Mandela: A Critical Life, Tom Lodge, Oxford University Press, 2006, 0191578762, 9780191578762, 302 pages. A new and highly revealing look at one of the most celebrated political figures of our times. Drawing upon a range of original sources, Tom Lodge explores the making of a modern-day political hero, from Mandela's childhood years through to his role as a statesman in the construction of the new South Africa. - ;Nelson Mandela, the first African politician to acquire a world following, remains in the 21st century an iconic figure. But what are the sources of his almost mythic appeal? And to what extent did Mandela self-consciously create the status of political hero that he now enjoys? This new and highly revealing biography examines these questions in detail for the first time. Drawing on a range of original sources, it presents a host of fresh insights about the shaping of Mandela's personality and public persona, from his childhood days and early activism, through his long years of imprisonment, to his presidency of the new South Africa. Throughout, Lodge emphasizes the crucial interplay between Mandela's public career and his personal or private world, showing how his heroic status was a product both of his leading position within the anti-apartheid movement and his own deliberate efforts to supply a form of quasi-messianic leadership for that movement. And as Lodge shows, Mandela's huge international appeal is a compelling and unusual cocktail. Of the sacred and the secular. Of traditional African values and global media savvy. And of human vulnerability interwoven with the grand narrative of liberation throughout the story of this exceptional life. - ;Mr Lodge's elegant biography will be essential reading for anyone wishing to look behind the myth. He has a strong feel for South Africa's history. His anecdotes are well chosen and insightful, and serve to remind the reader that Mr Mandela, although an exceptional figure, still remains all too human. s - ;In this illuminating bio....Lodge makes an important contribution with his argument that Mandela's appeal rests in his ability to personify his political beliefs. - Publishers Weekly;thoughtful and educated appraisal - Rodger Hutchinson, The Scotsman;Lodge tells the story at a cracking pace...The strength of this book is that it tells its extraordinary tale with clarity, narrative focus and analytical shrewdness, teasing out the man from the encrusted myth - Bryan Roston Tribune d 22/09/2006.


Long Walk to Freedom The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela, Nelson Mandela, Mar 11, 2008, Biography & Autobiography, . Nelson Mandela is one of the great moral and political leaders of our time: an international hero whose lifelong dedication to the fight against racial oppression in South ....


Mandate For Marriage (Mills & Boon Vintage 90s Modern) , Catherine O'Connor, Oct 4, 2012, Fiction, . "I'm not in the habit of making mistakes." Fee was bowled over by Grant's charisma and rushed headlong into marriage. But the old saying "Marry in haste, repent at leisure ....

Mandela The Authorized Biography, Anthony Sampson, Jan 11, 2012, Biography & Autobiography, 736 pages. Nelson Mandela, who emerged from twenty-six years of political imprisonment to lead South Africa out of apartheid and into democracy, is perhaps the world's most admired leader ....

Learning about Forgiveness from the Life of Nelson Mandela , Jeanne Strazzabosco, 1996, Juvenile Nonfiction, 24 pages. A brief biography of the South African civil rights worker and president who serves as an example of forgiveness..
Higher than hope the authorized biography of Nelson Mandela, Fatima Meer, 1988, History, 426 pages. Traces the life of the South African social acitivist and his efforts to end apartheid.

Mandela The Rebel Who Led His Nation to Freedom, Ann Kramer, 2008, Juvenile Nonfiction, 64 pages. Presents a biography of the South African leader, who spent years as a political activist and prisoner trying to overturn apartheid and who went on to become the country's....

Nelson Mandela A Biography, Peter Limb, 2008, Biography & Autobiography, 144 pages. Examines the life and accomplishments of the first black South African president, who spent twenty-seven years in jail for his political beliefs..

State formation and state consolidation in post colonial South Africa, Tom Lodge, 1996, , 29 pages. 

Mandela's struggle & triumph, David C. Turnley, Jun 1, 2008, Biography & Autobiography, 167 pages. Depicts the life and accomplishments of the South African president who spent twenty-seven years in jail for his political beliefs, and discusses his struggle to bring the....

The Meaning of Mandela A Literary and Intellectual Celebration, Xolela Mangcu, 2006, Biography & Autobiography, 40 pages. These engaging and witty lectures bring together the ideas of three renowned scholars--Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Wole Soyinka, and Cornel West--as they reflect on Nelson Mandela....


Now, in this new and highly revealing biography, Tom Lodge draws on a wide range of original sources to uncover a host of fresh insights about the shaping of Mandela's personality and public persona, from his childhood days and early activism, through his twenty-seven years of imprisonment, to his presidency of the new South Africa. The book follows Mandela from his education at two elite Methodist boarding schools to his role as a moderating but powerful force in the African National Congress. Throughout, Lodge emphasizes the crucial interplay between Mandela's public career and his private world, revealing how Mandela drew moral and political strength from encounters in which everyday courtesy and even generosity softened conflict. Indeed, the lessons Mandela learned as a child about the importance of defeating ones opponents without dishonoring them were deeply engrained. They shaped a politics of grace and honor that was probably the only approach that could have enabled South Africa's relatively peaceful transition to democracy.

Nelson Mandela is perhaps the world's most revered living political figure for his role in transforming South Africa into a true democracy. In this illuminating bio, University of Limerick professor Lodge (Politics in South Africa) shows how Mandela's struggle for equality brought him to prominence. Though Mandela is hardly lacking biographers, Lodge makes an important contribution with his argument that Mandela's appeal rests on his ability to personify his political beliefs. Mandela's politics, which emphasize a mix of authority, empathy and respect for all people, are mirrored by his actions and behavior toward everyone he's come in contact with, thereby allowing his personal grace and dignity to be a political gesture. According to Lodge, Mandela's magnanimity serves as a model for a new kind of citizenship, one that embraces difference and the messiness of democracy without sacrificing the gentlemanly restraint Mandela associated with English political institutions. Lodge is careful to give Mandela an assertive role in this process, showing how he cultivated his own life story and his status as a martyr for justice in order to hasten the coming of democracy to his country. Vivid descriptions of the daily horrors of apartheid and the men and women around Mandela, such as his ex-wife Winnie and the troubled F.W. de Klerk, reveal the complicated world that Mandela ultimately and triumphantly managed to change. 17 b&w photos not seen by PW. (Sept. 30)
For those who want much more than the view of Mandela as a global public hero, this biography combines a chronological account of his life with dense critical analysis of his political and personal roles. Lodge is a well-known scholar of South African history, and he draws on a wealth of testimonies, letters, and interviews from a wide range of sources, as well as the acclaimed authorized biographies, including Antony Sampson's Mandela (1999). Of course Lodge also draws extensively on Mandela's best-selling memoir, Long Walk to Freedom (1994), even while pointing out that "autobiography is not always good history." Then there are the recent news events, including Mandela's commitment to combating the AIDS pandemic and how that effort became tragically personal when his son died of the illness. One question raised is how much the messianic image was carefully crafted. The analysis in no way belittles Mandela; rather, it humanizes the man who, after 27 years in prison, led his country in a nonviolent transition to democracy. Hazel Rochman

I had read Nelson Mandela's autobiography "Long Walk to Freedom" some time ago. I was hoping to find an objective and complimentary third party analysis of his extraordinary story. I am happy to say that Tom Lodge's book provided me exactly with what I was looking for. Lodge has authored a persuasive and unbiased examination of the public and private life of one of 20th century's greatest men.

The book provides a fascinating view on the crafting of the Mandela icon by himself and those around him. It is also interesting to understand the details that Mandela has consciously chosen not to include in his autobiography, such as, for example, some of the more humiliating treatments inflicted on him by South African prison guards.

Considering the book's relatively short length, Lodge's assessment of the important events underlying Mandela's life is, in many cases, remarkably extensive, often considering the view of multiple sources from varying stand points. That being said, Mandela's political development, especially in the period of time prior to his long term imprisonment, is multifaceted and involves a large number of people and organizations. As a result, readers for whom this is an introduction to Mandela's story might be better off starting with his autobiography, "Long Walk to Freedom", and reading Lodge's work as an excellent second book on this subject.

In just a little over 200 pages, "Mandela: A Critical Life" tells the story of how Nelson Mandela rose to the top of the African National Congress and emerged as an icon in South African politics. The author taught political science at Wits University, has good contacts in the ANC, and is an expert on black politics in South Africa. His book is a masterpiece of insight and compression. That said, it is not for beginners looking for straightforward biography. The text follows Mandela's life and career chronologically, but the analysis/biography ratio is high, and readers without background knowledge of 20th century South African history would be quite lost.

Mandela, A critical life is a good biography of the man. It tells us the story of his life with enough detail to enable us to have an intelligent conversation about the subject with reasonably well informed people. I appreciated the author's ability to cover vast amounts of material without having to use huge amounts of words. It has been a few weeks since I finished the book and the main points are still with me, a good sign that the relevant material was covered well.

What is missing from the narrative are deeper dives in certain portions of Mandela's persona looking for more insights into the man; it is easily understood that much of Mandela was molded by his patrician upbringing and his flair for the British way of life. Is this all? I don't think so. There must be deeper forces that drove Mandela to choose armed rebellion; once the choice for armed rebellion was made the author fails to make a case as to why Mandela chose to risk a life in prison instead that of a freedom fighter? After all, Castro has finished demonstrating the possibilities. We all know there were significantly differences between Cuba and South Africa and that a man of Mandela's caliber and experience would have understood it? On the other hand, was Mandela's choice made due his experience, statesmanship, a lack of courage, or some other reason?
This book gives an in depth account of the actions of Mr. Mandela's political associations with groups and people in power during his entire life. Although I am not familiar with most of the organizations, because I have not studied the history I am fascinated. Mandela's life was complex, and his status as a member of a "royal" family enabled him access to jobs and positions that could not otherwise be obtained. He was not always the most qualified for his positions in political groups, but he was well respected and seen as a man of honor. His personal contact with the people which gave him more insight. His imposing appearance and reputation opened doors to make a difference. I would have rated it with 5 stars if the book was better organized in time sequences. It is a very good book especially if one knows more about African political history. I believe he was a hero to Africa, a great man.

To say that the lives of prominent political leaders are symbolic of the political culture of their time is, of course, a truism. Nelson Mandela is one of the handful of 20th-century leaders for whom this statement holds true in global terms, illustrated by the recent unveiling of his statue in London's Parliament Square. At the event, the veteran campaigner Tony Benn described the former South African leader as 'president of the human race'(1) - most would be happy to indulge such hyperbole. However, behind the headlines, plans for the Mandela statue were hamstrung by wrangling: London Mayor Ken Livingstone had unsuccessfully battled with Westminster Council to have the statue placed in Trafalgar Square, adjacent to South Africa House, while the statue itself was subject to criticism from within the art establishment. It was, moreover, the second depiction of Mandela by sculptor Ian Walters, whose earlier bust was unveiled by Oliver Tambo on the London South Bank in 1985. It is important to recall that this earlier version was modelled on speculation, for Mandela's actual physical appearance remained a mystery until his dramatic release from prison in 1990.

While we remind ourselves that Mandela was a somewhat obscure figure only a few years before his release, it is also worth recalling that his statue now shares a public space with that other South African leader who became a world statesman during the 20th-century: General Jan Smuts, ‘handyman of empire’. Like Mandela, the statue of Smuts was beset by political rows before its unveiling some eight years after Smuts’ death, ironically in the spot previously occupied by anti-slavery campaigner Thomas Fowell Buxton. In his fascinating analysis of the genesis of the Smuts memorial, Bill Schwartz notes that the General served as a 'philosopher of race', for post-war Britain, an individual whose image could symbolically cast notions of racial superiority in terms of the 'essential liberality' of the imperialist past.(2) Mandela had joked, when visiting London in 1961, that one day he might replace Smuts. They now share Parliament Square and Mandela has indeed replaced Smuts in the pantheon of heroes, having become a symbol of a 'post-imperial' global discourse that seeks to transcend the language of race.

For there can be no more familiar figure in South African history than Nelson Mandela, whose own personal narrative is inextricably bound up in the public imagination with that of the broader struggle against apartheid. This is, in part, testament to the power of life stories within politics, of the role played by a narrative of leadership in generating and sustaining popular support. In Mandela's case, his deliberate cultivation as an icon of the African National Congress (ANC) cause was conceived initially as a way of focusing attention on the campaign for the release of South African political prisoners, but developed during the 1980s into the symbol of the ANC's legitimacy as a post-apartheid government. But his iconic status was secured by his leadership in the negotiations preceding South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, and then (if one needs to be reminded) as the country's first black president.

Given his mythic status, it is understandable that some have questioned the need for a new biography of Mandela - is it not (to invoke the cliché©) too soon to judge his long-term significance of Mandela?(3) Furthermore, Lodge's biography can be added to an array of works covering the life of Mandela, including some very weighty tomes indeed. Mandela's first biographer, anti-apartheid campaigner Mary Benson, sought to explain how he had come to embody the liberation struggle and interwove the story of his life with that of the history of the ANC's struggle - hers is a story of the evolution of a political leader, drawing substantially on Mandela's political writings and speeches.(4) The first authorised biography was published two years later. Written by academic Fatima Meer, whose friendship with Mandela and his wife Winnie, provides a more personal focus, it is illustrated
by extensive extracts from Mandela's prison letters. Yet, it was Mandela's autobiography (written in collaboration with the journalist Richard Stengel) that saw the first attempt to provide an exhaustive account of his life. Following his retirement from political life in 1999, a second authorised biography, written by journalist and political commentator Anthony Sampson provided, through its use of substantial new documentary sources, an immense and detailed portrait that sought to unravel the public and private persona of Mandela.

So what does this new biography bring to the scholarship on Mandela that earlier accounts have missed or neglected? Lodge himself suggests a number of points of departure from earlier assessments of Mandela, arguing that there was greater continuity in the development of his political beliefs from the 1950s until his release from prison - 'between the young Mandela and the older veteran of imprisonment'. Lodge also places emphasis upon the performative character of Mandela's politics - his deliberate construction of a public persona that projected what Lodge describes as a 'messianic leadership role'. What underpins such questions are the critical instincts of one of the leading scholars of late 20th-century South African politics, which provide a biographical account located within both the broader history of liberation movements and wider theoretical approaches to political thought.

Perhaps inevitably, the structure of the book follows a familiar pattern: we move from Mandela's childhood in the Transkei to his life in the city, his development as a 'notable' in Johannesburg society and metamorphosis into resistance leader; from the theatre of his trials to the story of his survival - in both human and political terms - in prison in the 1970s and 80s; through the narrative of his return as leader, initially within prison, and then as the head of the ANC as it negotiated (in all senses of the term) its progress towards power in 1994; and finally, to his elevation to embodiment of the 'new' South Africa and world statesman. In dealing with Mandela's childhood, Lodge invests crucial significance in the complex interaction between the structures of Xhosa tradition and the mission-school, both of which helped to shape - but not to determine - his later political life. Lodge's account then takes us to Johannesburg, where it was through his relationships with individuals like businessman and ANC activist Walter Sisulu, that Mandela began to engage with politics. Lodge shows how contacts with individuals like Gaur Radebe, Anton Lembede and Oliver Tambo helped to establish Mandela as a significant figure in black political circles. His association with both communists and the young Africanists who founded the influential ANC Youth League in 1944, placed Mandela in a key position just as black politics was becoming simultaneously more assertive and more precarious in the wake of the National Party's election victory in 1948.

Through a closer inspection of Mandela's developing role in the ANC during the 1950s, Lodge examines the variety of ideological influences at work upon the individual who would become ANC 'volunteer-in-chief' during the Defiance Campaign of civil disobedience during 1952. His early antipathy to communism was tempered by a friendship with Moses Kotane, general secretary of the Communist Party - a development that has not been satisfactorily explored according to some critics. Lodge provides a vivid account of Mandela's political career during the 1950s, balancing the personal narrative with discussion of the development of the ANC's campaigns against apartheid, set against an increasingly repressive State. It is the early 1960s, however, that Lodge regards as the turning point when Mandela was recast as messiah of the liberation struggle, as underground leader of the ANC (itself banned following the Sharpeville massacre of 1960), and, in the following year, as founding member of its armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe. While his career as guerrilla leader lasted less than a year, coming to an end with his arrest in 1962, Mandela's status was cemented at his trial alongside other Umkhonto leaders in 1964, during which he gave a statement that concluded with the famous assertion that the ideal of democracy was one for which he was prepared to die.

Lodge then pieces together a narrative account of Mandela's 27 years as a political prisoner, drawing (as he acknowledges) on recent studies of the Robben Island prison community and its place within the wider history of South African liberation movements. Lodge pieces together an account of Mandela's life in prison, outlining how he both maintained and developed his authority, both amongst veteran ANC activists like himself and with younger prisoners associated with the Black Consciousness Movement. Lodge also pays due attention to the personal aspects of
Mandela's incarceration, and the importance of the relationship with his second wife Winnie. The narrative then moves, somewhat rapidly, through the 1980s and the development of covert discussions with members of the South African security services to Mandela's ultimate release from prison in February 1990.

It is the final two chapters that provide some of the most valuable analysis, offering both a detailed account of Mandela's role in the transition to democracy and a close examination of the nature of his political authority as President from 1994 to 1999. Using the concept of 'moral capital', accumulated through leadership by example and the deliberate performance of actions that symbolise the aspirations of a wide constituency of followers, Lodge concludes with the suggestion that Mandela used such tactics to inspire an ideal of citizenship rather than to hold sway through popular adoration; and that his position as 'democratic hero' - both within South Africa and worldwide - rested upon the extent to which his own personal experiences had become part of the public history.(12)

As suggested above, this new biography has not been without its critics, and aspects of the political life of Mandela do require further attention, especially the intricacies of the relationship between Mandela and the ANC, between man and organisation. However, the strengths of this account, not least that it is written by a leading expert in the field of black politics in South Africa, far outweigh its weaknesses. On balance, it probably is too soon for a definitive critical analysis of the significance of Mandela's life, nevertheless, this work provides both a concise and careful account of the life of one of the 20th-century's most important public figures.

Robert Skinner's discussion of my book is perceptive and generous, other reviewers have been much more severe. Several readers have suggested that as a 'critical life' my biography is insufficiently critical. In particular it has been claimed that I failed to identify Mandela's weaknesses as a strategist during his career as a guerrilla revolutionary, that I am too willing to trust his testimony, and that I present too rosy a picture of Mandela's performance as a government leader between 1994 and 1999.

The first of these objections echoes criticisms that emerged from within the African National Congress (ANC) in the aftermath of the first Umkhonto we Sizwe campaign, both from Umkhonto veterans such as Ben Turok and from the ANC's left-wing critics, particularly Baruch Hirson and Martin Legassick. In rough summary the argument suggests that the turn to armed struggle was strategically misconceived. It decapitated a movement that still had considerable potential for non-violent resistance (especially in the workplace). Guerilla warfare was a blind alley in the 1960s; South Africa did not have the terrain that favoured the rural insurgency that was the prime focus of the programme Umkhonto adopted during the sabotage campaign. The hopes of external support that Mandela helped to raise in his tour of Africa and Europe were unrealistic.

With the wisdom of hindsight these criticisms have certain validity, but Mandela's perceptions in 1961-2 of what was then possible were widely shared; in any case the ANC was in danger of being outbid by the more belligerent Pan-Africanists. The Pan-African Congress (PAC) was making considerable headway 'diplomatically', not just in Africa. In the end external support was a critical consideration in achieving a successful transition to democracy for without armed struggle (however symbolic this may have been) such support might not have been forthcoming. Long after Mandela's imprisonment, the ANC's ability to revive its guerrilla campaigning in the late 1970s was a key factor in its attraction of a massive political following inside South Africa, especially among young people.

A second major criticism of my book is that I am too ready to take Mandela at his word, especially in his claims about his political allegiances. R. W. Johnson has suggested that in his court address at the Rivonia trial, Mandela was following a collectively written script. From this perspective, Mandela's presentation of himself as an African patriot with liberal democratic predispositions must be understood as tactically circumspect, and not a straightforward representation of his true beliefs. In fact, Johnson continues, Mandela was either a communist or so close to being one that it made no difference and his court addresses were in written by party members active in his defence team.
All I can say in response is that I have seen no evidence to confirm that Mandela joined the Communist Party. If the authorities had had such evidence at the time, or even thereafter, they would have used it (what they did have was rejected in court). In my biography I do show that Mandela was strongly influenced by the party’s thought and by deep friendships with people he knew were communists through the 1950s and early 1960s. While I acknowledge the importance of this influence, his distance from the party and his political independence were very evident during his visit to London in 1962; indeed his remarks about the ANC’s relationship with the party on his return to South Africa dismayed many South African communists. The similarities between his two court addresses, in October 1962 and April 1964, are so extensive that it is almost certainly the case that they were both written by the same person, yet the legal arrangements and people involved in both trials were different. All the eyewitnesses, including George Bizos and Anthony Sampson, suggest that Mandela wrote his 1964 address by himself, while its literary style conforms to other examples of his prose, including handwritten letters and drafts of his autobiography written while he was in prison in 1977.

In his autobiography Mandela is extremely critical of Umkhonto’s strategic programme ‘Operation Mayibuye’. Indeed, it is likely that this consideration prompted the autobiography’s suppression when it arrived in London, even though by that stage the operation had been incorporated into the ANC’s ‘Strategy and Tactics’. Mandela’s differences with Govan Mbeki in prison are also important pointers to his political position, at least in the 1970s. All the circumstantial evidence, therefore, suggests that Mandela was telling the truth in 1964. Would it have mattered if he had not been? Yes, I think so, because he would then seem a morally diminished figure and it is his ability to conform both with indigenous and with western liberal conceptions of honour that makes him so attractive and powerful as a historic personality.

Finally, critical readers have suggested that I fail to take Mandela to task sufficiently for the mistakes of his administration between 1994 and 1999: his failure to check the behaviour of incompetent or venal colleagues, the too high a premium placed on loyalty and friendship, policy drift and wasted opportunities. I certainly could have been harsher about certain ministers and Mandela’s toleration of their poor performance: Stella Sigcau and Nkosazana Zuma are two cases in point. Mandela himself has acknowledged that his administration was far too slow in developing sensible policies to address the HIV-AIDS pandemic. On venality, Mandela was a little too ready to allow crony-style social relationships to develop around the ANC. From time to time he could distance himself from a family-like loyalty to his party but often he would place party concerns before national interest.

With respect to the charge of policy drift I would maintain that the major responsibility was collective. Certainly it was the case that Mandela lacked a strategic vision in government and he probably did not have a very detailed grasp of his own party’s policies, especially with respect to macro-economic management. His foreign policy decisions are often viewed as erratic, though here I think his performance was rather better than is sometimes allowed, especially given what followed. On social reform, I think the Mandela administration again achieved more than it receives credit for. However, in fairness, while Mandela was indispensable as a leader of government who could build support for the new administration he was, by the time of his accession, too frail to play a really assertive role as an architect of policy. It was this consideration which influenced my own evaluation of his achievements and shortcomings in office.

Now, in this new and highly revealing biography, Tom Lodge draws on a wide range of original sources to uncover a host of fresh insights about t...more Striking in appearance--six foot four and physically imposing--with an aristocratic bearing and incredible charm and self-assurance, Nelson Mandela is the greatest African leader in modern history, an iconic figure the world over.

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