



MESSAGE FROM THE VEEP



Legends In Our Times

By Clarence M. Hatcherson

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RARE IT IS, INDEED, to live in the same moment when we can witness ordinary men transform into legendary figures; those whose character, convictions and actions have profound and even changing effects on a nation or the world. Many of us have shared the same moment with three such legendary figures whose actions changed the 20th Century social political climate of their countries and impacted the world for time to come.

MOHANDAS K. GANDHI (Oct. 2, 1869 – Jan. 30, 1948) was the preeminent leader and freedom fighter of Indian nationalism in British-ruled India. Employing nonviolent civil disobedience, Gandhi led India to independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. Gandhi was assassinated by *Nathuram Godse*, a Hindu nationalist with links to the extremist *Hindu Mahasabha*, who held Gandhi guilty of favoring Pakistan and strongly opposed the doctrine of nonviolence.

Gandhi did not receive the Nobel Peace Prize, although he was nominated five times between 1937 and 1948. Decades later, the Nobel Committee publicly declared its regret for the omission and admitted to deeply divided nationalistic opinion denying the award.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. was born on Jan. 15, 1929, in Atlanta, GA. King, both a Baptist minister and civil-rights activist, had a seismic impact on race relations in the United States, beginning in the mid-1950s. Among many efforts, King headed the *SCLC*. Through his activism, he played a pivotal role in ending the legal segregation of African-American citizens in the South and other areas of the nation, as well as the creation of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* and the *Voting Rights Act of 1965*. King received

the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, among several other honors. King was assassinated in April 4, 1968, at the *Lorraine Motel* in Memphis, TN at the age of 39. *James Earl Ray*, a fugitive from the *Missouri State Penitentiary*, was arrested on June 8, 1968 in London at Heathrow Airport, extradited to the United States, and charged with the crime. On March 10, 1969, Ray entered a plea of guilty and was sentenced to 99 years in the *Tennessee State Penitentiary*. Ray later made many attempts to withdraw his guilty plea and be tried by a jury, but was unsuccessful; he died in prison on April 23, 1998, at the age of 70.

These two legendary figures were taken away prematurely by an assassin's bullet; but on yesterday the world laid to rest one who lived his life full measure; one who studied Gandhi and King; one whose actions and perseverance moved an entire nation.

NELSON ROLIHLEHLA MANDELA (July 18, 1918 – Dec. 5, 2013) was a South African anti-apartheid revolutionary, politician and philanthropist who served as President of South Africa from 1994 to 1999. He was South Africa's first black chief



executive, and the first elected in a fully representative democratic election. His government focused on dismantling the legacy of apartheid through tackling institutionalized racism, poverty and inequality, and fostering racial reconciliation. Politically an African nationalist and democratic socialist, he served as *President of the African National Congress (ANC)* from 1991 to 1997. Internationally, Mandela was *Secretary General of the Non-Aligned Movement* from 1998 to 1999.

A Xhosa born to the Thembu royal family, Mandela attended the Fort Hare University and the University of Witwatersrand, where he studied law. Living in Johannesburg, he became involved in anti-colonial politics, joining the ANC and becoming a founding member of its Youth League. After the *South African National Party* came to power in 1948, he rose to prominence in the ANC's 1952 Defiance Campaign, was appointed superintendent of the organization's Transvaal chapter and presided over the 1955 Congress of the People. Working as a lawyer, he was repeatedly arrested for seditious activities and, with the ANC leadership, was unsuccessfully prosecuted in the Treason Trial from 1956 to 1961.

Although initially committed to non-violent protest, he co-founded the militant *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) in 1961, in association with the *South African Communist Party*, leading a sabotage campaign against the apartheid government. In 1962, he was arrested, convicted of conspiracy to overthrow the state and sentenced to life imprisonment in the Rivonia Trial.

Mandela served over 27 years in prison, initially on Robben Island, and later in Pollsmoor Prison and Victor Verster Prison. An international campaign lobbied for his release. He was released in 1990, during a time of escalating civil strife. Mandela joined negotiations with **President F. W. de Klerk** to abolish apartheid and establish multiracial elections in 1994, in which he led the ANC to victory and became South Africa's first black president. He published his autobiography in 1995. During his tenure in the Government of National Unity he

invited several other political parties to join the cabinet. As agreed to during the negotiations to end apartheid in South Africa, he promulgated a new constitution. He also created the *Truth and Reconciliation*



Commission to investigate past human rights abuses. While continuing the former government's liberal economic policy, his administration also introduced

measures to encourage land reform, combat poverty and expand healthcare services.

Mandela was a controversial figure for much of his life. Denounced as a Marxist terrorist by critics, he nevertheless gained international acclaim for his activism, having received more than 250 honors, including the *1993 Nobel Peace Prize*, the *U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom*, the *Soviet Order of Lenin* and the *Bharat Ratna*.

On December 15, 2013 with military pomp and traditional rituals, South Africa buried Nelson Mandela; the end of an exceptional journey for the prisoner turned president who transformed the nation.

“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 if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

‘Speech from the Dock’ April 20, 1964.



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