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Gandhi in South Africa – III

Lead: Mahatma Gandhi developed what some have erroneously come to call, “passive resistance” in turn of the twentieth century South Africa. There he acquired vital political skills, which he would use to great effect later in India.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: In theory at least, citizenship in the British Empire whether that be in India, Fiji, Jamaica, South Africa or England itself, implied equal rights with all other imperial subjects. The theory did not always work out in practice.

In South Africa as the nineteenth century drew to a close, the growing number of Indians was seen as a threat to white domination and prosperity by most settlers of Dutch ancestry known as Africaaners, and many Englishmen as well. Indians were subjected to the most egregious forms of petty segregation and discrimination. Their leader in resisting this abridgement of their rights was a young Indian lawyer named Mahantas Gandhi.

During one such campaign protesting the registration of Indians in the Transvaal province, Gandhi formulated the style of opposition for which he is best known. At first it was described as "passive resistance" but Gandhi rejected that because what he

had in mind had little to do with being passive. Later a term was fashioned to describe his methods. He said that it came from the New Testament teaching about "turning the other cheek." It is satyagraha. Satya or truth-implying love, and agraha, firmness. It's "in-your-face" kind of love or tough love.

During the next fifteen years Gandhi was to apply this aggressive yet loving form of pressure in numerous campaigns for Indian rights. By the time he left South Africa in 1919, had earned the respect of friend and foe alike and helped ease some of the petty rules making life uncomfortable for the Indian population. Later, through his imaginative use of satyagraha, love with firmness, he would secure

freedom and independence for the region of which three nations emerged: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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