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Can the Devil Speak the Truth? *The New York Times* Coverage of Mandela's U.S. Visit

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is on *The New York Times'* coverage of Nelson Mandela's tour of the U.S. in June 1990, with the main purpose of finding out the kind of image the paper presented to the American public. All issues of the paper two weeks prior to the beginning of the tour on June 20-July 1 when the tour ended were examined. The study also examines all issues of the paper two weeks after the tour to review or carry out a post-mortem. News reports and analyses, editorials, features, opinion and commentaries of columnists were studied and the author concludes that Mandela had a favourable coverage owing to U.S. foreign policy's change in attitude toward the African National Council and Mandela.

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Est-ce que le Diable Peut Dire la Vérité? Le Reportage de la Visite de M. Nelson Madela aux Etats Unis, d'après le *New York Times*

par Chris W. Ogbondah*

Résumé

Le sujet traité dans cet article c'est le reportage d'après le *New York Times* de la visite de M. Nelson Mandela aux Etats Unis en juin 1990, dans le but principal de découvrir l'image que ce journal a présentée au public américain concernant cette visite. Tous les numéros de ce journal qui datent de deux semaines avant le début de cette visite effectuée du 20 juin au 1 juillet ont été examinés. L'étude a examiné aussi tous les numéros de ce journal deux semaines après cette visite afin d'être capable de faire une revue. Des reportages et des analyses, des éditoriaux, des articles, des avis et des commentaires des journalistes ont été étudiés et l'auteur de cet article a conclu qu'on a bien reporté la visite de M. Nelson Mandela et ceci est dû au changement dans la politique étrangère des Etats Unis en ce qui concerne leur attitude vers le Congrès National Africain et vers M. Nelson Mandela.

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Introduction

President George Bush invited Nelson Mandela to Washington after the anti-apartheid leader was released from prison in February, 1990. The idea of the tour, however, grew out of a meeting of about 70 supporters of the anti-apartheid movement, including David N. Dinkins, mayor of New York, convened in Washington D.C. on May 11th, 1990 by Randall Robinson, executive director TransAfrica.¹

The tour, which began in New York City, took Mandela through most major cities, except Chicago, where anti-apartheid supporters asked him to avoid because Mayor Richard M. Daley had been lenient with companies that had dealings with South Africa. The visit cost the federal and state governments millions of dollars; for example, it cost New York City's police US \$2m in overtime duties alone.

Security efforts in New York City for instance, included 12,000 police officers, super-insulated bomb trucks at strategic points and 16 teams of demolition experts available around the clock, helicopters, boats, a 90-horse mounted unit, 6,200 sawhorse barricades and uniformed sharpshooters positioned on roof tops along Mandela's way. The security effort even included a flat-bed truck with a specially built bullet proof glass protective "bubble," dubbed the "Mandelamobile". The U.S. State Department's own Office of Diplomatic Security, which guards foreign dignitaries who are not heads of state, mounted its largest protection effort ever.²

While in the U.S., Mandela addressed a rare joint session of the American Congress and was honoured with a South Lawn ceremony and a White House luncheon, events usually only accorded foreign leaders.³ He delivered speeches to business groups, labour unions, college students and was special guest on ABC's "Nightline" television programme. During his visit, the anti-apartheid leader attended several events, including a ticker-tape parade in New York City, New York's traditional hero's welcome, a rally in Yankee Stadium and a star-studded concert in Los Angeles produced by Quincy Jones and other top entertainers. He also helped raise money for the African National Congress, A.N.C.⁴

The focus of this paper is on *New York Times*' coverage of Nelson Mandela's tour of the United States in June, 1990, with the main purpose of finding out the kind of image the paper presented to the American public. Did the *New York Times* present a positive (favourable) image of the anti-apartheid leader or did it present a negative (unfavourable) image of him?. Why did the *Times* present Nelson Mandela in the light that it did during his 12-day, eight-city tour of the U.S.?

To answer these questions, all issues of the paper two weeks prior to the beginning of the tour on June 20 to July 1 when the tour ended, were examined. The study also examined all issues of the paper two weeks after the tour to review or carry out a "post mortem". News reports and analyses, editorials, feature articles, opinions and commentaries of columnists concerning the tour and Nelson Mandela were all examined.

The *New York Times* was among several papers, including the *Los Angeles Times*, *Miami Herald* and *Washington Post* that gave daily coverage of the tour. The *New York Times* was chosen for this study because it is the leading American newspaper (Merrill, 1964). This paper was also chosen on the basis of its circulation and acknowledged opinion leadership, influence and popularity in the U.S. It is the paper that is much quoted by American opinion leaders and other publications and believed to be widely read by opinion leaders and decision makers not only in government and business but also in academic and other sociocultural circles in U.S. One study by Weiss (1994) concluded that the *New York Times* is the paper that American leaders read. While considered to be the, "newspaper of record," it is also regarded as one of the major vehicles of the American prestige press. Hachten and Beil (1985) observed this paper is, "a representative of the elite American press," and Gitlin (1980) noted that the *New York Times*, "ends up influencing the content of other mass media" in America. Another rationale for choosing the *New York Times* for this study was that apart from its recognized international robust journalistic stature, it maintains correspondents in South Africa, Nelson Mandela's native country.

Literature Review

Several studies of western media coverage of the Third World and Africa in particular point out that western media, especially those of the U.S. present to their readers inadequate, unbalanced, negative, biased, stereotypical and woefully misleading images of the Third World. The studies indicate that what the American media present to their readers about Africa in particular is news of coups and earthquakes, incessant catastrophes, strife, crises, bloodshed, calamity and inefficiency of governments and economies. The studies also point out that Third World achievements in education, literature, science, technology, agriculture etc, are ignored by the U.S press, leaving negative images of the region and its peoples.

Simmel (1976) found that even quantitatively, Third World countries received the shorter end of the stick (15%) in international

news coverage by the *New York Times*, while the developed countries received up to 65% of all foreign news items. This conclusion is supported by Berbner and Marvanyi (1977), who found that the *New York Times* had only 16% of its total news given to foreign editorial content, a result that strengthens Schiller's study (Schiller, 1978).

Barranco and Shyles (1976; 1984) found that in *New York Times*' coverage of Arab and Israeli news, Israel, the country with closer affinity to the U.S, received substantially more coverage than Arab nations. Hester (1973) also suggested that variables such as national rank in the power hierarchy of nations, dominance and weakness of nations and culture as well as economic affinities are causal factors in the pattern of news coverage by Western media. Rimmer made similar remarks in 1981 in a study of foreign news on UPI's flagship, its "A" wire, and concluded that: "The proportions of crime and disaster stories in regional titles tend to increase as attention moves from the U.S.A. and Western Europe into Third World regions."

Masmoudi (1981) stoutly argues that events in the Third World countries which account for about three-fourths of the earth's population are virtually ignored by the western press, which selectively report negative images of those countries. Even though Hachten and Beil's (1982) study of *New York Times* and *Times of London's* coverage of Ghana and Tanzania did not support Masmoudi's contention other studies (Mehra, 1982; Gunaratne, 1982; Bill, 1978; Rao, 1981; Schiller, 1976; and Agbese and Ogbondah, 1988) strongly support Masmoudi's argument.

In one study, Nwosu (1979) concluded that the emphasis of American media coverage of Africa is on crisis, with little or no reportage of positive, cultural and developmental news. Pratt (1980) also concluded the U.S. media project Africa in an unfavourable image, emphasizing violence and neglecting inventions and scientific developments. This conclusion supports the findings by Kirat and Weaver (1985) who observed that western media emphasize, "internal and armed conflicts and crises and crime" in their news presentation of the Third World. In a study of U.S. media coverage of Bolivia, Knudson (1952) observed that Africa is the least favourably covered region of the world by American press. "Probably no other area of the world received less coverage in the U.S. press than Latin America except Africa," .

Some scholars have attempted to explain why the American press presents negative images of Africa to their readers. The chairman of the *Daily Mirror* of London, for example, noted that a catalogue of achievements in Africa are simply not interesting to readers outside the continent (*Reporting Africa*, 1968). In a discussion about western media coverage of Africa, Enahoro pointed out that: "The myths and

legends with which Africa has been labeled persist, the only difference is that they have been brought up to date."

In his contribution to the discussion, a former *New York Times* correspondent in Africa, Lawrence Fellows, explained that American editors are not interested in the ordinary run of the news about Africa. He said: "If we are writing about some great, agonizing human dislocation or some piece of violent political change, we get the space." "If we write about less monumental things, we don't get the space". A similar explanation has been given by Hodding Carter, a former American foreign correspondent in Africa and White House press secretary under the Jimmy Carter administration.

Former director of the Associated Press, Harold Fitzgerald, made the same explanation, and said: "The amount of Africa's news wanted by the world's news agencies would be determined by what the newspapers wanted - and that was in turn determined by what the readers wanted." Kaplan (1979) and Cohen (1965) also made a similar explanation, while Chomsky and Hennen argued that U.S. media are part of the ideological institutions that "falsify, obscure, and reinterpret the facts in the interest of those who dominate the economy and political system."

An examination of the nature of news and the criteria for news selection in the west may help to explain why western media focus more attention on news of "coups and earthquakes" when reporting events in Africa.

The nature of news in the west is that news is the unusual, the abnormal, the rare, the odd and the sensational: "man-bites-a-dog" kind of news. And functioning like a "radar screen" (unlike a "window screen"), western media record only the unusual both at home and abroad.

Against this background, emphasis on the reportage of negative events in Africa may not seem to be an attempt by U.S. media to distort the image of the continent. What seems to be an attempt to distort the image of the continent, however, is the exclusion of news of "positive" character.

Did the *New York Times'* coverage of Nelson Mandela support the conclusions of these studies? How did the *Times* present to the American public information about the man arrested several times and jailed for nearly 28 years for alleged communist- inspired armed struggle against a friendly country that the U.S. and its western allies maintain social, economic and diplomatic ties with? What factors helped shape the light in which the paper presented Mandela to the American public?

Theoretical Framework

One would expect positive coverage of Nelson Mandela because the U.S. government's attitude towards South Africa tends to be changing. In the 1960's the U.S. government was so anti-A.N.C. that the American C.I.A. helped provide South African government security with intelligence that led to the arrest of Nelson Mandela. But in the early 1990's, there seemed to be a shift in attitude which led to the White House invitation of Nelson Mandela. With a relatively more favourable government attitude towards the A.N.C., the press would be expected to present a favourable reportage of Mandela's visit to the American public because the media tend to operate along the lines of U.S foreign policy.

Further, a positive coverage of Mandela would be expected as part of U.S., government policy to legitimize some of the changes that F.W. de Klerk is making. If the media tend to follow the foreign policy of the government, there is no surprise that it would also cover Mandela positively to legitimize F.W. de Klerk's changes.

A positive coverage of Mandela would also be expected in view of his popularity in the U.S. One poll conducted in June, 1990 by *Times/WCBS-TV* showed that a majority of Americans had a favourable opinion of Nelson Mandela. For the black community in particular, Mandela had become the symbol of black pride since Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The *New York Times* was aware of all this, and a negative reportage of Mandela would have been a contradiction.

Mandela's Profile

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was born on July 18, 1918 at Umtata in the Transkei territory of the Eastern Cape where his father was chief of the Xhosa-speaking *Tembu*. He renounced his hereditary right as successor to the royal chieftdom to study at Fort Hare College, where in his third year was suspended with some other students, including Oliver Tambo for helping organize a boycott of the Student's Representative Council after it had been deprived of its powers by the authorities. He later obtained a law degree from the University of South Africa in 1942.

Growing under the colour bar of the South African society - poverty overcrowded slums, constant harassment by police under the infamous pass laws and exclusion from political and economic opportunities - Mandela joined the African National Congress (A.N.C.)

in 1944. Together with Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, Anton Lembede and other men and women, Mandela formed the youth league of the A.N.C., South Africa's oldest liberation group formed in 1912.

When the National Party, which came to power in 1948 legalized racial segregation known as apartheid, Mandela and his youth leaguers responded with a nationwide call for strikes, boycotts and civil disobedience.

He served as president of the A.N.C. youth league from 1951-52, then became president of the Transvaal branch of the A.N.C. as well as deputy national president under Albert Luthuli.

Nelson Mandela was volunteer-in-chief in the 1952 Defiance Against Unjust Laws Campaign, led jointly by the A.N.C. and the Indian Congress. He was one of the 20 leaders charged and convicted for organizing the Defiance Campaign which ended with the imprisonment of 8,500 people (Mandela, 1986).

In an attempt to deal with his rising popularity, the government on December 11, 1952, banned him from attending gatherings and in September 1953, ordered him to resign from the A.N.C.

Over the years, he represented several of his countrymen and women in court against all shades of injustices. He also wrote numerous articles attacking the apartheid system and its laws.

In a swoop at dawn on December 5, 1956, the government arrested Mandela and 156 others charged with treason. In the trial, the government charged that Mandela's freedom movement was part of an internationally inspired communist effort to overthrow the government by violence.

On March 21, 1960 the South African police shot at thousands of peacefully protesting people, killing 69 and wounding 176 in Sharpeville. As a shocked global community watched, the government declared a state of emergency, outlawed the ANC and arrested 20,000 people, inevitably including Nelson Mandela. That event convinced Mandela that the days of nonviolent resistance were over, and he later headed the *Umkhonto We Sizwe*, an underground paramilitary wing of the ANC.

On August 4, 1962, he was arrested by the police in Natal while disguised as a chauffeur, following the assistance of the American C.I.A. After a protracted trial ended in June 1964, Nelson Mandela and eight others were convicted of sabotage and treason, and sentenced to life imprisonment. He was released from prison in February, 1990, after almost 28 years.

Apartheid is a form of government that sanctions racial segregation and political and economical discrimination against nonwhites who constitute a majority of the population of South Africa. It is a system

which established residential and business sections in urban areas for each race and which requires nonwhites to carry "passes" authorizing their presence in restricted areas. It forbids most social contacts between the races, authorizes segregated public facilities with separate educational standards, and restricts each race to certain types of jobs, curtails nonwhite unions and denies nonwhite participation in the national government. It is for all these that Nelson Mandela was so opposed to the system.

***New York Times*' Reportage of Mandela**

The *New York Times*' coverage of Mandela's tour and the paper's creation of an image of Mandela vis-a-vis the American public began before Mandela and his wife, arrived in U.S.A. on June 20, 1990.

A Legend

In one advanced news report titled "New York's Plea to Mandela: This Will Just Take a Minute," the impression the *Times* tended to create in the minds of its readers is that Mandela was something of a rarity, a man with a personality to be cherished and valued by all and sundry. According to the report, thousands of people and organizations had telephoned Jim Bell, a union official in charge of coordinating the visit in New York, and several others had written letters, sent facsimile messages or slipped notes under his office door requesting for an opportunity – just a minute – to see Mandela. The paper said that there had been 5,000 requests for press credentials to the State Department. The report said:

Manhattan wants him. Brooklyn wants him. Ministers want to preach to him, politicians want to pose with him and schoolchildren want to dance for him. At least a dozen songwriters, most of them struggling, have asked to perform their compositions for him.

Every conceivable interest-group and civil organization wants to bask in Mr. Mandela's now legendary reputation, some to gain greater political visibility and some simply to honour the man who has given his life to the fight against apartheid... Everybody wants to see him.³⁸

But wittingly or unwittingly, the *Times* failed to mention that there were also groups that did not wish to see Mandela. Those groups included the "skin heads", neo-Nazi groups, the Ku Klux Klan, white supremacist and other hate groups as well as Cuban American and Jewish communities who were angry over Mandela's embrace with Fidel Castro and Yasir Arafat.

On June 10, 1990 the paper published another report that tended to present Nelson Mandela positively, especially within the Jewish community. The paper wanted to contextualize and clarify Mandela's statement on the P.L.O and the state of Israel. It quoted Mandela saying that: "As far as the African National Congress is concerned - and that is my view as an individual - there has never been any doubting the existence, *defacto* and *deture*, of the state of Israel within secure boundaries."³⁹ Even Mandela's California meeting with Natan Sharansky, the Jewish dissident who spent years in a Soviet prison, concerning his remarks about the P.L.O and Arafat, was described as "very warm" in the *New York Times* issue of June 30, 1990.

Civil Rights Symbol

In another report the paper announced that the Bush Administration was making haste to pass a civil rights legislation to avoid embarrassment, should Mandela arrive and find the government foot-dragging on the passage of the bill. It said: "The Bush Administration has intensified efforts to reach a compromise with Congress on civil rights legislation, partly to avoid a divisive debate late this month during the visit of Nelson Mandela, the African National Congress leader." The report further said that in an effort to get the law passed before Mandela arrived (as if one of the founding fathers who wrote the Bill of Rights was visiting Washington). Attorney General Dick Thornburgh cut short his vacation to attend a special White House meeting on the bill with White House Chief of Staff John Sununu and Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, who sponsored the legislation. The report described Mandela as "a powerful symbol of the fight against racial injustice". It said some Democrats threatened to bring the legislation to the floor during Mandela's visit should the President not sign it before Mandel's arrival, creating the impression that Mandela was so important that his arrival triggered off political bouts between the Democrats and Republicans over civil rights.

In a different report, the paper announced that Nelson Mandela was a man whose "unflagging struggle for equal rights has a resonance for supporter of all races."⁴¹

A Hero

In one other report which tended to portray Mandela as a peace loving person, the paper said that: "To...millions..., Mandela is a commanding figure of decency and dignity...who has held talks with his former

jailers aimed at finding a peaceful end to apartheid."⁴² To strengthen the image of a dignifiable man, Flora Lewis labelled Mandela "a man of great stamina, courage and dignity."⁴³

A report in the *New York Times* of June 18, 1990 projected Nelson Mandela as an international hero. Describing him as "an international symbol of integrity, commitment and freedom", that report said: "He is a leader by example and a world hero." One wonders how many times the *New York Times* has described as heroes, other African leaders who successfully fought against European colonialism, a form of totalitarianism. On June 23, 1990 the paper quoted New York governor Mario M. Cuomo as saying that Mandela is "a symbol of hope for the world." In one advance story, John Kifner referred to the A.N.C leader as a hero and said: "Nelson Mandela...will be greeted today the way New York welcomes its heroes..."⁴⁴

A Celebrity

In the same positive reportage, Alessandra Stanley, writing for the paper observed that: "By the time Nelson R. Mandela arrived in the city, New Yorkers had already turned him into an instant American celebrity, civil rights leader they could call their own." Stanley described Mandela as "the dignified...populist" and "the civil rights hero," and recalled that no South African has received a hero's welcome in New York City since Gen. Jan Smuts, the South African prime minister and war hero who helped draft the U.N. charter, visited New York in 1947. Even at that, Stanley contentiously pointed out that Mandela had a greater hero's welcome than Smuts because the A.N.C leader received a ticker-tape parade, an honour reserved for American heroes only.⁴⁵ One author of an essay titled, "The Essential Mandela," in the *New York Times* of June 22, 1990 described Mandela as, "a symbol and a political leader."

In projecting a heroic image of Nelson Mandela in the June 23, 1990 issue, the *New York Times* said that New York City was "so mesmerized by Mr. Mandela's visit that the Empire State Building is lighted in the African National Congress colours of black, green and yellow," adding that "even an audience of executives was not immuned to Mr. Mandela's presence, giving him a standing ovation as he entered and departed."

At the end of his address to the U.N. the paper said that "Mr. Mandela received a hero's welcome from cheering United Nations employees. It presented a similar positive image of him at the end of his address to the U.S Congress and said that: "A standing ovation...greeted the tall, dignified Mr. Mandela."⁴⁶ In a July 1,

1990 report, the paper concluded that Mandela is "a popular hero hailed by millions."

Symbol of Black Unity

The *New York Times* also presented Nelson Mandela to the American public as a symbol of unity for African-Americans. It quoted Dr. Charlotte Hutton, a Boston resident as saying: "I'm hoping for a watershed effect in this country, that we will somehow feel some unifying presence because he's here."⁴⁷ It said that for African-Americans, Mandela's visit had taken on greater symbolism than any civil rights leader since Dr. King. The *Times* quoted one Atlanta businesswoman, Dorothy Clements, as saying that since after the civil rights march: "We have sort of forgotten how to do it. We don't have anybody who can get the adrenaline going like he (Mandela) does. I hope this will bring black Americans together if just for one day."⁴⁸

At the end of the tour, the *New York Times* said that Mandela's visit brought pride and "a joyous vision" to African-Americans, adding that: "Mandela's visit had energized black Americans as much as anything since the height of the civil rights era. And many are already beginning to try to find ways to channel the energies he has aroused." The report concluded that: "The aura of Nelson Mandela's visit remains in black communities even as he prepares to leave the United States. Millions of black Americans are pondering how to apply his uplifting message to the problems in the United States."⁴⁹

Decent and Courteous

In a June 20, 1990 report, the paper presented Nelson Mandela as a clean and decent politician who has risen above the politics of bitterness and animosity. It said that: "By setting an example of resistance to apartheid devoid of personal animosity, Mr. Mandela has inspired people...in and beyond South Africa, among them many Americans of African descent." In an effort to strengthen its portrayal of this image of Mandela, the paper in a piece written by Anthony Lewis said:

If Mr. Mandela had come out of prison as a man full of hate many would understand but not admire. What gives him such power in our imagination is his lack of bitterness. He gives us optimism about the possibilities of human nature.

From the moment of his release he has refused to criticize those who imprisoned him...

There is a sense of security in him, of confidence and courtesy.

The positive image of courteousness that Lewis wrote of Mandela was very dominant in the reports that the *New York Times* wrote about the A.N.C leader. In one report, the paper described him as "quite courteous" and "polite."⁵¹ And in a June 23, 1990 report, John J. O'connor described Mandela as "the man of myth and legend" with a "courteous manner wrapped in a steely and shrewd resolve". "The report added that Mandela is a man of "truly imposing figure who has a sense of dignity."

The failure to portray a balanced report of events and political leadership in Africa is why some scholars have sharply criticized the American press. Yet, throughout its reportage of Nelson Mandela during his tour of U.S.A., the American newspaper of record portrayed him as "a celebrity" whom several dignitaries desired photo opportunities with. Of Mandela's celebrity stature, the *New York Times* said that Mandela was one of the most celebrated guests at the Gracie Mansion, New York, in half a century. Todd S. Purdum said in one report that Mandela was "the most celebrated guest in years to stay in the intimate, elegant house...since Fiorella H. La Guardia...in 1942."⁵² The paper quoted New York mayor David Dinkins as saying that welcoming Nelson Mandela was "probably the greatest thing that will happen to me as New York's first black mayor. "In another report, it quoted an M.I.T political science professor Williard Johnson as saying: "I hope I get a chance to meet him...I'll be trembling." The *Times* also reported Rev. J. Alfred Smith, pastor of Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, California, as saying of Mandela that: "For once, something constructive and positive is coming that the little people, the common people can identify with..."⁵³

In its effort to portray an image of "dignity" of Mandela, the *New York Times* specially emphasized that "Mandela will... have lunch with members of the Kennedy family at the John F. Kennedy Library," and meet with the top cream of African-America's socioeconomic and political fabric. But the paper unflinchingly pointed out that Washington, D.C. Mayor Marion S. Barry Jr., embroiled in a drug indictment at the time, would not meet with Mandela. It said: "Unlike Mayor Dinkings, Washington's black mayor, Marion S. Barry Jr., who is embroiled in a drug trial, will not play a role in Mr. Mandela's visit..."⁵⁴ This report was consistent with the *Times* effort to present an image of dignified Mandela who could not be associated with "bad guys" such as Barry.

Devoted and Disciplined Leader

The *New York Times* did not only present Mandela to the American public as a "celebrity" and a "legend," it also portrayed him as a selfless, disciplined, devoted and dedicated leader of his people — an image of other African leaders devoid in the western media. Writing in the *Times* of June 20, Christopher S. Wren said that Nelson Mandela has declined "to exploit his celebrity for his own political ends." Wren further wrote of Mandela's "patrician bearing" and said that: "Over the last four months, Mr. Mandela has been content to serve as a disciplined, if very prestigious, member of the liberation movement that he joined 46 years ago."⁵⁵ Most western media reportage of Africa stereotypifies bad administration, indiscipline, corruption, embezzlement and exploitation of the masses. But this was not the case in the reportage of Nelson Mandela by America's top elite newspaper.

Of Mandela's dedication and devotion to responsibilities, the paper said: "Such is his devotion to the congress (A.N.C.) that Mr. Mandela... embarked on an exhausting six-week tour of 13 countries only a day after he was discharged from a Johannesburg hospital after surgery..."⁵⁶

Physically Fit and Alert

Even though Nelson Mandela was 72 and had been hospitalized just before his U.S tour, the paper portrayed him to the American public as physically fit. Don Cliff, writing for the paper on June 22, 1990 described Mandela as "the 71-year-old anti-apartheid leader" who looked alert, rested and at times lighthearted." The report added that: "He responded to questions in a firm, clear voice."

On the second day of the tour, the paper announced that Mandela "began his day with a brisk stroll." It also made reference to his amateur boxing days. The report further said that: "He appeared fit yesterday... As the day continued, Mr. Mandela displayed a certain combativeness during a taping of the ABC News Program "Nightline", at one point even reducing the usually commanding Ted Koppel, to silence."⁵⁷ Writing for the *Times* in another report on June 22, 1990, Anthony Lewis described Mandela as "a man of extraordinary conviction and strength". On the third day of the tour, the paper announced that: "His day began, as it had on Thursday, with a brisk walk." At the end of the tour, Flora Lewis concluded in one commentary, that Mandela was "a man of great stamina."⁵⁸ All these descriptions tended to give readers the impression that Mandela was physically fit and mentally alert as a leader.

Charming and Delightful

Just like icing the cake, the *New York Times* presented a positive image of Nelson Mandela's wife, Winnie. The paper wrote about her beauty, politeness and delightfulness. About her shopping on Seventh Avenue in New York City, the paper said that: "Mrs. Mandela's reception there rivaled the Rodeo Drive shopping scene in the movie, "Pretty Woman." The report said that Winnie Mandela was "the most delightful woman, absolutely delightful...She is so charming."⁵⁹ Writing in the June 23, 1990 issue, John Tierney described her as a woman with "serene dignity" who has been greeted with "unqualified adulation." The paper also wrote about the beauty of the "colourful" embroidered African dresses that Winnie Mandela wore on each day of the tour.

This type of new coverage which glorifies the beauty in African art, embroidery and garb is what some scholars say is devoid in the American press coverage of Africa. Interestingly enough, the paper reported nothing about Winnie Mandela's alleged involvement in the kidnapping and deaths of some youth soccer players in her home country.

Throughout its coverage of the tour, the *New York Times* presented Nelson Mandela positively to the American public, leaving a favourable image of the A.N.C leader in the minds of the American public. In one report, it published a *Times* WCBS-TV News poll that indicated that a majority of the public had a favourable opinion of Nelson Mandela,⁶⁰ a favourable opinion that the paper itself helped shape through its positive news reports of Mandela.

Analysis and Discussion

Why the *New York Times* report Nelson Mandela in a favourable light? Was Mandela not the "bad guy" the American C.I.A helped arrest, and who was subsequently imprisoned by a government that is friendly to the United States? What factors helped shape the "devil's" (*New York Times*) ability to speak the truth, deviating from its fashion of biased, negative and woefully misleading reportage of African events?

One of the reasons why the paper presented Nelson Mandela favourably to the American public is that the anti-apartheid movement and pro-ANC groups in the US such as the Labour Union and Trans Africa provided alternative sources of information about Mandela. Therefore, the coverage of the tour was not a situation where the *New York Times* had sole possession of information.

In addition to these groups there were devout anti-apartheid individuals who were so committed to ensuring that the tour was a

success. Those individuals mounted successful public enlightenment campaigns about Mandela through the press and other channels prior to Mandela's arrival in the U.S. Such individuals included Randall Robinson, executive director of Trans Africa, who had led several anti-apartheid demonstrations outside the South African Embassy in Washington, D.C. that saw 4,000 arrests there and 5,000 elsewhere in the country, and who is generally credited with helping to lead the U.S. Congress to approve economic sanctions against South Africa.

Other individuals were A.N.C.'s chief representative in the U.S. Lindiwe Mabuza, and Jim Bell, a union official in charge of co-ordinating the tour in New York, and who once said: "We want to show the national leadership that Nelson Mandela and the A.N.C. have a lot of support in America."⁶¹ In addition, the national headquarters of the A.N.C. in Lusaka, Zambia, contacted the U.S organizers of the tour, and helped launch a concerted effort for the tour's success and the dissemination of accurate information about the A.N.C leader. The *New York Times* was conscious of the fact that there were groups and individuals who would have reacted strongly against negative, biased and misleading coverage of Mandela.

Also, Mandela was in the U.S. in person and the public had the opportunity to see and listen to him on radio and television programmes and at public rallies. Information about Mandela was, therefore, not solely based on the opinions of correspondents and Western experts (Eastern or African experts never have anything to say). Since the *Times* knew that the public could obtain direct information about Mandela through his several media appearances, the paper knew that it could not afford to distort information about the A.N.C leader.

Further, the paper covered Mandela positively in order to legitimize President F. W. de Klerk's political changes in South Africa. The South African president was forced to admit the evil system of apartheid is dead, not because he was convinced, but because of the pressure for more economic sanctions on South Africa. For him evidence to show that apartheid is dead, was the release of Nelson Mandela from prison. For the *New York Times* presenting Mandela as a hero, legitimizes the changes introduced by President F. W. de Klerk. This means that there should be no need for economic sanctions since by maintaining sanctions, many U.S. businesses would lose out of their investments in South Africa. Therefore, the *New York Times'* favourable reportage of Mandela was not made on account of what Mandela stands for, but to legitimize de Klerk's political changes — which in a way point to the fact that changes are taking place to dismantle the evil system of government, and therefore economic

sanctions (which would hurt U.S. investments in South Africa) are not necessary.

Certain global events, especially the changes in Eastern Europe also help explain why the paper reported Mandela favourably. The liberalization, openness ("Glasnost") and restructuring ("perestroika") of the Soviet society and Eastern Europe along the lines of Western democracy and capitalism provide a glimmer of optimism in the West that even if Mandela's A.N.C. had in the past contemplated going all out for communism when it comes to power in South Africa, that dream might not be too eagerly pursued in light of the move toward global liberalization of political and economic institutions and the realization of the superiority of capitalism over communism by Mikhail Gorbachev and leaders like Boris Yeltsin.

Also, given the way the U.S. media celebrated the release of other well know political leaders such as Andrei Sakharov, Lech Walesa, Vaclav Havel and Natan Sharansky (who all spent less time in prison than Mandela), and presented them as the personification of the victory of liberalism over totalitarianism, it would have been open hypocrisy if the *New York Times* treated Nelson Mandela differently. Even though Mandela was not fighting against communist totalitarianism like these other persons mentioned above, he was a personification of the struggle against racial oppression and injustice. Therefore, the *Times* couldn't have treated him differently. All these reasons explain why the *New York Times* presented a favourable image of Nelson Mandela.

The U.S. government's change of attitude towards South Africa may also help to explain why the *New York Times* covered Mandela favourably. The government's attitude toward the A.N.C has become more positive, and the A.N.C is no longer seen as a terrorist organization but neither is Mandela himself seen as a terrorist. This can be attested to by George Bush's official invitation of Nelson Mandela to visit the U.S. The U.S. media (including the *New York Times*) which tend to operate along the lines of U.S. foreign policy have also changed their attitude toward the A.N.C. and Mandela - hence the favourable coverage of the A.N.C. leader.

Footnotes

1. *New York Times*, June 18, 1990, p.10.
2. *New York Times*, June 20, 1990, p.16.
3. *New York Times*, June 26, 1990, p.1
4. For detailed descriptions of Nelson Mandela's tour of the United States, see, *Newsweek*, July 2, 1990, pp. 14-20.
5. John C. Merrill, 'U.S. Panel Names World's Ten Leading 'Quality' Dailies,' *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 41, 1964. p.570. In this study, the *New York Times* topped other judged U.S. quality newspapers, including the *Baltimore Sun*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Los Angeles Times*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and *Washington Post* on the basis of the following criteria:
 - i) Emphasis on political, economic, cultural news and views;
 - ii) Long tradition of freedom and editorial coverage;
 - iii) Political and economic independence;
 - iv) Strong editorial page and/or views - essay section
 - v) Enterprise of staff members in obtaining news and writing commentary;
 - vi) Large portion of space given over world affairs: lack of provincialism;
 - vii) Good writing - regularly and in all sections;
 - viii) Much quoted by opinion leaders and other publications
 - ix) Large, well-educated staff;
 - x) Typographical and printing excellence and general; make-up dignity.
36. The American C.I.A. played an important role in the 1962 arrest of Nelson Mandela because it was concerned that a successful national movement threatened a friendly South Africa, according to a *New York Times* report which said that: "The intelligence service, using an agent inside the African National Congress, provided South African security officials with precise information about Mandela's activities that enabled the police to arrest him..." (*New York Times*, June 10, 1990, p. 15). The paper quoted an unidentified senior C.I.A. official as saying (immediately after Mandela had been arrested) that: "We have turned Mandela over to the South African security branch. We gave them every detail, what he would be wearing, the time of day, just where he would be." (*Ibid*). For a deeper understanding of the role of the American C.I.A. in the 1962 arrest of Nelson Mandela, see also *Newsweek*, February 1990.
38. *New York Times*, June 2, 1990, p.1.
39. *New York Times*, June 10, 1990, p.6.
40. *New York Times*, June 16, 1990, p.22.
41. *New York Times*, June 17, 1990, p.14.
42. *New York Times*, June 16, 1990, p.23
43. *New York Times*, June 30, 1990, p.23.

44. *New York Times*, June 20, 1990, p.16
45. *New York Times*, June 21, 1990, p.20
46. *New York Times*, June 27, 1990, p.11
47. *New York Times*, June 17, 1990, p.14.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *New York Times* July 1, 1990, p.1
50. *New York Times* June 22, 1990, p.27.
51. *Ibid.*, p.21.
52. *Ibid.* For a similar positive reportage of Mandela's celebrity status, see also *New York Times* June 27, 1990 p.11.
53. *New York Times*, June 17, 1990, p.14.
54. *New York Times*, June 18, 1990, p.10.
55. *New York Times*, June 20, 1990, p.1.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *New York Times*, June 22, 1990, p.21
58. *New York Times*, June 30, 1990, p.23.
59. *New York Times*, June 22, 1990, p.21
60. *New York Times*, June 21, 1990, p.20.
61. *New York Times*, June 2, 1990, p.32.

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