Ahimsa Center- K-12 Teacher Institute

| Title of Lesson: | Philosophical Conflict and the Founding of New Societies: Gandhi and Nehru in India, and Jefferson and Hamilton in the United States |
| Lesson By: | John Craven, Haverhill High School |
| Grade Level/ Subject Areas: | High School World History or U.S. History |
| Class Size: | May be modified for any group size |
| Time/Duration of Lesson: | 2-4 class periods, depending on length |

Guiding Questions:
- How do the philosophies of revolutionary and/or nationalist leaders affect the nations that they help to develop?
- What were the essential differences between the visions of Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in the creation of modern India?
- What were the essential differences between the visions of Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson in the creation of modern America?
- How do the thoughts of these four figures impact the countries that they helped to found?

Lesson Abstract:
This lesson leads students to consider the development of “new” civilizations, and the interplay between the foundational values of societies and the reality of the nations that they create. Students will also learn about the differences between systems-based and citizen-based approaches to building social values. Students achieve new understanding of these topics by examining two pivotal conflicts between nationalist leaders in history: between Gandhi and Nehru in India, and between Jefferson and Hamilton in the United States.

Lesson Content:
The philosophies of the first leaders of nationalist revolutions, and the new governments that those revolutions spawn, play a vital role in developing the values of emerging societies. For example, in the United States, the agrarian republic envisioned by Thomas Jefferson differed in many significant respects—economic, political, and social—from the capitalist aristocratic republic offered by Alexander Hamilton. In fact, Jefferson disagreed with most of the major policies put forth by Hamilton as Secretary of the Treasury to President George Washington, although these policies were, for the most part, adopted by the new government. These policies created a set of values for American society, discussed below, that were already so deeply entrenched by the time Jefferson became the third President of the United States that he could take little action against them. Similarly, in India, the great independence leader Mohandas Gandhi’s vision of a village republic stood in stark contrast to the state socialist democracy proposed by his chosen successor, Jawaharlal Nehru, who was able to implement his ideas as the first Prime Minister of India.

Too often, today’s high school students are attracted to the positions of Alexander Hamilton and Jawaharlal Nehru in these arguments because of the simplicity with which the conflict with their opponents is presented. Modern history textbooks look at these ideological conflicts as between modernity and technology on the one hand, and respect for agricultural traditions and cultural backwardness on the other. For students raised in a modern world, the choice between these two positions is simple.
However, in the cases of both the United States and India, the differences between these two positions are much more complex. Hamilton and Nehru represented the position that systems could make good citizens, while Gandhi and Jefferson shared the belief that citizens, freed as much as possible from the restraints placed upon them by strong central governments, could form the best societies. These complexities reveal criticisms of our modern societies that are worthy of further thought and study by students. Within these debates, a much more important question lingers than whether we want a modern, industrial society. Rather, a full understanding of the positions of Gandhi and Jefferson lead students to consider the question of the values we want at the foundation of our society, and the political, social, and economic policies that our society should embrace to achieve our ideals. Additionally, the ideas of Gandhi and Jefferson are not overly idealistic; they provide concrete steps that people can take to change their society and its values to more closely reflect our humanity.

**The Gandhi-Nehru Debate in India**

While Jawaharlal Nehru was Gandhi’s chosen successor, significant differences between the two emerged even before Gandhi’s death. The vision that Gandhi had for India was for the country to take the form of a federation of self-sufficient village republics. “The government of the village would be conducted by a Panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. Under the system the decentralization of power was a natural phenomenon” (Misra, 1995, pp. 123-124). The village system, along with the adoption of cottage industries (symbolized for Gandhi by the spinning wheel), was the source of self-reliance for the people and communities of India, and ultimately of a system of economic and political decentralization that would allow for the equality of all citizens. Equality was not to be found by bringing the poor up to the ranks of the rich, as Western observers such as the socialists would say, but by bringing everyone to the ranks of the peasant. Only by taking this step could society as a whole understand the plight of the poorer classes, and develop solutions so that everyone got only what they needed.

Nehru, on the other hand, supported the growth of Indian industry as a means to promote economic and social equality. He believed that ridding India of the improvements that Britain had brought during the Raj was a mistake. In his words, “I do not believe that it is possible for India to be really independent unless she is a technically advanced country” (Parel, 2009, p. 153).

His ideas about how to accomplish this brought two other pieces into his political philosophy, however: socialism, and the centralization of political power. Socialism, for Nehru, was a system that would force equality on the people of India, and thus bring aid to the poor. The “democratic socialism” that Nehru emphasized required a strong centralized state to conduct the planning necessary for rapid industrialization and modernization. When Nehru became the first prime minister of India, he implemented a series of five-year plans to effect these goals. Nehru wrote that, “our final aim can only be a classless society with equal economic justice and opportunity for all, a society organized on a planned basis for the raising of mankind to higher material and cultured levels, to a cultivation of spiritual values of cooperation, unselfishness, the spirit of service, the desire to do right, goodwill, and love—ultimately a world order” (Misra, 1995, pp. 129-130). It is easy to underestimate the degree to which Nehru was willing to
sacrifice liberty in the name of equality.

What Nehru missed in his critique of Gandhi was the spiritual element that stood at the foundation of Gandhi’s work. He believed that Gandhi proposed poverty for its own sake, not for the sake of the individual. “Personally,” Nehru wrote, “I dislike the praise of poverty and suffering. I do not think that they are at all desirable and they ought to be abolished. Nor do I appreciate the ascetic life as a social ideal” (Misra, 1995, p. 125). He failed to see Gandhi’s ideas beyond the so-called “praise of poverty.” Nehru wrote, “we cannot take refuge in vague and emotional phrases but must face these facts and adapt ourselves to them so that we can become subjects of history instead of being its helpless objects” (Misra, 1995, p. 127).

But, Gandhi’s reasons for adopting a life of poverty and relying on the village model for India went beyond a love of poverty for its own sake. Gandhi’s concern was with the development of values for both Indian citizens and, by extension, to India itself. “There was true wisdom in the sages of old having so regulated society as to limit the material condition of the people… therein lies salvation. People live long, under such conditions, in comparative peace much greater than Europe has enjoyed after having taken up modern activity” (Parel, 2009, p. 131). Again, later in life, Gandhi returned to the same points: “The key… lies in the idea that worldly pursuits should give way to ethical living… it is not an attempt to go back to the so-called ignorant, dark ages. But it is an attempt to see beauty in voluntary simplicity, [voluntary] poverty, and slowness” (Parel, 2009, p. xvi). The peasant life, for Gandhi, was an effective curb against materialism, greed, and violence, and a promotion of nonviolence, the value of hard work, and self-sufficiency—values that modern society has arguably lost.

To highlight the differences between the ideas of these two Indian nationalists, one needs look no farther than the India that Nehru helped to create. The state socialist model that Nehru adopted quickly made his country an important nation on the world stage. The democratic government adopted in India made it an easy ally of the West during the Cold War and after; its state-directed socialist economy rapidly increased India’s industrialization; and the sheer size of its population made it the global economic force that Nehru wished it to be.

But, what of his desire to make India a “subject of history” and to bring “equal economic justice and opportunity” to all of her citizens? Modern analysts of India regularly speak of the country as “two Indias.” In the first, encompassing an ever-growing number of India’s urban citizens, economic progress and social institutions have helped to improve the economic status, educational opportunity, and quality of life of its citizens. In the second, focused in the vast rural regions in which 80% of India’s population lives, social services seem overwhelmed by the needs of an impoverished people. Even today, roughly three hundred million Indians live on less than one dollar a day (Perry, 2004, “A Tale of Two Indias”). Nehru’s emphasis on economic progress through increased industrialization and production, on nationalism through economic strength, and, crucially, on economic improvement before economic redistribution has helped to create an India that is dangerously divided on economic lines, with a clear division between the haves and have-nots.

Gandhi, however, would have put wealth redistribution above further economic improvement. To Gandhi, “the redistribution of income is more important than the raising of output, and the
fulfillment of basic needs of the masses requires the limitation of the wants of the richer classes” (Iyer, 1973, p. 2). India would best become a “civilized” nation not through rapid industrialization, but by recalibrating the desires of the people so that the needs of the many would outweigh the needs of the few. Poverty would be eliminated by restricting the wealth of the haves, not simply improving the lot of the have-nots. In such a society, where people thought about the needs of society as a whole first, nonviolence and economic inequality would also be a thing of the past. Again, for Gandhi, citizens improve societies, not vice versa.

The Jefferson-Hamilton Debate in America

Characterizing the debate between Hamilton and Jefferson as simply a conflict between modernization and not likewise minimizes the importance of the issues that separated them. While it is true that Jefferson wished for America to remain an agrarian republic, his reasons for doing so went beyond a love of agricultural life for its own sake. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he wrote that “those who labor the earth are the chosen people of God, if He ever had a chosen people, whose breasts He has made His particular deposit for substantial and genuine virtue” (Peterson, 1984, p. 291). Industrial workers, city dwellers, and those engaged in commerce were deficient because of their dependence on their material desires, as well as on their industrial bosses. “Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition” (Peterson, 1984, pp. 291-292). Jefferson saw in agrarianism the seeds of social justice, true equality, self-sufficiency, and, above all, true democracy. His support for an agrarian America was an enunciation of that creed.

In contrast, Alexander Hamilton’s preference for industrialization and modernization reflected his deep disagreement with Jefferson about these fundamental values. Whereas Jefferson promoted a republic of individual self-sufficiency, Hamilton promoted industrialization as a source of national self-sufficiency. While Jefferson lauded the democratizing tendencies of giving everyone a plot of land to toil, Hamilton believed that political power should be held by the distinguished few—those among the higher classes who had the education necessary for true participation in government, and the wealth and support to lend the government in its time of need. Hamilton believed that, “only a ‘talented few’—understood to mean men drawn from the wealthy and aristocratic strata of society -- had the wisdom and dispassionate foresight to implement the measures necessary for the public good. The great majority of people, in Hamilton’s eyes, operated primarily out of self-interest and could not be trusted to think or act judiciously in matters of state power” (Finseth, 2009, *The Rise and Fall of Alexander Hamilton*). This led Hamilton to ideas such as the naming of a president for life to avoid the direct participation of the people. It also led him to the idea of a national bank, which would allow direct investment by the wealthy in the government of the United States—and consequently buy their interest in its success. He also believed in a very strong government that could force its policies on the states and on the people directly. “Only an energetic government would be able to provide the stability and order necessary to secure the blessings of liberty for the people, especially over such a large geographical area as the United States” (Finseth, 2009, *The Rise and Fall of Alexander Hamilton*). Much like Nehru, Hamilton exhibited a faith that a good system could give the people liberty and stability; if the citizens were given too much power, chaos, violence, and disorder would be the inevitable results.
Alexander Hamilton used his primary position in the administration of George Washington to plant the seeds of his ideology into America’s foundation. Hamilton’s successful proposal to create a national bank, in which control of the nation’s credit was placed in a corporation whose majority owners were private bankers, created a connection between the government and its wealthiest citizens that gave wealthy interests greater influence on government policy. Other Hamilton-inspired actions, like the assumption of state debts after the Revolution, made the states beholden to the national government, increasing national unity and the power of the federal government over the states. These two traditions are still prevalent in our understanding of American government today.

It is telling that Jefferson’s ideas did not return to the political mainstream until two other eras marked by devotion to the common people. The first was the period surrounding the presidency of Andrew Jackson. During this time period, Jackson took action against industrialization and against the concentration of wealth and power by the few. For example, Jackson vetoed the charter for a second national bank because he felt like it gave too much power to the wealthy interests. As long as the economic strength of the country was dependent upon private individuals, then the law and lawmakers were for sale. Power had to be returned to the people by breaking the bond between wealthy individuals and government. The second was the Progressive Era, a period of democratization in local, state, and national politics the sprung out of the agrarian-based Populist movement. Jefferson was no doubt smiling on the changes proposed, and eventually made, by these late nineteenth and early twentieth century reformers: direct popular election of United States Senators; initiative, referendum, and recall at the state level; and more popular supervision of city leaders.

None of this is meant to overstate the philosophical connection between Gandhi and Jefferson. First and foremost, Jefferson was no adherent to nonviolence in any form. A strong advocate of the form of liberal revolution practiced in France beginning in 1789, Jefferson had no qualms about using violence to advance the cause of liberty. More importantly, the Jefferson’s attraction to the agrarian lifestyle had different ends than Gandhi’s promotion of village life. For Jefferson, as already mentioned, the agrarian life led to the truest expression of democracy. The broad land ownership, hard work, and self-sufficiency of the agrarian republic led to greater liberty and independence. Only when freed from the yolk of subservience to any master, whether in the form of the desire for material goods, or the industrial boss, can a people be truly free to express their free will politically. Jefferson’s agrarian ideal, then, is more political than moral. (In fact, in some of his speeches and writings, Jefferson makes it clear that whether people are right or not in their expression is immaterial; that they express their liberty is much more important.) It is also distinctly American in that it sanctifies the good of the individual. If every individual is truly free to do and express what is best for him/her, then society as a whole will benefit.

Gandhi’s ideology, on the other hand, is both more ethical and more communal. Although his position as an Indian revolutionary leader sometimes confuses this point, Gandhi’s philosophy does not stress freedom from an exterior force as Jefferson’s does, but freedom from oneself. It also emphasized the good of the whole over the good of the individual. In this, Gandhi reversed Jefferson’s belief: “the good of the individual is contained in the good of all” (Parel, 2009, p. xi). The problem with India under colonial rule, and by extension of modern civilization, is that
people learn to indulge their passions. The object of life becomes the accumulation of wealth, power, and prestige, while concerns for ethics and for spirituality are devalued, if not ignored. Gandhi wanted to reset social values to place service to the community above the accumulation of wealth. In so doing, the problems of poverty, violence, and overconsumption would disappear.

Jefferson and Gandhi were revolutionary thinkers. Jefferson believed that agrarian republics would allow people to have firmer control over their governments. Gandhi, on the other hand, believed that the creation of village republics would allow people to refocus on their better ideals of communal welfare. While the specifics of their ideas were different, both shared the idea that the natural values of humanity, freed from the restrictions of a strong central government (in Jefferson’s case) or those imposed by modern civilization (in Gandhi’s), would help produce the best societies. In other words, both believed that our societies should be set by our values instead of letting our values be determined by the societies that we create.

All of this may or may not lead to a dramatic revision of students’ feelings about Gandhi, Nehru, Hamilton and Jefferson. But, at the very least, the information presented here should lead to a review of the values that we want for modern societies, and how to best pursue them. While the preference of Hamilton and Nehru for industry and modernization may have won the day, it is still for us to reconsider whether the ideas of Gandhi and Jefferson still hold meaning for us in our modern society in the values that their views may help us instill.

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<th>State Content Standards:</th>
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<td>Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework standards:</td>
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WHII.12 Identify major developments in Indian history in the 19th and early 20th centuries.
   C. the rise of Indian nationalism and the influence and ideas of Gandhi.

WHII.38 Describe the development and goals of nationalist movements in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, including the ideas and importance of nationalist leaders.
   E. Jawaharlal Nehru (India)

USI.22 Summarize the major policies and political developments that took place during the presidencies of George Washington (1789-1797), John Adams (1797-1801), and Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809).
   B. the conflicting ideas of Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton.

Materials Needed:
- Writing utensil and paper for each group (to record their conclusions)

Suggested Teaching Activities:
- Put students together into a number of groups divisible by four. One quarter of the student groups should read the American Declaration of Independence, as well as excerpts from Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia (the section on “Manufactures”). Another quarter should read the conclusion (pp. 112-119) of Gandhi’s
Hind Swaraj. The third quarter should read excerpts from Ian Finseth’s *The Rise and Fall of Alexander Hamilton* (“Federalist” and “Secretary of the Treasury”). The final groups of students should read excerpts from pages 122-131 of O.P. Misra’s *Economic Thought of Gandhi and Nehru*, which illuminates Nehru’s criticism of Gandhi, and his way forward for India. All groups should develop a list of characteristics of the ideal society envisioned by the author that they studied. These lists should then be listed on the board by the teacher through class discussion.

- Lead students in a discussion of the influences of the characteristics listed above on modern American and Indian society. Comparisons to American society can be made easily because of student experiences with American society; a textbook reading or lesson on the crises and successes of modern Indian society may be necessary prior to the discussion of modern India.

- Have students write a paper in the form of a newspaper or magazine article in which they take on the persona of Gandhi, Nehru, Jefferson, or Hamilton responding to the state of their respective country today. Students should point out the pros and cons of the modern status of the country from the perspective of their chosen historical figure, and suggest one or two changes that the writer would suggest, if he was alive today.

- As an alternative to the third one above, students could get into groups of three or four and determine the values that they would like either American society, or a hypothetical new society, to reflect. Then, they could put together written, multimedia, and/or artistic components to “build” a society with characteristics that reflect those values.

**Bibliography:**

Declaration of Independence.
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/HAM/hamilton.html>

*Resources also available online:
*Economic Thought of Gandhi and Nehru: A Comparative Analysis*: <http://books.google.com/books?id=IxGDqOU03h4C&pg=PP1&dq=economic+thought+of+gandhi+and+Nehru>