



Peace Talk

Building a Culture of Peace

Volume 31 No. 2

Nelson and Madiba: What Mandela Can Teach Us in 2014 and Beyond

by Crystal M. Hayes, NC Peace Action Assistant Director

The death of Nelson Mandela, or Madiba as he is commonly called in South Africa, showed me that the world loved the idea of Mandela far more than his actual ideas. When the news first broke that President Mandela was gone, it reverberated throughout the world. Facebook mourners swiftly, lovingly responded with new Mandela avatars and favorite quotes. Twitter memorialized Mandela with #RIPNelsonMandela hashtags trending worldwide. An editorial in *The New York Times* eloquently declared, “Nelson Mandela...fully deserved the legendary stature he enjoyed around the world for the last quarter-century of his life. He was one of the most extraordinary liberation leaders Africa, or any other continent, ever produced. Not only did he lead his people to triumph over the deeply entrenched system of apartheid that enforced racial segregation in every area of South African life; he achieved this victory without the blood bath so many had predicted and feared.”

Since June 2013 we all knew Mandela was gravely ill and that it was only a matter of time before he would no longer be with us. This fact didn't make the news of his passing any less shocking. We were all impacted and moved to contemplate this amazing life. This was no less true for me. This past spring, I had the honor of visiting South Africa on an academic fellowship to design a community based service learning project that I developed focused on ending violence against women. My college-aged daughter was studying there at the time as well. I felt an overwhelming sense of pride and joy visiting the country that gave birth to Mandela and one of the most important freedom movements of our time. I could not contain my tears when the pilot announced we were flying over Robben Island on our way to Cape Town. That I was sharing my first South African journey with my daughter, made the trip even more meaningful.

Months later, back in my North Carolina home watching the news of Madiba's passing unfold, my quiet reflection on the man, the movement, and the work, did not last long enough. Within hours of the death announcement, I watched as Twitterers, television news pundits, and politicians flattened his deeply complicated legacy rather than plumb the ninety-five year archive to honor the ways he challenged us to be more brave, loving—more fully human. Suddenly, everyone wanted to claim him. There are as many people today boasting that they were an anti-apartheid activist (who's pro-

apartheid anyway?!) as there are those claiming they marched alongside Martin Luther King Jr. I am sure if both men were alive today, they'd be humored by how beloved they have become, and troubled by how far some representations of them are from their core beliefs and practices.

I don't doubt that many people are deeply moved by Mandela, and I don't presume to dictate any one right way to mourn and commemorate. That said, it is painfully evident to me that it's easier for us to wrap ourselves in the symbols of Mandela's legacy without questioning its substance and making sacrifices to participate in the hard work required to end oppression in our community and the world.

What does it mean when we can watch President Obama tell us that we must “strive for a future that is worthy of his sacrifice” while not demanding that President Obama free all political prisoners right here in the United States? It's more than ironic that some of the same nations that once referred to Mandela as a terrorist or seditious figure gave him a hero's tribute at his memorial. One thing

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is indisputable: Mandela deserved all the accolades. He peacefully negotiated an end to the violent apartheid system from his prison cell, leading the healing of his beloved country. As the first democratically elected President of South Africa, Mandela shared power with former apartheid state leaders and oversaw constitutional reforms that triggered the beginnings of systemic change still unfolding today.

Let us take care not to deify Mandela, which he rejected. Deification removes the responsibilities of social action from all but an exclusive community of sainted, celebrity activists. Deification is, at its core, disempowering. It erases the contributions of the millions of people, spanning decades and walks of life, who make human rights revolutions such as that which occurred in South Africa possible. Deification dehumanizes. Instead of learning from Mandela how to love broadly and act daily, we place him on a pedestal so tall we can no longer see or hear him and are left instead, to await the next prophet. The elevation of singular male figures muffles the voices of Winnie Mandela and other South African daughters who faced down apartheid. Deification coincides with sanitization. Cornel West talks about the Santa Clausification of Dr. King. Instead of “Beyond Vietnam,” US citizens meet the King of a few “I Have a Dream” sound-bites, shreds of the original message. In short, deification serves a divide and conquer mentality that separates us from our own ability to participate in the struggle, the beautiful struggle, of self and societal emancipation. If we are alienated from our own powers of self-emancipation, we cannot work to expand freedom and joy alongside others.

If we are to strive for a future worthy of Madiba’s past, as President Obama urged, we must intervene against the violence in our midst. In the US, that means demanding the release of political prisoners like my father, former Black Panther Party member, Robert Seth Hayes, who has been held well beyond his original sentence, in a prison cell 40 plus years with little to no end in sight. We disgrace instead of furthering Mandela’s legacy by allowing apartheid like “Stop and Frisk” policies that treat Black and Brown bodies in New York City, and as Michelle Alexander has shown-nationwide, as born criminal. We further institutionalize racism of the sort Mandela helped overturn when we allow public schools to subject money-poor, and disproportionately Black and Brown kids to mediocre curriculums and over-worked, under-prepared teachers who too often view them as threats to manage instead of lights to teach and learn from. We also disgrace Mandela’s legacy every time we remain silent when Islamophobia appears everywhere from dinner table conversations to drone attacks in Pakistan, to US military atrocities against civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan. We miss Mandela’s message when we are unable to discuss gun violence in our own communities.

If we truly want to honor Nelson Mandela, let us look for him in our own private reflections. Let us begin, if we have not done it before, to have our own courageous conversations about how to eliminate the racial divide in our own country. When we choose the manufactured symbolism of Nelson Mandela the great compromiser, we get a Disneyfied mask that denies us the joy of the more complicated, human and thus familiar, Madiba, a Marxist freedom fighter who wasn’t afraid to challenge governments worldwide. Mandela challenged all those who he believed to be in opposition to freedom and justice including the United States. For example, on the eve of the US invasion of Iraq, he said, “If there is a country that has committed unspreak-

able atrocities in the world, it is the United States of America. They don’t care for human beings.”

As we return to work and our families after enjoying this holiday season, let’s remember that Christmas is a ripe time for choosing Madiba over a shadow that bears his name. The story that pervades the US and other Christian majority nations this time of year is, yes, about the birth of a prophet. However, it is also the story of a radical whose practices were closely akin to those of King and Mandela, a fact the new Catholic pontiff, Pope Francis, is re-popularizing. The Pope’s Christmas Day message spoke of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem as directed at “every man or woman who keeps watch through the night, who hopes for a better world, who cares for others while humbly seeking to do his or her duty...God is peace: let us ask him to help us to be peacemakers each day, in our life, in our families, in our cities and nations.”

The personal embodiment of love that Jesus of Nazareth practiced was also practiced by Mandela. To be sure, love is responsibility, as Erich Fromm and bell hooks have discussed. It recognizes and responds to which goes against love. Or, to invoke Dr. King, “. . .justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.”

The Christmas story and New Years is also about a new beginning, symbolized in the baby Jesus and all newborns. Perhaps it is for this reason that the Lincoln administration chose Christmas, new year season to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which it did January 1, 1863. January 1st is also the death anniversary of Oscar Grant, the Bay area 23 year-old shot to death by transit police in 2009. Grant is in the company of other unarmed youths like Trayvon Martin and men like Amadou Diallo, murdered in police interactions where Black and Brown bodies appear devoid of 4th amendment and habeas corpus rights, treated guilty until proven innocent. This is exactly the sort of state violence and double standard Mandela fought against.

Correcting that which stands against love, the way Mandela and those who worked alongside him did, requires us to have uncomfortable conversations with those who would hijack his legacy in lieu of doing the work to end atrocities against humanity. Allowing their flattened, ahistorical portrayals to circulate unchallenged is unacceptable and dishonors Mandela and all the people of South Africa who gave their lives to end apartheid. It also denies us the three dimensional, technicolor human being he was and we are. Madiba deserves better. We all do.



Thanks to a generous donation by Bill Towe in May, NC Peace Action was able to create a new part-time Assistant Director position. **Crystal Hayes** was not so much in the market for a part-time position, since she is already a full-time Assistant Clinical Professor of Social Work at NC State University. But she is also a full-time advocate and activist for social justice, and she was intrigued by the opportunity to connect across lines of ideology, and the streams of social activism. Please welcome Crystal Hayes to our NCPA family and follow her on Twitter @[motherjustice](#).

END WAR PROPOSAL SPRINGS TO LIFE

On Nov 20, some twenty veteran peace activists around the US shared a two hour conference call inaugurating the David Hartsough—David Swanson proposal to “End All War.” This movement builds on Swanson’s newly published book *War No More: The Case for Abolition*. One of the chief impediments to ending war is that many people, even within the peace movement, do not believe that ending war is possible. But as West Point graduate and former Army Captain Paul Chappell points out, ending slavery was thought to be impossible too. Our group’s next call will be international. The people of the world are coming to realize that, as Martin Luther King, Jr told us, “Wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows.” See www.worldbeyondwar.org

Echoing Dr. King, NC Peace Action member **Matthew Hoh** had the following letter published in the Washington Post on November 1st. Matthew is a former Marine Captain who resigned his State Department position in protest of US policy in Afghanistan.

A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON MILITARY STEWARDSHIP

Thanks to Thomas E. Ricks for his Oct. 27 Sunday Opinion piece, “[Can the military learn from its mistakes?](#)” I am glad such a prominent voice on military affairs is raising the question of the United States’ lost wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, Mr. Ricks missed the forest for the trees.

The U.S. military has failed to win because it has engaged in civil wars whose causes and meanings are absent any U.S. concern; Iraq, of course, is a civil war of our own making. There is no strategy, and certainly no general, capable of winning a war whose foundations were as morally rotten as the wars in Vietnam or Iraq, or a war in which success requires the funding and fortification of a corrupt and illegitimate government such as the regime in Kabul.

We can continue to argue about troop levels, deify or defrock generals and debate strategies, or we can own up to the reality that war is a failure. Until we do, lives will continue to be shattered without gain.

Additional recommended readings include Paul Chappell’s *The Art of Waging Peace*, and Jonathon Schell’s *The Unconquerable World*.

2003 - A DECADE OF DIFFERENCE - 2013

On February 15, 2003, the world’s largest protest of a war not yet begun saw tens of millions of people from dozens of cities on every continent march against the planned US war on Iraq. President George W. Bush dismissed this historic action as a mere “focus group” and launched the catastrophic invasion of Iraq a month later.

It was a dismal way to begin a new millennium. But after a decade of challenging the squander of blood and treasure, we are seeing signs of hope. US military participation in Iraq has

ended, and our troops are scheduled to return from Afghanistan this year. The overwhelming outcry against US military action against Syria has forestalled President Obama’s September plan to launch another war in the Middle East. To Obama’s credit, new diplomatic openings with the government of Iran promise to reverse what has been years of increasing threats against the Iranian people, based on unproven allegations of an Iranian nuclear weapons program.

Thanks to the 2011 Budget Control Act, we are seeing the first cuts in Pentagon spending in over a decade. The post 9/11 flag waving fervor appears to be on the wane, as the US public realizes the terrible costs, and lost opportunities, of a decade of war. At NC Peace Action, we have seen traction in the *Bring Our War Dollars Home campaign* in Durham, Alamance, Wake and Orange counties, with companion efforts sprouting in Mecklenberg, Buncombe, Haywood and Jackson. Thanks to the leadership of Betsy Crites and Vicki Ryder, our *letters to the editor campaign* has resulted in weekly LTE’s and op-eds being published in NC newspapers challenging the premises of militarism.

Betsy and Vicki also organized a successful documentary film series “Peaceful Means” with American Friends Service Committee, Veterans For Peace, Witness for Peace SE, and Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, that has become a model for our Peace Action chapters in Asheville, Burlington and Charlotte. These great organizational allies, along with CodePink, Elders for Peace, New South Network of War Resisters and Quaker House teamed up this August for a 5 city speaking tour for acclaimed author/activist Medea Benjamin.

Amid blossoms of hope and persistent action, we take inspiration from the life and work of long-time NC Peace Action leader Bill Towe, who passed away in October at the age of 80. Bill and his wife Betsy Jean were tireless in their efforts to build a culture of peace in North Carolina and around the world. As our Media Coordinator Mia Austin-Scoggins declared: “If one regards the tapestry of peace, action, and social justice in the South, particularly in North Carolina, in the span of the last half century, one will find the thread of gold, throughout, that is Bill Towe’s shining heart.”

In grateful remembrance, NC Peace Action is announcing the **Bill & Betsy Jean Towe Peace Legacy Fund**. Bill and Betsy Jean were among the first supporters when we launched our Peace Legacy Fund, to recognize student and young adult peacemakers. Since 2010, NC Peace Action has awarded outstanding young people with opportunities to travel abroad to Latin America as members of Witness for Peace delegations and lobbying visits with Congress members in DC. The list of NC Peace Action student alumni is impressive. We hope you will join us in celebrating the memory and legacy of Bill and Betsy Jean by swelling the ranks of our Peace Legacy Fund supporters.



Bill Towe

KHALILAH SABRA WINS AWARD

NC Peace Action board member Khalilah Sabra received the 18th Annual International Human Rights Award. Khalilah has been very much involved in human-rights advocacy, both domestically and internationally, since graduating from California State University, Los Angeles more than 25 years ago. Initially she interned in the office of the late California Congressman Mervyn M. Dymally, one of the first foreign-born blacks elected to the House of Representatives, where he served six terms representing heavily black and Hispanic, low-income areas. She credits him as her mentor. Under his tutelage she worked to improve health care for the poor and advocate for legislation to lower the state voting age to 18 and to expand civil-rights protections for women and the poor.

JEWISH VOICE FOR PEACE IN NC

Newly launched, **Jewish Voice for Peace-NC** is a grassroots movement of Jews, non-Jews, and Palestinian Solidarity activists seeking a just, sustainable peace in Israel/Palestine. NC Peace Action joins our good friends, The Coalition for Peace With Justice, in welcoming the new JVP chapter to North Carolina! You can visit the new organization at www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org

RALEIGH 4TH GRADER NOMINATED FOR STUDENT PEACEMAKER AWARD

On **September 28th**, there was an earth justice march and rally held in Raleigh, organized by our youngest nominee for a NC Peace Action Student Peacemaker Award. This is her story:

“My name is Hallie Turner and I am an 11 year old climate activist. What really inspired me to take action on climate change was when I read Al Gore’s book *An Inconvenient Truth*. The topic of climate change had just kind of come up during dinner one night and I wanted to know more about it. What I read in Al Gore’s book scared, surprised, and most of all angered me. After researching online and reading books like his, I had learned about this huge problem that threatened everyone on Earth. Even as a 4th grader, I wanted to take action. I was most angered by the fact that the government wasn’t taking action on this huge issue. I was very eager to take action, but there didn’t seem to be anything a kid could do in their community.

“Eventually, I discovered a nationwide organization called *Kids vs. Global Warming*, or the *iMatter Youth Council*. Alec Looorz started Kids vs. Global Warming five years ago when he was just 13. iMYC is a group of youth dedicated to putting a stop to climate change. We, as the youngest generation, will inherit this Earth after the leaders of today are gone. If we trash this planet today, the children of tomorrow won’t have a planet worth inheriting. What kind of legacy is that?”

“Being a part of iMatter was what inspired me to plan an iMatter march. Hundreds of other marches have happened all over the world, from Australia to Thailand to Brazil, with the message the same every time: We demand action on climate change. Now! So I decided to plan a march in Raleigh.

“It turned out to be harder than I thought. I wrote op-eds and sent out emails to anyone I could think of that might want to help, also encouraging them to spread the word. Eventually we got many organizations to endorse the event, including 350.org (Boone, Triangle, and Winston Salem), League of Conservation Voters, Southern Energy Management, and NC Interfaith Power and Light. We had four planning meetings, from

CLOSE GUANTANAMO BILLBOARD CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED IN NC

NC Peace Action has endorsed a national campaign to lease billboards with the message: “Close Guantanamo.” As of this writing, negotiations are underway for a 6 month billboard rental in Johnston County, home to ‘Torture Taxis’ Aero Contractors. So far, Veterans For Peace (both national and local Eisenhower Chapter) and NC Stop Torture Now are organizational allies in this effort.

July to the weekend before the march. We designed and printed flyers, talked about spreading the word, and went over the agenda and logistics again and again. NCLCV sent out hundreds of phone calls to people in Raleigh asking people to come to the march, we handed out flyers at BugFest, and a friend made a great promo video advertising the march.

“Finally it was the day of the event. Even though the event started at 3:30, we got there at 1:00 to set up. When 3:30 rolled around, there was music, recycled arts and crafts with Scrap Exchange, face painting, and the NC Declaration of Support For Climate Justice to sign. It was a great experience seeing all those people there because they cared about climate change. At around 4:30, we marched along the road, making noise with drums and chanting with a megaphone. We walked around the Capitol building with banners and signs and then back to Halifax Mall. It was, again, a really great experience knowing that it was me that caused all of this, if it wasn’t for me, none of this would be happening.

“The event ended with several speakers, some of them were people on the planning team, others were people active in the community or sustainable energy industry. I said a quick speech about why climate change is

such an important issue, why it is equally important that we take action on it, and just thanking everyone for their support and for coming to the event. Then it was finished!

“The planning team has already met and come up with more action steps. We are brainstorming which leaders we will send the NC Declaration of Support For Climate Justice to, other events we might organize in the future, and are coming up with an article to submit to our local newspaper about the march and what iMatter Youth will do in the future.

“I am really happy with how the event went and hope my taking action inspires others to do the same!”



Hallie Turner, our youngest nominee of the annual Student Peacemaker Award to date

Upcoming 2014 Events

HKonJ Returns to Raleigh Saturday, February 8th

NC Peace Action is one of over 140 statewide partner organizations in the HKonJ Movement (Historic Thousands on Jones Street), launched by the NC NAACP Conference in 2007. Join us again in Raleigh on February 8th! Look out for more information on our website, Facebook page, and email updates closer to the time.

Lake Junaluska Peace Conference March 27th - March 30th, 2014

Advancing the work of reconciliation and peace activists, this year's theme, Faith, Health, and Peace, will explore ways different faith communities can lift up the leading causes of life, combat causes of poor health including disease, violence, and poverty. Guest speakers include: Dr. Christoph Benn, Bishop Hope Morgan-Ward, Dr. Gary Gunderson, Dr. James Cochrane, and more. (<http://www.lakejunaluska.com/Peace/>)

The 2014 Lake Junaluska Peace Conference: **Faith, Health, and Peace: Seeking the Basic Right To Good Health For All God's Children**, seeks to:

- Look at good health as a basic human right from the perspective of faith traditions.
- Lift up and promote "the leading causes of life."
- Explore ways faith communities can combat the causes of poor health. i.e. disease, violence, poverty, etc.

NC Hosts 1st Veterans For Peace Convention, July 23 —26

For the 1st time in its 29 year history, the VFP National Convention will be held in North Carolina, hosted by Chapter 99 in Asheville. Recent conventions have featured luminaries such as Chris Hedges, Kathy Kelly, Alice Walker and Fr. Roy Bourgeois, founder of the annual SOA Watch at Ft. Benning, GA. NAACP NC Conference President Rev. William J. Barber Jr. has been invited to deliver the keynote address to the 2014 convention. VFP is the only veterans' organization that calls for the abolition of war. (www.veteransforpeace.org)



David Harris & John Heuer in Charlotte for International Day of Peace, September 21, 2013

VISIT OUR WEBSITE!

NC Peace Action members, staff and friends' actions have been too numerous to include in one newsletter. Board Chair Emeritus **Kim Porter** relocated to Costa Rica this year to study and teach at the University for Peace in San Jose. Kim is a veteran Honduras election observer. His report on the November 24 election will be filed at www.ncpeaceaction.org.

Also see the following stories on our website:

- The acquittal of George Zimmerman for the murder of Trayvon Martin shocked our conscience. NC Peace Action Assistant Director **Crystal Hayes** shares her reflections.
- **Khalilah Sabra** calls for a re-examination of US military aid to the Middle East.
- NC Peace Action Secretary **Anne Cassebaum** participated in a Witness for Peace delegation to Cuba. Her Point of View article calling for lifting sanctions on

Cuba was published in the Raleigh News and Observer. You can also read her September 26 letter to the Alamance News about the Alamance Peace Action Bring Our War Dollars Home campaign.

- NC Peace Action Director **John Heuer** also serves as national secretary to Veterans For Peace. His reflections on the 2013 VFP Convention in Madison, WI are here.
- John was one of several NC Peace Action members arrested during the 13 waves of Moral Monday protests at the NC General Assembly. Former NC Peace Action Director **Betsy Crites** shares her Moral Monday experience with us, and also Alamance Peace Action's **Barbara Clawson** shares her's.



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NC Mayors for Peace Honor Roll

[www.mayorsforpeace.org]

- **Bill Bell**, Durham
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- **Gavin Brown**, Waynesville
- **Lydia Lavelle**, Carrboro
- **Karl Pernell**, Louisburg
- **Darryl Moss**, Creedmoor

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

- **Margaret Mead**, US anthropologist (1901 - 1978)

