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Review: No Easy Walk to Freedom

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# *No Easy Walk to Freedom*

Alton B. Pollard, III\*

Steve Clark, ed., **NELSON MANDELA SPEAKS: Forging a Democratic, Nonracial South Africa** (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1993), pp. 296, cloth \$50.00, paper \$18.95.

On Sunday afternoon, February 11, 1990, Nelson Mandela, the world's most famous political prisoner, walked through the gates of Victor Verster prison near Cape Town, South Africa. Seldom in the annals of modern history had an event been so widely anticipated or covered as Mandela's release. With the entire world looking on, he emerged after twenty-seven years in apartheid's prisons unbowed and unbroken, an august picture of quiet dignity and strength. Later that day, addressing an estimated crowd of 100,000, Mandela said, "I stand before you not as a prophet, but as a humble servant of you, the people. Your tireless and heroic sacrifices have made it possible for me to be here today. I therefore place the remaining years of my life in your hands." Not a prophet, Mandela nevertheless came out of prison as a promise of the future, a complex living symbol of revolutionary resistance and hope. In the person and presence of Mandela a new stage in the struggle for South Africa—a democratic, nonracial and nonsexist South Africa—found life.

The release of Nelson Mandela from prison, coupled with the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and other African political organizations, deepened and accelerated the black-led struggle to dismantle institutional white supremacy. The majority population of South Africa had long endured in their struggle to replace apartheid (which literally and figuratively means "apart-hate") with a more just and humane social, political, and economic order. But it was the insurgent mass mobilization in the days and weeks following Mandela's release, up to the scheduling of the first one-person, one-vote elections in the history of the country that provides the setting for this important book.

In the last four years Mandela and the Mass Democratic Movement linked with the ANC have seized the initiative in establishing a new agenda for South Africa's future. **Nelson Mandela Speaks: Forging a Democratic, Nonracial South Africa** is an extraordinary collection of thirty-two speeches, letters, and interviews from the leading voice against apartheid and discrimination. Presented in a variety of forums, these statements are addressed to ANC supporters, nationwide audiences in South Africa, the Pretoria government, domestic and foreign correspondents, and the African and global international community.

On the whole, this volume documents the expansive vision of Mandela and the ANC for a post-apartheid South Africa. Based largely on a program first articulated in the ANC's historic Freedom Charter of 1955, Mandela's statements are remarkably consistent in their commitment to a nonracial social democracy that bestows equal opportunity upon all citizens. Central to his radically egalitarian political vision is a mixed form of economy, in which the new South African state will actively

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intervene to redress historic inequities visited upon black people, especially in the areas of employment, education, health care, utilities and land ownership. In Mandela's own words, "the ANC holds no ideological positions which dictate that it must adopt a policy of nationalization." Nonetheless, the ANC President rightfully warns, "there is no self-regulating mechanism within the South African economy which will, on its own, ensure growth with equity."

The ANC of the 1990s remains committed to the racial inclusiveness that has characterized it for decades, but its views have gradually shifted from the earlier loose political alliances of "multiracialism" to a more democratic and unitary "nonracialism" in which anti-apartheid opponents, regardless of race ("Indians," "Coloured," "white") or political ideology (communists, socialists, Black Consciousness adherents), are accepted within the ranks. It was a logical but difficult step, then, for Mandela and the ANC leadership to next embrace a "nonsexism" blueprint for South Africa, a position long advocated by the ANC Women's League and expressed by other affiliates as well. It should come as no surprise to find that race and gender inclusiveness are still lower priorities for many of the rank-and-file African membership.

That said, not only have Mandela, the ANC and its allies worked vigorously to build diverse support among the South African population, they have simultaneously pushed President F. W. De Klerk's National Party and its allies on every front. By carrying his message to arenas domestic, continental and global, Mandela has struck critical blows against Pretoria's disingenuous, self-serving calls for "group rights" and later, "power sharing."

The first major test of Mandela's moral and political authority came with his tour of Europe, the United States and Africa from June through September 1990. His message to the world was that Pretoria's narrowly qualified version of black political inclusion was nothing but apartheid with a new face. By successfully appealing for the maintenance of sanctions against the South African state (the ANC is now calling for foreign investment in a renascent South Africa), Mandela and the ANC-led mass movement were able to advance a series of domestic demands: the return of exiles; the release of political prisoners; the repeal of discriminatory laws; the establishment of an interim government; and a democratically elected constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. That concessions have come but incrementally—accompanied by the resistance of Inkatha, anti-apartheid factionalism, and strategic state repression—serves as a discomfiting reminder of the insidious and hegemonic nature of white supremacist rule.

Some final thoughts. Noteworthy for its omission from this set of documents was a signifying speech given by Mandela earlier this year in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The occasion was the joint awarding of the United States' Liberty Medal to Mandela and De Klerk by President Bill Clinton. The date was 4 July 1993. In his remarks that day Mandela sagaciously chose to quote not one of America's founding figures but the "Father of the African-American Protest Movement," Frederick Douglass—"The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me.... This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice; I must mourn.... I shall see this day and its popular characteristics from the slave's point of view."

Over the next few months, as the transfer of power takes place, the specific shape of the new South Africa will also gradually appear. Hopefully, the multiparty mandate under which the Government of National Unity operates will prove adequate to effect a "peaceful" and just dismantling of the apartheid regime. The only thing that is certain to those of us who have struggled for the liberation of the world's oppressed and exploited is that there can be no turning back for South Africa. Not now, not ever. What the majority of South African people—whether classified as African, Indians, Coloured, or white—now ask of us is a lasting commitment to their struggle. To paraphrase Frederick Douglass, we must clearly envision and endorse the remaking of South Africa "from the point of view of the enslaved."

As South Africa moves toward the realization of freedom, I stand in solidarity with my brothers and sisters, rejoicing even as I fear the cataclysm that may lie ahead. For Nelson Mandela, the African National Congress, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, the South African Communist Party, and the resurgent black-led movement; even in these early days of multiracial democracy, victory while near is not yet. For the justice-bound, there is "no easy walk to freedom."

*Amandla! Ngawethu! Power! It is ours!*