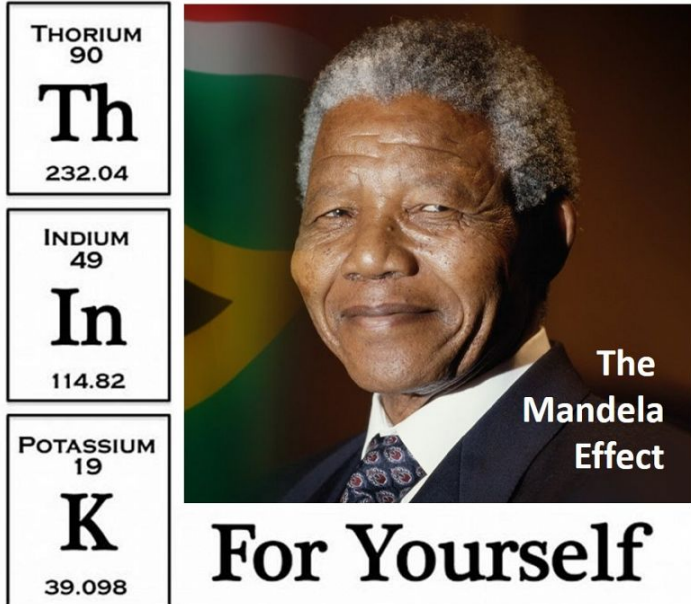


Think for Yourself: The Mandela Effect

By John Turnbull

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The passing of Mandela has had more of an impact on pop culture than one might think

Do you ever find yourself questioning your memory of major world events? You're not alone. Critical thinker [John Turnbull](#) takes a look at the mysterious Mandela Effect.

Nelson Mandela, a (very) brief history

According to the [Nelson Mandela Foundation](#), Rolihlahla (Nelson) Mandela was born in the village of [Mvezo](#) on 18 July 1918. He was given the "Christian name" Nelson in primary school, attended the [University College of Fort Hare](#) and joined the [African National Congress](#) in 1944. In 1952, Mandela established South Africa's first Black law firm, [Mandela & Tambo](#) and was [tried](#) for treason in 1956. While he was acquitted in that trial,

in 1963 Mandela was put on trial for [sabotage](#) and sentenced to life imprisonment, along with seven other accused.

On 12th of August 1988, the world leader was diagnosed with [tuberculosis](#) and spent the remainder of his prison term at [Victor Verster Prison](#) near [Paarl](#). Mandela was released from gaol on 11 February 1990 and elected President of the African National Congress the following year. In 1993, Mandela and [FW de Klerk](#) jointly won the Nobel Peace Prize and in May 1994 Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as South Africa's first democratically elected President.

Finally, he died in 2013, at the age of 95, from a [respiratory infection](#).

So, why do so many people on the internet seem to think he died in [gaol](#)?

Origins of the term

The term "[Mandela Effect](#)" was first coined in 2010 after a growing number of people on the internet claimed to have clear memories of Nelson Mandela's funeral. The revolutionary was very much alive at this point. "[Paranormal consultant](#)" [Fiona Broome](#) coined the term and states the effect is created by individuals moving between parallel realities — essentially an expansion of the [Multiverse Theory](#).

"The Multiverse? Sounds like a comic book thing..."

You're right. Marvel first introduced the concept way back in [1939](#) and DC has been playing with the idea of parallel dimensions since the late 1950s. Conceptually, however, it has been discussed by philosophers for centuries. [Erwin Schrodinger](#) (the cat guy) first addressed the problem scientifically in 1952, at a lecture in Dublin.

Popular scientific acceptance of the Multiverse Theory is mixed, most admit that it's an interesting thought experiment. The issue is it can't be falsified from a scientific perspective.

Despite this, many physicists over the years have argued for the existence of a multiverse, with the most popular theories breaking down as follows (with thanks to [space.com](#)):

Infinite Universes: the suggestion that a multitude of other universes exist beyond the observable boundaries of space-time. This theory is often expressed visually as a patchwork quilt of universes.

Bubble Universes: as proposed by cosmologist [Alexander Vilenkin](#), the theory proposes that some pockets of space stop inflating (following the Big Bang) while other regions continue to inflate, giving rise to multiple isolated bubble universes.

Parallel Universes: one of the most popular hypotheses, suggests near-identical universes are separated by dimensional membranes, described by Columbia University physicist [Brian Greene](#) as "like a slice of bread within a grander cosmic loaf".

Daughter Universes: which contends that multiple universes must arise based on the theory of quantum mechanics.

Mathematical Universes: a complex idea which posits multiple universes where the rules of mathematics (and by extension, physics) are fundamentally different.

Other Examples of the Mandela Effect

After Mandela, the second most referenced evidence of the effect is the [Berenstein Bears](#).

Many people claim to remember the series as the "Berenstein Bears".

Others claim to remember cartoons made by Looney Toons (rather than Looney Tunes) and think Curious George had a tail (he doesn't), suggesting that he may be an [ape](#) rather than a monkey. And also that the Wicked Witch from Snow White said "Mirror, mirror, on the wall..."

That last example is close, to be fair. In the original, it's "Magic mirror on the wall", but it's been misquoted so many times since, many people remember it incorrectly. Like the line from Star Wars between [Luke and his father](#), or the vague memory that [comedian Sinbad](#) once played a genie called Shazam (it was actually Shaquille O'Neal in 1996's [Kazaam](#)).

"I'm starting to see a pattern here..."

Yep. Most commentators, with even the slightest idea how the brain works, put the Mandela Effect down to false memories. While it's fun to hypothesise about parallel universes where every choice is played out, it's important to remember that human memory is far worse than most people think.

While I have written before on the [limitations of human perception](#), cognitive science has advanced significantly in the last 5 years — putting it all simply, [human memory sucks](#).

From [Psychology Today](#):

'Although memories seem to be a solid, straightforward sum of who people are, strong evidence suggests that memories are actually quite complex, subject to change, and often unreliable.'

You can test this over the approaching festive season. Bring up a beloved family moment from the past, then count how many details people remember differently. Known as the [Rashomon effect](#), this is closely related to the Mandela Effect. It illustrates once again that perhaps we're not as

smart as we think we are.

False Memory Syndrome

It's probably fair to say that most of us hold some false memories in our brains, but fortunately for most, this doesn't tip over into False memory syndrome — the psychological effect that drove the [Satanic Panic](#) of the 1980s.

From internet culture expert [Aja Romano](#) in [Vox](#):

'At its core, satanic ritual abuse claims relied on overzealous law enforcement, unsubstantiated statements from children, and above all, coercive and suggestive interrogation by therapists and prosecutors. Some of the defendants are still serving life sentences for crimes they probably didn't commit — and most likely didn't even happen in the first place.'

So you don't find the multiverse theory compelling?

On the contrary, I find it fascinating. As a lifelong comic book nerd, I would like nothing more than an alternate universe where I have somehow become Batman — ideally without the tragic death of my parents.

But, as an explanation for the Mandela Effect, the multiverse theory doesn't really hold up. It suggests that hundreds – if not thousands – of humans have passed between dimensions, with no disturbance to the space-time continuum, without even noticing until some minor pop culture detail tipped them off.

At the end of the day, it's probably more likely that humans have bad memories, tend to find patterns where none exist and enjoy a good [conspiracy theory](#). But, if you want to believe we live in a multiverse, with the potential to travel between layers, I certainly can't prove you're wrong.

Think for yourself.

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During the L.A. riots 25 years ago, Rodney King's famous "Can't we all JUST get along" speech has changed. Mandela Effect. pic.twitter.com/fxQ9duDneO

— David Kupidlowski (@ZEROParanormal)
[December 9, 2019](#)