

The New York Times<https://www.nytimes.com/1990/09/24/world/de-klerk-arrives-in-the-us-for-talks-with-bush.html>

De Klerk Arrives in the U.S. for Talks With Bush

By Thomas L. Friedman, Special To the New York Times

Sept. 24, 1990



See the article in its original context from
September 24, 1990, Section A, Page 8 Buy Reprints

[VIEW ON TIMSMACHINE](#)

TimesMachine is an exclusive benefit for home
delivery and digital subscribers.

About the Archive

This is a digitized version of an article from The Times's print archive, before the start of online publication in 1996. To preserve these articles as they originally appeared, The Times does not alter, edit or update them.

Occasionally the digitization process introduces transcription errors or other problems; we are continuing to work to improve these archived versions.

President F. W. de Klerk of South Africa, citing the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as an inspiration for the changes he has begun in his own country, arrived in Washington today for talks with President Bush.

After four decades in which Washington has kept South Africa at arm's length because of apartheid, Mr. de Klerk stepped off his South African Airways jet into a red-carpet reception at Andrews Air Force Base.

Mr. de Klerk, who was invited to Washington in February by President Bush after he released the black South African leader, Nelson Mandela, from prison and began negotiations to end white minority rule, clearly relished the moment.

"I am deeply aware of the historical importance of this visit," Mr. de Klerk said to the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, Herman J. Cohen, who headed the American welcoming party. "South Africa has embarked on a great journey. It is a journey towards full democracy at home and abroad, full participation in the family of nations. It is a journey that I sincerely believe will bring the fruits of both justice and economic well-being to every South African family."

Anti-Apartheid Sanctions

"In a few moments, we will begin our visit to Washington at the Reflecting Pool," said Mr. de Klerk, referring to the ceremony where he was formally welcomed by Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d. "It is there where the reflections of the great monuments to Washington and Lincoln come together. And it was there that many thousands of Americans heard the Rev. Martin Luther King describe his dream for an America of justice and harmony through nonviolence.

When Mr. de Klerk referred to the "family of nations," it was no idle oratorical flourish. To be welcomed at the White House on Monday, with the South African flag waving next to the Stars and Stripes, will be for him and other white South Africans the ultimate sign that their country is finally breaking out of its pariah status.

It was striking that moments after Mr. de Klerk's plane landed, almost all of the South African Airways flight attendants gathered around one of the United States Marine honor guards and asked him to pose for a picture with them next to the aircraft, which he gladly did. The flight was the airline's first to land in the United States since Congress banned air links with South Africa as part of the 1986 anti-apartheid sanctions.

Although the small official welcoming party that met Mr. de Klerk was in marked contrast to the tumultuous tickertape parades that greeted his negotiating partner, Mr. Mandela, the African National Congress leader, last June, it did not diminish the South African leader's evident satisfaction. He is the first South African head of Government to visit the United States since 1945.

'With Charity for All'

"The words and deeds of Presidents Washington, Lincoln and Dr. King still ring out to us all," continued Mr. de Klerk, 54, who at the time of Dr. King's civil rights activities in the 1960's was an enthusiastic advocate of apartheid. "Inscribed in stone above Lincoln's statue are the great words, 'With malice towards none, with charity for all, let us do all which may achieve a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.' These are words which also describe our efforts today in South Africa."

Mr. de Klerk's reference to Dr. King and his famous 1963 speech, one of the most inspiring of the civil rights movement, was seen as offensive by some American black leaders.

Randall Robinson, executive director of the African-American lobby TransAfrica, argued that Dr. King "died in a lifelong effort to perfect American democracy," while "South African blacks are fighting to establish the very essentials of a democratic system against a white minority, including de Klerk, that has insisted on retention of its privileges."

Mr. de Klerk was closeted with his aides much of the day and dined this evening with Vice President Dan Quayle. Monday morning, he will meet with Mr. Bush. After a working lunch at the White House, the South African President will go to the State Department for talks with Mr. Baker. On Tuesday he will deliver an address at the National Press Club and also meet with Congressional leaders.

A New Constitution

During his talks in Washington, the South African leader is expected to receive mixed messages from the White House and Congress.

Administration officials say he will hear praise for his bold decision to release political prisoners in return for the suspension of armed struggle by the African National Congress, and for his decision to begin talks with Mr. Mandela on how to draft a new constitution to govern a post-apartheid South Africa.

The Bush Administration wants to heap enough praise on Mr. de Klerk to encourage him to keep moving forward and give him something to point to when his rightist white critics ask what, if anything, his reforms have gained for South Africa abroad.

But this praise, Administration officials say, will be tempered by admonitions that the African leader still has not gone far enough in his reforms to justify a lifting of sanctions by Washington.

Mr. de Klerk, officials added, will also be questioned about how he plans to contain the

factional violence in South Africa's black townships, which threatens to undermine the constitutional negotiations. Many black leaders have accused the South African police and right-wing organizations of instigating some of that violence, which has led to more than 1,700 deaths this year.

'A Sad and Tragic Situation'

These and other issues explain why not everyone in Congress welcomes the de Klerk visit. TransAfrica is planning a demonstration across from the White House while Mr. de Klerk is in the Oval Office. And on Saturday the Congressional Black Caucus announced that it was canceling a scheduled meeting with Mr. de Klerk.

Mr. Robinson, of TransAfrica, said he had encouraged the cancellation because of his group's feeling that the de Klerk visit is nothing more than a "superficial photo opportunity, staged with the assistance of President Bush, to put a smiling face on a sad and tragic situation."

The American public, Mr. Robinson said, "must be reminded that the major pillars of apartheid remain firmly in place in South Africa."

A senior Administration official briefing reporters at the White House before Mr. de Klerk's arrival said, "We recognize, as will this visit, that President de Klerk has played a major role in bringing changes about."

The Administration official said, though, that he was certain that Mr. de Klerk was under no illusion that the sanctions against South Africa, embodied in the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, would be lifted.

"The United States has specific legislation relating to sanctions, and those cannot be relaxed until such time as certain conditions in the law are met," the official said. "And he understands, as do we all, that those conditions have not yet been met."