

## Nelson Mandela's New Book

This collection features more than 2,000 quotations over 60 years

By [Danny Schechter](#)

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### AS MANDELA TURNS 93, HE RELEASES A NEW BOOK OF QUOTATIONS

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA: Nelson Mandela, icon-hero of the world, turns 93 this month. He is hanging on despite family tragedies that claimed another great-grandchild in June. The child was born premature and died after just four days,

The man known by his clan name, Madiba, still evokes wonder and admiration and almost god-like reverence, with airport stores selling We Love Mandela posters and T-shirts. He is the one South African that most of South Africans take pride in, including the older generation that first knew him as an apartheid government designated terrorist.

So feared was he that his picture could not be shown in the media and his words could not be quoted for 27 years.

Ironically, all these years later he has released a book of authorized quotations ('By himself') that cull his thoughts from a life time of public and private utterances in letters, private papers, audio recordings as well from generations of speechifying,

Mandela doesn't really get out much anymore although a select few can still get in to see him especially if their name is Michelle Obama, whose comment on being given an advanced copy of the quotations was a not very quotable, "Wow!" (I have that on good authority from someone who was in the room.)

The last big book of political quotations that went to the top of the sales charts that I remember was Mao's Little Red Book. China's Communist party assured it would be a global bestseller given the size of the population, their control over the country and penchant for disseminating propaganda. Mao's idea appealed to Moammar Gadaffy who then released his own Little "Green Book" to thunderous yawns.

Mao used his book to fight his ill-fated cultural revolution; Now, Mandela's collection that could be called a little book of struggle and solidarity is out to promote the fight for democracy he led.

Its mission is spelled out in a letter he wrote from his prison cell to his daughter Zindzi back in 1980. That quotation explains: *"A good pen can also remind us of the happiest moments in our lives, bring noble ideas in our dens, our blood and our souls, It can turn tragedy into hope and victory."*

It wasn't just his words that brought his victory but they surely helped. This collection

features more than 2,000 quotations over 60 years, organized into 300 categories including “character” “courage” and “reconciliation.” Many have never been published before and were archived by the Nelson Mandela Foundation’s Memory Project. The editors, Sello Hatang and Sahn Venter “ say their aim is to offer an accurate and extensive resource.

“In editing the book,” they write, “ we were struck as much by the gravitas of his words...as by their simplicity.”

I was fortunate to be at the book’s launch in the offices of the Foundation in Johannesburg.

It was an appropriate place for me to spend my June 27th birthday reflecting on Mandela’s triumphs and my own small role in bringing some of them to public attention with six films documenting some of what happened after his release from prison—his election campaign in 1994 and two visits to America, among other memorable markers in his amazing life.

The event was typically low key with a few talks by people who knew him well, worked with him in the ANC and served alongside him in the cells on Robben Island. I knew some of the stalwarts who were there and they were very welcoming to have me back among them.

Doing what I could as a journalist and TV producer to help free South Africa is work that I am very proud of. In the end, I received far more than I gave. It was a great privilege.

In the formal program, his daughter from his first marriage told of visiting her father in prison and being asked if she had had a pap smear. Despite his reputation as a Victorian patrician, he was open about personal matters, and shocked her by talking about intimate subjects even urging her not to have unprotected sex.

Ahead of his time, that orientation led him years later to become a global leader in the fight against AIDS, a pandemic that also claimed one of his sons.

A former ANC leader described him as someone who was open to, and welcomed disagreement and debate to correct him when he was “wrong.” She read quotes that showed Mandela’s openness to criticism and self-criticism, qualities we don’t see in many world leaders better known for arrogance and elitism.

Two quotes in the book offer insight to his approach and humility. This comes from a speech he gave in September 1953:

*“Long speeches, the shaking of fists, the banging of tables and strongly worded resolutions out of touch with the objective conditions do not bring about mass action and can do a great deal of harm to the organization and the struggle we serve.”*

Although he often looks stern he also values a good sense of humor, explaining in 2005:

*“You sharpen your ideas by reducing yourself to the level of the people you are with and a sense of humor and a complete relaxation, even when you are discussing serious things does help to mobilize friends around you. And I love that.”*

Next was Ahmed “Kathy” Kathrada, one of the eight convicted activists including Mandela assigned to a special section in the draconian Robben Island prison. The apartheid

government practiced its racism there openly, giving Kathrada, an Indian, more privileges than his black comrades. He joined Mandela in protesting discriminatory practices.

Mandela always “led from the front,” he explained, taking principled stands and refusing any special treatment unless it was also given to his colleagues. Kathrada’s description of their life together on the inside for decades was vivid and matter of fact, even if his words brought tears to the eyes of people who have heard his stories before. These prisoners had nothing but contempt for the court’s verdict because they knew was made on a political basis, not a legal one.

Mandela himself embraces the notion of the role of people in the front. He puts it simply in this quotation: “*Good Leaders Lead.*” And leading he still is with several foundations, one for children, one focused on Aids, and the principal one encouraging community dialogues to fight xenophobia and violence,

Sitting in the front row and listening was one of the lawyers who represented Kathrada and Mandela in their famous treason trial. He is a legal legend by the name of George Bizos who came to South Africa from Greece, the cradle of democracy.

It was Bizos who convinced Mandela to add three small words to his most famous quotation, the one in which he told his Judges he was prepared to die for his ideals.

Bizos persuaded him not to be so categorical by, in effect, challenging the state to kill him. Before the phrase vowing he was ready to die, his lawyer interjected the words “If needs be” to the statement of defiance giving Mandela some political wriggle room. In the end, he was not sentenced to death and lived to outlast his warders and go from prison to the presidency.

Mandela is right: words and ideas matter, but he also insists they must lead to action. The movement he led was admired for its moral stance. Today, that movement is in power, known for the progress it brought but also for a pervasive corruption that threatens the legacy of his beloved African National Congress (ANC).

Cry the Beloved Country was one of South Africa’s greatest novels. Today, many of those who fought for its freedom are crying about its many self-inflicted crises. That’s an issue I will return to.

*News Dissector Danny Schechter produced the globally broadcast TV series South Africa Now and was a director six documentary films about Nelson Mandela. Comments to [dissector@mediachannel.org](mailto:dissector@mediachannel.org)*

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