

# commentary

## Walking in Mandela's Footsteps

By George E. Curry  
NNPA Editor-in-Chief



PRETORIA, South Africa - It's not easy walking in the footsteps of Nelson Mandela, the nation's first democratically elected president. No one knows that better than the two men who succeeded him as president of South Africa.

A larger-than-life figure, Mandela was elected president of the formerly White minority-ruled country in 1994, an accomplishment made even more remarkable by his having served 27 years in prison for his struggle to win equal rights for the violently oppressed Black majority. After serving one term and still at the apex of his popularity, the former lawyer decided to forgo a second 5-year term, clearing the way for his chief deputy and African National Congress (ANC) colleague Thabo Mbeki to assume the top office in 1999.

But after serving eight years in office, Mbeki was recalled by the ANC in 2007 after losing an elective conference to Jacob Zuma at a party gathering in Polokwane, Limpopo, just north of Johannesburg. He resigned in September 2008. Zuma succeeded Mbeki and there appears to be growing disenchantment with the country's third Black president's performance.

Zuma's presidency has been tarnished by repeated reports of scandals, including charges that he used state funds on his private residence in Nkandla, a rural town in KwaZulu-Natal province. Improvements include the addition of a swimming pool, visitors' center and amphitheater. The Zuma administration said the expenses, estimated at approximately \$2 million (U.S.), are for security reasons.

Photographs of the sprawling home have reminded South Africans of the contrast between the lavish lifestyles enjoyed by the elites and the millions of residents mired in poverty. The allegations of corruption are taking a political toll on Zuma, who is in his second term.

According to the Sunday Times, Mbeki told a UK television network that Zuma should resign if recalled by the ANC.

"So when they look at some of the things that are happening when they see this corruption in the country, which seems to be increasing at all levels of government, the people are aggrieved. They are saying that this is not what freedom was for."

With nearly 100 international leaders in South Africa to memorialize the beloved Nelson Mandela, Zuma was loudly booed by some participants at the main memorial service. At a send-off from Pretoria the day before Mandela's funeral, Zuma seemed to be answering his critics when he said, "I'll be very happy if, as we mourn and celebrate Madiba, we do not abuse his name. Mandela never abused his membership and his leadership in the ANC. We should not think that Madiba's passing on is a time for us to indirectly settle scores."

Mbeki is not the only Mandela loyalist to believe that Zuma is not the leader the nation needs at this time.

In an interview earlier this year with the Mail & Guardian, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu said: "I have over the years voted for the ANC, but I would very sadly not be able to vote for them after the way things have gone." Tutu explained, "We really need a change. The ANC was very good at leading us in the struggle to be free from oppression. They were a good freedom-fighting unit. But it doesn't seem to me now that a freedom-fighting unit can easily make the transition to becoming a political party."

Last week, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, the country's largest trade union and a traditional ally of the ANC, called for Zuma to resign and announced that it will not support the ruling ANC in next year's election.

The pressure for Zuma's resignation continues to build.

According to a poll released Dec. 15 by the Sunday Times, slightly more than half (51 percent) of registered ANC members believe Zuma should resign from office as a result of a scandal involving his home in Nkandla.

Zuma's critics acknowledge that the dissatisfaction with the president has as much to do with disappointment at the slow rate of progress over nearly 20 years of freedom, including the Mandela years, than Zuma individually.

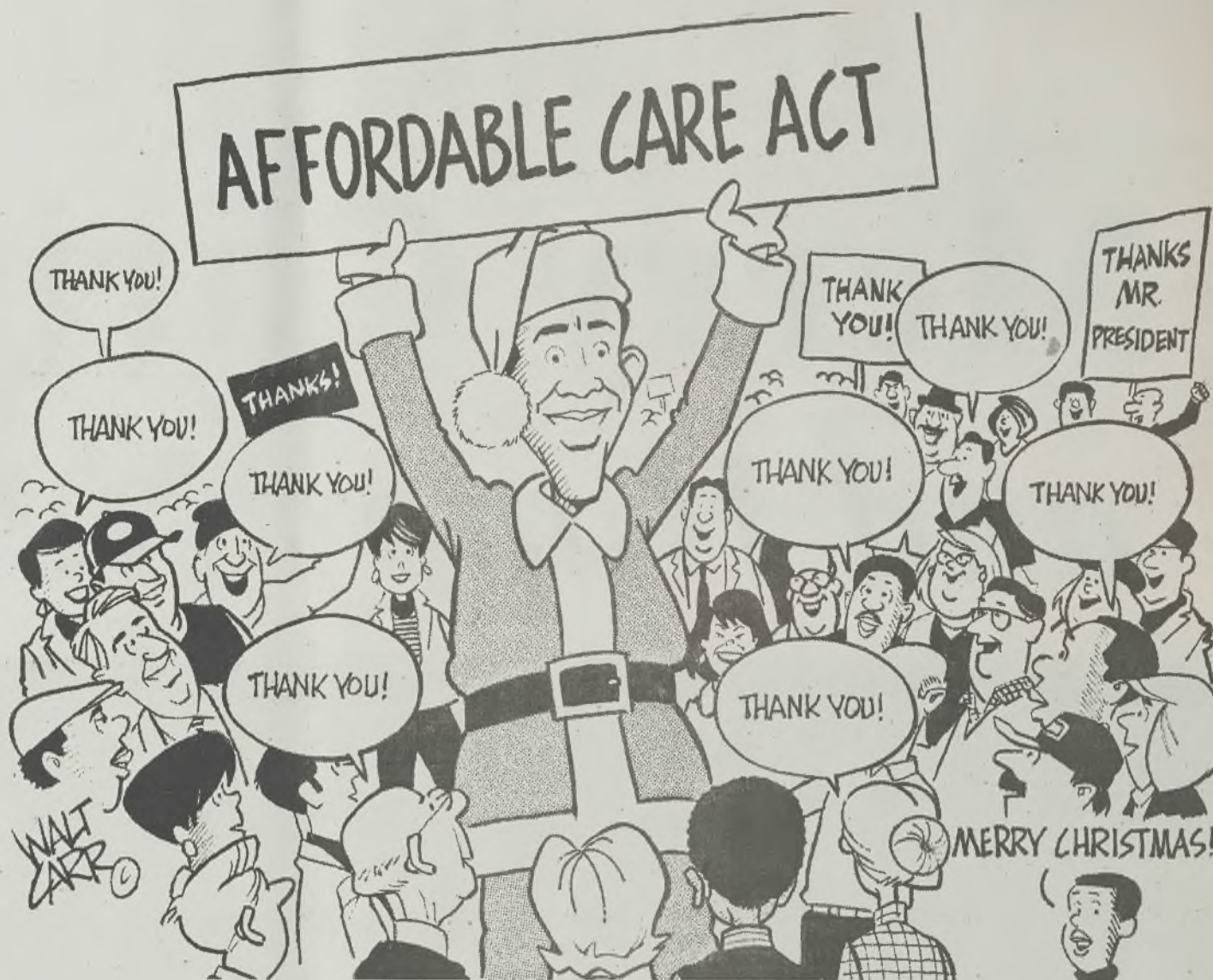
A report last year by Statistics South Africa showed that over the past decade, annual earnings of Black households increased by 169 percent to 60,613 rand (approximately U.S. \$6,644) while White household earnings over that same period rose by 88 percent to 365,134 rand (about U.S. \$40,927).

Official unemployment is nearly 25 percent. If you add discouraged workers no longer actively seeking work, the figure is 33 percent.

The Economist noted, "the gap between rich and poor is now wider than under apartheid."

South Africa is learning the lesson that other countries around the world, including the U.S., are being forced to accept. It's one thing to criticize government as an outsider. It's quite another to assume power and make fundamental changes.

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## What Color Is Your Santa Claus?

By Lee A. Daniels  
NNPA Columnist



In case you haven't noticed, 'tis the season - to have another controversy illuminating America's race-driven fault lines. This time we can thank Fox News' talk-show host Megyn Kelly for responding to a December 12 essay by writer Aisha Harris on Slate.com that criticized what Harris said was the outdated notion of Santa Claus as a white man.

Harris wrote of the "two different Santa Clauses" of her childhood - the white Santa of the larger American culture, and the one who existed within her family: her father, whose "skin was as dark as mine."

Noting that "I like the holiday itself," Santa Claus today is far removed from his religious origins and the real-life historical 4<sup>th</sup>-century Christian bishop, St. Nicholas. Harris asserted the ecumenical spirit of Santa Claus was its most important feature. She recommended that because television programs and films have made children so used to seeing animals with human characteristics and conveying human meaning, Santa Claus should be a penguin.

Kelly a few days later declared on her program she was having none of it: "For all you kids watching at home, Santa just is white." And for good measure she added that Jesus was "white," too.

Naturally, the blogosphere and the twitterverse had a field day, with many agreeing with Harris that today's Santa Claus isn't a person but a symbol of kindness, compassion, and putting the happiness of others above one's own.

That spirit was beautifully described in writer Soraya Chemaly's poignant remembrance in Salon.com of her Christmas "growing up in a British colony as it went through independence," where almost "every Santa I remember seeing - was a black man."

"When it comes to Santa," she wrote, "the most 'real' thing about him is millions of parents, often but not always mothers, who quietly work away into the wee hours, tiptoeing in darkened rooms so Santa can get everything done before daybreak. - It wasn't until I had my own small children that I fully realized how much time, effort and thoughtfulness my mother put into making sure that Santa Claus was so amazing and that Christmas was fantastical."

She concluded with this: "Given the way childcare is still distributed, most of the time, women and mothers are doing the invisible work that Santa relies on to get through his busy night. If there is one thing for sure, Santa will not be a small, brown woman for some time to come. This self-erasure is poignant, and not an entirely positive lesson. Given the history of the United States in particular, the darker a parent, the more poignant the erasure. However, it is a testament of the purest kind of love. The rank parsimony of insisting on Santa's whiteness with such vehemence is an ironic way to defend the idea of selfless giving."

Confronted with an onslaught of facts about the origins of both Santa Claus and Jesus, Kelly two days later declared she had "learned" [it is] far from settled - whether the color of Jesus' skin was or was not white. (Actually, it is settled that the color of his skin was not white; the question is what shade of brown was Jesus.)

Kelly characterized her earlier statement about Santa as a "tongue-in-cheek," humorous response to Aisha Harris's essay. She then added that those criticizing her represented "the knee-jerk instinct by so many to race-bait and to assume the worst in people, especially people employed by the very powerful Fox News Channel."

Those transparent claims aside, this season's "Santa controversy" underscores the broader tension that has gripped American society since the civil rights victories of the 1960s erased the color line's hard, legalized barriers.

It revolves around the same fundamental question that has always defined black-white relations in America: Where's the "tipping point?" - that point along the spectrum from intolerance to tolerance where the dominant group's resistance to those who are different flares.

Soraya Chemaly made just this point about Megyn Kelly's attempt to place a whites-only sign on two of the world's revered icons.

"What some people are unwilling to digest," she said, "is that while they can see themselves, or specific prioritized aspects of themselves, everywhere in culture, they obstinately deny others the exact same right. ... they cannot even imagine what it is like to admire and love people who don't look like them. People of other colors. People of other genders. People of other sexes."

Lee A. Daniels is a longtime journalist based in New York City. His latest book is *Last Chance: The Political Threat to Black America*.

### Child Watch

## A Christmas Prayer: O God of All Children

By Marian Wright Edelman  
NNPA Columnist



As millions of Christians around the world prepare to celebrate Christmas and their belief that God entered human history as a poor tiny baby, let us remember all the poor babies and children who struggle to live and realize their God-given potential in our own rich land and all around the world today. Let's commit to act to assure hope and justice for them all.

O God of the children of Somalia, Sudan, and Syria, of South Africa and South Carolina, Of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and of India, Iraq, Iran, and Israel Of the Congo and Chicago, of Darfur and Detroit Of Myanmar and Mississippi and Louisiana and Yemen "Help us to love and respect and protect them all."

O God of Black and Brown and White and Albino children and those all mixed together, Of children who are rich and poor and in between, Of children who speak English and Russian and Hmong and Spanish and languages our ears cannot discern, "Help us to love and respect and protect them all."

O God of the child prodigy and the child prostitute, of the child of rapture and the child of rape, Of runaway or thrown away children who struggle every day without parent or place or friend or future,

"Help us to love and respect and protect them all."

O God of children who can walk and talk and hear and see and sing and dance and jump and play and of children who wish they could but can't Of children who are loved and unloved, wanted and unwanted, "Help us to love and respect and protect them all."

O God of beggar, beaten, abused, neglected, homeless, AIDS, drug, violence, and hunger-ravaged children, Of children who are emotionally and physically and mentally fragile, and of children who rebel and ridicule, torment and taunt, "Help us to love and respect and protect them all."

O God of children of destiny and of despair, of war and of peace, Of disfigured, diseased, and dying children, Of children without hope and of children with hope to spare and to share, "Help us to love and respect and act to protect them all."

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