

# Gandhi college essay



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Mohandas Gandhi was a religious man, however, his religious beliefs did not come from his childhood but from his studies that he began as a political activist in South Africa. Upon his return to India from England, he had had a rough start as a lawyer and accepted an offer to work on a case in South Africa. He ended up staying in South Africa for more than twenty years. In South Africa Gandhi became a leader of the Indian immigration population. Gandhi had to learn skills to overcome caste, class, and religious divisions to build a base for dramatic mass actions. In the process, Gandhis religious development influenced his politics. He believed that the search for truth was the goal of human life, and since no one could ever be sure of having attained the ultimate truth, use of violence to enforce ones own necessarily partial understanding of it was sinful.

Gandhi had worked out the basic strategy of nonviolent resistance, which he called satyagraha. It consisted of training a core of volunteers who helped to lead mass marches and mass violations of specific laws that resulted in intentional mass arrests. Three satyagraha campaigns made him famous in India even before he returned. While he was still in South Africa, Gandhi wrote about India in his pamphlet, "Hind Swaraj, and targeted industrial civilization because he thought that was the real enemy. The appeal of Gandhi's non-violence strategy appealed to two groups of people. It appealed to masses of villagers because it was a collective way to resist, trying to rise above all the violence and show the dignity of their cause. It also appealed to the wealthy merchants, landlords, and small-holding peasants who supported Gandhi because it offered the hope of getting rid of

the British while not threatening to destroy their property or endanger their economic and social position.

Gandhi returned to India and joined the Indian National Congress during the First World War. The war was bringing an economic and political crisis for the British, and space opened up for Indian textile bosses to get a greater share of the home market. A growing section of them was impatient with British control of the market, and many became supporters of the nationalist movement.

The Rowlatt Act, which sought to extend war-time restrictions on civil rights, coincided with a strike wave by mill workers. Gandhi's approach to the Rowlatt Act was to launch a satyagraha to channel people's anger in a nonviolent direction. He called for mass demonstrations nationwide, but called them for a Sunday so as not to encourage work stoppages.

Mass marches and strikes broke out in many other cities, and the middle class started to fear the militancy of workers and peasants. Gandhi expressed this concern by condemning the violence that had broken out on both sides, though it was far from equal. Gandhi felt he had made a mistake in calling for mass civil disobedience without enough organizational and ideological control over the movement.

But the next mass movement, the Non-Cooperation Movement, also unleashed forces beyond Gandhi's control, and he called the campaign off when a crowd in Chauri-Chaura responded to police beatings and gunfire by killing cops. The fact that Gandhi could call an all-India movement—and then

call it off when it got too militant for his taste shows how important he had become to the national movement.

Gandhi also started the Civil Disobedience Movement which began with the campaign to violate the British salt monopoly. The salt satyagraha escalated quickly. Mass marches to the coast to break the British salt monopoly led to mass arrests. Throughout the country, peasants who had refused to pay their land taxes physically resisted police attempts to seize their property.

Gandhi was always trying to reconcile class divisions, and his commitment to nonviolence was one way to keep the struggle calm. The refusal to lessen the use of physical force virtually ruled out strikes as a method of struggle. Despite Gandhi's efforts, class divisions could not be smoothed over, and Gandhi's campaigns would continually move beyond the boundaries he tried to impose.

A combination of factors pushed the British to finally accept that they could no longer hold India. It was clear that the British empire was crumbling. Inside India, Gandhi launched the Quit India Movement, which became the biggest revolt against the British since 1857. But after the war, when Britain was negotiating terms of departure with Congress and the Muslim League, the revolt continued without Congress support.

In the end, Congress agreed to partition off Pakistan because the party was not prepared to support class struggle. The British, for their part, were eager for Congress to take over, since they realized that an Indian government could more easily put down the wave of strikes than they themselves could.

After India had achieved its independence, Gandhi personally journeyed to areas where communal violence had broken out and did his best to persuade people to stop, walking barefoot through the riot-torn slums and threatening “ to fast unto death. His moral authority was able to stop the violence sometimes, but when he left, all the social and economic problems that led people to see another religious group as their main enemy were still in place. Gandhi died for upholding Muslim equality and was assassinated in 1948 by a Hindu. Gandhi’s principle of nonviolence repeatedly held back many struggles at key moments. As a result, privileged groups in the urban centers and countryside were able to detach the struggle for political independence from the struggle for radical social change using Gandhi’s own goals of social justice. The British were gone, but the bureaucracy and police they built up still functioned with little change. Gandhi’s will had been strong, but class forces proved stronger. The result of Gandhi’s nonviolent political action movements was that an exploitative class structure cannot be broken without violence somewhere along the way. Property rights, defended by state violence, have never yielded to the peaceful pressure of the exploited class. Therefore, no exploiting class has ever left the stage of history without being pushed.