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Nonviolence in the Twentieth Century

Some men are great thinkers. Some are great doers. Then there are those whose ideas are manifest in their actions, and wherever they go, they are followed by great crowds of people. They are called leaders, but reject the title. They give speeches, but do not hear the applause. They win the hearts of the people, but seek to change the hearts of nations. These men are the writers of history. They fight the uphill battle of progress, and most often accomplish their mission only in death.

Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Desmond Tutu were these men of the twentieth century. Each of them led a successful revolution in his country, and these movements sprouted from the same seed of nonviolence and germinated under the similar conditions of discrimination, colonization, majority oppression of the minority, etc.

Nonviolence is an ancient concept that seems to have been forgotten in the world's rush to industrialize, colonize, and modernize. Ironically, Gandhi rediscovered this concept while in Great Britain, mother country to his colonized homeland of India, leader in modern industry and technology. In 1889, as a young law student, Gandhi read the poet Edwin Arnold's versions of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the Hindu scripture, and *The Light of Asia*, the legend of Buddha.¹

¹ *Nonviolence for the Third Millennium*. Edited by G. Simon Harak, S.J. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2000), 29.

Gandhi became the father of modern nonviolence, and King and Tutu were influenced by his example in India to use nonviolence to accomplish change in the United States and South Africa. Modern nonviolence can be defined as “the collective pursuit of social or political objectives...not involving physical force.”² It is pursued through “unconventional acts implemented...without intentional damage to persons or property...boycotts, strikes, sit-ins, occupations, demonstrations, refusal to pay taxes, creation of alternative and parallel institutions, and other forms of civil disobedience.”³ Nonviolence is neither passive nor submissive, but very active and often illegal.⁴ Nonviolent movements arouse violent reactions from governments, but refuse to return violence for violence.

In the twentieth century, nonviolent action helped Gandhi, King, and Tutu lead independence and civil rights movements that forever reshaped the political and social systems of India, the United States, and South Africa. Each leader used the philosophy of nonviolence in a slightly different manner to struggle for the unique cause of his time. The strength of the movements was in the men who emerged as leaders, the times made ripe by oppression, and the millions of people who participated even in the face of death to win a better standard of life.

Gandhi: Indian Rights At Home and Abroad

When I despair, I remember that all through history the ways of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants, and murderers, and for a

² Schock, Kurt. “Nonviolent Action and Its Misconceptions: Insights for Social Scientists.” *Political Science and Politics* 36, no. 4 (2003): 705.

³ Zunes, Stephen. “The Role of Non-Violent Action in the Downfall of Apartheid.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 37, no. 1 (1999): 138.

⁴ Schock, “Misconceptions”: 705.

time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall... Victory attained by violence is tantamount to a defeat, for it is momentary.⁵

–Mahatma Gandhi, from the film *Gandhi: His Triumph Changed the World Forever*, screenwriter John Briley

Gandhi began his career as an Indian rights activist in South Africa. In 1883 he received a legal assignment which carried him to South Africa, where he intended to stay for no more than a year.⁶

During his time in South Africa, Gandhi experienced extreme prejudice and racism for the first time. Many Indians lived in South Africa, mostly poor farmers who had immigrated there on labor contracts. They had fewer rights than Indians who lived under British rule in India.⁷ Gandhi organized petitions and protests, and founded the weekly publication *Indian Opinion* to inform the Indian community of civil rights issues.⁸ He called his approach to nonviolent action *Satyagraha*, which literally means “seizing or taking hold of the truth.” Gandhi believed truth was God. Using *Satyagraha*, one seeks to resolve conflict by finding common truth. There are no enemies, and the solution is a peaceful compromise.⁹

In 1907 Gandhi organized a “mass rule-breaking” where over 9,000 Indians broke the law by refusing to register with the government. Gandhi was arrested on that occasion and multiple times in the following years, but continued to lead a campaign for

⁵ *Gandhi: His Triumph Changed the World Forever*. Directed by Richard Attenborough. 190 min. Columbia Pictures, 1982. DVD.

⁶ Schuldt, Lori Meek. *Martin Luther King, Jr. with Profiles of Mohandas K. Gandhi and Nelson Mandela* (Chicago: World Book, 2007), 11-12.

⁷ Attenborough, DVD.

⁸ Power, Paul F. “Gandhi in South Africa.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 7, no. 3 (1969): 444.

⁹ Hardiman, David. *Gandhi in His Time and Ours* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 51-52.

the Indians in South Africa to be treated as British citizens.¹⁰ In 1914, Gandhi's South African movement succeeded when a tax on Indians was abolished and the government agreed to recognize Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi (a Zoroastrian religion) marriages.¹¹

In 1915, Gandhi went to India to campaign for independence from Great Britain. In 1919, the British tried to pass bills against organizing opposition to the government, but Gandhi and his followers prevented one bill from passage and ignored the other.¹² When riots broke out, Gandhi went on a hunger strike, a nonviolent tactic for which he is famous, until the violence stopped.

Later that year, in the British government reacted violently to the campaign. In the Amritsar Massacre, General R.E.H. Dyer took fifty British soldiers and blocked the entrance to an enclosed courtyard where several thousand unarmed Indian people had assembled for a political rally. Dyer ordered his men to fire on the crowd until they ran out of ammunition. Hundreds of people were killed, and even more wounded.¹³

After the massacre, Gandhi's campaign became a full fledged independence movement and gained even more followers. Gandhi organized marches, protests, boycotts of British goods and taxes, as well as noncooperation with British public institutions. Many Indians quit jobs under the British government, withdrew their children from British schools, and refused to buy British goods. They began making their own clothes in defiance of British culture and industry and they defied the British

¹⁰ Power, "Gandhi in South Africa": 452-54.

¹¹ Schuldt, *Martin Luther with Profiles*, 18.

¹² Schuldt, *Martin Luther with Profiles*, 18-19.

¹³ Attenborough, DVD.

monopoly of the salt factories by traveling to the sea and illegally making salt themselves.¹⁴

Gandhi served as India's nationalist leader for nearly thirty years, although he never held a political office. On August 14, 1947, the British government partitioned India, forming the nation of Pakistan for the Muslims, and on August 15 India was declared an independent nation.¹⁵

The last year of Gandhi's life was spent trying to pacify the violence between Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi advocated religious tolerance and considered Indian Muslims to be his brothers and countrymen. He was deeply grieved by the partition, and horrified by the outbreak of violence that followed: nearly 500,000 people were killed in riots. Although Gandhi was 78 years old, he went on a hunger strike until leaders on both sides agreed to stop fighting.¹⁶

On January 30, 1948, Gandhi was assassinated by a radical Hindu who opposed his ideas of religious tolerance.¹⁷ Since his death, India has continued to flourish at the expense of social injustice. Not only are Indians an independent people, but the caste system has been outlawed and women have gained more rights. Historians pay tribute to Gandhi as the father of modern India.

King: Dreaming of Justice for African Americans

He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword...that is what God said. We are not advocating violence. We want to love our

¹⁴ Attenborough, DVD.

¹⁵ Schuldt, *Martin Luther with Profiles*, 20-23.

¹⁶ Attenborough, DVD.

¹⁷ Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours*, 190.

enemies¹⁸ ...Nonviolence [is] aimed at a love that is so strong that you love your fellow man enough to lead them to justice.¹⁹

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

King's legacy as the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement leader began in the early 1950s, less than ten years after Gandhi's assassination. His ideas of nonviolence developed gradually and were influenced by a number of sources including his father, his studies in college and graduate school, and his experience as a Baptist minister.²⁰ Before becoming a minister, King obtained a BA in Sociology from Morehouse College, a Bachelor of Divinity from Crozer Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from the Boston University School of Theology.²¹

In 1954, when he was twenty-five years old, King accepted a job as the senior minister of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.²² King came to Alabama, a state with tense race relations, on the eve of the Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which ended school segregation on the basis that it was unconstitutional.²³

The Montgomery Bus Boycott, inspired by the arrest of Rosa Parks, was King's first nonviolent protest. King said the boycott was "the culmination of a

¹⁸ Branch, Taylor. *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-65* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 410.

¹⁹ King, Jr., Martin Luther. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Edited by Clayborne Carson (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 79.

²⁰ Miller, Keith D., "Composing Martin Luther King, Jr.," *PMLA* 105, no. 1 (1990): 71.

²¹ Miller, "Composing": 70.

²² Branch, Taylor. *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 111.

²³ Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 112.

series of injustices and indignities that had existed over the years.”²⁴ The black population of Montgomery was protesting the city’s laws of bus segregation, in which whites sat in the front, and blacks in the back, but black people were expected to give their seats to white passengers as the buses filled.

The city council responded to the protest by spreading rumors and trying to discredit King and other leaders. When this did not work, the council resorted to mass arrests.²⁵ King was arrested in 1956 for driving five miles over the speed limit, and went to jail for the first time in his career. When a large crowd assembled outside of the jail, causing the police to panic, the city released him. In November of that year, the United States Supreme Court declared bus segregation laws unconstitutional, and in December the Montgomery buses were integrated.²⁶

King was arrested multiple times in the following years, and received numerous threats on his life. He continued to lead without fear for his own safety and press for nonviolence. King gave many famous speeches such as his “I have a dream” speech from the 1963 Civil Rights March on Washington DC, his acceptance speech for the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize, and his 1968 sermon “I’ve been to the mountaintop.”²⁷ King travelled across the United States speaking for many causes having to do with civil rights such as integration (Montgomery), voting rights (Selma), better employment conditions (Memphis), and equal housing (Chicago).

²⁴ King, *Autobiography*, 69.

²⁵ King, *Autobiography*, 72-73.

²⁶ King, *Autobiography*, 83.

²⁷ “Biographical Outline of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.” *The King Center*. <http://www.thekingcenter.org/mlk/bio.html>. (accessed April 28, 2008).

Nonviolence can work in four ways: conversion, accommodation, coercion, and disintegration.²⁸ Early in his life, King was an idealist. He wanted to convince racists that segregation was wrong.²⁹ Conversion, such as King hoped for, is the least likely result of nonviolent action. It is not possible in most cases to convert an opponent to a belief system he or she opposes. More often nonviolent action exerts pressure on the government, forcing it to legally accommodate the minority. Nonviolent action has also caused the disintegration of certain power structures, such as the apartheid government in South Africa.³⁰

As King grew more familiar with the political system of the United States, he became a realist, realizing the biggest advantage of nonviolence was not its conversion of individuals, but its capacity to pressure the national government into taking action. In his *Letter From a Birmingham Jail*, King stated, “Nonviolent direct action seeks to foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.”³¹

On April 4, 1968, King was assassinated while in Memphis, Tennessee.³² Riots ensued despite his plea to followers early in the movement, “If one of you find me sprawled out dead, I do not want you to retaliate with a single act of violence. I urge you to continue protesting with the same dignity and discipline

²⁸ Schock, “Misconceptions”: 706.

²⁹ Fairclough, Adam, “Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Quest for Nonviolent Social Change,” *Phylon* 47, no. 1 (1986): 2.

³⁰ Schock, “Misconceptions”: 706.

³¹ Hornsby, Jr., Alton, “Martin Luther King, Jr. ‘Letter from a Birmingham Jail’,” *The Journal of Negro History* 71, no. ¼ (1986): 39.

³² *The King Center*, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/mlk/bio.html>.

you have shown so far.”³³ His career as a Civil Rights Movement leader saw the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which desegregated schools and public facilities, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which protected the rights of all voters and made it difficult for the south to find creative ways, such as literacy tests, to stifle the black vote.³⁴

King’s legacy has continued to shape American history as African Americans have become equal and active citizens in the United States political and social scenes. Barak Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign is a testament to King’s accomplishments and his slogan “Yes We Can”, referring to America’s capacity to change, is reminiscent of, or perhaps an extension of, King’s words in 1963, “I have a dream.”

The success of the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 60s was fulfillment of Gandhi’s prediction that nonviolence would be propagated through the black struggle for freedom.³⁵ Desmond Tutu, an Anglican Archbishop, brought the philosophy of nonviolence back to South Africa, the country where Gandhi first used it to pressure the government into giving Indians their rights as British citizens.³⁶ Gandhi did not approach the issue of black disenfranchisement in South Africa, but he laid the foundation for the anti-apartheid movement that would take place there in the latter part of the century.

Tutu: Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa

³³ King, *Autobiography*, 76-77.

³⁴ Powledge, Fred. *Free at Last?* (Boston: Little Brown, 1991), 655-656.

³⁵ Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours*, 256.

³⁶ Zunes, “The Role of Nonviolent Action”: 150.

We are involved in a noble struggle. We are involved in a moral struggle. We are involved in a struggle that will succeed. We have no doubt that we are going to be free. Because we know that we are going to be free, we can afford to be disciplined, we can afford to be dignified, and we need to underline the fact of this struggle being a nonviolent struggle...we have now chosen a way, a glorious way, the way of Jesus Christ.³⁷

—Desmond Tutu

Tutu was seventeen years old in 1948 when the National Party of South Africa came to power by the vote of the white electorate. The National Party immediately instituted the apartheid, and laws were passed to forbid marriage and sex between different races and to force all people to be registered according to race. Urban areas and universities were strictly segregated and the government was allowed to detain citizens without trial. Nelson Mandela and other leaders of the resistance were arrested or exiled.³⁸ In the face of oppression, the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) resorted to violence and guerilla warfare. Many people believed an armed struggle was the only way to win freedom, but in retrospect, the armed resistance proved much less effective than nonviolent resistance.³⁹

In 1961, Tutu was ordained a priest in the Anglican Church, and a year later he began theology studies at King's College in London. After obtaining a masters degree in theology, Tutu returned to South Africa and became a professor at St. Peter's College Federal Theological Seminary. Tutu was appointed Bishop

³⁷ Tutu, Desmond. *The Rainbow People of God*, ed. John Allen (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 175-77.

³⁸ Tutu, *Rainbow People*, xiii-xiv.

³⁹ Zunes, "The Role of Nonviolent Action":139-140.

of Lesotho, and later Bishop of Johannesburg, placing him in a position of religious authority and political influence.⁴⁰ He advocated peaceful resistance to the apartheid, condemning his countrymen's use of violence and guerilla warfare.

South Africa was in political and social turmoil in the last three decades of the century, but Tutu acted in the midst of the chaos as an intermediary between people of all races. Although he was bitterly opposed to the apartheid, he believed the only right way to resist was through nonviolence. As leader of the South African Council of Churches, he led peaceful marches and protests throughout South Africa, but especially in Cape Town, and encouraged people not to retaliate to the violence of the police and government.⁴¹

Tutu dreamed of a peaceful South Africa made up of people from many races. *The Rainbow People of God*, a book of Tutu's sermons and speeches, takes its title from a famous sermon in 1991, when Tutu said in a room full of blacks and whites, "Raise your hands!...Look at your hands—different colors representing different people. You are the rainbow people of God... [and] the rainbow in the Bible is the sign of peace...the sign of prosperity...we can have [peace, prosperity, and justice] when all the people of God, the rainbow people of God, work together."⁴²

After Nelson Mandela was released in 1990, he and Tutu continued to press the white South African government to form a democracy based on majority rule. In 1993, exclusive white rule was officially ended, and in 1994, Mandela

⁴⁰ Tutu, *Rainbow People*, xiv-xv.

⁴¹ Zunes, "The Role of Nonviolent Action": 158.

⁴² Tutu, *Rainbow People*, v.

was inaugurated President after South Africa's first democratic elections.⁴³ As the government changed hands, Tutu feared the cycle of violence would continue if the black majority used their new power for retaliation rather than reconciliation.⁴⁴ This is why in 1995 African church leaders as well as government officials formed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).⁴⁵

The purpose of the TRC was "to facilitate national reconciliation by creating a public record of human rights violations." The record included violations from all sides of the conflict, white and black. Victims of abuse as well as perpetrators testified about their experiences, and amnesty was given to a number of those found guilty. Tutu called the process a "nationwide process of healing through contrition, confession and forgiveness" and led the meetings in churchlike fashion. Many individuals were granted legal amnesty and reconciled with family members of persons they had killed, but others simply took the amnesty and did not ask for forgiveness.⁴⁶

Overall, South Africa was able to make the transition to majority rule democracy peacefully, and the country has continued the healing process. South Africa has become a prominent nation on the continent of Africa, and a world example of the power of nonviolence, from protest and struggle to victory and reconciliation. Tutu continues to live in South Africa and practice his priesthood.

⁴³ Tutu, *Rainbow People*, xvii.

⁴⁴ Polkinghorn, Brian. "Breaking the Cycle of Protracted Violence in South Africa: Excerpts and Ruminations from an Interview with Archbishop Desmond Tutu." *International Journal of Humanities & Peace* 15, no. 1 (1999): 81.

⁴⁵ Gallagher, Susan V. "'I Want to Say:/Forgive Me' South African Discourse and Forgiveness." *PMLA* 117, no. 2 (2002): 303.

⁴⁶ Gallagher, "Forgive Me": 304-305.

He is the only nonviolent leader of the twentieth century who has escaped a violent death and lived to see the long term effects of his work.

Comparing the Movements and Their Leaders

One difference between King's and Gandhi's philosophies of nonviolence is how each responded to violence from the opposition. Gandhi abhorred violence from all sides. He did not support violence from his followers, and he was grieved by violence from the British. When India gained its independence and Pakistan was partitioned, Gandhi was so upset by the outbreak of Hindu and Muslim violence that he went on a hunger strike until both sides agreed to lay down their arms. Gandhi believed the only right and dignified way to win independence was through nonviolence. The means was more important to him than the ends.⁴⁷ He would rather stop the movement than continue to lead it and cause more violence.

King said "There can be no remission of sin without the shedding of blood."⁴⁸ Just as Christ suffered for our sins to bring salvation, humans would suffer the cause of justice. There was a difference between "dramatic" violence and "deadly" violence. King led mass protests with very few casualties. However, he did not discourage violence from the opposition. He did everything in his power to keep his followers from being killed, even stopping or postponing certain protests, but some of his actions deliberately incited a violent reaction from the government, which he called creating tension.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Attenborough, DVD.

⁴⁸ Fairclough, "Quest for Nonviolent Social Change": 11.

⁴⁹ Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours*, 265-66.

An example of this is in Birmingham, where King knew Eugene Connor was a white supremacist police commissioner likely to respond with enough violence to attract the attention of the media. When Connor did indeed react to the protests with fire hoses and police dogs, the brutality was televised across the entire globe, raising awareness of, and support for, the movement.⁵⁰

Tutu's nonviolent movement occurred alongside a very violent guerilla movement led by the ANC and other loosely organized militant groups. While Tutu was very much the leader of the nonviolent movement, he wielded very little control over the militant faction of the resistance. The two movements were simultaneous and often conflicting. The white government of South Africa used the actions of the violent resistance to deface the nonviolent movement in the eyes of the public. "Terrorism has traditionally united the opposition, often making them more entrenched, while dividing the aggrieved population—in effect, the opposite of nonviolent action."⁵¹

The nonviolent struggle became the leading means of resistance, but violence continued in the background of the movement. Tutu was not a pacifist, and therefore not opposed to armed resistance in general, but he did not believe it was necessary to defeat the apartheid.⁵² Tutu won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 and in 1985, after a series of violent black attacks against the white apartheid minority, Tutu threatened in the manner of Gandhi to leave the country if the

⁵⁰ Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours*, 264.

⁵¹ Zunes, "The Role of Non-Violent Action": 145.

⁵² Zunes, "The Role of Non-Violent Action": 148.

violence did not cease. Three years later, in 1988, he publicly asked the ANC to stop the armed resistance.⁵³

The Indian Independence Movement of the early 1900s could be viewed as the father of the succeeding nonviolent movements of the century. Gandhi's use of nonviolence was by far the purest because he did not accept any violence as a form of resistance. King and Tutu followed in Gandhi's footsteps, but each of them diplomatically discouraged violence from their followers rather than outright condemning it. While they were unwilling to support violence, they accepted it as an unfortunate, but expected, side effect of the larger nonviolent struggle. Gandhi's roots as a Hindu perhaps better allowed him to pursue pure nonviolence, whereas King and Tutu as Christians were more established in the tradition of salvation through sacrifice and bloodshed.

Religious Roots of the Movements

Gandhi, King, and Tutu were deeply religious men who looked at the universal struggle between good and evil and believed good would always win. Their belief in peace, God, and the ultimate goodness of humanity allowed them to preach causes of justice with absolute certainty justice would win. They believed there was no way they could be defeated. Even if they were killed, as Gandhi and King were, their causes would win in the end simply because they were right and the opposition wrong. The people, their followers, would continue the struggle against the evil of oppression with or without their leadership.

Nonviolence emerged in Gandhi's mind from his readings of Hindu and Buddhist literature.⁵⁴ While in England, however, Gandhi was deeply influenced

⁵³ Zunes, "The Role of Non-Violent Action": 148.

by his experience with Protestantism. While he remained a Hindu throughout his life, he was inspired by the figure of Jesus in the Bible and Christianity. Gandhi believed in the “truth of all religions” and did not believe that one individual should try to convert another individual to his/her own faith. Gandhi did not seek to convert his followers to Hinduism, but to make them better followers of their own faiths. His religious views allowed him to gain the respect of religious leaders from all of the mainstream religions (Islam, Hinduism, Christianity) and to encourage peace between them.⁵⁵

King’s expression of nonviolence was channeled through his ministry as a Baptist preacher. His image was twofold; he was both a religious and a political figure in the United States. He preached nonviolence from the pulpit of the church and from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. The Civil Rights Movement would not have been successful without the black church. The black Christian community became like the Jews in Egypt, fighting for deliverance. The people truly believed God was on their side, and the church was a meeting place and rallying point for many of the protests.⁵⁶

Tutu’s life as priest caused him to look for less violent means of pressuring the South African government to become more democratic. He desired a racially diverse South Africa, a “rainbow” of peace and prosperity. Black people in South Africa won their freedom and the vote in a mixture of violence and nonviolence, but Tutu emerged as the leader of the Truth and Reconciliation

⁵⁴ Harak, *Third Millennium*, 29

⁵⁵ Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours*, 178-180.

⁵⁶ *Eyes on the Prize: Awakenings v. I*. Directed by Judith Vecchione. 60 min. PBS Video, 1986. VHS.

Commission, helping South Africa find hope and healing. Just as Christians are “reborn” when they receive the Holy Spirit at baptism, Tutu believed South Africans could be reborn through the process of receiving amnesty and forgiveness for the admission of sins committed during the movement.

Conclusion: Applications for Today

In *Step Across this Line*, a collection of lectures Salman Rushdie gave at Yale University in 2002, Rushdie makes the comment, “we all crossed a frontier [September 11, 2001]...on the other side of that frontier we find ourselves facing a moral problem: how should a civilized society—in which, as in all civilizations, there are limits, things we will not do, or allow to be done in our name...—respond to attack by people for whom there are no limits at all, people who will, quite literally, do anything...”⁵⁷ Rushdie goes on to explain how America and the rest of the world have responded to the crisis, how we have crossed one frontier and become pioneers in a new world. Just one year after the attacks, Rushdie criticized the actions of President Bush and the United States and poked fun at the idea of an “axis of evil.” Near the end of the lecture, Rushdie finally comes to his point, as he asks his audience a crucial question: “How uncivilized are we going to allow our own world to become in response to so barbaric an assault?”⁵⁸

The frontier “shapes our character and tests our mettle,” Rushdie concluded, and he could not have been more right.⁵⁹ Almost seven years after September 11, 2001, The United States is involved in two ongoing wars in the

⁵⁷ Rushdie, Salman. “Step Across this Line,” in *8th Edition of The Norton Anthology of Western Literature*, ed. Sarah Lawall (New York: WW Norton, 2006), 2412.

⁵⁸ Rushdie, “Step Across this Line”: 2415.

⁵⁹ Rushdie, “Step Across this Line”: 2415.

Middle East. Afghanistan has been long forgotten in the media as Iraq has taken the main stage in American politics, but we have soldiers in both countries. Soldiers who will not be coming home any time soon. Our reputation in the world has been soiled by the fighting. Support is gradually waning and turning into disgust.

America sees herself as the world police, but the world sees her as a tyrant. It appeared she was provoked into fighting in 2001, but now seems she simply took advantage of the timing of the attacks on the World Trade Centers to launch a war she had been hoping to fight for a long time. Popular opinion says that this is a war of colonization and imperialism more than one of protection or peacemaking. The question must be asked, “Is it possible to make peace through war?”

If they were alive, Gandhi and King would surely agree that it is not possible to make peace through war, because peace is the very antithesis of war. Tutu has spoken against the war since it started, reprimanding the United States and Britain for making such a mistake and urging them to apologize and admit error.⁶⁰ There has been very little progress since the war began. The United States is not mighty enough to vanquish the “axis of evil,” and it is perhaps counterproductive to continue to try.

Where has the concept of nonviolence gone? Tutu quoted the Just War Theory, saying that war should only an option after all peaceful means of conflict resolution have failed. Other components of the theory include good chances of

⁶⁰ Mason, Barnaby. “Tutu Attacks ‘Immoral’ Iraq War.” *BBC News International Version* (2004). http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3494345.stm. (accessed April 28, 2008).

success and being positive that the situation, whatever it may be, will improve as a result of the war.⁶¹ Did responding nonviolently to 9/11 ever cross the American mind? Likely not. Nonviolence is sometimes misconceived as passive, or weak, but history has proven it a very effective, empowering force. The United States missed its chance to use nonviolence in response to the terrorist attacks, and now our country seems to be wrapped in a cycle of violence, spinning out of control. Rushdie's question of how uncivilized we will allow ourselves to become is haunting.

Gandhi, King, and Tutu preached nonviolence as a dignified, disciplined response to conflict and oppression. The United States has lost much of her dignity in the eyes of the world, a dignity that could have been saved if she had decided to *be* peace rather than *make* peace. Perhaps nonviolence can still be used as a means to restore peace—maybe the Iraqi people will ban together in a nonviolent movement to force the United States to leave; maybe Americans will ban together in a nonviolent movement to force the government to change its policy.

Whatever the future becomes, the first decade of the twenty-first century has proven violence is not the answer. If we are fortunate, history *will* repeat itself, and the modern world will discover the beauty of nonviolence that leaders of the twentieth century nonviolent movements recognized so well. There is a beauty in martyrdom, in being willing to die for peace. We have perverted this

⁶¹ Tutu, Desmond. "War in Iraq : Disastrous US Decision." *The Washington Post On Faith* (2007). http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/desmond_tutu/2007/01/a_disastrous_decision_to_go_to.html. (accessed April 27, 2007).

beauty by making peace something to kill for, by becoming the murderer rather than the martyr.