

**ORATIO: ADDRESS TO COMMEMORATE THE 2013 MARTIN LUTHER KING
DAY AT THE LAW FACULTY, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN**

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SUMMARY

The paper commences by considering the similarity between Dr King, MK Gandhi and Nelson Mandela and argues that they are high mimetic figures who inspire us to be better. Their legacy and memory operate as a yardstick by which we can evaluate the conduct of those exercising public and private power over us. Each remains dominant in his respective society decades after passing on or leaving public life, and the paper suggests that very little societal value is had by deconstructing their lives and judging facets of their lives through the prism of latter day morality. We gain more by leaving their high mimetic status undisturbed.

There is a clear link between their various struggles with King being heavily influenced by the writings and thinking of Gandhi, who commenced his career as a liberation activist in South Africa. King was instrumental in commencing the discourse on economic sanctions to force the Apartheid government to change and the Indian government had a long and committed relationship with the ANC.

The second half of the paper turns to an analysis of how Dr King's legacy impacted directly and indirectly on developments in South Africa. One of the key objectives of the Civil Rights movement in the USA was to attain substantive equality and to improve the quality of life of all. The paper then turns to assessing the extent to which democratic South Africa has achieved these objectives and concludes that the picture is mixed. Important pioneering changes such as enabling gays and lesbians to marry have taught important lessons about taking rights seriously. However, despite important advancements, neither poverty nor inequality has been

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appreciably reduced. One of the major failures has been the inability to provide appropriate, effective and relevant education to African children in public schools. Effectively educating previously disadvantaged persons represents one of the few means at our disposal of reducing inequality and breaking the cycle of poverty. Fortunately, there is a general awareness in the country that something needs to be done about this crisis urgently. The paper notes comments by President Zuma that the level of wealth in white households is six times that of black households. The critique is that comments of this nature do not demonstrate an acknowledgment by the ANC that, after 19 years in power, they must also accept responsibility for statistics such as this.

KEYWORDS: Martin Luther King; Mahatma Gandhi; Nelson Mandela