

Gandhi's first crusade

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(1931-1991) began her career as a newspaper editor in New York City, and then worked as a freelance writer and editor, contributing to such newspapers as *The New York Times* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. She took an interest in history, politics, and social causes, and wrote 18 books of history and biography.



Culture flash

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) is India's most famous leader and is often considered a saint. He is usually referred to as Mahatma Gandhi ("Great soul"). He helped lead India to independence from the British, but his political awakening took place in South Africa, where Indians, who were scornfully called "coolies", had no political rights.

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Word help

1. trembling
2. /dɔːm/ *aube*
3. invited
4. /retʃɪd/ *misérable*
5. *projet de loi*

In 1893, Mohandas Gandhi went to South Africa to work as legal counsel to a wealthy merchant. At the time, about 65,000 Indians, most of them very poor, lived there.

- A**bout a week after Gandhi arrived at Durban, his business took him to Pretoria. [...] He bought a first-class ticket and dressed, as he did then, in impeccable European clothing, traveled first-class until the train reached Maritzburg. There, a white passenger protested to railroad officials, and
- 5 Gandhi was ordered to a lower-class compartment. He pointed to his first-class ticket and refused to move. A policeman threw Gandhi and his luggage off the train, which continued its journey without him. He spent the night in the station's unlit, unheated waiting room. It was bitterly cold, but Gandhi's overcoat was in his luggage and his luggage
- 10 was in the hands of the railroad authorities. Gandhi dared not request it for fear of being insulted again. Instead, he sat shivering¹ through the endless night. [...] By dawn² he had made a decision. He would fight for his rights and the rights of all people. He sent telegrams of protest to railroad officials and to his employer.
- 15 The following evening he was permitted to take the train to the end of the line. The next portion of the journey was by stagecoach, and the man in charge refused to permit Gandhi to sit inside with the white passengers. Gandhi agreed to sit beside the driver, but that night he wrote to the company's agent, firmly insisting he be seated inside the coach the
- 20 following day. He was. Within a week after he arrived in Pretoria he summoned³ the local Indians to a meeting to discuss their wretched⁴ condition. He made his first public speech that night. Indignation had finally freed his tongue. [...] Having concluded his case, Gandhi returned to Durban to prepare to
- 25 sail home to India. But at a farewell party in his honor he noticed a newspaper item about a bill⁵ which would deprive [...] Indians of the right to vote for members of the legislative assembly. [...] "If it passes, it strikes at the root of our self-respect," said Gandhi. The guests agreed. Then one spoke up. "Stay here a month longer, and we will fight as you
- 30 direct us," he said. Gandhi said he would stay. [...] Thus the farewell party was transformed into a planning session for a crusade for civil rights. It would last twenty years and test the essential weapons of every non-violent freedom movement of the twentieth century.

Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht, 1965.