

CENSORED 2015

INSPIRING WE THE PEOPLE

The Top Censored Stories and Media Analysis of 2013–14

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with **Project Censored**

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Rewriting Apartheid

News Media Whitewashing of South Africa and the Legacy of Nelson Mandela

Brian Covert

Apartheid in South Africa was a legalized and institutionalized system of racial segregation and economic “separate development,” imposed by a European minority population on an African majority. From 1948 to 1994, this system robbed millions of South African citizens of basic human rights, destroyed countless individual lives, broke up families and uprooted entire communities, and sent thousands of its people beyond its borders into exile.

South African apartheid also divided the international community of nations, and pitted the citizens of a number of countries against their own governments in demanding an end to political and economic support of the apartheid system. For years on end, hardly a day went by without news about apartheid and South Africa being carried by some news organization or another, somewhere on the planet.

The passing of former South African president Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela in 2013 at age ninety-five, and his extraordinary life over those nine decades as arguably the greatest statesman of modern times, gave the press worldwide a golden opportunity to go back and dig deeply into the history of apartheid, the long and often bloody road that Mandela and his people had taken to freedom, and the roles that various other countries had played in that process.

Yet the corporate press in the United States and elsewhere passed by—if not avoided—this opportunity, and, in consequence, important news stories about apartheid South Africa and Mandela’s legacy went underreported, misreported, or not reported at all. The crime of apartheid—an “indelible blight on human history,” as Mandela him-

self aptly called it—was all but rewritten out of history and media memory in the wake of Mandela’s passing.

This report, using a diversity of available sources (print and audio-visual, database and web-based, corporate and independent media), attempts to correct that rewritten record by covering some of the more important issues surrounding Mandela, South Africa, and apartheid that corporate media either distorted or deleted altogether.

A SANITIZED STRUGGLE

When African-American journalists who have reported on the South African scene for some of the biggest American news outlets reviewed the US corporate media’s performance in reporting Nelson Mandela’s death, prominent among their criticism was the sanitizing from most coverage of one key element of the Mandela story: the armed struggle.²

An informal survey of corporate media coverage of Mandela’s passing shows that criticism to be well-founded.

“Mandela is often mentioned in the same breath as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., who also changed nations through non-violence. Yet Gandhi and King were killed before their dreams were realized,” reported the Associated Press shortly after Mandela’s passing.³ CNN labeled the late Mandela a “pacifist” as well as someone who was “greatly inspired by Gandhi, by the nonviolent struggle.”⁴

It is true that Mandela did follow the policy of nonviolent resistance espoused by his political organization, the African National Congress (ANC), up until the early 1960s. But it is also a fact that increasingly brutal crackdowns and the South African government’s outlawing of the ANC and other grassroots organizations pushing for peaceful change led Mandela and others to create in 1961 a new armed wing of the ANC called “Umkhonto we Sizwe” (Spear of the Nation), or “MK” for short. Mandela served as the guerrilla army’s first commander in chief.

In Mandela’s first-ever television interview, conducted with a British reporter in May 1961 during the year or so that Mandela was an underground fugitive in South Africa, he made his position clear:

There are many people who feel that it is useless and futile for us to continue talking peace and nonviolence against a government whose reply is only savage attacks on an unarmed and defenseless people. And I think the time has come for us to consider, in the light of our experiences in this stay at home [protest campaign], whether the [nonviolent] methods which we have applied so far are adequate.⁵

A month after this interview, Mandela launched Umkhonto we Sizwe; six months later in December 1961, MK conducted its first acts of sabotage by setting off bombs at electric power stations and government offices around South Africa. The ANC's armed struggle had begun.

Media Faces of Mandela

Even against that historical background, however, some in the US news media could not resist the temptation of tacking on a few other inaccurate faces as well to the Gandhi/King face of Mandela.

NBC aired interviews from South Africa in the wake of Mandela's passing with former US presidents Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter, both of whom compared Mandela to Gandhi and King. Carter went one better, adding a comparison of Mandela to Mother Teresa, the late Albanian nun who had been made a saint by the Catholic Church.⁶

To some in the US black community, this kind of reportage smacked of a media whitewashing of Mandela's true face: that of an African patriot who had helped bring the apartheid regime down to its knees by taking up arms and fighting back.

"In whitewashing the image of Mr. Mandela, the corporate media's plan is to do to Mandela what was done to Dr. Martin Luther King, namely, to make him a one-dimensional peacemaker who had no other agenda than to appease his enemies," wrote a columnist for the *Final Call*, the newspaper of the US-based Nation of Islam, once the spiritual home of the late African-American leader Malcolm X.⁷

Reverend Jesse Jackson, a former aide to King, expressed similar sentiments. "There is an attempt to do in his [Mandela's] death what they could not do in life—take away his story," Jackson said while in

South Africa for Mandela's memorial services. "He did not go to jail as some out-of-control youth who needed to be matured. He went in as a freedom fighter and came out as a freedom fighter."⁸

And in an audio report from prison in the US, African-American journalist/activist Mumia Abu-Jamal commented: "At his passing, American media has painted [Mandela] as a kind of African 'civil rights' leader, perhaps Martin Luther King the Fifth, with a halo of white hair." Abu-Jamal added, "In fact, it is dangerously misleading to make of Mandela a King or a Malcolm [X]. He was neither. He was himself: an African lawyer who used every tool available to him—legal when he could, illegal when he must—to resist a system that crushed African lives like peanut shells. He was a revolutionary, an armed guerrilla, and commander of a guerrilla army. . . ."⁹

But if the US corporate media were quick to sanitize Mandela's legacy, there were also some prominent African Americans who did their share to help out.

In an interview broadcasted on the NBC *Today* show, former US secretary of state Colin Powell said of Mandela: "He went for love. He said, 'Let's reach out and show love and reconciliation.' He kind of reminds me of the experience of the United States. He's [like] our [George] Washington, and our [Abraham] Lincoln, and our Martin Luther King all rolled in one."¹⁰

That same line was followed by US President Barack Obama during his public tribute to Mandela at a soccer stadium in the South African black township of Soweto. Obama compared Mandela to Gandhi, to King, to "America's founding fathers," and to Lincoln: "Emerging from prison, without the force of arms, [Mandela] would—like Abraham Lincoln—hold his country together when it threatened to break apart."¹¹ (Contrary to Obama's claim, in fact, MK, the "force of arms" that Mandela had organized and led before he went to prison, was still waging guerrilla war and was still a potent political tool against the apartheid regime when Mandela came out of prison twenty-seven years later.)¹²

All absurd likening aside of Mandela to US presidents Washington and Lincoln and to Mother Teresa, what did Mandela himself make of such comparisons between his struggle and nonviolent movements led by renowned figures like Gandhi and King?

In a 1999 special edition of *Time* magazine devoted mostly to Albert Einstein as “person of the century,” Mandela penned a two-page tribute to Gandhi that laid it all out:

Gandhi remained committed to nonviolence; I followed the Gandhian strategy for as long as I could, but then there came a point in our struggle when the brute force of the oppressor could no longer be countered through passive resistance alone. We founded Umkhonto we Sizwe and added a military dimension to our struggle.

Gandhi himself never ruled out violence absolutely and unreservedly. He conceded the necessity of arms in certain situations. He said, “Where choice is set between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence. . . . I prefer to use arms in defense of honor rather than remain the vile witness of dishonor. . . .”

Violence and nonviolence are not mutually exclusive; it is the predominance of the one or the other that labels a struggle.¹³

One US independent cable television outlet posed the question after the ex-South African leader’s death: was Mandela a terrorist or a pacifist?¹⁴ The correct answer is that he was neither one. Until the US media get this basic question straight, it is doubtful that the true legacy of Mandela as a revolutionary figure in his own right will be reported to and understood by the wider public.

USA: THE CIA CONNECTION

For years following Nelson Mandela’s arrest by South African police in 1962, rumors swirled that the US government’s Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had somehow been involved. Yet despite the importance of this issue to the apartheid saga, the American media’s reporting of it over time has ranged from sporadic, erratic coverage at best to no coverage at all.

In 1986, while Mandela was serving his second decade of a life sentence in prison, the long-rumored CIA connection finally broke the surface of the news barrier. Three South African newspapers,

including the *Star* daily paper of Johannesburg, reported that a US government diplomat in South Africa (who reportedly had a little too much to drink at a farewell party) admitted that two decades earlier he had been working for the CIA and had been the one who passed on the tip to South African authorities of Mandela's underground whereabouts.¹⁵

An independent US television producer, John Kelly, had been looking into those same rumors stateside as well: "I initially obtained a 1962 secret CIA report about the penetration and surveillance of the ANC, and this led me to begin an investigation. And right at that time, CBS News contacted me because a story had broken in the Johannesburg *Star* about the general incident, about the original arrest of Mandela."¹⁶

And so it was that on August 5, 1986—twenty-four years to the very day after the arrest of Mandela—the American public first heard of the CIA connection when anchor Dan Rather announced it during prime time on the *CBS Evening News*.¹⁷

The two-minute-long segment, though framed within the narrow context of Cold War hostilities between the US and the Soviet Union, nevertheless expanded on the *Star's* story and gave a name and a visible face to the loose-tongued US diplomat: Donald Rickard, a former consular officer based in South Africa. The CBS report quoted "US intelligence sources" as saying that Rickard had been working in South Africa at the time of Mandela's arrest under diplomatic cover for the CIA.¹⁸

The long-held rumors had finally been backed with hard facts and were now out there waiting to be investigated further by the esteemed American Fourth Estate.

And then . . . silence. No major US media picked up the explosive story from there—not the big papers of record such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* or any other of the US television networks.¹⁹ US-based British journalist Andrew Cockburn did manage to cleverly slip the news about the CIA and Mandela into an article he contributed to the *Times*, but Cockburn's story appeared on an op-ed page, not on the news pages.²⁰

There the CIA connection to Mandela stayed, buried at the bottom of the dead-news pile and unreported to the public for another four years.

Liberating the Story

One week after the February 11, 1990, release of Mandela from prison, *Newsweek* magazine touched on the CIA connection: “[B]etrayed by informers—some accused the CIA, though no one ever proved it—he went out one day disguised as a chauffeur, ran into a roadblock and lost his freedom for the next 27 years.”²¹

But just as they had done a few years before with CBS, the US media on the whole took a pass on following up that information.²²

Then, a few months later, with Mandela in Europe and planning to visit North America next, the CIA connection was dug up again and put back into the headlines and airwaves in a big, unexpected way.

Joseph Albright and Marcia Kunstel, two reporters from the Washington DC bureau of Cox News Service—through the company’s flagship newspaper, the regional *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*—published details of the US government’s “increasingly embarrassing secret” of the 1962 CIA tip leading to Mandela’s arrest.²³

In the Cox News report, an anonymous “former US official” quoted another South Africa–based US CIA operative, Paul Eckel, as saying within hours of Mandela’s capture: “We have turned Mandela over to the South African security branch. We gave them every detail, what he would be wearing, the time of day, just where he would be. They have picked him up. It is one of our greatest coups.”²⁴

The front-page *Journal-Constitution* story also quoted Gerard Ludi, a former South African intelligence operative, as saying that the CIA had a “deep cover” South African agent working in the inner circle of the ANC branch in Durban back in 1962, and that the deep-cover agent reported to the top US officer working for the CIA in South Africa at the time, Millard Shirley. “Millard was very proud of that operation,” Ludi was quoted as saying.

Caught with their proverbial pants down, the Big Media Feeds in the US that for so long had gone out of their way to avoid investigating the CIA connection to Mandela—the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* in particular—were now forced to report the story, and did so: they mostly repeated the *Journal-Constitution* story while adding no original reporting of their own to it, aside from contacting the CIA to ask for a comment.²⁵

But the CIA was not commenting; neither was the White House.²⁶ Then-US president George H. W. Bush, a former CIA director, was publicly evasive about the new CIA-Mandela revelations—even though it was Bush himself, as vice president under prior US president Ronald Reagan, who had approved the inclusion of Mandela and the ANC in an international “Terrorist Group Profiles” index that had been compiled just two years before in 1988.²⁷

African-American leaders demanded a full disclosure of the CIA’s role in Mandela’s original arrest and a US government apology to him.²⁸ But during Mandela’s first whirlwind tour of US cities soon afterward in summer 1990, neither a full disclosure nor an official apology to Mandela ever came—not from Bush or any other US president after him, including Barack Obama.

The Struggle Continues

When Mandela died, the CIA role in his arrest was revived among some independent and alternative media. But most of the US establishment press once again showed no sign of wanting to go back and revisit the story.²⁹

Though the details have remained officially unconfirmed, it is generally known today that both US and British government spy agencies had the activities of a number of South African antiapartheid activists like Mandela under close surveillance for decades, both within South Africa and overseas, and were sharing that information with their South African intelligence counterparts.³⁰

In early 2014, a month after Mandela’s death, the online *Huffington Post* reported that Ryan Shapiro, an activist and PhD student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), had filed a federal lawsuit against the CIA, seeking information on the agency’s connection to the late Mandela’s arrest.³¹ The lawsuit seeks for the CIA to disclose its connections to South African intelligence agencies, plus any other information that it may have on past investigations of the late Mandela and of antiapartheid movements in both the US and South Africa.³²

In March, *Democracy Now!* broke the story that Shapiro had also filed lawsuits against the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Na-

tional Security Agency (NSA), and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), seeking information on what they too have in their files on the arrest and activities of the late Mandela.³³

The CIA connection to Mandela is, by any standard of news, a story worth investigating and reporting. Yet the facts of that connection remain mostly hidden to this day behind a Great Wall of official obscurity and a US corporate media whiteout. It has been a real struggle for more than fifty years for the whole truth of this important story to come out in the media and, to borrow a phrase from the international antiapartheid movement of the time, the struggle for that truth continues.

JAPAN: “HONORARY WHITE”

Following Nelson Mandela’s passing, an article in the *Japan Times* daily newspaper in Tokyo typified much of the generally respectful coverage in the Japanese vernacular and English-language press on the former South African president.

The Times reported on Mandela’s three visits to Japan in his lifetime, the last one being in 1995, a year into his presidency: “During the five-day official visit, he expressed appreciation for Japan’s support during South Africa’s struggle to end racial segregation and achieve democracy.”³⁴

But as an alert reader of the story correctly pointed out, such news coverage in Japan gave a greatly distorted view of the true relationship that had existed back then between Japan Inc. and apartheid South Africa.

In fact, at the time Japan was playing both sides of South Africa’s racial divide, giving lip service to “support” for Mandela and the black antiapartheid struggle while also remaining fully engaged in trade with the country’s white-ruled apartheid regime.

Missing from this and other news reporting in Japan following Mandela’s death was the one controversial factor that defined the Japan–South Africa relationship throughout the Cold War era: the preferential status known in Japanese as *meiyo hakujin* (“honorary white”), which was officially bestowed on the Japanese people by the South African government and accepted as such by Japan’s government and business community.

The honorary white status for Japan had first been set by South Africa back in 1930—even before formal diplomatic ties between the two nations were established in 1937, and long before South Africa’s official apartheid policies of “separate development” of the country’s races became the law of the land starting in 1948.

The idea of the South African government back in those early days was to grease the wheels of trade with Japan by issuing a special, short-term exemption for Japanese tourists, students, and wholesale merchants and buyers of South African products to reside in South Africa.³⁵ The honorary white designation was seen from the beginning by the Japanese government as a positive step for “our mutual commerce and amicable relations.”³⁶

What that meant in daily life was that any Japanese visitor to South Africa granted an honorary white exemption—unlike most South Africans of color—would be allowed to live in whites-only residential areas, to frequent whites-only facilities such as restaurants and public swimming pools, and to use whites-only public transportation such as buses. (As time went on, however, even those honorary white Japanese found themselves being discriminated against and unaccepted by white South African society.)

Japan came under increasing pressure by the international community, especially African nations, from the 1960s onward to take a stronger stand against apartheid. Yet while other Western countries had been forced by domestic and international pressures over the years to reduce trade with South Africa, Japan was steadily holding the course and in some areas even increasing its ties.

Thus in 1986, for the first time ever, Japan had the dubious “honor” of becoming the world’s number-one trading partner with apartheid South Africa. That honor was repeated again the following year in 1987.³⁷

Condemnation of Japan–South Africa relations now seemed to come from all corners, domestic and foreign.

In December 1988, the United Nations passed a resolution expressing grave concern at the growing repression in South Africa and calling for more severe international measures to further isolate Pretoria. To Tokyo’s horror, the UN General Assembly singled out Japan by name in its resolution, calling upon “those States which have in-

creased their trade with South Africa and, particularly, Japan, which recently emerged as the most important trading partner of South Africa, to sever trade relations with South Africa.”³⁸ The government of Japan ignored that urgent UN recommendation.

Mandela in Japan

Erased too from Japanese news coverage following Mandela’s death was the controversy that surrounded his first two visits to Japan in the early 1990s.

The first visit was in October 1990, eight months after his release from prison in South Africa. Mandela, then ANC deputy president, was invited by the Japanese government on an official state visit to Japan during a fundraising swing that he and an ANC delegation were making through Asian nations and Australia.

Upon his arrival in Japan, Mandela received a warm welcome from the public as he addressed a stadium crowd of about 20,000 Japanese and foreign-resident supporters in the city of Osaka.³⁹ But in the days that followed in Tokyo during Mandela’s meetings with government and business leaders, then–prime minister Toshiki Kaifu of Japan personally turned down Mandela’s request for \$25 million, saying Japanese laws did not permit such financial funding of overseas political organizations.⁴⁰

The financial shunning from Japan—apartheid South Africa’s second-largest trading partner at the time—was a major one, and the only such rejection that Mandela and the ANC received from any of the other countries on that first Asian tour.

That snub was followed up by another one a half-year later in April 1991, when the International Press Institute (IPI), a press advocacy organization based in Austria, invited Mandela to be the keynote speaker at that year’s IPI annual conference in the Japanese city of Kyoto.

Word was out from the ANC’s office in Tokyo that the Japanese government had put one condition on Mandela’s upcoming visit: no politically oriented speeches while he was in Japan as a private citizen. That would mean that unlike all the other countries Mandela had been visiting, no big ANC fundraising events could be held in Japan,

and consequently no large sums of money would be going back home with Mandela to South Africa for the antiapartheid struggle.

And that is exactly how it played out during his second visit to Japan. Mandela gave his address on the importance of press freedoms to the international gathering of journalists in Kyoto, then quietly departed Japan before most of the Japanese media and public knew he was even in the country.⁴¹

Diplomatic Moves

The reason behind such an embargo on public appearances by Mandela became clear enough just a few months later when Japan, like other countries anxious to get trade back on track, lifted many of its already weak sanctions against South Africa.

Some months after that in early 1992, despite vehement protests from the ANC at that stage, Japan and South Africa resumed full diplomatic ties, opening embassies in each other's nations for the first time.⁴²

"It was a great setback for Japan's diplomacy in the post-Cold War [period], ruining all that we've tried to build through the years," Jerry Matsila, the ANC's representative in Tokyo, said of the premature moves. "The image that I've tried to build among black Africans is that Japan is morally conscious and should be given a chance. They've destroyed all of that."⁴³

A few months later in June 1992, white South African President F. W. de Klerk paid an official visit to Japan as the first head of state from South Africa ever to set foot on Japanese soil.⁴⁴

As things turned out, it was Mandela who was elected president two years later in 1994 in South Africa's first democratic elections. A year into his presidency in 1995, Mandela returned to Japan for his third and last visit to the country, this time as head of state of a free South Africa.

Following Mandela's death in 2013, prominent government officials of the current ultra-right-wing administration of Japan were quick to dispense with accolades for the late South African leader, in the process giving history a good, old-fashioned rewriting. The Japanese ambassador to the United Nations, for one, fondly remembered Mandela's supposed "strong connection with Japan."⁴⁵

Likewise, unreported in most Japanese media coverage of Mandela's death was any sign at all that South Africa's discriminatory "honorary white" status had ever existed—a status that Japan Inc., in its pursuit of ever more profits, had embraced right up to the end of apartheid, even at the cost of being internationally ostracized.

CENSORED TRUTHS

Well-known media personalities in the US took the opportunity of Nelson Mandela's passing to swap old war stories of their past coverage of South Africa and to generally pat themselves on the back for a job well done.⁴⁶

"[T]his broadcast made a commitment to cover [Mandela's] struggle when few others were," one ABC News anchor presumptuously announced. "*Nightline* has been there every step of the way on his long walk to freedom."⁴⁷

But if those in the US corporate media had bothered to check the historical record, they would have found a much different story to report: one of the more shameful periods in US press history in which the American media submitted to outside censorship and even censored themselves and others when it came to coverage of apartheid in South Africa.

Removing the Images

In 1985 and again the following year, South African President P. W. Botha declared a state of emergency in the country.

In an attempt to remove brutal images of police and military repression from the news reports of the world, the South African government began expelling from the country foreign news correspondents whose coverage was deemed anything less than flattering of apartheid. Foreign media outlets remaining in South Africa toned down their reports.

The desired result was soon achieved: the "bad news" about South Africa disappeared almost overnight from corporate media coverage and from public view.

Richard M. Cohen, a CBS News senior producer, was among the

outspoken few within the US journalistic community at the time who called for US media companies based in South Africa to pull out of the country rather than continue to censor their own news coverage under the apartheid regime's draconian laws.

Cohen blasted his profession's performance in a *New York Times* opinion article: "We play an insidious game of video appeasement with the [South African] government. Walk up to the line. Don't cross it. Show as much as you think you can get away with, never more."⁴⁸

But some elites in the US media establishment preferred to play that game. Following Cohen's article appearing in the *Times*, his boss, CBS News president Howard Stringer, personally wrote a letter to South African government information officials, reassuring them that CBS intended to play by the rules as long as it remained in the country.⁴⁹

Not even the highly respected anchor Walter Cronkite, America's favorite avuncular figure of TV news, was beyond the reach of US media self-censorship. Following a trip by Cronkite to South Africa, where he and a CBS News crew had filmed partly in secret for a planned documentary called *Children of Apartheid*, executives at CBS took the highly unusual step of having a South African lawyer sign off on the TV program before it could be aired to viewers in the United States. "I've never been involved in one where that's been done," Cronkite responded. "I found that whole process quite strange."⁵⁰

In 1988, the government of Canada commissioned a study of the effects of South African censorship of the media. The study found that news coverage about South Africa by the leading US commercial television networks—CBS, NBC, and ABC—dropped dramatically in the wake of South African government press restrictions. "Pretoria has been largely successful in removing scenes of poverty, violence, and human rights violations from the television newscasts of the western world," the report found.⁵¹

Incident at Capitol Hill

Following up on the Canadian government study, a US congressional hearing was arranged in Washington DC over two days in March 1988 before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs' subcommittee

on Africa to investigate the extent of South African government censorship on the US public.⁵²

It was on the second day of the subcommittee hearing that some heavy hitters in the American media industry were scheduled to testify on censorship in South Africa and tell it “the way it was”: Cronkite of CBS News; John McChesney, a senior editor with National Public Radio (NPR); former *Boston Globe* editor Tom Winship, representing the Washington DC–based Center for Foreign Journalists; political commentator Hodding Carter III, who worked in the US Department of State under past president Jimmy Carter; and Richard Manning, former Johannesburg bureau chief for *Newsweek*.⁵³

When the time came for them to testify before Congress that day, however, not one of those influential media persons even bothered to show up—not even Uncle Walter of CBS News.

A seemingly stunned Howard Wolpe (D-MI), the subcommittee’s chairman, said that a fear by American journalists of putting themselves or their US news companies “at serious risk of retaliation by the South African government” was the real reason behind most of the no-shows that day, and the reason that other unnamed journalists had declined earlier invitations to testify to the subcommittee as well.⁵⁴

“These events are truly alarming,” Wolpe said, opening the second day’s hearing. “They suggest that South Africa’s manipulation of the United States press penetrates well beyond South Africa’s borders. It extends right into Capitol Hill.”⁵⁵

CBS News later denied any such fear of retaliation by South Africa, saying only that it was “not appropriate” for Cronkite to appear “before a House committee under circumstances in which the editorial process, protected by the First Amendment, could come under scrutiny.”⁵⁶

With most of the subcommittee’s star witnesses now suddenly absent, the final day of the congressional hearing turned into a searing indictment of US media cooperation with apartheid.

The only journalist to show up that day was Kenneth Walker, a former ABC News correspondent then working for *USA Today* television. He testified how, as an African-American reporter, he had lobbied ABC News management for years to send a correspondent to South Africa to regularly cover the volatile situation there. When ABC had finally relented and broadcasted a special edition of its *Nightline*

program live from South Africa in 1985, he said, it “subsequently became the most honored program in the history of broadcast news.”⁵⁷ (A far cry from ABC having “been there every step of the way,” as a *Nightline* anchor would boast two decades later.)

The real issue, Walker emphasized, was not that the US press, with all its resources, could not fully report on the crisis facing the majority black population of South Africa due to censorship, but rather that the American press would not take the risk. “I think once again the basic problem in South Africa really has less to do with restrictions than it does with the will and nerve of the management of US news organizations,” he testified.⁵⁸

In the end, Walker’s damning statements that day about his own profession, like the rest of the congressional hearing’s two days of testimony, disappeared into a media vacuum. Not a single US national newspaper or TV network reported on the congressional hearing on South African censorship.⁵⁹ The proceedings appeared only on the C-SPAN cable television network in a live broadcast.

By the time of Mandela’s death twenty-five years later, US television media could not devote enough air time to South Africa. News personalities gushed with praise and personal anecdotes of Mandela as a much-loved and respected international figure. Take, for example, ABC News correspondent Ron Claiborne, on why it was “always difficult for me personally” to be professionally detached when reporting on Mandela: “Something kept getting in the way—the fact that I admired the man deeply.”⁶⁰

But if the US media, especially broadcast media, had gone beyond all the sentimental small talk and been more honest about their own past coverage of South Africa, they could have reported on how the US press had been no stranger to issues of censorship and self-censorship over the years. For media companies busy rewriting apartheid and priding themselves on “being there every step of the way,” however, that was one news story that would go unreported following Mandela’s demise.

THE NEXT MANDELA

No sooner had Mandela passed away than some in the media started scurrying around in search of a worthy replacement.

“[W]hile Nelson Mandela’s work is sadly done, his dream is unfinished. The search for ‘the next Mandela’ is on,” a Canadian children’s rights activist declared in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper of Toronto.⁶¹

“The next Nelson Mandela of the world is rotting in a jail cell tonight, just like Mandela nearly withered for 27 years on Robben Island,” surmised one senior writer for the *Philadelphia Daily News*. “Or he is on someone’s terrorist watch list, or she is segregated and searched every time she travels through an international airport.”⁶²

“Where is the [next] British Mandela prepared to fight—really fight—for equal opportunities? To rail against the same injustices that galvanized Mandela: poverty and lack of human dignity?” a former British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) announcer pleadingly asked.⁶³

One right-wing media personality in the USA found the answer there among his own listeners: “I tell you, *you* are the next Nelson Mandela. You are the next Martin Luther King. You are the next Gandhi. You are the next Abraham Lincoln. You are the next George Washington.”⁶⁴

And on an NPR program titled “Who is the Next Mandela?,” a *New York Times* columnist found it “kind of frustrating, frankly, that so much of the analysis has been backward-looking at the mistakes that the US made when Mandela was in prison years ago,” preferring instead to move on and “stand up for people in various parts of the world who are now in prison and now need our help.”⁶⁵

Mandela, while he was alive, seemed to be an irresistible media choice when it came to reporting news related to South Africa. But by focusing on some vague notion of who might occupy Mandela’s high pedestal on the global stage now that he is gone, those in the media are overlooking some bigger, more critical questions that need to be asked and reported about the country today.

This year marks exactly twenty years since the end of apartheid in 1994 and the birth of a democratic South Africa. A new generation, the so-called “born-frees”—those born into a free, post-apartheid nation—has now come of age. In May of this year they became the first of their generation to be eligible to vote in South Africa’s parliamentary elections, the first national elections held after Mandela’s death.

But as South African writer T. O. Molefe has noted, South Africa

today is a country with huge economic, social, and educational disparities that threaten to undo the reconciliation of the “rainbow nation” that Mandela worked to bring together in his lifetime.⁶⁶

At the time of Mandela’s death, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*, a South African–produced epic motion picture based on his autobiography, was showing at big movie theaters in cities around the world to great media acclaim.⁶⁷

Showing in various countries around the same time to smaller audiences and with much less US media attention was a documentary film, *Dear Mandela*, also South African–produced, that raises some very uncomfortable but pressing issues. The film shows how masses of poor black residents of the country’s sprawling shantytowns (officially called “informal settlements”) continue to be forcibly evicted as a matter of local government policies, and how the ANC, the party of Mandela, is viewed as both condoning excessive police violence and being behind mob actions against those so-called shack dwellers who dare to protest their living conditions.⁶⁸

There are many within and outside of South Africa who see the race-based apartheid system of the past as essentially having been replaced by a class-based apartheid system over the past two decades. The born-frees of today’s South Africa have inherited from apartheid extremely high levels of poverty, joblessness, and homelessness, with most of the nation’s arable land remaining in wealthy white minority hands instead of in poor majority black hands. Molefe expressed what is surely on the minds of many other young South Africans when he said: “Today, an economic revolution is what is needed most if South Africa is to continue on the path to reconciliation.”⁶⁹

Who will be the next Mandela to finish the revolution, indeed?

Whoever it is, let us hope that by the time the corporate media do find their elusive next Nelson Mandela, some of the more substantive news stories concerning the legacy of the original Mandela and South African apartheid—the armed struggle, the CIA, honorary white, and media censorship and self-censorship, among them—will have been duly looked into and accurately reported by the press once and for all.

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