

Gandhi, king and mandela: what made non-violence work?

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



All through history governments and empires have been overthrown or defeated primarily by the violence of those who oppose them. This violence was usually successful however, there have been several situations, when violence failed, that protesters have had to turn to other methods. Non-violent protesting never seemed to be the right course of action until the ideology of Mohandas Gandhi spread and influenced successful protests across the world. Non-violent methods were successfully used, most notably, by Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela.

Mohandas Gandhi's methods not only led to India's independence from Britain but also had victories over racial discrimination in South Africa. Gandhi saw, upon his return to India from South Africa, that Britain had run India's people into poverty and subordination. Indians were not allowed to manufacture or own their own salt. This affected the poor population most because of how often they used salt. Gandhi began by writing to the English Governor in India describing his plan to "convert the British people through nonviolence and [to] make them see the wrong they have done to India" (Document 1).

He felt that the "British rule [was] a curse". Even though Gandhi spent a total of 2,338 days in prison, he "did not feel the slightest hesitation in entering the prisoner's box" (Doc. 7). People followed Gandhi in his protests and many followed him into jail feeling "firm in [their] resolution of passing [their] terms in jail in perfect happiness and peace" (Doc. 7). While he was in jail, Mme. Naidu, an Indian poetess, filled in his position in leading protests. She encouraged the protesters by reiterating that "[they] must not use any

violence... [they would] be beaten but [they] must not resist...not even raise a hand to ward off blows" (Doc. 4). The author felt that " the western mind finds it difficult to grasp the idea of nonresistance", but this was not the case.

Just 25 years later Martin Luther King, Jr. found his own kind of victory using Gandhi's techniques. King began his career of peaceful protests as a follower, not a leader. In 1960, he " took part in the lunch counter sit-ins" in order to " bring the whole issue of racial injustice under the scrutiny of the conscience of Atlanta" (Doc 2). King hoped to help not just the African-American population but the white population as well. By 1963, King had been chosen as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference which sought to aid in the efforts to put an end to segregation. He accepted " volunteers to serve in [their] non-violent army" knowing that they would have to " accept and endure violence without retaliating" (Doc. 5).

Their will to fight was from " the conviction that [they] were right". King's followers were so empowered that, for their participation in the Montgomery bus boycott, " people had rushed down to get arrested... [they] were now proud to be arrested for the cause of freedom" (Doc. 8). King got white and blacks to work together for the " March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom" (Doc. 11). He wanted them to ' b able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood".

Nelson Mandela used the same " Gandhian principles of nonviolence...that seeks to conquer through conversion" (Doc. 3). He lived under the strict laws

of apartheid that separated the white Dutchmen from the native African population. In similar circumstances as M. L. King, Mandela supported the same acts of nonviolence in order to gain rights for South Africans. He knew that “ attempts at violence...would be devastatingly crushed” under the power of the state. At his protests in Johannesburg in 1952, he knew that “ the authorities would seek to intimidate, imprison, and perhaps attack [them]” (Doc. 6) however, like Gandhi, he encouraged the volunteers not to retaliate.

Mandela spent 26 years and 8 months in jail as punishment for his protesting however, he felt that “ no sacrifice was too great in the struggle for freedom” (Doc. 9). He spent time in jail with other protesters that all felt that “ whatever sentences [they] received, even the death sentence... [their] deaths would not be in vain” (Doc. 9). Freedom for the South African people from apartheid finally came in 1993. To Mandela this was not just the freedom of his people but “ the freedom of all people, black and white” (Doc. 12). “ South Africa’s New Democracy” rose after years of continuous nonviolence from the populace.

Gandhi, King, and Mandela each fought for their causes with a method that was very rarely used but even less rarely successful. Their efforts at peaceful protest without retaliation to attacks were successful in overthrowing trans-continental rule and ending segregation of races. Gandhi transformed the idea of non-violence into a way to fight for freedom and justice which would ultimately end in success and peace.