

Civil rights



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Topic: Civil Rights Martin Luther King was inspired by Gandhi's theory of non-violence in building the basis for the American civil rights movement, introducing Satyagraha as a political method for rights in America in a manner similar to the way Gandhi used it in the anti-racism struggle in South Africa and the anti-imperial movement in India. In the speech given on August 28, 1963 known as “ I Have a Dream,” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. inspired the minds of millions to believe in the moral progress of society and the process of social justice primarily as means through which African-Americans could enter into full equality in the country. (King, 1963) Blacks in America suffered from slavery during the early days of the Colonial period until the Civil War, but in many areas racist statutes known as “ Jim Crow Laws” prevented blacks from voting or enjoying other basic rights of society until Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led his movement for change. (King, 1963) In leading blacks to full political inclusion and equality, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. built a path of civil disobedience based in the philosophies of Henry David Thoreau, Mahatma Gandhi, and deep Christian understanding that focused on securing social justice through legislative change. This included removing “ Jim Crow” laws from the books and passing new legislation nationally such as the Voting Rights Act of 1968 and Civil Rights Act of 1964 that officially guaranteed the human rights of African-Americans. (Infoplease, 2007) Dr. Martin Luther King was a Southern Baptist minister whose community included poor African-American families who had suffered the legacy racism and repression of Jim Crow laws, segregation in restaurants, hotels, schools, and other public facilities as part of an American “ apartheid” doctrine similar to that in South Africa historically. Nelson Mandela and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. can be seen of leaders in the same type of civil rights

movement in the international context. Both used the non-violent tactics of Gandhi designed to appeal to the common morality of the oppressor and to convert through social demonstration, rhetoric, and critical analysis. Both Mandela and King determined peaceful and non-violent resistance to racist States in order to enact legislative and structural change. One issue related to both leaders that continues as an international emergency today is global poverty in developing nations and America itself that still may be based in the structural racism of the imperial era. Gandhi, King, and Mandela all shared a concern for the world's poor as the foremost element of their foreign and domestic policies, and did so while opposing racist State militarism and violence through a dedication to Satyagraha. Thus, in looking at where the legacy of the civil rights movement is most needed and active today, it is in relation to the global poverty crisis which predominates in developing nations primarily internationally but can also be seen in American society today with lower incomes, standard of living, education standards, etc. in African-American communities when compared to "whites" or mainstream American standards. This economic marginalization of large minority communities points to a different form of racism and to the difficulties in healing societies from the legacy effects of an apartheid-type of system. Ultimately, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. saw the U. S. civil rights movement as a necessary and required act that was an expression of agape (Greek), a term from the Bible he used to explain the nature of God's love to his ministry. Agape was related as a type of universal, selfless love for all life forms that was also the basis of Gandhi's Satyagraha, translated as "Soul Force," "Truth Force" or "Love Force" in English from Sanskrit. (Gandhi, 1927) Both Gandhi and MLK used these ideas to communicate the need for a

far-reaching change in society and the life of the individual which was based on classical religious tenets of service and universal love, but the achievements of their movements both in India and the USA failed to accomplish the full extent of their vision. Sadly, both were assassinated by racists who opposed their social vision of love with hatred, violence, and fear. Following their example, it is possible to consider amendments to the Constitution that would extend their social agenda and implement the social vision of Satyagraha, yet even in 2011 this is considered a politically radical or impossible idea. Both Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. can be considered the purest of pacifists as they appeared in the 20th century, thus society should consider the manner that this view is integral to their social philosophies and the civil rights struggle itself, implementing this through social legislation as a means to end war and poverty globally. Sources: Gandhi, Mohandas K. (Translated by (from Gujarati) by Mahadev Desai). *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Navajivan Trust, 1927. Web. 10 April 2011. Infoplease. *Civil Rights Movement Timeline (14th Amendment, 1964 Act, Human Rights Law)*, Family Education Network, Pearson Education, Inc., 2007. Web. 10 April 2011. King, Dr. Martin Luther Jr.. "I Have a Dream," delivered 28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington D. C., *Top 100 American Speeches*, Online Speech Bank, American Rhetoric, HTML transcription by Michael E. Eidenmuller, 2011. Web. 10 April 2011.