*The following excerpt is taken from a May 2019 Carnegie Council podcast entitled “*[*The Crack-Up: The Amritsar Massacre & India's Independence Movement, with Gyan Prakash*](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/studio/multimedia/20190515-crack-up-amritsar-massacre-india-independence-movement-gyan-prakash)*.” The podcast is based off* TheNew York Times *opinion piece “*[*The Massacre That Led to the End of the British Empire*](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/13/opinion/1919-amrtisar-british-empire-india.html?rref=collection%2Fspotlightcollection%2F2019-1919-year-history&action=click&contentCollection=opinion&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=2&pgtype=collection)*” written by historian* [*Gyan Prakash*](https://history.princeton.edu/people/gyan-prakash)*. This transcript has been edited for classroom use.*

What happened [during the 1919 Amritsar Massacre] was that on April 13, [British] Brigadier General Dyer led a group of soldiers…into this public garden called [Jallianwala Bagh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jallianwala_Bagh). The entry was very narrow, so they got off the armored truck and went to this public garden, where many hundreds of unarmed civilians and women and children had gathered. It was a day of a festival, so there was a kind of festive air to the place. Without warning, General Dyer ordered his troops to fire on the crowd. They fired for about 10 minutes, and about 379 people by official count died, and many thousands were injured. The unofficial count was much higher…

…[W]hen the massacre happened the news spread very quickly, although there was censorship imposed. But by the end of April the news had spread across the country, and the [Indian National] [Congress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_National_Congress) was of course mobilizing. The [Indian National] Congress had become for the first time a kind of mass nationalist organization. There was revulsion across the country that the British could open fire on an unarmed civilian population. That was really a kind of catalytic event in mobilizing nationalist opposition.

1. Why was the Amritsar Massacre a turning point in 20th century Indian history?

…What was maybe exceptional about 1919 was that first, it was unexpected. Indians had expected that after the end of the war, the British, having won the war, would be generous toward Indian demands, and they were not. Having introduced a bill that was popularly known as the [Rowlatt Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rowlatt_Act) after the war, which continued all the wartime restrictions on speech and assembly, Indians were really taken by surprise. Gandhi famously had actually supported the British in the war. There was an expectation that that loyalty would be rewarded by some concession to their demands, but that was not to be.

…[T]he other complicating factor was that after 1857 the British had recruited their troops heavily from the Punjab because they thought the Sikhs were a martial [military] race, and Sikhs had been largely quiet during the [1857] rebellion. So they were seen as a loyal force.

Now, after World War I, many of these Sikh troops were demobilized, so there was also this [British] fear that these people had been trained in arms and ammunitions. Many of them had fought in the First World War in the European and African theaters and had come back with different ideas about the Empire. So there was this [British] fear that there [could be] a kind of rebellion. The leadership [against the British] is united across religious lines. Added to this combustive mix is the presence of the demobilized soldiers.

1. In what ways did the events of World War I and 1919 lead to the Amritsar Massacre?