

## **2007 GANDHI AWARD ESSAY ENTRIES**

**High School ...**

**Third Prize**

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**Grade - 12**

It has been almost a century since Mahatma Gandhi stood up to lead the people of India back towards independence by the path of peaceful resistance. Initially known as passive resistance, Gandhi rejected this name for his movement, stating that there was nothing “passive” about the methods used by his followers. Their opposition to British rule was a direct confrontation; the courage they displayed in the face of martial violence was anything but passive. Gandhi helped show the world that nonviolent resistance was a stronger negotiating tool than any missile or army. He proved that the collective effort of human beings working toward peace was more persuasive than any “shot heard ‘round the world.”

In these eighty years since Gandhi’s passing, mankind has displayed its ability to emulate his teachings through cooperation and negotiation as well as ignore them with continued violence and wars. Countries and armed organizations around the world have continued to slaughter civilians and soldiers alike without any attempt to understand the problems between them, much less solve it. Situations like that in Israel or Darfur exemplify this crisis. India itself struggles with border conflicts between themselves and Pakistan. In America, we see the devastating effects of miscomprehension and “preemptive force” in the prolonged conflict in Iraq. With all of humanity’s bombs and high-precision weaponry, what have we accomplished. Our rewards are flag-draped coffins and broken families.

Yet there are many signs of hope for peace in our recent history as well. In the past half century, men and women of all backgrounds and cultures have ensured that Gandhi’s life’s work was not futile. Episodes like the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Civil Rights movement of the 50’s demonstrate the power of words and negotiation in preventing violent standoffs. Figures as diverse as Richard Nixon and Nelson Mandela have set aside traditional differences and extended their hand by simply being willing to engage in open, bipartisan discussion with “the

enemy.” Recent international agreements, such as the Kyoto Protocol, display the united will of countries across the world to prevent the use of nuclear weapons. In an “eye for an eye” world, these events prove that there are some who still see.

There is no knowing what Gandhi would think of the modern world. In many ways, it seems foolish to sit and debate whether we’ve lived up to his example, or failed by it. Instead, people around the world must seek to avoid failure in the future by striving to achieve peace without violence. As Martin Luther King Jr., a great admirer of Gandhi’s teachings, once said, “World peace through non-violent means is neither absurd nor unattainable. All other methods have failed. Thus we must begin anew.” But beginning anew starts with the individual. It starts with people dropping their guns, and opening their ears. Maybe then we can hear the sounds of harmony.