



# JUNE FREEDOM DAYS MOMENTS IN CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY



Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, cofounder of South Africa's first black law firm and Nomzamo Winifred Madikizela, South Africa's first black social worker, were married on June 14, 1958.

BY JANUS ADAMS

**JUNE 5**

In the parade of Supreme Court decisions that steadily chipped away at the legal foundation of segregation, three cases form a collective milestone: *Henderson v. United States*, *Sweatt v. Painter*, and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*. Adding to their impact, the unanimous decisions reached in each of the three cases were all handed down on the same day—June 5, 1950.

*Henderson v. United States*: This transportation case was brought by Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity against Southern Railway Company, which, in its dining car, assigned one table to blacks and reserved the other tables for whites only. Under the Interstate Commerce Act, passengers are equally entitled to facilities appropriate to the class of service for which they have paid. Because "the curtains, partitions, and signs" all called attention to differences in treatment by race, the Court banned dining car segregation.

*Sweatt v. Painter*: Brought by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, this case attacked segregated graduate schools. Faced with a legal challenge, the Texas legislature had hastily funded a black law school. But as the decision stated "The University of Texas Law School possesses to a far greater degree those qualities...which make for greatness in a law school...It is difficult to believe that one who had a free choice between these schools would consider the question close." The Court was not ready to strike down the doctrine of "separate but equal" segregation, but it ordered Herman Sweatt admitted to the law school under the "equal protection" clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, granting rights of citizenship to blacks.

*McLaurin v. Oklahoma State*

*Board of Regents*: Further undergirding *Sweatt*, the Court held that once admitted, students could not be segregated within the school. Recognizing such segregation as a handicap to the African American student, the Court finally declared all graduate school racial segregation invalid.

**JUNE 11**

June 11, 1963: What a day. Alabama Governor George Wallace announced plans to personally block admittance to the University of Alabama of two black students—James Hood and Vivian Malone. Prompted by Wallace's bravado, Dr. King initiated a challenge: "If the governor of Alabama will present his body by standing in the door to preserve an evil system, then President Kennedy ought to go to Tuscaloosa and personally escort the student into the university with his body!" As Wallace appeared, the president did not, but a deputy attorney general and federal troops did.

Back in Alabama, the two students were admitted and the university was officially desegregated under federal guard. That night, JFK took to the air. Segregation, he told the nation, was morally wrong, and he outlined his proposed Civil Rights Act.

**JUNE 14**

Their courting days were spent in an endless round of politics, law, school, and survival. But despite one of apartheid's infamous banning orders, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, cofounder of South Africa's first black law firm, and Nomzamo Winifred Madikizela, South Africa's first black social worker, were married on June 14, 1958.

They each remembered seeing the other for the first time when the other was unaware. He passed a bus stop, saw her waiting, and tucked

her face away as a pleasant memory. She first saw the "imposing" barrister in court when a friend of hers was assaulted by police. They met in his office when she consulted his lifelong partner, Oliver Tambo. Phoning the next day, he asked her to help raise money for the Treason Trial Defense Fund: "It was merely a pretext to invite her to lunch." Nervously, she "took out every schoolgirl's dress" and ultimately wore a friend's dress. From then on they were together—even when they couldn't spend much time. "I was both courting her and politicizing her," said he. "Life with him was always a life without him," said she. At that first lunch, he said, "I knew right there I wanted to marry her—and told her so." Winnie added, "One day, Nelson just pulled up on the side of the road and said, 'You know, there is a woman, a dress-maker, you must go and see her, she is going to make your wedding gown.'" He was given six days' leave of his banning order and paid the traditional bride price (lobola) to her father. After the ceremony, a piece of the wedding cake was wrapped up for the bride to bring to the groom's ancestral home for the second part of the wedding. But that was not meant to be. Indicted for treason, he returned to Johannesburg for trial. Six years later, he was sentenced to life.

True to her name—Nomzamo means "one who strives" and one who undergoes trials"—she, too, endured banishment, prison, and constant upheaval. For twenty-seven years, she was all the world knew of him. Still, she kept the cake—though it "crumbled a bit." It was there when he returned from prison, a hero, in 1990.

This is an excerpt from the book "Freedom Days". Permission for reprint was given by John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

*"One unfortunate thing about Black Power is that it gives priority to race prejudice at a time when the impact of automation and other forces have made the economic question fundamental for blacks and whites alike. In this context a slogan "Power for Poor People" would be much more appropriate."*

By Martin Luther King

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