

# **What Do Nelson Mandela And F.W. De Klerk Have In Common? A They Both Started Apartheid.B They Both Spent**

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Understanding the history of South Africa requires examining the complex roles played by two of its most influential figures: Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk. While their actions and beliefs diverged significantly over the years, their early involvement in the political landscape of South Africa and their connection to the apartheid regime have sparked many debates. This article explores what Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk have in common, particularly focusing on their initial roles related to apartheid, their political journeys, and their contributions to South Africa's transformation.

## **Introduction: The Complex Legacy of Mandela and De Klerk**

South Africa's history is marked by deep divisions rooted in racial segregation and inequality. Nelson Mandela, the iconic anti-apartheid revolutionary, spent decades fighting against systemic oppression. F.W. De Klerk, on the other hand, was a former state president who played a pivotal role in dismantling apartheid. Despite their opposing roles in the struggle, both figures are intertwined in South Africa's turbulent history, with their early political actions offering insights into their complex legacies.

## **What Do Nelson Mandela And F.W. De Klerk Have In Common?**

### **A They Both Started Apartheid**

At first glance, the statement that both Mandela and De Klerk "started apartheid" may seem misleading. However, this phrase is often used to highlight that both men, in their early political careers, were part of the structures that upheld or initially operated within the apartheid system.

#### **Nelson Mandela's Early Political Involvement**

- Membership in the African National Congress (ANC): Mandela joined the ANC in 1943, which was committed to ending racial discrimination.
- Participation in the Defiance Campaign: In the 1940s, Mandela participated in protests against unjust laws.

- Initial Approach to Resistance: Mandela initially believed in peaceful protest and civil disobedience but later adopted more radical strategies.

#### F.W. De Klerk's Early Political Role

- Member of the National Party: De Klerk joined the ruling National Party, which formally instituted apartheid in 1948.
- Support for Segregation Policies: During his early years, De Klerk supported or at least operated within the framework of apartheid policies.
- Political Positions: As a member of the government, De Klerk was involved in maintaining apartheid laws before later initiating reform.

#### Common Ground in Their Early Careers

- Both Mandela and De Klerk operated within the political system of South Africa during different eras.
- Both interacted with or were influenced by the prevailing racial policies at different times.
- They were both, at different points, part of institutions that supported or upheld systemic racial divisions.

## **B They Both Spent Time in Political Leadership Positions**

Another aspect they share is their time in significant leadership roles, which shaped the course of South African history.

#### Mandela's Leadership

- President of South Africa (1994-1999): Mandela became the country's first Black president.
- Leading the Transition: He was pivotal in steering South Africa from apartheid towards democracy.
- Symbol of Reconciliation: Mandela's leadership emphasized healing racial divides.

#### De Klerk's Leadership

- State President (1989-1994): De Klerk was the last white president of South Africa.
- Reforms and Negotiations: He initiated reforms to end apartheid and negotiated with Mandela.
- Shared Nobel Peace Prize: Both Mandela and De Klerk received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 for their efforts to peacefully end apartheid.

#### Contrasts in Leadership Roles

- Mandela's leadership was rooted in revolutionary change and anti-apartheid activism.
- De Klerk's leadership involved reforming and dismantling the existing system from within the government.

## **Key Points of Comparison and Contrast**

## Political Ideologies and Beliefs

- Nelson Mandela: Committed to racial equality, anti-apartheid, and African nationalism.
- F.W. De Klerk: Initially supported the status quo but later recognized the need for reform.

## Approach to Racial Equality

- Mandela: Advocated for complete racial integration and justice.
- De Klerk: Supported gradual change, ultimately endorsing the end of apartheid.

## Impact on South Africa's Transition

- Mandela: Became the face of the anti-apartheid movement and reconciliation.
- De Klerk: Facilitated the political transition and opened the door for democratic elections.

## Their Evolution Over Time

Despite their early associations with the apartheid regime, both Mandela and De Klerk evolved significantly.

### Nelson Mandela

- Transitioned from a militant activist to a global symbol of peace and reconciliation.
- Emphasized forgiveness and nation-building after his release from prison.

### F.W. De Klerk

- Shifted from defending apartheid to actively supporting its abolition.
- Recognized the injustices of the system and worked to establish a multiracial democracy.

## The Legacy of Mandela and De Klerk

### Nelson Mandela's Legacy

- Freedom fighter, prisoner, and first Black president of South Africa.
- Nobel laureate and global icon for justice and reconciliation.
- Inspired movements for social justice worldwide.

### F.W. De Klerk's Legacy

- Architect of peaceful transition from apartheid.
- Recognized for his role in ending racial segregation.

- Controversial figure due to his early association with apartheid policies.

## **Conclusion: Understanding Their Shared History**

While Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk began their political journeys under very different circumstances, their early involvement in South Africa's political system and their leadership roles in shaping the nation's future are undeniable. Their stories reflect the complexity of moral and political evolution, illustrating how individuals can change and influence history in profound ways. Recognizing what Mandela and De Klerk have in common helps us appreciate the nuanced path South Africa took from apartheid to democracy, and the roles both played in shaping a more inclusive future.

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

### **Did Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk work together?**

Yes, Mandela and De Klerk collaborated during South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy. De Klerk's decision to end apartheid and negotiate with Mandela was instrumental in the country's peaceful transition.

### **Were both of them opposed to apartheid initially?**

Not exactly. Mandela was committed to fighting apartheid from the start, while De Klerk initially supported the system but later became a reformist leader who helped dismantle it.

### **What awards did both leaders receive?**

Both Mandela and De Klerk received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 for their efforts to end apartheid and facilitate a peaceful transition.

### **How are Mandela and De Klerk remembered today?**

Nelson Mandela is celebrated globally as a symbol of resistance and reconciliation, while F.W. De Klerk is recognized for his role in peacefully ending apartheid, despite ongoing debates about his early political positions.

In summary, Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk's early political careers were intertwined with South Africa's racial policies, but their subsequent actions helped redefine the nation's future. Their stories exemplify how individuals can evolve and influence history, ultimately contributing to a more

just and democratic South Africa.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What do Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk have in common?**

They both played significant roles in ending apartheid in South Africa and shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993.

### **Did Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk both work towards ending apartheid?**

Yes, both leaders collaborated to dismantle the apartheid system and promote peaceful transition to democracy.

### **What is a key similarity between Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk?**

Both were pivotal figures in South Africa's history, working towards racial reconciliation and political change.

### **Did Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk ever cooperate during the transition period?**

Yes, they engaged in negotiations that led to the end of apartheid and the first multiracial elections.

### **Are Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk recognized for their efforts in peace?**

Absolutely, their joint efforts earned them the Nobel Peace Prize for their roles in ending racial segregation.

### **What was F.W. De Klerk's role in South Africa's history compared to Nelson Mandela?**

De Klerk was the last white apartheid-era president who helped initiate reforms, while Mandela was the anti-apartheid leader who became South Africa's first black president.

### **Did Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk share similar views on reconciliation?**

Yes, both advocated for national reconciliation and unity after decades of division.

# What do Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk have in common regarding their political impact?

They both significantly influenced South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy through leadership and negotiation.

## Additional Resources

What Do Nelson Mandela And F.W. De Klerk Have In Common? A They Both Started Apartheid. They Both Spent

The history of South Africa is intertwined with complex narratives of conflict, reconciliation, and profound change. Among the most pivotal figures in this story are Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk—two leaders whose lives and legacies have often been examined in contrast but are also deeply connected through the tumultuous history of apartheid. This article explores their surprising commonalities, especially focusing on the fact that both of them, at different points in their lives, played roles in the inception and maintenance of apartheid, and how their paths eventually led to a shared pursuit of dismantling the system they helped build. Understanding their journeys provides critical insight into the intricate tapestry of South Africa's struggle for freedom and democracy.

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The Origins of Apartheid: A Shared Beginning

The Roots of Segregation and Discrimination

Apartheid, the system of institutionalized racial segregation and discrimination, officially began in South Africa in 1948, but its ideological foundations were laid much earlier. Both Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk were born into a society where racial divisions were entrenched and institutionalized—though their personal trajectories would diverge sharply in terms of ideology and actions.

Nelson Mandela (1918-2013):

Born in the small village of Mvezo in the Eastern Cape, Mandela grew up in a society where colonialism and racial hierarchies were pervasive. As a young man, he was influenced by the injustices faced by black South Africans under colonial rule and later under the apartheid regime. Initially, Mandela did not envision outright rebellion but believed in working within existing structures to improve the lives of his people.

F.W. De Klerk (1936-2021):

Born in the Western Cape, De Klerk grew up in a society where Afrikaner nationalism and conservative politics were prominent. His early career was embedded in the apartheid system, and he was a member of the National Party, which implemented apartheid policies. His early political positions reflected a commitment to maintaining white supremacy and the status quo.

How Both Got Involved in the System

While their backgrounds differed, both Mandela and De Klerk became part of the machinery of apartheid at different points:

#### - Mandela's initial involvement:

Mandela was a lawyer who, in the 1940s, became active in anti-colonial and African nationalist movements. However, in his early political career, he participated in organizations that worked within the system, such as the African National Congress (ANC). For a time, Mandela believed in negotiations and nonviolent protest but was also prepared for more confrontational actions.

#### - De Klerk's early role:

As a member of the ruling elite, De Klerk's political career was aligned with maintaining apartheid policies. He served in various government roles, supporting legislation that enforced racial segregation. His early stance was that apartheid was necessary for stability.

#### Shared Starting Point:

Both leaders, despite their later divergent paths, started their political lives within a society built on racial inequality. Their initial involvement was shaped by the social and political contexts of their upbringing, and both contributed—directly or indirectly—to the system of apartheid.

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### Diverging Paths: From Upkeep to Dismantling

#### The Transformation of Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela's journey from a young lawyer to a revolutionary is a testament to ideological evolution:

#### - Early advocacy:

Mandela initially believed in peaceful protest and negotiation but grew increasingly frustrated with the apartheid government's repression. The Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, where police killed protesting black South Africans, marked a turning point for him.

#### - Militant resistance:

In 1961, Mandela co-founded Umkhonto we Sizwe ("Spear of the Nation"), a militant wing of the ANC, signaling a shift toward armed resistance. His actions and leadership made him a target of the apartheid regime.

#### - Imprisonment and global symbol:

Mandela was arrested in 1962, sentenced to life imprisonment in 1964, and spent 27 years behind bars. During this time, he became an international symbol of resistance against oppression.

#### - Transition to reconciliation:

After his release in 1990, Mandela led negotiations that ended apartheid peacefully. His leadership emphasized reconciliation, forgiveness, and building a new South Africa based on equality.

#### The Evolution of F.W. De Klerk

De Klerk's transformation was perhaps more surprising, given his early commitment to apartheid:

#### - Gradual recognition of change:

De Klerk became increasingly aware of the systemic problems and economic pressures facing South Africa in the 1980s. The country was facing internal unrest and international sanctions.

- The decision to reform:

In 1989, De Klerk became president and began a process of reform. His government lifted some bans on political organizations, released political prisoners including Nelson Mandela, and initiated negotiations for a transition to democracy.

- From defender to dismantler:

De Klerk's willingness to negotiate with the ANC and accept majority rule marked a significant departure from his earlier stance. His role was pivotal in the peaceful transition from apartheid to a democratic South Africa.

Commonality in Their Transitions:

Both Mandela and De Klerk, despite starting at opposite ends—one as a revolutionary, the other as a defender of apartheid—became architects of reconciliation and democratic change. Their willingness to change and adapt was central to the peaceful end of apartheid.

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What Do They Have in Common?

While their early roles were markedly different, Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk share several critical aspects that underscore their historical connection:

#### 1. They Both Started Within the System of Apartheid

Despite their differing ideologies, both leaders were initially part of or complicit in the apartheid regime's machinery:

- Mandela, although an anti-apartheid activist, participated in the political system through the ANC and later in militant resistance.
- De Klerk was a member of the ruling National Party, supporting and upholding apartheid policies.

#### 2. They Both Experienced Personal and Political Transformation

Their journeys highlight that leadership can evolve:

- Mandela's shift from a militant activist to a symbol of reconciliation demonstrates personal growth and a commitment to peace.
- De Klerk's decision to negotiate and dismantle apartheid policies shows political courage and willingness to change.

#### 3. They Both Played Pivotal Roles in Ending Apartheid

Their leadership was instrumental in South Africa's transition:

- Mandela's leadership in negotiations and reconciliation earned him the Nobel Peace Prize and worldwide respect.
- De Klerk's decision to release Mandela and support democratic reforms was crucial in avoiding civil conflict and establishing a new order.

#### 4. They Both Faced Personal Risks and Criticism

- Mandela faced imprisonment and lifelong sacrifice.
- De Klerk risked his political career and faced criticism from within his own party and constituency.

## 5. They Both Embraced the Idea of Reconciliation

Despite their origins, both leaders prioritized building a united South Africa:

- Mandela's famous call to "forgive and forget" set a tone for nation-building.
- De Klerk's acknowledgment of past injustices and efforts to include all racial groups helped foster peace.

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## The Legacy of Two Leaders

The story of Mandela and De Klerk exemplifies how leadership can evolve from complicity to reconciliation. Their shared history illustrates that monumental change often involves complex personal journeys, difficult decisions, and the willingness to confront the past.

Nelson Mandela's legacy:

He became a global icon of resistance, emphasizing forgiveness and equality. His leadership helped heal a fractured nation and set a precedent for peaceful transitions worldwide.

F.W. De Klerk's legacy:

His role in ending apartheid was controversial but ultimately significant. As a white leader who chose dialogue over division, De Klerk demonstrated that change is possible from within the system.

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## Conclusion

Nelson Mandela and F.W. De Klerk's lives are testaments to the profound complexities of history and leadership. Both started within the apartheid system—one as a participant, the other as a supporter—and both evolved into figures committed to ending racial segregation and building a democratic South Africa. Their journeys remind us that change often begins with recognition of past mistakes, the courage to challenge entrenched systems, and the willingness to forge a new path grounded in reconciliation and justice.

Understanding their intertwined stories enriches our appreciation of South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy—stories of transformation, redemption, and hope that continue to inspire nations around the world.

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