Crossing the great divide: the Gandhian repertoire's transnational diffusion to the American civil rights movement
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### Chapter three INITIAL RECEPTION OF THE GANDHIAN REPERTOIRE

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Chapter three

INITIAL RECEPTION OF THE GANDHIAN REPERTOIRE
1921-1929

The Gandhian repertoire began its long journey across the Pacific Ocean as the satyagraha campaigns in India were growing in size and intensity. Before World War I, missionaries, scholars, journalists, and travelers only sporadically provided the American public with information about India, painting an exotic and usually distorted picture of the country’s history and current situation. Through their stories and writings, these observers generally gave the impression that the Indian people were mysterious Oriental heathens with backward social customs and dysfunctional political institutions (Singh 1962). After the Rowlatt campaign commenced in 1919, however, American interest in Gandhi, satyagraha, and Indian nationalism became more regular and deliberate. Several newspapers and journals started to recognize the newsworthiness of events in India, while a few active citizens appreciated the significance and implications of the Gandhian repertoire. Yet it was not until 1921, with the noncooperation movement in full swing, that mainstream communication channels and critical communities in the United States became sufficiently serious about Gandhi’s ideas and practices to speak of diffusion (Chatfield 1976: 33-34, 77-213; Chatfield 1999).

World War I affected the context for the Gandhian repertoire’s transnational diffusion in several ways. At the global level, it demonstrated that the British Empire’s dominant status in the world system was no longer as unassailable or permanent as it once appeared (Hutchins 1967). The postwar rise of nationalism among subordinated groups in India and other parts of the colonized world revealed that collective resistance could be fruitful in the long run. Despite some cracks in the armor of the imperialist world system, though, British propaganda ensured that even sympathetic American observers continued to perceive Gandhi, Indian independence, and the Gandhian repertoire through Orientalist lenses (Said 1979; Fox 1989; Israel 1994). At the national level, World War I catalyzed enormous structural transformations in American society. Postwar developments like the collapse of cotton plantations in the South, the northward
migra-tion of African-American workers, the reduction of immigration from Europe, and
the return of vociferous African-American veterans caused a great deal of tension in
social relations. Threatened by the changing role of minority groups, for instance, white
supremacists and supporters of the Ku Klux Klan precipitated race riots all over the
United States. Moreover, hysterical fears about the rise of domestic communism led to
infamous “Red Scare” campaigns and violent reactions against labor strikes, unions, and
any other form of collective militancy (Huggins 1971: 53, 155; Franklin and Moss 1988:
chapter XVII; McAdam 1982).

The climate of turbulence and uncertainty dominating postwar America altered
the ways of thinking among scholars, community leaders, artists, and intellectuals.
Before and during the Great War, conservative voices defending the domestic and
international status quo still went largely uncontested. After 1918, though, progressive
opinion leaders and media sources started raising troubling questions about the kind of
moral order that would arise now that skepticism and science prevailed, rather than the
optimism of traditional Protestant religion and Jeffersonian liberalism (Huggins 1971).
In contrast to conservatives, progressives usually looked favorably at anti-imperialist
forces in the world system and regarded Gandhi and Indian nationalism as reflections of
such forces. But while progressives received national attention, nearly all of them were
highly educated professionals with roots in cosmopolitan New York and Washington,
D.C., who primarily appealed to fellow members of the intellectual elite in these cities.
The rest of the country, and particularly the South, lagged far behind in terms of exposure
to international events and political developments (Huggins 1971; Chatfield 1971: 97).
After Gandhi suddenly terminated the noncooperation campaign in 1922, moreover,
American interest in satyagraha rapidly waned—even in New York and Washington,
D.C. (Singh 1962: 199, 206). With the Indian leader’s retreat from the limelight, and
with the United States entering a period of prosperity, the few observers who did pay
attention to India after 1924 agreed that Gandhi and his repertoire had become “a spent
force” (Sorabji 1926: 368-379; see also, Chatfield 1976: 205-213).

Chapter three discusses how this geographical and historical environment not only
enabled the inception of the transnational diffusion process, but also constrained the
American reception of the Gandhian repertoire. The first section illustrates that although
the mainstream field of reception spread information about the diffusion item through the United States, it simultaneously encouraged stereotypes based on hyper-difference and over-likeness rather than serious analysis or adoption. The following section introduces the relevant critical communities during the 1920s and argues that they failed to overcome—and actually reproduced—the perceptual obstacles constructed by mainstream media and opinion leaders. The last section, then, focuses on the influence of brokerage and collective appropriation, the two transnational diffusion mechanisms.

1. Mainstream field of reception

By sparking and participating in discussions about the Gandhian repertoire, mainstream publications and opinion leaders helped spread relevant information throughout the receiving environment. At the same time, though, these communication channels also produced significant twists in the transnational diffusion process—twists that classical diffusion theory fails to incorporate into its model. The mass media and its contributors formed the American public’s perception of the diffusion item by amplifying some of its aspects, and underplaying others, to make sense of contemporary events in India without threatening the existing social order in the United States. Their interpretations of the Gandhian repertoire, in other words, were “hegemonic”: they maintained the status quo by defining the situation for audiences and excluding viewpoints that seriously contested the dominant power structure.

The mainstream field of reception reproduced the hegemonic interpretations of the Gandhian repertoire in two specific ways. Some prominent spokespersons and media sources magnified the cultural gap between the Indian and American social system, and assumed that Gandhi’s ideas and practices could only work in an Oriental country like India, not in an Occidental country like the United States. Others, in contrast, admired satyagraha for its similarities with Western forms of nonviolence—such as Christian

"Like Todd Gitlin (1980: 10), I see hegemony as "operating through a complex web of social activities and procedures. Hegemony is done by the dominant and collaborated in by the dominated...Hegemonic ideology enters into everything people do and think is "natural"...In every sphere of social activity, it meshes with the "common sense" through which people make the world seem intelligible; it tries to become that common sense." For similar views on hegemony, see esp. Gramsci (1971), Raymond Williams (1973, 1977) and Stuart Hall (1973).
pactism and passive resistance—and minimized its innovative aspects. These
mainstream opinion leaders and media sources also tended to regard Gandhi as a
reincarnation of Jesus Christ and his life story as a model for Christians to follow.
Following Richard Fox (1997: 67-68, 71-73), I will refer to the first stereotype as “hyper-
difference” and to the second stereotype as “over-likeness.” Both hyper-difference and
over-likeness represented perceptual obstacles impeding the transition from initial
reception of the Gandhian repertoire to actual adoption in the American context.

The internal composition of the mainstream field of reception, moreover, was
heterogeneous and included various kinds of communication channels. The conservative
press and its representatives tended to use a “negative” version of the hyper-difference
stereotype: they criticized the Gandhian repertoire by exaggerating the distinction
between a backward Indian and a progressive American society. They also generally
supported the British point of view and argued that Indians were incapable of ruling
themselves: assumed that democracy could not succeed in India and that most Indian
people had prospered under British rule and opposed change; and stressed that Gandhi’s
movement was reactionary, anarchistic, and bound to fail. On the contrary, their
moderate counterparts regularly expressed sympathy for Gandhi’s ideas and practices in
terms of over-likeness or a “positive” version of hyper-difference: they overstated
similarities with familiar notions of nonviolence or highlighted only the superior
characteristics of India’s spiritualistic culture. Similarly, contributors to the mainstream
African-American press expressed their sympathy in positive yet stereotypical terms:
they admired the independence movement in “colored” India for using Western methods
to fight Western imperialism, but were usually dubious whether satyagraha could work
outside of India. Both moderate and African-American journalists, moreover,
condemned British policy in India and accentuated the Indian nationalist movement’s
moral right to fight for freedom and independence (Singh 1962: 173). In their own
particular ways, therefore, the three mainstream segments of the American field of
reception helped create and reinforce the obstacles of hyper-difference and over-
likeness.1

1 Of course, many opinion leaders and media sources were conservative and critical in some cases,
moderate and sympathetic in others. I make these analytical distinctions to give some idea of the different

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The conservative press

Conservative media and interpersonal channels started their anti-Gandhi campaign soon after the noncooperation movement began. As early as January 21, 1921, for instance, editors of the *Christian Science Monitor* already took the movement’s downfall for granted:

> The Non-Cooperation movement inaugurated by Gandhi, the well-known Indian leader, last summer, a campaign which sought to bring the Anglo-Indian Government of India to a standstill by the simple refusal of all Indians, Mohammedan or Hindu, to take part in it, has proved a failure (quoted in Singh 1962: 184).

Several months later, the same paper (July 29, 1921) asserted that the caste system made Indian independence undesirable, if not irresponsible: “The one obstacle between India and the full realization of her hopes of self-government is caste. A freely elected Parliament in India today would simply mean a Brahmin Parliament and nothing else” (quoted in Singh 1962: 187).

The most outspoken opinion leader in the conservative camp was Maurice Joachim, a former member of the Indian Civil Service. Joachim went to great lengths to highlight the dark side of Indian society and Gandhian nonviolence (Singh 1962: 170-197). In the *New York Times Current History Magazine* (July 1922: 649), for instance, he gave the following explanation for the noncooperation movement:

> Popular support for a new fad is not an uncommon thing in India. There has always been an undercurrent of ruthless criminality in the Indian masses. This is kept under control in normal times, but Gandhi’s doctrines have caused it to the surface and he has received a ready response because the majority of Indians experience an abnormal pleasurable excitement in defying law, provided they are in a crowd.

His opinion of Gandhi was no less virulent: “He thrives in this age of cant and cheap notoriety because political reputations often depend upon the persistence and vehemence with which the catch phrases and the popular cries of the movement are reiterated” (idem). Thus, both the *Christian Science Monitor* and Joachim invoked the “hyper-difference” between the Indian and American social system to make their derogatory perspectives within the mainstream field of reception, not to draw rigid lines between the conservative, moderate, and African-American press. For more on the distinction between the conservative and moderate perspective, see esp. Singh (1962); for more on the African-American media’s response to the Gandhian repertoire, see esp. Lentz (1990) and Kapur (1992).
claims and justify British propaganda (Israel 1994). The former made references to the failure of Hindu-Muslim unity and the backwardness of India's caste system, while the latter voiced blatantly Orientalist stereotypes about the Indian masses and Gandhi's leadership.

**The moderate press**

The emergence of the noncooperation movement inspired relatively progressive publications and spokespersons to celebrate Gandhi's leadership and promote the Indian nationalist view of British rule (Chatfield 1976). For example, an editorial in the *New York Times* --arguably the most influential and cosmopolitan forum in the mainstream field of reception --described Gandhi as an "ascetic...whose popularity among the Hindus appeared to have attained almost Messianic proportions" (May 17, 1921: 2, 7). A few months later, an editorial in the liberal *New Republic* (July 27, 1921: 232) noted that:

> When Mr. Gandhi calls on his followers to renounce the social order which the British *raj* has imposed on India, to give up titles and offices, to refrain from Courts, to withdraw their children from Government schools, and all to abstain from violence....he is following more closely the methods of Jesus than any leader since Saint Francis.

Another liberal journal, *The Nation* (March 22, 1922: 332), with pacifist Oswald Garrison Villard as chief editor, reacted forcefully to the Indian government's subsequent arrest of the satyagraha leader: "When an alien government arrests a national hero who, its own apologists admit, is the most saintly figure in the modern world, no further proof is required that it rests its case on naked force."

Besides devoting editorials to the topic, these publications also provided a public platform for moderate opinion leaders. Journalist Vincent Anderson, for instance, contributed the following analysis of Gandhian nonviolence:

> ...Gandhi has a new religion. It is not altogether new to the Occident. Anyone who steeps himself sympathetically in Bernard Shaw and Tolstoi...may arrive at the conclusion that the defect of modern civilization is civilization itself. This is new, however, to the India that is adopting English and becoming commercial...To Westerners Gandhi's primitive program will seem Quixotic. So it is....

> What is Gandhi's solution? We are suffering, he says. We have two alternatives, to fight actively or passively. If we fight actively we will be killed like flies...If we fight passively we at least have a chance to win. If we take a physical sword we will perish spiritually...The Indians listen to this: they like it immensely for they always have been hero-worshippers. And here is a saint and a revolutionary one....
Resistance is coming. A bloody revolution is not only likely but, I believe, inevitable (The Nation, December 21, 1921: 721; see also, Chatfield 1976: 111-112).

And W.W. Pearson (The New Republic, July 27, 1921: 240-242), who first met Gandhi in South Africa, began his study of the satyagraha leader by invoking the words of Abraham Lincoln: “We will grow strong by calmness and moderation; we will grow strong by the violence and injustice of our adversaries” (see also, Chatfield 1976: 98-105). As these examples illustrate, moderate voices also perpetuated the over-likeness and hyper-difference stereotypes—despite their positive reaction to satyagraha, respect for Gandhi, and refusal to blindly accept British propaganda. Comparing Gandhi with saintly figures in the West—with Jesus, Shaw, Tolstoy, Lincoln, and Don Quixote—and equating the Gandhian repertoire with Western forms of passive resistance reinforced over-likeness, while asserting that Indians “have always been hero-worshippers” or portraying their leader as an “ascetic” validated hyper-difference (Fox 1997: 71).

The African-American press

For the African-American minority, the emergence of the Indian independence movement provided hope that the racial color line would soon crumble—in India, the United States, and the rest of the world. African-American newspapers and journals picked up on their readers’ fascination for anti-imperialist developments, and started paying considerable attention to Gandhi and satyagraha during the noncooperation campaign. The Crisis, the widely read organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (it had a circulation of about 100,000), was the first mainstream journal to highlight the significance of Indian events for African Americans. In July 1921, it published articles on Gandhi by John Haynes Holmes, a board member of the NAACP, and Basanta Koomar Roy, an Indian scholar residing in the United States (Kapur 1992: 27. fn. 5). Over the next few years, it printed Gandhi’s open letter to the British people in India, devoted five pages to an extensive review of “Gandhi and India,” and provided a forum for scholarly discussions on satyagraha that pitted well-known defenders of nonviolent resistance against outspoken critics (such as Howard University’s E. Franklin Frazier) (The Crisis, March. 1922: 203-207; idem.
March, 1924: 213). By far the most dramatic message, though, was the one signed by Gandhi himself, which appeared in the July 1929 issue:

Let not the 12 million Negroes be ashamed of the fact that they are the grand children of the slaves. There is no dishonour in being slaves. There is dishonour in being slave owners. But let us not think of honour and dishonour in connection with the past. Let us realise that the future is with those who would be truthful, pure and loving. For, as the old wise men have said, truth ever is, untruth never was. Love alone binds and truth and love accrue only to the truly humble (225).


*Chicago Defender* columnist A.L. Jackson, for instance, argued that Gandhi “believes in the doctrine taught by the Christ and turns the other cheek twice and yet again if necessary,” and that he relied on “a religious philosophy which is capable of very definite political application” (December 24, 1921). Soon afterwards, the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* (April 1, 1922: 4) noted that “[t]he readers of the *Journal and Guide* are interested in the millions of East Indians because they are an off-color people seeking a larger measure of self-determination and participation in their governmental affairs than the British Government allows them as a part of the Empire” and criticized the British rulers for arresting Gandhi during the noncooperation movement, because “it is a difficult matter for tyrannical governments to throttle the aspiration of the oppressed to be free.”

And in 1929, Mary Church Terrell, a prominent educator and suffragist, wrote an article for the *Defender* (February 9, 1929: part 2, 2) in which she pointed to Gandhian activism in India as “a wonderful illustration of what an oppressed people can do who organize against injustice perpetrated upon them by the rich and powerful” and urged fellow African Americans to: “Just watch the people of India who have allowed the British to oppress them for years!” Like the moderate press, therefore, the mainstream African-American press generally responded positively to Gandhi’s efforts in India and asserted that his political methods were similar to the doctrine of Christ (Kapur 1992: 29-39). But, again like the moderate press, it did not interpret the Gandhian repertoire as a potential weapon for transforming the hegemonic power structure in the *American context* and, therefore, sustained the over-likeness and “positive” hyper-difference obstacles inhibiting adoption.

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II. Critical communities

The post-World War I era allowed several critical communities to emerge with the incentive, or at least the potential, to overcome the mainstream’s hegemonic stereotypes and initiate their own experiments with the Gandhian repertoire. In the religious sphere of American society, Social Gospel gained influence as the theological school of thought that emphasized not only the personal and spiritual dimension of Christian ethics, but also its social and activist aspects. Pioneered by prominent thinkers like Walter Rauschenbusch, Washington Gladden, and Charles Reynolds Brown, Social Gospel encouraged adherents to take an active stance against the destruction caused by war and to embrace international pacifism (Chatfield 1971; Miller 1992; Carter 1998; Lynch 1999). At about the same time, in the philosophical realm, American pragmatists like John Dewey and William James tried to persuade people to replace traditional values of rationalism and materialism with new notions of spontaneity and freedom. Dewey, for instance, argued that action inspired by given ends like the “Will of God” or “Kultur” is servile, while “action directed to ends to which the agent has not previously been attached inevitably carries with it a quickened and enlarged spirit” (McDermott 1981: 94). Similarly, James evaluated ideas on the basis of the quality of life they contained, not their conformity to some timeless truth (May 1959: 248; Huggins 1971: 156). Inspired by these theological and intellectual perspectives, Christian radicals, liberals, and democratic socialists recognized the wider significance of the Indian independence movement and formed a religious-pacifist critical community to learn more about the Gandhian repertoire.

The climate after World War I not only helped liberate Christian thinking and American philosophy, but also enabled African-American artists and intellectuals to develop their abilities and proclaim the birth of the “New Negro” (Huggins 1971: 6-7). Buoyed by recent developments, African-American philosopher Alain Locke argued that Africans in the United States and other parts of the world had freed themselves from the stereotypical fictions of the past, and were ready to reinvent themselves and their race. Appearing in 1925, his essay symbolized the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance, in which the New Negro represented “the advance-guard of the African peoples in their
contact with Twentieth Century civilization” (Locke 1925: 3-16; quoted in Huggins 1971: 59). Over the next few years, top-notch works of art—such as the Jazz compositions of Duke Ellington; the poems of Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Claude McKay; the paintings by Aaron Douglas; the sculptures of Richmond Barthé; and the novels of Nora Zeale Hurston—demonstrated once and for all that the African-American cultural elite was no less talented than its “Euro-American” counterpart (Franklin and Moss 1988: chapter XVIII). As part of the rise and heyday of the Harlem Renaissance, two African-American critical communities emerged that appreciated the importance of contemporary events in India. One, led by W.E.B. Du Bois, appealed to the African-American “talented tenth” and aimed at eliminating the worldwide color line through political reform. The other, led by Marcus Garvey, called on African masses within and outside of the United States to build their own empire.

But while each of these three critical communities pointed to serious social problems, none of them viewed the Gandhian repertoire as a means for fundamentally restructurizing the American system. Although they sometimes referred to Gandhi and his movement to support their critiques of domestic injustices, they did not seek to undermine the hegemonic interpretations of satyagraha and initiate a Gandhian social movement to challenge dominant authorities in the United States. Thus, religious pacifists and African-American intellectuals retained such close ties to the mainstream field of reception that they were unable (or unwilling) to eliminate the over-likeness and hyper-difference stereotypes. Both critical communities, for instance, received much of their information about the diffusion item from mainstream journals—the former from The Nation, the latter from The Crisis. Both, moreover, relied on a “moderate” repertoire of contention that called for legal and political changes within the existing power structure. The third critical community, led by Garvey, did distance itself from mainstream society, but it was too short-lived and relied too much on an “extremist” repertoire of contention to play a major role. And even the fourth critical community of this period—consisting of Indian exiles—was too focused on winning mainstream support for their compatriots to stimulate application in the United States. Clearly, therefore, the critical communities’ priorities and relationships to mainstream society
were part of the reason for why initial reception did not lead to adoption of the Gandhian repertoire during the 1920s.

**Religious pacifists**

In 1921, prominent pacifist John Haynes Holmes held a sermon entitled “Who Is the Greatest Man in the World Today?” in his Community Church of New York. To his congregation’s surprise, he chose the relatively unknown Gandhi and highlighted the similarities between the Indian leader and Jesus Christ: “[W]hen I think of Gandhi, I think of Jesus Christ. He lives his life; he speaks his word; he suffers, strives and will some day nobly die for his kingdom upon earth” (Chatfield 1976: 599-621). Soon after his address on April 10, Holmes published it in *Unity*, the Christian weekly he edited, instigating a flood of articles on Gandhi’s role in the Indian independence movement by fellow religious pacifists (Watson 1989). But while Holmes’s words helped transform the Gandhian repertoire from an exotic subject to a serious issue, they also perpetuated the over-likeness barrier (Harrington, n.d.: 2; Voss 1964: 603-606).

Holmes was one of the founders of the American Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), at the time the central pacifist organization in the United States. FOR started in Europe soon after World War I broke out and spread across the Atlantic Ocean in 1915, when British Quaker Henry Hodgin (one of the originators) organized a conference for progressive American Protestants and persuaded them to follow their European counterparts (Pagnucco and McCarthy 1999: 238-239). In addition to Holmes, some of the early members of the American FOR included: Oswald Garrison Villard, grandson of abolitionist William Garrison, editor of *The Nation*, and director of the NAACP; Roger Baldwin, initiator of Civic League and American Union, the precursors of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU); Norman Thomas, a young Presbyterian minister (and soon afterwards the Socialist Party leader); Reinhold Niebuhr, the famous theologian; Harry Emerson Fosdick, the popular Social Gospel pastor; Rufus Jones, the Quaker mystic and founder of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC); Howard Thurman, the African-American mystic and theologian; Devere Allen, the pacifist editor and writer; Kirby Page, the pacifist historian and secretary of YMCA’s Sherwood Eddy; John Nevin Sayer, a clergyman in New York (and later executive secretary of FOR as
well as the International Fellowship of Reconciliation); and A.J. Muste, the clergyman of the Dutch Reformed Church, who later became known as “Mr. Pacifist.” Besides their opposition to war and belief in pacifism, these influential FOR members shared several characteristics: they were white (except for Thurman), college educated, liberal, ecumenical, Protestant or Quaker, sympathetic to Christian socialism, and active in other social causes like women’s suffrage or the labor movement (Chatfield 1971: 30-31; Chatfield 1999). Moreover, they not only belonged to FOR, but also to other important networks within this critical community, such as the AFSC, the War Resisters League (WRL), the Fellowship of Youth for Peace, the Emergency Peace Campaign, the National Peace Conference, the National Council for Prevention of War, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, the Women’s Peace Society, the Women’s Peace Union, the Committee on Militarism in Education, and the Pacifist Action Committee (Chatfield 1971: 103, 106; Chatfield 1999: 283-288; DeBenedetti 1978).

Prior to World War I, most Christian pacifists in the United States protested war through some form of nonresistance, which acknowledged that states had to engage in war but urged individuals to refrain from force in their own lives. FOR and affiliated groups, however, opposed this dualistic value system and argued that true Christians not only avoided, but also actively tried to overcome evil by bearing individual witness. FOR’s original statement of purpose proclaimed that the:

...distinctive note of the Fellowship is its repudiation of war and commitment to a way of life creative of brotherhood....Membership implies such a dedication to the practice of the principle of love as the inevitable law of personal relationships and the transforming power of human life that any use or countenance of the war method by those who belong is impossible (in Pagnucco and McCarthy 1999: 239).

To promote and disseminate this collective identity, the religious-pacifist critical community held annual conferences and founded the World Tomorrow, a journal that highlighted the need for pacifism in “international, industrial, and interracial relations” (Chatfield 1971: 40). During the 1920s, FOR, the World Tomorrow, and the international peace movement grew considerably in size and stature as an increasing number of Americans focused on the destructive rather than the heroic side of war.

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1 The AFSC was formed in 1917 as a humanitarian agency promoting alternatives to violence, while the WRL was established in 1924 as the secular offspring of the FOR.
The religious-pacifist critical community adopted several strategies to spread its values and achieve its political goals. Groups emphasizing the need to educate the American public on international affairs focused on disseminating relevant information through the press, speeches, sermons, articles, books, and radio programs (Harrington, n.d.: 5). Groups seeking to influence governmental decision-making—particularly in the areas of international agreements and military expenditure—preferred legal action in the courts and lobbying within the political system. Despite such differences in approach, though, critical community members generally agreed that both close ties with mainstream society (e.g., by contributing regularly to publications like *The Nation*, the *New Republic*, and the *New York Times*) and courageous individual action were necessary to achieve desired social, political, cultural, and economic changes (Chatfield 1971).

Given its collective identity and strategies, this critical community’s interest in the Gandhian repertoire was not surprising. For people like Holmes, Gandhi’s efforts in India confirmed that following the way of Jesus Christ was not only morally right in the private sphere, but could also be effective in the social and political arenas (Cortright 1997). Inspired by the growing fascination for Gandhi and nonviolent resistance in the United States, the *World Tomorrow* devoted an entire issue to the topic in December, 1924, with an introduction by Holmes himself and articles by other supporters of Indian independence such as E. Stanley Jones, C.F. Andrews, Sarojini Naidu, T.H.Z. Rezmie, and Taraknath Das. And in 1929, Kirby Page accompanied Sherwood Eddy to India, met with Gandhi, and wrote *Mahatma Gandhi and His Significance* (1930) on the basis of his talks and experiences (Chatfield 1971: 203-204). But while American religious pacifists admired Gandhi and recognized the power of nonviolent direct action in India, they continued to reproduce the over-likeness stereotype and apply methods of “appeal” rather than experiment with the Gandhian repertoire’s more militant action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language in their own environment.

**Du Bois and the African-American talented tenth**

White pacifists were not the only receivers of the Gandhian repertoire: African-American intellectuals were equally interested in the diffusion item—although for different reasons. The key figure in this critical community was W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the founders of the
NAACP and chief editor of *The Crisis*. In his eyes, the Indian independence movement was part of a worldwide struggle against the color line and, as such, closely linked to African-American efforts to eliminate racial segregation in the United States (*The Crisis*, May 1921: 27; idem, July 1921: 124-125). Du Bois’s opposition to segregation had started at the end of the nineteenth century, in an era when Booker T. Washington’s view that African Americans should accommodate white leaders (especially in the South) by accepting social separation in exchange for economic opportunity still predominated.

Contrary to Washington, Du Bois felt that the African-American minority could not improve its material situation without civic and political equality, and in 1905 he founded the Niagara Movement to achieve “the incorporation of African-Americans into a reconstructed American democracy in which the color line had been abolished” (Fredrickson 1995: 106-107). This organization consisted exclusively of highly educated members of the African-American elite, who agreed with Du Bois that the “talented tenth”—“the men born to rule, born to think, born to contrive, born to persuade”—would have to lead the African-American battle for civil rights (Du Bois in Broderick and Meier 1965: 40-48). In 1909, most Niagara Movement participants joined the newly established NAACP and, over the next twenty-five years or so, continued to support Du Bois’s elitist perspective of African-American advancement and his interpretations of the Gandhian campaigns in India.

In line with a collective identity based on the “talented tenth,” Du Bois’s critical community developed strategies seeking political reform through “appeals” to the mainstream public, the media, the courts, and government. Throughout the 1920s, it adopted the action program that Du Bois had previously outlined in *The Crisis*:

First we must fight obstructions; by continual and increasing effort we must first make American courts either build up a body of decisions which will protect the plain legal rights of American citizens or else make them tear down the civil and political rights of all citizens in order to oppress a few....We must secondly seek in legislature and congress remedial legislation; national aid to public school education, the removal of all legal discriminations based simply on race and color....Third the human contact of human beings must be increased; the policy which brings into sympathetic touch and understanding, men and women, rich and poor, capitalist and laborer.

Du Bois and other African-American intellectuals regularly contributed to mainstream African-American newspapers and journals such as the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *New York Amsterdam News*, the *A.M.E. Church Review*, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, the *Atlanta Daily World*, the *Chicago Defender*, and the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*. And, much less frequently, they also wrote articles for mainstream “white” publications such as *The Nation*, the *New Republic*, and the *New York Times*.
Asiatic and European must bring into closer contact and mutual knowledge the white and black people of this land....Fourth only the publication of truth repeatedly and incisively and uncompromisingly can secure that change in public opinion which will correct these awful lies....The press should be utilized—the 400 Negro weeklies, the great dailies and eventually the magazines...(April 1915: 310-312; in Brodbeck and Meier 1965: 57-58).

Besides emphasizing legal agitation, lobbying, and public opinion, Du Bois and his colleagues also focused on "constructive" efforts such as economic cooperation, promotion of art and literature, political training, basic and higher education, and support of civil rights organizations like NAACP and the National Urban League (NUL) (idem: 58-60). In addition to domestic protest against racial segregation, moreover, this critical community also participated in an international Pan-African struggle of the "darker races" versus Western imperialism (Fredrickson 1995: 151).

Guided by their collective identity and basic strategies, members of Du Bois’s critical community regarded Gandhi as an admirable "colored" leader and satyagraha as an effective weapon in the confrontation with British supremacy. Yet they also fell in the over-likeness and "positive" hyper-difference traps laid by opinion leaders and media sources in the mainstream field of reception. Prominent figures like Reverdy Ransom, a bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and participant in the Niagara Movement, referred to Gandhi as an "Indian Messiah and Saint" and hoped that successful Gandhian protest in India would demonstrate to African Americans that Christian nonviolence was the ideal means for gaining freedom in the United States (A.M.E. Church Review, October 1921: 87-88). Du Bois, in contrast, believed that satyagraha could only succeed in a spiritualistic and traditional country like India, not in a materialistic and modern country like the United States. He argued that while African Americans should draw hope and strength from Gandhi’s efforts, they should continue to support the NAACP and its gradualist means for achieving social justice at home. Despite its fascination for Gandhi and Indian nationalism, therefore, this critical community did not adopt the Gandhian repertoire’s characteristic action forms, organizational forms, or discursive language during the 1920s.

Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association
The "talented tenth" was not the only African-American group that recognized the significance of the Gandhian repertoire after World War I. Working-class members of the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) frequently received information about Gandhi and Indian nationalism from their populist leader Marcus Garvey or his journal *The Negro World*. On August 1, 1920, during his address at the UNIA's first international convention in New York, for instance, Garvey pleaded for solidarity among all people of color and urged the audience to follow the example of Indian anti-imperialism (Hill 1983, MGUNIA II: 340). In the summer of 1921, at the height of the noncooperation movement in India, he sent the following cable message to Gandhi:

"Please accept best wishes of 400,000,000 Negroes through us their representatives, for the speedy emancipation of India from the thrall of foreign oppression. You may depend on us for whatsoever help we can give" (idem, MGUNIA III: 587). And in March 1922, after Gandhi’s arrest, Garvey expressed admiration for the Indian leader’s career in the *Negro World* and once again pledged “the support of all the Negroes of the world” to the cause of Indian independence (idem, MGUNIA IV: 568). While Du Bois’s sophisticated views on the diffusion item only reached the upper echelons of the African-American community, Garvey’s plain words captured the attention of the African-American masses.

After growing up in Jamaica, Garvey came to New York in 1916 to promote his vision of an independent empire for Africans throughout the world, of an “Africa for the Africans.” During the next few years, he established the UNIA and *Negro World* as the institutional infrastructure for spreading his views, created the Black Star Steamship Line to facilitate travel between the United States and Africa, and announced:

Negroes have got to win their freedom just as the Russians and the Japanese have done—by revolution and bloody fighting. Negroes in the United States cannot do this. They would be hopelessly outnumbered and it would be foolish to attempt it. But in Africa, where there are over four hundred million Negroes, we can make the white man eat his salt (Hill, MGUNIA I: 377, quoted in Fredrickson 1995: 155).

Based on this message, his organization subsequently grew to more than half a million members and thirty-eight chapters, while hundreds of thousands of Africans across the globe read its journal (Stein 1986: 38-88; Fredrickson 1995: 154). The American government and the African-American elite felt threatened by Garvey’s popularity and
UNIA’s spectacular growth, though, and initiated a propaganda campaign against them. In the end, this hostile climate would bring down Garvey and his critical community. In 1923 a court found him guilty of mail fraud and financial improprieties at the Black Star company, sentencing him to jail in 1925. Upon his release in 1927, the American government immediately deported him to Jamaica and by 1930 UNIA was no longer a significant force within the African-American community (Fredrickson 1995: 160).

During its brief heyday, Garvey’s critical community presented itself as an alternative to the programs of African-American leaders like Du Bois and organizations like the NAACP. Contrary to the African-American elite, which sought integration and equality inside the United States, Garvey asserted that the African-American masses wanted to improve the conditions of their race and establish their own country (and, eventually, empire) in Africa:

We believe the white race should uphold its race pride and perpetuate itself, and that the black race should do likewise. We believe that there is room enough in the world for the various race groups to grow and develop by themselves without seeking to destroy the Creator’s plan by the constant introduction of mongrel types…Let the Negro have a country of his own. Help him to return to his original home, Africa, and there give him the opportunity to climb from the lowest to the highest positions in a state of his own (Garvey in Broderick and Meier 1965: 86-87).

The rank and file participants in the UNIA—primarily skilled workers and small business owners in the urban ghettos—regarded Africa as a symbol of hope for a brighter future in which African ancestry was a source of pride and success rather than shame and submission (Fredrickson 1995: 158-160). Their collective identity, therefore, emphasized physical and geographical separation from white Americans, not assimilation into (or reform of) the existing social and political system.

Consequently, this critical community’s long-term strategies focused primarily on emigration instead of integration. The only way to avoid race riots like those in 1919, it claimed, was to create a nation and government in Africa for all the African people in the world (Broderick and Meier 1965: 84). As Garvey reminded his supporters in 1923:

This plan when properly undertaken and prosecuted will solve the race problem in America in fifty years. Africa affords a wonderful opportunity at the present time for colonization by the Negroes of the Western world. There is Liberia, already established as an independent Negro government. Let white America assist Afro-Americans to go there and help develop the country. Then, there are the late German colonies; let white sentiment force England and France to turn them over to the American and West Indian Negroes who fought for the Allies in the World’s
War. Then, France, England and Belgium owe American billions of dollars which they claim they cannot afford to repay immediately. Let them compromise by turning over Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast on the West Coast of Africa and add them to Liberia and help make Liberia a state worthy of her history (idem: 88-89).

In the meantime, however, UNIA members needed to work toward achieving the other aims stipulated in the organization’s original constitution:

To establish a Universal Confraternity among the race; to promote the spirit of pride and love; to reclaim the fallen; to administer to and assist the needy; to assist in civilizing the backward tribes of Africa; to assist in the development of Independent Negro Nations and Communities;... to establish Commissions or Agencies in the principal countries and cities of the world for the representation of all Negroes; to promote a conscientious Spiritual worship among the native tribes of Africa; to establish Universities, Colleges, Academies and Schools for the racial education and culture of the people; to work for better conditions among Negroes everywhere (idem: 86).

Thus, while the UNIA’s strategies were radical in seeking autonomous African territory for the world’s African diaspora, they were also quite conservative. They actually promoted racial segregation within the United States rather than trying to transform the existing American power structure.

For Garvey, Gandhi was a kindred soul who wanted to establish an “India for the Indians,” just as he wanted to establish an “Africa for the Africans.” Similarly, he and his supporters admired Gandhi’s nonviolent methods because they contributed positively to the Indian struggle against British rule, not because they were applicable in the United States (Kapur 1992: 16-23). As the UNIA leader told his audience in 1922:

You are well acquainted with the work of Gandhi... For twenty-five years Gandhi has been agitating the cause of his countrymen. Within the last three years he became very active. He organized a movement that has swept the entire country of India—a movement that has united the different [castes] of India that have been apart for centuries. The British people are now feeling the pressure of Gandhi’s propaganda....Leadership means sacrifice; leadership means martyrdom. Hundreds of thousands of men as leaders have died in the past for the freedom of their country—the emancipation of their respective peoples—and we will expect nothing else from Gandhi but that self-sacrifice and martyrdom will ultimately free his country and his countrymen (Hill 1983, MGL UNIA IV: 567).

While members of Garvey’s critical community enthusiastically endorsed Gandhi and his achievements in India, they created their own forms of over-likeness and “positive” hyper-difference, and did not seriously consider implementing the Gandhian repertoire’s specific action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language in the American context.

87
Indian exiles

The final critical community contributing to the Gandhian repertoire's initial diffusion consisted of Indian nationalists who fled to the United States between 1919 and 1921 to avoid the implications of the Rowlatt legislation. While these Indian exiles were not Gandhians at first, they became loyal supporters of satyagraha during the Rowlatt campaign and particularly the noncooperation movement. As the words of one expatriate indicate, though, Gandhi's nonviolent direct action was no less foreign to them than to their American hosts:

It was left to this Hindu "saint," the leader of the non-cooperation movement in India in the twentieth century, to clothe the ancient doctrine, to emphasize its positive character, and to put it firmly on the plane of practical achievement...And what does it all mean? Simply that refusal to help the ruling class to rule is to take the place of mobilization; love is to take the place of bitterness and ill-will...It is fighting by Christ's way rather than Caesar's (Reznie in Watson 1989: 281, 284).

Nevertheless, as representatives of India, they played an important role in promoting a positive image of the Gandhian repertoire in the United States (Muzumdar 1962, 1986; Watson 1989; Israel 1994: 277-308; Kapur 1992: 14-23).

This generation of Indian exiles followed in the footsteps of an illustrious predecessor, Lala Lajpat Rai, who lived in New York from 1914 until 1920 to circumvent imprisonment in India. During his stay, Rai set up the India Home Rule League of America, edited its journal Young India, forged ties with progressive American intellectuals, and informed the American public about Indian events and history (Israel 1994: 279; Chand 1978: 290-317). After 1920, people like Syed Hossain, Taraknath Das, Anup Singh, Dhangopal Mukerji, Jag Jit Singh, T.H.K. Reznie, Maneck Anklesaria, Hari Govil, and especially Haridas Muzumdar took advantage of Rai's efforts and networks to found organizations such as the National Committee for India's Independence (with a journal named The Voice of India), the Young India Association, the India Society of America, and the India League of America. They also arranged tours by visitors from India, gave speeches at all kinds of associations and institutions, expanded the number and range of connections, contributed essays about India to the American press, and wrote books on Gandhi and Indian nationalism (Muzumdar 1962).
What united this disparate group of political refugees was a shared interest in propagating Indian independence and a mutual belief that favorable American public opinion would exert indirect pressure on the British Empire. With such a tenuous and loose collective identity, this critical community opted for strategies that promoted its cause without posing a threat to authorities in the host country. Instead of criticizing the hegemonic views of the Gandhian repertoire, they cautiously tried to educate the American public about the Indian independence movement, defuse distorting British propaganda in the American press, win the sympathy of American politicians, and establish friendly contacts with progressive American intellectuals (Kapur 1992: 15; Israel 1994). While they fervently supported the satyagraha campaigns in their home country, therefore, they neither helped American critical communities transcend the over-likeness and "positive" hyper-difference barriers nor encouraged them to employ the Gandhian repertoire's action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language to fight injustice in the United States—at least not during these years.

III. Diffusion mechanisms

The four critical communities were capable of overcoming the hyper-difference and over-likeness obstacles predominating in the mainstream field of reception. Yet they failed to take advantage of this potential and actually reinforced the stereotypical interpretations of the Gandhian repertoire rather than replacing them. To get a more complete picture of how these critical communities initiated the transnational diffusion process and why they did not contribute to adoption during the 1920s, this section focuses on the brokerage and collective appropriation mechanisms. Religious pacifists, African-American intellectuals, Garvey supporters, and Indian exiles helped spread information about the diffusion item by constructing multiple networks between India and the United States, and among themselves. But since the transnational and domestic ties they created were not aimed at applying the Gandhian repertoire in the American context, they invoked it to confirm existing means and ends rather than to transform their respective collective identities and strategies.
Transnational brokerage

Inspired by the mainstream media's coverage of Gandhi and events in India, American receivers began forging interpersonal and interorganizational relationships with Indian nationalists during the 1920s. The most obvious stimulus for transnational brokerage was the critical community with highly knowledgeable and articulate Indian exiles. Muzumdar, for example, established friendships with a number of religious pacifists—including Devere Allen, Blanche Watson, Norman Thomas, and especially John Haynes Holmes—while Govil contributed articles on Gandhi to religious-pacifist journals (Muzumdar 1932: xi; Muzumdar 1962: 15-16; Govil, Unity, September 28, 1922; Govil and Muzumdar, World Tomorrow, March 1922). Rai, moreover, remained close to Du Bois following his return to India (Chand 1978: 298-314). After the police beat the Indian nationalist to death in 1928, the African-American scholar wrote:

It was my good fortune to know Lala Lajpat Rai while he was in exile in America during the great War....I hope that the memory of Lala Lajpat Rai will be kept green in India, and that out of the blood of his martyrdom very soon a free colored nation will arise" (The Crisis, January 1929: 5).

And Garvey, on his part, frequently invited Muzumdar and Anup Singh to speak about the Indian independence movement at UNIA meetings, and published an article by the former in the Negro World (April 1922; Watson 1989: 267-268). These contacts were mutually beneficial: they not only supplied American critical community members with new information, but also helped Indian exiles gain access to the mainstream American media.

The presence of exiles also encouraged Gandhi's friends and colleagues to go to the United States and hold lectures promoting Indian independence. In 1929, Sarojini Naidu, the famous author and politician, came for a tour across the country and met with Roger Baldwin, the liberal pacifist who was involved in the League Against Imperialism at the time (Israel 1994: 301). That same year, C.F. Andrews first traveled from India to New York, where he encountered Du Bois, and then went down South to stay at Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute (Tinker 1979: 229). The Crisis (August 1929: 271, 284) printed one of Andrews' addresses about segregation in which he remarked that Gandhi had been excluded from a Christian church in South Africa and argued that this contradicted Jesus Christ's call for racial equality. Other temporary Indian guests
included Madeleine Slade (Gandhi’s loyal British assistant), V.J. Patel, Bhicoo Batalivala, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, and Vijaylakshmi Pandit (Muzumdar 1962: 11-12). Each of these visits helped familiarize American audiences with Gandhi’s campaigns and facilitated the propaganda efforts of Indian exiles.

Except for Kirby Page and Sherwood Eddy at the end of the decade, few Americans took the boat to India for a face-to-face meeting with Gandhi. For most critical community members during the 1920s, correspondence was the only direct form of communication with the satyagraha leader. Holmes, for example, began exchanging letters with Gandhi in January 1926, and wrote at least eight more over the next four years (Reddy 1998: 161-170). E. Stanley Jones, Kirby Page, A.J. Muste, Oswald Garrison Villard, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Amy Garvey (Marcus Garvey’s wife) also conversed with him through personal writings (in Reddy 1998; see also, Narasimhaiah 1969). Indirectly, though, FOR leaders received regular updates from IFOR ambassadors like Muriei Lester, who did stay in personal contact with Gandhi and his associates (Anderson 1997: 41).

Although the number of transnational ties constructed by critical communities was impressive, they only solidified the mainstream field of reception’s dichotomous views of the Gandhian repertoire and thus obstructed adoption. Indian exiles presented an overly optimistic, and equally one-sided, image of their country to compensate for British propaganda in the United States. Rather than destroying the hyper-difference stereotype of India, they merely emphasized its good aspects. While this “positive” version of Orientalism was an effective antidote to the “negative” version highlighted by the British and conservatives, it also led Du Bois, Garvey, and their followers to believe that satyagraha was only applicable in a spiritualistic Eastern country like India, not in a rationalistic Western country like the United States (Fox 1989). Neither a handful of visitors from India nor a few lines exchanged with Gandhi could prevent this disabling perspective within the two African-American critical communities. Religious pacifists, in contrast, interpreted messages received through transnational networks as validating the universal effectiveness of Christian nonviolence. As discussed earlier, from their point of view Gandhi was a contemporary messiah, while his method closely resembled the love ethic of Jesus Christ. Despite good intentions, exaggerating the likeness between
Christian nonviolence and the Gandhian repertoire was no less disabling for the transnational diffusion process than essentializing the gap between Indian and American culture.

**Domestic brokerage**

During the 1920s, links among the three American critical communities were one-sided, fragile, or non-existent. On the one hand, several religious pacifists were involved in the same organizations as Du Bois and likeminded African-American intellectuals. Holmes was a co-founder and board member of the NAACP and contributed regularly to the *Crisis*, while long-time pacifist and *The Nation* editor Oswald Garrison Villard was a co-founder and president of the same association. People like Roger Baldwin, L. Hollingsworth Wood, George Collins, and Claud Nelson were also actively involved in peace as well as civil rights efforts (Chatfield 1971: 113, table 2; Franklin and Moss 1988: 289). On the other hand, however, no African-American members of Du Bois’s critical community reciprocated this relationship by serving on the boards of FOR or other religious-pacifist organizations.

Both African-American critical communities, moreover, relied too heavily on their respective leaders. In the first place, the critical community built around Du Bois only existed because of the latter’s personal interest in Gandhi and Indian nationalism. If he shifted his attention to other issues, his network of receivers would quickly dissipate. And during its short lifespan, Garvey’s critical community also depended almost exclusively on its figurehead’s charisma and opinions. His personal fate consequently determined UNIA’s fate, while his outlandish antics and rhetoric precluded serious cooperation with other American critical communities (Fredrickson 1995: 154). In any case, the hierarchical and top-heavy structure of these two critical communities limited their contribution to brokerage within the United States as well as their durability.

Although the religious-pacifist critical community was more balanced and resilient, it also suffered from relational weaknesses during the 1920s. As I alluded to before, it relied too strongly on mainstream communication channels such as Villard’s *The Nation*, the *New Republic*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *New York Times* for influencing national public opinion and national power holders. Whereas these liberal
publications helped create widespread sympathy for the Gandhian repertoire and pacifism in general, they could not deviate too far from American "common sense." or promote militant forms of nonviolent direct action in the American context, without losing access to the political and social elite (Chatfield 1971: 57). Religious pacifists' mainstream orientation thus produced a blind spot for the diffusion item's radical implications and innovative characteristics. Furthermore, while this critical community was eager to build coalitions with other progressive networks in the United States, it tended to avoid long-term projects and confrontational organizations (idem: 21). During these years, religious pacifists mostly worked with individuals and groups that preferred brief publicity campaigns instead of sustained contentious politics.

Overall, the lack of strong and reciprocal links among American critical communities further inhibited their ability to overcome the hyper-difference and over-likeness obstacles. Although religious pacifists recognized the limitations of "positive" Orientalism, they were not in a position to criticize African-American receivers who employed such arguments. Similarly, African-American receivers who understood that the Gandhian repertoire was more than Christian nonviolence were unable to help religious pacifists conquer their bias. Without constructive dialogue between them, the critical communities of this decade failed to push the transnational diffusion process beyond the mainstream field of reception—despite the high number and density of domestic networks supporting Gandhi's campaigns in India.

(Lack of) collective appropriation
Inferior brokerage and perpetuation of the hyper-difference and over-likeness stereotypes seriously undermined the prospects for collective appropriation. Religious pacifists invoked the diffusion item to justify familiar action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language based on the Christian imperative to bear individual witness rather than the Gandhian emphasis on confrontational collective protest. Du Bois and his colleagues argued that since satyagraha could only work in an Oriental country like India, the African-American community should continue to support the NAACP’s moderate methods for achieving first-class citizenship and social reform within the American system: legal agitation, publicity, and lobbying. Garvey and his supporters promoted
Gandhi’s struggle against the British Empire despite the fact that their extremist methods, institutions, and message—emigration to Africa and “bloody revolution” if possible, capitalist enterprises and an imperial infrastructure, and openly separatist rhetoric, respectively—could hardly have been less Gandhian. And finally, the Indian exiles only promoted the Gandhian repertoire to win public support for the Indian independence movement, not to encourage nonviolent direct action in the United States. Such counterproductive collective appropriation, in turn, further limited the contribution of brokerage.

Thus, during the 1920s, the effects of the transnational diffusion mechanisms were complex and ambiguous. The critical communities’ own activation of brokerage and collective appropriation enabled them to set the Gandhian repertoire’s transnational diffusion in motion. At the same time, however, the way the critical communities activated brokerage and collective appropriation also constrained their ability to adopt the Gandhian repertoire in the American context. If this particular case of transnational diffusion had continued along the pathway entered during these years, it would have stranded at the level of awareness and infatuation instead of proceeding to the level of practical experimentation and actual implementation.