HIST 181: Gandhi

PAC 422, Tues - Thurs 1:10-2:30

See Course Documents folder for information about the course.

See the schedule below for the schedule of readings and assignments.

Students with Disabilities:

It is the policy of Wesleyan University to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible [during the nth week of the semester], so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at http://www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html.

WEEK 1

21 Jan: Introductions. British India in a nutshell.

Part I. Coming of Age in Britain’s Indian (Ocean) Empire

In this introductory section of the seminar, we learn about Gandhi’s life in his own words and we use his own autobiographical reflections as a way of immersing ourselves in the history of the British Empire in India, the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia, and South Africa. In addition to and alongside Gandhi’s autobiography, we will read Thomas Metcalf’s Imperial Connections. In each session we will ask ourselves how the imperial world described by Gandhi differs from or is confirmed by that which is described by Metcalf. They are writing about the same time frame and they are addressing remarkably similar themes. Would each agree with the picture that the other paints of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century?

25 Jan: Law and subjection

Gandhi, Autobiography, preface, introduction, and part I, to p. 86

[Note: these pages refer to the Beacon press edition]

Metcalf, Imperial Connections, 1-45 (introduction and chapter one)
Shatranj ke Khilari (The Chessplayers)

Shatranj ke Khilari offers a fine glimpse of a "Resident": The link is to a youtube clip of the film, directed by the great Satyajit Ray. The film was based on a Hindi short story from the 1920s by Munshi Premchand (also called "The Chessplayers", or in Hindi, "Shatranj ke Khilari"). The story is about two chess-obsessed noblemen in Awadh, one of the last great princely states of India, annexed by the British in 1856—which event is thought to have been a major contributing factor in the uprising of 1857. The "Resident" is played by Richard Attenborough, who would go on to direct "Gandhi". Weston, the lieutenant, is played by Tom Alter, a famous Bollywood star and the brother of a Wesleyan graduate. Amjad Khan plays Wajid Ali Shah, the Nawab of Awadh. The first 40 seconds or so is in Hindi, describing (with the cartoon) the policy of annexation under Dalhousie in the 1840s and '50s, and the love for his crown by the nawab. But the rest is in English with some Urdu poetry. A really nice depiction of the meddling in affairs of state by the Resident, which is touched on as a theme in Metcalf.

27 Jan: Imperial identities and racial hierarchies in the Indian Ocean arena

Gandhi, Autobiography, part II, 87-184
Metcalf, Imperial Connections, 46-67 (chapter two)
For the past two weeks, we've been learning about the British Empire in the Indian Ocean through the eyes of Gandhi, who lived the experience, and Metcalf, a historian looking back from the early twenty-first century. We've also learned a little bit about Gandhi, or, at the very least, how Gandhi wanted to be understood. Both Gandhi and Metcalf perceive India to be crucial to the British Empire. In your opinion, what are the most important differences between the Indian Ocean world as described by Gandhi and as described by Metcalf? Alternatively, describe what you see to be the key ways in which Gandhi's life and career exemplify the imperial "Indian Ocean" linkages that Metcalf describes. In what way was Gandhi "imperial", and how does that shift our understanding of both 1) the newly christened "mahatma" who, by 1920, had managed to grasp the reins of the decidedly anti-imperial Indian nationalist movement, and 2) the British Empire itself? Whichever question you choose to address, be sure to reflect on (and, if necessary, account for) the evidentiary challenges posed by autobiography.

February 14 - February 20

WEEK 4

Part II. Deconstructing and Reconstructing Gandhi

In this segment, we examine Gandhi through the eyes of others and the ways in which he's been mythologized and, subsequently, humanized. A variety of "texts" will assist us in this: Claude Markovits' book, _The Ungandhian Gandhi_; select primary sources; Richard Attenborough's film, "Gandhi" (1982); and _The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi_.

15 Feb: Gandhi's image in the West

Markovits, _Ungandhian Gandhi_, 1-55

Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj, or Indian Home Rule*, scan but read especially pp. 27-31 on "The Condition of England" and "Civilization"; note also the "Testimonies by Eminent Men" at the end, pp. 72ff.

Rolland, _preface, intro., and selection, Mahatma Gandhi_ (1924)

Andrews, _Introduction, Speeches and Writings of M. K. Gandhi_ (1922), 21-26

Tolstoy-Gandhi correspondence


17 Feb: The Crystallization of Gandhi's Message

Markovits, _Ungandhian Gandhi_, 56-76

Nehru, _Toward Freedom_ (1941), 47-73 [Note: on the left side you can choose how you'd like to read this text.]

Nehru, "The Light has Gone Out", speech on All-India Radio, 30 January 1948

American journalist's interview with Gandhi, 1931, Fox Movietone
Newsreel: Gandhi's voyage from Bombay to London, 1931
Video: Nehru’s “Tryst with Destiny” speech, 1947

February 21 - February 27

WEEK 5

22 Feb: Gandhi from Below

Markovits, UnGandhian Gandhi, 77-128

Ambedkar, What Congress and Gandhi have Done to the Untouchables (1945), preface, chapters X and XI

Additional resources on Ambedkar
CNN interview on caste discrimination in Indian society

24 Feb: History, Film, Fact, Fiction. Paper Two, due in class.

Markovits, UnGandhian Gandhi, 129-165


PAPER 2 (due in class): Film and history (or perhaps it is better to say "Mainstream Film" and "Academic History") are narrative genres that have many contradictory impulses when it comes to the relationship of the audience to the text. In a work of history, the reader is expected to exercise abundant critical skepticism. The reader expects all claims to be based on evidence readily identified in footnote or bibliographic references to archival or equivalent, "fact-checkable" documentation. Indeed, that reader's "enjoyment" of the text depends on that unwillingness to suspend disbelief. Even (the above parenthetic disclaimer about Academic History notwithstanding) "popular" history and biography are not immune to this dynamic. With mainstream film, by contrast, the success of the project depends to a larger degree on the viewer's aesthetic experience. As film viewers, we are trained to "suspend disbelief" so as to enjoy the cinematic moment. Thus we--almost unconsciously--abandon our critical faculties with respect to evidence. We tend not to ask whether the events in the film actually occurred in the way being depicted--or even occurred at all. Our "enjoyment" of the film does not, in the final analysis, depend on the historicity of the film. This does not mean, however, that mainstream film is entirely immune to questions of historical accuracy. Historicity in film seems to depend on something else altogether: the ability of the director and actors (and everyone else) to "get it right", that is, get the costumes and scenery and context right. A Rolex wristwatch in a film about medieval Europe would detract, fundamentally, from the audience's enjoyment of the film. But "getting it right" is itself predicated on what a modern or postmodern audience thinks the period in question should look like. Thus a "historical" film tells us as much if not more about the worldview of those making and viewing the film than it tells us about the period and people being depicted. (There are those, of course, who would argue that the same pitfall plagues historians.)

Your job in your paper is to comment on this range of historiographical/theoretical questions in the context of Markovits' UnGandhian Gandhi, Attenborough's Gandhi, and the various primary sources we have read thus far. You can either work from the outside in (beginning with a general claim and then drilling down to specifics in the the various "texts"--including the film--to see if the general claim is sustainable) or the inside out (beginning with an examination of specific instances of discrepancy or similarity in the competing representations to arrive at larger conclusions about these narrative genres and, inter alia, the nature of historical work), but either way your argument must be original and based on clear evidence.
[NOTE: This assignment has benefited in ways too numerous to mention from discussions with Professor Scott Higgins in Film Studies. Among his many insightful comments during the course of our exchange are the points that 1) documentaries do expect viewers to exercise their critical faculties and 2) much experimental film—decidedly not "mainstream"—does in fact "ask viewers to question the reliability of the image." Hence my insertion of the "mainstream film" and even "academic history" caveats above. Nevertheless, written and visual narratives do carry with them their own historiographical implications, and it is with the intention of prompting a reflection on this fact that this assignment is designed.]

Due in class: 2 pages (500 words)

Richard Grenier, 'The Gandhi Nobody Knows', Commentary, March 1983

Responses to Grenier's review of 'Gandhi', the film, in Commentary Magazine

Jason DeParle's response to 'Gandhi' (the film) and Grenier in particular, in the Washington Monthly

WEEK 6


Paper 3: choose a CWMG volume (all volumes are fair game, except for material you've already read, such as the volume that contains Autobiography. For Part I of the paper: Map the volume in prose, in one paragraph. In other words, describe its main organizing principles. Any interesting details? Who/what shows up with greater frequency? What doesn't show up that surprises you? For Part II (second paragraph): Choose a letter by Gandhi. Why was it written, and to whom? What is the context for the letter? Was there a response? What new insights does it (and the response, if extant) afford? 1 page (250 words or so). Due in class.

3 Mar: The Research Project [note: project description due in class]

Today's session is devoted to helping students begin to think about their final research projects for the seminar. There are many important issues to reflect upon when doing historical research, and some good guides to the process may be found online. Here is one, at Bowdoin. Here is another, at wikibooks. A third, at Carleton College.

The research paper for this course does not have to focus on Gandhi. It might be about someone who was close to Gandhi or a critic of Gandhi. Or the paper may be focused on a close examination of a particular issue that Gandhi took up at one point, such as military recruitment for World War I. A crucial issue is making sure that you can find sufficient primary source materials. Usually this means lots of advance planning, so that you can order stuff in a timely fashion from InterLibrary Loan (for which you'll need an Illiad account).

You should come to class having thought seriously about a topic. To that end, bring to class 1) a written paragraph describing the question you seek to answer in your paper, 2) a bibliography listing the primary sources you will be using (and how you'll get them, if they're not in Olin), and 3) a list of at least three secondary sources with a sentence annotation for each describing how it relates to your topic.

Research projects
WEEK 7

Part III. Around Gandhi

In this part of the course, we will examine the people and events around Gandhi. Three texts have been chosen for this purpose: one a post-colonial treatise that situates Gandhi amid other prominent thinkers and writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; the second an examination of a major subaltern response to Gandhi in 1922; and the third a political-romance approach to the events of 1947-48 and the Partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. Each of these texts is, in its own way, concerned with the problem of violence in South Asian society. Each also reflects major intellectual and cultural trends in South Asian and World History, namely, the application of psychoanalysis in history, the rise of "subaltern studies", and the return of narrative and popular historical writing.

Student teams will be responsible for leading discussion. Sign ups will be coordinated in advance. Each day will vary, but some of the major questions to be addressed will be: What is the thesis of the work? What are the arguments in support of that thesis? Does the evidence carry the weight of the argument? What are the implications of the work? Why is the author undertaking his/her particular approach? How does this work change our understanding of Gandhi, Indian nationalism, the British Empire, history in general?

22 Mar: Colonizing the Mind
Ashis Nandy, *Intimate Enemy*, 1-63

Discussion team

24 Mar: Decolonizing the mind
Ashis Nandy, *Intimate Enemy*, 65-113

Discussion team

WEEK 8

29 Mar: Chauri Chaura, 'An UnGandhian Event'
Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory*, 1-114

Discussion team

31 Mar: Microhistory on trial
Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory*, 115-200

Discussion team

WEEK 9
5 Apr: The Road to Partition
von Tunzelmann, *Indian Summer*, 1-209
Discussion team

7 Apr: Liberty and Death
von Tunzelmann, *Indian Summer*, 212-318
Discussion team

### WEEK 10

**Part IV: Student projects**

No class this week. Students should advance their research projects. Individual meetings with students as necessary.

The following three weeks are devoted to in-class discussion of individual projects. Students will assign readings and present their research ideas. The goal is to offer an opportunity for students to articulate their ideas and gain critical feedback. 25 minutes will be devoted to each project (3 projects per session). Individual presentations should be no longer than 5 minutes, followed by questions and discussion.

The instructor will schedule the sessions based on the shared themes suggested by research topics.

### WEEK 11: Student projects [schedule TBA]

19 Apr: After Gandhi

- Becca: The Image of Gandhi in the American Civil Rights Movement
- Jisan: Kazi Nazrul Islam and Bengal
- Alanna: Martin Luther King visits India
- Aly: Indian Immigrants in Uganda

  - Becca's readings
  - Becca's image
  - Jisan's readings
  - Jisan sound link ["March Forward"]
  - Alanna's reading [1], esp. pp. 234, 236-237
  - Alanna's readings [2]
  - Alanna's sound link, King's farewell address
  - Aly's reading
  - Aly's image [see the second image]

21 Apr: Religious Gandhi

- Sophia: Gandhi and the Gita
- Mac: Gandhi and Theosophy
- Jessica: Gandhi and Brahmacharya

  - Sophia's readings
  - Mac's readings
April 25 - May 1

WEEK 12: Student projects [schedule TBA]

26 Apr: Imperial Gandhi, Colonial Gandhi
   Rosa: Gandhi and Economics
   Adam: Gandhi as the ultimate British Imperial actor
   Grace: Gandhi's understanding of Indian History
   Trevor: Gandhi and the Amritsar Massacre

28 Apr: Around Gandhi
   Ryan: Tagore's Gora and 'colonial psychology'
   Hira: Iqbal and Jinnah
   Mita: The Politics of Language

May 2 - May 8

WEEK 13: Student projects [schedule TBA]

3 May: Gandhi as Tactician
   Gabe: Gandhi and Fasting
   Sara: Gandhi's bodily ethics
   Robert: Gandhi and the Media

Gabe's reading
Gabe's link (Time Magazine, 1939)
Sara's reading
Robert's readings