Mahatma Gandhi is hailed as one of the most respected and influential leaders the world has ever seen. He is often compared to the Buddha and Jesus Christ. His model of peaceful resistance to oppression brought about India’s Independence from British colonial rule and his campaign against untouchability set off the greatest social transformation in India’s history. His ideas and practice continue to inspire countless social and political movements across the globe, from the U.S. civil rights movement and the One Percent protest, anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, the environmental campaigns and the sustainability movement, worldwide. Gandhi was an original thinker, a brilliant organizer, clever strategist, charismatic and courageous leader, social reformer and spiritual guru. One of the most public figures, he also remains something of an enigma.

In this seminar, we will try to understand Gandhi’s life, work, impact, and legacy by analyzing his key writings and important writings about him by leading scholars. We will read his critique of various models of civilization, his ideas on capitalism, colonialism, socialism, human rights, social justice, morality, individual responsibility, and how an individual can make a difference to society. Topics include: The making of the Mahatma, the evolution of his character, personality, formative influences—religious, moral, spiritual, and political. His leadership of campaigns in South Africa and of India’s Independence Movement; his ideas and ideals, in theory and in practice: truth, integrity, non-violence, human rights, personal morality, satyagraha (peaceful resistance), social harmony, simplicity, sustainability. His vision for a pluralist world. His relations with great figures of his time. His evaluation by his contemporaries and later generations. His legacy and impact on the world. His continuing relevance to today’s issues: capitalism; socialism; globalization; development; inequality, environmental issues; sustainable development; corporate responsibility, global political movements; terrorism, authoritarianism, bullying.

Requirements: Presentation, term paper, active participation in class discussions, midterm exam.