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**Breytenbach to Mandela:
A Sense of Urgency - A Sense of History
Keeping it Real
By Larry Pinkney
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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Nothing is guaranteed but the struggle itself.

It was with a sense of sadness and yet relief that this writer read the poignant open letter from Afrikaaner poet Breyten Breytenbach to Nelson Mandela. [Reference the essay titled, *MANDELA'S SMILE* in HARPER'S MAGAZINE, December 2008.] The words of Breytenbach (who was himself imprisoned seven years in South Africa for his activities against apartheid) are extremely important and well worth analyzing, not only as they pertain to present day South Africa, but also to the ever-widening chasm between a relatively small Black bourgeois elite and the overwhelming majority of Black and poor everyday people here in the United States.

In Breytenbach's open letter to Nelson Mandela, he describes with enormous respect someone who could be his "father," "a mentor and a reference," and surely most of all, "a comrade." Nevertheless, Breytenbach does not shirk his responsibility in describing what many especially Black South Africans already know *only too well*: That elements within the power circles of the African National Congress (ANC) have, in very large measure, *abandoned* the very principles that initially brought the ANC into existence, and are financially enriching themselves at the expense of the masses of people who are falling deeper into poverty, violence, and despair.

As Breytenbach explicitly, and I fear, accurately puts it:

"The seemingly never-ending parade of corrupt clowns in power at all levels, their incompetence and indifference, indeed their arrogance as historic victors

drunkenly driven by a culture of entitlement, the sense of impending horror in the air because of the violence and cruelty with which crimes are committed, to be tortured and killed for a cell phone or a few coins - one becomes paranoid...What chokes the heart are the random events that have become emblematic of a society in disarray..."

As excruciatingly painful as it may be to read and digest Breyten Breytenbach's words as they relate to South Africa today, his words should also serve as a warning, and an urgent need for analysis as to what to some extent, has already happened and continues to unfold right *here* in the United States, where much of the relatively small Black political and economic elite has shamelessly *sacrificed* the people's struggle for social, political, and economic justice on the altar of economic opportunism, cynicism, greed, and political expediency.

They inaccurately describe themselves as the "Joshua generation," when in fact it is to Judas that they are akin. The parallels today between South Africa and the United States, though by no means exact, are nonetheless chillingly similar in many significant respects, and the economic and social consequences for the overwhelming majority of people are horrific.

There are, to be sure, those in South Africa just as in the United States, who are demanding and organizing for political accountability and an *intensification* of the struggle for economic, political, and social justice. This includes Black, Brown, Red, White, and Yellow peoples. Moreover, our organizing must be deeply rooted in an ongoing and thorough political analysis of how to *expose*, *effectively* struggle against, and *reverse* the despicable sell out of the people by the so-called Black bourgeois elite in the U.S., South Africa, and elsewhere - who have no love for the people *or* the people's struggle. We must not allow ourselves to be blinded by narrow bourgeois cultural nationalist elements who would have us believe that color is the determining factor with regard to who we should politically support and who we should not.

The words of Malcolm X warrant being *reiterated*:

"I believe that there will ultimately be a clash between the oppressed and *those who do the oppressing*. I believe that there will be a clash between those who want freedom, justice, and equality *for everyone* and those who want to *continue* the system of exploitation. I believe that there will be *that* kind of a clash, but I don't think it will be based on the color of the skin..."

The true freedom struggle in South Africa will ultimately not remain *derailed and stagnated* by opportunist elements there. And for a certainty, the people's struggle of Black, White, Brown, Red, and Yellow peoples right here in the United States will intensify despite the installment of the incoming president.

The words of the writer, poet, and activist Breyten Breytenbach are imbued with a much needed sense of urgency, just as the achievements of Nelson Mandela represent an important sense of history. Presently however, we must look both backward and forward *simultaneously*; for so much is at stake in this ongoing struggle.

Let us be certain about this: nothing is guaranteed but the struggle itself; and struggle is what hones us all.

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The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog


BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board Member, Larry Pinkney, is a veteran of the Black Panther Party, the former Minister of Interior of the Republic of New Africa, a former political prisoner and the only American to have successfully self-authored his civil/political rights case to the United Nations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In connection with his political organizing activities in opposition to voter suppression, etc., Pinkney was interviewed in 1988 on the nationally televised PBS NewsHour, formerly known as The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour. For more about Larry Pinkney see the book, [Saying No to Power: Autobiography of a 20th Century Activist and Thinker](#), by William Mandel [Introduction by Howard Zinn]. (Click [here](#) to read excerpts from the book). Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Pinkney.

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