

Black Britain and Nelson Mandela: “Pulling the Branch of a Tree”, edited by E. M. Williams

2025. London: Bloomsbury Academic. xxviii + pp. 252. No price quoted.

ISBN 978-1-3505-4077-0

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Black Britain and Nelson Mandela: “Pulling the Branch of a Tree”, provides a fascinating contribution to studies on Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. The introduction and nine chapters are written by renowned scholars from a British perspective. It generally follows a positive approach to Mandela’s leadership but does not fail to adopt a critical perspective at times.

The book begins with an analysis of the question whether there is still more to be said about Mandela. The response is in the affirmative. It then proceeds to engage with issues relating to Mandela, such as culture and spirituality, leadership, ambiguous relationship to British law, legacy and contribution to contemporary life. What emerges is a person who, while respectful of certain aspects of colonial legacy, such as the British legal system, remained grounded in his own traditional culture by espousing values, such as peace, harmony and solidarity through consensus. He truly inculturated Christianity and this alone has given rise to suspicion regarding his faith position, yet he remained open to and respectful of other faith positions. It is also interesting to note his contributions to reggae music and philosophy.

An analysis of the legal context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is offered including the complex and controversial matter of reparations. The process, while flawed in certain respects, facilitated the peaceful post-1994 transition towards national unity and justice. This was the result of Mandela’s moral authority derived from his



Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae

Volume 51 | Number 3 | 2025 | #20037 | 2 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/20037>
ISSN 2412-4265 (Online), ISSN 1017-0499 (Print)
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tendency towards achieving consensus. However, he was not absolved from criticism and was accused of favouring the desires of whites at the expense of blacks. This was especially true with regard to the issue of securing economic justice and reconciliation for all. This lay at the heart of Mandela's mission and vision.

With regard to his legacy, Mandela is often compared to Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe in a hero-tyrant contrast. However, the truth is not as simplistic as is demonstrated in the book. Differences in their approaches to political dynamics, economics and colonial justice, Cold War geo-politics and the nature of negotiation processes are analysed. Within the South African context it is no easy matter to rationalise Mandela's involvement with the Rhodes Trust relative to the Rhodes Must Fall movement, other than to justify it by his absolute commitment to the inherent right of education for all and his ability to forgive.

The book adds to readers' knowledge and understanding of Mandela as a person, leader, lawyer and statesman. He was an African through and through and never departed from his cultural heritage even though he became an international figure of dignity and respect. He not only contributed to the ending of legislated apartheid in South African but willingly engaged in conflicts in other African nations as a committed peacemaker.

With all this said, the absence of comment on and from the British churches is notable. For instance, the impact of Mandela and others, like Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak, on the Scottish churches, the Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church and the Scottish Episcopal Church in particular is significant. This could provide a basis for further research.

Thus, *Black Britain and Nelson Mandela: "Pulling the Branch of a Tree"*, is worthy of wide dissemination as it provides a sound foundation for ongoing discussion of Mandela's legacy.