

# Nelson Mandela

Diary entry

Friday 12th June, 1964

Dear Diary,

Today represented a day that would mark a turning point in my life; my determination, my struggles, my fight against the unjust world that I lived in had resulted in imprisonment nearly a year after my fateful arrest at Rivonia. My life would now be condemned to a cell and it became apparent that I would need to rely on others to now continue the fight I had started. If this led to change, it was a sacrifice I was willing to make.

As we raced through the streets, the sirens of our convoy wailed on our way to the Palace of Justice. From the window, I could see that all the roads leading to the courthouse had been blocked off to normal traffic; I presumed it was so that nothing or no-one could interfere with the hearing. As well as this, police were checking the identification of anyone who attempted to approach the venue, whilst checkpoints had even been established at the local bus and railway stations. However, despite their efforts to intimidate our supporters, as many as two thousand people had shown their determination and were positioned outside of the courthouse, brandishing banners and signs to show their support. Even inside, the gallery was full which forced the local and international press into standing for the duration of the session.

As I entered the courtroom, I caught sight of the familiar faces of my mother, who had journeyed all the way from the Transkei, and my wife, Winnie. Their support has been unwavering and I must admit that their strength has given me strength. Finally, our case was called and I listened – although almost in a daze – as two pleas in mitigation were read out. Both men spoke about the need to listen to a nation's grievances and how these voices should not be suppressed, whilst the



other tried to remind the judge about how his own people – the Afrikaners – had struggled violently for their freedom. I appreciated the men's efforts but it seemed as though these pleas had been shared in vain, for the judge was barely listening and made no notes throughout the entire time the men spoke. It was clear that his decision had already been made.

After what felt like an eternity, the judge, who was called De Wet, nodded at us – myself and the other defendants also on trial – to rise. Despite normally being a calm man, the judge was very pale and seemed to be breathing heavily. I caught the eye of the other defendants and we all thought the same thing: we were going to be awarded with the death penalty. Nevertheless, when he began to speak, it became clear that he did not intend to have us killed; instead, he sentenced us all to life imprisonment. As soon as the words left his mouth, a collective gasp could be heard in the courtroom because we were all sure that we would be sentenced to death. All I could do was smile. Yes, I was to be imprisoned but I would still have my life and for that, I had to be grateful.

Immediately, I turned towards the gallery with a smile on my face. I searched for Winnie's and my mother's faces but the courtroom had erupted into chaos especially from the section where the ANC supporters had been sat. As the verdict was announced, they had dashed outside to share the excellent news with the crowd, who were still waiting impatiently. Still searching for Winnie's face, I felt one of our police guardians place a hand on my shoulder as they began to hustle us out of the dock, lead us towards the door and take us underground to the cells below.

I am now a convicted prisoner and find myself locked up in cells in Pretoria Local, where we are being kept separate from the other prisoners. I am unsure where we will end up but I must be thankful that I still have my life.

