



NELSON MANDELA: A Jacana Pocket Biography

Colin Bundy
Jacana: Auckland Park, 2015. 159 pp

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A pocket biography of a person like Mandela cannot capture the essence of the man. Colin Bundy, while recognising this dilemma, has presented a clear and coherent introduction, making it very easy to slip back in time and relive many of the events considered. Those who have not read anything of Mandela would find this book an ➤

honest assessment of the man and his experiences. There is no attempt to gloss over the negative issues, what drove him and what made him do the things that he did. Those who have read about the great man would also find new insights.

The book covers his early life, schooling and university in the Eastern Cape, his move to Johannesburg and activism, his marriages, time in prison and eventual release, the negotiations that lead to democracy, his presidency, his close association with business and its leaders, his retirement, his retirement from retirement, and his passing. It is incredible that Bundy was able to fit all of this in.

Bundy also separates the man from the myth by clearing up misconceptions and providing insights into his difficult relationships with Winnie Mandela and his children, with F.W. de Klerk, and with Thabo Mbeki. Bundy also suggests that Mandela sowed some seeds of the patronage and corruption that are now endemic. His life after retirement leaves one with a bittersweet sensation: his intervention in securing the 2010 Fifa World Cup for South Africa, establishing the 46664 campaign, and the period during his illness when the ANC top brass paraded him before the public.

This honest assessment indicates that many of the cracks in our fledgling democracy were papered over by “Madiba Magic” and started to resurface the moment he left office. It leaves one open to decide for oneself the real legacy of Nelson Mandela. Mandela always said that he was not a saint: he was a man doing what he thought was right. This much is clear from Bundy’s book. Mandela’s errors and lapses in judgment are laid out and we are given a glimpse of a man as he was and not the man shielded by his minders. It is a snapshot of the life and times of South Africa’s greatest leader. [NA](#)