Asia/History 470—Gandhi, India and the United States—is a transformation of a 300-level course called Twentieth-Century India. Each course sustained its existence by meeting general requirements for students at Washington State University who were not majoring in history. In the earlier course students showed little interest in India since independence, especially in the politics. This was due in part to the drama of the independence movement, and with events thereafter seeming prosaic to students, most of whom had little, if any, previous exposure to India in either high school or college. I played up the excitement and historic significance of the movement and its colorful leaders, comparing them and their situation to the American Revolution.

But I was not satisfied with my efforts to teach about the nature and importance of Gandhi’s satyagraha (active nonviolent resistance) movement and particular events within it. The role of nonviolence as a positive force (rather than passive), central to satyagraha, was equally difficult to get across to students.
When the video series “Eyes on the Prize” appeared, I recognized the possibility of using some of the tapes as examples for satyagraha. Indeed, particular satyagrahas and civil rights events can be compared; e.g., Vykom Satyagraha and Nashville lunch counter sit-ins; Salt Satyagraha and the Freedom Rides.

About that time or a little later, the university developed a concept of senior-level “capstone” courses, largely of a cross-cultural nature. The students had shown great interest in the tapes, and soon the American civil rights movement replaced India since independence in the course. It became quite popular, with enrollment virtually doubling. Indeed, I found myself grappling to keep the Indian element dominant. That is an important point for purposes of this article; I consider the American segment to be an outgrowth of the Indian and structure the course and choice of textbooks with that in mind.

The first part of the course deals with the Indian independence movement, albeit in a general way. The text I use here, _Gandhi and India_ by Gianni Sofrì, is general, well illustrated, and highly readable, and it provides an adequate pre-twentieth-century background. I do elaborate on it in class, however, especially with regard to Asoka’s almost pre-Gandhian policies; the book has some problems, but they are minor. I use films, both on the Indian independence movement and on imperialism. There is a wide range to chose from; one I feel to be essential is a twenty-five-minute collection of newsreel clips from the old CBS series “The Twentieth Century.” I use parts of the Richard Attenborough Academy-Award winner, _Gandhi_, especially the initial section on South Africa.

The next section involves the theoretics of Gandhi’s satyagraha. First, I find a brief (but somewhat intense) introduction to central Hindu concepts necessary, specifically Advaita Vedanta (or “non-dualism”). I have developed my own rather succinct handout for that, not wishing to spend time on a detailed text. I also have a handout for the concepts of satyagraha, but that is not essential; what is essential is Joan Bondurant’s _Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict_, which provides a theoretical explanation and concise explications of five satyagrahas, the most valuable of which are the Vykom and Salt Satyagraha accounts. I really cannot over-emphasize the importance of this book, especially the first four chapters, for a college-level course. A high school teacher would certainly want to use it for reference.

A transition is needed for the American segment, and it can be provided by means of the two introductory parts of a video recently shown on PBS, “A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict”; there is a related but separate book with the same title. (I will be using both the text and the video in a senior seminar this spring.) There is another important text: Sudarshan Kapur’s _Raising Up a Prophet: The African-American Encounter with Gandhi_. It is important, for it provides the historical links between Gandhi and the American movement. But it may well be more important for the instructor than the students, especially at the high school or community college level, as some students seem to have trouble absorbing it (through no fault of the book). There is a good substitute, which can be put on reserve: chapter three ("East to West: Contacts between the Indian and American movements") of _Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Power of Nonviolent Action_, by Mary King. Although this book is somewhat expensive, it could well do as the only text in a course approaching the Gandhi-King comparison from a different angle than mine, which is historical and India-based. In any event, it is a fine work and should be examined by the instructor.

There are several textual choices for the American section. Until recently I used an oral history which was almost parallel to the “Eyes on the Prize” video series, _My Soul Is Rested: Movement Days in the South Remembered_. I still like it, but consider _Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement_, by John Lewis, to be without peer. It provides a broader and yet more vertical insight by the person I feel to be the most important after King. He certainly was very, very involved in many phases of the movement.

Finally, I need to say this about texts before I suggest supportive works, primary and secondary, by which I mean those of use to the teacher or instructor for background and preparation. There is so much written on the American movement and on Gandhi that there is no way all could be included in this short article; this applies to what I have called supportive works as well. Some readers are going to be displeased with my omissions;
indeed, I have omitted some that I like very much, but thought their relevancy to be secondary to the particular purposes of this article. The same could be said for videos. I have not mentioned many Web sites; they appear and disappear with rapidity. Further, many Web sites that focus on Gandhi are hagiographical and today’s search engines make locating such sites and links to similar sites relatively easy.

I find the use of levity important to break the tension, or at least the seriousness, in such a course. I like to read the class a passage from Krishna Nehru Hutheesing’s autobiography, We Nehrus, in which she relates a conversation involving Gandhi and her father when the latter was on his deathbed, but still clearly coherent. Gandhi chides Motilal Nehru for calling for a drink at cocktail-time. The great lawyer and freedom-fighter, good friend of Gandhi but so very different from him, humorously chides Gandhi back, telling him that he shall leave the unworldly for Gandhi, that as long as he himself is on earth, he will be earthy. It provides a balance.12

REFERENCES FOR INSTRUCTION
and additional text possibilities

The basic source for historical background, as well as theory and practicality of nonviolence, is Gene Sharp’s The Politics of Nonviolent Action, a three-part study funded in part by the Department of Defense.13 Two more recent (though not necessarily more valuable) sources are Robert J. Burrowes’s The Strategies of Nonviolent Defense: A Gandhian Approach,14 and a collection of essays, Nonviolent Social Movements: A Geographical Perspective.15 As the subtitle suggests, the latter consists of wide-ranging assessments of fairly recent movements and events; there is, however, historical account of movements in the United States.16

As for Gandhi himself, there are too many sources, primary and secondary. Most, such as the hundred-volume Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi17 and his autobiography18 I find to be unnecessary for this course. On the other hand, Satyagraha in South Africa is far more useful, although also not really necessary.19 It is a good read, however, and does provide insight into an important and formative period of his life, and of the development of satyagraha. Particularly useful for reference, and topically arranged (and with excellent indices) is the three-volume collection of Gandhi’s writings edited by Raghavan Iyer, The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi.20

There are several good anthologies of varying length, such as Dennis Dalton’s Mahatma Gandhi: Selected Political Writings (particularly the first half, on satyagraha), and, especially for a lower-division or high school course, All Men Are Brothers: Autobiographical Reflections, edited by a colleague of Gandhi, Krishna Kripalani. A bit unwieldy and voluminous for the course, but good for background, is a work first published by Indiana University Press in 1956, again in print in paperback: The Gandhi Reader: A Sourcebook of His Life and Writings. Its value lies in the inclusion of items by a number of people besides Gandhi (e.g., Jawaharlal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore).21

For purposes of my course, the Sofri text suffices for biography, along with the film and video on Gandhi. There are, however, a great many biographies. I will only mention three recent ones, the newest being Stanley Wolpert’s Gandhi’s Passion: The Life and Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi, which is not yet in paperback. B. R. Nanda’s Gandhi and His Critics is in paperback and has the advantage of being concise. Of particular value for such a course, and in paperback, is Dennis Dalton’s Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action. It contains a chapter on Gandhi, King, and Malcolm X, as well as a detailed analysis of the Salt Satyagraha.22

There are probably hundreds of secondary references on Gandhi, many very good indeed. I am going to mention just four, based on their direct relevance to the course, as I see it.

In my experience, the most thorough and challenging intellectually is Raghavan Iyer’s The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi. When it was in print I used it in a class which was devoted entirely and solely to Gandhi. It worked well, especially as it addresses Gandhian concepts within the Advaita philosophical context. Less philosophical
It would be useful for students first to clearly understand that satyagraha is not the same as pacifism; it is not violent, but it is “war by other means.”

and more in a social and historical context is Krishnalal Shridharani’s War Without Violence, which takes a fascinating and very human approach. He makes connections between Gandhi and the culture which I have seen nowhere else. Were it in print, I would use it.23

The other two sources are recent: The introduction to Anthony J. Parel’s edition of Gandhi’s Hind Swaraj and the collection of essays he edited, Gandhi, Freedom and Self-Rule. I am sure there are any number of people who would insist that Hind Swaraj itself, Gandhi’s “seminal” work, must be read; I am not so sure for this course, even as background for the instructor; but the introduction is invaluable, really elucidating the points and contexts of Hind Swaraj (“Indian Independence”) better than the work itself. In the collection of essays, two are of great value: Dennis Dalton’s “Gandhi’s Originality” and Stephen Hay’s “Gandhi: Guide to a Better Human Future.”24

Finally, the instructor may wish to look at a small book by Gandhi’s secretary, Mahadev Desai, chronicling the Ahmedabad Textile Workers’ Satyagraha. Not only is the thirty-seven-page account of the struggle of interest and use for its narrative and detail, but the explication of the leaflets and appendices attached provide a clearly organized insight into the practical mechanics of a satyagraha.25

I will keep my remarks on background and reference material on King brief, in part because some have been covered above, and in part because the material is more accessible than that on Gandhi. Besides, as a South Asianist I am much less comfortable here than with the Gandhi material. Again, I will mention what I have found to be of greatest use.

Among the many biographies, David J. Garrow’s Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference is a standard. The basic resource for the movement is likely to be Taylor Branch’s Pulitzer Prize winning Parting of the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–63. There is also a moving video biography, but it is 103 minutes long, making class use problematical.26

Less intimidating in terms of volume is a concise study by William D. Watley, Roots of Resistance: The Nonviolent Ethic of Martin Luther King, Jr. A valuable collection of essays is We Shall Overcome: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Black Freedom Struggle. A very readable history is Robert Weisbrot’s Freedom Bound: A History of America’s Civil Rights Movement.

An excellent reference tool, encyclopedic in nature, is Sanford Wexler’s The Civil Rights Movement: An Eyewitness History. A powerful set of photographs, arranged chronologically by event, is Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore. Finally, a primary source is A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., which is arranged topically.27

An invaluable reference, which might easily be overlooked, is the daily newspaper. First, events often happen locally which can have at least indirect bearing on the course.
Next, when prominent figures in the movement die, obituaries can be a great source of information (especially in the *New York Times* which is now available seemingly everywhere). Finally, an event may happen of such importance that it is written up with a comparative context to the movement, such as the arrest of Rev. Al Sharpton and associates for protesting U.S. Navy bombing practice in Puerto Rico (*New York Times*, June 3, 2001, p. 26; this particular article is good, with mention of both King and Gandhi).

Perhaps not of direct relevance in regard to civil disobedience, but certainly of use at least in a peripheral manner is material available from the Southern Poverty Law Center (Montgomery), both in regard to publications and tapes, often made available at discount, often free, for educational purposes. The Center’s magazine, *Teaching Tolerance*, is free to teachers and is very useful, as is its outstanding Web site.28

**CLASSROOM APPROACHES AND ACTIVITIES**

In addition to listing teacher resources, *Teaching Tolerance* and its Web site, as well as that of the Asia Society, provide suggested activities. There are also some items for discussion and examination that I use which could be modified effectively for classroom participation. These are largely of a comparative nature. It would be useful for students first to clearly understand that satyagraha is not the same as pacifism; it is not violent, but it is “war by other means.” A discussion on this issue might help clarify the meaning of satyagraha. Similarly, a discussion of the similarities between the American civil rights movement (especially as described in the “Eyes on the Prize” series) and the satyagraha movement in India—in terms of intent, method, and ideals—should help clarify the universal nature of such an approach.

Depending on how deeply one wishes to get into the history of the movement, students could be asked to explore the perceptions of Gandhi by black Americans early in the twentieth century, especially how they rationalized the fact that, although he was not a Christian, he lived a Christly life. Students might be asked to develop individual reports on some of the generally unsung heroes of the American movement, for example (to name just a very few): James Farmer, C. T. Vivian, Fred Shuttlesworth, Diane Nash, and Fannie Lou Hamer. There are many, many others in “Eyes on the Prize.” John Lewis’s role as liaison between the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Students’ Nonviolent Coordinating Committee might be discussed in terms of generation gap. James Lawson’s role as teacher of Gandhian nonviolence is essential, though until lately it has generally gone unrecognized. That lack of recognition, as well as the importance of his teaching, should be noted, and the reasons discussed.

It can be very worthwhile to have students do concise descriptive comparisons, written or oral, between a particular satyagraha and an American civil rights event (sources: Bondurant’s outline accounts and “Eyes on the Prize”). The best examples are the Vykom Temple Road Satyagraha and the Salt Satyagraha on the Indian side, and the Montgomery bus boycott, Nashville lunch counter sit-ins, and Selma-Montgomery march on the American side. Besides the general features, methods employed are of critical importance. Students could consider which ones make the best pairs. They probably will not agree on their pairings.

Communication—open, nonsecretive communication—was essential in both movements. The importance and purpose of such open discussion could be highlighted by examination of the use of leaflets in the Ahmedabad Textile Workers’ Satyagraha, included in Mahadev Desai’s account of the movement (see note 25).

There are other, perhaps more basic but difficult activities. Depending on the level and the depth desired, students could be asked to equate the three pillars of satyagraha
with equivalents in the American movement: satya = faith in God; ahimsa = nonviolence; tapasya = discipline/sacrifice. Not only the basic similarities, but the subtle distinctions could be studied. Here it should be noted that both Gandhi and King had implicit faith in God—but it must be stressed that while one was Christian, the other was Hindu. What, if any, difference did that make? And why was each, a man of nonviolence, killed with violence?

Most important is an exercise of considerable significance: have students study King’s classic “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” April 12, 1963 (available from countless sources), and then comment on the Gandhian satyagraha elements (or similarities) therein. It could be done as a paper or a take-home test; regardless, the Letter must be read in such a course.

The last exercise might well take too long, but it does go the heart of the matter. I show the first tape and about half of the second of “The Jewel in the Crown” (based on Paul Scott’s The Raj Quartet).29 It is the story of a tragic love affair between a British girl and an Indian boy, with consequences unimaginable to most students today. It can just as effectively be seen individually (or in small groups) outside of class, but is likely to raise some incredulity from students.

POSTSCRIPT

After the overwhelming events of September 11, 2001, I mentioned to the editor that it could be appropriate to provide a statement in regard to what might have been Gandhi’s response in regard to armed reprisal. Of course there is danger here; asked what Mahatma Gandhi would have said about Indian armed involvement in the Bangladesh war, then-prime minister Indira Gandhi replied something to the effect of, “We don’t know, do we? He’s not here.” That reply is not as flippant as it may seem. Gandhi did not believe in consistency for its own sake. In one way or another he was supportive (albeit not in a combative role) in the Boer War, the Zulu Rebellion, and World War I. He also did not believe in nonviolence as something purely physical; he had at least two qualifications upon it: nonviolence is more mental than physical, and far worse than violence is cowardice.

Having said all that, I wish to leave the matter to the words of Gandhi himself, a metaphor or allegory from an article in Young India, September 13, 1938. He received criticism, and in his replies to it admitted—in his typical manner—that his rationalization was not entirely adequate, but that it would have to do.30

Let me take an illustration. I am a member of an institution, which holds a few acres of land whose crops are in imminent peril from monkeys. I believe in the sacredness of all life and hence I regard it as a breach of ahimsa to inflict any injury on the monkeys. But I do not hesitate to instigate and direct an attack on the monkeys in order to save the crops. I would like to avoid this evil. I can avoid it by leaving or breaking up the institution. I do not do so because I do not expect to be able to find a society where there will be no agriculture and therefore no destruction of some life. In fear and trembling, in humility and penance, I therefore participate in the injury inflicted on the monkeys, hoping some day to find a way out.

Even so did I participate in the three acts of war. I could not, it would be madness for me to, sever my connection with the society to which I belong. And on those three occasions I had no thought of noncooperating with the British Government. My position regarding that Government is totally different today and hence I should not voluntarily participate in its wars and I should risk imprisonment and even the gallows if I was forced to take up arms or otherwise take part in its military operations.

But that does not solve the riddle. If there was a national Government, whilst I should not take any direct part in any war, I can conceive occasions when it would be my duty to vote for the military training of those who wish to take it. For I know that all its members do not believe in non-violence to the extent I do. It is not possible to make a person or a society non-violent by compulsion.
“Civil disobedience is the inherent right of a citizen. He dare not give it up without ceasing to be a man. Civil disobedience is never followed by anxiety. Criminal disobedience can lead to it. Every state puts down criminal disobedience by force. It perishes, if it does not. But to put down civil disobedience is to attempt to imprison conscience.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Source: The Words of Gandhi
Selected by Richard Attenborough
Publisher: Newmarket Press
Design and selection copyright © 1982 Newmarket Press

41
“I do believe that where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence I would advise violence. Thus when my eldest son asked me what he should have done, had he been present when I was almost fatally assaulted in 1908, whether he should have run away and seen me killed or whether he should have used his physical force which he could and wanted to use, and defended me, I told him that it was his duty to defend me even by using violence. Hence it was that I took part in the Boer War, the so-called Zulu rebellion and the late War. Hence also do I advocate training in arms for those who believe in the method of violence. I would rather have India resort to arms in order to defend her honor than that she should in a cowardly manner become or remain a helpless witness to her own dishonour.

Mahatma Gandhi

Source: The Words of Gandhi
Selected by Richard Attenborough
Publisher: Newmarket Press

21. “Part I. Satyagraha: The Power of Nonviolence” (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), pp. 27–94. The second half, or Part II, is “Swaraj: Gandhi’s Idea of Freedom.” The Kripalani compilation is topically arranged, composed of snippets of varying length which are nevertheless insightful and interesting (New York: Continuum, 1980). Students generally find it very attractive. The Sourcebook was edited by Homer Jack, reissued by Grove/Atlantic (New York: 1989). It was one of the earliest, and has remained a classic in its field.
25. A Righteous Struggle (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1951). I have used this little book quite advantageously as a text. It has been available from Greenleaf Books, a seemingly mobile distributor of “Gandhiana” (with their address moving around in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine).
Branch (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988); the second volume, Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963–65 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998) is also of great value. It is the first book, however, which lays out the historical and social context. The video is King: Montgomery to Memphis (Beverly Hills: Pacific Arts Video, 1988), and does involve some duplication of Eyes on the Prize.
28. The fall 2001 issue (p. 57) has a list of references of direct and peripheral interest for this article. The Web site is www.teachingtolerance.org. This Web site has numerous links, as well as sections for teachers, parents, and kids. A few other Web sites should be mentioned as well: www.askasia.org of the Asia Society and Education About Asia’s own Web site, www.asianst.org/eea-toct.htm; www.bpagency.com (type “Gandhi” in the “title” section) provides a comprehensive list of books about Gandhi, with annotation available.
29. London: Granada, 1983; it is roughly equivalent with the first volume, also called The Jewel in the Crown (New York: Avon, 1979; first published in Great Britain, 1966). The problem is, the time involved is about 150 minutes.

FRITZ BLACKWELL is an Associate Professor of History and past Director of the Asia Program at Washington State University. He has published a number of articles on Indian culture, and has co-edited a book of poetry from India and Letters from Chittagong. Currently he is working on a reference book on India and, in collaboration with others, a world civilization reader of travelers’ tales.