



July 21, 2021

Mandela and Truth

July 18, 2021, marks the 103rd birth anniversary of Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa. Nelson Mandela International Day is celebrated every year on July 18 and is also known as Mandela Day. Nelson Mandela, the first President of the new Republic of South Africa, was released from prison 31 years ago on February 11, 1990. He had been imprisoned for 27 years. To recognize the anniversary of his release, President Obama said, “I remember the hope we all felt watching Mandela’s release from prison. The gift of a new way of seeing. The chance to participate in the work of building a better world. The ultimate example of perseverance and faith for each new generation to follow.”

As Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. states in his book, *Democracy in Black*, “Apartheid in South Africa, the Jim Crow South, and Nazi Germany are clear examples of societies organized by white supremacy. In each case, the belief that white people are valued more than nonwhite people shaped every aspect of social and political life.”

So, what did Nelson Mandela do when he became president of the new South Africa to deal with the evil and the effects of apartheid? Mandela formed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was created to investigate gross human rights violations that were perpetrated during the period of the apartheid regime. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is thought by many to have been a crucial component of the transition to full and free democracy in South Africa. Hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission were held to bear witness to, record, and in some cases grant amnesty to the perpetrators of crimes relating to human rights violations, as well as offering reparation and rehabilitation to the victims.

What does this mean for us today in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and so many other Blacks, as our current systems are examined to clearly see the truth of how white people are still valued more than Blacks by the very way those systems are set up? Would our own Truth and Reconciliation Commission help to recognize past and present systems that value Blacks less, help to create restorative justice, and make essential reparations? How can we work for truth in telling our history, and how can we work to continue to change the systems that result in racism?

Part of the chance to participate in building a better world is exercising our constitutional right to vote to choose the elected officials who will work for us by passing laws that affect our lives and choosing judges and others who will work for justice. The right to vote is so crucial that the system that allows people to record their vote must be fair.

This right to vote is so important that I was House Co-sponsor of legislation that was signed into law on August 21, 2019, that became Public Act 100-0442, which became effective January 1, 2020. This legislation creates a way for eligible voters who are confined or detained in jail and not convicted of an offense to exercise their right to vote. Outside of Cook County, this means that a system must be set up so eligible voters may vote by mail, and in Cook County, temporary branch polling places must be set up inside Cook County Jail. The system will allow a voter to vote in the same elections that the voter would be entitled to vote where the voter resides.

This law is so important for those people living on the West and South Sides who are disproportionately jailed. On January 1, 2020, there were 5,616 individuals at Cook County Jail. The self-reported Zip Codes for those in custody on

1/1/20 are mostly on the West and South Sides. Here is a list of the number of people in Cook County Jail from the top 15 Zip Codes:

Zip Code	No.	Frequency %
60623	252	4.50%
60624	236	4.22%
60628	218	3.90%
60644	206	3.68%
60651	198	3.54%
60619	190	3.40%
60620	188	3.36%
60621	173	3.09%
60617	158	2.82%
60636	156	2.79%
60637	126	2.25%
60629	122	2.18%
60649	117	2.09%
60411	104	1.86%
60612	101	1.81%

We can honor the legacy of Nelson Mandela, including his release from prison 31 years ago, by working to change those systems that affect Blacks differently. Working together, we can work to make sure that people who have the right to vote have a chance to exercise that right. Let's all work for Truth and Justice, which will lead us to Reconciliation and Peace.

Sincerely,



La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District