

To:

Dayne Walling

Mayor

City of Flint, Michigan

1101 S Saginaw St, Flint, Michigan 48502

From:

Ambedkar Association of North America, Michigan.

8 September 2010

Ref: Memorandum against erection of M. K. Gandhi statue

Dear Sir/Madam:

We are writing in opposition to a movement to honor Mohandas Gandhi, the internationally known Indian leader. One segment of the local Indian population wants to place a statue of Gandhi's likeness on the grounds of the University of Michigan-Flint. Yet, as members of America's large community of Indian minorities, we are compelled to strongly protest this statue.

Please refuse to honor a man who preached such passionate prejudice! For the past 60 years, India has used the mythical image of Gandhi as a pacifist hero to promote its agenda. The reality is that Gandhi was a first-class racist committed to cloaking deception and violence in pacifist terminology. Gandhi's writing, compiled in an uncensored series of volumes by the Indian government, is liberally sprinkled with verbal violence against the black South-African natives. His animosity toward black people is almost tangible, and his racism is undeniable.

Books such as *Gandhi: behind the Mask of Divinity* (Prometheus, 2004) and *Gandhi under Cross-Examination* (Sovereign Star, 2009) have revealed how Gandhi acted upon a deep-seated prejudice against the black South Africans and various minorities in India. One of his most notable legacies is the damage he did to these communities, which was so extensive that black South-African journalist Sentletse Diakanyo wrote in a 2008 article for the *Mail & Guardian*, "The greatest injustice against the struggle for liberation of black people was the projection of Mahatma Gandhi as committed to a cause against segregation."

While he lived in South Africa, Gandhi regularly wrote diatribes against the black natives, describing them to his Indian readers as lazy, incompetent, sex-obsessed, and a danger to Indian society. He lobbied political and social bodies to expand segregation by removing blacks from proximity to the Indian population. The source for these claims is Gandhi's original writings, which were compiled into the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*. This compilation was officially sanctioned by the Indian government and can be searched for and located easily on the Internet. This is an unimpeachable source, and it is beyond question that the writings were produced by Gandhi's own hand.

One shocking example of Gandhi's racism occurred in 1895, when he actively promoted racial segregation in Durban, South Africa. The local post office had two doors: one for whites and the other shared by Indians and black South Africans. Being Indian, Gandhi was required to share a door with black South Africans, which deeply offended him. After a short campaign to correct what he viewed as a problem, Gandhi summarized the results, writing: "In the Durban Post and telegraph offices, there were separate entrances for natives and Asiatics and Europeans. We felt the indignity too much and many respectable Indians were insulted and called all sorts of names by the clerks at the counter. We petitioned the authorities to do away with the invidious distinction, and they have now provided three separate entrances for natives, Asiatics, and Europeans."

[Source: *CWMG*, Vol. 1, pp. 367–368]

Another example is, while on a visit to India in 1896, Gandhi summarized his general opinion of black South Africans in a speech to a public audience in Bombay, stating "Ours is one continual struggle against a degradation sought to be inflicted upon us by the Europeans, who desire to degrade us to the level of the raw Kaffir, whose occupation is hunting and whose sole ambition is to collect a certain number of cattle to buy a wife with and, then, pass his life in indolence and nakedness." [*CWMG*, Vol. 1, pp. 409–410]

The term “Kaffir” is a pejorative South-African term for blacks that is equivalent to the “n word.” Use of this term has been an actionable offense in South Africa since 1975. Despite always using it to describe black Africans, Gandhi was fully aware of the offensive nature of the word, demonstrated by his comment during a religious conflict in India: “If ‘Kaffir’ is a term of opprobrium, how much more so is *Chandal*?” [CWMG, Vol. 28, p. 62] *Chandal* is a racist term for low-caste Hindus.

A final example can be seen in a letter Gandhi wrote to the Johannesburg Medical Officer of Health in 1904, protesting a decision allowing black Africans to settle in Indian neighborhoods. In it, he said, “Under my suggestion, the Town Council must withdraw the Kaffirs from the location. About this mixing of the Kaffirs with the Indians, I must confess I feel most strongly. I think it is very unfair to the Indian population, and it is an undue tax on even the proverbial patience of my countrymen.” [CWMG, Vol. III, p. 429, Feb. 15, 1904]

Gandhi was far more interested in gaining legal superiority over the blacks than he was in gaining legal equality with the whites. He said upper-caste Indians “have been dragged down with the Kaffir without the slightest justification” [CWMG, Vol. 3, p. 32] and protested legislation he believed “reduces Indians to a level lower than that of the Kaffirs.” [CWMG, Vol. 6, p. 28] In 1908, he complained that upper-caste Indians were being equated to the blacks. According to Gandhi, the British considered upper-caste Indians “to be so lowly and ignorant that they assume that, like the Kaffirs who can be pleased with toys and pins, we can also be fobbed off with trinkets.” [CWMG, Vol. 8, p. 167]

Within the Indian community, Gandhi remains highly divisive and intensely disliked by many. For instance, Mayawati, the chief minister of the large northern Indian state Uttar Pradesh, blamed Gandhi for India's caste problems, saying, “He divided Indian society into two categories: the weaker sections and upper castes.” In June 2009, Mayawati elaborated, calling Gandhi a *natakbaaz*, or “fake,” who “did nothing substantial to improve the condition of the Dalits.” The Dalits, commonly known in the West as “Untouchables,” are considered to be lowest in the Hindu caste system.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who was born into a Dalit family, was a contemporary of Gandhi and a highly respected academic. He has been called the “father of the Indian constitution and modern India.” Explaining the double-minded view of peace held by Gandhi, Ambedkar said, “If a man with God's name on his tongue and sword under his armpit deserved the appellation of a Mahatma, then Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a Mahatma.”

People such as Mayawati and Ambedkar are exceptions to the rule, as most of India's 160 million Dalits live in slave-like conditions. However, Gandhi was an avid proponent of the Hindu caste system, saying in 1933 that “to abolish caste is to demolish Hinduism.” Despite the severe prejudice faced by India's Dalits—which is often manifested in beating, rape, and even murder—Gandhi said, “I would resist with my life the separation of ‘Untouchables’ from the caste Hindus. The problem of the ‘Untouchable’ community is of comparatively little importance.”

These short quotes and excerpts are brief examples of Gandhi's bigoted past. His extensive writings are full of views disparaging practically everyone but upper-caste Hindus, including black people and Dalits. Some have questioned whether Gandhi ever repudiated his racist views later in life. The simple truth is that he continued spreading such beliefs until his death. In 1940, for instance, years after his activities in Africa, an elderly Gandhi wrote to Adolf Hitler. Addressing the letter to his “dear friend,” he told Hitler, “We have no doubt about your bravery or devotion to your fatherland, nor do we believe that you are the monster described by your opponents.” [CWMG, Vol. 79, p. 453]

The surest indicator that Gandhi never overcame his racism is that he never apologized for the damage his actions caused. Even if his views had changed, the harm was already done.

Considering Gandhi's past, we urge you and other officials who may be asked to support a Gandhi statue to answer with an unequivocal "no." Such a statue would quickly become an embarrassment to the state as the public becomes aware of the reality of Gandhi's life. Additionally, hailing Gandhi as a role model inappropriately supersedes true American heroes who actually deserve admiration, such as Martin Luther King Jr.

We can send you a copy of *Gandhi under Cross-Examination*, by retired U.S. Army Col. G. B. Singh and Dr. Tim Watson. The foreword is by Dr. Lewis Baldwin, a well-known Dr. King expert who demands an open discussion of Gandhi's lifelong struggle with racism, calling it "a challenge that no human being should ignore in this age of cynicism, violence, and terror." We encourage you to take up that challenge.

Perpetuating Gandhi as a role model by erecting a statue of him in a location as prominent as the University of Michigan-Flint grounds would be deeply offensive to those minorities who were harmed by his ardent prejudice. Please consider replacing this commemoration of Gandhi with the celebration of someone of better character who can provide a positive role model for society.

Thank you
Sincerely,

Ambedkar Association of North America
www.aanausa.org

Encl: Gandhi facts, Atrocities in India