

S. Africa elections a worldwide lesson

The right to vote in this country is a right that is often taken for granted or even overlooked. People turn away from the polls because the line extends beyond the doors or even down the sidewalk.

In South Africa, the voting lines are 500-people long and have been that way from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. People are carrying others who can't walk and all are voting because the well-being of their lives depends on it. For South African blacks, this is the first opportunity in their lives to vote.

The story of South Africa reads almost like a fairy tale. Nelson Mandela, imprisoned for 27 years, was released and vowed to fight for the rights of South African blacks, and he is: fighting his way into office and fighting to end white-minority rule. Odds are he will become the new president and bring the African National Congress back into office. His election will end a long stint of white-minority rule that has deprived black South Africans from many of their rights.

At stake is a life for those who have been robbed of many of life's simple rights: things like a house and equal education; things like honor and equal status. The whites of South Africa have accumulated huge houses and wealth while 8 million of the estimated 30 million blacks live in villages without sewers. The ANC wants to change this.

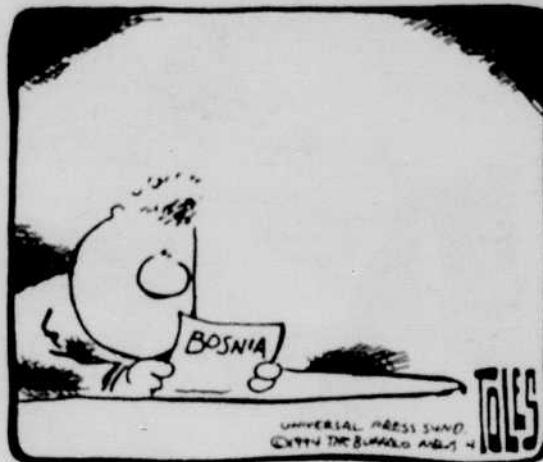
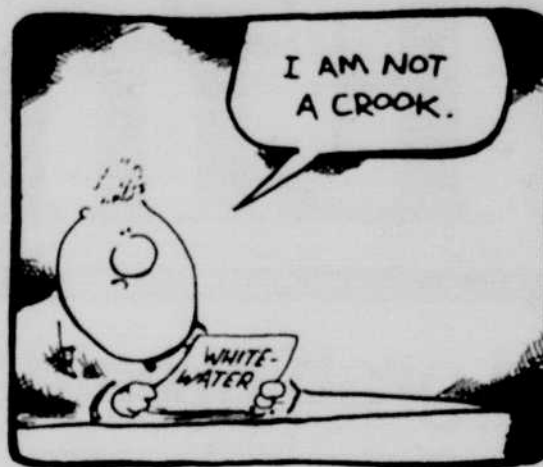
However, the road is long and the work plentiful if ANC is elected. Its plan to effect change in the country has been called overzealous and ambitious. And it most certainly is. But it is a plan where there has been no chance of a plan before. If half of what the ANC aims to do is accomplished, then opportunities will exist that have not existed before.

Putting South Africa back on track will broaden the wealth of the entire country. With the polls still open, stock prices on the Johannesburg stock exchange reached a record high. Developing a strong democratic party in South Africa will help to stabilize the rest of Africa as well. One of the most important trading partners for much of Africa, South Africa's trading status will grow as its economy grows, strengthening trade for the entire country.

Conquering its race relation problems to the extent South Africa has should provide insight to many others.

The majority of South Africa is black. They are fighting for the right to run their country; they are winning and they should. They have overcome racial hurdles that are almost impossible to comprehend when compared to the racial problems people of other countries experience. They have accepted their racial problems, opted for change and worked toward it. A lesson that should be learned by many.

Polls close today, but the election results won't be tallied for 48 hours. There is a lesson here to be learned by everyone, everywhere. South Africa has tangled with colossal problems for quite some time but perseverance has finally paid off. The outcome of the election will, most likely, reap benefits that have been merely a dream for black South Africa.



COMMENTARY

Enough! Nixon was no hero



ROBBIE REEVES

OK, so he's finally dead. And not a moment too soon.

Unless you've been totally oblivious to the outside world for the past week, you probably know that Richard Nixon, former First Crook of the United States, died last week in a New York hospital following a stroke.

It's interesting to note that before he died, Nixon was looked upon as the criminal that he really was. But now that he is stiff, everyone looks at him like some sort of a hero.

Guess what, folks? He's a dead ex-president and nothing more.

Sure, he did some good things. After all, he did resign. He also helped to thaw relations between America and China, as well as with the Soviet Union. But the guy did next to nothing domestically.

Well, that's not entirely true, I guess. Nixon did contribute to modern American political scandal in a way that no other president has before. After all, he dug himself so far into a hole that he had to resign. Coincidentally, Nixon's friends are putting him into a hole of his own this week.

I know that a lot of people see no harm in respecting the man for a week or so, during the time it takes them to get him into the ground. And they're right, there probably isn't.

What I object to is how some people are making Nixon out to be some sort of a god.

Some of the TV coverage of

Nixon's death was, uh, a bit extreme. Take for example CNN. Over the weekend, CNN had no fewer than a half dozen camera crews scattered around the nation to seek out people to say good things about him. Some of these interviews got pretty old after a while; how many times can the mayor of the town that Nixon lived in say that Nixon walked around his condo in the evening?

President Clinton went so far as to declare Mar. 27 a national holiday. There was no mail delivery that day, meaning that the average American will remember Richard Nixon by getting a one-day reprieve from receiving his or her phone bill.

It's funny that almost every politician can say nice things about Nixon this week. Even Jimmy Carter, the last living Democratic ex-president, had his glowing quote about Tricky Dick on the news.

It will be interesting to see how politicians, especially liberal Democrats, handle the death of, say, Ronald Reagan. Betcha most of them won't be as glowing the next time around.

Nixon did leave behind quite a legacy. His library in Southern California is a site to behold. CNN actually did a tour of the library over the weekend, and one would assume by the size of the library that Nixon either did a lot as president or had one hell of an ego. I argue the latter.

Yet the story is not totally over. Even though the man is dead, and by the time you read

this, safely in the ground, his Watergate tapes have still not been released. In the interest of full disclosure, it would only seem fair, as well as legally sound, that the tapes be released to the general public. After all, Nixon isn't going to care anymore.

There is a lot that can be learned from the life of Richard Nixon. For example, it is generally not good to say that you are not a quitter and then quit. Similarly, it isn't such a hot idea to say that you're not a crook, and, well, you get the idea.

As president, it usually isn't recommended that you be involved with felonious crimes in any way during your term of office, such as a break-in. It generally doesn't look good at re-election time.

You see, without Nixon, politicians might not know these things. Then again, maybe Watergate gave elected officials some ideas. Who knows?

But then, there is the ultimate lesson, one which Nixon didn't quite learn. If you're going to commit a crime, don't get caught.

But for the time being, politics in America seem to be caught on some fanatical pro-Nixon sentiments. Fortunately, these will subside with time.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the memories of Richard Nixon and his presidency.

Robbie Reeves is a columnist for the Emerald.

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