



# WORLDVIEWS FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

A Monograph Series

## The Global Legacy of Nelson Mandela Lives On

A Conversation with Ndaba Mandela



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## *Worldviews for the 21st Century: A Monograph Series*

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# **The Global Legacy of Nelson Mandela Lives On**

## **A Conversation with Ndaba Mandela**

**Q: You spent a key part of your life with your grandfather, Nelson Mandela, as he was freed from prison, was elected president and led South Africa on a new course. Tell us about it.**

Ndaba Mandela: As you can imagine, being a young man and moving in with a great statesman that the whole country adored was quite daunting. Our relationship centered on education and how I was doing at school. He made me understand that, as his grandson, people looked at me a certain way – as a leader in my classroom – and therefore I had to get the best marks. So, from early on, there was a lot of pressure to do well at school and, of course, to emulate him and always make sure I represented him – and African people in general – in the best light possible.

**Q: How did your experience evolve?**

A: I “went to the mountain” – the rite of passage to manhood by way of traditional circumcision school and initiation – and then completed my undergraduate degree in political science and international relations at the University of Pretoria. At that point, my grandfather began to open up. We developed a good friendship,

and were able to talk and share perspectives, including on what he did before going to circumcision school and then on some of his views about the world.

**Q: Most people saw only the public side of Mandela. He seemed very generous, forgiving, fair and kind to everyone. What was he like in private?**

A: He was the same, although I should note he was a disciplinarian. On one occasion, I lost my school jersey for the second time. He was very angry and said I would no longer sleep in the house, and sent me outside. I thought the punishment was very harsh. As the sun went down, he asked the woman who prepared our meals to send me a blanket, which made me think I was really going to sleep outside. Just as it got dark, he called me inside and said, “Don’t lose another jersey again. Otherwise, you really will sleep outside.” Then I had dinner and went to bed. Although it was harsh, it worked. I never lost another jersey.

**Q: What is one of your favorite recollections regarding Mandela’s leadership?**

A. On various occasions, I realized how truly exemplary he was as a leader. For example, when the international community was looking for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the U.N. Secretary General at the time was Kofi Annan, the first black African to serve in that role. The day the United States decided to intervene, my grandfather sent a very strong message to the American president in which he said, “Is it because the Secretary General is now an African that America decides to defy the United Nations and go into Iraq, against U.N. recommendations?” And he left it at that. I thought it was very good example of leadership, because he was supporting his brother, Kofi Annan. He just put it into perspective and left it at that – primarily to cause people to think, but also to make sure that they understood on which side of the fence he stood. He was not supportive of the intervention.

**Q: What is the most common aspect of his legacy that people reflect on and use in their daily lives?**

A: You know, the one thing I must say about our grandfather is that he was very humble. He never judged a person on the basis of appearance or class. He always taught me to be very humble. He even told me that I must not drive a Jaguar because people would know I had money. He was also a very warm person, whether he was dealing with another president, a famous actor, a prominent athlete, a well-known musician or the staff at our house. He treated everybody in the same way.

**Q: As you travel and people inquire about him, what is the most common question?**

A: The first question typically is, “Are you related to the old man?” When I say yes, they are clearly delighted to meet a family member because of the love, admiration and respect they had for our grandfather. They also want to know what work I am doing and if I am continuing in my grandfather’s footsteps. I feel that because he portrayed such a high level of leadership, people expect his family to carry that on. I am trying to do my part through the work of the Africa Rising Foundation.

**Q: How did the foundation come into being?**

A: I am very lucky to have traveled to a number of countries, sometimes with the old man. I remember the first time I came to the United States, I visited Walt Disney World in Orlando. As we were approaching a ride, a gentleman asked where I was from. Upon hearing South Africa, he said, “How big do the lions get?” My response was that I had no idea, as I had never worked at a zoo or been a game ranger. In other countries, I have heard similar questions, usually about animals or crime. I came to understand that many people outside of the continent have very limited knowledge of Africa. Upon returning home, with the help of many friends, I decided to start the foundation. We registered it in 2010 as an

organization that would empower the youth in order to change the image of Africa.

**Q: What are the foundation's main areas of emphasis?**

A: There are three key pillars. One is education. We're working on a resource center which is being established in the Eastern Cape, in partnership with the Nelson Mandela Museum. There will be a computer center as well as a library. There's also an entrepreneurship component, which is adopted from the California-based Students for the Advancement of Global Entrepreneurship. The goal is to teach high-school kids about social entrepreneurship and full-on entrepreneurship. Finally, we focus on culture, specifically the celebration of African culture, including through the Nelson Mandela Day Project. Nelson Mandela Day is all about giving service to the community, whichever community you come from. It's usually done on July 18th, his birthday, but the moto has expanded over time to say, "Let's make every day a Mandela Day." Thus you're not restricted to his birthday to do community service. In these efforts, we are building towards a celebration in 2018, when our grandfather would have turned 100.

**Q: What other kinds of partnerships are you establishing at home and abroad to reach your goals?**

A: In South Africa, we are working with institutions such as the University of Pretoria and Walter Sisulu University. We're also interested in developing partnerships with more institutions in the United States and elsewhere around the world. We would like people to understand that Africa is a place where you can come for a holiday with your family, see amazing beaches and wildlife, and conduct business. On the last point, when you look at the fastest-growing economies of the world, many are in Africa. It is evident that Africa has tremendous potential. To realize it, we need to engage with more people from all over the world. Ultimately, the positive development of the continent means the positive development of everyone. It's not just about Africa.

*Ndaba Mandela is the grandson of Nelson Mandela, formerly president of South Africa. In an effort to continue his grandfather's legacy, Mandela co-founded and co-chairs the Africa Rising Foundation. The foundation is dedicated to promoting a positive image of Africa around the world and increasing its potential for growth. Previously, Mandela served as a senior political consultant at the Embassy of Japan in Pretoria. While working at the embassy, he was chosen to represent his country in a business leadership and entrepreneurship program in Jordan. He then joined Investec Asset Management and later worked in business development as a client liaison officer. In 2012, Mandela was instrumental in creating the International Day of Happiness at the United Nations. This interview was conducted by Worldviews Editor John C. Bersia on September 21, 2015.*