

# 'Higher Than Hope: The Biography of Nelson Mandela

By Fatima Meer

Nelson Mandela's release on February 11, after 27 years of imprisonment in South Africa was one of the most eagerly anticipated and joyfully celebrated events of our time. Mandela, the leader of the African National Congress, has attained the status of legend within his own lifetime, and world looks to him to lead South Africa in its difficult transition towards government after apartheid. He has been the subject of praise of virtually every world leader, and figures as diverse as Pope John Paul II, Richard Attenborough, Genevieve Wonder and Mike Tyson have eulogized him. Yet while Mandela, the legend, and his message are well-known, the man behind them is not.

Fatima Meer's *Higher Than Hope: The Biography of Nelson Mandela* (Harper & Row, March 9, 1990, \$19.95) was first published in South Africa in 1988, immediately sold out its first printing, and was subsequently banned. It is a dramatic and intimate portrait of Mandela, written by a close friend of the family. Professor Meer, a prominent and outspoken critic of apartheid in her own right, and no stranger to arrests, harassment and banings, was invited to write this biography by Mandela himself. In researching *Higher Than Hope*, Professor Meer had unprecedented, exclusive access to Mandela, his correspondence, his family and close associates in the ANC. Mandela himself carefully examined, approved and authorized the manuscript. Winnie Mandela writes in her foreword to *Higher Than Hope*, "There was no better person (for Nelson's biography) than Fatima Meer...Not only did Mandela request Fatima to undertake this task, he wrote to her an asked me to pursue her to get down to it and I did."

*Higher Than Hope* is a compassionately written account of a man who, more than almost anyone, can claim to have made African history. Working within certain limitations — the greatest being the difficulty of making contact with Mandela (she spent a total of 18 hours with him at Victor Verster prison) — Professor Meer nevertheless paints an impressive portrait. Mandela himself, on reading the manuscript, wrote that she had done "a marvelous job for

which the family will remain very grateful."

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*The picture Professor Meer presents is that of an ordinary human being with natural emotions and desires and not an ancient myth which often provokes the tiresome questions: "Why do children who were not yet born when Mandela was jailed eulogize this man?" "Do you think the youth of the land really want a man they do not know to lead them if he is released?"*

— Winnie Mandela

In the wake of Mandela's release, a book such as *Higher Than Hope* becomes even more important. Meer vividly transforms the figure of myth into an ordinary man who abandons a successful career as an attorney to give his all for the Cause. From Transkei region of Mandela's birth, to Johannesburg, to his underground travels through Africa and to England, Meer's narrative mixes the political and the personal in Mandela's life, giving us the picture of a fully rounded human being. Mandela granted Meer the copyright to his prison correspondence, and these letters — divided into headings such as "Winnie," "Sons," "Daughters," "Kinsfolk," "Regrets, Nostalgia, Dreams," "House and Land" — add a still more personal voice.

*HIGHER THAN HOPE* traces Mandela's rise in the ANC and his evolving political beliefs in the face of increasing repression by the South African government. From Mandela's joining the ANC in 1944, through his Defiance Campaign and the work stoppage he orchestrated in the 1950s, to his eventual acceptance of the need for armed struggle in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre and the State of Emergency in the early 1960s — *HIGHER THAN HOPE* presents with authority and insight the alliances, key players, and historical background necessary to understand this crucial chapter in South African history. Meer covers in great detail the Rivonia Trial, in which Mandela and dozens of others were sentenced to life for "attempting to overthrow the state," and reproduces large segments of Mandela's passionate Statement From the Dock, an articulate defense of

the ANC, of himself, and of his people which proved to be essential in the formation of his larger-than-life persona:

*During my lifetime I have dedicated my life to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for, and to see realized. But my lord, if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.*

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One of the most striking commentaries on Mandela's stature and importance appears in the author's Preface to *HIGHER THAN HOPE*. Meer traveled to the cottage at Victor Verster prison where Mandela had been moved since his battle with tuberculosis in 1988. With its swimming pool and television room, the isolated but comfortable prison compound was a far cry from Mandela's hard labor days at Robben Island, the site of his original incarceration. During this visit, Meer saw something odd in the behavior of the prison staff, puzzled over it, and finally realized:

*As we talked and saw the deference shown him by the guards, it dawned on me that it was not only South Africa's disenfranchised who saw their hopes reflected in him, but that the government too was hoping to resolve its problems through him.*

Nelson Mandela is, quite simply, one of the greatest living figures of our time. *HIGHER THAN HOPE* is a unique tribute to and essential biography of the great man. It is also a perceptive commentary on the situation in South Africa. It is a document that no one concerned with politics or humanity can afford to miss.



The Welsh national flower is the leek—a vegetable that closely resembles the onion.



PRINCE

## Riveting Musical Performances Rock New Prince Film

MINNEAPOLIS — Production on PRINCE's fourth major motion picture, a new wave "Hollywood" musical with a contemporary urban slant, began last month and continued through March. The Minneapolis-based artist is directing, scoring and starring in "Graffiti Bridge," which also stars "Purple Rain" pals Morris E. Day and Jerome Benton. The film is introducing the intriguing and sexy newcomer Ingrid Chavez.

Leaked reports from the set of "Graffiti Bridge" have already caused a buzz throughout the entertainment industry. With the use of an eclectic mix of choreography by Otis Sailid, an intensely dramatic use of cinematography and a host of sizzling musical performances, industry insiders are already speculating that the film will be one of the summer's hottest attractions.

The film features Prince as The Kid (resurrected from "Purple Rain") and Morris E. Day as rivals in a power struggle over the direction of the Glam Slam, a nightclub they co-own. Left to them in a friend's will, the Glam Slam is all that the two young men have in common. Money rules the sleazy world of Morris E. Day while The Kid is driven by a deeper force expressed through the powerful energy and raw beauty of his music.

Some of the film's hottest footage is sure to be the on-screen reunion of one of the world's 'coolest' bands. Joining lead singer Morris Day and his sidekick Jerome Benton are the rest of the original Time bandmembers — Jimmy Jam, Terry Lewis, Jesse Johnson, Jellybean Johnson and Monte Moir.

"Graffiti Bridge" examines the power of love, hope and faith. The film's characters are frequently confronted with the dilemma of choosing integrity in a world where greed and corruption seem more readily rewarded. Combining elements of magical fantasy with reality, the film is an inspiring, upbeat look at the challenge of following dreams and the struggle involved with being true to one's self.

In addition to riveting performances by Prince's electrifying band, the film features appearances by funk's 'Founding Father' George Clinton and 'Gospel Maven' Mavis Staples, who portray nightclub managers. Thirteen-year-old Tevin Campbell (who sings two tracks on Quincy Jones' current release, "Back On the Block") plays Staples' son.

Other Paisley Park Records artists appearing in the film are Jill Jones and rappers Robin Power and T.C. Ellis.