



JOURNEYS TOWARD FREEDOM

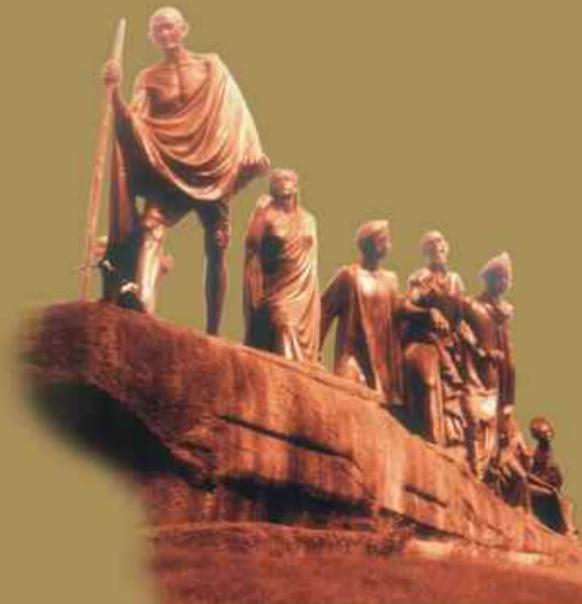
“

True nonviolent resistance is not unrealistic submission to evil power. It is rather a courageous confrontation of evil by the power of love, in the faith that it is better to be the recipient of violence than the inflictor of it, since the latter only multiplies the existence of violence and bitterness in the universe, while the former may develop a sense of shame in the opponent, and thereby bring about a transformation and change of heart.

King, 1959

”

New generations of Americans and Indians honor the values, leadership and sacrifice of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) and Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968)



Dandi March, Gandhi March. © Partha Shah, CMAC



From Many Streams of Thought



Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. were men of peace who revolutionized their countries through a powerful idea that freedom could be won and justice established through nonviolent civil disobedience. Although they were born into different circumstances, both saw clearly the transformational power of nonviolent social protest against the injustices of their times. They were not alone, either in the formulation of their ideas or the actions they took. Their victory lay in persuading millions to suffer for a cause greater than one individual, but noble for its dedication to the basic rights due each human being.



Today, Americans acknowledge that King and the movement he led helped change the United States forever, and for the better. The American civil rights movement drew substantial inspiration from Gandhi and India's independence struggle.



Gandhi and Thoreau

Born and raised in Gujarat, Gandhi went to practice law in South Africa in 1893, where he encountered legalized racial discrimination. In 1906, as he organized the Indian minority in Johannesburg to disobey unjust laws en masse while accepting the consequences of such resistance, he read American writer Henry David Thoreau's essay, *Civil Disobedience*. This text was to have a lasting impact on Gandhi's work, and on the work of King, also.

Thoreau was born in Concord, Massachusetts in 1817. A writer and philosopher, he was a member of the transcendentalist literary movement, which had drawn inspiration from Indian philosophy, including the Bhagavad Gita. As a protest against slavery and what he saw as an imperialist American war with Mexico, Thoreau refused for several years to pay his poll tax. This led to his arrest in 1846. Although he was released after one night when a relative paid the tax, this episode was the occasion for Thoreau's writing of *Civil Disobedience*.

Thoreau wrote,

“Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once? ...Moreover, any man more right than his neighbors, constitutes a majority of one already.”

I was agreeably surprised to receive your letter.... A friend sent me Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience. It left a deep impression on me. I translated a portion of that essay for the readers of Indian Opinion in South Africa, which I was then editing, and I made copious extracts from that essay for that paper. That essay seemed to be so convincing and truthful that I felt the need of knowing more of Thoreau, and I came across your Life of him, his 'Walden' and other short essays, all of which I read with great pleasure and equal profit.

Yours sincerely,
M.K. Gandhi

(Letter, 1929, to Henry S. Salt, a Thoreau biographer)

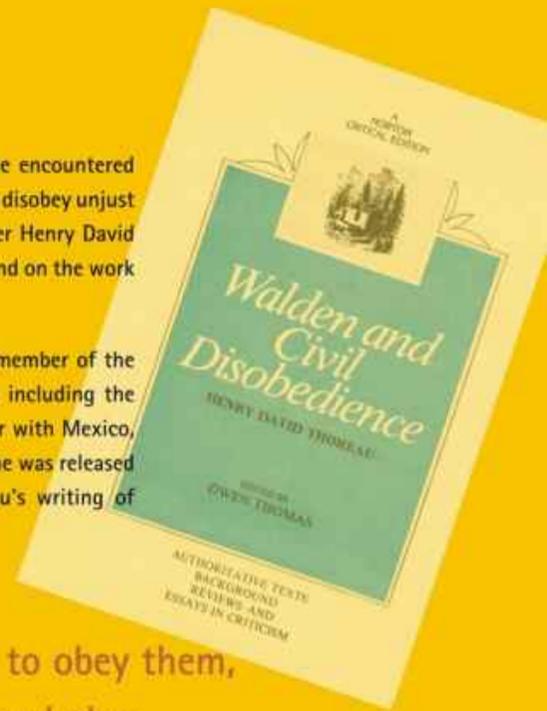
Gandhi told an American journalist, Webb Miller, that *Civil Disobedience* helped him to name his passive resistance struggle.

“Until I read that essay I never found a suitable English translation for my Indian word, *satyagraha*.”

Gandhi, 1931

In his writings and interviews, Gandhi credited Thoreau, John Ruskin and Leo Tolstoy as major intellectual influences. Gandhi said that Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* contained the essence of his own political philosophy regarding relations between citizens and their government.

King was no less affected by the words of Thoreau. “During my student days I read Henry David Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience for the first time.... Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system, I was so deeply moved that I reread the work several times. I became convinced that noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good.... As a result of his writings and personal witness, we are the heirs of a legacy of creative protest.” King, 1962



Gandhi's Struggle in India



The Salt March, 1930

Civil Disobedience

From his return to India in 1915 until the time of his death, Gandhi devoted much of his life to examining the principles of justice, what he called "experiments with truth," and to pressing for India's independence from Britain. In the freedom struggle, Gandhi outlined two resolutely nonviolent *satyagraha* strategies for social action: noncooperation, the passive rejection of injustice; and civil disobedience, the active confrontation of British colonial rule.

In January 1930, Gandhi urged Indians to systematically challenge British colonial laws. He released an 11-point charter that included demands for abolition of the salt tax, reduction of land taxes and the release of political prisoners. When the British authorities rejected these demands, the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution to launch a civil disobedience movement.

Gandhi inaugurated this movement with the Salt March, accompanied by 78 co-workers from his Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat. The 25-day march, to the seashore near the village of Dandi, where he broke the law against Indians making their own salt, energized the Indian freedom movement and made Gandhi a powerful example of active civil disobedience.



Gandhi Centenary Stamp
Copyright © A.P.W.W.P.

I wondered what Thoreau would think if he could know that his ideas and one night in jail in Concord had indirectly influenced the current of history and the lives of 350 million Indians three generations later.

Miller, 1931

Another method Gandhi had used in South Africa was to call upon masses of his followers to break the law and willingly accept the consequences, whether it were jail, deportation, fines or beatings. "But...so long as there is even a handful of men true to their pledge, there can only be one end to the struggle, and that is victory," Gandhi said, as great numbers of Indians violated the Black Act that required them to register with the authorities and carry a certificate at all times. The South African police arrested the leaders of the *satyagraha* movement, including Gandhi, thinking this would intimidate and disperse his followers. But Gandhi, pleading guilty in the same court where he had often appeared as an attorney, asked for the maximum sentence; the others followed his example.



Gandhi at his London headquarters discusses the results of the Round Table Conference with the press, December 1931. © AP/WWP.

At a meeting of 1,000 people in Johannesburg in 1908, Gandhi was asked what would happen if the government broke its promise to repeal the Black Act, made as part of a settlement process. His reply reflected a deep belief in the goodness of mankind.

A *satyagrahi* bids good-bye to fear. Even if the opponent plays him false twenty times, the *satyagrahi* is ready to trust him for the twenty-first time, for an implicit trust in human nature is the very essence of his creed.



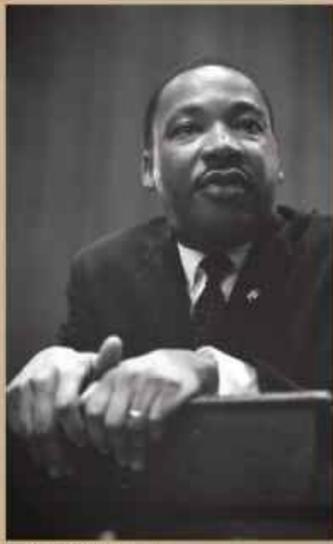
Gandhi arrives in Folkestone, England, September 1931, to attend the Round Table Conference on Indian constitutional reform. © AP/WWP



King's Encounters with Gandhi



Mahatma Gandhi



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“The freedom of India will demonstrate to all the exploited races of the earth that their freedom is very near.”

Gandhi, 1945



Mahatma Gandhi delivering a discourse in New Delhi, January 1948. © AP/WIDE

Visitors from the Land of Lincoln

Although focused on the struggle for Indian independence, Gandhi also wrote widely on other contemporary issues of justice, including the continuing legal challenges facing African Americans. Gandhi's challenges to British rule in India had become widely known, and in 1935, a group of African American leaders, including Howard Thurman, dean of Howard University, traveled to India to visit him. Gandhi urged his American visitors to try civil disobedience, stressing that nonviolent action was the only effective form of direct action against injustice. He also set his sights high: Beyond ending British rule, he said he wanted India to end the “cruel practices and inner contradictions” that he saw were holding the nation back.

“Let not the 12 million Negroes be ashamed of the fact that they are the grandchildren of the slaves. There is no dishonor in being slaves. There is dishonor in being slave owners.” Gandhi, 1929

When the Americans invited Gandhi to the United States he declined, saying his message had not been perfected sufficiently in his own land to be carried to others.

King Experiences Gandhian Philosophy

Ten years after his own meeting with Gandhi in 1936, Morehouse College President Benjamin Mays introduced King to Gandhi through weekly lectures. Some years later, while a seminary student, King said he heard a lecture by Howard University President Mordecai Wyatt Johnson on Gandhi's life and thought. Like Mays, Johnson had been to India to create bridges between Gandhians and the African American struggle. “The message was so profound and electrifying that I left the meeting and bought a half dozen books on Gandhi's life and works,” King said.

“The intellectual and moral satisfaction that I failed to gain from Bentham and Mill, Marx and Lenin, Hobbes, Rousseau, Nietzsche, I found in the nonviolent resistance philosophy of Gandhi. I came to feel that this was the only morally and practically sound method open to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.”

King, 1958



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. addressing a rally in Alabama. © AP/WIDE



King speaking at a mass meeting at the Holt Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, 1955



Beginning of the Journey



Mahatma K. Gandhi, center, is surrounded by workers in his law office in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1912. © AP/WIDE

Gandhi was a 24-year-old in 1893, when he booked and paid for a first-class train ticket from Durban to Pretoria, where he was to argue a legal case, but was ordered to move to the van compartment because of his race. When he refused, he was unceremoniously thrown off. After spending a cold night in the non-European waiting room at Pietermaritzburg railway station he continued on his journey by stagecoach. Gandhi later called it one of the landmark experiences of his life, his moment of truth. From that time, he refused to accept injustice as part of the natural order; he would defend his dignity as an Indian and as a man.

“If it was a **train** ride that created **Gandhi**, it was a **bus** journey that made **Martin Luther King**”

Sourabh Bhattacharya, 2002



JFK from Luther King Jr.

Although President Abraham Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation which freed America's slaves in 1863, and the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution had ended the practice of slavery, by the middle of the 20th century, the United States had not brought to a firm end the legal and social discriminatory practices against African Americans. A new generation of black and white Americans knew that the promise of “equal justice under law” had yet to be fulfilled—and many were determined to make it a reality.

In December 1955, while serving as pastor of a Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, King found himself thrust into leadership of the African American community's boycott of the state capital's racially segregated bus system. The boycott was sparked by an incident on December 1, when Rosa Parks, a woman returning home from work, refused to give up her seat on the bus for a white, male passenger—and was arrested.

During the boycott King was arrested twice. He was among scores of Montgomery residents who walked into the police station, identified themselves as being among the indicted, and submitted to being photographed and fingerprinted.

“...I was proud of my crime. It was the crime of joining my people in a nonviolent protest against injustice.”

King, 1956



The boycott continued for 381 days. On November 13, 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Alabama's laws requiring racially segregated buses were unconstitutional. Five weeks later the court's order arrived, requiring the city to halt segregation on buses. The next day, King, with white and black friends, rode a bus. They sat next to each other, on any seats they liked.

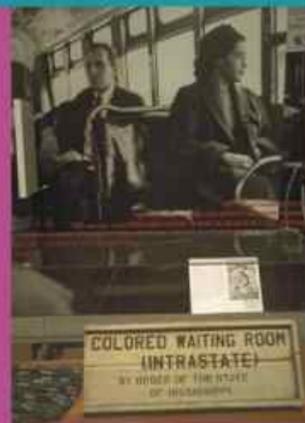
The Montgomery bus boycott established the parameters of strategic nonviolence, derived from Christian and Gandhian ideas, for the African American civil rights movement.

On the night of Rosa Parks' arrest, Jo Ann Robinson, head of the Women's Political Council, printed and circulated a flyer throughout Montgomery's black community which read:

“Another Negro woman has been arrested and thrown in jail because she refused to get up out of her seat on the bus for a white person to sit down. It is the second time since the Claudette Colvin case that a Negro woman has been arrested for the same thing. This has to be stopped. Negroes have rights, too, for if Negroes did not ride the buses, they could not operate. Three-fourths of the riders are Negroes, yet we are arrested, or have to stand over empty seats. If we do not do something to stop these arrests, they will continue. The next time it may be you, or your daughter, or mother. This woman's case will come up on Monday. We are, therefore, asking every Negro to stay off the buses Monday in protest of the arrest and trial. Don't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday. You can afford to stay out of school for one day if you have no other way to go except by bus. You can also afford to stay out of town for one day. If you work, take a cab, or walk. But please, children and grown-ups, don't ride the bus at all on Monday. Please stay off all buses Monday.”



Rosa Parks with her lawyer, Fred Gray, and Alabama Governor George C. Wallace. © AP/WIDE



A close-up of a display at the Museum of African American History in Detroit highlights Rosa Parks. © AP/WIDE

Visit to India



The Kings were garlanded upon arrival in New Delhi on February 10, 1959. © AP/WWP



The Kings at the Gandhi Memorial in New Delhi. © AP/WWP



The Kings with President of India Dr. Rajendra Prasad. Courtesy: Gandhi Smarak Nidhi / National Gandhi Museum



The Kings with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in New Delhi. Courtesy: Photo Division, Press Information Bureau, Government of India

The Montgomery bus boycott victory was hardly the end of the American civil rights movement. Rather, together with the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which outlawed racial segregation in public schools, there was a growing sense that the time had arrived to finally end legal discrimination. There was much work to be done, though the way forward was not clear.

For years, King had wanted to visit India to learn more about Gandhi's nonviolent protest movement that helped bring about India's independence. King was encouraged by some of his associates who had spent time in India. With a \$4,000 grant from the Christopher Reynolds Foundation and \$1,000 from the American Friends Service Committee, King, his wife, Coretta, and a friend, Lawrence Reddick, traveled to India in February, 1959—a few weeks after the young leader's 30th birthday.

To other countries I may go as a tourist, but to India I come as a pilgrim.

King, 1959

Feb 10 Delhi

The Kings and Reddick arrived in New Delhi, were greeted by Sucheta Kripalani, vice chairman of the Gandhi National Memorial Fund and general secretary of the Indian National Congress. King told the press his visit to the land of Gandhi was significant for him as it was an opportunity to study at close quarters the philosophy of nonviolence.

"Perhaps, above all, India is the land where the techniques of nonviolent social change were developed that my people have used in Montgomery, Alabama and elsewhere throughout the American South." *King, 1959*

The Kings were hosted at dinner by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and joined by his daughter, Indira. Nehru spoke about India's efforts to eliminate discrimination based on caste. King later remarked that he was "surprised and delighted" that Indian leaders had placed their moral power behind anti-discrimination laws protecting untouchables. King was left with a positive impression of Nehru, describing him as someone seeking to "steer a middle course" between Gandhi's emphasis on local economic self-sufficiency and western-style modernization.

Feb 11

The Kings paid an early morning visit to Rajghat, where they knelt in prayer for several minutes at the Gandhi memorial. They also met President Rajendra Prasad and Vice President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. King remarked that encountering India's leaders was "like meeting George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison in a single day." *Coretta Scott King, 1976*

Feb 13

The Kings, with Reddick, Swami Vishwananda and James Bristol as companions, traveled to Patna where they met the governor, Zakir Hussain, a strong nationalist leader from the Muslim community and a companion of Gandhi. The Kings visited the austere ashram of Jayaprakash Narayan at Sokhodeora after having had his company the previous day touring the Buddhist sites at Gaya. King "was like a Pied Piper, and moved about the Ashram with several children clutching his arm or holding his hand," Bristol wrote.

From *I Go Round with the Kings* by Swami Vishwananda, and *Notes from my Tour-Diary* by James E. Bristol, in the book, *With the Kings in India*, published by the Gandhi National Memorial Fund.

The Religious Society of Friends, or the Quakers, is a religious group founded in England in the mid-17th century. It has spread to the United States, India and other countries, and its adherents were among the most active opponents of slavery in America. Adherents of the Society were also active in the civil rights movement. A central tenet of Quaker belief is that violence is morally wrong—and to this day, many Friends are anti-war activists, regardless of the background of a conflict. In 1947, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the British and American service branches of the Society.



Jammu & Kashmir



The Kings at the Quaker Centre, which sponsored his visit.



In Madras with the Governor.
Courtesy: Gandhi Smarak Niधि / National Gandhi Museum



King at the Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi.



King with Rajkumari Amrit Kaur.
Courtesy: Gandhi Smarak Niधि / National Gandhi Museum



And later on the Vice President. Courtesy: Gandhi Smarak Niधि / National Gandhi Museum

Shantiniketan

Feb 15

Having spent a couple of days in Bihar, the Kings proceeded to Shantiniketan, housing the Visva-Bharati, a university established by poet Rabindranath Tagore, that fostered cross cultural exchanges.

From here they traveled to Calcutta and were able to experience the role and scope of the trade unions and their impact in organizing and struggling for labor norms and laws. King met some extraordinary freedom fighters, students, and noted social and political leaders from the city. At a large student gathering, King spoke about the progress African Americans had made in the past 25 years, but noted the challenge that lay ahead to remove the last vestiges of tyranny and exploitation.

Madras

Feb 18



At Gandhigram in Madras state, 500 Gandhian workers greeted the Kings in white khadi. They continued on to Madurai and its surrounds, visiting three villages involved in cooperative farming. The care and concern with which the villagers hosted the Kings, along with seeing the work of the volunteers, created an unforgettable experience. Mrs. King, who was particularly moved, said that Gandhigram would remain evergreen in her memory.

Trivandrum

Feb 22



The Kings received a rapturous welcome at the Trivandrum airport and were hosted at lunch by Chief Minister E.M.S. Namboodripad. At Cape Comorin, they visited the site where a portion of Gandhi's ashes were dispersed. King attended the state assembly the next day and met with the press. Speaking to a public gathering of close to 1,000 people, King extolled the virtues of nonviolence as shown by the actions of Gandhi, placing it in the context of the looming nuclear threat. He stressed,

"The choice is not between nonviolence and violence but between nonviolence and nonexistence."

Throughout the trip, King marveled at how the Montgomery bus boycott was well known in India. News conferences and meetings with journalists in several cities convinced him that the news media in India possessed an astonishing understanding of what was happening in the United States.

In Trivandrum, at "a school attended by and large by students who were the children of former untouchables ... The principal introduced me..., 'Young people, I would like to present to you a fellow untouchable from the United States of America.' ... I started thinking ... And I said to myself, 'Yes, I am an untouchable, and every Negro in the United States of America is an untouchable.'" King, 1965





King and his wife, center wearing sun, pose in the home of Acharya J.B. Kripalani in New Delhi, India on March 10, 1959. © AP/WIDE

Bangalore

Feb 24

In Bangalore, at the home of the chief minister, they discussed economic development in India. The next day they visited two newly established factories and in an early morning meeting the following day at the Institute of World Culture, King remarked on how life began much earlier in India as compared to the United States, where he would rarely have expected or accepted an invitation to speak so early in the morning, for it would surely mean a thin crowd.

Bombay

Feb 26

The Kings proceeded to Bombay and were hosted at Mani Bhavan, which had served as Gandhi's home. "It was a simple building in no way distinguishable from the hundred other buildings around it.... Memories of his living ... were all kept clean and as though ready to be used by him again if he ever did come back," notes Swami Vishwananda. King recorded the significance of staying in Gandhi's residence in his guest book entry. He held a series of intriguing discussions with the governor of Bombay, the chief minister and labor minister of Maharashtra on the continuing relevance of nonviolence. In a public speech, King stressed the effectiveness of nonviolence as a means to resist discrimination, and commented that the problem of integration was one of time. "The colored people all over the world have come a long, long way, but we have a long, long way to go."



In a setting of Indian women. Courtesy: Gandhi Smarak Nidhi / National Gandhi Museum

Ahmedabad

March 1-3

The Kings reached Ahmedabad, and were driven to the Sabarmati Ashram, founded by Gandhi after his return from South Africa. Gandhi had stayed at the ashram for 18 years and trained a number of followers in nonviolent action there. After starting the 1930 Salt March at Sabarmati, Gandhi never returned, vowing not to do so until India was free from British rule. At the ashram the Kings were welcomed by a throng of children and attended the morning prayers.

King traveled to near Kishinagar and walked the rural roads with Vinoba Bhave, a Gandhian who pioneered a land reform movement for which he undertook long marches across India. The two men chatted in a school building about nonviolence, interracial marriage, social organization and the influence of Western philosophy.

Agra

March 4

The Kings visited the Taj Mahal at Agra.

March 5-10

These few days, marking the culmination of their visit, were spent at the Quaker Centre in New Delhi. King assimilated thoughts and reflected on various places visited during the tour. They also visited Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, and spent some time discussing ideas both newly formed and strongly held.

A final farewell dinner was hosted for the Kings at the residence of Acharya Kripalani, a senior socialist leader who had been a close ally of Gandhi during the Non-Cooperation Movement.

Early on the morning of March 10, after spending a month in the country, King, his wife and friend departed India. Swami Vishwananda recalled his emotions, "Some of us were very silent; the relationship that had developed was too sacred. When the heart speaks the tongue is silent."



Coretta Scott King with village workers in South India. Courtesy: Gandhi Smarak Nidhi / National Gandhi Museum



The Kings with Gandhigram workers in South India. Courtesy: Gandhi Smarak Nidhi / National Gandhi Museum



At the public meeting in Bombay. Courtesy: Gandhi Smarak Nidhi / National Gandhi Museum



At the Quaker Centre.

Throughout the trip, Coretta Scott King roused the crowds with spirituals and freedom songs. At a farewell reception at Gandhi Smarak Nidhi a few days before leaving, Mrs. King sang gospel songs.

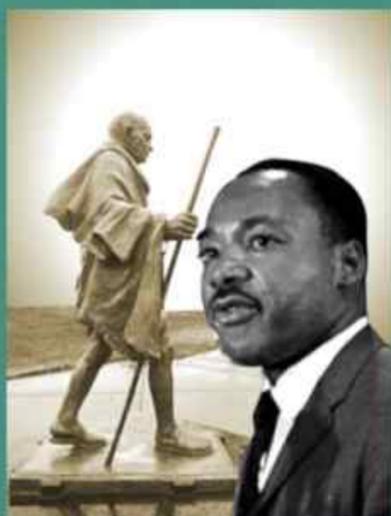
Mrs. King was taken to the All India Radio studios in Calcutta to hear Indian music and see a display of Indian musical instruments.



Coretta Scott King singing to an Indian audience. Courtesy: Gandhi Smarak Nidhi / National Gandhi Museum



Assimilating the Visit



A collage of King's photo with the statue of Gandhi at the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Site in Atlanta, GA.

“...Gandhians accepted us with open arms... To them as to me it also suggests that nonviolent resistance when planned and positive in action could work effectively even under totalitarian regimes.”

King, 1959

On numerous occasions after the month-long visit, King referred to the significance of his experiences while in India, the sincere hospitality extended to him and his wife and the impact it had on him. He was able to reaffirm his belief in nonviolence and mold the methods to fight for civil rights in America.

“I left India more convinced than ever before that the method of nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom and human dignity...I have returned to America with a greater determination to achieve freedom for my people through nonviolent means. As a result of my visit to India, I believe that my understanding of non violence is greater and my commitment deeper.”

King's letter to G. Ramachandran, secretary, Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, May 19, 1959



King addresses reporters during his "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., August 28, 1963. © AP/WIDE

King also reflected on the relationship between the two countries, urging his countrymen to do more for India, struggling as it was under the burden of poverty. King noted,

“Whatever we do should be done in a spirit of international brotherhood, not national selfishness. It should be done not merely because it is diplomatically expedient, but because it is morally compelling.”



Gandhi addresses group to help adjust a congressional delegate in Calcutta, August 1954. © AP/WIDE



King at the Alabama voter registration march in Montgomery, March 1965. © AP/WIDE

“...India is a tremendous force for peace and nonviolence, at home and abroad. It is a land where the idealist and the intellectual are yet respected. We should want to help India preserve her soul and thus help to save our own.”

King, 1959



The Civil Rights Movement



King with Ralph Abernathy, left, and Bayard Rustin, leaders in the civil rights movement. © AP/WFP

Having returned from India with a wealth of experience and renewed conviction, King and his followers set about the task of orchestrating the civil rights movement as an active but nonviolent campaign of resistance, using civil disobedience as a tool.

As Gandhi had in India, King exhorted the black community to peacefully refuse use of segregated services and second-class status in all walks of life. This mode of protest formed the cornerstone of struggles across the United States. The restraint of the protesters and their resolve to maintain a nonviolent stance in the face of violent recrimination earned the effort a great deal of support. As with India's struggle in the preceding decades, the strength of the protests lay in the steely resolve to not submit to that which was unjust.

Students began to mobilize, especially those in black colleges across the American South. Many benefited from mentors like the Reverend James Lawson, a Methodist missionary to India who had learned Gandhian theories and techniques in Nagpur. Each week he rehearsed the students in role-playing confrontational situations, stressing polite behavior and refusal to engage in violent response.

In 1960, sit-ins began when four students in North Carolina decided to sit at a "whites only" lunch counter. When asked to leave, they politely refused. They were not served, but neither were they arrested or harmed.

The technique exploded, with student leaders stepping up and taking action across the South. When provoked, the students stood firm. Within the next six months these nonviolent sit-ins had ended restaurant and lunch-counter segregation in 26 southern cities. Student sit-ins were also successful against segregation in public parks, swimming pools, theaters, churches, libraries, museums and beaches.

In 1961, student organizers launched what would come to be known as the Freedom Rides—deliberate attempts to challenge segregation of buses, stations, toilets, and waiting rooms in the South by riding integrated buses through the region.



African Americans take seats at the "whites only" section of a store in Atlanta during a sit-in demonstration, October 1960. © AP/WFP



A "Freedom Ride" 1961 in front of a bus in Jackson, Miss., August 1961. These black and white riders challenged the rule of segregation by entering waiting rooms labeled "whites only." © AP/WFP



A group of whites and African Americans boarded two buses in Washington, D.C. in May. Their route took them into South Carolina and Alabama. One bus was burned by a white mob, and riders were mercilessly beaten. This approach was questioned as too dangerous and confrontational. Yet more students from around the nation joined, and were jailed, some for weeks, on charges of trespassing, unlawful assembly and violation of remaining segregation laws. The Freedom Rides pushed the federal government to set penalties and enforce the existing law that prohibited discrimination on interstate transportation.

King was traveling the country making speeches and inspiring Americans to become involved in the civil rights movement.



King leads a protest march in 1961. © AP/WFP



King being arrested by Albany's Chief of Police, Laurie Pritchett, after praying at City Hall, July 1962 © AP/WFP



Civil Rights Movement - The Experience of Prison

"We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," 1963



King, accompanied by Ralph D. Abernathy (center), is escorted by city police in Montgomery, February 1956. © AP/WWP



Crowd gathers outside the Montgomery County Jail in Alabama, as police bring in leaders indicted in the bus boycott. © AP/WWP



Rosa Parks is handcuffed by police in Montgomery, February 1956. © AP/WWP



A policeman leads away Abernathy (left) and King, from a demonstration they organized against continued discrimination by business of Birmingham, Alabama, April 1963. © AP/WWP

Thoreau, Gandhi and King: All three were jailed, and all translated the experience into seminal speeches and writings. From a jail in Birmingham, Alabama, King wrote one of the most important documents in the nonviolence movement. Arrested for protesting the segregation of eating establishments in the conservative southern city, King spent more than 24 hours in solitary confinement, which he later described as "the longest, most frustrating and bewildering hours I have lived."

Gandhi was jailed multiple times, adding up to more than five years of his life. Each detention helped his cause by building public sympathy. Following the 1930 Salt March, Gandhi was imprisoned for eight months. He was joined by his followers; tens of thousands of Indians were arrested. He wrote, "Our triumph consists in thousands being led to the prisons like lambs to the slaughter house."

Gandhi's tactic of remaining in jail was taken up by King and his followers, who specifically invoked the Salt March.



Young Black demonstrators endure high pressure water hoses during a demonstration in Birmingham in May 1963. © AP/WWP

...Remain in jail and...make the maintenance of segregation so expensive for the state... that they would hopefully come to the conclusion that they could no longer afford it. Fill up the jails, as Gandhi did in India, fill them to bursting if we had to.

Civil rights activist Jim Farmer, early 1960s



King at a Miami, Fla. news conference, August 1963. © AP/WWP



King's oratory inspired audiences to get involved.



Civil Rights Movement - Changing the Laws



Start of the Selma to Montgomery March in 1965. © AP/WIDEWORLD

In an attempt to persuade the U.S. Congress and President John F. Kennedy's administration to pass proposed civil rights legislation, an estimated 200,000 people joined the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, led by King and other civil rights leaders in August 1963. A multiracial throng listened to King deliver his now famous "I Have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial.

Less than a year later, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964, containing the most sweeping protections of civil rights since President Abraham Lincoln's nearly 100 years before. The law prohibited discrimination of any type based on race, color, religion or national origin, and gave the federal government powers to enforce desegregation.



King delivering the "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963. © AP/WIDEWORLD



King leads a protest march in Montgomery. © AP/WIDEWORLD

The last major nonviolent action was the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in 1965 to demand that black Americans be allowed to register and vote. These rights, granted by constitutional amendments in the 1800s, were nullified through bullying and corruption in southern cities. The marchers were twice stopped by viciously brutal local police, which caused national revulsion and brought support for the cause.

King briefly left the march to deliver an address in Cleveland, Ohio. There he made explicit his debt to Gandhi, whose march to the sea anticipated the Selma-to-Montgomery trek. "We are challenged to make the world one in terms of brotherhood," King said. "We must learn to live together as brothers, or we will all perish as fools."

The U.S. Congress passed the National Voting Rights Act five months later and King stood next to President Johnson as he signed it.



King leads a protest march in 1961. © AP/WIDEWORLD

Today is a triumph for freedom as huge as any victory that's ever been won on any battlefield. Today we strike away the last major shackle of fierce and ancient bonds.

Johnson, 1965

King dedicated his last years to the needs of poor laborers. On April 3, 1968, while in Memphis, Tennessee, to help striking sanitation workers, he was assassinated by a white racist. He was 39 years old.

Twenty years earlier, on January 30, 1948, Gandhi was assassinated by a fellow Hindu while on his way to pray.



President Lyndon Johnson shakes hands with King after handing him one of the pens used in signing the Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964 at the White House in Washington.



King's wife and four children were left to carry on his legacy.



Honoring King's Legacy



Coretta Scott King, before receiving the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding for 1966, from Dr. Zakir Husain, President of India, January 24, 1969.

The image of King as a leader, a man of peace and a follower of Gandhian principles endured in India even after his death.

His wife, Coretta Scott King, returned to India in 1969 to accept the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding, which was accorded to King posthumously. At the same time, the Government of India issued a commemorative stamp, marking the 10th anniversary of King's visit. In 1961, the U.S. Postal Service had issued a stamp to honor Gandhi.



Coretta Scott King during her visit to India, January 1969.



Coretta Scott King receives a stamp honoring her late husband, from India Communication Minister Ram Sahib Singh, in New Delhi, January 1969. © AP/WFP



Coretta Scott King during her visit to India, January 1969.



Coretta Scott King during her visit to India, January 1969.

“Because his task was not finished, I felt that I must rededicate myself to the completion of his work.”
Coretta Scott King, 1969



The Abiding Legacy



Then Senator Obama lays a wreath at the tomb of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King with King's sister, Christine King-Farris in Atlanta, January 2008. © AP/WWP



Non-violent boycott marches, such as this one by Hispanic workers in Texas in May 2006, keep the spirit of the civil rights movement alive. © AP/WWP

America's civil rights movement removed barriers for African Americans and other minorities. Yet, it was not until 2008 that the true measure of equality was achieved. The United States elected Barack Obama, an African American, as President. With his victory, he has provided hope to many around the world by espousing a philosophy of inclusiveness.

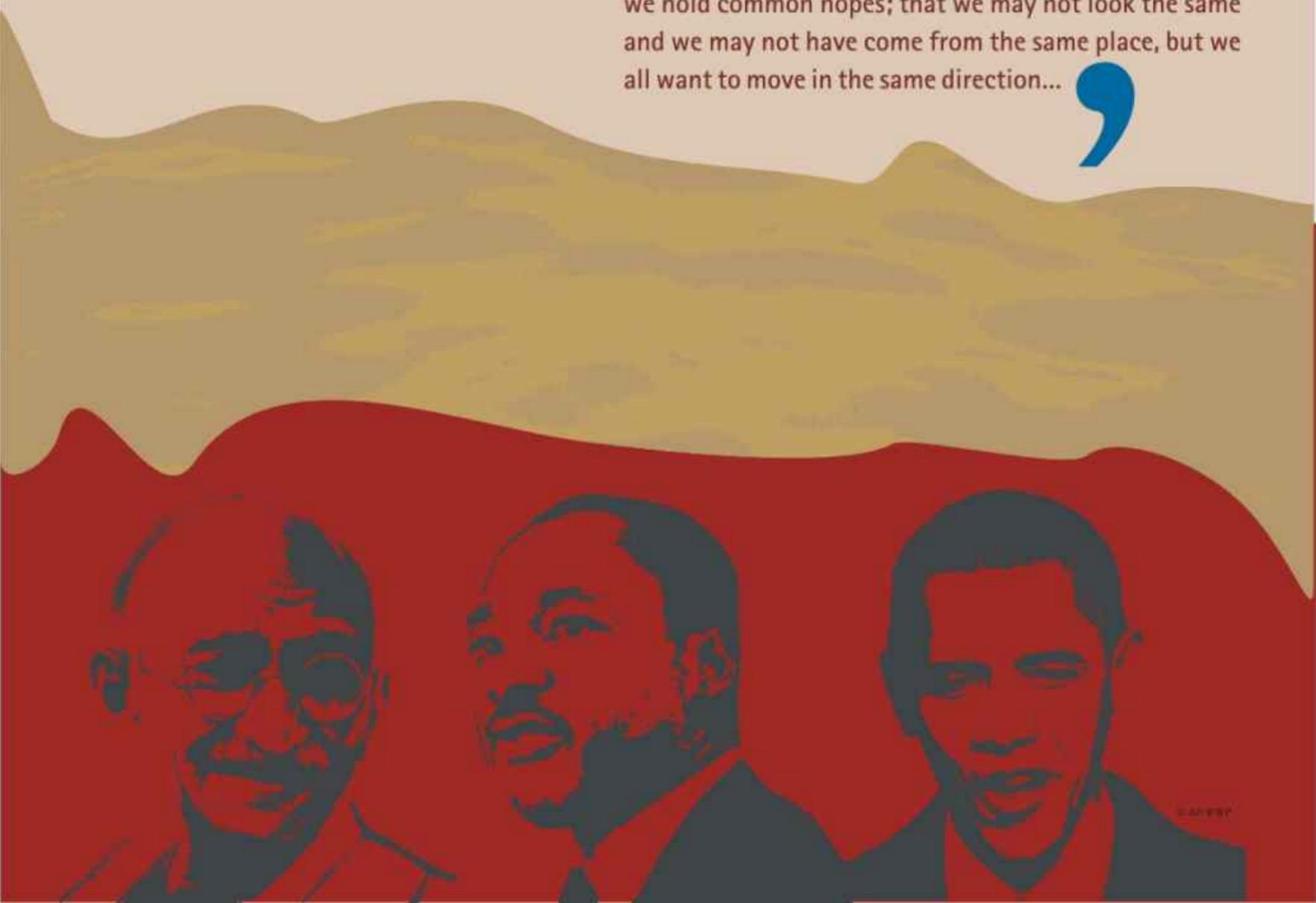
In a landmark speech on race relations in March 2008, Obama noted his debt of gratitude to the leaders of the civil rights movement:

“And yet words on a parchment would not be enough to deliver slaves from bondage, or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States. What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part—through protests and struggle, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience and always at great risk—to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time.

This was one of the tasks we set forth at the beginning of this campaign, to continue the long march of those who came before us, a march for a more just, more equal, more free, more caring and more prosperous America. I chose to run for the presidency at this moment in history because I believe deeply that we cannot solve the challenges of our time unless we solve them together—unless we perfect our union by understanding that we may have different stories, but we hold common hopes; that we may not look the same and we may not have come from the same place, but we all want to move in the same direction...



President Obama with his collection of inspirational photos, including Margaret Bourke-White's photograph of Gandhi sitting at his spinning wheel (bottom right). © AP/WWP



The March Continues



Barack Obama takes the oath as President of the United States. © AP-WWP



Mr. Obama will have the opportunity and the duty to pick up the mantle of Abraham Lincoln, of Lyndon Johnson, of Bobby Kennedy—and of Martin Luther King, Jr. Yet this duty is not Obama's alone. We must all embrace this dream as our civic responsibility. For it to function effectively, we must all take an active role in our democracy and champion the cause that is the common good.

Martin Luther King III, 2009



Candlelit gathering at the Gandhi-King Memorial Plaza at New Delhi's India International Centre, January 2009. Photo: Hemant Bhattacharjee

Today, a new generation of Americans and Indians recognize not only our debt to the men and ideas that powerfully shaped our countries and our values, but our obligation to continue the work of building a more just and peaceful world.

