

Mandela

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Tributes to a Global Icon

Edited by Toyin Falola



CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS

Durham, North Carolina

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ISBN 978-1-61163-651-2
Library of Congress Control Number: 2014946522

Carolina Academic Press
700 Kent St.
Durham, NC 27701
Telephone (919) 489-7486
Fax (919) 493-5668
www.cap-press.com

Printed in the United States of America

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South African flag, 31 October 2008. Image courtesy of Chris Eason.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

On December 5, 2013, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela joined his ancestors. As in life, his death became a global event, and eulogies flooded in like a heavy downpour, in quantities and qualities that are unprecedented in African history. His burial on December 15th was witnessed all over the world, thanks to the global media. The entire African continent was united, in what can be described as a temporary rebirth of Pan-Africanism.

A very small number of the eulogies are included in this book, some written when his death was the most dominant piece of news, and some commissioned after his death. I have to thank all those who felt the need to put their emotions on paper, in verse and prose. Photographers and artists joined to form a powerful team to honor a great man. Some are older images; about a dozen are specially commissioned for this book. I am grateful to you all.

Mandela's life reinforces the adage that character makes a person. A courageous fighter, an honest and tireless worker, an original thinker, the Madiba, as he was popularly called, put people at the center of his activities. It was clear that the progress of his country and its people was the motivation for his behavior, actions, and decisions.

Without the passion, hard work, and commitment of Ms. Jamie DeAngelo, who served as the manager of this project, this book would not have seen the light of day. She was efficient in reaching out to the contributors, determining when and how to seek copyrights, making the requests for photographs, and obtaining permissions to print. I cannot thank you enough, Jamie.

I imagine that, even in death, Mandela can still speak to us. As I walked on Nelson Mandela Street in Pretoria, I stood still on one spot and I imagined that he has composed, still fresh in heaven, a poem to caution us, his own way of joining me to express gratitude to Jamie and all the contributors:

*Everything that glitters is not gold
Even the materials on the tomb in which I sleep for Good
are not made of gold and ivory, as the world has been told
Transient objects, the sign of the fakeness of those left
behind
Not the wholeness of my spirit.
Knowledge takes time — now I know
I wander in an unseen world
Wondering about my works' rewards
Awaiting the day of judgment
I worried on earth about heaven
In heaven I think about earth
Though I am banned from re-entry.
Youth is the foundation of life
Old age is the triumph of youth
Search not for lost days
Repair not your old age
If the late days are crippled
To youth belongs all the blame.
When the world rots
It is not the whole world
Only one of the worlds
Apartheid's rot does not doom the world.
Still posing? Still boasting?
Exploiting men and women?
Take a break to visit my grave
The flesh is no more — the bones have decayed
So shall it be your turn
When the body you now adorn
Will disintegrate
Apartheid's curse and humanity's cross
Merge into the cul de sac of death.*

*Toyin Falola,
Pretoria, March 2, 2014*