Crossing the great divide: the Gandhian repertoire's transnational diffusion to the American civil rights movement
Taudin Chabot, S.K.

Citation for published version (APA):
Chapter four

DISLOCATION OF THE GANDHIAN REPERTOIRE
1930-1939

For most Americans it was the Salt March that really caught their imagination. While events in the early 1920s generated interest among urban and cosmopolitan intellectuals, the satyagraha campaign of 1930 and 1931 inspired *Time* magazine to declare Gandhi “Man of the Year” and put his face on the cover. Such publicity allowed books about Indian nationalism and its leader to reach much wider and more sympathetic audiences than before: led the Columbia Broadcasting Company of America to invite Gandhi for a national radio address (Muzumdar 1932: 165-170); and even encouraged Senator John J. Blaine of Wisconsin to (unsuccessfully) move two resolutions in Congress, calling for official recognition of Indian independence and formal disapproval of British repression in India (Jha 1973: 133-135, 273-276; Singh 1962: 364-365).

Clearly, information on the diffusion item received by the American public was more voluminous, dramatic, and direct than during the previous decade.

The Salt March occurred at a time when the United States and other Western countries were suffering from the Great Depression. Following the stock market crash in October 1929, thousands of industrial laborers lost their jobs, while countless farmers had to subsist on starvation wages. The numerous American victims of the Great Depression soon realized that incumbent leaders or institutions were unable to alleviate poverty and in 1932 the American population overwhelmingly voted for the “New Deal” promised by Franklin D. Roosevelt. After taking office in 1933, president Roosevelt immediately sent new initiatives to Congress aimed at revamping the national economy and reducing material hardship—which would later result in legislation like the National Industrial Recovery Act, the Social Security Act, the Tennessee Valley Project, and the Agricultural Adjustment Act—but the Supreme Court initially blocked his proposals and ruled in...

---

1. Popular books on Indian nationalism included: C. F. Andrews’s *Mahatma Gandhi’s Ideas Including Selections from His Writings* (1930) and *Mahatma Gandhi: His Own Story* (1930), Kirby Page’s *Is Gandhi the Greatest Man of the Age* (1930), Joseph Washington Hall’s *Eminent Asians: Six Great Personalities of the New East* (1930), William James Durant’s *The Case for India* (1930), and Haridas Muzumdar’s *Gandhi Versus the Empire* (1932).
favor of corporate interests. In response to the political stalemate in Washington, D.C.,
industrial workers subsequently organized strikes and sit-downs throughout the country
and revitalized the American labor movement (Foner 1947; Fine 1969; Bernstein 1971;
Brooks 1971; Lynd 1973; Piven and Cloward 1979; chapter 3). Finally, after Roosevelt’s
reelection and another round of protest in 1936, the Supreme Court accepted the National
Labor Relations Act (also known as the Wagner Act), opening the door for
implementation of the New Deal program. Greater federal involvement in the social,
economic, cultural, and political arena not only altered relations between capitalist
employers and the working class, but also stimulated other repressed groups in the United
States to take matters into their own hands (Egerton 1994; Franklin and Moss 1988;

By altering the domestic power structure, the Great Depression and the New Deal
strongly affected the context for receivers of the diffusion item. Previously, satyagraha
had appeared as an exotic concept that inspired admiration and respect among some
Americans, but did not encourage them to fundamentally change their ways. With the
economic system in disarray and socialism (and later fascism) on the rise, however, direct
action and mass insurgency no longer seemed impossible or necessarily undesirable—
even to respectable opinion leaders and elitist critical community members. If a
confrontational social movement was inevitable, some progressive observers argued, then
the Gandhian repertoire would certainly be a less destructive means for achieving
structural change than the methods prescribed by Marxism (or Nazism, for that matter).
Although activist groups did not initiate deliberate experiments with the Gandhian
repertoire during this decade, they took the prospect of applying it outside of India more
seriously than ever before.

This chapter analyzes how, during the 1930s, the Gandhian repertoire slowly
seeped through the perceptual barriers impeding its transnational diffusion to the United
States, enabling American receivers to consider—but not yet test—satyagraha’s practical
relevance beyond its original setting. First, I describe the mainstream field of reception’s
responses to the Salt March campaign and demonstrate that these continued to waver
between hyper-difference and over-likeness. Then, I depict the collective identities and
strategies of the three critical communities that were able to overcome the diffusion
obstacles, and argue that they contributed vitally to the Gandhian repertoire's "dislocation" from the Indian environment. And finally, I illustrate how brokerage and collective appropriation during these years helped move transnational diffusion in a more promising direction than before—a direction that made eventual adoption and implementation appear feasible, if not likely.

I. Mainstream field of reception

After the Salt March started, Gandhi, satyagraha, and the Indian independence movement became hot topics in the mass media, stimulating sympathizers as well as critics in the mainstream field of reception to contribute their perspectives on a regular basis. The newsworthiness of these subjects, moreover, encouraged several newspapers to station top journalists in India and publish their eyewitness accounts, providing interested readers in the United States with almost instantaneous access to the momentous events taking place. Despite the higher intensity and volume of news coming from India, though, the mainstream media and its representatives continued to present hegemonic and stereotypical views of the diffusion item—just like during the 1920s. Although reports and opinion pieces responded to the latest developments, the conservative press still tended to focus on the "negative" dimension of hyper-difference between India and the United States, while the moderate and African-American press still interpreted matters from a "positive" hyper-difference and/or over-likeness perspective.

The conservative press

In general, critical publications and journalists argued that Gandhi's most recent campaign was no more likely to succeed than previous ones, and that British authorities needed to act strongly to prevent further unrest among the Indian people. Predictably, before the Salt March had even started, the Christian Science Monitor (March 10, 1930) noted that:

Mahatma Gandhi is once more advocating non-violent civil disobedience in India. This is done in the face of disasters which, by his own admission, befell India during his previous attempt to apply this policy... However, Gandhi and the extremist politicians who work with him are apparently convinced that the weapon which failed before can succeed now.
The Philadelphia Inquirer (March 14, 1930) was more strident and repeated the old mantra that, like children, Indians only responded to coercion, by violent means if necessary:

The Mahatma’s doctrine of “civil disobedience” is in effect rebellion, and the probabilities are that the demonstrations of his followers will eventually have to be put down by force. It may be wise for the authorities to refrain from acting until the last possible moment, lest they unleash passions hard to control. But the oriental is not to be controlled by persuasion: the only argument that appeals to him is the strong hand.

Throughout the Salt march campaign, publications like the Richmond Times-Dispatch and Commonweal similarly accentuated the dangerous implications of Gandhian nonviolence and the backwardness of Indian society (Singh 1962: 297-298). Particularly after 1935, however, the conservative press quickly lost interest in the diffusion item: its representatives assumed that, with the emergence of the young Nehru as India’s new leader, satyagraha had permanently given way to more familiar forms of socialism and power politics (Jha 1973: 265-266).

The moderate press

In the first half of the 1930s, most American readers (and listeners) disagreed with the conservative press and eagerly followed events in India. Webb Miller’s heart-wrenching description of the raids on the Dharsana Salt Depot in the New York Evening Telegram of May 21, 1930 (part of which I cited in chapter two) later appeared in about 1,350 newspapers across the world and became the most widely distributed text on Gandhian nonviolent action during the Indian independence movement (Chatfield 1976: 38; Jha 1973: 114-116). Besides Miller, foreign correspondents Negley Farson of the Chicago Daily News and Charles Dailey of the Chicago Tribune also helped make news coverage of the Salt March campaign more graphic and captivating than ever before (Jha 1973: 114-117). Other moderate newspapers and magazines were equally on top of this story and assigned their best journalists—or invited the most qualified opinion leaders—to write articles about it (idem: 108-114). Nevertheless, the progressive mainstream media reproduced the same kinds of stereotypes as during the 1920s and refused to suggest or endorse application of the Gandhian repertoire in the United States.
The *Springfield Daily Republican* (March 14, 1930), for instance, overemphasized Gandhi’s debt to Tolstoy, his Western teacher, and the similarity between the Salt March and the Boston Tea Party: “Gandhi’s challenge to the salt monopoly,” it predicted, “may be as notable an incident as Boston’s short way with tea.” The *Review of Reviews* (June 30, 1930: 34-38), in contrast, published a story by Newton Phelps Stokes II—a recent Yale graduate who had participated in the Salt March—that exemplified the “positive” hyper-difference perspective. Stokes wrote that, during an interview, he had asked Gandhi “to what extent he thought his program was applicable in the West,” to which the latter had answered: “In entirety” (also in Chatfield 1976: 243-244). In the young American’s eyes, however, the Indian population was uniquely prepared for satyagraha:

The Indians certainly seem well fitted for a nonviolent war. One sees this in the tactics of baggage coolies when not satisfied with a tip. They never swear and shout like the Chinese, but just wait around meekly for several minutes murmuring supplications (quoted in idem: 245).

Stokes obviously implied that Americans would never “wait around meekly,” and were therefore not “well fitted for a nonviolent war.” And finally, *The Nation’s* (September 28, 1932: 267) reaction to Gandhi’s “fast-untol-death” in 1932 demonstrated that liberal voices in the United States focused almost exclusively on the fate of the person rather than the quality of his methods: “The death of Gandhi by self-starvation would not only mean the loss to the world of one of its most significant figures. It would let loose in India a storm which the British already foresee.” Consequently, when Gandhi withdrew from national politics between 1934 and 1939, even the sympathetic American media agreed that his collective action repertoire and leadership style were no longer practical, and shifted their focus to Jawaharlal Nehru and Congress (Singh 1962: 353; Seshachari 1969).

**The African-American press**

During the 1930s, minority journalists and publications did consider adoption of the diffusion item in the United States, but they either equated the Gandhian repertoire with existing forms of Christian nonviolence and political protest, or highlighted only the differences between the African-American and Indian situation. A few days before Indian marchers reached the Dandi coast, Howard University’s Kelly Miller contributed
an article to the *New York Amsterdam News* that incorporated both the over likeness and the "positive" hyper-difference stereotype. First of all, he made the point that "like his great master, the Christ, [Gandhi] makes a virtue of necessity, and urges his people to gain the righteous end by passive resistance." and urged African Americans to apply the "weapon of meekness and non-resistance" as well. He then argued that, contrary to the Indian majority, the African-American could not challenge white power holders directly; consequently, they should support the legal efforts by reformist organizations such as the NAACP (*New York Amsterdam News*, April 2, 1930: 20). Several months later, the *Pittsburgh Courier* (February 14, 1931: 10) printed a sermon by African-American preacher Dr. H. H. Proctor, who called Gandhi "not only the greatest statesman in the east, but also the one public man most like Christ in spirit, purpose and method in the world today."

After the Salt March ended, though, the African-American press became more critical of the applicability of the Gandhian repertoire in the American context. In an article for the *New York Amsterdam News* (February 10, 1932: 8), for instance, prominent intellectual and NAACP member William Pickens argued:

> Those who see in Gandhi’s procedure a model method for the solution of the race problem are people who reason in shallow analogies; they think that a social formula which works at one time, in one place, within a given set of circumstances, can be made to work at all times, in all places, against all conditions.

He added that, unlike the Indian population, African Americans were not only outnumbered, but also challenging fellow citizens rather than foreigners. Clearly, nonviolent direct action in the United States was impractical and impossible:

> If the Negro of Mississippi starts a boycott against working for and trading with white people, or against buying or employing any of the facilities owned and controlled by whites, the Negro race would be the very first to freeze and starve. White Mississippi would be crippled, but black Mississippi would be utterly ruined. Also, Gandhi’s people may practice civil disobedience with at least some temporary and partial success—such as not paying taxes, refusing to hold office, to vote or to obey the ordinary laws of the British-controlled government. Suppose the Negroes of America should try not paying taxes, not voting and declining to hold office, resigning as policemen, firemen, clerks—how beautifully they would deliver themselves into the hands of their worst enemies! Inside of twelve months all their property would be seized for taxes and all the leaders of their small minority would be in jail (idem).
And in his contribution to the *Atlanta Daily World* (October 4, 1932: 1), local politician William E. King agreed with Pickens that what Gandhi was doing for the untouchables in India would not bring down the system of racial segregation in the South. Overall, therefore, the African-American press of this period paid more attention to the practical implications of satyagraha than the "white" press. But since no African-American leader could specify how to wage Gandhian nonviolent protest outside of India, most journalists concluded that the African-American minority should remain faithful to the traditional legalistic methods of the NAACP—particularly when Gandhi retreated from the public arena in 1934 (Kapur 1992: 41-71). As before, breaking through the perceptual barriers impeding adoption depended on the ideas and practices of critical community members, not mainstream opinion leaders or media sources.

II. Critical communities

The Great Depression left a deep imprint on all the critical communities that contributed significantly to the Gandhian repertoire’s dislocation during this decade. After the cultural rebirth and prosperity of “the roaring twenties,” the crash of 1929 heralded a decade in which economic justice took precedence over expressive freedom or artistic recognition. Whether they belonged to the racial majority or minority, to the bourgeoisie or the working-class, American progressives agreed that regaining material security for the Great Depression’s victims was more important than winning support for an ideological, philosophical, or spiritual perspective. In this climate, many intellectuals and religious leaders openly supported the relatively militant activities of the American labor movement and encouraged their constituents to do so as well. Some prominent intellectuals and religious leaders of this era—particularly those who felt that the Roosevelt administration’s New Deal was not potent enough—even regarded Marxism or socialism as viable options for poor, unemployed, and desperate Americans. Although the actual number of members in the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) remained small in comparison with other countries, radical pacifists and African Americans appreciated the CPUSA’s role in campaigns protesting racial oppression especially its defense of the Scottsboro Nine, young African-American men falsely
accused of raping two Euro-American women) and defending workers’ rights.
Internationally, moreover, they respected the Communist Party’s principled stance
against the rise of fascism in Europe and Asia during the second half of the 1930s (Kelley
1994: 110, 123).41

This domestic and global context led one preexisting critical community to shift
focus away from Gandhi and Indian nationalism, another to reinvent itself, and yet
another to expand its activities. It also inspired one new critical community to emerge
and facilitate the Gandhian repertoire’s dislocation from its original setting. An internal
conflict with Walter White, the executive secretary of the NAACP, precipitated the end
of Du Bois’s editorship of The Crisis and, consequently, the dissolution of his critical
community (Egerton 1994: 150-151). Particularly after accepting a position at Atlanta
University in 1934, Du Bois grew increasingly interested in the international ascendancy
of fascism and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and as editor of the newly founded
Phylon. he (like the rest of the African-American press during these years) rarely
published or wrote articles on the Gandhian repertoire (Lewis 2000). The religious-
pacifist critical community also suffered from an internal conflict, but afterwards it
actually became more—not less—interested in the practical relevance of satyagraha. The
other critical community from the 1920s, the Indian exiles, took advantage of the
publicity surrounding the Salt March by infusing its promotional campaign with new
blood and vigor. And finally, the new critical community consisted of African-American
theologians associated with Howard University, who regarded the Gandhian repertoire as
a means for translating prevalent Christian language into a discourse boldly promoting
African-American liberation. But while they generally accepted the Gandhian
repertoire’s discursive language during these years, the religious pacifists, Indian exiles,
and African theologians did not go beyond the “moderate” repertoire of action forms and
organizational styles in the American context.

41 But since American Marxists did not rule out violent revolution and, therefore, did not take the Gandhian
repertoire of nonviolent contention seriously, they were not a receiving critical community. Consequently,
I will only discuss their contributions when they relate to prominent figures in critical communities that did
play a significant role in the transnational diffusion process.
Religious pacifists

As growing numbers of religious pacifists joined the American labor movement to deal with the societal repercussions of the Great Depression, they increasingly faced a dilemma: if violence were the only realistic means for defeating tyranny, should they still espouse nonviolence? In other words, if they could not have both, should conscientious Christians highlight the need for peace or justice (Chatfield 1971: 176; Chatfield 1976: 58; Cortright 1997)? The internal tensions produced by this dilemma surfaced in May 1929 and came to a head in 1934. The first sign of conflict arose when the executive committee declared that the FOR Statement of Purpose’s absolute adherence to nonviolence was “arbitrary and negative,” while its reference to Jesus Christ was overly “exclusive and sectarian.” Critics such as Devere Allen, J.B. Matthews, Norman Thomas, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Roger Baldwin wanted to change these clauses to allow for closer cooperation with individuals who were secular and regarded nonviolence as a useful tactic under certain circumstances rather than a moral imperative in every situation (Niebuhr 1934; Miller 1992: 49). In contrast, FOR leaders like John Nevin Sayre, one of the two executive secretaries, and Kirby Page agreed that working with non-Christians and non-pacifists was desirable, but maintained that the organization’s core message was to derive ethical forms of social action from common religious principles. According to Chatfield (1971: 185), they believed that FOR was “essentially but not exclusively Christian.”

A new statement of purpose in 1930 only temporarily reconciled the two camps, and three years later Matthews, the other executive secretary, offered his resignation to FOR’s council and stated: “The technique of non-violent resistance is secondary to the aims....As between capitalism using non-violent resistance for injustice and communism using violent resistance against injustice, I am with the latter” (in Chatfield 1971: 194). The following year, after the council had accepted Matthews’s resignation, more than fifty members left the FOR (idem: 331-332). Later, in Christian Century (January 3, 1934), Niebuhr explained why he decided to renounce pacifism:

The Fellowship controversy has revealed that there are radical Christians who can no longer express themselves in pacifist terms. I think we have to leave the Fellowship of Reconciliation with as good a grace as possible....We must find more solid ground for the combination of radicalism and Christianity than the creed of pacifism (quoted in Anderson 1997: 64).
That fall, the remaining members elected Sayre as chairman and Harold Fey as executive secretary and editor of the new journal Fellowship, which replaced the moribund World Tomorrow. Instead of declining after this internal split, though, FOR expanded in the second half of the 1930s and became more directly involved in the American labor movement (Anderson 1997: 197).

With the departure of Christian radicals favoring just ends over peaceful means, FOR members and likeminded religious pacifists actually strengthened their commitment to the Gandhian repertoire as a spiritual and intellectual guide. They drew much of their inspiration from Richard Gregg’s The Power of Nonviolence, which appeared in 1935 and convincingly answered the criticism of Niebuhr and other former pacifists. Gregg was an American FOR member who had gone to India in 1925 to learn more about nonviolent resistance. During these years, he lived with Gandhi for several months and, through extensive discussions and correspondence, became an intimate and trusted friend of the satyagraha leader (Reddy 1998: 48-88). Gandhi carefully explained the reasons for his experiments and the specifics of his repertoire, while Gregg gave advice on matters like diet, spinning techniques, law, education, industrial relations, and the constructive program. Due to this reciprocal relationship with Gandhi and his observations of satyagraha in action, Gregg was able to avoid the hyper-difference and over-likeness stereotypes and to dislocate the diffusion item from the Indian context. Where his FOR colleagues had mostly learned about Gandhi’s campaigns second-hand through the print media or acquaintances—he based his insights on direct, strong ties with Gandhians in India. Unlike other American receivers, moreover, he concentrated on the Gandhian repertoire’s innovative content and implications, not on Gandhi’s enigmatic personality or spiritual mystique. Recognizing the uniqueness of his position, Gregg returned to the United States in 1929 to finish writing his book and persuade fellow religious pacifists to accept the Gandhian repertoire as the core of their critical community’s purpose and collective identity (Reddy 1998: 48-50; Chatfield 1971: 204-212; Cortright 1997).

In The Power of Nonviolence, Gregg made three important points with far-reaching implications for the religious-pacifist critical community’s strategies. First of all, he elucidated in clear psychological terms why moral means were essential
prerequisites for achieving just ends. In a chapter on "moral jiu-jitsu," his most famous concept, he showed that:

The nonviolence and goodwill of the victim act in the same way that the lack of physical opposition by the use of physical jiu-jitsu does, causing the attacker to lose his moral balance. He suddenly and unexpectedly loses the moral support which the usual violent resistance of most victims would render him....He feels insecure because of the novelty of the situation and his ignorance of how to handle it. He loses his poise and self-confidence....The user of nonviolent resistance, knowing what he is doing and having a more creative purpose, keeps his moral balance. He uses the leverage of a superior wisdom to subdue the rough direct force of his opponent....

In a struggle of moral jiu-jitsu, the retention of moral balance seems to depend upon the qualities of one's relationship to moral truth. Hence part of the superior power of the nonviolent resister seems to lie in the nature of his character. He must have primarily that disposition best known as love—an interest in people so deep, and determined, and lasting as to be creative; a profound knowledge of or faith in the ultimate possibilities of human nature; a courage based upon a conscious or subconscious realization of the underlying unity of all life and eternal values or eternal life of the human spirit; a strong and deep desire for and love of truth; and a humility that is not cringing or self-deprecating or timid but is rather a true sense of proportion in regard to people, things, qualities and ultimate values. These human traits of love, faith, courage, honesty and humility exist in greater or less strength in every person (Gregg 1959: 44, 49).

In short, Niebuhr, Matthews, and the other defectors were wrong to primarily emphasize moral ends and underestimate the potential effectiveness of moral means. Secondly, Gregg argued that the fundamental prerequisite for collective nonviolent direct action was group discipline rather than saintly or highly skilled participants. Such group discipline resulted from rigorous training and thorough preparation, not from superior socio-economic status or academic knowledge (idem: 143). In fact, he personally witnessed that literate and intelligent Indians often had more difficulty with self-restraint than the illiterate peasantry of India. Similarly, in the West, the educated elite was no more (and no less) capable of satyagraha than the working-class or rural masses. And finally, Gregg made clear that the Gandhian repertoire was applicable outside of India and, in the book's last chapter, outlined the kind of training and preparation required for a nonviolent social movement (idem: 149-175).

Buoyed by Gregg's analysis, religious-pacifist groups entered the political arena with renewed vigor in the late 1930s, implementing the general strategy promoted by Fey (Fellowship, December 1935: 5):

True reconciliation recognizes that if injustice is to be overcome, religious radicals must plunge into the organization of pressures....This involves the development of a powerful labor movement, the organization of farmers and tenants, the encouragement of cooperatives, the building of a
strong political instrument of justice and the use of each of these to whittle down privilege, to
cajoled, coerce and eventually absorb all business affected with a public interest and to control it
through machinery set up and directed by society. In this way we attack the roots of violence in
the injustices of a social order which subsidizes inequalities and rewards those who exploit the
weakest and neediest” (quoted in Chatfield 1971: 212).

Fey’s words clearly indicated that this critical community was now willing to challenge
mainstream society directly and employ “counter-hegemonic” or oppositional discourse
(Gramsci 1971; Hall 1973; Williams 1977; Gitlin 1980; Terdiman 1986). But while the
collective action campaigns initiated by FOR and affiliated networks were more
confrontational and better organized than during the 1920s, they remained unable to
perform the kind of nonviolent resistance that Gregg and Gandhi had in mind. Although
critical community members now recognized the innovative qualities of the Gandhian
repertoire at an intellectual and discursive level, and fully accepted that it was not just an
Indian phenomenon, they were still looking for ways to experiment with its action forms
and organizational styles at a practical level.

**Indian exiles**

The Salt March at home and Gandhi’s tremendous popularity throughout the world
facilitated the Indian exiles’ propaganda efforts in the United States. The American
mainstream press was even more eager to publish their views than before and helped
them gain the advantage in the public relations war with Great Britain (Israel 1994). The
*New York Times* (August 29, 1930: 10), for instance, invited Muzumdar to write about his
personal experiences during the satyagraha campaign, while *The Nation* (January 1,
1930: 25-26) and *The New Republic* (February 26, 1930: 41-43) printed long articles by
C.F. Andrews, who was in the country to support the Indian exiles. Syud Hossain and
Taraknath Das also regularly contributed columns to mainstream journals, and Kedar
Nath Das Gupta founded the All-World Gandhi Fellowship during these years (Jha 1973:
102; Muzumdar 1962: 35). Thus, during the 1930s, this critical community forged closer
links with the mainstream field of reception and pursued similar activities as before, but
with more intensity and greater effect.

At the same time, though, increased and more successful access to the mass media
led to internal discord between those promoting Indian independence by any means
necessary and those insisting on adherence to the Gandhian repertoire. On one side, Sailendranath Ghose, founder of the American Branch of the Indian National Congress, argued that peaceful resistance would never end British rule and that the Indian population was prepared for violent revolution. Supporters of Ghose’s stance included Sher M. Quraishi in Detroit, who represented the Independence of India League (Jha 1973: 101). On the other side, T.H.K. Rezmie, director of the India Independence League of America, assured American audiences that the Indian National Congress and the independence movement remained committed to nonviolent forms of resistance. Rezmie enjoyed the backing of Andrews and of experienced exiles such as Muzumdar, Das, and Hossain. In the end, the dramatic achievements of the Salt March campaign proved that the Indian population was capable of effective peaceful resistance and, after 1932, the influence of the first group quickly dissipated.

For the most part, however, the pro-Gandhi exiles remained focused on their own cause, not on application of the Gandhian repertoire in their host country. One crucial exception was newcomer Krishnalal Shridharani, a graduate from Gandhi’s university in Ahmedabad and a veteran of the Salt March. On June 19, 1934, at the age of twenty-two, Shridharani arrived in New York to study Journalism and Sociology at Columbia University. He soon heard about the work of Muzumdar, Das, Hossain, and other nationalists, and joined their campaign to promote Indian freedom. In the next few years, he spoke to countless “college groups, religious bodies, dilettante clubs, and peace organizations” about his youth, the situation in his country, and his meetings with Gandhi (Shridharani 1941: 31; Muzumdar 1962). Mainly, though, Shridharani spent his years in New York writing a dissertation about satyagraha (or what he called nonviolent direct action) “through the Westerner’s eyes.” Based on his unique background, he wanted to demonstrate in an academic and analytical way that satyagraha was indeed applicable in the West. In the final manuscript, appropriately entitled War Without Violence (1939), he not only outlined the content of the diffusion item in clear and accessible terms, but also—unlike his colleagues—unambiguously “dislocated” it from the Indian and Asian context. Although this critical community as a whole did little to stimulate the transnational diffusion process, therefore, Shridharani’s book was highly significant because it provided clear guidelines for experimenting with the Gandhian repertoire’s
action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language in American settings.

**African-American theologians**

The only new critical community of the 1930s was particularly important because it kept African Americans interested in the Gandhian repertoire after the UNIA’s decline and Du Bois’s intellectual reorientation. Its center of gravity was Howard University in Washington, D.C., the foremost African-American university in the country. There, president Mordecai Johnson proclaimed in March 1930: “Gandhi is conducting today the most significant movement in the world, in his endeavor to inject religion into questions of economics and politics.” In the same speech, he added that young African Americans should “study and understand Gandhi perfectly” (*Pittsburgh Courier*, March 29, 1930: 10). The following month, two Howard University students, Vivian Coombs and Martin Cotten, translated Johnson’s words into practice when they resisted the policy of segregation by refusing to go to the back of the bus taking them from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C. (*Baltimore Afro-American*, May 3, 1930: 3). Johnson had a similar effect on Howard University faculty members, especially on two fellow preachers: Howard Thurman, who became the Dean of Rankin Chapel in 1932, and Benjamin Mays, the Dean of the School of Religion from 1934 until 1940 (*McKinney 1997; Thurman 1979: 87-88; Carter 1998: 131*). In the second half of the decade, these three African-American theologians led a critical community—consisting of likeminded colleagues, students, and members of their congregations—that facilitated the Gandhian repertoire’s dislocation from India.

Johnson, as president of Howard University, was a prominent opinion leader in the African-American community, whose name frequently appeared in the African-American press. He was an active member of various progressive and religious organizations, including the NAACP, YMCA, India League of America, National Council for the Prevention of War, and ACLU; his sermons reached African-American Christians far beyond Washington, D.C.; and he was perhaps the most gifted African-American orator of his generation, giving lectures on a wide range of subjects in all parts

---

of the country (McKinney 1997). Thurman was no less involved in social and spiritual causes: he was a leader in the Christian Student Movement, the YMCA, and the NAACP, and became the first African-American board member of FOR. But he was best known as an eloquent minister with a large congregation; as a loyal follower of Rufus Jones, the Quaker mystic; as an early proponent of interracial living and communion; and as one of the most influential African-American theologians of his generation (Fluker and Tumber 1998: 1-17). And finally, Mays served as National Student Secretary of the YMCA, briefly worked for the National Urban League, and belonged to various civic organizations. He published several groundbreaking sociological and theological books (*The Negro’s Church* (1933) and *The Negro’s God as Reflected In His Literature* (1938) are still classics), wrote numerous academic articles and chapters, contributed thousands of columns to the African-American and Christian press, and delivered nearly as many speeches and sermons—with as well as outside of the United States. More than anything, though, Mays was an educator, whose weekly chapel talks inspired his African-American students to fight racial segregation with their body, mind, and soul (Carter 1998: 1-31, 415-425).

Although the styles of these religious leaders varied considerably, they all wanted to transform Christian doctrine into a theology that highlighted the activist side of Jesus Christ and explicitly called for desegregation. Accepting the aims of the Social Gospel, they criticized its lack of attention for racial injustice and modified it to promote African-American liberation. Johnson argued that the Christian church’s original constituency consisted of “slaves, servants, dishwashers, rude street sweepers, and the outcasts of the world”—that is, the African-American masses in American society—and believed that the only way to eradicate the color line without contradicting the Christian religion was “to subordinate the love of race to the love of Christ” (McKinney 1997: 221, 224). Thurman, as an “affirmation mystic,” believed that Christian individuals had to struggle with inner demons to experience the essential harmony of human existence, and that they could only find their true selves through disciplined as well as ethical interaction with an imperfect environment (Fluker and Tumber 1998: 108-123). Like Johnson, he urged African-American Christians to draw inspiration from Jesus Christ as “an exemplar of a religiously inspired public ethic that takes seriously the plight of the disinherited”—not
from the conventional view of Jesus Christ as a neutral object of devotion and worship and to challenge social and political injustice in the United States through active resistance rather than passive submission or spiritual escapism (idem: 131; Thurman 1979). And finally, Mays posited that while “the Negro’s God” was an active participant in their struggle for freedom, African Americans also had to contribute to this struggle by infusing God’s values into human society. In contrast to traditional “compensatory thinking” (which emphasized “the magical, spectacular, vengeful, and anthropomorphic nature of God revealed in the Old Testament,” and tended to produce fatalism), Mays called for “constructive” rebellion within individuals as well as against immoral political, economic, and social structures (Carter 1998: 6-7). No less than Johnson or Thurman, he waged a theological battle against contemporary Western Christianity and articulated a perspective that accentuated “the oneness of humanity” and the “interrelatedness of all life” (Carter 1998: 243-245; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

Johnson, Thurman, Mays, and fellow critical community members promulgated this radical Christian discourse through Howard University’s *Journal of Negro Education*, sermons, speeches, and writings. But while their collective identity was “counter-hegemonic” in the sense that it went against dominant Christian doctrine, their collective action strategies did not challenge mainstream society head on. As academic theologians and intellectuals, they supported the moderate means of legal or public appeal and the moderate end of political reform favored by organizations like the NAACP, and did not form militant protest groups or initiate confrontational protest campaigns. Strategically, they concentrated on improving the internal quality of African-American churches and universities, and empowering people involved in these key institutions to become courageous leaders and committed opponents of racial segregation. As Mays (1945: 333) once put it:

> Let it be known in your community and in you profession that you are not for sale...that you are not putty to be molded and twisted in the pattern of injustice and corruption. Develop strong, rock-rubbed, steel girded characters so that whoever bumps against you, will bounce back because they came up against a man or a woman who is not for sale (quoted in Carter 1998: 256).

Thus, this critical community primarily acted in the relatively protected realm of the African-American church and university, and emphasized intellectual and psychological
development rather than the formation of a mass movement on the basis of the Gandhian repertoire.

Despite such limitations, this African-American critical community's interpretation of God and Jesus Christ was clearly compatible with the Gandhian repertoire. Toward the end of the decade, therefore, both Thurman and Mays traveled to India for personal interviews with Gandhi at his ashram. Inspired by the Salt March—which they regarded as a powerful example of how religion and politics could complement each other—they asked the Indian leader whether satyagraha was a suitable weapon for the African-American minority in the United States. Gandhi's answers were heartening and persuaded them that nonviolent direct action was indeed feasible outside of its original context. Nevertheless, during the 1930s, neither Thurman nor Mays (nor Johnson, for that matter) led efforts to apply the Gandhian repertoire's action forms and organizational styles in order to launch an African-American liberation struggle.

III. Diffusion mechanisms

All three critical communities of this era moved beyond the hyper-difference and over-likeness stereotypes and contributed to the Gandhian repertoire's dislocation from India. Among religious pacifists, Richard Gregg played a crucial role in erasing the mysterious, exotic surface of satyagraha: he translated its dynamics as well as its implications into understandable language for Americans. Among Indian exiles, Krishnalal Shridharani was no less significant: he went further than Gregg, arguing that the American environment was actually more conducive to Gandhian experiments than the Indian environment and outlining the content of the Gandhian repertoire in even more specific terms than The Power of Nonviolence. And among Howard University theologians, Mays and Thurman were the first African-American leaders to meet with Gandhi face-to-face and share his optimistic views on satyagraha by a racial minority with their colleagues, students, congregations, and audiences. But while anecdotal evidence shows that dislocation occurred, only an analysis of the diffusion mechanisms can specify how critical communities made dislocation possible and why this did not lead to application of
the diffusion item at this time. As always, the type of brokerage helped determine the type of collective appropriation in the American context, and vice versa.

**Transnational brokerage**

Clearly, the depth and range of ties between critical community members in the United States and Gandhians in India were much greater in the 1930s than before. While Kirby Page and Sherwood Eddy had briefly met Gandhi and some of his associates in 1929, for instance, Richard Gregg crossed the Pacific Ocean to fully immerse himself into Indian society and dedicate himself to Gandhi's ideas and practices:

> After thinking it over for a year or more, and writing to Gandhi about my wishes, I set sail for India on the last day of 1924. Within a week after arriving in India, I found myself at his school or *Ashram* at Sabarmati... There I stayed for about a month and then for several months visited villages in other provinces and returned again to the *Ashram*. I lived entirely in Indian houses, wore Indian clothes, ate Indian food, read Indian literature, learned as much of the language as I could, and tried to absorb Indian ways... I stayed nearly four years in India, of which about seven months all told I spent at Gandhi's *Ashram* (quoted in Reddy 1998: 49).

Instead of just asking Gandhi questions and politely listening to his answers, Gregg stayed in dialogue with him over many years and not only witnessed but also participated in the application of the Gandhian repertoire in all its facets. For Gandhi, Gregg was a fellow satyagrahi and seeker of truth, not merely a foreign visitor:

> He [Gregg] is studying in a very concrete manner and with a passion worthy of a patriotic son of the soil the many questions affecting this land. His studies and experiments in hand-spinning continue unabated. He is experimenting in education of the children of backward classes. He is interested in the welfare of these classes. And in that connection, he is studying the question of agriculture. Having watched the economic and highly hygienic disposal of night-soil at the *Satyagraha Ashram*, Sabarmati, he is now studying that question in a methodical manner (*Young India*, June 9, 1927).

When Gregg returned to the United States at the end of 1929, therefore, he came as a true Gandhian who wanted to serve the two countries he loved by making his knowledge and experience available to other American religious pacifists. By publishing his influential book in 1934 and talking with people throughout the country, he became the ideal American broker between transmitters and receivers of the Gandhian repertoire.

Until 1934, though, it was an *American* religious pacifist who traveled to India, adapted to the Indian way of life, experienced satyagraha in action, and called for a
Gandhian social movement in the United States. As of yet, no Indian satyagrahi had come to the United States, adapted to the American way of life, and called for a Gandhian social movement in the United States. In the second half of the 1930s, however, Shridharani did just that. Through his speeches, articles, personal relationships with Americans, and especially his *War Without Violence* in 1939, he continued the deep cross-fertilization process set in motion by Gregg and embodied the ideal Indian broker.

As described in his autobiographical *My India, My America* (1941: 48-87), he made a point of wearing Western clothing, learning American English, meeting American girls, going to American dances, making American friends, visiting American homes, adjusting to the American academic world, and otherwise living the “American Way”—without relinquishing his identity as an Indian. Like Gregg, Shridharani felt affection for his mother as well as his adopted country, and was therefore well suited to convey his practical understanding of the Gandhian repertoire to American receivers.

Although not as strong as those forged by Gregg and Shridharani, the transnational links constructed by Thurman, Mays, and their companions were no less vital for the African-American minority. After touring Asia for a few months, Howard Thurman, his wife Sue, Mr. Carroll, and Mrs. Carroll finally had a chance to speak Gandhi in February 1936 (CWMG 68: 234-238). When they arrived at his ashram in Bardoli, the satyagraha leader welcomed them so affectionately that, afterwards, his secretary whispered to Thurman: “This is the first time in all the years that we have been working together that I’ve ever seen him come out to greet a visitor so warmly” (Thurman 1979: 131). After the introductions, Gandhi immediately started asking them about the challenges of slavery, the African-American view of Christianity, public school education, voting rights, lynching, and so forth. Then Thurman and his wife engaged Gandhi in a wide-ranging discussion about the persistence of British rule in India, Indian nationalism, his own perspective of Christianity, and, most importantly, the specific methods for training individuals and groups in nonviolent direct action. At the end of their meeting, on Gandhi’s request, Thurman’s delegation sang several African-American spirituals, including “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?” and “We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder.” and as they departed, Gandhi remarked prophetically: “Well, if it comes true, it may be through the Negroes that the unadulterated message of
nonviolence will be delivered to the world” (CWMG 68: 237-238; Thurman 1979: 132-135; emphasis added).

Less than a year later, in January 1937, Mays and Channing Tobias, secretary of the YMCA’s Colored Men’s Department and board member of Howard University, traveled to India to participate in the world conference of the YMCA. Before the conference began, they visited Gandhi at his ashram in Warda. Mays initially inquired about his reason for attacking untouchability without challenging the caste system and, of course, his notion of nonviolence. Gandhi’s answer to the second question was:

Passive resistance is a misnomer for nonviolent resistance. It is much more active than violent resistance. It is direct, ceaseless, but three-fourths invisible and only one-fourth visible. In its visibility it seems to be ineffective, e.g., the spinning-wheel which I have called the symbol of non-violence. In its visibility it appears ineffective, but it is really intensely active and most effective in ultimate result....Non-violence is an intensely active force when properly understood and used. A violent man’s activity is most visible while it lasts. But it is always transitory...And the more it is practised, the more effective and inexhaustible it becomes, and ultimately the whole world stands agape and exclaims, ‘a miracle has happened’. All miracles are due to the silent and effective working of invisible forces. Non-violence is the most invisible and the most effective (CWMG 70: 261).

Then Mays asked whether a racial and political minority could successfully adopt nonviolent means against a dominant majority. Gandhi responded that the satyagraha campaigns in South Africa taught him that “a minority can do much more in the way of non-violence than a majority... I had less diffidence in handling my minority in South Africa than I had here in handling a majority.” With training and discipline, he continued, nonviolent action “is not restricted to individuals merely but it can be practiced on a mass scale” (CWMG 70: 263-264).

During his own interview, moreover, Tobias pressed Gandhi further on the relevance of his collective action repertoire for African Americans:

Negroes in U.S.A. – 12 million—are struggling to obtain such fundamental rights as freedom from mob violence, unrestricted use of the ballot, freedom from segregation, etc. Have you, out of your struggle in India, a word of advice and encouragement to give us (CWMG 70: 269)?

Again, Gandhi referred to his experiences in South Africa and repeated that: “there is no other way than the way of nonviolence, a way, however, not of the weak and ignorant but of the strong and wise.” Right before leaving, Tobias asked: “What word shall I give my
Negro brethren as to the outlook for the future?" To which the satyagraha leader replied: "With right which is on their side and the choice of non-violence as their only weapon, if they will make it such, a bright future is assured" (idem). But while Gandhi's answers were encouraging, they did not inspire Mays and Tobias to create institutions or engage in activities directly aimed at building a Gandhian social movement in the United States. Like Thurman, they chose to concentrate on spreading the message of nonviolence to their African-American students and supporters, who had to decide for themselves whether they wanted to apply satyagraha in practice.

After coming back, the African-American leaders discussed their journey in lectures, sermons, conversations, and the African-American press. The Norfolk Journal and Guide (May 9, 1936), for instance, reported that Thurman told Howard University faculty members: "how his visits and discussion with Mahatma Ghandi [sic], great social religious leader, had revealed the striking similarity between the Indian and American problems" (quoted in Kapur 1992: 91). And Mays (1937b: 9, 19) contributed six articles to the same journal, highlighting satyagraha's significance for African Americans:

The Negro people have much to learn from the Indians. The Indians have learned what we have not learned. They have learned how to sacrifice for a principle. They have learned how to sacrifice position, prestige, economic security and even life itself for what they consider a righteous and respectable cause. Thousands of them in recent times have gone to jail for their cause. Thousands of them have died for their cause.

He also wrote an essay for the Journal of Negro Education, shedding light on how Gandhi dispelled fear from the Indian mind and instilled pride in the Indian heritage (Mays 1937a: 134-143). Although they did not engage in Gandhian collective action themselves, Thurman and Mays (like Gregg and Shridharani) left no doubt that, following sufficient training and adaptation, oppressed groups outside of India could employ the Gandhian repertoire to confront their own social problems.

**Domestic brokerage**

Transnational brokers also stimulated domestic brokerage between generations and between critical communities. While contemporary critical community members drew inspiration from their predecessors and veteran colleagues, they carefully avoided making the same mistakes. Gregg, for example, respected the "great man" interpretation of
Gandhi popularized by Holmes and Page, but realized that he could only grasp the deeper meaning of Gandhi’s methods if he studied them (and their author) at close range and over a considerable period of time. Shridharan similarly appreciated the propaganda efforts of veteran Indian exiles like Muzumdar and Hossain, but recognized that he could facilitate the dissemination of the Gandhian repertoire by outlining its specific content and strongly refuting arguments suggesting that it could only work in India or Asia (Shridharan 1939, 1941). Mays, moreover, accepted Du Bois’s opinion that the Indian independence movement provided hope for the African-American “talented tenth,” but added that uneducated African Americans could equally benefit from Gandhian forms of resistance (Carter 1998: 215-231). Without denying the previous generation’s positive contributions, therefore, the new generation of critical community members successfully moved beyond its hyper-difference and over-likeness views.

The ties connecting contemporary American critical communities, moreover, were considerably stronger and more reciprocal than during the 1920s. Religious pacifists and African-American theologians often shared the same pulpits, contributed to the same publications, and belonged to the same organizations. As the Great Depression evolved, progressive white Christians increasingly recognized that overcoming racial oppression and prejudice was as vital to domestic peace as workers’ rights and economic justice. Consequently, they invited the top African-American academics and theologians to participate in sermons and discussions about the impact of segregation for the future of American democracy. Benjamin Mays was one of the speakers in the Detroit Lenten Series; Mordecai Johnson preached at the Riverside Church of famous religious pacifist Harry Emerson Fosdick; Howard Thurman joined Social Gospel ministers like Niebuhr, Walter Rauschenbush, and E. Stanley Jones at the most important stop on the pulpit circuit: the Chicago Sunday Evening Club (McKinney 1997: 32; Miller 1992: 48-49). In addition, Mays and Thurman often wrote for Christian Century and Pulpit, both edited by anti-war advocate C.C. Morrison, while Johnson’s orations appeared in the annual series Best Sermons—with those by Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, George Buttrick, and other prominent religious pacifists (Miller 1992: 52, 68). In turn, many of these white Christian leaders lectured at Howard University and published essays in its journals (idem: 52-53). In sum, transnational and domestic brokerage during the 1930s was more
intensive and extensive than before, and although the receiving networks did not contribute to significant relocation at this time, they did highlight the possibility for Gandhian collective action in the American environment.

**Collective appropriation in free spaces**

Improved brokerage not only helped overcome the hyper-difference and over-likeness obstacles, but also allowed for more fruitful collective appropriation. Unlike during the 1920s, critical communities now employed the Gandhian repertoire to create what Sara Evans and Harry Boyte call “free spaces” for developing counter-hegemonic discourses (Terdiman 1986). Physical spaces such as African-American churches or universities, and relational spaces such as religious-pacifist or theological networks, were “free” in the sense that they provided environments where critical community members could (and actually did) contemplate and discuss potential ways of applying the Gandhian repertoire in their own settings without overly inhibitive constraints—whether self-imposed or external. In other words, while preceding critical communities only criticized mainstream interpretations of the diffusion item at the margins and without threatening the status quo, in the 1930s they used the diffusion item to construct alternative and oppositional discourses that called for radical transformation of the existing power structure (Hall 1973; Fraser 1992; Polletta 1999).

Richard Gregg was the earliest and most important translator of existing Christian religion into a “liberation theology” based on the Gandhian repertoire. *The Power of Nonviolence*, as Chatfield (1971: 209) points out, literally wanted to reveal the unique “language” of satyagraha as well as its potential significance for repressed groups outside of India. The religious pacifists who remained (or joined) after political realists like Niebuhr, Matthews, and Allen left FOR generally agreed with Gregg’s analysis; they regarded Gandhian action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language as guidelines for initiating confrontational nonviolent protest in the United States. But

---

* Evans and Boyte (1986: 17) define free spaces as “the environments in which people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue. Put simply, free spaces are settings between private lives and large scale institutions where ordinary citizens can act with dignity, independence and vision.” As Polletta (1999: 3) argues, however, free spaces “also provide the conceptual space in which dominated groups are able to penetrate the prevailing common sense that keeps most people passive in the face of injustice, and are thus crucial to the very formation of the identities and interests that precede mobilization.”
while Gregg explained the dynamics of nonviolence and stressed the necessity of rigorous training, he did not specify which American groups should initiate satyagraha campaigns or how they should organize them. Shridharani’s (1939: 321) book, however, did discuss the concrete steps involved in nonviolent direct action (it even started with a chapter on “How is it done?”) and unambiguously stated that: “racial and political minorities, as well as relatively weaker economic groups, are better off with Satyagraha than with violence.” While Gregg’s book offered moral and psychological discourse, therefore, *War Without Violence* not only provided the pragmatic and strategic discourse supporting American experimentation with the Gandhian repertoire’s militant action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language, but also confirmed Gandhi’s optimism about the African-American minority’s potential for satyagraha on a mass scale. Furthermore, as a relatively autonomous actor, Shridharani (1939: 270-273) — unlike Gregg, for example—was able to criticize moderate religious pacifists for their passivity and encourage pro-active direct action, without causing conflict within their critical community.

At the same time, preachers at Howard University developed their own kind of “liberation theology,” using the Gandhian repertoire to reinterpret the gospel of Jesus Christ from an African-American perspective. Their meetings with Gandhi motivated Thurman and Mays to allocate even more energy toward creating an alternative Christian discourse that opposed the prevailing attitude on racial segregation within their church, and toward experimenting with various ways to promote their counter-hegemonic views in indigenous churches and universities, the African-American community’s principal free spaces (McAdam 1982; Morris 1984; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Although they were probably familiar with the work of Gregg and Shridharani—through Thurman’s membership of FOR and Mays’s involvement in the YMCA—most of their inspiration for combining Christian with Gandhian language came from president Mordecai Johnson and from the suffering faced by African Americans on a daily basis. Contrary to religious pacifists and Shridharani, who did not belong to an oppressed group in the United States, African-American theologians had both a personal and a collective stake in promoting adoption of the Gandhian repertoire’s action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language.
The two emerging types of liberation theology induced several critical community members to attempt Gandhian forms of protest in the United States. As mentioned earlier, in 1930 Howard University’s Martin Cotten and Vivian Coombs engaged in individual nonviolent resistance when they disobeyed segregation policy on an interstate bus. After Harold Fey took over as executive secretary in 1934, moreover, FOR tried to promote satyagraha within the American labor movement. As chairman of FOR’s Committee on Industrial Relations, for instance, A.J. Muste argued that the short-lived “lie-down” pickets in December of 1936—initiated by workers in Reading, Pennsylvania and led by an FOR member and a student of Gregg’s work—should become the model for the wave of “sit-down” strikes that followed. He asserted that while the lie-down activists adhered to Gandhian principles and were “moved by the spirit of love, even toward their enemies,” the sit-down activists reverted to “passive resistance” and only adopted nonviolent tactics for expedient reasons (Muste in Hentoff 1967: 206). And finally, several years later, religious pacifist Dave Dellinger helped found the Newark Ashram to assist the urban poor in New Jersey (Dellinger 1993; Cortright 1997). Each of these efforts, however, was too brief, sporadic, isolated, unprepared, and ineffective to grow into sustained experimentation with the Gandhian repertoire of collective action.\footnote{The activists involved in these efforts could not take advantage of Shridharam’s book, which appeared too late to guide critical communities during this decade.}

Overall, therefore, the fusion of diffusion mechanisms was much more productive than during the 1920s. But while brokerage and collective appropriation in this period enabled dislocation of the Gandhian repertoire from its native soil, these same dynamics also constrained constructive relocation in the receiving environment. Nevertheless, by transcending the dichotomy between hyper-difference and over-likeness, and by creating “free spaces” for counter-hegemonic discourses, the critical communities of the 1930s initiated a turning point in the transnational diffusion process and helped make the unthinkable—a massive satyagraha movement in the United States—appear feasible. Once again, though, they left collective application of—and prolonged experimentation with—all facets of the Gandhian repertoire for future generations.