

We Have a Dream. Gandhi, King and Mandela in De Nieuwe Kerk Amsterdam

Some of the twentieth century's greatest achievements were breakthroughs that brought freedom to peoples and social groups across the world: independence, universal suffrage and an end to racial segregation. Victories were achieved that would have been impossible without the effort of courageous people, who risked life and limb to make the world a better place. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Junior and Nelson Mandela are perhaps the most obvious examples. They were normal people who went on to become leaders of great movements, determined to fight racial discrimination and social inequality. All three of them became worldwide role models, but they also aroused opposition and resistance. Two of them were murdered for their views and their activism.

We Have a Dream, the winter exhibition 2017/18 in Amsterdam's De Nieuwe Kerk, promises to be an inspiring journey through milestones in the lives of these three famous figures who changed the world for the better. They fought for universal human values, equality irrespective of colour, gender or social background and were driven by idealism, with no personal interest at stake. Their resistance was explicitly peaceful and non-violent.

Through three personal, historic objects, numerous historic photographic and film images and their life stories, visitors will gain an impression of them and of the decisive moments in their lives, when they achieved a breakthrough in their struggle. They will also learn about the impact they have had on the generations that followed them. It turns out that there are some remarkable similarities between their inspiring stories and lasting legacies.

Gandhi, King and Mandela each had their own characteristic approach to achieving their ideals.



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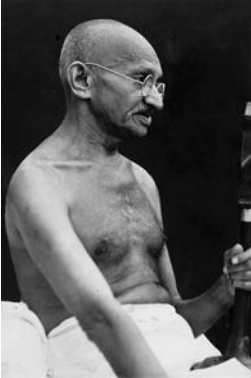
Gandhi's source of inspiration was the spiritual concept of non-violent resistance, *ahimsa*. This non-violence was central to his philosophy *Satyagraha*, 'holding onto truth'. Gandhi's teachings and achievements would ultimately inspire both King and Mandela, as well as many later demonstrations and protests, including the massive peace demonstrations in the Netherlands in 1980–81, the Chinese student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in 1989 and the Occupy protests of 2011. Even many of today's activists are part of a long line that can be traced right back to Gandhi. A very recent example is the Pakistani children's rights activist Malala Yousafzai (1997) with her focus on equal rights and especially girls' rights to education.

King's speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC in August 1963 was iconic. The speech, in which he clearly articulated his vision, completely overwhelmed the spectators. He reached out to people of all ranks and classes and achieved something that until then had been impossible for someone from his background. His inspiration still lives on today, his ideas continue to appeal to millions of people and his visionary words are still used by politicians, writers and musicians in their work. In 2012, the #blacklivesmatter movement was established by Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi and Alicia Garcia to breathe new life into the black struggle for freedom. They argued that the black population was again (or perhaps still) being disadvantaged. The movement targets all black people, gay, straight, queer, transgender, disabled, male, female, young and old, from all strands of society. It focuses on the dehumanisation of the black population in the United States and the extrajudicial killings committed by police and vigilantes.

Finally, with his politics of reconciliation, Mandela put the ideas of both of his predecessors into practice. Ideals and goals are just the start, inspiration gets people moving, but the struggle is yet to be fought. As the only one of the three who gained responsibility for governing his own country, Mandela was able to give further shape and direction to that struggle. Reconciliation and forgiveness were the cornerstones of Mandela's presidency and the most important ingredients for rebuilding South African society.

Today, that society is continuing in the process of redefining itself. There are debates about statues of colonial figures such as Jan van Riebeeck that some feel no longer belong on the streets of the modern world or about the curricula at the now mixed-race universities, which many believe should be much more diverse and also specifically include the history and culture of black people, Indians and other non-white groups. Of course, these discussions spark strong responses, but that only shows that society is changing, that people are thinking about and working with each other. Without Mandela's reconciliation, South Africa would have been a very different place.

Biographies



Gandhi – the doctrine of non-violent resistance/civil disobedience

'Be the change you wish to see in the world'

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2 October 1869 in Porbandar, the capital of a small princely state on the western coast of India. He was born into the Vaishya caste, whose members generally belonged to the upper middle classes: merchants, scholars and local governors. His father and grandfather both held the position of *diwan*, the first minister of the princely state. His father was Hindu and his mother a follower of Jainism, a very strict religious movement that advocated non-violence or *ahimsa*. This pious woman who often fasted had a great influence on her son. Gandhi became a strict vegetarian.

In 1888, Mohandas went to London to study law after successfully appeasing his mother's initial resistance and ignoring a ban on the move imposed on him by Hindu leaders. He was excommunicated by them, but this had little impact on Gandhi since his religious philosophy transcended institutionalised religion. His mother died while he was in London, but he would not find out about it until his return to India in 1891. His career there got off to an inauspicious start. When he was offered a contract in South Africa in 1893, he seized the opportunity with both hands.

Turning point: forcibly removed from the train

While in South Africa, Gandhi underwent an important development and his ideas about freedom and non-violent resistance began to take shape. His work brought him into contact with Indians from various castes. Everyday confrontations with racism and discrimination led him to understand that being Indian was about much more than caste and class alone.

On 7 June 1893, as a young lawyer in a smart suit and holding a first-class train ticket, he was ordered to sit in third class, because of his skin colour. Gandhi refused and was forcibly removed from the train at Pietermaritzburg. He spent the night in the station's cold waiting room. It marked a turning point in Gandhi's thinking and in his life. He felt that his dignity as an Indian and as a human being had been violated. After learning more about the position of the Indian community in South Africa and in the British Empire as a whole, Gandhi called for peaceful protest against discriminatory laws. In 1894, he founded the Natal Indian Congress.

In 1906, his philosophy *Satyagraha* began to take shape: the doctrine of non-violent resistance. In response to compulsory registration for Chinese and Indian inhabitants, Gandhi was able to

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encourage many of his compatriots to refuse to cooperate with the colonial government. People refused to register or burnt their documents. After a harsh government clampdown, registration continued, but the South African powers felt compelled to negotiate with him because of his non-violent and ascetic resistance, against which a display of power by government compared badly. All of this brought mixed successes for Gandhi, but left him with a lasting reputation.

In 1915, he took his status and experiences back with him to India. After again learning more about the Indian population, but this time in his own country, he became a member of the Indian National Congress. He had a single aim in sight: independence for India. In 1918, he organised his first major protest. Under his leadership, farmers refused to cultivate indigo, which they had been forced to grow by the British government. His efforts led to concessions from the British.

In 1920, Gandhi became the leader of the INC and increased his demands on the British. The primary aim was to achieve *Swaraaj*: complete political, religious and spiritual independence for British India. The means of achieving this were peaceful protest and civil disobedience. Gandhi reshaped the party from an elite stronghold to an open organisation, including people of all ranks and classes. It made the INC extremely popular and the population were becoming increasingly willing to revolt.

In 1922, Gandhi was arrested for incitement and condemned to six years' imprisonment. During his time in prison, which would ultimately last just two years because he contracted appendicitis, divisions emerged within the INC. The old guard wanted to work on independence within the colonial system whereas another, revolutionary, group favoured more action and strikes. Fractures also began to appear in the unity between Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi remained on the sidelines for much of this period. It was not until 1928 that he returned to centre stage when the British appointed a reform committee with no Indian representatives. Gandhi threatened a large-scale nationwide independence campaign. The British refused to budge and on 31 December 1929 the INC unilaterally declared Indian independence.

Breakthrough: the Salt March

The great breakthrough came in 1930. In response to a ban by the British on the extraction of salt from seawater by the Indians, enabling the British to maintain their monopoly on salt, Gandhi called on Indians to go to the coast to harvest their own salt. The march from Ahmedabad to Dandi lasted from 12 March until 6 April 1930 and gained legendary status as the Salt March. During the march covering more than 400 km, thousands of people joined Gandhi. It ultimately led to 60,000 INC members being imprisoned, although this time Gandhi himself was not among them. A year later, after negotiations between the British leader and Gandhi, all political prisoners were released in exchange for an end to the protest movement. Gandhi also became the only Indian to participate in the roundtable discussions in London about the Indian situation.



In 1934, Gandhi stood down from the INC in order to make way for different voices and views within the party. He was to return two years later when the party threatened to end its policy of non-violence. World War II brought another advance in the fight for independence. Gandhi's argument was: the Indians cannot participate in a war for democratic

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freedom when they themselves are suppressed. The calls for the United Kingdom to 'Quit India' became ever louder.

Towards the end of the war, there were also increasing rumours that the British were set to leave India. When the war ended, this was indeed confirmed. Gandhi called for an end to the struggle, demanding the release of around 100,000 prisoners in return. The demand was honoured. But before independence really came about, there were riots among Muslims, who wanted their own state. Although Gandhi had always opposed this, he admitted he had not fully understood how strong the feeling was among Muslims. It became inevitable that British India would become independent as two separate states. In August 1947, this became a reality when the mainly Hindu India and Islamic Pakistan were established.

On 30 January 1948, Gandhi was murdered by the Hindu extremist Nathuram Godse, who accused Gandhi of favouring Pakistan and who opposed the doctrine of non-violence. On the day after his death, an estimated one million people walked the streets of New Delhi to pay their final respects.



King – the vision, from ideas to a movement

'Let freedom reign'

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born into a relatively well-to-do family on 15 January 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia. His father was a Baptist preacher, active in the human-rights movement. Despite his harsh upbringing, King Jr. would always maintain a great admiration for his father.

At the Booker T. Washington High School, King was already earning a name for himself for his effective public speaking and membership of the school's debating team. At the age of 13, having just won the debating competition, King had to stand up on the bus to make way for a white passenger, but he refused. He eventually agreed, because his teacher said he would otherwise be breaking the law. Afterwards, King described his emotions at that time as 'the angriest I have ever been in my life'.

King was an exemplary student and was two classes above his contemporaries. At the age of 15, he went to university, Morehouse College. After completing his Bachelor's degree in Sociology, he decided to become a church minister. He chose this because he saw it as the best way of satisfying 'an inner urge to serve humanity'. In 1951, he gained his Bachelor's degree in Theology at the Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania.

Turning point: Rosa Parks

During his time as a student, King was already preoccupied with 'the burdens of the Negro race'. He became acquainted with the Social Gospel movement, which pursued Christian values in the fight against social inequality. The first protest organised by King himself was the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, triggered by the arrest of Rosa Parks. She had deliberately sat in the white section of the bus and refused to stand up for a white passenger. The protest proved to be a turning point: from then on, King set himself up as one of the leaders of the American civil-rights movement. The boycott lasted for 385 days and resulted in a court judgement outlawing racial segregation in buses. But the situation had escalated to such an extent by that time that King's house was bombed. He was not in it at the time and fortunately no members of his family were injured.

In 1957, King and several others established the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference). Through this organisation, they brought together the scope and moral weight of the black churches in America to fight in the struggle against inequality and discrimination. King remained president of the SCLC until his death. According to his philosophy, well-organised, non-violent resistance was the best way of fighting the segregated system. In this, he clearly took inspiration from Gandhi. Above all, he realised that this strategy enabled him to attract widespread media coverage for justice and discrimination.

Thanks to King's commitment and leadership, he was able to organise various protest marches for voting rights, an end to racial segregation, and workers' and civil rights for black Americans. His philosophy became a reality and his ideas became a popular, mass movement. In the early 1960s, the civil-rights movement was the most important theme in American politics. Eventually, the movement's key demands were recognised and enshrined in law in the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965.

Breakthrough: March on Washington



After many civil-rights movements had joined forces, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom took place on 28 August 1963. It was the largest civil-rights protest march in the history of the United States. Martin Luther King's SCLC was one of the key participants. His great breakthrough came when, in front of 250,000 people, he gave his iconic 'I Have a Dream' speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Even today, this speech still inspires and motivates people

to join the fight against social injustice and discrimination.

On 4 April 1968, Martin Luther King was murdered on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. The building is now the National Civil Rights Museum. A suspect was arrested, James Earl Ray. He confessed and was convicted for the murder. He later withdrew his confession, claiming he had been coerced into pleading guilty. As a result, it has never become clear who committed the murder nor what the precise reasons for it were. But King was fully aware that his activism incited opposition. He had made several allusions to a potentially premature death.



Mandela – reconciliation of very hostile groups

'It is an ideal which I am willing to die for'

Nelson Mandela was born on 18 July 1918 in the village of Mvezo in the South African province now known as the Eastern Cape. His father, Chief Henry Mandela, was a councillor to the monarch. Mandela was raised in the Thembu culture but also with strong Christian traditions. At the age of seven, he went to a Methodist missionary school, where an English-speaking teacher gave him the name Nelson.

When his father died in 1927, Nelson was entrusted to the guardianship of the Regent, whose children he grows up with. Mandela attended the Clarkebury Methodist High School, the largest school for black Africans in the Thembu region. He completed his certificate in two years. During his studies, he developed a strong interest in traditional African culture. In 1939, he attempted to obtain a Bachelor's degree in order to work at the Native Affairs Department. As a student, he met student activists and members of the African National Congress (ANC).

In 1941, Mandela left for Johannesburg in order to avoid a marriage that had been arranged for him by his guardian. He began working at a law firm and in 1943 started studying law as the only black student at the University of the Witwatersrand. After facing discrimination and racism, Mandela became increasingly involved in protests and in August he joined the ANC. In 1944, he developed the movement's youth wing.

Following elections in 1948, the South African government began introducing more and more apartheid legislation. Mandela called on the ANC to intensify its protests by organising boycotts and strikes. The Joint Defiance Campaign was launched in 1952 and followed in the footsteps of Gandhi's ideals. Mandela addressed groups of tens of thousands of black Africans and became the face of the civil-rights movement in South Africa. The government responded with arrests. Mandela was forbidden to attend ANC meetings for a six-month period. In the ensuing years, he had regular brushes with the law.

When, on 21 March 1960, the police opened fire on unarmed black demonstrators in the township of Sharpeville, leading to dozens of fatalities and hundreds of injuries, Mandela concluded that non-violent resistance would not achieve sufficient results. In 1961, he founded *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (Spear of the Nation). This militant wing of the ANC carried out attacks on key infrastructure and military targets, although with the express aim of minimising civilian casualties.

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On 5 August 1962, Mandela was arrested and accused of inciting strikes and leaving the country without permission. (He had spent some time among Algerian rebels.) In court, he staged his own defence and used the proceedings to raise the ANC's profile as an anti-racist organisation. Eventually, he was condemned to five years' imprisonment. In July 1963 the police raided an *Umkhonto we Sizwe* hideout. Weapons were found, people arrested and documents seized that provided evidence of Mandela's involvement in the movement. In the Rivonia trials that followed, Mandela was accused of sabotage and conspiracy to overthrow the government. During the court proceedings, Mandela held his 'I am prepared to die' speech. The most important section:

'I have dedicated my life to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But my lord, if needs be, it is an ideal, for which I am prepared to die.'

The court case attracted worldwide attention. Despite calls from the United Nations and the World Peace Council for the accused to be released, he was sentenced to life imprisonment. The death sentence was withdrawn at the last minute.

Turning point: more than 27 years' imprisonment

Mandela spent the years from 1962 until 1982 in the prison on Robben Island. During this long period, he experienced his personal turning point. He spent the days engaged in hard labour and experienced discrimination from white prison guards. In the evenings he attempted to study for a degree in law. Mandela also organised the prisoners, in what he saw as a micro-version of the struggle against apartheid. Partly thanks to the action of the prisoners, conditions in the prison improved. In 1975, Mandela was given greater freedoms and began exchanging letters with other anti-apartheid activists, including the later Nobel Prize winner Desmond Tutu. In the late 1970s, his sixtieth birthday led to him being awarded honours across the world and widespread calls for his release. But the government was able to ignore these calls, thanks to the support of Reagan and Thatcher who considered Mandela and the ANC to be communist terrorists.

In 1982, Mandela was moved to Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town. Although he was more isolated from other young activists there, he also had more freedom of movement. As the 1980s progressed, the struggle for civil rights became increasingly violent and fear of civil war grew. A growing group of interested parties worldwide, including various banks and now even Margaret Thatcher, called for Mandela's release in an attempt to restore calm. A variety of famous people worldwide were calling for his release. However, in 1985, Mandela refused a proposal for release. *'What freedom am I being offered while the organisation of the people (ANC) remains banned? Only free men can negotiate.'* The conflict continued and both the ANC and the government carried on engaging in violence. Meanwhile, in the background, Mandela was negotiating with government representatives.

Breakthrough: South African president, champion of reconciliation



In the late 1980s, President Pieter Botha tentatively began to prepare public negotiations with Mandela. When Botha became ill and was replaced in 1989 by Frederik Willem ('F.W.') de Klerk, the actual talks soon followed. Under De Klerk's leadership, the ANC was legalised on 11 February 1990 and Mandela was released, together with all political prisoners. The first free elections were held in South Africa in 1994. Mandela was elected president with 63% of the vote.

It was a breakthrough. South Africa's first black president chose Thabo Mbeki and De Klerk as vice-presidents.

Mandela's presidency was characterised by justice, but also by the reconciliation of groups that had violently opposed each other for decades. Together with Desmond Tutu, he set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to resolve violence and crime from the past. In 1999, he did not stand for re-election. Mbeki became the new president. Mandela travelled the world spreading his message of reconciliation. On his death on 5 December 2013, it again became clear how loved Mandela was, both for his role as a symbol and for his inspirational personality.

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Gandhi: Hulton Archive/Getty Images



Gandhi: SZ Photo / Scherl / Bridgeman Images, 1930



Photo Salt March: Bridgeman Images / 1930
(Gandhi and his supporters on departure for the Salt March near Ahmedabad , to the Indian coast to protest against the British tax on salt, March 12- April 05, 1930 / Bridgeman Images)



King: SuperStock/Getty Images



King: Hulton Archive / Agence France Presse / Contributor / Getty Images, 1963



Mandela: Paul Weinberg, Anzenberger



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