

Nelson Mandela finally getting his just due

By Nicole C. Lee

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Though the world celebrated, on July 18, Nelson Mandela will turn 90. For any human being, reaching the age of 90 is a monumental feat.

For a man who was imprisoned for almost 30 years it is virtually a miracle.

Mandela is a worldwide symbol for freedom. A Nobel Prize winner and the first president of a multi-racial democratic South Africa, he has been a constant warrior in the pursuit of truth and justice.

Yet, the U.S. government did not take him off the terror watch list until June 27, 2008. Yes. The U.S. government considered Nelson Mandela and the freedom fighters of the African National Congress terrorist until June 27 of this year.

In and out of office, Mandela has spoken truth to power and worked tirelessly to resolve conflicts within the African continent.

Whether in leading the struggle against apartheid regime or championing the cause of people with HIV/AIDS, Mandela has consistently challenged the great powers of the globe.

For him, leadership means representing the poor and disenfranchised, not the rich and connected.

I like talking with school-aged children about Nelson Mandela. Their faces light up as I talk about his presidency and the values of multiculturalism.

For them, Mandela has always been a hero. They were not exposed to the propaganda we were dealt prior to a free South Africa.

Remember the good/bad ol' days? The Reagan era? Countries were categorized based on their allegiance to one Super Power (the U.S.) or the other (Soviet Union), while African countries and their people were just pawns in the Cold War chess game.

Mandela played a key role within the African National Congress (ANC) and Umkhonto we Sizwe, its armed wing formed in 1960 after the Sharpsville Massacre.

The ANC party, now the majority party in South Africa, was banned by the apartheid government in 1960, remaining an outcast political party until 1990.

For decades, Nelson Mandela and high level government officials from the ANC party have remained on the U.S. terror watch list. Stricter legal measures put into place af-



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ter 9/11 solidified the ANC's categorization as a terrorist organization, and even required the South African ambassador to the U.S. to obtain special permission to enter the U.S.

Certainly the Reagan and Bush I Administrations had no love for the Southern African Liberation movements.

Reagan's constructive engagement policy was a complete ruse to allow 'business as usual' in apartheid South Africa. As late as 2000, Dick Cheney, who was in the Senate at the time, defended his vote against economic sanctions on the apartheid regime.

But recently Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and officials in the Justice Department have all vocalized their support for his removal and now, the 148th session of Congress has worked to ensure that the U.S. is now on the right side of history. Finally!

On June 27, 2008, the U.S. Senate passed legislation to protect ANC members from being denied visas to enter the United States.

According to reports, for years the Senate based its decision on the ANC members' anti-

apartheid activities. In passing HR 5690, we see that the arcane and unfair characterizations of the ANC members has given way to a more fair and unbiased view towards their anti-apartheid activities.

To be sure, state sponsored violence and armed attacks against Black citizens were a part of apartheid in South Africa.

But far too often, those struggling for freedom are demonized as an excuse to continue the repression. Freedom fighters looked like terrorists from the perspective of an evil empire, and no doubt this was true in South Africa.

Wounds are still healing from this painful period in South African history and Mandela has played a vital role in the healing process.

For decades, Mandela has shown us that no obstacle is too great in the quest for fairness and freedom. He has been a shining beacon for liberation movements around the world, and stands shoulders above most of the men and women who claim to be the voice of the people. He was able to forgive his oppressors while leading a revolutionary movement, and we have finally taken the first step towards showing him the respect his legacy of visionary sacrifice deserves.

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Rise in gun violence needs our full attention

By Marian Wright Edelman

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Over a 48-hour period this Memorial Day weekend, 21 people were shot in New York City, six fatally.

A gunman opened fire on a crowd in a shopping district in Queens and wounded five people.

A 15-year-old was killed while leaving a party in Manhattan.

A 13-year-old boy and a 15-year-old girl were wounded in Harlem.

This spring frenzy of gun violence has not been limited to New York. Other cities have experienced a similar rash of shootings. In one weekend in June, 14 people were shot to death in Los Angeles County. The police attributed the violence to gang activity.

During the early morning hours of May 24, three men were shot to death in Philadelphia. Each was the victim of multiple bullet wounds. In the last weekend in May, seven

people were killed and three were wounded in the District of Columbia in just nine hours.

In a city where homicides had been on the decline in recent years, the number of D.C. murders surpassed the previous year's mark for May. A rash of shootings earlier this year caused the District's police chief to call a virtual "all hands on deck" alert to put as many officers on street duty as possible as a deterrent to more gun violence.

Regardless of whether the shootings were motivated by a gang rivalry, revenge or an unwelcome glance at someone else's girlfriend, the rampant gun violence plaguing our nation must stop.

To do something about this scourge, we have to address its causes. There are more



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than 200 million, privately owned firearms in the United States.

Too many of these guns have ended up in the wrong hands. Congress's refusal to extend the Assault Weapons Ban didn't help.

Since the ban expired in 2004, the number of deaths among children and teens from firearms increased for the first time since the ban was enacted in 1994. The June 26 Supreme Court ruling to strike down Washington, D.C.'s handgun ban dealt yet another blow to securing our children's safety from gun violence.

Putting a police officer on every street corner is not feasible and resorting to repressive measures would be abhorrent. But there are things we can do.

Those who own guns should remove them from their homes so they are out of the reach of children and irresponsible adults. We don't need to read any more newspaper accounts like the one on June 9 when a 4-year-old girl in Columbia, South Carolina, pulled a gun from her grandmother's handbag and shot herself in the chest.

We must urge Congress to impose common sense restrictions on the purchase and availability of firearms.

Forty percent of all guns in the United States are purchased without a background check, including those bought at gun shows. Congress must enact legislation that closes the gun show loophole by requiring criminal background checks on those who purchase guns from unlicensed dealers.

There are a number of community-based models that can be replicated like the Boston Ten Point Coalition, an ecumenical Christian community, which achieved a 30-month moratorium on juvenile gun violence in that city.

It focuses on developing Black and Latino youth, especially those at risk of violence, drug abuse and other destructive behaviors. The organization provides counseling in schools on peer conflict and gang mediation. Much of the group's work is done through home visits.

In addition to faith institutions, the coalition includes community organizations, government agencies and local businesses.

The toxic elements of popular culture that celebrate violent behavior through the powerful media of music, movies and television are major contributors to the rise of gun violence.

To counter the constant stream of brutal images our children witness daily, we must arm them with nonviolence strategies on how to resolve conflicts.

Each of us must do more to personally instill in our own children the values that will lead to the creation of safe communities. We need to mold them into healthy adults who are brought up with love, self-confidence and a generous spirit.

As I've mentioned before, we need to bring back "Cradle Rolls," when a child born to anyone in our church community was immediately placed on this special list, and members of the congregation were responsible for following these children until they reached the "age of accountability."

We need to extend the Cradle Roll to all our communities. And we need to enact common sense gun control measures.

The rise of gun violence in our communities is serious and dangerous, but we don't have to stand by as mere witnesses. We can do something about it. We must take action now to curb the threat that firearms pose to our nation. Too much is at stake. We cannot allow these shots to go unheard.

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need, all the knowledge we need to succeed in this country and in this world as it exists today, lies in the accomplishments of our ancestors, especially in the area of economic empowerment.

The "struggles" we face today pale in comparison to what our people went through during their early existence in America. So let's stop the negative behavior and get busy with a lot more positive behavior, heeding the lessons along the way.

Marcus Garvey said, "The Negro must be up and doing if he will break down the prejudice of the rest of the world. We must strike out for ourselves in the course of material achievement, and by our own effort and energy present to the world those forces by which the progress of man is judged."

you want in life you must make up your mind to do it for yourself and accomplish it for yourself, and then God will bless the effort, because He will realize that you are using your intelligence for the best."

Now to whom are you going to listen? Marcus Garvey, Martin Delany, Ida B. Wells, Maria Stewart? Or, will you follow those who would keep you in one place, doing one thing, and never reaching your full potential? Who knows?

Maybe you or your child could be the next Delany — multi-talented, multi-skilled, and determined to use your resources to help Black people.

If our ancestors could do it in the 1800's surely we can do even more today.

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Garvey also admonished, "Whatsoever