



This stirring new film on South Africa's 1995 Rugby World Cup victory includes serious distortions of history. Directed by Clint Eastwood and starring Morgan Freeman as President Nelson Mandela, *Invictus* makes a major contribution towards the building up of the mythology of Nelson Mandela as a modern day idol.

### **Their Finest Hour**

*Invictus* focuses on the New South Africa's finest hour as the Springbok rugby team, led by Francois Pienaar, won the World Cup. It also focuses on President Nelson Mandela's finest hour as he donned the Springbok rugby team's green and gold jersey and cap and publicly associated with the Springbok's triumph.

There is no doubt that this was probably Nelson Mandela's most astute move to appear in public at the World Cup Finals in the Springbok uniform jersey and cap. One billion people were watching. This was, as Morgan Freeman playing Nelson Mandela in the film declared: "An opportunity!" Indeed any wise politician would seize the limelight and exploit such an opportunity to identify with his national team's greatest moment of triumph.

In the context of the racially polarized New South Africa, this gesture was meaningful and it was appreciated. It particularly won Nelson Mandela much admiration and support from white South Africans to whom rugby was much more than their national sport. However, it was a political token amidst a much broader context of Marxist violence.

### **Racial Stereotypes**

This beautifully crafted, stirring and inspiring film, *Invictus*, clearly has a political agenda. It has dangerous distortions of reality and a selective focus which portrays the whites in South Africa as narrow minded, disgruntled, racial bigots. In fact, all the white characters in

*Invictus*

are one or two dimensional, with no depth of character. Incredibly this even includes Matt Damon's portrayal of Francois Pienaar, the South African rugby team captain. One never gets to see quite what makes him tick. His leadership seems completely inadequate to explain this spectacular triumph of the Springboks over the previously unbeatable Australian and New Zealand rugby teams.

### **A Political Hijack**

Incredibly, *Invictus* boldly gives all the credit for the Springboks' World Cup victory to President Nelson Mandela. This must be the first time in history that any head of state has been given the credit for a sport team's achievements on the field. Does Queen Elizabeth II get the credit if England's rugby team wins? Was US President Bush credited with American Olympic athlete's achievements in Beijing?

### **An Astute Politician**

It was undoubtedly a very wise and astute political move for Nelson Mandela to oppose his own party's plans to abolish the Springbok green and gold uniform and symbols. Doubtless Nelson Mandela genuinely wanted the national team to win, not only for the desirable national unity it could inspire, but for the international prestige it could give to his government.

### **Ignoring the Context**

However, the film maker should not have oversimplified the fascinating story by separating it from its real context of crime and violence after a brutal 30 year terrorist war waged by Nelson Mandela's ANC.

### Imaginative Idolatry

Time and again the film focuses on Mandela's imprisonment on Robben Island, often with dream-like imaginative flashbacks of Nelson Mandela breaking rocks on Robben Island. The film even includes a pilgrimage to Mandela's cell in the prison on Robben Island, but there is never any mention of **why** he was imprisoned.

The impression given is that he was imprisoned for opposing apartheid, but many people, including Bishop Desmond Tutu, vigorously opposed apartheid without ever being imprisoned.

### The Unanswered Reason Why

The fact is that even Amnesty International refused to take on Nelson Mandela's case because they asserted that he was no political prisoner but had committed numerous violent crimes and had had a fair trial and a reasonable sentence.

Nelson Mandela was the head of UmKhonto we Sizwe, (MK), the terrorist wing of the ANC and South African Communist Party. He had pleaded guilty to 156 acts of public violence including mobilizing terrorist bombing campaigns, which planted bombs in public places, including the Johannesburg railway station. Many innocent people, including women and children, were killed by Nelson Mandela's MK terrorists.

South African President P.W. Botha had, on a number of occasions, offered Nelson Mandela freedom from prison, if he would only renounce terrorist violence. This Mandela refused to do.

### New Maths

In *Invictus* Mandela's 26 years in jail, custody and prison becomes 30 years in the cell in

Robben Island, even though prisoners on Robben Island were allowed to walk freely around the Island during the day and were only locked up at night. No mention was made of the very comfortable warden's house at Victor Verster (five star) prison where Mandela spent his last years of confinement.

### Inspiring Words

*Invictus* regularly portrays Nelson Mandela as a most gracious, kind and forgiving man. Many most commendable words are put in his mouth including *"the past is past. We need your services. We can only succeed with your help... reconciliation starts here.... forgiveness liberates the soul....forgiveness is a powerful weapon."*

### Did Only One Group Have Anything to Forgive?

Under Clint Eastwood's directorship, *Invictus* dogmatically asserts that Nelson Mandela and the black people needed to forgive the whites. Never does the film portray how much the whites had to forgive people like Nelson Mandela and his ANC terrorists who were responsible for the murder of thousands of South Africans. There is no mention in

*Invictus*

of the three decades of vicious terrorist warfare, including the burning down of thousands of schools, hacking to death of thousands of innocent people in homes and in the streets, pouring gasoline over a thousand innocent victims setting them alight, in the brutal necklace murders, the car bombs in public streets, limpet mines in shopping centres, petrol bombs and grenades through windows at night and assassinations.

Nor were economic sanctions referred to – which cost millions of jobs; and the sports boycott which had prevented the Springboks from competing internationally for decades.

### A Negotiated Settlement

At one point in the film, Morgan Freeman's Mandela character reminds his secretary: "The whites still control the army, the police and the economy." That was correct, which gives the lie

to the picture portrayed in *Invictus* of grudging, unwilling, narrow minded white racist bigots.

The fact is that white South Africans, who had the political, military and economic power and who had defeated Mandela's ANC terrorists consistently, willingly handed over the reigns of power after a negotiated settlement.

### **The Communist Connection**

*Invictus* never mentions Nelson Mandela's open support for brutal communist regimes such as Fidel Castro's Cuba, Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe, Red China, Gadhaffi's Libya, Saddam Hussein, Yasar Arafat and other dictators. During the very time covered by *Invictus* Mandela received Fidel Castro, the longest reigning dictator in the world, and gave him the highest award that South Africa could give and then had both Houses of Parliament gather to hear an address from the Cuban tyrant.

### **The Ugly Reality**

During the very time covered by the movie many hundreds of white farmers, and their wives and children, were being brutally murdered, actually tortured to death, often by UmKhonto we Sizwe guerillas, many of whom were now part of the South African National Defence Force.

### **Double Standards**

Although *Invictus* gives all glory for the Springbok Rugby World Cup win to Nelson Mandela, it does not attach any blame to him for the rising crime and plummeting economy. During one short visual in the film Mandela looks at a newspaper headline which speaks of the rising crime and plummeting rand. This reality deserved a little bit more attention. During 46 years of National Party *apartheid* rule over 18,000 people had been killed by rioters, terrorists, by the police and the army, on all sides, including terrorists, civilian victims, military casualties and police. A total of 18,000 dead during 46 years of conflict. However, in peacetime, under Nelson Mandela, an average of 20,000 to 25,000 people were murdered every year.

### Fueling the Crime Wave

Yet to celebrate his birthdays, Mandela would regularly open the prison doors and set many criminals, including armed robbers, murderers and rapists, free. Some of whom were murdering and raping within 24 hours of being released.

### Economic Deterioration

In the 1970s, even while facing terrorism, riots and engaged in a border war with the Cubans in Angola, the South African Rand was stronger than the US Dollar. However, after years of US sanctions, the South African Rand had fallen to R2 to the Dollar. Under Nelson Mandela even with no war, no sanctions, no riots, no conscription, and with massive international aid and investment, the Rand plummeted to R8 to the Dollar, and even R10 to the Dollar, then R12 and even to R14 to the Dollar for a time. But according to *Invictus*, no blame can be attached to Nelson Mandela for the economic deterioration and the sky-rocketing crime rate under his presidency. However, he should be given all the credit for what the Springbok rugby team achieved on the field!

### Legalising Abortion and Pornography

Viewers of *Invictus* also need to be aware that the kind and thoughtful gentleman portrayed in *Invictus*

was the prime mover of the legalisation of abortion, pornography, gambling and homosexuality in South Africa and of the introduction of sex education in public schools. Since Nelson Mandela forced through the legalisation of abortion, not even allowing ANC MPs a conscience vote, and signed it into Law, 1 February 1997, over 900,000 South African babies have been killed through abortion, officially, legally and with tax-payers money.

### Censoring Christianity

Another disturbing aspect of *Invictus* is the editing out of the Christian Faith of key members of the Springbok rugby team. There were many consistent reports of a core of the Springbok rugby team being Bible-believing Christians who regularly met for prayer before the matches.

Yet that is never depicted. The film does give a very anaemic presentation of the Springbok team kneeling in prayer after their victory, but it is such a lame and limp “Thanks Lord for letting us win the game” that it just doesn’t ring true.

As Francois Pienaar declared in his BBC Sport interview in 1995: When the final whistle went “I fell right to my knees. I'm a Christian and wanted to say a quick prayer for being in such a wonderful event, not because of the winning. Then all of a sudden, the whole team was around me, which was a special moment.”

### Slanderous Distortion

Despite Francois Pienaar’s testimony, *Invictus* incredibly portrays him as fornicating before the winning match and swearing during it. And although the Springbok rugby team gave all glory to the Lord Jesus Christ for their triumph, Clint Eastwood’s production of

*Invictus*

transfers that glory to Nelson Mandela and a humanist poem by English poet William Ernest Henley, which he quotes: “I thank whatever gods may be for my unconquerable soul... I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.” It is the title of that poem,

*Invictus*

, after which the film is named.

### Selective Focus

Francois Pienaar also pointed out in his 1995 interview with BBC Sport that the game favourites for the World Cup Rugby had been Australia, whom the Springboks beat in the opening game. This landmark victory is down played in *Invictus*.

### Oversimplifying a Complex Country

It is unfortunate that *Invictus* reinforces stereotypes of narrow minded, white racists and whitewashes Nelson Mandela and the Marxists in the ANC. South Africa is far more complex and interesting than this film suggests. To understand South African history we need to understand the African context and the reality of the Cold War, which was the backdrop to the conflict in which Nelson Mandela played such a key role.

### **A Paid Political Advertisement?**

It would be interesting to know from where the funding came for this film. At times it seemed like a paid political advertisement for Nelson Mandela and the ANC. If all that the film depicts of Nelson Mandela encouraging the team is really true, then it is commendable. But surely any sport team's victory is to the credit of the Manager, the Coach and the team members' dedication, training, fitness and skill?

Dr. Peter Hammond

Frontline Fellowship  
P O Box 74 Newlands 7725  
Cape Town South Africa  
Tel: 021-689-4480  
E-mail: [admin@frontline.org.za](mailto:admin@frontline.org.za)  
Web: [www.frontline.org.za](http://www.frontline.org.za)

For more background information see: [\*\*\*The Battle For South Africa\*\*\*](#) ; [\*\*\*The Battle For the Mind in the News Media\*\*\*](#)

;

[\*\*\*True and False Guilt\*\*\*](#)

;

[\*\*\*The Cold War and The Iron Curtain\*\*\*](#)

;

[\*\*\*The Paganisation of South Africa\*\*\*](#)

;

and

[\*\*\*Over a Million Reasons Why I Will Not be Voting ANC\*\*\*](#)

, available on  
[www.frontline.org.za](http://www.frontline.org.za)