

## REGIONAL CONFLICTS

**Biography**

After South Africa won independence from Britain in 1910, the white minority passed laws that restricted the freedom of the black majority, finally formalizing the system of apartheid in 1948. Black political leader Nelson Mandela devoted his life to ending apartheid and ensuring equality for all South Africans. ♦ *As you read, think about the consequences of the choices Nelson Mandela made throughout his life. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

**Nelson Mandela (1918–)**

Nelson Mandela was born in Transkei, South Africa, the son of the chief of the Tembu people. Instead of succeeding his father as chief, Mandela chose to pursue a career in law. He received his bachelor's degree in 1942 and then went on to become a lawyer.

In 1944, Mandela joined the African National Congress (ANC). This group was dedicated to fighting for the freedom of South Africa's black majority. Mandela became one of the leaders of the organization in 1949. He led it in the direction of nonviolent resistance to apartheid.

In 1952, Mandela and his friend Oliver Tambo were the first blacks to open a law practice in South Africa. Many of their clients were poor blacks who had been unjustly evicted from their land. Tambo said that if he and Mandela hadn't already opposed apartheid, seeing its victims in their law practice would have convinced them to do so.

Mandela was in charge of the ANC's "Campaign for the Defiance of Unjust Laws." He traveled the country urging masses of people to join this campaign of civil disobedience. In 1956, the government tried him for treason. He was acquitted, in part because of his record of nonviolence.

In 1960, after the police massacre of unarmed black demonstrators in Sharpeville, and the banning of the ANC, Mandela began to support acts of sabotage against the government. In 1964, he was arrested again. This time he received a sentence of five years. While in prison, he was tried and found guilty of treason and conspiracy when large quantities of arms were found at the ANC's headquarters. He received a life sentence.



Nelson Mandela, 1990

Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years. During this time he became a powerful international symbol of South African oppression. World leaders demanded his release. He finally was freed in 1990 by the South African president, F. W. de Klerk. De Klerk and Mandela worked together to dismantle the system of apartheid. In 1993, they were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1994, Mandela was elected president of South Africa in the first election in which all races could vote.

After serving one term as president, Mandela chose not to seek reelection in 1999. He continued to support organizations that promoted human rights. In 2004, he retired from public life due to declining health.

**Questions to Think About**

1. What events caused Mandela to turn from nonviolence to supporting acts of sabotage against the government?
2. What did Mandela do when he was released from prison?
3. **Draw Conclusions** Why do you think Mandela is a hero to people in South Africa and abroad?