

Ronald H. Brown,

attorney and political leader, was elected chairman of the Democratic National Committee on this day, becoming the first Black in U.S. history to be elected head of a major national political party. He played a pivotal role in the Clinton presidential campaign. Brown went on to be appointed U.S. Commerce secretary in the Clinton administration, the first Black in that post as well. Brown graduated from Middlebury College in Vermont and earned a law degree from St. John's University in New York. He built a successful career in the 1980s as a lawyer and lobbyist. As Commerce Secretary, Brown was one of the foremost spokesmen for the administration's economic and trade policies, helping U.S. firms win contracts in developing and newly industrialized nations. He was killed on April 3, 1996, in a plane crash during a trade mission to Bosnia.

February 11, 1990--

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, South African statesman, president, leader of the African National Congress (ANC), was freed from prison on this day. Mandela was one of the world's most famous political prisoners, spending more than 27 years in jail due to South Africa's apartheid. He gave his first public address in Cape Town, South Africa, upon his release. Throughout his captivity, Mandela achieved legendary status. Governments and groups around the world demanded his freedom. In June 1990, he embarked on a triumphant sojourn of 13 nations around the world. Four years later, Mandela made history again by being elected the first Black president of the country under its first multiracial democratic elections.