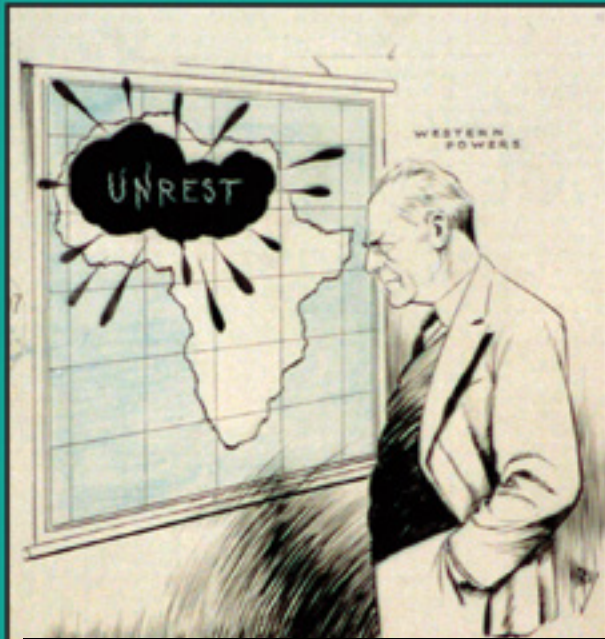


History
UNFOLDING

THE END OF THE IMPERIAL AGE



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MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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Introduction

The End of Empire

Speaking in South Africa in 1960, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan made this dramatic claim about trends in Africa at that time:

Ever since the break up of the Roman Empire, one of the constant factors of political life has been the emergence of the independent nations. The wind of change is blowing through this continent, and whether we like it or not this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. We must all accept this fact and our national policies must take account of it.

By the time of Macmillan's speech, the age of empire was in fact already all but over for Great Britain and the other nations of Western Europe.

World War II had the most to do with triggering this collapse of empire and of Europe's will to impose its rule on others. Europe itself was in ruins. And its legitimacy as a civilizing force was in tatters after the self-inflicted butchery of two world wars and the horror of totalitarian genocide. Also, as Macmillan noted, a sense of "national consciousness" was growing rapidly, at least among educated elites throughout the colonial lands.

At the same time, World War II helped give new life to another, vastly different imperial system—the Soviet imperial system. Soviet conquests in Eastern Europe triggered a Cold War. And this created an ironic context for decolonization, since the Soviets themselves often aided anti-colonial movements directed against the older, Western empires. Yet in the 1980s, the Soviets themselves learned that the drive for national independence could not be so neatly channeled only against the West. In 1991, the Soviet empire itself disintegrated.

This set uses 12 visual displays to focus on several of the key themes in this dramatic turning point in world history. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

Decolonization Struggles: Asia

The illustrations focus primarily on Mohandas Gandhi and India, with one cartoon on more violent independence struggles in Southeast Asia.

Decolonization Struggles: Africa

Here the illustrations call attention to the wide variety of African liberation movements in the 1950s and '60s. Some were peaceful; others were not. All of them confronted challenges, both before and after decolonization.

The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire

The Soviet Union itself has often been described as an empire. With the conquest of Eastern Europe that empire expanded enormously. However, in historical terms, it also perished in a very short space of time.

World Reactions, Alternative Views

The process of decolonization became caught up in the Cold War rivalries of Western and communist-bloc nations. This produced complex reactions to it around the world, some of which are explored here.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

*The End of the Imperial Age***OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand the struggle for independence in India and elsewhere in Asia.
2. Students will debate the relevance of Gandhi's approach to other decolonization struggles.

Decolonization Struggles: Asia

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

After World War II Europe lay in ruins. Its power had shrunk, its prestige had vanished, its colonial subjects no longer held it in awe. Clearly, time was running out on Europe's age of empire. Of all the struggles against colonial rule, the largest occurred in India, the jewel of the British imperial system. It was led by Mohandas Gandhi, whose campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience wore down the British and led them to grant India independence in 1947. In the top photo here, Gandhi is seen with Jawaharlal Nehru, a follower who became India's first prime minister. Gandhi's simple lifestyle and long struggle made him a hero to millions around the world. He seemed proof that under some circumstances, at least, a relatively peaceful struggle for social change could succeed.

Illustration 2

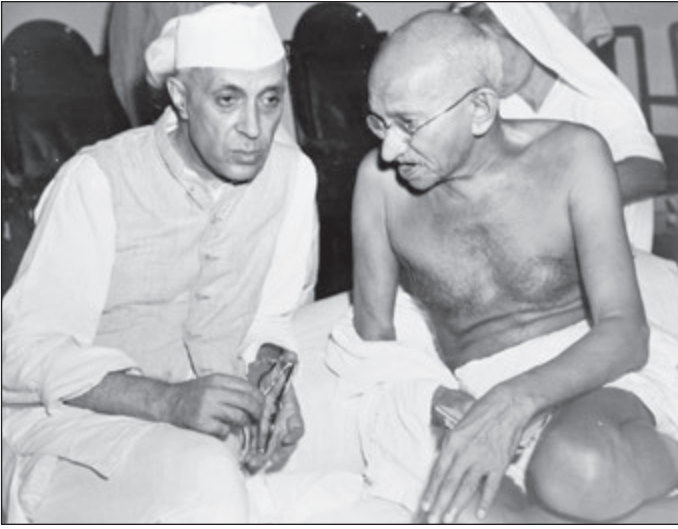
Decolonization, however just, rarely fulfilled the high hopes of former colonial subjects. In India, for example, Muslims and Hindus clashed even during the anti-colonial struggle. Gandhi hoped the groups would unite. But with independence, India was split into a mostly Hindu India and a largely Muslim Pakistan. Violence resulted in more than a million deaths during and just after independence. In early 1948 a Hindu fanatic assassinated Gandhi. Nehru led India from 1947 until his death in 1964. Two years after his death, in 1966, his daughter Indira Gandhi, no relation to Mohandas Gandhi, became prime minister. This cartoon comments on some of the huge problems she still faced as she took office.

Illustration 3

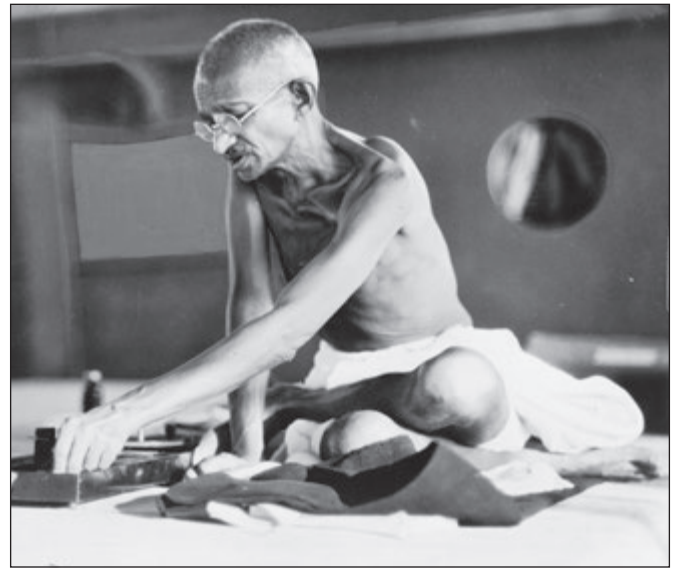
India's independence struggle had its violent moments, but it strove to remain peaceful. Elsewhere in Asia, struggles against colonialism took a much more violent form, also often getting caught up in Cold War rivalries. After World War II, for instance, the U.S. supported France's fight to regain control of Vietnam against the communist rebels fighting for that nation's independence. The U.S. concern was with the spread of communism, but France's goal was to reestablish its colonial empire in Southeast Asia. This U.S. cartoon from the early 1950s reflects the irritation Americans felt at France's lack of gratitude for U.S. help. Eventually, the French pulled out of Vietnam, and colonialism came to an end. But the U.S. continued the fight against the communists, a fight it would finally lose in 1975.

Lesson 1—Decolonization Struggles: Asia

Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

1. After World War II, movements all over the world arose calling for an end to Europe's colonial empires. What is meant by the term "colonial empire"?
2. Of all the independence struggles, perhaps the most famous was led by the man in these two photos. Who is he, which nation did he lead to independence in 1947, and who ruled that nation as a colony?
3. Mohandas Gandhi is famous for his philosophy of nonviolent civil disobedience. What do you know about this philosophy and the effect it had on the way Gandhi conducted India's independence struggle?
4. On the left, Gandhi is shown with Jawaharlal Nehru, a key supporter and the man who became India's first leader. Can you explain why Gandhi himself never had a chance to lead India as an independent nation?
5. Some people say nonviolence in India worked mainly because the British were reasonable colonial rulers. What do you think these people mean? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Mohandas Gandhi and Winston Churchill, two giants of the 20th century, disagreed about India. Here are two quotes from them:

Gandhi: *"India's destiny lies not along the bloody way of the West, but along the bloodless way of peace that comes from a simple and godly life."*

Churchill: *"Democracy is totally unsuited to India. Instead of conflicting opinions you have bitter theological hatreds."*

Read more about these men and their ideas about India. Organize a debate with half of the group taking Gandhi's position and the other half, Churchill's.

2. Along with his ideas on nonviolent civil disobedience, Gandhi's unique dress and lifestyle were important expressions of his ideas about India and its future. Read more about Gandhi and the lifestyle he adopted during India's independence struggle. In a brief essay, explain and evaluate these aspects of his life and their role in Gandhi's struggle and leadership.