Crossing the great divide: the Gandhian repertoire's transnational diffusion to the American civil rights movement
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Chapter five

RELOCATION OF THE GANDHIAN REPertoire
1940-1947

When World War II broke out in Europe, conditions for the reception of the Gandhian repertoire changed considerably, especially for those involved in the African-American civil rights struggle. Following a decade of recession and unrest, wartime production stimulated economic growth and allowed millions of Americans to find new jobs. Rapid industrialization, in turn, promoted large-scale urbanization and migration as numerous white Americans came to live in Southern cities and many African Americans moved to metropolitan areas in the North. These broad social processes dramatized the racial problems that still plagued the country. While president Roosevelt urged the democratic world to defend the Four Freedoms and, in 1941, signed the Atlantic Charter, African Americans continued to face segregation, poverty, and oppression at home. Defense industries regularly excluded African-American workers, African-American soldiers suffered from discrimination in the military, the Red Cross refused to accept African-American blood, public establishments served German POWs but not African-American citizens, the federal government did little to change the Jim Crow system that prevented African Americans from voting in the South, and a disproportionate number of African Americans remained destitute despite the economic recovery. At the turn of the decade, most progressive voices in the United States agreed that the contemporary situation was precarious and required far-reaching political measures, both to facilitate the war effort in the short run and to secure social stability over the long term (Blum 1976; Sitkoff 1981; McAdam 1982; Franklin and Moss 1988; Marable 1991).

For some religious pacifists and African-American radicals in the early 1940s, satyagraha was the ideal weapon for compelling American authorities to take an active stance on race relations. Adopting the Gandhian repertoire to guide collective and nonviolent direct action, however, provoked much more resistance on the part of the domestic establishment than merely talking or writing about nonviolence. While initial reception and subsequent dislocation occurred without much external interference.
relocation of the diffusion item largely depended on the possibilities and limits set by the political context in the United States. Contemporary scholars generally concur that four features of the national political context enable or constrain contentious struggle: the relative openness or closure of government institutions; the stability or instability of elite alliances within the power structure; the presence or absence of elite supporters of the insurgents; and the government's capacity and propensity for repression (McAdam 1996: 26; see also, Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1994; Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, and Giugni 1995). They then argue that people tend to participate in protest campaigns when the state consists of open institutions, is internally unstable, includes sympathetic elites, and displays a reluctance to use coercive force (Tarrow 1994: 17-18). While persuasive in theory, this so-called "political opportunity structure" approach is much more ambiguous in practice. On the one hand, expansion of political opportunities in one area may be offset by contraction in another area; on the other hand, historical actors may not have "subjectively" perceived the possibilities that academic researchers "objectively" identify many years later (Goodwin and Jasper 1999: 30-33; Kurzman 1996). Instead of classifying the political context between 1940 and 1947 as either favorable or unfavorable, therefore, I will briefly discuss both its enabling and its constraining aspects.

Particularly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, which forced the United States to actually participate in the war against Fascism, Roosevelt's declarations encouraged African-American activists and their supporters to push his administration to take race equality seriously. As a result, the American president signed Executive Order No. 8802 in June 1941, calling for the establishment of the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to eliminate job discrimination in the defense industries (Pfeffer 1990: 49; Egerton 1994: 213-216). This concession clearly symbolized an opening in the federal government's attitude toward civil rights, particularly because an influential group within the White House—including Eleanor Roosevelt—endorsed the creation of the FEPC as well as other strong measures to improve the circumstances of African Americans. In addition, with the American military focused on the battle in Europe, outright repression of domestic protest was unlikely (Blum 1976).
Each of these political opportunities, however, had its downside. Despite Roosevelt’s rhetoric about the Four Freedoms, for instance, the American armed forces continued to segregate African-American soldiers (Tate 1943: 530). The FEPC, moreover, not only represented a strategic victory for the African-American minority, but also allowed the White House to divert responsibility for civil rights issues. Thus when race riots erupted in 1943, American officials refused to take any more positive action to prevent unrest and blamed radical African Americans for exploiting a nation at war. Ignoring progressive advisers, president Roosevelt let his Southern assistants deal with racial issues and adopted the motto: “will it help to win the war? if not, the hell with it!” (Sitkoff 1971: 676). Civil rights proponents responded to this contraction of political opportunities by focusing primarily on moderate appeals for “interracialism” between 1944 and 1947, withdrawing their previous support of relatively militant forms of resistance (idem: 675-681; Marable 1991: 15; Korstad and Lichtenstein 1988).

Chapter five depicts how the transnational diffusion process proceeded from dislocation to relocation in the highly ambivalent political context sketched above. The first section gives an impression of the mainstream field of reception and demonstrates that the mass media continued to reproduce the hyper-difference and over-likeness stereotypes between 1940 and 1947. The following section describes the changes within two preexisting critical communities and introduces two new ones. No matter how favorable or unfavorable the American political opportunity structure was during these years, in the end relocation depended on the “labor of experiment” performed by various groups of religious pacifists and civil rights activists in the United States (Scalmer 2002). The last section, then, analyzes the contribution of the brokerage and collective appropriation mechanisms to the Gandhian repertoire’s relocation.

I. Mainstream field of reception

World War II cast a shadow over mainstream American responses to the Gandhian repertoire between 1940 and 1947. News coverage of contemporary events in India primarily focused on their significance for the Allied battle against the Axis powers, and columnists weighed the arguments of Indian nationalist leaders against the declarations of
American president Roosevelt and British prime minister Churchill. During the 1920s and 1930s, many mainstream American observers had regarded Gandhian nonviolence as a fascinating and inspiring but also as an exotic and distant subject. After the Nazis invaded Poland and attacked Great Britain, however, the conservative, moderate, and African-American press quickly shed romantic images of satyagraha and concentrated on its strategic and military implications for the Allied cause (Hess 1971: 46). Following the war, moreover, they interpreted Indian developments primarily in the context of the emerging United Nations and tended to consider Gandhi’s methods admirable as well as outdated.

**The conservative press**

Conservative media and journalists tended to denounce the Indian National Congress and its leaders for exploiting war conditions to achieve their political aims. Journals like the *Free World* and *Amerasia*, for example, reported that India contributed only one and a half million troops to the Allied forces, out of a population of about four hundred million. To halt Japanese expansion in Asia and prevent a fascist world order, these publications argued, India would have to commit a much larger share of its economic capacity and manpower to the war effort (*Free World*, August 1943: 119, 123-124; *Amerasia*, November 1940: 421; see also, Kane 1944).

Pro-British newspapers like the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The Christian Science Monitor* also criticized Gandhi and his colleagues for rejecting the British government’s offer to discuss Dominion status after the war (Hess 1971: 71). In March 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps came to India with a plan that promised India “self-government, with a constitution as free in every respect as our own in Great Britain” in exchange for its full cooperation with the United Nations (Kane 1944: 75). Congress, however, refused to accept a proposal that did not relinquish British control of the executive branches of government and, therefore, did not guarantee an independent India. And conservative observer Herbert Matthews, in the *New York Times Magazine* (August 8, 1943: 12), repeated the old mantra that Congress failed to unite India in support of the Allies because it merely represented the wealthy Hindu bourgeoisie and the upper castes, not the working classes, the peasants, or Muslim communities. Although the specific topics had
changed, therefore, the mainstream conservative press continued to defend the British perspective, and to exaggerate cultural differences between East and West, until India gained independence in 1947.

The moderate press

Moderate magazines like The Nation and The New Republic usually emphasized the Indian nationalist perspective of World War II and its implications for American national interests. In The Nation (May 4, 1940: 564-566), for instance, Shridharani insisted that Gandhi’s willingness to negotiate with British rulers and the Congress’s decision to postpone civil disobedience in 1940 “drew home the fact that India was not seeking to make political capital out of England’s predicament in Europe. This proof of good-will and understanding at the outset of struggle is held to be of utmost importance to the success of satyagraha.” Journalist Louis Fischer, who had visited and interviewed Gandhi numerous times, described how important the situation in India was for the war effort and, therefore, for the United States. Only president Roosevelt, according to Fischer (The Nation, August 15, 1942: 63-64; idem, August 22, 1942: 145-147), could persuade Churchill to grant India independence after the war, convince Gandhi to call off the civil disobedience campaign, and induce the Indian population to help resist Japanese aggression in Asia.

In The New Republic, Lin Yutan, a Chinese intellectual residing in the United States, criticized the British stance and agreed that a diplomatic intervention by Roosevelt was the only way to resolve the Indian problem. Contrary to Shridharani and Fischer, however, Lin Yutan (The New Republic, August 17, 1942: 191-192) felt that Gandhi’s approach only complicated matters:

Mr. Gandhi is enormously irritating to the Western mind. His pacifism appeals to only a minute minority of British or Americans. From time to time he says very foolish things. Yet in the crisis of this war, we must deal with Mr. Gandhi whether we like to or not. There are plenty of moral issues in the Indian situation, and always have been, but these too can be brushed aside for the present. The plain fact is that Mr. Gandhi believes he is in a position to blackmail the British into granting India her freedom at once. He may be wrong; his policy might only throw India under the wheels of the Japanese juggernaut...but now that it is clear that Mr. Gandhi is prepared to take such risks, he can no longer be ignored...One should add, however, that the policy of the British bureaucrats seems to point toward a debacle almost as surely as that of Mr. Gandhi.
The following day, Yutang reiterated these views in a radio program of the Columbia Broadcasting System, organized by the Post War World Council. Thus while the moderate press during World War II still left room for loyal supporters of Gandhi, it focused primarily on the repercussions of the situation in India for the American government. Unlike before 1940, it provided space for observers who derided Gandhi’s political decisions, particularly if they appeared to have a negative effect on the Allied cause. After the United States emerged from the war victoriously though, centrist media channels once again highlighted Gandhi’s saintly personality and resemblance to Jesus Christ, but without explicitly calling for Gandhian direct action in the United States (Chatfield 1976: 531-551, 503-505; Hess 1971).

The African-American press

Particularly after African-American soldiers began serving tours of duty in Asia and Europe, the mainstream African-American press consistently pointed out that opposing the racist ideologies of Fascist countries and preserving domestic racial segregation was hypocritical at best. To dramatize this issue, the *Pittsburgh Courier* (February 14, 1942: 1) announced a “Double V” (double victory) campaign and declared that “in our fight for freedom we wage a two-pronged attack against our enslaves at home and those abroad who enslave us.” The Double V campaign was a tremendous hit among African-American readers and soon other minority journals followed the Courier’s example (Franklin and Moss 1988: 404; Finkle 1973; Wynn 1975; Blum 1976). It not only framed the African-American mainstream’s interpretation of World War II, but also influenced responses to the Quit India movement and the Gandhian repertoire.

The *Chicago Defender* of September 26, 1942, for example, published an article by prominent labor leader A. Philip Randolph, who proclaimed that both an Indian victory abroad and an African-American victory at home would contribute to the war effort:

Both the Indian people and the Negro people are subject people, lacking the constitutional civil and political rights of a free people. The Indian and Negro people are immensely important to the winning of this war against totalitarian tyranny. But, the Indian and Negro people insist upon their right to fight for democracy in the true spirit of democracy, namely, as a free people…. (quoted in Kapur 1992: 107)
Given these similarities, Randolph promoted the adoption of the Gandhian repertoire in the United States. Most African-American journals, however, preferred to express their respect for Gandhi without calling for African-American application of his methods—especially after the race riots in June 1943. Although African-American editors sometimes reserved space for proponents of nonviolent direct action such as Randolph, they generally believed that the traditional protest methods of the NAACP or the NUL were more realistic and practical (Finkle 1973; Wynn 1975).

The New York Amsterdam News (March 13, 1943) thus invited a long-time admirer of Gandhi, W.E.B. Du Bois, to explain why American experiments with satyagraha were inappropriate as well as unnecessary. “[L]aunching a broad national program based on non-violent civil disobedience and no-cooperation [sic], modeled along the lines of the campaigns of Mohandas K. Gandhi [sic],” according to Du Bois, “would be playing into the hands of our enemies.” Since prayer, fasting, and self-sacrifice had been “bred into the very bone of India for more than three thousand years,” he asserted, implementing nonviolent direct action in the United States “would be regarded as a joke or a bit of insanity.” Like most mainstream African Americans, Du Bois still supported the political program of traditional civil rights organizations: “My own feeling is distinctly that Agitation and Publicity are still our trump cards, and that their possibilities, within bounds of law and order, are by no means exhausted…” (quoted in Kapur 1992: 110). The Pittsburgh Courier (May 3, 1943) was even more direct in its criticism of Randolph’s program, charging him with “irresponsible talk about suicidal civil disobedience and mass marches which never materialize” (quoted in Pfeffer 1990: 61).

After World War II, African-American media continued to promote moderate forms of appeal and deny the practicality of nonviolent direct action in the United States. While covering the U.N. conference in San Francisco, therefore, the Baltimore Afro-American printed a statement by Mrs. Pandit, Nehru’s sister, confirming the cultural specificity of the Gandhian repertoire. To a question about satyagraha’s significance for the African-American civil rights struggle, she answered: “it is an Indian method and… it has to do with the soul of a people.” In her opinion, “it worked to some extent only because it appealed to the conscience of the English people” and because India had Gandhi while “as yet you have no Gandhi” (Baltimore Afro-American, February 15.
1947: magazine, 9). In other words, despite the fact that the African-American press was united in its opposition to racial segregation during and right after World War II, its coverage reproduced the same stereotypes of the Gandhian repertoire as the moderate white press. It regularly expressed its admiration for Gandhi, and even printed articles by African-American proponents of his methods, without contributing positively to the Gandhian repertoire's adoption (Garfinkel 1969; Sitkoff 1971, 1981; Finkle 1973; Wynn 1975). Relocation clearly depended on the presence and activities of critical communities, not on the information spread by the mainstream field of reception.

II. Critical communities

The critical communities playing a role during World War II and its aftermath agreed with African-American journalists that fighting for freedom abroad and ignoring racial segregation at home was contradictory (Wynn 1975; Blum 1976). Particularly in the wake of Pearl Harbor, critical community members' language became more explicit and oppositional, while their actions became more audacious and militant. Religious pacifists and African-American theologians from the 1930s continued to hone and popularize their Christian interpretations of Gandhian discourse. The other critical community of the New Deal era, the Indian exiles, did not contribute to the Gandhian repertoire's relocation in the United States, because they primarily focused on contemporary events in their mother country. One significant exception was Krishnalal Shridharani, but his decision to help American activists was personal and did not reflect the strategies of his colleagues. Both new critical communities, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the March on Washington Movement (MOWM), used Shridharani's *War Without Violence* as a handbook for nonviolent direct action and built on the work of religious pacifists and African-American theologians. The critical communities of this period, in other words, adopted the Gandhian repertoire's discursive language and experimented with some of its action forms and organizational styles. Yet while they broke new

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¹ Kapur (1992), in contrast, argues that the African-American press contributed positively to the civil rights movement's eventual adoption of the Gandhian repertoire. He does not make a clear distinction, however, between support for nonviolence as an abstract philosophy and support for actual nonviolent *direct action*. In my eyes, this distinction is crucial for analyzing the transition from mere knowledge of the Gandhian repertoire to collective application of the Gandhian repertoire in the United States.
ground by moving beyond familiar extremist and moderate repertoires of contention, their small-scale and limited efforts failed to produce a Gandhian social movement in the American context—at least between 1940 and 1947.

Religious pacifists

World War II had a paradoxical effect on the religious-pacifist critical community: on the one hand, the broad coalition sustaining the American peace movement disintegrated as social and political pressure to conform intensified; on the other hand, the remaining peace organizations actually gained strength, profiting from the passionate commitment of a small core of radical pacifists (Wittner 1969: 34, 54; Glazer 1972: 596-597). Within the FOR, A.J. Muste’s rise to the position of national secretary in 1940 symbolized a definite break with traditional “nonresistance” and the ascendance of militant Gandhian action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language. Muste had participated in most of the major American protest campaigns since World War I. In 1919, he led the strike of textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts and was elected as national secretary of the Amalgamated Textile Workers of America. Between 1921 and 1933, he served as educational director of Brookwood Labor College and helped found the Conference for Progressive Labor Action (CPLA). Afterward, he even experimented with Marxist-Leninism by creating the American Workers Party and merging with the Trotskyist Communist League. In 1936, however, Muste returned to his pacifist roots and became a dedicated proponent of Gandhian nonviolence (Hentoff 1967).

As the FOR’s national secretary, Muste solidified the Gandhian collective identity and strategies of the religious-pacifist critical community. Immediately after his personal “rebirth,” he had already highlighted the spiritual and practical importance of love, truth, and “soul force”:

Pacifism—life—is built upon a central truth and the experience of that truth, its apprehension not by the mind alone but by the entire being in an act of faith and surrender. That truth is: God is love, love is of God. Love is the central thing in the universe. Mankind is one in an ultimate spiritual reality… Such an affirmation one must accept, and make, first in one’s soul. If it is not there, it exists only in formulas and abstractions…. We must carry the dynamic and method of love into every relationship—into family life, into race relations, into work in the labor movement, political activity, international relations…. I believe that one who holds such views as I have described must live and work in fellowship with those who hold like views in such an organization as the Fellowship of Reconciliation (Hentoff 1967: 201-202).
In his book *Nonviolence in an Aggressive World*, published in 1940, he confirmed that American pacifists could only change the domestic and international situation by preparing for a militant "nonviolence movement" based on the Gandhian repertoire (idem: 223-226). Strategically, moreover, he urged fellow FOR members to focus on racial segregation as the main symptom of social injustice in the United States, and to cooperate closely with African-American institutions and leaders:

"This is the true road to liberation. Chiefly, mankind must always depend on its minorities, on the downtrodden, to show the way, since the privileged are too much bound by their vested interests. Gandhi, in India, practiced nonviolence on a great scale. If the Negro churches of this country were to give the lead to their own people and their friends in the use of this basically Christian way of redemption, it would constitute another great step toward the achievement of a revolution greater and more beneficent than all the revolutions of the past (idem: 295)."

While Richard Gregg and Harold Fey had contributed to the Gandhian repertoire's dislocation, therefore, Muste developed concrete ideas and plans for its relocation.

Inspired by Muste's leadership, several religious pacifists set up institutions to put his program into practice. In 1940, Jay Holmes Smith, who had lived in India as a missionary and had met Gandhi personally, created the Harlem Ashram as a free space for American activists eager to study Shridharani's book and discuss satyagraha.46 These discussions in turn led to the formation of the committee for Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA) and the Free India Committee, which organized numerous demonstrations in New York and Washington, D.C. (Anderson 1997: 70-71). As Smith (quoted in Wittner 1969: 63-64) later wrote, NVDA participants recognized that:

"Total pacifism [necessitates] a new revolution, in which we seek to transform society by the method of non-violent action....We envision the application of this method, developed by Mahatma Gandhi, to such areas of injustice and consequent conflict as race discrimination, denial of civil liberties...[and] any other entrenched social evil."

After the war ended, moreover, radical activists founded groups like the Committee for Non-Violent Revolution (CNVR) and the Peacemakers, which explicitly called for civil disobedience as "the most democratic and patriotic course" (idem: 157). Whereas the previous generation had perceived the innovative potential of the Gandhian repertoire

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46 In the summer of 1941, moreover, Smith's Harlem Ashram inspired the "Ahimsa Farm," a small cooperative located near Cleveland and run by seven young pacifists seeking to establish a Gandhian training center for nonviolent living (Chatfield 1971: 216).
outside of India, this generation of religious pacifists actually experimented with Gandhian discursive language, organizational styles, and even action forms to address social problems in the United States.

**African-American theologians**

African-American theologians responded to World War II by highlighting the negative effects of segregation and promoting Gandhian nonviolence as the ideal means for improving racial relations within as well as outside of the United States. Mordecai Johnson, the president of Howard University, was a particularly influential opinion leader during these years. He gave lectures on themes such as “Christianity’s World Opportunity in America” and “Segregation Saps the Nation’s Strength,” and participated in a national radio program on the role of African Americans in the war effort (McKinney 1997: 110-111). Benjamin Mays, after becoming president of Morehouse College (the second-ranked African-American university) in 1940, was also very active as public spokesperson for the African-American community. In 1942, for instance, he co-authored the famous Durham statement, which called on Southern leaders of both races to improve living conditions of African Americans in the South and eliminate the racial tensions that surfaced during World War II, and subsequently joined the Southern Regional Council (SRC) (Egerton 1994: 306-307). And starting on June 1, 1946, he wrote weekly columns for the *Pittsburgh Courier* that encouraged African Americans to apply the nonviolent praxis of Jesus Christ and Gandhi in their personal lives as well as collective endeavors (Carter 1998: 252, 259). As university presidents, however, both Johnson and Mays were reluctant to support confrontational *direct* action on the basis of the Gandhian repertoire, because the financial solvency of their institutions largely depended on Congressional appropriations and monetary contributions by progressive white Americans (McKinney 1997: 53; Carter 1998: 372).

The relocation efforts of Howard Thurman and William Stuart Nelson, who became a prominent critical community member after taking over as dean of the School of Religion in 1940, were less constrained by their positions. As dean of Howard University’s Rankin Chapel, Thurman was more concrete in his support of nonviolent militancy—and more adventurous in his experiments with *satyagraha*’s action forms.
organizational styles, and discursive language—than Johnson or Mays could afford to be. In “The Will to Segregation,” an article published in 1943, he specifically outlined why Christian Americans of both races needed to employ the Gandhian repertoire to fight social injustice:

"What must a man do who wishes to work effectively on this problem within the framework of Christian ethics? In the first place I must see to it that what I condemn in society, I do not permit to grow and flower in me.... But even if my heart is pure, my motives above reproach and my personal action unequivocal and positive, this is not enough. I must share the guilt of my age, my society, and my race....

This means that for my second action I must put my creative mind to work in the devising of techniques, personal and group, for the achievement of these ends. High among these techniques are those that belong in the general classification of moral suasion, attempts to make individual and social conscience articulate with reference to a specific sin....

The third type of personal action is even more difficult because a conflict of loyalties makes the decision of positive Christian action in a given situation very difficult to determine.... But I may decide that I cannot wait for the thing to work itself out.... Something concrete must be done now.... What do I do then? I may resort to the exercise of some shock, by organizing a boycott, or widespread non-cooperation, or the like. The function of these techniques is to tear men free from their alignments to the evil way, to free them so that they may be given an immediate sense of acute insecurity and out of the depths of their insecurity be forced to see their kinship with the weak and the insecure.... Action of this kind requires great discipline of mind, emotions and body to the end that forces may not be released that will do complete violence both to one’s ideals and one’s purpose. All must be done with the full consciousness of the Divine Scrutiny (Fluker and Tumber 1998: 217-219).

Like Gandhi, therefore, Thurman recognized that although self-discipline was essential for leading a nonviolent life, in certain situations only mass direct action (or what he referred to as “shock”) could produce the sense of urgency and solidarity required to achieve fundamental social transformation. In 1944, when he left Howard University to set up the Church for Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco, Thurman used his outline to establish a spiritual environment—a free space—where his congregation could prepare for Gandhian activism.

Nelson was also more explicit about the need for applying satyagraha’s action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language in the African-American freedom struggle than the two university presidents. As editor of Howard University’s Journal of Religious Thought, he created an academic forum for Christian approaches to race relations that acknowledged the potential effectiveness of massive nonviolent direct action. And when African-American activists gathered in Chicago for the “We Are Americans Too!” conference in 1943 to discuss the practical implications of the Gandhian repertoire (or, what they referred to as “Non-Violent Goodwill Direct Action”),
it was Nelson who chaired the symposium entitled “Mapping a Broad National Program in the Interest of Abolishing Jim Crow in America” and led the “National Advisory Committee On Mass Action and Strategy” (Bracey and Meier 1990, Reel 20, Box 24: 152; idem. 21(25): 155). In 1946, moreover, he eagerly accepted an invitation by the AFSC to provide relief to famine victims in India. During his meetings with Gandhi in January and August of 1947, the Indian leader once again confirmed that only active satyagraha—not passive resistance—could help the African-American minority gain first-class citizenship in the United States. After returning home, Nelson shared his experiences and insights with African-American audiences throughout the South, reinforcing his reputation as one of the country’s foremost experts on the Gandhian repertoire. Like Thurman, in short, Nelson helped make the transition from dislocation to relocation possible by adopting new and audacious strategies to express his critical community’s enduring collective identity.

**Congress of Racial Equality**

Both religious pacifists and African-American theologians influenced the founders of CORE, the most significant new critical community of this period. At his first annual conference as the FOR’s executive secretary, in September 1941, A.J. Muste appointed three new staff members, all of whom would play leading roles in CORE: James Farmer as race relations secretary, George Houser as youth secretary, and Bayard Rustin as secretary for student and general affairs. Farmer, an African-American graduate from Howard University, also enjoyed close ties with Benjamin Mays, an intimate friend of his father, and particularly with Howard Thurman, his mentor and confidant (Farmer 1985: 134-136). Houser and Rustin, moreover, knew Thurman as a famous preacher and fellow participant in the FOR. But while they were committed to their elders’ Christian ideals, all three appointees wanted to move beyond their elders’ approach to Gandhian activism in the United States.

After several months as FOR secretary in Chicago, Farmer became convinced that contemporary ideas and practices would never lead to racial equality. Inspired by discussions with local friends, he started preparing a memo entitled “Provisional Plan for Brotherhood Mobilization.” In a preliminary draft, he wrote:
Segregation will go on as long as we permit it. Words are not enough; there must be action. We must withhold our support and participation from the institution of segregation in every area of American life—not an individual witness to purity of conscience, as Thoreau used it, but a coordinated movement of mass noncooperation as with Gandhi. And civil disobedience when laws are involved. And jail where necessary. More than the elegant cadre of generals we now have, we also must have an army of ground troops. Like Gandhi’s army, it must be nonviolent. Guns would be suicidal for us. Yes, Gandhi has the key for me to unlock the door to the American dream (Farmer 1985: 74).

The final version—which he sent to Muste on February 19, 1942—gave credit to the FOR, Jay Holmes Smith, and especially Shridharani’s *War Without Violence* for formulating a new set of protest forms: the Gandhian repertoire. It also expressed respect for the achievements of traditional civil rights organizations like the NAACP and the NUL (as well as their “elegant cadre of generals”), but argued that these had been unable to deal with the race problem as a whole (memo in Farmer 1985: 355). The only way to eliminate racial segregation at its roots, according to Farmer, was to adopt the Gandhian repertoire and adapt it to American circumstances:

1. Certain societal and cultural differences between the United States and India, and certain basic differences between the problems to be dealt with in the two countries, militate strongly against an uncritical duplication of the Gandhian steps in organization and execution. The American race problem is in many ways distinctive, and must to that extent be dealt with in a distinctive manner. Using Gandhism as a base, our approach must be creative in order to be effectual.
2. If any such movement is to amount to more than a gesture of protest, however valuable such a gesture may be, it must seek to draw mass following. Therefore, the movement cannot be limited to pacifists but must try to “mobilize” all persons who want to see an end to racial discrimination in America, and are willing to commit themselves to a disciplined non-violence in working toward that goal.
3. If such an endeavor is not to degenerate into violence and chaos, pacifists must serve as its nucleus, its moving force.
4. Such a program must be on a religious base if it is to possess genuine motive power and is to appeal to masses of people, black and white, Jewish and Gentile.
5. The difficulty in developing and utilizing mass discipline in unified action is so great that we would probably not attempt vital mass nonviolent direct action, except on an experimental scale, until discipline and training was perfected. There should be no hesitancy, however, in carrying out education and “moral suasion” projects from the very beginning. This, of course, is following the Gandhian and commonsense procedure of launching vital campaigns only when satisfactory discipline and unity is arrived at (idem: 356).

Unlike his predecessors—unlike Gregg or Muste, unlike Thurman or Nelson—Farmer developed a plan that called for sustained collective application of the full range of satyagraha’s action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language. Besides setting up institutions based on a Gandhian collective identity and experimenting with Gandhian
strategies in relatively safe places, he actually aimed at mobilizing Gandhian protest campaigns—and, eventually, a Gandhian social movement—to challenge the American system of racial segregation (idem: 355-357).

Meanwhile Houser, the FOR’s white youth secretary, had organized a Committee on Nonviolence in Chicago to encourage local students to study and discuss Gandhi’s methods. When Muste invited Farmer and his colleagues to present the “Brotherhood Mobilization Plan” to the FOR’s National Council in March, 1942, therefore, Houser and his committee agreed to join them. At this meeting, Farmer explained that his plan appealed to all layers of the African-American community, not just the educated elite; stressed the need to reach out to indigenous churches, civic organizations, and schools; and described preliminary attempts at Gandhian protest in Chicago (idem: 359-360). Concerned about the coercive and radical nature of his ideas, the National Council authorized him to launch an autonomous organization that would be affiliated with, but not directed by, the FOR (idem: 103; Broderick and Meier 1965: 220-221). Soon afterward, Farmer, Houser, and their associates founded the Committee of Racial Equality (CORE) and made preparations for further experimentation with the Gandhian repertoire. The other initial participants of CORE included Jimmy Robinson, Bernice Fischer, Homer Jack, Joe Guinn, Bob Chino, and Hugo Victoreen. Robinson, Fischer, and Jack were white radical pacifists and theology students in Chicago; Guinn was an African-American activist; Chino and Victoreen were white students at the University of Chicago (Farmer 1985: 90, 104-105).

In April and May of 1942, these original CORE members initiated a Gandhian campaign against a roller skating rink and held the first collective “sit-ins” at a local coffee house. FOR members throughout the country heard about these dramatic events and set up their own CORE chapter in places like Seattle, Denver, New York, Philadelphia, and Evanston. Each new CORE chapter adopted the same collective identity and adhered to the same strategic rules as its parent organization. As the statement of purpose indicated, all members had to know the principles of nonviolent philosophy well, “commit themselves to work as an integrated, disciplined group,” and contribute to general policy “through democratic group discussion” (quoted in Meier and Rudwick 1973: 9). And CORE’s “Action Discipline” stipulated that collective
campaigns had to follow Shridharani’s guidelines for applying the Gandhian repertoire in the American context. It identified seven specific steps for groups engaging in nonviolent direct action:

1. Investigation of the injustices.
2. Negotiation of the difficulty with those who seem to be primarily responsible.
3. Education of the public on the issue through speeches, pamphlets, etc.
4. Organization of public pressure through letter-writing campaigns, petitioning, organizing Citizens Committees to protest, etc.
5. More direct demonstration through picketing or leafletting.
6. Direct action through civil disobedience and non-cooperation with injustice.
7. Non-retaliation in case violence enters into the picture.

Then, on June 15, 1943, CORE held the first annual conference in Chicago to create a national organization that could coordinate the local chapters’ activities. At the same gathering, it changed its name from Committee of Racial Equality to Congress of Racial Equality (Meier and Rudwick 1973: 16-18).

Although Rustin, the other African-American secretary of FOR, had been involved in strategy sessions from the beginning, he did not become an official representative of CORE until this conference (Farmer 1985: 112). Previously, he had been active as a “one-man crusade” for the FOR, traveling across the country to persuade religious pacifists and young African Americans to employ the Gandhian repertoire in their struggle to eliminate racial segregation (Anderson 1997: 81-82). Even after formally joining CORE, Rustin continued to initiate his own efforts to organize mass satyagraha. In October and November of 1943, for instance, he held workshops in San Francisco to transform “The Vanguard League” into a Gandhian organization (Meier and Rudwick 1973: 17). He argued that this league had the same purpose as CORE—“to eliminate racial discrimination”—and should adopt the same method—“interracial, non-violent direct action.” As Rustin wrote:

The Gandhian Non-Violent Action strategy and techniques furnish the best current example of the effort to develop non-violence into an effective revolutionary instrument in a large-scale social and political situation. We do not, of course, suggest a mechanical or slavish copying but an

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These seven steps appear in a long memo written by George Houser on June 16, 1944 (to prepare for a summer campaign in 1945) and reflect the lessons learned from CORE campaigns in previous years. The number of steps referred to in the CORE literature varied (usually it mentioned just the four basic steps: gather facts, negotiate, rouse public opinion, and, as a last resort, direct action), but the basic message remained the same during these years (Meier and Rudwick 1973: 9-13).
imaginative and creative adaptation of the Gandhian method in conflict situations of various kinds in the United States (CORE Papers 6:2).

He also identified familiar steps for engaging in Gandhian protest: "investigation, negotiation, education, arbitration by self-sacrifice, and direct action" (idem). Thus, while Rustin basically accepted the principles and strategies of CORE, he was not nearly as committed to its organizational growth as Farmer, Houser, and other founding members.

Even with Rustin's help, though, CORE was unable to prevent the negative effects of the 1943 race riots. In subsequent years, its leaders forged links with various groups and initiated numerous projects—most famously, the Journey of Reconciliation in 1947. But they failed to turn CORE into a national organization and failed to build the kind of Gandhian social movement Farmer and Houser originally had in mind (Meier and Rudwick 1973: 3-39). Nevertheless, CORE's small-scale experiments with nonviolent direct action between 1942 and 1947 were more militant and innovative than the preceding efforts of religious pacifists, African-American theologians, and other critical communities. Despite its limitations, this new critical community of young, inexperienced activists contributed more to the relocation of the Gandhian repertoire's action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language than any of its predecessors.

March on Washington Movement

The other critical community emerging during World War II was the brainchild of Asa Philip Randolph, the prominent African-American labor leader. In September 1940, after a long career as president of the first African-American union, the Brotherhood for Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP), Randolph joined Walter White of the NAACP and T. Arnold Hill of the NUL to talk with President Roosevelt about racial discrimination. When the meeting proved futile, he declared that the traditional methods of his two colleagues were outdated and that new strategies were needed (Pfeffer 1990: 47). He urged large numbers of African Americans to march to Washington, D.C. and to demand desegregation of the military as well as free access to jobs in the defense industries:

On to Washington, ten thousand black Americans... We shall not call upon our white friends to march with us. There are some things Negroes must do alone. This is our fight and we must see it through. If it costs money to finance a march on Washington, let Negroes pay for it. If any
To put his bold plan into practice, he founded the March on Washington Committee in April 1941 and, with the help of BSCP volunteers, began preparing for the event. The Roosevelt administration was concerned about the impact of such a massive march on the war effort and tried to persuade him to call it off. But Randolph refused to give in—until the president offered to sign Executive Order No. 8802 and establish the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) in June 1941 (Pfeffer 1990: 48-50).

Although Randolph had postponed the actual campaign, he continued his organizational efforts. In December 1941, following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, he created the March on Washington Movement (MOWM) and started holding massive rallies throughout the country (Pfeffer 1990: 53). Several months later, to answer his mainstream critics, he announced that a MOWM conference on future policy would take place in September 1942. It was at this conference in Detroit that Randolph first proposed the adoption of the Gandhian repertoire, which had been so successful in India, as the MOWM’s main weapon:

[The Negro needs more than organization. He needs mass organization with an action program, aggressive, bold and challenging in spirit....Witness the strategy and maneuver of the people of India with mass civil disobedience and non-cooperation and the marches to the sea to make salt

The central principle of the struggle of oppressed minorities like the Negro...is not only to develop mass demonstration maneuvers, but to repeat and continue them....We must develop a series of marches of Negroes at a given time in a hundred or more cities throughout the country, or stage a big march of a hundred thousand Negroes on Washington to put our cause into the mainstream of public opinion and focus the attention of world interests. This is why India is in the news....

We must have every Negro realize his leadership ability, the educated and uneducated, the poor and wealthy. In the March on Washington Movement the highest is as low as the lowest and the lowest is as high as the highest. Numbers in mass formation is our key, directed, of course, by the collective intelligence of the people....But the Negro people are not the only oppressed section of mankind. India is now waging a world shaking, history making fight for independence. *India’s fight is the Negro’s fight* (quoted in Broderick and Meier 1965: 201-210; emphasis added).

After the Detroit conference, he traveled across the United States to drum up support for his new program and helped establish MOWM branches in twenty-four American cities. He wanted members of these branches to apply the same steps and principles as CORE, which had recently staged several small-scale campaigns in Chicago and other American cities (Bracey and Meier 1990, 30(38): 0677-0678; Pfeffer 1990: 55-88). Although
nearly all MOWM activists were African-American, secular, and working class. Randolph believed that they could use Gandhian strategies—or, what he called, "nonviolent, goodwill direct action"—to build a nationwide social movement against racial segregation (idem: 58).

Following several months of localized activities and preparations, Randolph declared that the MOWM would organize the "We Are Americans, Too!" conference in the summer of 1943 to bring American experts on the Gandhian repertoire together and "map out a broad national program in the interest of abolishing jim crowism in America" (Bracey and Meier 1990. 21(25): 153). Ten days before the conference started, however, the worst race riots of the decade broke out in Detroit and spread across the country, eradicating nearly all African-American and progressive support for militant nonviolent protest (Garfinkel 1969: 144; Pfeffer 1990: 87; Sitkoff 1971). Although the "We Are Americans, Too!" sessions took place anyway, the window of opportunity for a national Gandhian movement in the United States had already closed. Formally, the MOWM continued to exist until 1946, but by then Randolph—its commanding leader and principal driving force—had shifted his attention to less ambitious projects like the FEPC, "A Call to American Progressives" (with John Dewey and Norman Thomas, among others), and the People's Party (Pfeffer 1990: 126-127).

All in all, the MOWM contributed significantly to satyagraha's relocation between 1940 and 1947. By organizing local nonviolent direct action campaigns, and preparing for national ones, it demonstrated that even groups without a typically Gandhian collective identity—that is, without the religious commitment or interracialism of theologians, pacifists, and CORE activists—could apply Gandhian strategies to fight racial segregation in the United States (Pfeffer 1990: 88). While it failed to achieve its primary goal, the MOWM helped prepare the soil for future attempts at constructing an American social movement guided by the action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language in the Gandhian repertoire.

III. Diffusion mechanisms
Each of the critical communities during this period contributed to the transition from dislocation to relocation, although some more directly than others. Religious pacifists and African-American theologians primarily worked behind the scenes, creating an intellectual and spiritual climate that encouraged Gandhian resistance. CORE and MOWM activists, however, took the final and most important step toward relocation: they actually engaged in practical experimentation with, and creative reinvention of, the Gandhian repertoire in local American settings (Chabot 2002a). The political context for these efforts was far from ideal. Although president Roosevelt made a symbolic concession by signing Executive Order No. 8802 in 1941, for example, he also allowed FBI agents to secretly monitor MOWM and CORE leaders thereafter (Reed 1991). And while Randolph, as a prominent figure, enjoyed some access to the mainstream African-American press, coverage of his plans for mass satyagraha campaigns in the United States was mostly negative. African-American newspapers that had previously expressed their admiration for Gandhi’s activities in India, such as the New York Amsterdam News and the Pittsburgh Courier, now vehemently opposed similar activities in their own country (Wynn 1975; Blum 1976). To fully understand how and why critical communities achieved relocation despite unfavorable political conditions, I now turn to the brokerage and collective appropriation mechanisms.

Transnational brokerage

With the focus shifting toward implementation in the United States, critical communities reduced their emphasis on transnational ties. By remaining active, though, veteran brokers like Richard Gregg and Krishnalal Shridharani ensured that existing cross-border networks did not disintegrate. Several newcomers, moreover, followed in their precursors’ footsteps, traveling to India to meet with Gandhi and observe satyagraha in action. Inspired by Gregg, for instance, J. Holmes Smith and Ralph Templin settled in India as missionaries, worked closely with Gandhian activists, and tried to develop a Christian version of satyagraha (“Kristagraha”). At the end of the 1930s, however, the British authorities expelled them for refusing to pledge loyalty to the Indian government (Anderson 1997: 70; Farmer 1985: 149). After returning home, both continued their efforts to make the Gandhian repertoire attractive for American Christians. Smith helped
found the Harlem Ashram, the NVDA, and the Free India Committee, while Templin promoted nonviolent direct action through his writing and lecturing. In 1943, for example, it was Templin who responded to Du Bois’s critical article in the *New York Amsterdam News* (May 29, 1943: 10) and strongly defended the relevance of the Gandhian repertoire in the American context.

Similarly, William Stuart Nelson’s admiration for Thurman and Mays motivated him to cross the Pacific Ocean and witness satyagraha with his own eyes. Nelson was particularly eager to learn more about Gandhi’s views on Christianity and Indian independence. During his conversation with Gandhi in January 1947, therefore, he asked how the AFSC delegation, a group of Christian pacifists, could help the victims of the Bengal famine in 1943. The Indian leader replied that it should take care of basic needs before talking about religion: “When men are without food or clothing or shelter, they are not amenable to an appeal to the spirit until these needs are satisfied at least to a degree” (*Baltimore Afro-American* 1947: 14). And in August 1947, Gandhi came to bid Nelson farewell and confided that, although India was about to gain sovereignty, the nationalist struggle “had not been one...of nonviolence but of passive resistance, a weapon of the weak” (WSN Papers 7: 5). The African-American theologian took these messages back to Howard University and reminded his audiences that satyagraha required economic autonomy as well as inner strength.

**Domestic brokerage**

Although the role of Smith, Templin, and Nelson should not be underestimated, domestic brokerage between generations and between critical communities was more important for achieving relocation than transnational brokerage. Unlike before, young and old receivers during the early 1940s agreed that the time was ripe for dramatic deeds, not just fiery rhetoric. When Farmer wrote the memos that subsequently led to the formation of CORE, therefore, he knew that Muste and Thurman supported militant forms of nonviolent direct action, even if they did not want to lead such campaigns themselves. And when Rustin embarked on his “one-man crusade” to desegregate restaurants in the South, he was well aware that Muste, Gregg, and other experienced radical pacifists approved (Anderson 1997). This kind of intergenerational transfer of knowledge and
experience not only provided a solid foundation for sustained collective action, but also helped construct even tighter relationships between the critical communities than during the 1930s.

In 1942, for example, members of the FOR, MOWM, and CORE regularly met in New York to read and discuss books such as Thoreau’s essay on civil disobedience, My Gandhi by John Haynes Holmes, The Conquest of Violence by Bartolomeo de Ligt (a Dutch pacifist), Gregg’s The Power of Nonviolence, Shridharani’s War Without Violence, and Gandhi’s autobiography. Frequent participants included Muste, Smith, Rustin, Houser, Farmer, and Randolph (Anderson 1997: 69). But the highpoint of domestic brokerage was the MOWM’s “We Are Americans, Too!” conference in 1943, which assembled all four critical communities under one roof. Channing Tobias and Mordecai Johnson joined William Stuart Nelson as African-American theologians; Muste, Smith, and E. Stanley Jones spoke for the religious pacifists; Rustin and Farmer participated in name of CORE (Bracey and Meier 1990, 20(24): 137-161; idem, 21(25): 152-155, 942). Although the race riots precluded execution of Randolph’s national program, the strong Gandhian infrastructure created during this conference would continue to play a major role.

**Collective appropriation in free spaces**

The consolidation of transnational links and crystallization of domestic networks enabled inventive applications of the Gandhian repertoire in the United States. Some of these innovative forms of collective appropriation took place in the context of new free spaces. The Harlem Ashram of J. Holmes Smith, for example, was not only a product of transnational brokerage, but also an instance of collective appropriation in itself. But while Smith’s efforts inspired others to create their own spiritual communes and discussion groups, the Harlem Ashram never evolved beyond an impoverished and dirty meeting place for radical pacifists who had already decided to engage in nonviolent direct action (Farmer 1985: 149-150; Wittner 1969: 64). Howard Thurman’s experiments with the Church for Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco resulted in a more original free space for collective appropriation of the Gandhian repertoire.
In 1943 A.J. Muste asked Thurman to recommend someone to establish an interracial and multicultural Fellowship Church for the FOR. Unexpectedly, Thurman accepted the position himself and, in 1944, he moved to San Francisco to join Dr. Alfred Fisk, a white Presbyterian minister, as co-pastor. For Thurman, the Fellowship Church represented a relatively safe environment for trying out unorthodox forms of religious communion and worship on the basis of universal ideals of brotherhood and fellowship—ideals that figured prominently in satyagraha as well as the Sermon on the Mount. In other words, it was a free space for transforming the most segregated institution in American society, the church, according to Christian and Gandhian principles.

In particular, Thurman hoped the Fellowship Church would help resolve four dilemmas haunting him since his trip to India and meeting with Gandhi:

- First, is it possible to establish islands of community or fellowship in a sea of religious and social strife, with any hope of their resolving the strife? Second, is it possible for an authentic interracial and intercultural church to develop—a church that will not be largely dominated by one particular group with some other group on the fringes? Third, is it possible for a Negro and white minister to share the leadership of such a church on the basis of their respective gifts rather than on the basis of their group affiliations?... Fourth, how fundamental, and of what kind, will be the opposition to the development of the idea in practice, both from ecclesiastical interests and other interests of the community? What steps will be taken to neutralize its effect and to defeat its purpose? (Fluker and Tumber 1998: 222).

To find answers to these questions, Thurman introduced the Twilight Hours, a religious service that allowed for more spiritual freedom, moments of silent reflection, appreciation of the arts, and creative imagination than the traditional sermon (Thurman 1979: 92-93). He and Fisk also initiated the Fellowship Camp to stimulate children's interest in foreign nationalities; held Fellowship Dinners to encourage distinct racial groups to cook together; and established a reading room with publications by members of various cultures and races in the United States (idem: 222-224). Although these activities were not dramatic and received little public attention, they produced a free space for Gandhian discourse that was amenable to religious Americans from diverse backgrounds.

On the one hand, Thurman's Fellowship Church taught individuals how to lead lives based on ecumenical fellowship and mutual understanding. On the other hand, it prepared individuals for implementing the Gandhian repertoire beyond the relatively protected confines of the church.
Collective appropriation in direct action campaigns

Without a doubt, though, direct action campaigns contributed most significantly to the relocation of the Gandhian repertoire. They enabled the difficult transition from lofty ideas to concrete practices, and brought the counter-hegemonic content of Gandhian discourse to the surface by openly challenging the American status quo in the political arena. Yet the opportune moment for such collective appropriations of satyagraha passed quickly: nearly all important events took place between 1942 and 1944. Although the Journey of Reconciliation in 1947 basically followed the same guidelines as previous campaigns, the repressive political climate after the war drastically restricted its impact.

The founders of CORE were the first activist group to expand a single incident into lasting nonviolent direct action. In 1942, during one of their meetings at the Boys’ House in Chicago, they decided to launch a Gandhian campaign against White City, a roller skating rink that prohibited entrance to African Americans. Their plan was to first send a team of twelve white Americans, who would enter without problems, and then a second team of two white Americans and one African American. In his autobiography, Farmer describes what happened to the second team:

They were stopped by the ticket taker, who told them that there was a private club party in progress and one had to be a member of the private club in order to come in and skate. When asked what club was giving the party, he said he didn’t know.

One of the three men gave me a hand signal, tugging at the lobe of his right ear. I then entered the line and made my way up to the ticket window. The woman who sold tickets said that I could not buy a ticket because it was a private club party night and I had to be a member of the club to get in.

I asked her, “What club?” She didn’t know but said that I would have to show a club membership card to get in. I asked to see the manager, and she summoned him....

“The woman selling tickets tells me that one has to be a member of some unnamed private club to skate tonight. Is that correct?” I asked.

“That is right,” the manager replied...

“What club is giving the party tonight?”

“I don’t carry that information around in my head; it’s in my office,” he said....

“Would you mind getting that information for me?”

“I most certainly would mind,” he said, “I don’t have time for this kind of stuff.”

“Well, now.” I began, taking a different tack, “am I to understand that no one can skate tonight without being a member of that private club?”

“Absolutely no one,” he said, emphasizing each word.

“And everyone in there skating has a membership card in the club?”

“Everyone,” he replied, jerking his head.

“Then why is it,” I asked, with a trace of a smile, “that twelve of my friends are in there skating and are not members of any private club and have no membership cards?”

Two of the twelve stopped by the doorway and waved. I pointed them out to the manager. He visibly reddened.

“Are you sure they have no membership cards?” he asked lamely.
“Positive,” I said. “What are you going to do about it?”...

The manager dropped his head and walked away in the direction of his office. He was a beaten man. But we had no victory. The situation was an impasse. We had exposed his club party ruse, but no blacks were skating. The line was still moving, and people were still entering and leaving the skating area.

We all left and went to Boys’ House to discuss strategy (Farmer 1985: 97-98).

The next morning, Farmer swore out warrants for the arrest of White City’s manager, ticket seller, and ticket taker. Following the Gandhian repertoire’s guidelines, they now waited for the justice system to take action in the White City case (Raines 1977: 28-29). But in the meantime, they celebrated their own courage and enjoyed the initial taste of victory.48

In May of 1942, soon after formally becoming an organization, CORE embarked on the first collective sit-in in American history. The origins of the sit-in went back to February of the same year, when Farmer and Jimmy Robinson entered the Jack Spratt Coffee House in Chicago for a cup of coffee.49 After taking a seat at the counter, the manager of the establishment ordered them to vacate the premises because he refused to serve an African American. Taken by surprise, Farmer feebly responded with “Why can’t you?” but to no avail. Two days later, after persuading a few friends to join them and after discussing the essential principles of the Gandhian repertoire, they returned to Jack Spratt’s. This time the manager did not seem to mind their presence and allowed the waitress to serve them food and drinks. Upon leaving the coffee house, however, he came outside and threw their money into the street, screaming: “Take your money and get out! We don’t want it!” (Farmer 1985: 93). That evening, at the Boys’ House, they tried to figure out what to do next. Looking for inspiration, Farmer started leafing through a book:

It was *War without Violence*, by Krishnalal Shridharani, a disciple of Gandhi who had been with Gandhi on his famed salt march. The book was an analysis and outline of Gandhi’s method of nonviolent direct action. It presented the three basic and essential steps: investigation (to get the facts), negotiation (to try to solve the problem in face-to-face discussions), and direct action.

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48 After being postponed for more than six months and after the state’s assistant attorney unexpectedly took over the prosecution, CORE lost their legal case against the White City Roller Skating Rink (Farmer 1985: 108-109).

49 Although CORE members were aware of the sit-down strikes that labor activists had initiated at the end of the 1930s (Fine 1969), therefore, the sit-ins were fundamentally different. Unlike the sit-downs, the sit-ins organized by CORE during these years relied on strict adherence to the Gandhian repertoire of nonviolent contention and aimed at desegregating public establishments rather than defending the interests of employees.
According to Gandhi’s steps, I pointed out, we should now attempt to negotiate before using direct action at Jack Spratt. Although we were not slaves to Gandhi’s steps, and Shridharam had not written the Bible, I urged that we make a serious and honest effort at negotiation before we clobbered our opponent—nonviolently, of course.

Jimmy and Bernice agreed, and so did Guinn. The others followed. I was asked to try to make contact with the coffee shop’s manager to set up a meeting at which Bernice, Jimmy, and I would try to persuade him to change his policy (idem: 94).

The next day, James drafted a letter to the manager, asking for a meeting to discuss the issue and requesting a reply within ten days. He mailed the letter that evening. More than two months later, Jack Spratt still had not responded to their ultimatum. After another round of negotiations, CORE members agreed to proceed to the Gandhian repertoire’s final step: direct action.

First, they informed the police chief of their plans, reminding him of the civil rights law prohibiting discriminatory practices. Then, a group of twenty-eight CORE members entered the coffee house in parties of two, three, and four—each with one African-American man or woman:

With the discipline of peacefulness strictly observed, we occupied all available seating spaces at the counter and in booths....Waitresses looked at each other and shrugged. Then they looked at the woman in charge for a cue, but none was forthcoming....Two whites, who were not obviously members of our group and were sitting some distance from each other at the counter, were served. One, a well-dressed, middle-aged woman, thanked the waitress when her food arrived, but sitting with hands in her lap, did not touch it. The other, a man, also older, promptly passed his food to the black beside him, who proceeded to eat it....

The woman in charge went to the lady who had been served and asked, “Is your dinner all right, ma’am?”

“Oh, I’m sure it’s just fine.”

“But you aren’t eating it.”

“I know. You see, it wouldn’t be very polite for me to begin eating before my friends also had been served.”...

After making a phone call, the woman in charge swept past me and spoke to Jimmy Robinson. “If the colored people in your group will go to the basement, I’ll have them served there.”

I responded: “No, ma’am. We will not eat in the basement.”

“Well,” she said, still speaking to Jimmy, not to me, “if you’ll clear out the two rear booths, then all the colored people can sit there, and I will have them served.”

“No, thank you,” I said. “We are quite comfortable where we are.”

“I’ll call the police,” she said, and now she was looking directly at me with a triumphant expression on her face.

I told her I thought that might be the appropriate thing for her to do....

Within minutes, two of Chicago’s finest walked in....[O]ne of them asked, “What did you call us for, lady? I don’t see anybody disturbing the peace. What do you want us to do?”

“I want you to throw these people out, of course,” she replied.

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50 CORE’s newsletter in January 1943 summarized the steps as follows: “Gather facts. Negotiate. Rouse public opinion, and then, if absolutely necessary, and only as a last resort, Take Direct Action....” (quoted in Meier and Rudwick 1973: 13).
"Lady, we can't do that. What're they doing wrong? You're open for business, aren't you? They're not trespassing. ... You must either serve them or solve the problem yourself the best way you can."

The woman in charge ordered the waitresses to serve everyone (Farmer 1985:106-107).

Everyone ate their meal and paid their bill, leaving good tips for the waitresses. No one threw money on the street this time. That same evening Robinson wrote a letter to Jack Spratt, expressing gratitude for the service and his establishment's change in policy. Over the next couple weeks, small CORE groups confirmed that the coffee house's racial practices had indeed improved (idem: 107-108; Raines 1977: 29-32).

CORE's groundbreaking efforts received little attention in the local or African-American press. Both the Chicago Tribune and the Chicago Defender only published short articles on one of their back pages, and there was no television coverage (Raines 1977: 32-33; Farmer 1985: 115). Even Fellowship devoted many more reports to Rustin's personal experiences than to the collective action campaigns in Chicago. Nevertheless, through word of mouth, FOR members throughout the country heard about the sit-ins and began setting up CORE chapters in Seattle, Denver, New York, Philadelphia, and Evanston (Farmer 1985: 112). And at Howard University, Farmer's alma mater, students were eager to follow CORE's example and adapt the Gandhian repertoire to circumstances in Washington, D.C. (Meier and Rudwick 1973: 14; Murray 1987: 201).

In January 1943, three female sophomores at Howard University—Ruth Powell, Marianne Musgrave, and Juanita Morrow—entered a United Cigar store, sat down at the counter, and ordered hot chocolate. When the waitress refused to serve them, they asked for the manager and waited for him in their seats. Instead, two policemen came and, to her surprise, they ordered the waitress to serve the students. She did so, but charged them 25 cents for each cup instead of the usual 10 cents. Rather than paying the full amount, Powell, Musgrave, and Morrow left only 35 cents and on their way out the policemen arrested them.

Their arrest caused a stir of protest within the Howard University student body. Against the wishes of president Mordecai Johnson, who did not want to jeopardize the university's financial prospects, supporters of the three young women began organizing their own sit-ins or what they called "stool-sitting." Discussions in Truth Hall led to a
plan of action that emphasized the four steps of the Gandhian repertoire outlined in Shridharani’s book (Murray 1987: 138). They formed a Civil Rights Committee and a Direct Action subcommittee, to ensure that their activities were legal and well planned. They held rallies, meetings, and workshops to recruit participants and teach them the principles of satyagraha. They designed a code of conduct, agreed to dress neatly, and pledged to behave nonviolently—even if provoked. And finally, they decided that Little Palace Cafeteria would be their first target (idem: 203-207). On April 17, 1943, about twenty carefully selected students departed from Howard University’s campus in groups of four and walked to the cafeteria:

As each group arrived, three entered the cafeteria while the fourth remained outside as an “observer.” Inside, we took our trays to the steam table and as soon as we were refused service carried our empty trays to a vacant seat at one of the tables, took out magazines, books of poetry or textbooks, notebooks and pencils, and assumed an attitude of concentrated study. Strict silence was maintained...

The management was stunned at first, then after trying unsuccessfully to persuade us to leave, called the police. Almost immediately a half-dozen uniformed officers appeared. When they approached us we said simply, “We’re waiting or service,” and since we did not appear to be violating any law, they made no move to arrest us. After forty-five minutes had passed and twelve Negro students were occupying most of the tables of the small cafeteria, Chaconas [the owner] gave up and closed his restaurant eight hours earlier than his normal closing time. Those of us who were inside joined the picket line and kept it going for the rest of the afternoon...

When Chaconas opened his place on Monday morning, our picket line was there to greet him, and it continued all day. Within forty-eight hours he capitulated and began to serve Negro customers. We were jubilant (idem: 207-208).

Although CORE did not reach mainstream audiences, therefore, its actions did inspire other students in the United States to adopt similar methods and initiate similar campaigns.41

On June 15, 1943, CORE leaders held a general conference and discussed the formation of a national organization to coordinate the growing number of branches throughout the country. During the plenary meeting, they formed the National Federation of Committees of Racial Equality, agreed to a constitution, and adopted the CORE rules for action (Bell 1968: 195-196; Meier and Rudwick 1973). But the highlight of the

41 In fact, about one year later (in April 1944) Howard University students started another satyagraha campaign, this time against three local cafeterias in the John R. Thompson Company chain. Following similar procedures as the previous year, they once again successfully desegregated the establishments. As with CORE events, however, the local press almost completely ignored their efforts. Like before, moreover, president Mordecai Johnson, who had been such an eloquent proponent of Gandhi and his methods, explicitly urged the students to refrain from direct action in Washington, D.C., out of fear that Howard University’s Congressional funding would be cut off (Murray 1987: 225-226).
conference was the guest lecture by Krishnalal Shridharani. As Farmer later observed, his appearance was as significant as his words:

I was startled when I saw him for the first time. I had expected a Gandhiesque figure—ascetic, bony, waiflike. Instead, there was a roundish, well-fed, thirty-two-year-old Brahmin, meticulous in a three-piece Brooks Brothers suit, lavender silk shirt, and impeccably shined shoes. A finger on one hand supported a large ruby ring, and on the other hand was a star sapphire. Thin lips on a fleshy face caressed a long cigar.

Although I found a worldly man instead of another Gandhi, I felt more comfortable with him than I would have with Gandhi. Yet, when Shrid, as I came to call him, spoke of Gandhiji, the respectful term for the beloved Mahatma, he took on almost an ascetic appearance.

He told us that we were on the right track, and that the essential Gandhian method would work in the American scene. But it could not be lifted bodily from his country; for America was not India, and the Hebraic-Christian culture was not identical to that of Hinduism. On those themes, he elaborated at length in scholarly fashion (Farmer 1985: 112-113).

The presence of “Shrid” at the CORE convention symbolized that the Gandhian repertoire’s relocation to the United States was complete—both culturally and intellectually. The Indian satyagrahi’s sophisticated and cosmopolitan exterior confirmed that non-ascetics were no less capable of implementing the Gandhian repertoire than ascetic saints, while his verbal support of CORE’s activities legitimated the way they were appropriating the Gandhian repertoire (Fox 1997). Galvanized by Shridharani’s kind words, CORE representatives concluded the event with a celebratory sit-in at Stoner’s, a large and well-known restaurant in Chicago’s Loop district (idem: 113).

It was George Houser who had led preparations for the sit-in. The origins of the event went back to October 1942, when the owner of Stoner’s told three CORE members that he did not serve African Americans. After waiting in vain for forty-five minutes, the three activists tried to make an appointment with Mr. Stoner to discuss the matter, but without success. Following several additional attempts at negotiation, CORE began distributing leaflets to customers of the restaurant, informing them of its discriminatory practices. It investigated the policies of other restaurants in the area and discovered that Stoner’s was the only one that excluded African Americans. Finally, after months of negotiation and investigation, it decided to proceed to the Gandhian repertoire’s final step and try direct action (Meier and Rudwick 1973: 13).

On the evening of the conference, sixty-eight CORE activists entered the restaurant in question. First, the majority of white participants took their seats in groups of twos, threes, and fours. Then, the first interracial group with six African Americans
and two whites tried to do the same. After waiting half an hour, the hostess showed them to a large table and took their orders. This was the cue for the second interracial group, consisting of nine African Americans and one white American, to request a table. But at this point Mr. Stoner ordered the African Americans to leave and called the police. Meanwhile, other customers in the restaurants were wondering what was going on and the CORE members who were seated explained the situation. Most of those present had not been aware that Stoner’s did not serve African Americans and sympathized with CORE’s cause. Pressure on the owner mounted until, after nearly two hours, an elderly lady walked up to one of the African-American women in the second group and offered her a seat at her table. Soon afterwards Mr. Stoner gave in, showing everyone else in the group to their tables as well (Broderick and Meier 1965: 221-225; Farmer 1985: 113-114). Houser (in Broderick and Meier 1965: 224) describes the emotional response that followed:

Then a very unexpected, spontaneous demonstration took place—a wild applause broke out. Practically everyone in the restaurant took part in this sustained acclamation. It was a fitting climax to a well-executed non-violent demonstration for racial justice.

Like true satyagrahis, the activists had not only convinced the restaurant owner to alter his racial policies but also persuaded bystanders that segregation was a serious problem requiring immediate solution.

Meanwhile, the MOWM was initiating its own experiments with nonviolent direct action, with the ambition of expanding small-scale campaigns into a mass movement. In the wake of the Detroit Policy Conference in September 1942, Randolph attempted to relocate the Gandhian repertoire on several fronts: he called for small marches on city halls and councils to arouse the African-American masses and draw public attention to the MOWM’s cause; he advocated the creation of “Negro mass parliament” as places where repressed ghetto residents could voice their everyday problems, tell their personal stories of hardship, and discuss possible lines of action; and he recommended sit-ins at public accommodations, emphasizing the same steps, methods, and behavioral guidelines as CORE (Pfeffer 1990: 58-60). Although the MOWM never gave birth to a national

52 As a labor movement representative, though, Randolph tended to exaggerate the similarities between the sit-down strikes and the sit-ins introduced by CORE activists (Pfeffer 1990: 58).
social movement, it contributed significantly to the collective appropriation of the 
Gandhian repertoire in the United States. It demonstrated that Gandhian strategies could 
work in the American context, it appealed to the “good-will” of the American population, 
and it introduced innovative ways of involving the African-American masses in activism. 
And most importantly, it served as an organizational base for Randolph—the first 
African-American leader to attempt nationwide application of the Gandhian repertoire in 
the form of a social movement (Broderick and Meier 1965: 201-210; Garfinkel 1969; 
Pfeffer 1990).

Neither the MOWM nor Howard University students engaged in nonviolent direct 
action after 1944. The most dramatic Gandhian campaign following the war was the 
Journey of Reconciliation in 1947, a two-week interracial trip through states in the 
“upper” South—Virginia, North Carolina, and Kentucky—organized by CORE’s Bayard 
Rustin and George Houser. The previous year, the Supreme Court had ruled in the case 
of Irene Morgan versus the Commonwealth of Virginia that state laws calling for 
segregation of interstate passengers on motor carriers (buses as well as trains) were 
unconstitutional. The Journey’s intention was to test whether local transportation 
companies recognized the Morgan decision and “to learn the reaction of bus drivers, 
passengers, and police to those who nonviolently and persistently challenge Jim Crow in 
interstate travel” (Houser and Rustin 1947). Prior to the initial bus voyage, the sixteen 
participants—eight African-American and eight white men—received intensive training 
in Gandhian methods and behavior.

Then, on April 9, they split into two groups and took different buses out of 
Washington, D.C. The most significant incident took place in North Carolina, on the 
fifth day. As soon as the bus driver saw Andrew Johnson (an African-American student) 
and Joseph Felmet (a white member of the Southern Workers Defense League) sitting up 
front, he asked them to move to the back. When Johnson and Felmet refused to comply 
with his instructions, he called the police, who immediately arrested them on charges of 
disorderly conduct and disobeying the bus driver. In response, Bayard Rustin and Igal 
Roodenko (a white activist from New York) moved to the same seats in the front, upon 
which they were arrested as well. In the mean time, local people had started gathering 
around the bus and one of them hit James Peck (a white participant) on the head.
Fortunately, a local minister heard about the incident, came to the bus station, and helped the remaining eight men escape without further violence.

Several additional arrests followed on the remaining bus and train rides, but none involving much racial tension or bodily harm. Felmet, Rustin, and Roodenko were later sentenced to thirty days on the chain gang, while Johnson only received a $25 fine. Despite the strict punishments, Houser and Rustin considered the campaign successful: all the participants had remained nonviolent and calm throughout, despite the humiliations and threats; the interracial character of the two groups had prevented tensions and created sympathy among some of the other passengers; audiences, particularly university students, were enthusiastic and eager to get more information about the FOR, CORE, and the Supreme Court decision; and most importantly, the campaign had demonstrated that Gandhian collective action was not only feasible in the North and West, but also in the (upper) South. Nevertheless, the Journey of Reconciliation failed to spark a wider social movement and could not prevent the subsequent decline of the main critical community of this period (Houser and Rustin 1947; Meier and Rudwick 1973: 33-39).

All in all, decades of brokerage and collective appropriation in free spaces had set the stage for the Gandhian direct action campaigns that took place during and right after World War II. Clearly, the critical communities involved in these small-scale campaigns, especially CORE and the MOWM, could not have succeeded without the cooperation of both diffusion mechanisms, which were at least partly contingent and uncontrollable. The next chapter addresses whether the critical communities and diffusion mechanisms that contributed to partial implementation of the Gandhian repertoire between 1940 and 1947 would enable full implementation between 1948 and 1954.