

**MOTION BY SUPERVISOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS****APRIL 23, 2019****Proclaim April 27, 2019 as Freedom Day in Los Angeles County**

Freedom Day commemorates the Republic of South Africa's first democratic elections held on April 27, 1994. These were the first national elections in which anyone of voting age could register to vote, regardless of race. Prior to this, universal adult suffrage was prohibited under the apartheid regime.

Apartheid, which means 'apartness' in Afrikaans, was the ideology supported by the ruling National Party (NP) government. Apartheid was characterized by an authoritarian political culture based on baasskap (Afrikaans for 'white supremacy'), which encouraged state repression of black African, coloured, and Asian South Africans for the benefit of the nation's minority white population. Although apartheid was formally introduced in South Africa in 1948, the first apartheid policy dates back to the 1913 Land Act which forced black Africans to live and work on reserves that offered minimal resources, causing many black communities to plunge into extreme poverty. Most reserves were divided into subdivisions, further separating black Africans according to tribal and ethnic backgrounds. The South African government used this further division of African racial groups to reduce the political power of South Africa's indigenous people.

**- M O R E -****MOTION**

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RIDLEY-THOMAS \_\_\_\_\_

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Some of apartheid's more onerous laws included the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) and the Immorality Amendment Act (1950), which made it illegal for most South African citizens to marry or pursue romantic relationships across racial lines. The Population Registration Act (1950) required that people register with the government in order to be classified into one of four racial groups based on appearance, ancestry, socioeconomic status, and cultural lifestyle: "white," "black," "coloured," and "Indian." The government then conferred different rights and privileges, based upon classification. The Group Areas Act (1950) physically separated races, especially in urban areas. The Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act (1959) moved all black people out of cities and placed them in townships. Property was seized from black landowners and redistributed to white males. By the time this discriminatory agrarian reform was completed, more than 80 percent of the land in South Africa belonged to the white minority.

Apartheid cruelly and forcibly separated people, using an enormous and vicious state apparatus to torture and incarcerate those who protested. Some of the most important organizations involved in the struggle against this repression were the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) and the United Democratic Front (UDF). There were also Indian and coloured organized resistance movements, such as the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), the Coloured People's Organisation, and white organized groups, such as the radical Armed Resistance Movement (ARM), and Black Sash.

Perhaps none is as well-known as the ANC, which was formed in 1912. In 1952, the ANC embarked upon the Defiance Campaign, a nonviolent movement that called on people to purposefully break apartheid laws and offer themselves for arrest. Black people boarded whites-only buses, used whites-only toilets, and entered into whites-only areas. Sadly, despite 8,000 arrests, the campaign had little effect on the apartheid

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regime. However, the movement grew the ANC's membership from 20,000 to 100,000 and established the ANC's young leader, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, as a national figure. Educated as a lawyer, Mandela went on to lead myriad protests against apartheid and its separatist practices. After being arrested numerous times and witnessing the murder of hundreds of black demonstrators during peaceful protests such as the Sharpeville Massacre, Mandela was tried and convicted in 1964 for operating a sabotage campaign against the government. He and several other ANC leaders were sentenced to a term of life imprisonment.

Criticism began mounting outside South Africa in the 1970s and 80s, culminating in widespread governmental and private economic divestment from South Africa. Amid growing domestic and international pressure, President F. W. de Klerk began releasing ANC political prisoners in the late 1980s. On February 11, 1990, Mandela emerged after 27 years of imprisonment to a nation that could no longer maintain apartheid under the world's growing scrutiny. Mandela traveled to multiple nations encouraging leaders to continue supporting sanctions against the South African government until apartheid was dismantled. His visit to the U.S. in June 1990 included a speech at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum (Coliseum) that drew more than 75,000 people.

On April 27, 1994, Mandela won the South African presidency with 63% of the vote. 19.7 million people cast their ballots, representing an astounding 86.9% of all registered voters. Leading a broad coalition government which collaborated on a new constitution, Mandela emphasized reconciliation among the country's racial groups and created the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* to investigate past human rights abuses. Mandela's administration also introduced measures to encourage land reform. Since 1994, all ethnic and linguistic groups have held political representation in the country's liberal democracy, which comprises a parliamentary republic and nine provinces. Mandela retired in 1999, with 80% of South Africans polled expressing

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satisfaction with his performance as president. On May 8th, South African voters will go to the polls for the sixth time since the historic elections of 1994.

Mandela passed away on December 5, 2013 and is held in deep respect throughout the world. In South Africa, he is referred to, with great affection, by his Xhosa clan name "Madiba," and also as the "Father of the Nation." In 2014, the Coliseum Commission voted unanimously to add Mandela to the Coliseum's Court of Honor which includes images of world leaders who have addressed audiences in the Coliseum. In Mandela's June 1990 address at the Coliseum, he said, "we who have suffered and continue to suffer the pain of oppression know that underneath that face of Los Angeles lies the great and noble spirit of the citizenry. We who fight for human rights know the depths of the human spirit running through the hills and valleys of the state of California."

Freedom Day is observed as a national public holiday on April 27<sup>th</sup> each year throughout South Africa in order to celebrate the republic's first democratic elections and to honor its first Black president, Nelson Mandela. In observation of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this momentous occasion, and in recognition of the special relationship between Mandela and Los Angeles, it would be appropriate for the County to proclaim April 27, 2019 as Freedom Day throughout the County.

**I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS** proclaim April 27, 2019 as Freedom Day throughout the County of Los Angeles, and in doing so, urge all residents, municipal leaders, and organizations to join this effort in celebrating the Republic of South Africa's transition to democracy, while envisioning and working toward a world in which freedom, fair representation, and human rights are guaranteed to all.

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