While knowing almost nothing specifically of his struggles or political fights, I think the household name "Gandhi" invokes an almost innate sense of trust in both me and most people that derives from the vague belief that this legendary man was always in the right. Similar to other prominent historical figures such as George Washington, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mother Theresa, the myth of Gandhi involves a man deemed so wise, compassionate, progressive, and simply *infallible* that it seems anyone willingly deciding to disagree with his views must be committing some heinous transgression by assuming the view of evil itself. That said, Gandhi's short essay, "Nonviolent Force: A Spiritual Dilemma" (1927), explains his counter-intuitive and controversial decision to participate in the Boer War on the side of the British from 1899-1902. While advancing some rather revolutionary and insightful ideas concerning the inherently violent nature of humans and war itself, Gandhi never fully explains or supports this decision that goes against his lifelong principle of *ahimsa,* or nonviolence.

The underlying (and simplified) argument of "Nonviolent Force: A Spiritual Dilemma" is that the most productive and efficient way for Gandhi to further his cause was by fighting himself on the side of the British, in order to subvert and eventually change (from the "inside") the accepted view that war was an acceptable way of resolving disagreement. In the beginning, however, the article quickly establishes that Gandhi and his friends think war of any kind is wrong: "[a]ll of us recognized the immorality of war" (262). Starting from this initiative, it would be

expected that Gandhi would have much explaining to do to even minutely justify his participation in the war and support of British troops.

Unfortunately, any persuading proof of the long-term good his involvement in the Boer War accomplished is surprisingly absent from the rest of the essay. First, Gandhi seems to support his decision to help in the war by a process of elimination, instead of by any strong feelings he has about the positive outcome of his actions. He states that "if I desired to retain my connection with the Empire and to live under its banner, one of three courses was open to me" (262). The first option he lists is not consistent with the former statement: to openly resist the war and boycott the Empire is not a good way of "retaining connections" with the country he feels so strongly about. The second option, to seek imprisonment by disobeying British laws to prove that war is wrong, likewise does not meet his goal of "living under [the British] banner" or maintaining friendship with the government. Since the last option, to fight in the war, doesn't interfere with either of his goals, Gandhi seems forced to choose this one. The problem with this solution, as has already been stated, is that it goes against every nonviolent ideal the man stood for.

To his credit, it can be gathered that Gandhi did believe some good would come out of his battle participation. He writes,

> [w]hen two nations are fighting, the duty of a votary of *ahimsa* is to stop the war. He who is not equal to that duty, he who has no power of resisting war, he who is not qualified to resist war, may take part in war, and yet wholeheartedly try to free himself, his nation and the world from war (262).

He then continues to say that "I could participate in the war … and thereby acquire the capacity and fitness for resisting the violence of war" (262). This means that by supporting the British in their war against the Boers, Gandhi believes he will thus gain the ability to fight the institution of war using his own conflict-resolution techniques, which he wrote extensively about in the three newspapers he edited during his career. For instance, the last of his "conflict norms" is to try to convince one's opponent rather than coerce them into an agreement or belief, to "convert the opponent into a believer of the cause" (Weber 494). Gandhi believed he could do this by "undergo[ing] 'self-suffering' in the belief that the opponent can be converted to seeing the truth by touching his or her conscience" (Weber 495). Many Gandhi theorists agree that "Gandhi denies the alleged necessity of using violence by showing to the world that non-violent methods of solving group conflicts work, and actually work in a far better and more sure way than violent ones" (Pontara, 197). Whether his wartime actions worked in accordance with these principles and helped him further his long-term goals is up for debate.

To promote non-violence through protest and self-torment is a principle that has no doubt been used successfully by others in the past. However, the logical extension of this belief, of *how* he expected he would accomplish this, or *how* he expected war involvement would give him the ability or credibility to fulfill his goals, is never mentioned in the rest of the essay. And nor is it mentioned, because the article was written 25 years after the end of the war, how his decision to participate *did* help him resist war in general. This is the critical weakness of the article, and the one that disintegrates the potential strength and persuasiveness of

Gandhi's argument. Because of this crucial omission, the intelligent reader might assume that Gandhi didn't know *how* his wartime participation might further his political and social agenda, which would reduce his reasoning for involvement to nothing. Another assumption could be that in the end, his expectations didn't turn out as he had planned, but that this was too controversial a subject to admit that he had been wrong in retrospect.

Interestingly, Gandhi does quickly gloss over one more possible reason behind his decision to involve himself in the war. He states that "[i]t was quite clear to me that participation in war could never be consistent with *ahimsa.* But it is not always given to one to be equally clear about one's duty" (262). While it is not clear whether he was referring to duty in general or duty to *ahimsa* because the subject is dropped at this point, it is not far-fetched to speculate that a sense of duty *in general* might have had more to do with his involvement than Gandhi would have liked to admit. Throughout the essay, he repeatedly makes it clear that he has a sense of allegiance to the British nation. This may be because of the good education he received while living there, or because of the valuable connections he made with influential people who may have helped him with his ultimate goals to "improve my status and that of my people through the British Empire" (262), or because of the gratitude he felt to the British fleet when he was "enjoying [its] protection … and taking shelter as I did under its armed might" (262); no one would really know. It is possible, though, that Gandhi did not want to list a mere sense of duty, or need for repayment, as his primary reason for participation in the Boer War because these

motivations are so much more intangible than a more solid purpose, though unsubstantiated, such as the good it would do for his cause in the long run.

Finally, it must be conceded that although Gandhi only acted as a medic in the war, and personally inflicted no direct harm upon the "enemy," he lays no more blame on the actual killers than for himself. "I make no distinction," he says, "between combatants and non-combatants … those who confine themselves to attending to the wounded in battle cannot be absolved from the guilt of war" (262-3). This is one point that must be respected because despite his reasons behind participating, he is not hiding from the consequences of his decisions: he realizes that helping his peers in war would only make more violence on his enemies, so therefore he is actually a source of violence himself. It says much of him as a person and leader that he does not shy away from his actions' final implications under the guise that he did not *directly* hurt the opposition. Once again, though, this point does nothing to advance his argument.

Gandhi was and is still often seen as a saintly figure, fighting for his people and an end to war and violence. Ironically, he himself fought in not one but two wars against generally less-qualified opposition. Although stating his reasons behind these decisions in his essay "Nonviolent Force: A Spiritual Dilemma," upon closer inspection it is decided that his basis for fighting does not have enough support to convince the skeptics that his true intentions were something other than a sense of duty to his adopted nation. Over and over again he writes that it was a controversial decision requiring much thought, and in the end all of this reaffirmation may prove his own doubts to the validity of his argument.

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