Nelson Mandela (1918– ) was trained to be a leader of the Thembu people. Later, he received a Western education. In 1952 Mandela became one of the leaders of the African National Congress (ANC). The ANC at first followed a policy of nonviolent resistance to white rule and apartheid in South Africa. Later, it supported more violent methods. Mandela was arrested in 1962 and sentenced to life imprisonment. During his 28 years in prison, Mandela’s reputation grew throughout Africa and the world. Finally, the South African government released him and agreed to hold free elections. In 1994 Mandela became the first black president of South Africa.

I cannot pinpoint a moment when I became politicized, when I knew that I would spend my life in the liberation struggle. I had no epiphany, no singular revelation, no moment of truth, but a steady accumulation of a thousand slights, and a thousand indignities produced in me an anger, a desire to fight the system that imprisoned my people.

One night in 1943 I met at Walter Sisulu’s house Anton Lembede and A.P. Mda. From the moment I heard Lembede speak, I knew I was seeing a magnetic personality who thought in original and often startling ways. He was then one of a handful of African lawyers in the whole of South Africa and was the legal partner of Dr. Pixley ka Seme, one of the founders of the ANC.

Lembede said that Africa was a black man’s continent, and it was up to Africans to reassert themselves and reclaim what was rightfully theirs. He hated the idea of the black inferiority complex and castigated what he called the worship and idolization of the West and its ideas. He believed blacks had to improve their own self-image before they could initiate successful mass action.

Primary Source Reading A
continued

☑ Document-Based Questions

Directions: Use information from the primary source to answer the questions below.

1. Describing How does Mandela describe his initial interest in the struggle against apartheid?

2. Identifying Who was Anton Lembede?

3. Paraphrasing What did Lembede believe?

4. Making Connections Compare the ideas that are expressed in Mandela’s statements to events that have happened in the United States. Name a person from the United States who also believed in equality for everyone.