Mahatma Gandhi

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born to a Hindu family on October 2, 1869, in India. He was a lawyer, politician, social activist and writer who became the leader of the nationalist movement against the British rule of India. Today he is best known for being a symbol of peace, humility and willful poverty.

At thirteen Gandhi was married to a girl who was the same age as he. He traveled to London in 1888 to study law and graduated in 1891. After attempting but failing to practice law in Bombay, India, Gandhi accepted a job offer in South Africa. He spent more than two decades there. This is also where he found his true passion for advocating civil rights.

In South Africa, where the Indian population mainly worked as poor laborers, Gandhi experienced the oppression and racism in this country at first hand. He was thrown off a train, barred from hotels reserved "for whites only," and assaulted by a white mob. Like his fellow Indians, he was not even allowed to walk on the pavement!

In 1894 Gandhi tried — but failed — to oppose a bill in court which would deny Indians the right to vote. During the Second Boer War he organized a party of 1,100+ volunteers to carry wounded soldiers for miles to receive medical care. He was awarded the Queen's South Africa medal for this act.

The British victory in the war brought little relief to the Indians in South Africa. A law was passed making it compulsory for Indians over eight years of age to carry a pass bearing a thumbprint. This caused outrage among the Indian population, who refused to

register and, under Gandhi's leadership, decided to resist passively. The struggle lasted seven years, during which time Gandhi himself and thousands of other Indians went to jail. Some were beaten and even shot.

On July 18, 1914, Gandhi returned to India and led his country to full independence after 30 years of opposition to British rule – without violence. Their non-violence policy, however, led to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919. British troops opened fire on a crowd of peaceful protesters, killing nearly 400 Indians and wounding over 1,200.

After years of peaceful protesting, meetings with world leaders, and hunger strikes by Gandhi, Britain finally granted India independence. In 1948, at the age of 79, Gandhi was assassinated by Nathuram Godse, a young Hindu fanatic.

Gandhi received numerous accolades including:

- Rabindranath Tagore, a great Indian polymath, gave him the title of "Mahatma," meaning "great soul" in Sanskrit.
- *Time* magazine named him 'Man of the Year' in 1930.
- He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize five times between 1937 and 1948 though he was never awarded the prize. The Nobel Committee publicly declared its regret for the omission decades later.
- In Johannesburg, South Africa, a statue of him was erected in the Gandhi square in October 2003.