

Leaders of Recent Nonviolent Revolutions

Melissa N. Matusevich

The names Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi often evoke feelings of awe, not just in their home countries, but all over the world. Gandhi led a nonviolent revolution for India’s independence from British rule, and King—who studied Gandhi’s philosophy and methods—led a social and political revolution against racial prejudice and Jim Crow laws. Our respect for these men arises, in part, because they both sacrificed a great deal: facing hostile police and violent crowds, serving prison sentences, remaining steady during personal attacks and tactical defeats—and ultimately succumbing to an assassin’s bullet. Nonviolence is not an easy pursuit.

Certainly, it is important to teach middle level students about these giants of history. However, as teachers living at the opening of the twenty-first century, we should also present examples of very recent nonviolent revolutions—and the biographies of leaders who are still living. Such an exercise can help our students recognize the values, skills, and methods that citizens have employed to confront oppressive governments, reform unjust laws, and expose social prejudices. It can also help students “demystify” the “giants” by tempering their “awe” of King and Gandhi with a historical knowledge of their reform movements. These men did not act alone; they were leaders of movements in which many thousands of men and women took action and faced similar risks in cities and towns over many years. The nonviolent methods that these ordinary citizens used are available today to every citizen in every nation (although there has never been a guarantee of success).

Many of the living leaders of recent nonviolent revolutions are unsung heroes. For example, Rev. Christian Fuehrer is a name that few Americans would recognize.¹ Fuehrer was a major leader of the “Velvet Revolution,” the

nonviolent movement that culminated in the collapse of communism in East Germany and the reunification of Germany in 1989. Shouldn’t students learn not just that the communist Eastern Block fell, but some details about how it happened and who was involved?

In the lesson that follows, the teacher provides a scholarly example by leading students through a speech by Rev. Fuehrer about his historic efforts. Then, following the teacher’s example, students work in small groups to learn about four other leaders of nonviolent revolutions that have occurred in our lifetime: Bishop Desmond Tutu, who fought against official apartheid in South Africa; Lech Walesa, whose Solidarity movement eventually freed Poland from its totalitarian regime; Corazon Aquino, who led a movement that brought democracy to the Philippines; and Wangari Maathai, who fought a repressive regime in Kenya and sparked a “green revolution” as well.

One goal of the study of history and the social sciences is “improvement in the ability of young citizens to make intelligent and socially responsible decisions.”² Students can enhance their repertoire of critical analysis skills

through worthwhile classroom studies. These skills will serve them well as they become active participants in our democratic process.³ By analyzing the deeds of people who have made their lives exemplary, students are more likely to develop exemplary traits of character themselves through identification and imitation.”⁴ The lesson that follows challenges students in grades 6, 7, or 8 to learn about five nonviolent revolutions that have occurred within living memory, to use skills of critical analysis, and to demonstrate what they have learned in the form of a chart and a written essay.

Time, Background, and Materials

This lesson of three one-hour classes over three days would enhance a curriculum about 20th-century history. Schedule this lesson toward the end of a unit of study on world history since World War II. A world map and the handouts provided here constitute the necessary materials.

Day 1: Presentation by the Teacher

Begin this lesson by telling students that in recent history, ordinary citizens have led movements that resulted in great social change. These individuals often remain “unsung heroes” unless we make the effort to discover them. Explain that you will be focusing on five living individuals who have served as leaders of nonviolent revolutions within the last few decades.

Ask students to state what they know about nonviolent action, and summarize their statements on the board. Then

distribute Handout 1: “Definitions of Nonviolent Action.” Ask four different students to read aloud the four definitions that are offered, and devote a few minutes to questions or comments that students may have as they compare these different statements.

Write the names of five leaders of nonviolent revolutions on the board in a long column, which reflects the left-hand margin of Handout 2: “Comparing Leaders of Nonviolent Revolutions.” Informally poll the class to determine what exactly students may already know about these people. Explain that you will lead the class today in studying one of these individuals, then tomorrow students will work in small groups to study a different person, and finally, each student will write about a leader of his or her choice.

Distribute Handout 3: “Christian Fuehrer.” Read it aloud (including the introduction), or have students read it silently.⁵ Ask students to comment on the narrative, and make sure the point is made that the idea of one citizen, joined at first by a handful of young people, led to a large political revolution with global consequences.

Finally, up on the board, fill out the column headings shown on Handout 2: “Comparing Leaders of Nonviolent Revolutions.” Work aloud with the class as you fill out the first row, which should summarize the narrative of Rev. Fuehrer. Help students think carefully about the eight categories listed across the top.

1. **Time and Country:** When and where did the revolution occur?
2. **Forms of Oppression:** What problems, injustices, and issues led each person to take action?
3. **Leadership Traits:** In what ways did a leader show courage, strength, foresight, and practical know-how?
4. **Religion and Philosophy:** What role, if any, did religion or spirituality play in the lives of these leaders? What other teachings or sources of inspiration guided their actions?

5. **Nonviolent Methods:** How did this leader appeal to, negotiate with, and confront oppressors?
6. **Participants:** What groups in society were at the forefront of the struggle? Examples: clergy, laborers, students, clergy, intellectuals, artists, professionals, military, or an ethnic minority.
7. **Reaction of Authorities:** How did oppressors react at first, and as the nonviolent movement grew?
8. **Ensuing Reform:** What did the nonviolent revolution ultimately gain? What major social and political changes occurred?

Distribute, Handout 2: “Comparing Leaders of Nonviolent Revolutions,” to all students and have them copy the information from the board onto their own charts. Alert students to the fact that that they will have to think carefully about these items again, on their own, during tomorrow’s activity, while studying a different leader.

Day 2: Small Group Study

Organize the class into four groups with five or six students in each group. Distribute the remaining handouts to the groups. Give each student in the first group his or her own copy of the Handout 4: “Corazon Aquino”; give each student in the second group a copy of Handout 5: “Wangari Maathal,” and so on. Require five minutes of silence while each student reads about the nonviolent leader assigned to his or her group. Then student groups work together to complete the chart (Handout 2), which they have already used to summarize Rev. Fuehrer’s role in the “Velvet Revolution.” Each student should fill out the appropriate row of his or her own chart. At the end of the lesson, two rows of the chart should be filled out: one for Rev. Fuehrer and one for that group’s revolutionary leader.

Day 3: Small Group Presentations

Each group, in turn, presents information about the person it has studied. As

Resources for Teachers on Nonviolent Conflict and Change

Cohen, Roger. “The Hidden Revolution: The Serbian Students Who Brought Down Milosevic,” *The New York Times Magazine* (November 26, 2000).

Elwood, Douglas J. *Philippine Revolution 1986: Model of Nonviolent Change*. Detroit, MI: Cellar Book Shop, 1987.

Gnanadason, Aruna, et al., eds. *Women, Violence, and Nonviolent Change*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1996.

Hope, Marjorie and James Young. *Struggle for Humanity: Agents of Nonviolent Change in a Violent World*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977.

Menkart, Deborah, et al., eds. *Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching: A Resource Guide for K-12 Classrooms*. Washington, DC: Teaching for Change, 2004.
www.civilrightsteaching.org/

PeaceJam Lesson Plans,
www.peacejam.org.

Rosenberg, Marshall B. *The Heart of Social Change: How to Make a Difference in Your World*. Encinita, CA: Puddledancer Press, 2004.

Sharp, Gene. *The Role of Power in Nonviolent Struggle*. Cambridge, MA: Albert Einstein Institution, 1990.,
www.Aeinstein.org.

Zinn, Howard. *A People’s History of the United States*. Encinita, CA: Puddledancer Press, 2004.

students are speaking, the teacher works down the rows of the chart on Handout 2: “Comparing Leaders of Nonviolent Revolutions,” which is duplicated on the front board. If a group’s contribution on any item is weak, challenge students in that group to look again at the biography to see whether the information they seek is there. For example, if students fail to point out that both the working class and the elite of Philippine society (Participants, sixth row on the chart) were involved in the movement to overthrow Ferdinand Marcos, then mention that fact. You may also wish to spend some time connecting this lesson with other events of the modern era that the class has learned about in an ongoing unit of study.

Writing Assignment

Tell students to select one leader from among the five that they have studied in

class, one whom they admire most or with whose struggles they most closely identify. Each student should take the bibliography (Handouts 4–7) on the individual that he or she has chosen to study. As a homework assignment, students write a persuasive essay explaining why they believe that person’s methods of nonviolent social change proved, over time, to be effective. The essay should be at least 500 words long.

Extension Activity

To make the homework assignment more challenging, students may obtain a book at the library (or go online to a scholarly website) that provides more detailed information about the leaders they have chosen. Suggested references for further study are listed at the end of Handouts 3-7, which describe each nonviolent leader. Students should include information and insights they get from

these materials in their essay. The next day, invite students to share their essays with the class. 📖

Notes

1. Using the German alphabet, the name is spelled *Führer*.
2. Shirley H. Engle and Anna Ochoa, “A Curriculum for Democratic Citizenship,” *Social Education* 50, no. 7 (November/December 1986): 514-525.
3. E. Seif, “Dare We Build A New Curriculum for a New Age?” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the World Future Society, August, 1979 (Minneapolis, MN: ERIC DRSN ED 184 937).
4. Joseph O’Brien, J. Kohlmeier, and C. Guilfoyle, “Prediction Making with a Historical Context,” *The Social Studies* 94, no. 6 (November/December 2003): 271-280.
5. Speech by Rev. Christian Fuehrer at St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig, July 4, 2002. My visit was sponsored by the Goethe Institute, www.goethe.de/ins/us/prj/top/enindex.htm.

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Handout 1

Definitions of Nonviolent Action

Gene Sharp, 1999

In nonviolent struggle, people have practiced three general types of behavior:

1. Symbolic protests, such as marches, vigils, printing leaflets, and collecting petitions
2. Non-cooperation, such as boycotts, non-payment of taxes, and walkouts
3. Obstruction and intervention, such as sit-down strikes, “underground” activities, seeking imprisonment, and nonviolent invasion.

Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps:

1. collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist;
2. negotiation;
3. self-purification; and
4. direct action.

We have gone through these steps in Birmingham. ... Nonviolence seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue.

Mohandas K. Gandhi, 1930

I seek entirely to blunt the edge of the tyrant’s sword, not by putting up against it a sharper-edged weapon, but by disappointing his expectation that I should be offering physical resistance. The resistance of the soul that I should offer ... would not humiliate him but would uplift him ... Non-cooperation is not a passive state, it is an intensely active state—more active than physical resistance or violence ... For me, nonviolence is not a mere philosophical principle. It is the rule and the breath of my life.

Henry David Thoreau, 1849

Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority ... but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight. ... If a thousand men were not to pay their tax bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood.

Sources

- Gene Sharp, *Developing a Realistic Alternative to War and Violence*, 1999, www.Aeinstein.org.
- King, Jr., Martin Luther, *Why We Can’t Wait* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 79-80.
- Ronald Duncan, ed., *Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press 1951), 59, 63, 74.
- Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience*, 1849, www.cs.indiana.edu/statecraft/civ.dis.html.

Handout 2

Comparing Leaders of Nonviolent Revolutions

Student name _____

My group studied _____

Time Period and Country	Forms of Oppression	Leadership Traits	Religion and Philosophy	Nonviolent Methods	Participants	Reaction of Authorities	Ensuing Reform
Christian Fuehrer							
Corazon Aquino							
Wangari Maathai							
Desmond Tutu							
Lech Walesa							

Christian Fuehrer

From a speech by Reverend Christian Fuehrer, Lutheran pastor of the St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig, Germany, on July 4, 2002. Rev. Fuehrer spoke through a translator about his role in the “Velvet Revolution” in what was then East Germany. This is an edited version of the transcript.
— Melissa N. Matusevich

Introduction

St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig, Germany, was the cradle of a peaceful revolution in 1989. There was an artificial border in Germany, and we, the people of East and West Germany, wanted our nation to be whole again. In 1871, the bloody Franco-Prussian War resulted in German unification and the establishment of the German Empire. This lasted until World War II, when the Russians took over occupation of the eastern sector and instituted an oppressive regime. In 1989, Germany was again united, this time without bloodshed. On October 9, 1989, the entire city of Leipzig held a march for peace. It was unprecedented. The citizens knew and the government knew that the era of oppression was over. The prayer services for peace finally culminated in the collapse of the East German government. One month later, on November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall was torn down. It all began simply with a prayer service for peace and a few brave souls willing to risk openly speaking their minds. Here is the story.

Small Beginnings

In 1980 the government was about to build up arms—middle range atomic missiles—meaning that world war would be six minutes away on the “Doomsday Clock” of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, which estimates the danger of nuclear war in the world. Both East and West German citizens wanted to stop this build up of arms.

I came to this church in 1980 and decided to offer something for the peace movement. I had an idea. I decided to schedule a midnight service to pray for peace and then wait and see what would happen. On the first night, I went to the altar room and about 120 people came. They were young people, punks with spiked hair, tattoos, and piercings everywhere. They were the ones I least expected! The government was afraid of these young people, two of whom were songwriters. They created songs and we used the church as a forum. The youth were not Christians. Many had never been in a church before. “What do I say to them?” I wondered. So I told them about the cross and its meaning as Roman punishment. I laid the cross on the floor and put a basket of candles next to it and asked if anyone wanted to speak. Almost all the young people spoke.

Then, a miracle occurred. It was an act of liberation as all



spoke freely. We lined candles up on the cross and made it shine to show the resurrection. The most important thing about what happened was the moment when the young people had a chance to speak. After the service, people stayed. It was a strange situation. So, I prepared tea and bread. It was odd. Near the altar, which is a space for the minister and other church officials, was a large group of people with a teapot and bread. They enjoyed it so much that I realized the solution was to open the church to people who could not speak freely outside.

Because the government had a policy in regard to churches, most people didn’t know much about church. The church was always struggling with the authorities. Even though small, the church community had many sympathizers. They called themselves “The Minority with a Future.” State officials became very afraid of what was going on because we held prayer services for peace every Monday night after that. Government officials began to monitor the goings on at the church. We were not allowed to publish anything or to put up posters. But they were not needed. Word of mouth worked.

Government Reaction

In the beginning, the government underestimated the significance of the prayer services for peace. The government always pretended publicly to be a moderate, tolerant state to the outside world. It claimed that people had the liberty to go to church and to worship. So, the government had to fight the church in secret. First they infiltrated the church with members of the secret service. Their aim was to cause deterioration from

the inside. Then, government wrote a paper criticizing the character of the church. They put pressure on a higher church authority to move the preacher (me) to a new location. Only in the very end, in 1989, could the government no longer hide its oppressive efforts. The public square outside the church became the most heavily guarded spot in East Germany.

The government began organizing “camps” for church leaders. At any moment I could have been taken away. In September, I was taken into custody and questioned. I was told that if I did not stop the Monday prayer services, the government would. All of us were afraid day and night, but in the end my faith was stronger than my fears. We continued the Monday night prayer services for peace.

Repression Increases

Beginning on the 8th of May, 1989, all roads to this church were blocked. The more the government tried to stop them, the more the people came. Something East Germans respected very much was this church. A great challenge arose when the church was filled and there was no room for more people and then the entire square outside was filled to capacity. This was all because of the work of a few young Christians and a few church people. Imagine 2000 people standing in the halls of the church. They weren't even Christians. The government couldn't control this and it all happened peacefully. It was miraculous. In a way, the people in the church were touched by the spirit of God.

Let me describe the setting for this event. The church's infrastructure was a mess. There were two toilets — “East German” toilets. You had to flush them ten times and then there was a flood. I kept repeating the Sermon on the Mount to the crowd. When people would leave, I'd tell them to take the peaceful nonviolent attitude of Jesus to the roads with them. It took half an hour for all the people to get out of the building.

Fifteen minutes after they started leaving the church, a government official broadcast a warning over a loudspeaker, “Citizens disperse!” Of course people didn't disperse from the square. So, the police, the *Stasi*, arrested one person and took him away. This made everyone, including the young people, tense. But we did not fight violence with violence. One young man had an idea: If anyone should get arrested, that person should shout his or her name as loud as possible so that someone could write the name and publish it in church. So we did that. We put the names on boards and hung them in the church. If someone was missing, people could come to the church to check the names. Then people began to put candles and flowers with the names and set them in the train station for all to see. Suddenly, everywhere in the train station were flowers and candles and names of people the government had taken away after the prayer meetings. But the government could not stop it. One government official called me and told me to remove the candles because they were a safety hazard. I told him that it was common for East-German constructed chimneys to fall from roofs, which was far more dangerous, so if he would fix all the chimneys, I'd get rid of the candles.

Expressions of Solidarity

The candles and flowers were also placed in the large square outside the church. One morning in September, I saw a government official coming with snow-collecting equipment. He removed all the candles from the square. It made me very sad. After, there were only leftover bits of candles. The garbage collectors picked them up and lit them and set them in the church windows. It was a very brave thing for them to do. It may not be stated in any history book, but this was a good example of a peaceful revolution, a revolution of people not asking permission.

People could come to the prayer service and speak extemporaneously about what touched them personally. It was hard for some to speak in front of such a large group, especially knowing that there were government spies in the audience who could identify them later. This shows you how people found courage in the church when they were no longer able to bear the backbreaking weight of oppression. Having spies in the church turned into an advantage for us. Every week they heard prayers and the Sermon on the Mount. Where else could people have heard that?

I began to say to the audience, “Today I want to especially greet all informal members of our government.” People began giggling and smiling and then laughing. This alleviated the fears of oppression. I used to say, “What a great thing it is that we have these big churches and the security of 2000 visitors.” This also made everyone feel relieved. But people were afraid of the *Stasi* because they were so powerful in the East German government. The *Stasi*, though, had no power inside the church. People were frightened seeing them sitting openly and grim in church. But in the end our services made the big state institution come to an end.

Epilogue

Looking back, we can see that religious communities had an important advantage over the government of East Germany—the church had a monopoly on freedom, both physical and spiritual. This led to young people criticizing the communist system freely in church. And this was the beginning. 🌍

For Further Reading

“Welcome to Germany” and other curriculum materials from the Inter Naciones and the Goethe Institut (see the Publications link at www.socialstudies.org).

Ackerman, Peter and Christopher Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century*. Westport, CT: Praeger Paperback, 1993.

Bleiker, Roland, *Nonviolent Struggle and the Revolution in East Germany*, monograph 7. Cambridge, MA: Albert Einstein Institute, 1997, www.Aeinstein.org.

Corazon Aquino

Born in Manila on January 25, 1933, Cory Aquino attended high school and college in the United States. Her father was a three-term congressman in the Philippine legislature. Her mother, a pharmacist, was the daughter of a senator. In these early years, she was shielded from the worst aspects of life under the oppressive government of dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

Upon her return to the Philippines, Corazon began studying law, but ended when she married Benigno S. Aquino, Jr. They had five children.

Benigno, was a political activist and legislator. He was the first person jailed under martial law in 1972. For more than seven years he was imprisoned in a military camp. He was an elected senator, and was a leader of the party opposing Ferdinand Marcos, when he was assassinated on August 21, 1983. Soldiers shot him as he was escorted off an airplane at Manila International Airport. Most people suspected that Marcos was behind the killing.

After her husband's assassination, Corazon Aquino gradually assumed leadership of the opposition to Marcos. Some, including U.S. policy makers, regarded her as inexperienced and naive. Yet in the events leading up to Marcos's ouster, she displayed unexpected shrewdness and determination.

Corazon became leader of the People's Power movement, which was especially popular in the cities. People's Power included members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, the business elite, and a faction of the armed forces. Its millions of working-class, middle-class, and professional supporters were united not by ideology or class interests, but by their esteem for Aquino's widow, Corazon, and their disgust with the Marcos regime.

The United States supported the dictatorial Marcos regime despite its unpopularity. Marcos announced his decision to hold a "snap" presidential election on television's "This Week with David Brinkley," setting February 7, 1986 as the date. He promised skeptical Americans that poll watchers could monitor the elections. Observers noted many signs of fraud, but Marcos claimed victory.

Two weeks later, some Philippine military leaders issued a statement demanding Marcos's resignation. Marcos ordered loyal units to suppress the uprising, but a popular Cardinal appealed to the people (through the Catholic radio station) to bring food and supplies for the rebels and to use nonviolence to block pro-Marcos troop movements.

Hundreds of thousands of citizens responded. In the tense days that followed, priests, nuns, ordinary citizens, and children linked arms with the rebel soldiers and faced down, without violence, the tanks and machine guns of government troops. Many of the government troops defected, including the



The government shut down public transportation to discourage people from going [to my husband's funeral], but the people came out. The government sent out buses when rain started to pour, to show its concern, but the people would not ride.

—Speech upon Receipt of the Fulbright Prize, October 11, 1996, gos.sbc.edu/a/aquino.html.

crews of seven helicopter gunships, which seemed poised to attack the massive crowd on February 24, but instead landed and announced their support for People's Power. Violent confrontations were prevented. The Philippine troops did not want to wage war on their own people.

Marcos and his wife fled to exile in the United States. An almost bloodless revolution brought Corazon Aquino into office as the seventh president of the Republic of the Philippines. She successfully served her term and presided over an orderly transfer of power to her successor, President Fidel V. Ramos. 🇵🇭

Sources

J. William Fulbright Prize for International Understanding, www.fulbright.org/prize/1996/aquino1.htm.

Library of Congress Country Studies, cweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html.

Chua-Eoan, Howard, *Corazon Aquino*. New York: Chelsea House, 1988.

Haskins, James *Corazon Aquino: Leader of the Philippines*. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow, 1988.

Wangari Maathai

Wangari Muta Maathai was born in Nyeri, Kenya, East Africa in 1940. The first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a doctorate degree, Maathai studied in the United States, Germany and the University of Nairobi, where she became a professor in the Department of Veterinary Anatomy.

Wangari Maathai was very interested in the connection between poverty and land use. Throughout Africa (as in much of the world), women hold primary responsibility for tilling the fields, deciding what to plant, nurturing the crops, and harvesting the food. They are the first to become aware of environmental damage that harms agricultural production: if the well goes dry, they are the ones concerned about finding new sources of water and those who must walk long distances to fetch it. As mothers, they notice when the food they feed their family is tainted with pollutants or impurities.

Maathai founded the Green Belt Movement on Earth Day, 1977, encouraging the farmers (70 percent of whom are women) to plant “Green Belts” of trees to stop soil erosion, provide shade, and create a source of lumber and firewood. She distributed seedlings to rural women and set up an incentive system for each seedling that survived. To date, the movement has planted over thirty million trees, produced income for 80,000 people in Kenya alone, and has expanded its efforts to over thirty African countries, the United States, and Haiti.

Maathai won the Africa Prize for her work in preventing hunger, and was heralded by the Kenyan government and press as an exemplary citizen.

A few years later, Maathai denounced Kenya’s President Daniel arap Moi’s proposal to erect a 62-story skyscraper in the middle of Nairobi’s largest park (graced by a four-story statue of Moi himself). Government officials warned her to curtail her criticism. When she took her campaign public, she was visited by security forces. When she still refused to be silenced, she was subjected to a harassment campaign and threats. Members of parliament denounced Maathai, dismissing her organization as “a bunch of divorcees.” The government-run newspaper questioned her past. Police detained and interrogated her, without ever pressing charges. Eventually President Moi was forced to forego the project, in large measure because of the public pressure Maathai successfully generated.

Years later, when Maathai returned to the park to lead a rally on behalf of political prisoners, pro-government thugs beat her and other women protesters, sending her to the hospital. They threatened to mutilate her. But Wangari Maathai was more determined than ever, and today continues her work for environmental protection, women’s rights, and democratic reform.



[Green Belt Movement] participants discover that they must be part of the solutions. They realize their hidden potential and are empowered to overcome inertia and take action. ... Citizens were mobilized to challenge widespread abuses of power ...

—Nobel Lecture, December 10, 2004, nobelprize.org/peace/laureates/2004/maathai-lecture.html.

In December 2002, Prof. Maathai was elected to Kenya’s parliament with an 98 percent of the vote, she representing her home region. In January 2003, a new president, Mwai Kibaki, appointed her Assistant Minister for Environment and Natural Resources in Kenya’s ninth parliament, a position she currently holds. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 “for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace.”

Sources

- Ahmad, Iftikhar, “Nobel Peace Laureate Wangari Maathai,” *Social Education* 69, no. 1 (2005): 18-22.
- Kennedy Cuomo, Kerry and Eddie Adams. *Speak Truth to Power: Human Rights Defenders Who are Changing the World*. New York: Umbrage, 2004, excerpted at greenbeltmovement.org/.
- “Maathai to lead PeaceJam with Upper Mid West Youth,” www.peacejam.org.
- Nobel Prize Biographies, nobelprize.org/peace/laureates/2004/maathai-bio.html

Desmond Tutu

Desmond Tutu was born in the South African state of Transvaal in 1931. Although he had planned to become a physician, his parents could not afford to send him to medical school, so he trained to be a teacher.

After World War II, the National Party had risen to power promising a system of *apartheid* — complete separation of the races. All South Africans were legally assigned to an official racial group; each race was restricted to separate living areas and separate public facilities. Only white South Africans were permitted to vote in national elections. Black South Africans were only represented in the local governments of remote “tribal homelands.” Blacks were barred from certain jobs. They could not form labor unions. Passports were required for travel within the country. Critics of the system could be banned from speaking in public and subjected to house arrest.

When the government ordained inferior schools for black students, Tutu refused to cooperate. No longer teaching, he was yet determined to do something to improve the life of his disenfranchised people. He studied for the Anglican priesthood and was ordained as a priest in 1960. At the same time, the South African government began a program of forced relocation of black Africans and Asians from newly designated “white” areas. Millions were deported to distant “homelands,” and only permitted to return as “guest workers,” which divided families for most of the year.

During the 1970s, tens of thousands of black workers went on strike. Demonstrations turned into violent riots in Soweto and other large cities. A popular student leader, Steven Biko, rejected the use of violence adopted by earlier black leaders. But in 1977, Biko, who was a medical student, died from massive head injuries sustained during a police interrogation.

In 1978, Tutu, now a bishop, became the first black General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches. He now had a national platform to denounce the *apartheid* system as “evil and unchristian” and to call for an economic boycott of South African businesses by other nations. The government revoked his passport to prevent him from speaking abroad, but his case soon drew the attention of the world. In the face of an international public outcry, the government was forced to restore his passport.

In 1984, Tutu was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace. Two years later, he was elected Archbishop of Cape Town — head of the Anglican Church in South Africa. The growing international boycott, and internal dissent from blacks and whites alike, was forcing the South African government to reform.

In 1990, Nelson Mandela, leader of the opposition movement, the African National Congress, was released after almost



Our children protested against inferior education, singing songs and displaying placards and marching peacefully. Many in 1976, on June 16th and subsequent times, were killed or imprisoned. ... Many children went into exile. The whereabouts of many are unknown to their parents.

—Nobel Lecture, December 11, 1984, nobelprize.org/peace/laureates/1984/tutu-lecture.html.

27 years in prison, at age seventy-one. The following year the government began the repeal of racially discriminatory laws.

After the country’s first multi-racial elections in 1994, the new President Mandela appointed Archbishop Tutu to chair the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, investigating the human rights violations of the previous 34 years. As always, Tutu counseled forgiveness and cooperation, rather than revenge for injustices of the past. 🌍

Sources

Academy of Achievement, www.achievement.org.

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Lech Walesa

Lech Walesa was born on September 29, 1943 in Popowo, Poland. After graduating from vocational school, he worked as a car mechanic at a machine center. He served in the army for two years, and rose to the rank of corporal. In 1967, he was employed in the Gdansk shipyards as an electrician. In 1969 he married, and now is father of eight children.

During those years, Poland was ruled by a communist, one-party government allied with the Soviet Union. During a clash in December 1970 between the workers and the government, Walesa was one of the leaders of the shipyard workers and was briefly detained. In 1976, as a result of his activities as a shop steward, he was fired and had to earn his living by taking temporary jobs.

In 1978, with other activists he began to organize free, non-communist trade unions and took part in many protests and meetings in coastal towns and factories. He was kept under surveillance by the state security service and frequently detained.

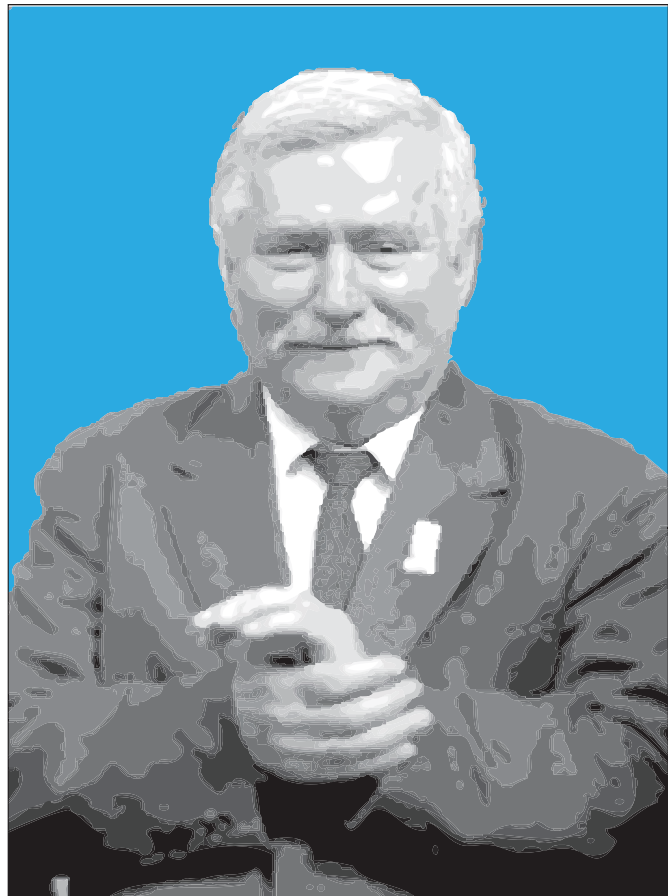
In August 1980, he led the Gdansk shipyard strike. This gave rise to a wave of strikes over much of the country. The primary demands were for workers' rights. The authorities finally capitulated and negotiated with Walesa. The Gdansk Agreement of August 31, 1980, gave the workers the right to strike and to organize their own trade union, independent of the government.

The Catholic Church supported the movement, and Walesa visited Pope John Paul II in the Vatican. Walesa has always regarded his Catholicism as a source of strength and inspiration. In September 1981, he was elected Solidarity Chairman at the First National Solidarity Congress in Gdansk.

Suddenly, the country's brief enjoyment of freedom ended in December 1981, when General Jaruzelski imposed martial law, "suspended" Solidarity, arrested many of its leaders, and interned Walesa in a country house at a remote spot. Jaruzelski feared that the Soviet Union, alarmed by workers in Poland getting so much political power, would intervene with armed soldiers.

In November 1982, Walesa was released and reinstated at the Gdansk shipyards. Although kept under surveillance, he communicated with other Solidarity leaders in the "underground." While martial law was officially lifted in July 1983, many of the restrictions were continued in practice. In October 1983, the announcement of Walesa's Nobel Prize raised the spirits of the underground movement, but the award was attacked by the government press.

The Jaruzelski regime became even more unpopular as economic conditions worsened. It was finally forced again



When I recall my own path of life I cannot but speak of the violence, hatred, and lies. A lesson drawn from such experiences, however, was that we can effectively oppose violence only if we ourselves do not resort to it.

—Nobel Lecture, December 11, 1983, nobelprize.org/peace/laureates/1983/walesa-lecture.html.

to negotiate with Walesa and his Solidarity colleagues. The result was the holding of parliamentary elections, which led to the formation of a non-communist government. The Soviet Union, under Mikhail Gorbachev, was no longer prepared to use military force to keep communist parties in satellite states in power, so it did not intervene.

Walesa was now head of the revived Solidarity Labor union. In December 1990, in a general ballot, he was elected President of the Republic of Poland. He served until defeated in the election of November 1995. 🇵🇱

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