

ALMEIDA THEATRE

'I Am Prepared To Die' by Nelson Mandela

The Speech

- Watch the speech delivered by Lucian Msamati.

Duration: 15 minutes

<https://www.speech.almeida.co.uk/speech/prepared-to-die>

- Discuss students' initial responses.

Context

Nelson Mandela was a South African revolutionary and politician, who fought against racism and apartheid. He joined the African National Congress in 1942 and led a campaign of non-violent activism against the government for 20 years.

In 1962 he was arrested for leaving the country and inciting a workers' strike. From 1963 – 1964 Mandela was placed on trial with 10 other opponents of apartheid and charged with conspiracy and sabotage. His conviction saw him spend 27 years in prison, finally being released in 1990.

In 1994 he became the country's first black head of state, as well as the first President elected in a fully representative democratic election.

- How great an impact do you imagine this speech had at the time it was delivered?
- Below is a list of key events in the history of South African apartheid. Ask students to place these events on a timeline and add any additional events they find. They can use the sources listed at the end of this document.

National Party founded

African National Congress founded

600 students are killed in the Soweto Massacre

Group Areas Act passed to segregate blacks and whites. African National Congress responds with campaign of civil disobedience, led by Nelson Mandela

African National Congress banned

Nelson Mandela is imprisoned with a life sentence

President Frederik Willem de Klerk ends the ban on the African National Congress

The Bantu Education Act is passed

Nelson Mandela is released from prison

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Nelson Mandela joins the African National Congress

Apartheid begins following the election of The National Party

South Africa is expelled from the United Nations

Nelson Mandela becomes President of South Africa

Content

- Watch the speech again.
 - Assign students **one** of the words below. Ask them to make a note of any ideas or phrases in the speech that pertain to that word or topic.
 - Invite them to share their responses at the end of the speech.
- Dignity
 - Humility
 - Determination
 - Resilience
 - Altruism
 - Self-sacrifice
 - Education
 - Rights
 - Poverty

Language and Structure

- Ask students to read a copy of the speech (**a transcript of the speech is included at the end of this document**) and find examples of the following imagery and content. They should then rank the headings in order of most effective to least effective, explaining their decisions.
- Imagery of apartheid
 - Legal language and statistics
 - Imagery of a fairer South Africa

Discussion

- Watch the discussion between Lucian Msamati and students at City and Islington College.

Duration: 4 minutes 40 minutes

<https://www.speech.almeida.co.uk/reaction/prepared-to-die>

- Ask students to rank the points raised in the discussion group in order of those that resonate with them the most to the least. Ask them to explain their choices.

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- Nelson Mandela’s speech inspires faith. He seems to be offering the audience ‘truth’. **00:09**
- Politician’s withdraw facts and push opinions in their efforts to influence voters. **00:35**
- Mandela explained his political agenda clearly and at length in an effort to be transparent, while modern politicians too often obscure true intentions. **00:57**
- Modern politicians feel the need to present palatable objectives, rather than true agendas. **01:19**
- Fear inhibits modern politicians from communicating the truth. **01:32**
- Passion and conviction are rare in modern politics. **02:14**
- Despite the end of apartheid, racial prejudice still permeates the institutions of many countries, including ours. **02:58**

Extension Task

- Ask students to research and compare the legacy of Nelson Mandela in South Africa to another leader advocating change in their country, such as Gandhi or Martin Luther King.

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Useful Links

Websites

[To Die for an Ideal](#) – an analysis of Nelson Mandela’s sacrifice

[A Heavyweight with a Light Touch](#) – Nelson Mandela’s legacy

[Nelson Mandela](#) – Biography and Timeline

[Nobel Peace Prize](#) – a video of Mandela accepting his Nobel Prize

[African National Congress](#) – history of the Political Party

[Bantu Education Act](#)

[Living under Apartheid](#) – BBC Archive Interviews

Books

[Long Walk to Freedom](#) by Nelson Mandela

[Conversations with Myself](#) by Nelson Mandela

[The Prison Letters of Nelson Mandela](#) edited by Sahn Venter

Films

[Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom](#) – based on Nelson Mandela’s autobiography and starring Idris Elba

[Winnie Mandela](#) – starring Jennifer Hudson this film charts the life of Mandela’s wife Winnie.

[Invictus](#) – starring Morgan Freeman and Matt Damon

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I AM PREPARED TO DIE Nelson Mandela | 20 April 1964

In my youth in the Transkei I listened to the elders of my tribe telling stories of the old days. Amongst the tales they related to me were those of wars fought by our ancestors in defence of the fatherland. The names of Dingane and Bambata, Moshoeshoe and Sekhukhuni, were praised as the glory of the entire African nation. I hoped then that life might offer me the opportunity to serve my people and make my own humble contribution to their freedom struggle. This is what has motivated me in all that I have done.

Having said this, I must deal immediately with the question of violence. I do not deny that I planned sabotage. I did not plan it in a spirit of recklessness, nor because I have any love of violence. I planned it as a result of a calm and sober assessment of the political situation that had arisen after many years of tyranny, exploitation, and oppression of my people by the Whites.

I, and the others who started the organization, did so for two reasons. Firstly, we believed that as a result of Government policy, violence by the African people had become inevitable, and that unless responsible leadership was given to canalize and control the feelings of our people, there would be outbreaks of terrorism which would produce an intensity of bitterness and hostility between the various races of this country which is not produced even by war. Secondly, we felt that without violence there would be no way open to the African people to succeed in their struggle against the principle of white supremacy. All lawful modes of expressing opposition to this principle had been closed by legislation, and we were placed in a position in which we had either to accept a permanent state of inferiority, or to defy the Government. We chose to defy the law. We first broke the law in a way which avoided any recourse to violence; when this form was legislated against, and then the Government resorted to a show of force to crush opposition to its policies, only then did we decide to answer violence with violence.

But the violence which we chose to adopt was not terrorism. We who formed Umkhonto we Sizwe were all members of the African National Congress, and had behind us the ANC tradition of non-violence and negotiation as a means of solving political disputes. We believe that South Africa belongs to all the people who live in it, and not to one group, be it black or white. We did not want an interracial war, and tried to avoid it to the last minute. Already scores of Africans had died as a result of racial friction.

South Africa is the richest country in Africa, and could be one of the richest countries in the world. But it is a land of extremes and remarkable contrasts. The whites enjoy what may well be the highest standard of living in the world, whilst Africans live in poverty and misery. 30% are labourers, labour tenants, and squatters on white farms and work and live under conditions similar to those of the serfs of the Middle Ages.

The complaint of Africans is not only that they are poor and the whites are rich, but that the laws which are made by the whites are designed to preserve this situation. There are two ways to break out of poverty. The first is by formal education, and the second is by the worker acquiring a greater skill at his work and thus higher wages.

The present government has always sought to hamper Africans in their search for education. One of their early acts, after coming into power, was to stop subsidies for African school feeding. Many African children who attended schools depended on this supplement to their diet. There is compulsory education for all white children at virtually no cost to their parents, be they rich or poor. Similar facilities are not provided for the African children. In 1960-61 the per capita government spending on African students at state-aided schools was estimated at R12.46. In the same years, the per capita spending on white children in the Cape Province (which are the only figures available to me) was R144.57.

According to the Bantu Educational Journal, only 5,660 African children in the whole of South Africa passed their junior certificate in 1962, and in that year only 362 passed matric. This is presumably consistent with the policy of Bantu education about which the present Prime Minister said, during the debate on the Bantu Education Bill in 1953:

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"When I have control of native education I will reform it so that natives will be taught from childhood to realise that equality with Europeans is not for them ... People who believe in equality are not desirable teachers for natives. When my Department controls native education it will know for what class of higher education a native is fitted, and whether he will have a chance in life to use his knowledge."

Africans who do obtain employment in the unskilled and semi-skilled occupations which are open to them are not allowed to form trade unions which have recognition under the industrial conciliation act. This means that strikes of African workers are illegal, and that they are denied the right of collective bargaining which is permitted to the better-paid white workers. The discrimination in the policy of successive South African governments towards African workers is demonstrated by the so-called 'civilised labour policy' under which sheltered, unskilled government jobs are found for those white workers who cannot make the grade in industry, at wages which far exceed the earnings of the average African employee in industry.

The government often answers its critics by saying that Africans in South Africa are economically better off than the inhabitants of the other countries in Africa. I do not know whether this statement is true and doubt whether any comparison can be made without having regard to the cost-of-living index in such countries. But even if it is true, as far as the African people are concerned it is irrelevant. Our complaint is not that we are poor by comparison with people in other countries, but that we are poor by comparison with the white people in our own country, and that we are prevented by legislation from altering this imbalance.

The lack of human dignity experienced by Africans is the direct result of the policy of white supremacy. White supremacy implies black inferiority. Legislation designed to preserve white supremacy entrenches this notion. Menial tasks in South Africa are invariably performed by Africans. When anything has to be carried or cleaned the white man will look around for an African to do it for him, whether the African is employed by him or not. Because of this sort of attitude, whites tend to regard Africans as a separate breed. They do not look upon them as people with families of their own; they do not realise that they have emotions - that they fall in love like white people do; that they want to be with their wives and children like white people want to be with theirs; that they want to earn enough money to support their families properly, to feed and clothe them and send them to school. And what 'house-boy' or 'garden-boy' or labourer can ever hope to do this?

Pass laws, which to the Africans are among the most hated bits of legislation in South Africa, render any African liable to police surveillance at any time. I doubt whether there is a single African male in South Africa who has not at some stage had a brush with the police over his pass. Hundreds and thousands of Africans are thrown into jail each year under pass laws. Even worse than this is the fact that pass laws keep husband and wife apart and lead to the breakdown of family life.

Poverty and the breakdown of family life have secondary effects. Children wander about the streets of the townships because they have no schools to go to, or no money to enable them to go to school, or no parents at home to see that they go to school, because both parents (if there be two) have to work to keep the family alive. This leads to a breakdown in moral standards, to an alarming rise in illegitimacy, and to growing violence which erupts not only politically, but everywhere. Life in the townships is dangerous. There is not a day that goes by without somebody being stabbed or assaulted. And violence is carried out of the townships in to the white living areas. People are afraid to walk alone in the streets after dark. Housebreakings and robberies are increasing, despite the fact that the death sentence can now be imposed for such offences. Death sentences cannot cure the festering sore.

Africans want to be paid a living wage. Africans want to be allowed to live where they obtain work, and not be endorsed out of an area because they were not born there. Africans want to be allowed to own land in places where they work, and not to be obliged to live in rented houses which they can never call their own. Africans want to be part of the general population, and not confined to living in their own ghettos. African men want to have their wives and children to live with them where they work, and not be forced into an unnatural existence in men's hostels. African women want to be with their menfolk and not be left permanently widowed in the Reserves.

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Africans want to be allowed out after eleven o'clock at night and not to be confined to their rooms like little children. Africans want to be allowed to travel in their own country and to seek work where they want to and not where the labour bureau tells them to. Africans want a just share in the whole of South Africa; they want security and a stake in society.

Above all, we want equal political rights, because without them our disabilities will be permanent. I know this sounds revolutionary to the whites in this country, because the majority of voters will be Africans. This makes the white man fear democracy. But this fear cannot be allowed to stand in the way of the only solution which will guarantee racial harmony and freedom for all. It is not true that the enfranchisement of all will result in racial domination. Political division, based on colour, is entirely artificial and, when it disappears, so will the domination of one colour group by another.

The struggle is a truly national one. It is a struggle of the African people, inspired by their own suffering and their own experience. It is a struggle for the right to live. During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.