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The U.S. Revolution that Supported Mandela

By Jazelle Hunt

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INGTON (NNPA) - Nearly three decades ago, a handful of black activists began organizing a movement that would help break the back of apartheid in South Africa and force government and American companies to end their support of minority rule on the continent.

It was called the Free South Africa Movement began on August 15, 1984, when then-U.S. Civil Rights Commissioner Frances Berry, TransAfrica executive director Randall Robinson, D.C. Congressman Walter Fauntroy, and current-D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (then a law professor at Georgetown University), were granted a meeting at the South African Embassy in Washington, D.C.

The group called for an end to apartheid and the release of all political prisoners in South Africa. When their demands were ignored, they staged a sit-in at the South African embassy on Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.

At Norton were arrested for trespassing, and their actions went from local, then international news.

There were already protests before, but no one got any momentum. "We wanted to get arrested. And we tried to get arrested up to get arrested the next day."

Not arrested the next day, the day after that and the following day, every day for a year, the Free South Africa Movement demonstrations at the South African Embassy in Washington.

The movement attracted support from celebrities, members of Congress and other high-profile people, many of whom participated in protest and allowed themselves to be arrested in order to draw attention to the issue. Before long, chapters of Free South Africa Movement sprang up across the United States.

Do not forget that Britain, the U.S. and all of the western nations labeled Mandela a terrorist and steadfastly propped up the apartheid regime - they were on the wrong side of history," says civil rights leader Jesse Jackson. Mandela is not gone, he remains with us. He'll always be a chin bar to pull up on. He has left this world, but he soars high among the heavens, and his eloquent call for justice and equality is still heard among the winds and rains, and in the hearts of the people of the world over."

Frances Berry, a professor of history at the University of Maryland, remembers the personal side of Mandela.

Working with him in personal interactions - having the privilege of talking with him and talk to him in an informal setting - he was not at all full of himself, and completely down to earth. Though he was larger than life, he considered himself on the level of an ordinary person, and he didn't take himself too seriously. He loved a joke and always had witticisms."

To maintain pressure on the streets, movement organizers organized a legislative assault on apartheid, resulting in passage of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986.

It took an entire year to get it passed by Congress and presented to President Reagan for his signature. Instead of signing, however, Reagan vetoed it. But supporters had enough votes to override the veto. In line were U.S. companies that profited from doing business in the white-ruled nation, including Shell Oil, which had been boycotting workers in South Africa. Boycotts were launched against companies such as the Krugerrand, a South African currency that would be illegal to import under the Anti-Apartheid Act.

While the United States and other governments had condemned apartheid and continued to support the South African government, anti-apartheid movements gained traction. Something about apartheid had struck a chord, especially for people of African descent.

There were chapters of FSAM all over the country and there were many white people in those chapters, but the leadership was black. People got involved because our message was simple. "If people didn't remember Jim Crow or the Civil Rights Movement, then their parents did," says Berry. "We told people that the African government passed laws just like what we did here, and we did with people in this country."

John Foote, founder and president of the Constituency for Africa, worked to foster African and African American relations throughout his 35 years. He remembers watching Mandela become a symbol of justice.

"African people of African descent learned about apartheid, it didn't seem much different than what happened with slavery," he says. "I think with Mandela - who would've thought you'd have this strong, powerful man come out of prison after 27 years with pain, and do the things he did. He got us to think differently about Africa."

"He was one of the greatest people to walk the Earth in our lifetime. There's discussion of Mandela happening in our lives all over the world."

"I see parallels between black South Africans' regard for Obama, and black Americans' regard for Nelson Mandela. It's for those who visited South Africa during Mandela's presidency [black South Africans] based their revolution against apartheid on us," says Berry. "People, especially white people, try not to make that link with Mandela - who would've thought you'd have this strong, powerful man come out of prison after 27 years with pain, and do the things he did. He got us to think differently about Africa."

"Berry, Mandela's life and anti-apartheid work taught her that things require perseverance, especially during low moments. She learned how to make movements effective."

"I reinforced the view that it takes grassroots movements working with political action to make change," she states. "If you can organize around a simple issue - and messaging has a lot to do with it - and if the issue is clearly one of morality, you can prevail."



NELSON MANDELA (File photo from a visit to the United States)

Reform Law Could Pose Major Threat to Black Banks

By Charles Ellison

Special to the NNPA from The Philadelphia Tribune

When President Obama signed the Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (otherwise known as Dodd-Frank) into law in the summer of 2010, no one could be satisfied. Only bill creator and outgoing Sen. Chris Dodd was putting a happy spin on it at the time, while Rep. Barney Frank, a famously crabby Congressman from southern Massachusetts, reluctantly put his political capital behind it before retiring.

Supporters of the law were pretty dim on its prospect as an effective Wall Street enforcement tool, with many decrying it as toothless. Critics, on the other hand, were equally disdainful for different reasons: They saw Dodd-Frank as not only the bane of the financial services industry and big banks, but the cataclysmic end of capitalism as we knew it.

Three years later, and Wall Street is still humming along alive and well with record breaking markers on the stock market. The top banks, wealth management and other financial service firms in the United States hold over \$10 trillion in total assets, according to the latest Federal Reserve report, nearly \$3 trillion more than they held in 2008 before the Great Recession laid waste to the economy.

But as the fog of Dodd-Frank appears to lift somewhat, critics on both sides of the aisle agree that the law's focus on big banks has come at the expense of smaller community banks. That includes the less than two dozen African American-owned banks lightly sprinkled throughout the nation and struggling to serve economically battered African American communities.

According to a white paper released during a recent Community Bank Research Conference sponsored by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, more than 250 banks with assets under \$250 million have failed since 2002. The bulk of those failures occurred at the onset of the financial crisis in 2009 but continued persisting even as Dodd-Frank went into effect. While the rate at which smaller banks failed decreased significantly, it didn't go unnoticed by experts that the pace of big bank failures since Dodd-Frank dropped sharply compared to small outfits: In 2009, at the height of the financial crisis, 30 banks with assets over \$1 billion failed. But, by 2012, only 1 big bank failed compared to 35 smaller community banks.

"Communities cannot reach their full potential without the local presence of a bank," warned Thomas Boyle, vice chairman of Illinois-based State Bank of CountrySide during a Congressional hearing on Dodd-Frank in 2011. "Hundreds of new regulations - are slowly but surely strangling traditional community banks and handicapping our ability to meet the credit needs of our communities."

Two years later, B. Doyle Mitchell, Jr., President and CEO of Industrial Bank, is ringing the same alarm bell. Testifying before a House Small Business Committee panel last week, Mitchell's tone was grim in his assessment of Dodd-Frank's impact on his business. Industrial Bank, based in Washington, D.C., is one of the largest and oldest African-American banks in the country, with total assets valued near \$350 million.

"These regulations are being enacted in response to the worst abuses of the pre-crisis mortgage market, abuses in which community banks did not engage," explained Mitchell during testimony. "In order to reach their full potential as catalysts for entrepreneurship, economic growth and job creation, community banks must have regulation that is calibrated to their size, lower-risk profile, and traditional business model."

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