„Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man." ~Mahatma Ghandi

If we look at this statement from a moral perspective I think we can all easily answer how accurate we think it is. To try and work together and sort things out in case of a conflict is always the better way than just going head on into it, trying to prove your point and eventually even escalating things. I will die on this hill may be a statement that is familiar to you but, really the better way of doing things would be trying not to make enemies while sticking to your opinion no matter what but instead peacefully solving whatever conflict you may encounter. Imagine someone takes your pen in class without asking. Would the better way to get it back be asking for it and getting it back this peaceful way or punching him in the stomach while screaming at him and then just taking it. I think all of us can agree that the most succesful and overall best way of solving this would be the first option. At least I would hope so...

This would be a pretty easy way to try and find out how well Ghandis quote can be applied. A more complex way would be looking at situations where we can really see whether or not non-violence was the key to success. And as we are a bilingual history class I think the best way of figuring out the accuracy of statements would be looking at history.

Let us look at the ,for this statement, most obvious historical case. Mahatma Ghandi and the indian fight for independence. (As we couldnt prepare a presentation for this I wont be able to show you any sources but I hope that I seem trustworthy enough that you can just take my word for what follows now.) I think most of us here know that Ghandi was one of the key figures for the indian independence movement. But what exactly did he do? Originally he was a lawyer but when he was faced with the racial discrimination in south africa during his time there he began developping his concept of non-violent resistance. After the first world war, when he returned to india, there was a bill in place that allowed the imprisonment of any person that they found to be a suspect for terrorism without going to court. So basically everyone of you could just go to prison because someone thought that you seem suspicious... and you wouldnt have the slightest chance to do anything against it. Sounds unfair? That is what they thought too, so they started participating in strikes. But then a catastrophe happened when soldiers opened fire at peaceful people that had gathered to either protest or just to stay in the park where it occured. From then on Ghandi and his followers started boycotting votes and any institutions with links to Great Britain. This led to his imprisonment but when he was released he started protesting again. After one of his hungerstrikes the law for Indian self rule was implemented. 12 years later India was finally independent from British rule. But were Ghandi and his peacefull followers really the main cause for it? Or would, if the circumstances were different, the British have kept actively working against protests or even killing protestors like they did before? A huge factor for Indian independence was also the second world war and the destabilitating effect it had on Great Britain. Furthermore the muslim and the hindu population started fighting each other. Eventually these conflicts peaked when over 5000 people lost their lifes during violent clashes in calcutta. This event sparked even more violence which led to the British proposing a two state solution which was later put into place when India gained its independence but was split into two sovereign nations. India and Pakistan. So were Ghandis peaceful actions or the violent clashes that were potentially about to fully go of the rails and into a full blown war the cause for England granting India independence? With this example alone we would be back at trying to decide between two aspects and trying to weigh them up against each other. So let us take a second example.

I dont know how many of you are familiar with the struggle of Irish independence. After Irish home rule was partly procclaimed guerillas began to form to try and either stop the home rule

efforts and stay under british rule or to try and gain full independence from Britain. Eventually around 1919 violence broke out again and after self-procclaimed freedom fighters attacked british soldiers, the british army then went on to shoot onlookers of a football match that was currently happening.

This marked the beginning of a guerilla war and after the violence had killed way over 1000 people and the British figured that the guerillas werent to be defeated, they proposed a truce and eventually granted Ireland independence in 1921. During all of that time a lot of protests were going on throughout Ireland including a lot of strikes. For example the railway workers had stopped letting British forces use trains. But those protests and strikes are rarely ever mentioned when you look up causes for the Irish independence. So if we only looked at this conflict we would conclude that violence is the key to success if your goal is independence or working against an oppressor. We would probably also figure that working with the force actively trying to work against you and trying to compromise would also slightly resemble appeasement politics and we especially as germans know that this is not the way to proceed... or is it?

So is violence really the answer if you work against someone trying to oppress you? Let us take a look at the final example I have picked. After Ireland gained its independence Northern Ireland wanted to follow them which led to a conflict lasting form 1968 to 1998. From this time there stems a phrase a bit similar to Ghandis: Our revenge will be the laughter of our children. A phrase by Bobby sands that is still written on a lot of houses throughout northern Ireland along with murals of Sands and other Irish activists from that time. With this phrase he is explicitly against revenge. With this he means the members of the catholic guerillas that at this time commited several terrorist attacks on England because they wanted revenge for Britain still ruling over them, which they saw as oppression. Instead he was for more peaceful methods like the hunger strike he started that later killed him after he encountered health problems. While the British tried giving the catholics a say in politics and get towards a compromise by opening up offices for the catholic party Sinn Fein, the guerillas didnt stop commiting terror attacks on England. The British then increased their police and military in northern ireland which could have easily overpowered the guerillas and stopped any effort for independence. Instead the Irish and English politicians started working together, finally signing an agreement that at least officially ended the conflict and compromised by granting Northern Ireland full home rule. In this example we can see how violence is not the answer to conflicts but, if used against a stronger opponent, could potentially lead to them using violence against you until you cant achieve anything no more. Instead this shows how talking and peaceful negotiations can be far more beneficial to find compromises. So what can we conclude from these three cases that all on their own would have led to a whole other conclusion?

The difference in these three cases shows that in history there is never a right or wrong. After having a close look at them all we see that in history everything depends on other circumstances. If the hindus and muslims would have lived together peacefully there maybe wouldnt have been Indian independence despite Ghandis protests. If the Guerillas in Ireland would have acted slightly differently, we wouldnt have Irish independence. And if the politicians in Northern Ireland wouldnt have tried to compromise there would have probably been even more terror and in the end no self rule for Northern Ireland. So is violence or non violence the better way to work? I think it really depends on your circumstances as we have just seen. If you for example worked against a remorseless state instantly prosecuting and even killing protestors, the only way to work against them would be trying to overthrow them by violence. But if you would instead work against a state with a huge army but a working political system the better call would be trying to change the system the political and official way.

The difficult thing about history is that there is no right or wrong. When I first wrote this I wanted to say that the phrase is wrong because in some cases non violence didnt work. But then I pictured Mr. Weidauer who would, if you gave him this answer probably ask: Why so? Werent there times where it worked. So after really researching everything for this speech I came to the conclusion that history just isnt this easy.There will always be more examples, that, if you consider them, will change your view on a topic. There is no complete good or bad, right or wrong. The thing you have to learn is to see nuances between the distinct, simple answers which just give you a simple yes or no. If you take everything, that you can find and think of, into account, in order to answer a historical question, there will most definetly be some sort of „it might be this way... but“ in your answer because history is far too complex and difficult to just decide for one side.

I hope I got you to think about this statement and to reconsider just looking for the easiest answer, especially when thinking about historical or political questions. Or that I have at least provided you with some new general knowledge about Ghandi, Indian independence and Irish history.

 Thank you.