



## NELSON MANDELA VOTES IN THE ELECTION OF 1994

I voted on April 27, the second of the four days of voting, and I chose to vote in Natal to show the people in that divided province that there was no danger in going to the polling stations. I voted at Ohlange High School in Inanda, a green and hilly township just north of Durban, for it was there that John Dube, the first president of the ANC, was buried. This African patriot had helped found the organization in 1912, and casting my vote near his grave site brought history full circle, for the mission he began eighty-two years before was about to be achieved.

As I stood over his grave on a rise above the small school below, I thought not of the present but of the past. When I walked to the voting station, my mind dwelt on the heroes who had fallen so that I might be where I was that day, the men and women who had made the ultimate sacrifice for a cause that was now finally succeeding. I thought of Oliver Tambo, and Chris Hani, and Chief Luthuli, and Bram Fischer. I thought of our great African heroes, who had sacrificed so that millions of South Africans could be voting on that very day... I did not go into that voting station alone on April 27; I was casting my vote with all of them...

I marked an X in the box next to the letters ANC and then slipped my folded ballot into a simple wooden box; I had cast the first vote of my life.

The images of South Africans going to the polls that day are burned in my memory. Great lines of patient people snaking through the dirt roads and streets of towns and cities; old women who had waited half a century to cast their first vote saying that they felt like human beings for the first time in their lives; white men and women saying they were proud to live in a free country at last. The mood of the nation during those days of voting was buoyant. The

violence and bombings ceased, and it was as if we were a nation reborn...

It took several days for the results to be counted. We polled 62.6 percent of the national vote...Some in the ANC were disappointed that we did not cross the two-thirds threshold, but I was not one of them. In fact I was relieved; had we won two-thirds of the vote and been able to write a constitution unfettered by input from others, people would argue that we had created an ANC constitution. I wanted a true government of national unity.

On the evening of May 2, Mr. de Klerk made a gracious concession speech. After more than three centuries of rule, the white minority was conceding defeat and turning over power to the black Majority. That evening the ANC was planning a victory celebration at the ballroom of the Carlton Hotel in downtown Johannesburg...Mrs. Coretta Scott King, the wife of the great freedom fighter Martin Luther King Jr., was on the podium that night, and I looked over to her as I made reference to her husband's immortal words.

"This is one of the most important moments in the life of our country. I stand here before you filled with deep pride and joy — pride in the ordinary, humble people of this country. You have shown such a calm, patient determination to reclaim this country on your own, and now the joy that we can loudly proclaim to the rooftops — free at last! Free at last! I stand before you humbled by your courage, with a heart full of love for all of you...This is a time to heal the old wounds and build a new South Africa."

—Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*

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