jacob Zuma, was booed while Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe was cheered.

Beyond the coverage of the formal events the talkathon by world leaders and related pomp you did get a sense of the genuine affection in which the man they call Madiba is held by most South Africans.

Former labor leader Jay Naidoo wrote to me and others: "I found the spirit of Madiba amongst the ordinary people in the queues that went to pay their

respects. There were no dignitaries and celebrities here. Just the people Madiba loved, black and white, young and old, even the infirm had travelled hours and days to join the sombre lines that snaked around the streets, through parks and stadiums to pay their final respects. They were here to reclaim the legacy of Madiba and re-ignite his courage and fearlessness to demand the promise of freedom now.”

At the same time, more and more critical voices began to surface, and not only on leftist websites where he was faulted for various betrayals and not leading the socialist revolution they hoped for or on the Right where they “always knew” he was nothing but “a communist terrorist.”

In South Africa, some the writers like Mark Gevisser, who wrote a biography of Mandela’s successor Thabo Mbeki, saw the memorials as also mourning the death of idealism in what used to be called “the beloved country.” Gevisser editorialized in the Mail & Guardian:

“This is a consequence of the way Mandela’s legacy has been popularised: the world’s embrace of him only as an icon of forgiveness and reconciliation of love rather than also as a fierce combatant for justice who turned to forgiveness and reconciliation because he understood it as the best route to the liberation of his people. It took Barack Obama, of all people, to remind the world of the latter.”

Others, like labor columnist Terry Bell were willing to lash out at the “deification” of Mandela, noting “As everyone from monarchs to the labouring masses this week sought to share in the Mandela memorial moment, the myth machine went into overdrive, the very machine Mandela had so disparaged when I sat with him in his Johannesburg office in 1992.

“One sentence he uttered then has resonated with me throughout the years: ‘I am no messiah.’ ... The virtual deification of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, would almost certainly have been anathema to the man.”

I have seen several articles referring to Mandela as an aristocratic democrat who pumped out plenty of myths himself to motivate his country to take the path of reconciliation. Unfortunately, in his desire to pump money for jobs and services into his country, he mellowed his approach to economic policy, embracing the markets and sucking up to big business which rarely honored the promises to him.

In the research for my book *Madiba AtoZ: The Many Faces of Nelson Mandela*, commissioned by the producer of the movie “Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom,” I heard many stories of Mandela’s pragmatic right turn away from nationalization

and strict regulation of big business for fear that would alienate the country from the West.

This troubled many in the ANC like Ronnie Kasrils, a former commander in the ANC's armed struggle who became a Minister of Intelligence. He now scolds his comrades for not holding firm as poverty and inequality remains pervasive.

He told me: "What I call our Faustian moment came when we took an IMF loan on the eve of our first democratic election. That loan, with strings attached that precluded a radical economic agenda, was considered a necessary evil, as were concessions to keep negotiations on track and take delivery of the promised land for our people.

"Doubt had come to reign supreme: we believed, wrongly, there was no other option, that we had to be cautious, since by 1991 our once powerful ally, the Soviet Union, bankrupted by the arms race, had collapsed. Inexcusably, we had lost faith in the ability of our own revolutionary masses to overcome all obstacles. Whatever the threats to isolate a radicalizing South Africa, the world could not have done without our vast reserves of minerals. To lose our nerve was not necessary or inevitable"

This too is part of the Mandela legacy that does not feature in the coverage, and hence, what conversation there has been around it.

When he spent those long years in prison, photos of Mandela's image were strictly prohibited in South Africa. Most of the world media did not press his jailers to give them access and went along with the prohibitions. Censorship there was accompanied by self-censorship here because media outlets feared they could be denied access when and if things began to change.

Africa has never been covered fully or fairly, and that is unlikely to change. Wrote former ANC Leader Pallo Jordan in South Africa's leading business newspaper: "South Africa will not experience such a proud moment for a lifetime or two! Not only does this moment demonstrate the tremendous goodwill South Africa enjoys, thanks to Mandela, it is also a symbolic expression of the world community's unmistakable endorsement of the achievements of South African democracy."

Yet, many Western countries whose own democracies are being challenged don't want this spectacle to go on too long; it could inspire more activism of a kind that is being suppressed in countries like Ukraine, China, Egypt and Turkey. (It shouldn't be surprising that leaders like Netanyahu and Putin were no shows at the memorial).

You can bury people like Nelson Mandela but you can't bury their ideas and

triumphs.

**News Dissector Danny Schechter made six non-fiction films about Nelson Mandela and has written Madiba AtoZ (Madibabook.com) Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org.**

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## Honoring Mandela, Not Reagan

**Exclusive:** The U.S. government's relationship with Nelson Mandela was often strained, from the CIA's hand in his imprisonment to Ronald Reagan's veto of a sanctions bill aimed at getting him freed, lost history that must now be reconciled, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

As Americans honor the memory of Nelson Mandela, they must grapple with the inconvenient truth that one of their most honored recent presidents, Ronald Reagan, fiercely opposed punishing white-ruled South Africa for keeping Mandela locked up and for continuing the racist apartheid system that he challenged.

Rhetorically, Reagan did object to apartheid and did call for Mandela's release, but Reagan viewed the struggle for racial justice in South Africa through a Cold War lens, leading him to veto a 1986 bill imposing economic sanctions on the Pretoria regime aimed at forcing Mandela's freedom and compelling the dismantling of apartheid.

In explaining his veto on July 22, 1986, Reagan reserved his harshest criticism for "the Soviet-armed guerrillas of the African National Congress," a movement that Mandela led. Reagan accused the ANC of having "embarked on new acts of terrorism within South Africa." He also claimed that "the Soviet Union would be the main beneficiary" of a revolutionary overthrow of the Pretoria regime.

Beyond opposing sanctions that might destabilize the white-supremacist regime, Reagan argued that "the key to the future lies with the South African government." He called for "not a Western withdrawal but deeper involvement by the Western business community as agents of change and progress and growth."

Yet, despite Reagan's speech, Congress enacted the sanctions bill over his veto as "moderate" Republicans, including the likes of Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, rejected Reagan's go-slow "constructive engagement" with South

Africa's white supremacists. The Senate vote was 78-21, exceeding the necessary two-thirds by a dozen votes.

McConnell's remarks about the bill reflected the concerns of many Republicans that they would find themselves with Reagan on the wrong side of history. "In the 1960s, when I was in college, civil rights issues were clear," McConnell said. "After that, it became complicated with questions of quotas and other matters that split people of good will. When the apartheid issue came along, it made civil rights black and white again. It was not complicated."

To Reagan, however, the issue was extremely complicated. White-ruled South Africa provided military support to right-wing revolutionary movements challenging leftist governments in Africa, such as in Angola where Jonas Savimbi of the CIA-backed UNITA led a brutal insurgency which involved him reportedly burning his opponents at the stake.

Indeed, Reagan supported a number of right-wing insurrectionary movements despite widespread reports of their human rights abuses, including the Contra rebels fighting to overthrow Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government. The Contras not only engaged in rapes, murders and acts of terror but were implicated in cocaine smuggling into the United States.[See Consortiumnews.com's "[Contra-Cocaine Was a Real Conspiracy.](#)"]

Reagan also backed brutal right-wing regimes in Latin America and elsewhere as they engaged in extermination campaigns against leftists, including in Guatemala where Reagan hailed Gen. Efraim Rios Montt as his regime waged genocide against Mayan Indians considered supportive of leftist guerrillas. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Ronald Reagan: Accessory to Genocide.](#)"]

Given Reagan's support for these anti-leftist pogroms a policy sometimes dubbed the Reagan Doctrine he naturally disdained Mandela and the African National Congress, which included communists and drew support from the Soviet Union.

### **The CIA and Mandela**

Mandela had long been a target of Cold Warriors inside the U.S. government, since he was viewed as one of the young militants resisting European colonialism and sympathetic to radical change. The CIA often acted to neutralize these leaders who were considered sympathetic to socialism and potential allies of the Soviet Union.

In the case of Mandela, I'm told that his arrest in 1962, which led to his 27-year imprisonment, resulted from a CIA officer tipping off South African security officials about Mandela's whereabouts. But there remains a difference

of opinion inside the CIA whether its role in Mandela's capture was intentional or accidental, possibly a careless remark by an intoxicated field agent to his South African counterparts.

At the time of Mandela's capture, President John F. Kennedy was trying to break out of the Cold War framework of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, especially regarding CIA hostility toward African nationalists. Kennedy feared that U.S. support for white rule in Africa would play into Soviet hands by alienating the continent's emerging leaders. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[JFK Embrace of Third World Nationalists.](#)"]

U.S. policy toward South Africa's white supremacist government grew more contentious as American attitudes toward race evolved during the civil rights movement of the 1960s and after the 1968 assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, who both strongly sympathized with the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa.

President Jimmy Carter further broke from the Cold War mold in the late 1970s when he elevated human rights as a factor in U.S. foreign policy. But those human rights concerns were rolled back after Ronald Reagan ousted Carter in the 1980 election.

Reagan initiated a policy of "constructive engagement" toward South Africa's white supremacists, meaning that he opposed overt pressure such as economic sanctions in favor of quiet diplomacy that sought gradual reform of the apartheid system.

In reality, Reagan's approach allowed white South African leader P.W. Botha to crack down on the ANC and other revolutionary movements which Reagan viewed as pro-communist. Instead of substantive moves toward full citizenship for blacks, the Pretoria regime instituted largely cosmetic reforms to its apartheid system.

It was not until the U.S. and global economic sanctions took hold combined with the world's ostracism of the white racist regime that Botha gave way to F.W. de Klerk, who, in turn, cleared the path for Mandela's release in 1990. De Klerk then negotiated with Mandela to transform South Africa into a multiracial democracy, with Mandela becoming its first president in 1994.

Now, as the world honors the life of Nelson Mandela, who died Thursday at the age of 95, the American people must reconcile his inspirational story with how their much-honored Ronald Reagan opposed the sanctions that finally brought freedom to Mandela and to his nation.

Given Reagan's support for the ghastly slaughters in Central America and

elsewhere, some Americans might reasonably wonder why his name is attached to so many public facilities, including Washington's National Airport.

While it may be unrealistic to expect this Congress to reconsider the many honors heaped on Ronald Reagan, individual Americans may want to at least unofficially delete his name from the airport that serves the nation's capital by referring to it again as Washington National.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, you also can order Robert Parry's trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America's Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).**

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## Sanitizing Nelson Mandela

When Nelson Mandela was a dedicated freedom-fighter against white-ruled South Africa, he was almost as much a "non-person" in the U.S. media as he was in South Africa's press. Only after Mandela pulled back from demands about redistributing wealth was he embraced as a mass media icon, Danny Schechter reports.

By Danny Schechter

There's anger amidst the apprehension in South Africa as the numbers of "journalists" on the Mandela deathwatch grows. Members of his family have about had it, comparing what even the New York Times called a "media swarm" to African vultures that wait to pounce on the carcasses of dead animals.

President Barack Obama was soon in South Africa, carrying a message that he hyped as one of "profound gratitude" to Nelson Mandela. The Times reported, "Mr. Obama said the main message he intended to deliver to Mr. Mandela, 'if not directly to him but to his family, is simply our profound gratitude for his leadership all these years and that the thoughts and prayers of the American people are with him, and his family, and his country.'"

It doesn't seem as if the South Africa's grieving for their former president's imminent demise are too impressed with Obama seeking the spotlight. Some groups including top unions protested his receiving an honorary degree from a

university in Johannesburg.

Interestingly, NBC with its team buttressed by former South African correspondent Charlayne Hunter-Gault did not bother to cover the protest but relied on Reuters reporting “nearly 1,000 trade unionists, Muslim activists, South African Communist Party members and others marched to the U.S. Embassy where they burned a U.S. flag, calling Obama’s foreign policy ‘arrogant and oppressive.’”

“We had expectations of America’s first black president. Knowing Africa’s history, we expected more,” Khomotso Makola, a 19-year-old law student, told Reuters. He said Obama was a “disappointment, I think Mandela too would be disappointed and feel let down.”

Reuters reported, “South African critics of Obama have focused in particular on his support for U.S. drone strikes overseas, which they say have killed hundreds of innocent civilians, and his failure to deliver on a pledge to close the U.S. military detention center at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba housing terrorism suspects.”

(Oddly, The South African police detained a local cameraman who used his own drone to photograph the hospital from above. He was stopped for “security” reasons.)

For symbolic reasons, as well as because of his global popularity, Nelson Mandela seems to be of special interest to the American media with the networks, nominally in an austerity mode, busting their budgets to have a dominant presence.

South African skeptic Rian Malan writes in the Spectator, “Every time Mandela goes into hospital, large numbers of Americans (up to 50) are flown here to take up their positions, and the South African network is similarly activated. Colin, (a cameraman who works for a U.S. network) for instance, travels to Johannesburg, hires a car and checks into a hotel, all on the network’s ticket. Since last December, he’s probably spent close to 30 days (at \$2000 a day, expenses included) cooling his heels at various poolsides. And he has yet to shoot a single frame.

“As Colin says, this could be the worst disaster in American media history, inter alia because all these delays are destroying the story. When the old man finally dies, a lot of punters are going to yawn and say, Mandela died? Didn’t that already happen a year ago?”

Hostility to the media is satirized in an open letter by Richard Poplak from the foreign media to South Africa that appears in The Daily Maverick:

“As you may have noted, we’re back! It’s been four long months since the Oscar Pistorius bail hearing thing, and just as we were forgetting just how crappy the Internet connections are in Johannestoria, the Mandela story breaks.

“We feel that it is vital locals understand just how big a deal this is for us. In the real world, far away from your sleepy backwater, news works on a 24-hour cycle. That single shot of a hospital with people occasionally going into and out of the front door, while a reporter describes exactly what is happening, at length and in detail? That’s our bread and butter. It’s what we do. And you need to get out of the way while we do it.”

Why all the fanatical interest? The U.S. media loves larger-than-life personalities, often creating them when they don’t exist. Mandela has assumed the heroic mantle for them of Martin Luther King Jr. whose memory enjoys iconic status even as his achievements like Voting Rights Act was just picked apart by right-wing judicial buzzards in black robes. (King’s image was also sanitized with his international outlook often muzzled).

The current homage to Mandela wasn’t always like this. For many years, the U.S. media treated Mandela as a communist and terrorist, respecting South African censorship laws that kept his image secret. Reports about the CIA’s role in capturing him were few and far between. Ditto for evidence of U.S. spying documented in cables released by Wikileaks.

In the Reagan years, Mandela’s law partner Oliver Tambo, then the leader of the ANC while Mandela was in prison, was barred from coming to the U.S. and then, when he did, meeting with top officials. Later, Rep. Dick Cheney, R-Wyoming, refused to support a congressional call for Mandela’s release from jail.

In 1988, I, among other TV producers, launched the TV series “South Africa Now” to cover the unrest the networks were largely ignoring as stories shot by U.S. crews ended up on “the shelf,” not on the air.

A 1988 concert to free Mandela was shown by the Fox Network as a “freedom fest” with artists told not to mention Mandela’s name lest they “politicize” all the fun. When he was released in 2000, a jammed all-star celebration at London’s Wembley Stadium was shown everywhere in the world, except by the American networks.

Once Mandela adopted reconciliation as his principal political tenet and dropped demands for nationalization anchored in the ANC’s “Freedom Charter,” his image in the U.S. was quickly rehabilitated. He was elevated into a symbolic hero for all praised by the people and the global elite alike. Little mention was made of his role as the creator of an Armed Struggle, and its Commander in Chief,

U.S. networks also did not cover the role played by the U.S.-dominated IMF and World Bank in steering the economy in a market-oriented neo-liberal direction, assuring the new government could not erase deep inequality and massive poverty and that the whites would retain privileges.

The American press shaped how Mandela was portrayed in the U.S. The lawyer and anti-nuclear campaigner, Alice Slater, tells a story of her efforts to win Mandela's support for nuclear disarmament.

When "Nelson Mandela announced that he would be retiring from the presidency of South Africa, we organized a world-wide letter writing campaign, urging him to call for the abolition of nuclear weapons at his farewell address to the United Nations. The gambit worked.

"At the UN, Nelson Mandela called for the elimination of nuclear weapons, saying, 'these terrible and terrifying weapons of mass destruction – why do they need them anyway?' The London Guardian had a picture of Mandela on its front page, with the headline, 'Nelson Mandela Calls for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.'

"The New York Times had a story buried on page 46, announcing Mandela's retirement from the Presidency of South Africa and speculating on who might succeed him, reporting that he gave his last speech as President to the UN, while omitting to mention the content of his speech."

And so it goes, with his death seeming to be imminent, he has been reduced to a symbolic mythic figure, a moral voice, not the politician he always was. He became an adorable grandfather praised for his charities with his political ideas and values often lost in the ether of his celebrity. He has insisted that he not be treated as a saint or a savior. Tell that to the media.

As ANC veteran Pallo Jordan told me, "To call him a celebrity is to treat him like Madonna. And that's not what he is. At the same time, he deserves to be celebrated as the freedom fighter he was."

Watch the coverage and see if that message is coming through, with all of its implications for the struggle in South Africa that still lies ahead.

**News Dissector Danny Schechter made six documentaries about Nelson Mandela. He blogs at [newsdissector.net](http://newsdissector.net) and edits [Mediachannel.org](http://mediachannel.org). Comments to [dissector@mediachannel.org](mailto:dissector@mediachannel.org)**

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