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 seven

FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GANDHIAN REPERTOIRE
DURING THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT
1955-1965

The years between 1955 and 1965 witnessed several international events affecting the Gandhian repertoire's journey to the United States. The end of the Korean War, for example, helped reduce the "chilling effects" of McCarthyism and anti-communism in American society—without completely dispelling them (Wittner 1969: 235). Stalin's death similarly contributed to a thaw in the Cold War, while the wave of decolonization in Africa and Asia infused repressed African Americans with a new sense of pride and defiance. Taking advantage of this emerging solidarity among "colored people" throughout the world, five Asian governments organized the Bandung Conference in 1955, bringing together representatives from Africa, Asia, as well as the United States to discuss the repercussions of Western colonialism. For African Americans, this conference symbolized the end of imperialism and was a sign that the worldwide color line had started to crumble (Rollins 1986: 63-64).

Although the domestic political context for applications of the Gandhian repertoire remained ambiguous, American civil rights activists were able to take advantage of several opportunities during these years. Despite the Supreme Court victory in 1954, they continued to suffer from closed political systems and lack of public support in southern states, while the political leadership in Washington, D.C. initially became more conservative under president Eisenhower. On the enabling side, however, both political parties recognized the growing significance of African-American voters in the hotly contested presidential and congressional elections of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Mainstream opinion leaders, moreover, increasingly acknowledged the strategic salience of the race issue—not only for the country's future, but also in its propaganda war with the Soviet Union (Piven and Cloward 1979: 213-221, 231-235; McAdam 1982: 156-160; Jenkins 1985: 218; Vallenty 1993).
But the civil rights movement that emerged in this political context was by far the most important stimulus for full implementation of the Gandhian repertoire in the United States. It all started on December 5, 1955, when the African-American community in Montgomery, Alabama turned a one-day bus boycott into a nonviolent direct action campaign that lasted more than a year and catapulted its young leader, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., to international fame. During the next few years, African-American leaders capitalized on the bus boycotts across the South by forming the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). On February 1, 1960, the civil rights movement reached a new plateau when four African-American college students in Greensboro, North Carolina sat down at a segregated lunch counter and inaugurated a wave of sit-ins that spread "like a fever" to more than hundred Southern cities. This wave of protest involved approximately fifty thousand nonviolent demonstrators, captured the imagination of television viewers throughout the world, and led to the establishment of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), in April of 1960 (Wolf 1970; Morris 1981; McAdam 1983; Polletta 1998). Inspired by their young colleagues, experienced CORE members embarked on the Freedom Ride through the Deep South in 1961, to test the Supreme Court’s ruling prohibiting racial segregation of terminal facilities and seating arrangements on interstate travel. Pictures of a bus engulfed in flames appeared on the front pages of newspapers across the globe and helped turn CORE into one of the civil rights movement’s primary organizations (Meier and Rudwick 1973; Farmer 1985; Branch 1988).

Between 1961 and 1965, SCLC sponsored three Southern community-wide campaigns: in Albany, Birmingham, and Selma. Although the first campaign did not achieve its goals, the latter led to the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965), respectively (Watters 1971; Garrow 1978; Morris 1981; McAdam 1983). Meanwhile, SNCC initiated the Voter Registration Project in Mississippi in order to organize local African-American communities and increase the number of registered voters. This project, which in many ways resembled Gandhi’s constructive program in India, set the stage for Freedom Summer in 1964 and the creation of the indigenous Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) (Belfrage 1965; Holt 1965; Carson 1981; McAdam 1988). And of course the 1963 March on Washington—best known for its two
hundred thousand peaceful demonstrators and King's “I Have A Dream” speech symbolized to the nation and the world that African Americans deserved to be treated as first-class citizens, and that American society was capable of doing so (Williams 1987: 197-205; Garrow 1986; Branch 1988).

This chapter analyzes how, after a general retreat at the start of the Cold War, American critical communities began fully implementing the Gandhian repertoire during the heyday of the civil rights movement. Contrary to Everett Rogers and classical diffusion theory, it argues that transnational diffusion is unpredictable and can “skip stages” in both directions—backward as well as forward. The first section discusses how the mainstream field of reception of this era interpreted the Gandhian repertoire by examining the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the deeds of civil rights activists rather than the words of Gandhi and the deeds of Indian nationalists, as in previous eras. In the hands of conservative, moderate, and African-American media representatives, nonviolent direct action was primarily the product of American history, not the result of a foreign diffusion item. The second section describes the strategies and collective identities of three familiar and two new critical communities, and specifies how they not only overcame the main diffusion obstacles, but also adopted a new contentious repertoire that incorporated yet went significantly beyond the moderate and extremist repertoires. The concluding section demonstrates that the same two diffusion mechanisms continued to channel applications of the Gandhian repertoire during the civil rights movement.

I. Mainstream field of reception

As before, the mass media and its representatives not only reflected but also helped shape the mainstream field of reception. In the first place, mainstream communication channels popularized the civil rights movement and its implementation of the Gandhian repertoire among a wide audience, forcing bystanders, authorities, and sympathizers to take a stand.

54 Just like the Gandhian repertoire in India, therefore, the Gandhian repertoire in the United States included the “civility” of the moderate repertoire (favored by the NAACP and NUL in particular) and the “militancy” of the extremist repertoire (favored by Garvey's UNIA, Marxists, and later Black Power activists) without incorporating the passivity and submissiveness of the former or the violence and shortsightedness of the latter.
Without the mass media, civil rights would not have become a prominent and legitimate national issue during these years, while the African-American freedom struggle would not have had the power to pressure the federal government into getting actively involved in racial desegregation. Yet the mainstream press and television stations also impeded the adoption process by reproducing the hyper-difference and over-likeness obstacles, and relaying hegemonic views of the diffusion item. Like in previous decades, even the "sympathetic" media interpreted the Gandhian repertory in a way that, at best, promoted limited reform of the dominant social and political system through conventional means rather than radical transformation through militant nonviolent direct action (Gitlin 1980: 35). This section illustrates that although conservative, moderate, and African-American media channels of this era no longer focused on India, their interpretations of the Gandhian repertoire resembled previous stereotypes. Instead of contrasting the American with the Indian environment, they now exaggerated disparities or similarities between the protest methods applied by the civil rights movement and traditional modes of American resistance.

The conservative press

The newsmagazine U.S. News & World Report typified the "respectable" conservative response to African-American insurgency (Lentz 1990). After trying to ignore the Montgomery bus boycott for nearly two months, its first article on the civil rights movement stressed that the main issues were not King and nonviolence, but the unconstitutional intrusion of the federal government into Southern affairs and the threat of increased African-American political influence (USN, February 24, 1956: 47-48). It would repeat similar themes in subsequent reports. In 1961, for example, it declared that the Freedom Riders who had "invaded the South" were not nonviolent demonstrators but "rabble rousers" and "Communist agitators" and instead of discussing CORE's goal of interracial harmony and desegregation, its headline asked: "Is South Headed for Race War?" (idem. May 29, 1961: 6; idem, June 5, 1961: 43). Moreover, during the Albany campaign in 1962, U.S. News & World Report (January 1, 1962: 43-44) portrayed the African-American activists as asking for retaliation, while the police chief Laurie

175
Pritchett and white residents of this "rather moderate Southern city" withstood the provocations and remained nonviolent (idem, September 3, 1962: 43-46).

Its reports on the Birmingham campaign in 1963 similarly presented the police as courageous law enforcers and African-American activists as uncontrollable savages:

The demonstrations were run with almost military precision. The Negroes would gather in a church to listen to exhortations and instructions, then set off in waves toward downtown Birmingham. Police, using trained dogs and fire hoses, turn back wave after wave. Hundreds were arrested daily under an ordinance which forbids parading without a permit. Eventually, however, police were overwhelmed. On May 7, hordes of Negroes escaped police control and surged through downtown streets and stores, snarling traffic and shoving white people from their path (U.S. News & World Report, May 20, 1963: 38-39).

For the U.S. News & World Report, young demonstrators were not innocent victims but militant deviants, while King was not a symbol of nonviolence but an intruder inciting race hatred in a calm and peaceful Southern city. Right before the March on Washington, moreover, the weekly published a debate about civil disobedience, with as telling headline: "Is It All Right to Break the Law?" The discussion pitted King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” his most radical writing in favor of direct action, against an unknown judge in New York, who had remarked that civil disobedience damaged respect for the law (idem, August 12, 1963: 6).

In following years, the same magazine repeated this tactic of confronting King and nonviolent direct action with legal experts (including a retired Supreme Court justice) and the need for social order to make its point that civil rights leaders were reckless and that satyagraha inevitably produced lawlessness (USN. July 5, 1965: 60-62). Thus, as coverage by the U.S. News & World Report indicates, conservative views of the “American Gandhi” and the American version of the Gandhian repertoire during the late-1950s and early-1960s closely resembled conservative views of the real Gandhi and the original Gandhian repertoire in previous decades. Instead of overstating the differences between India and the United States, they now exaggerated the differences between “orderly” democratic practices and “reckless” (not to mention un-American) means of nonviolent protest (Lentz 1990).}

"Of course, this conservative response to direct action does not only apply to the Indian independence movement and the American civil rights movement. Historically, the reactionary media—particularly but
The moderate press

In general, the moderate counterparts of the *U.S. News & World Report* presented themselves as sympathetic toward the ideals of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement, which they portrayed as powerful symbols for the ideals of American society as a whole. These publications argued that, far from challenging the underlying fabric of mainstream, middle-class America, King’s African-American followers really just wanted to share in its glories. As long as the civil rights movement’s methods remained familiar and moderate, they supported its goals and even deified its leaders. But the moment that civil rights activists called for militant forms of nonviolent protest, the same journals expressed their disapproval and urged African Americans to be patient.

Coverage by *Time* and *Newsweek* represented the mainstream’s moderate view of King and the civil rights movement (Lentz 1990). Soon after the Montgomery bus boycott, the two weeklies started molding their image of the man as well as the event. *Newsweek* (March 5, 1956: 25) quoted King as saying that “the right to protest” was “one of the glories of America,” while *Time* (March 5, 1956: 21) added that the campaign did not reflect “tension between the Negro and whites” but was merely “a conflict between justice and injustice.” At the start, then, the relatively liberal media conveyed to their audiences that the young minister was an eloquent spokesman for the American Creed and certainly “no radical” (*Time*, February 18, 1957: 17), while the African-American struggle’s goals were reasonable and modest. Several years later, however, the same publications sharply criticized the Freedom Ride, despite the fact that its participants had much more experience with Gandhian protest than the young ministers in Montgomery. *Time* (May 26, 1961: 16), for instance, claimed that the Freedom Riders “were, in fact, hunting for trouble—and found more of it than they wanted” and asserted that, by forcing the crisis, they had embarrassed the country.

Subsequent direct action campaigns during the civil rights movement received similar treatment. On the eve of the Birmingham event in 1963, both magazines argued that the time was not ripe for militancy and questioned the methods proposed by protest
leaders. *Time* (April 19, 1963: 30-31) pointed out that many African Americans in Birmingham felt that King was part of the problem because he “inflamed tensions at a time when the city seemed to be making some progress, however small, in race relations,” while *Newsweek* (May 13, 1963: 27-28) strongly disapproved of his decision to involve schoolchildren: “if it was wrong for police to put the children in jail, was it right for the integrationists to start them on the way?... Indeed, should there be any demonstrating at all?” The latter magazine, moreover, agreed with Robert Kennedy’s observation that African Americans “should press their case against segregation in meetings, in good-faith negotiations, and not in the streets.” Clearly, the moderate field of reception’s admiration for King and the civil rights movement was not unconditional. Its representatives only expressed sympathy if both the man and the event stayed within the strict limits of American idealism and “acceptable” forms of protest.

After Birmingham, the two newsmagazines objected to the civil rights movement’s radical intentions and shifted their allegiance toward leaders and organizations that were unambiguously moderate and gradualist. *Newsweek* (July 1, 1963: 18) initially labeled the plan for a “Negro march on Washington and a massive sit-in at the Capitol” as dangerously militant, while *Time* (July 19, 1963: 17) began favoring the approach of NAACP’s Roy Wilkins—who declared: “We are not fighting white people. We are fighting for an idea. You don’t need guns; you only need this dynamite-like idea of freedom. You don’t have to be discourteous or rude, to be militant or even stubborn”—over the strategies of committed Gandhians like SCLC’s King and SNCC’s John Lewis. Of course, when the March on Washington turned out to be a peaceful and amiable event, both publications stressed that it celebrated American ideals instead of challenging American practices and that it was “too respectable and popular and stuffy to spark an explosion,” as *Newsweek* (September 9, 1963: 18-22) put it (see also, *Time*, September 6, 1963: 13-15). After this highly symbolic national event, though, the moderate press was even less inclined to defend civil disobedience or nonviolent direct action, particularly when a wave of urban riots swept across the country in 1965 (Button 1978; Viorst 1979). *Time* (August 13, 1965: 15) served as an accurate barometer of middle-class opinion in the United States when it contended that it was time “for the revolution to move off the streets,” that African-American civil disobedience had turned
into "civil righteousness," and that "the Negro...angrily [refuses] to look back over his shoulder to see how far he has come" (see also, idem, August 27, 1965: 16, 17). While favorable coverage of particular campaigns undeniably helped create the political climate for legislative achievements such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, therefore, it also reduced the American public's patience for confrontational forms of Gandhian protest.

Thus, the "sympathetic" media primarily supported King and the civil rights movement to legitimate their own pre-existing ideologies and interpretive frames (Goffman 1974; Gitlin 1980; Lentz 1990), not to uncover the complexities and deeper meanings of the diffusion item for its audiences. Although they endorsed the African-American struggle in the abstract, they usually disapproved of its militant campaigns, even when these campaigns clearly remained within the parameters of the Gandhian repertoire. While the mainstream moderate press no longer referred to Gandhi or the Indian independence movement, therefore, it continued to reproduce the same two diffusion obstacles as before. When it supported King and the civil rights movement, it constructed "over-likeness" between Gandhian methods and traditional American forms of nonviolent protest. From this perspective, African-American efforts to gain voting rights were familiar, resembling George Washington's battle to liberate the United States from colonial rule, Abraham Lincoln's battle to emancipate Southern slaves, female suffragettes' battle to gain voting rights, and the labor movement's battle for unionization (Goldman 1991). And when it criticized King and the civil rights movement for excessive (and "un-American") radicalism, it constructed "hyper-difference" between Gandhian methods and traditional American forms of nonviolent protest—just like the mainstream conservative press.

**The African-American press**

Ironically, when the civil rights movement gained foothold toward the end of the 1950s, the minority press had already started to decline. While its famous Double V campaigns during World War II had led to dramatic increases in circulation (up to nearly 2 million following the war), McCarthyism in the late 1940s and early 1950s had had devastating effects on African-American editors and newspapers (Finkle 1973; Wynn 1975; Blum
Due to their lack of resources, African-American journals could not compete with the mainstream "white" press. As a result, most African Americans began reading mainstream "white" publications and watching mainstream "white" television programs, while the best African-American journalists accepted offers to work for prestigious "white" newspapers and broadcasting companies. With circulation dropping rapidly, African-American publications had to attract large advertisers, who wanted to reach out to African-American consumers and avoid any hint of radical advocacy. Consequently, the minority press was often more critical of King and nonviolent direct action, and more protective of traditional political leaders and methods, than the moderate "white" media.

Hesitant as they were, indigenous journals could not deny that after 1956 King was the "No. 1 Negro leader of men," as Ebony (August, 1957: 16-22) put it (see also, New York Amsterdam News, June 1, 1957; Garrow 1986: 94). Almost immediately, however, they began focusing on King's personal life and his tense relationships with traditional civil rights advocates. As early as 1957, for instance, the popular Pittsburgh Courier (March 23, 1957: 7) hinted that King had a history of extramarital affairs and two years later the same newspaper (December 26, 1959: 2) noted that: "Jealousy among Negro leaders is so thick that it can be cut with a knife" (see also, Garrow 1986: 96, 124). That same year Jet (October 20, 1959: 10-11), the largest African-American newsmagazine, published a piece by correspondent Simeon Booker criticizing SCLC's failure to meet its announced goals, while "the NAACP quietly has expanded its southern vote registration force and is making up gains in many states. The moral: headlines won't do it" (see also, Branch 1988: 265).

The African-American media's preference for traditional means of protest became even more obvious during confrontational campaigns. During the city's sit-ins in 1960, for instance, Atlanta Daily World's chief editor C.A. Scott urged student activists to stop causing trouble and let reliable adults deal with civil rights issues (Branch 1988: 287). The same Scott, who also owned the Birmingham World, initially tried to ignore the Birmingham campaign of 1963. When events forced him to react, he attacked direct action as "wasteful and worthless" and chose to headline a luncheon speech by the NAACP's Roy Wilkins in Kentucky rather than report on brutal clashes between local demonstrators and police forces (Birmingham World, April 10, 1963: 6; idem, April 13.
Moreover, when the indigenous press was forced to acknowledge King's achievements, it tended to portray him as a Machiavellian leader instead of a Gandhian activist. When SCLC came to Albany in 1962, Jet (March 8, 1962: 14-16) was not alone in remarking that the civil rights movement's most famous figure was traveling across the South "in a manner more familiar to an office-seeker than a man of the cloth...in the best traditions of a political machine" (see also, Branch 1988: 578). In other words, both King's message and his movement were familiar means of acquiring power, not innovative ways of challenging racial segregation.

Given the positive responses to the Gandhian repertoire between the 1920s and 1940s, it is surprising that the mainstream African-American press was often more conservative in its treatment of King's philosophy and the civil rights movement's protest methods than the "white" media. For various reasons, minority publishers generally went to great lengths to avoid any association with nonviolent direct action or other "un-American" (and, therefore, suspicious) kinds of extremism and radicalism. They criticized Gandhian militancy by stressing its "hyper-difference" with the moderate repertoire of collective action espoused by leaders such as Wilkins and organizations such as the NAACP. And when they conceded the significance of SCLC, SNCC, CORE, and its leaders, they usually did so by asserting "over-likeness" between their methods and traditional forms of politics. In short, African-American communication channels in the mainstream field of reception were no less liable to reinforce diffusion obstacles than their "white" competitors. As in previous decades, the main actors promoting experimentation with the Gandhian repertoire in American settings were critical communities, not mainstream opinion leaders or media channels.

II. Critical communities

The emergence of the civil rights movement dramatically altered the role of existing critical communities. While African-American theologians, religious pacifists, and the Highlander Folk School continued to pursue similar activities as before, a new generation of civil rights activists and organizations experimented with applications of the Gandhian repertoire in the context of a social movement (Cortright 1997). The first few years even
CORE, despite its emphasis on direct action, receded to the background, leaving the initiative to leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and groups like the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), SCLC, and SNCC. Indirectly, though, the older critical communities remained important as repositories of Gandhian knowledge and experience. Among the theologians, for example, Howard Thurman and Benjamin Mays served as primary sources of advice and inspiration for movement leaders—particularly for King. The latter carried a copy of Thurman’s book Jesus and the Disinherited (1949) with him during the Montgomery bus boycott, and used it as a spiritual and philosophical guide (Moses 1997: 146, 151). King also regularly discussed strategic or practical matters with Mays, who had been his teacher and mentor at Morehouse College (Branch 1988: 175-176).

The assistance offered by religious pacifists, the Highlander Folk School, and (initially) CORE went even deeper than ethical or personal consultation. These critical communities represented a particular type of free space, what Morris (1984: 139-140) calls a movement halfway house:

A movement halfway house is an established group or organization that is only partially integrated into the larger society because its participants are actively involved in efforts to bring about a desired change in society....What is distinctive about movement halfway houses is their relative isolation from the larger society and the absence of a mass base....Nevertheless, in their pursuit of change movement halfway houses develop a battery of social change resources such as skilled activists, tactical knowledge, media contacts, workshops, knowledge of past movements, and a vision of a future society...[that] assist the movement in rapidly developing the internal organization necessary to engage in sustained collective action.

While the theologians' input was sporadic and unorganized, the movement halfway houses regarded the civil rights movement as an opportunity to revitalize their own collective efforts and disseminate the Gandhian repertoire throughout the country. Thus, the relationship between the movement halfway houses and the emerging social movement was symbiotic: the growth and strength of the African-American freedom struggle contributed to the growth and strength of the three halfway houses, and vice versa (idem: 139-173)."'

"I argue that while free spaces (or critical communities in general) do not necessarily contribute to a social movement, movement halfway houses do. Movement halfway houses, therefore, can only be identified in retrospect, after the emergence of a particular social movement (compare Morris 1984; Evans and Boyle 1986; Polletta 1999). (See also chapter 1, footnote 17.)
The Highlander Folk School, led by Myles Horton, facilitated the expansion and survival of the civil rights movement in at least four areas. In the first place, it helped make direct action campaigns possible by training and assembling civil rights leaders from various backgrounds. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, Horton began inviting African-American ministers, beauticians, union members, farmers, and funeral home directors to discuss issues like racism and community organization with experienced white protest leaders. Some of these African-American participants—particularly Rosa Parks, C.T. Vivian, E.D. Nixon, Septima Clark, Fred Shuttlesworth, and Esau Jenkins—later became prominent civil rights activists (Morris 1984: 146; Polletta 1999).

Secondly, Highlander and its workshops were models of social integration. As Parks remarked in 1955, after her visit just months before the Montgomery bus boycott:

At Highlander, I found for the first time in my adult life that this could be a unified society, that there was such a thing as people of differing races and backgrounds meeting together in workshops and living together in peace and harmony. It was a place I was very reluctant to leave. I gained there strength to persevere in my work for freedom, not just for blacks but all oppressed people (Adams 1975: 122; see also, Burns 1997: 81).

Thirdly, Highlander helped create Citizenship Schools across the South, where undereducated African Americans of all ages could learn to read, write, and discuss fundamental social problems in preparation for voter registration and political participation. At the end of the 1950s, Horton transferred the responsibility for the Citizenship Schools to King and the SCLC, and in the early 1960s the SNCC’s Mississippi Voter Registration Project built on the foundations laid by Highlander’s Septima Clark and Esau Jenkins (Morris 1984: 149-157). And finally, the Highlander Folk School grounds served as a place where social movement activists and organizations could meet, recuperate from the strains of protest, and discuss strategy away from the limelight (Evans and Boyte 1986; Polletta 1999). Thus on April 1, 1960, at the height of the sit-ins, African-American student leaders (including Bernard Lafayette, Marion Barry, James Bevel, Julian Bond, Diane Nash, and John Lewis) came to Highlander to talk about the Gandhian repertoire and sing “We Shall Overcome” for the first time. And in August of 1961, SNCC volunteers returned to Highlander for a conference on how to combine nonviolent direct action campaigns with voter registration drives in the Mississippi Delta (Zinn 1964: 58-59; Adams 1975: 142; Morris 1984: 147).
While Highlander served as a relatively neutral location for examining nonviolent direct action, the religious-pacifist critical community represented a loose network of intellectuals that zealously promoted the Gandhian repertoire as both a way of life and a practical method (Polletta 1999: 9-10). The latter halfway house contributed to the civil rights movement in several significant ways. First of all, it supplied a wide range of information through multiple channels of communication. The FOR, for instance, published a comic book entitled *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story* and produced a film called *Walk to Freedom* to reach a wide audience. While it held workshops and training sessions to prepare leaders as well as rank-and-file participants for the practical implications of satyagraha. Moreover, after 1955, religious pacifists wrote countless pamphlets, articles, and books on Gandhian nonviolence, which resonated among a large number of civil rights activists (Jack 1956; Sibley 1963; Miller 1964).

Secondly, during the Montgomery bus boycott, the FOR’s Glenn Smiley and the WRL’s Bayard Rustin exerted concrete influence on strategic decisions. Smiley functioned as an expert guide for King and other MIA leaders, motivated participants through lively anecdotes at mass meetings, and helped draft the “Suggestions for Integrating Buses” document (Morris 1984: 161). Rustin, the tactical genius among American Gandhians, facilitated King’s leadership role, outlined memos for the MIA, and conveyed the Montgomery bus boycott’s meaning to the American public. After 1956, moreover, he set up the SCLC, gave advice during protest campaigns, and (with Randolph) directed preparations for the March on Washington in 1963 (PMLK: 136-138, 163, 213-215, 481-483, 491-494; Garrow 1986; Anderson 1997: chapter 12 and 13; Burns 1997: 20-23). In the third place, this movement halfway house created links between the civil rights movement and the resurging peace movement. Activists like Dave Dellinger, A.J. Muste, James Peck, and Rustin not only supported the African-American freedom struggle, but also set up new pacifist organizations such as the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), the Committee for Non-Violent Action (CNVA), and the Civil Defense Protest Committee. By organizing satyagraha campaigns against war and nuclear weapons they stimulated the popularity of nonviolent direct action, which, in turn, encouraged civil rights groups to increase the size and
intensity of their activities (PMLK: 158-159, 163, 178-179, 182-183, 211-212, 236, 316, 350, 388-391; Wittner 1969: 233-275). And finally, the FOR and other religious-pacifist organizations served as training grounds for several prominent leaders of the civil rights movement, including non-pacifists (like Randolph and, eventually, Farmer) as well as pacifists. African-American pacifist James Lawson, for instance, molded future student leaders such as John Lewis, Diane Nash, Marion Barry, James Bevel, and Bernard Lafayette as organizer for the Nashville Christian Leadership Council (NCLC), and in April of 1961 he almost single-handedly drafted the SNCC’s original statement of purpose (Broderick and Meier 1965: 273-281; Raines 1977; Lewis 1998; Halberstam 1998).

One of the FOR’s offsprings, CORE, also served as a movement halfway house—at least until 1961. After years of decline, the Montgomery bus boycott sparked the reemergence of this critical community. It shifted its area of focus from the North to the South and sent a representative to meet with King and establish links with the MIA. To broaden its membership base, it began concentrating more on promotional activities: in 1956, it distributed 40,000 copies of King’s pamphlet on the campaign in Montgomery accompanied by CORE appeal letters; it circulated tens of thousands of copies of *This is CORE* and *CORE Rules for Action*; and in 1957, it invited King to join Randolph and others on the Advisory Committee (Meier and Rudwick 1973: 76-81). Furthermore, CORE initiated voter registration drives and assisted the SCLC and the NAACP in organizing the 1959 March for Integration (idem: 86). And most importantly, in 1960 it was the first critical community to help African-American students involved in the sit-ins by organizing sympathy pickets and nationwide boycotts in the North, and by holding workshops on satyagraha and initiating its own nonviolent direct action campaigns throughout the South (idem: 101-131). In short, despite the fact that CORE was not (yet) a leading movement organization during these years, it eagerly shared its Gandhian knowledge, experience, and resources with organizations such as the MIA, the SCLC, and the SNCC (Morris 1984: 157-159; Cortright 1997; Polletta 1999).62

---

62 Although the national NAACP often played a supportive role in campaigns, its representatives were generally opposed to confrontational nonviolent direct action, preferring traditional means of protest within the existing political system, like court trials and lobbying. Nevertheless, local chapters of the NAACP and the NAACP’s Youth Councils frequently participated in nonviolent direct action campaigns despite
Although the role of movement halfway houses was significant, in the end critical communities within the civil rights movement enabled the diffusion item’s full implementation in the United States. Where CORE and the MOWM had previously initiated small-scale experiments with satyagraha, the SCLC, the SNCC, and a reborn CORE now applied the Gandhian repertoire in the context of a mass-based social movement. Besides transcending the dichotomies between hyper-difference and over-likeness, and between the moderate and extremist repertoires of contention, these critical communities learned how to fully implement the Gandhian repertoire as a whole, and after adapting its action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language to the situation at hand—used it to wage their own “war without violence.”

*Southern Christian Leadership Conference*

Although King’s name has become virtually synonymous with the Montgomery bus boycott, many African Americans who decided to walk to work on Monday, December 5, 1955 had never heard of the young Baptist minister. They responded to the initiative of familiar community leaders such as E.D. Nixon and Jo Ann Robinson, the efforts of well-known organizations like the Progressive Democratic Association and the Woman’s Political Council, the bravery of Rosa Parks, and, most of all, their own experiences with racial discrimination. King did not accept the leadership of the new Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) until the evening after Montgomery’s farmers, factory workers, domestic workers, and seamstresses had demonstrated their willingness to challenge the bus company and Montgomery’s political system. As MIA president, King initially preached Christian love and moral salvation rather than declaring the need for direct action or structural desegregation, and as early as January 27, 1956, he considered giving up his leadership role and conceding defeat. But the courage of working-class participants and his own religious faith persuaded him to remain as MIA president and build a mass movement guided by Gandhian nonviolence (Burns 1997: 43, 125-133).

---

misgivings among leaders of the national NAACP. For more on the role of the NAACP’s local chapters and Youth Councils, see especially Morris (1981, 1984). **Since even a brief historiography of the SCLC, the SNCC, and a revived CORE would take me too far afield, I will only discuss the Gandhian repertoire’s impact on the collective identities and strategies of these important critical communities.**

186
By the time that the Montgomery campaign achieved its political and legislative goals, it had encouraged other African-American communities in the South to initiate their own bus boycotts, produced a leader of international stature, and expanded into a Gandhian social movement. Although each event was unique, African-American boycotters in Southern cities like Tallahassee, Atlanta, New Orleans, Birmingham, and Mobile employed similar methods, organizations, and leadership styles as in Montgomery. Meanwhile, in New York, Bayard Rustin recruited experienced civil rights activists and pacifists to support the Montgomery bus boycott and facilitate the spread of nonviolent direct action across the country. He not only created the Committee for Nonviolent Integration (CNI)—which included familiar names such as Farmer, Muste, and Randolph—but also co-founded In Friendship, with Stanley Levison and Ella Baker (Anderson 1997: 194-195; Steinberg 1997). Levison was a Jewish radical, who specialized in fund-raising for liberal causes and later became King’s closest white friend (Branch 1988: 208-212). Baker had been organizing young African Americans since she joined the NAACP in 1940, and in 1946 became the first African-American female to serve as president of an NAACP chapter, in New York (idem: 231; Grant 1998). In the second half of 1956, Rustin, Baker, and Levison began discussing the formation of a new civil rights organization to fill the vacuum left by CORE and the NAACP, and to capitalize on the momentum created by the Montgomery bus boycott and King’s leadership (PMLK: 491-494).

In August of 1957, the plans developed by Rustin, Levison, and Baker led to the foundation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, with King as president and Reverend Steele (Tallahassee), Reverend Shuttlesworth (Birmingham), Reverend Jemison (Baton Rouge), and Reverend Abernathy (Montgomery) as officers. From the start, the Gandhian repertoire was the bedrock of the SCLC’s collective identity and strategies. This is SCLC (in Broderick and Meier 1965: 269-273), the organization’s

---

1 The Montgomery bus boycott was not the only inspiration for these bus boycotts. They also followed the example of the bus boycott in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, which took place in 1953. Whereas the latter remained purely local, however, the former had far-reaching effects for the South and, eventually, the country as a whole. Again, a comprehensive analysis of the Baton Rouge campaign would distract from my main argument. For more on this campaign, see especially, Meier and Rudwick (1976); Thornton (1980); Morris (1984); Fairclough (1987).
central document, states at the outset that the means for gaining civil rights in the United States were nonviolent:

SCLC activity revolves around two main focal points: the use of nonviolent philosophy as a means of creative protest, and securing the right of the ballot for every citizen... The basic tenets of Hebraic-Christian tradition coupled with the Gandhian concept of satyagraha - truth force - is at the heart of SCLC's philosophy....

It also emphasizes that, unlike the NAACP, the SCLC wanted to challenge the power structure through physical struggle and organize mass direct action and civil disobedience:

SCLC believes that the American dilemma in race relations can best and most quickly be resolved through the action of thousands of people, committed to the philosophy of nonviolence, who will physically identify themselves in a just and moral struggle... SCLC sees civil disobedience as a natural consequence of nonviolence when the resister is confronted by unjust and immoral laws... The Conference firmly believes that all people have a moral responsibility to obey laws that are just. It recognizes, however that there also are unjust laws... An unjust law is one in which people are required to obey a code that they had no part in making because they were denied the right to vote. In the face of such obvious inequality, where difference is made legal, the nonviolent resister has no alternative but to disobey the unjust law. In disobeying such a law, he does so peacefully, openly and nonviolent. Most important, he willingly accepts the penalty for breaking the law (idem).

In line with the Gandhian repertoire, moreover, the SCLC's methods incorporated dramatic confrontations with government authorities as well as a constructive program for community development:

SCLC's basic program fosters nonviolent resistance to all forms of racial injustice, including state and local laws and practices, even when this means going to jail; and imaginative, bold constructive action to end the demoralization caused by the legacy of slavery and segregation inferior schools, slums, and second-class citizenship... There MUST be a balance between attacking the causes and healing the effects of segregation... (idem).

And finally, whereas Gandhi and Congress proclaimed the goal of swaraj (i.e., individual and national self-rule) for Indian Hindus and Muslims (Iyer 1973: ch.12), King and the SCLC aspired to the "beloved community" within the United States, where interracial ways of life were actualities instead of abstract ideals:

The ultimate aim of SCLC is to foster and create the "beloved community" in America where brotherhood is a reality... Our ultimate goal is genuine intergroup and interpersonal living integration. Only through nonviolence can reconciliation and the creation of the beloved community be effected (in Broderick and Meier 1965: 269-273).
In short, the SCLC adopted the three major dimensions of the Gandhian repertoire—the action forms, organizing styles, and discursive language—and later employed them to plan and conduct the protest campaigns in the American context.

**Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee**

Most journalists and academics start their historical descriptions of the Southern sit-ins with the four African-American students at the North Carolina A&T College, who decided to take a seat at the local Woolworth’s lunch counter on Monday, February 1, 1960 (Wolff 1970; Carson 1981; McAdam 1983; Oppenheimer 1989; Polletta 1998). According to these accounts, the events in Greensboro set in motion a wave that spread rapidly to other cities in the South. Beneath the surface, however, African-American students in Nashville began preparing for a Southern student movement much earlier and, unlike their colleagues in North Carolina, they played a central role in the Gandhian critical community that emerged several months afterwards. While none of the original demonstrators would be actively involved in the ensuing student organization, nearly all the core leaders of the Nashville sit-ins later became key figures in the SNCC (Wolff 1970: 185-186; Morris 1981).

James Lawson’s contribution to the Nashville sit-ins and the SNCC was in many ways comparable to Bayard Rustin’s contribution to the Montgomery bus boycott and the SCLC. But whereas the latter shared his insights with adult ministers and activists, the former spread Gandhi’s message to young students. The first time Lawson came to Nashville was as an FOR field secretary, in 1958. That fall, after enrolling at Vanderbilt’s School of Divinity, he started giving weekly workshops on nonviolence to a small group of local students (some of whom had read FOR’s *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story*), emphasizing that satyagraha was not just a political strategy or technique, but a practical way of life that was compatible with Christian ethics. At the end of 1958, he brought this group to a weekend retreat at Highlander and in the summer of 1959 to the SCLC’s Institute of Nonviolent Resistance to Segregation, with Rustin, Baker, Smiley, and Lawson himself as prominent speakers.

By the end of the year, committed students like John Lewis, Bernard Lafayette, Paul LaPrad, Marion Barry, Curtis Murphy, James Bevel, Rodney Powell, Gloria
Johnson, Angeline Butler, and Diane Nash were eager to put Gandhi's theory into practice (Halberstam 1998: chapter 5 and 7). Under Lawson's tutelage, they learned how to respond to verbal and physical assaults, participated in role-plays, and staged socio-dramas to prepare them for the brutal realities of a sit-in. They also set up an institution, the Nashville Student Movement, and created a central committee with a rotating chairperson, to prevent individual power from usurping group effectiveness (Lewis 1998: 85). In November and December of 1959, they decided to target the lunch counters of Nashville's downtown stores and held several trial runs:

We would simply enter a store, ask to be served, and if—or when—we were refused, we would leave. No issues would be forced, no confrontations created. Our aim was simply to establish the issue, and in the process to dip our toes in the water, to get a taste of the setting... (Lewis 1998: 86; see also Halberstam 1998: 90-92).

After Christmas break, attendance at the weekly workshops swelled and the experienced students were ready for action. So when Douglas Moore (a Methodist minister) called his old friend Lawson on February 3, and told him about the events in North Carolina, the latter immediately called a meeting. That evening the Nashville students decided to stage their own campaign on Saturday, February 13 (Lewis 1998: 92).

The sit-ins that took place in Nashville over the next few months followed the letter and spirit of the Gandhian repertoire, and were more disciplined and better organized than sit-ins in neighboring cities and states. While one of the Greensboro four had recently read the FOR's pamphlet on the Montgomery bus boycott and another had seen a documentary on Gandhi's movement in India, for instance, none had received the kind of rigorous training that Lawson provided to Lewis, Lafayette, Nash, Bevel, and the others (Wolff 1970: 156-157; Lewis 1998: 91). On April 15 and 16, with the Southern sit-in movement at its peak, Ella Baker (by then a prominent member of the SCLC) organized a conference at Shaw University, in Raleigh, North Carolina, to bring student leaders together and forge links with the civil rights movement as a whole. During his address, King praised the activists' courage and urged them to join the SCLC. Baker, on her part, stressed that lunch counters were only the beginning, commended the students' preference for group-centered leadership, and (like Horton earlier) warned them not to let established civil rights organizations or leaders take over. But it was James Lawson who really captured the young crowd's imagination. He criticized the NAACP for its
conservatism and for concentrating on “fund-raising and court action rather than developing our greatest resource, a people no longer the victims of racial evil who can act in a disciplined manner to implement the constitution” (Lawson 1965: 280; see also, Carson 1981: 23). And, most importantly, when the delegates decided to form a new organization, he convinced them that nonviolence should be a fundamental part of its collective identity and strategies.

The student leaders subsequently agreed on Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee as the new organization’s name and accepted the statement of purpose drafted by Lawson:

We affirm the philosophical or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our faith, and the manner of our action. Nonviolence as it grows from Judaic-Christian traditions seeks a social order of justice permeated with love. Integration of human endeavor represents the crucial first step toward such a society.

Through nonviolence, courage displaces fear; love transforms hate. Acceptance dissipates prejudice; hope ends despair. Peace dominates war; faith reconciles doubt. Mutual regard cancels enmity. Justice for all overthrows injustice. The redemptive community supersedes systems of gross social immorality.

Love is the central motif of nonviolence. Love is the force by which God binds man to Himself and man to man. Such love goes to the extreme; it remains loving and forgiving even in the midst of hostility. It matches the capacity of evil to inflict suffering with an even more enduring capacity to absorb evil, all the while persisting in love.

By appealing to conscience and standing on the moral nature of human existence, nonviolence nurtures the atmosphere in which reconciliation and justice become actual possibilities (reproduced in Broderick and Meier 1965: 273-274; see also, Carson 1981: 23-24).

Since most delegates were not as steeped in Gandhian lore as the Nashville group, Lawson expressed the core aspects of satyagraha in familiar religious terms. Clearly, though, his references to nonviolence, love, action, redemptive community, God, suffering, and reconciliation evoked the same meaning as Gandhi’s concept. Like his mentors Thurman and Muste, Lawson had recognized the Gandhian repertoire’s innovative implications and translated it into Christian language. Like King, moreover, he had contributed directly to the practical application of the Gandhian repertoire in the context of an American social movement.65

In August of the same year, the SNCC held a meeting at Highlander to discuss proposals by Robert Moses for a voter registration project in rural Mississippi. Moses

---

65 In other words, by highlighting that the Gandhian repertoire was original and far more direct action-oriented than traditional Western forms of pacifism and passive resistance, Lawson avoided the “over-likeness” stereotype.
had originally joined the SCLC after working with Rustin, but Baker had encouraged him to settle in the Deep South and organize local African Americans for the SNCC (Burner 1994). At the conference, SNCC members decided to set up a direct action wing under Diane Nash’s leadership and a voter registration wing headed by Charles Jones, who had accompanied Moses to Mississippi. Civil rights movement scholars commonly contend that this decision symbolized a shift in the SNCC’s orientation from the Gandhian forms of direct action preferred by the Nashville group to the “un-Gandhian” style of community organization between 1961 and 1963 (Carson 1981: 40-42; McAdam 1988: 122-123). But actually voter registration efforts in the Deep South just accentuated another (no less important) side of the Gandhian repertoire, the constructive program. Far from contradicting each other, therefore, the two wings within the SNCC initially paralleled and complemented each other: both contributed to the implementation of the Gandhian repertoire’s action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language in the United States, but in different ways.

**Congress of Racial Equality**

CORE did not make the transition from a movement halfway house to a leading movement organization until the Freedom Ride in 1961. On February 1, 1961, the National Action Committee elected James Farmer as the new national director, marking a return to its original militancy and a confirmation of its Gandhian collective identity and strategies (Meier and Rudwick 1973: 131). Through promotional literature, correspondence, workshops, and training institutes, CORE began distributing its *Rules for Action* more widely than before. This pamphlet stressed the organization’s continuing commitment to the action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language of satyagraha:

**THE NONVIOLENT DIRECT ACTION APPROACH** to problems of racial discrimination assumes that a lasting resolution of problems can best be obtained through a spirit of good will and understanding. This spirit must be combined with a determination to end discrimination through action programs directed to specific problems. The ultimate goal is an integrated society where each member is judged solely on the basis of his individual worth (reproduced in Bell 1968: 195).
Such declarations were more than just organizational rhetoric or empty propaganda. By demonstrating that civil rights activists could be militant as well as nonviolent, and by dramatizing its Gandhian collective identity and strategy, the Freedom Ride helped turn CORE into a major player in the civil rights movement and Farmer into a prominent African-American leader.

III. Diffusion mechanisms

To understand precisely how critical communities contributed to full implementation of the Gandhian repertoire during the civil rights movement—and why they did so during these years and not earlier—requires a closer look at their transnational ties with Gandhians in India and domestic ties with each other. Only by (re)constructing a strong and diverse Gandhian infrastructure, and by working together in spite of differences, could they adopt the Gandhian repertoire to plan and conduct constructive programs or nonviolent direct action campaigns. Only by applying satyagraha in practice, moreover, could they maintain and revitalize existing Gandhian networks. To a greater degree than the preceding thirty-five years, though, brokerage and collective appropriation depended on the external political context—in particular on the interactions between the critical communities within the civil rights movement, on the one hand, and state officials, business elites, bystander publics, and media representatives, on the other. Since the groups involved in the civil rights movement affected the interests of authorities and the opinions of third parties more directly than in the past (more directly, for example, than during World War II), the political opportunity structure played a more immediate role in their decision-making and collective action strategies (McAdam 1982). The two

---

66 In contrast, Inge Powell Bell claims that during the early-1960s CORE leaders began presenting absolutist Gandhian nonviolence in private life as optional and highlighted effective nonviolent coercion instead. In fact, though, CORE had never excluded non-pacifists or refrained from pragmatism, while neither Gandhi nor the Indian independence movement had ever adhered to an absolutist and otherworldly philosophy. Her argument that “[t]he main function of this philosophy in the civil rights movement was to make the new direct action tactics legitimate in the eyes of the public and among members of the movement” is misleading and ignores that for organizations like the SCLC, the SNCC, and CORE, Gandhian nonviolent was primarily significant as a practical and moral repertoire of collective action, not as a dogmatic ideology or an abstract philosophy (Bell 1968: 43).

67 At the same time, the groups involved in the civil rights movement also exerted more influence on the political opportunity structure than before. Thus, the relationship between the civil rights movement, on
diffusion mechanisms moved in a positive direction as long as critical communities could mold mainstream perceptions and reactions in their favor. But around 1965, when critical communities lost the ability (and willingness) to shape political conditions, the same diffusion mechanisms started exerting a negative influence on the transnational diffusion process, leading to the decline of the civil rights movement and, eventually, the rejection of the Gandhian repertoire.

Transnational brokerage

The process of transnational cross-fertilization set in motion during the 1920s, and catalyzed during the 1930s and 1940s, continued after the civil rights movement emerged. At the end of the 1950s, scholarly publications in India created a forum for Gandhians in American critical communities, while the mainstream Indian press reported on the African-American freedom struggle and its experiments with satyagraha. Around this time, for example, the Gandhi Peace Foundation in New Delhi started circulating Gandhi Marg, a quarterly journal that to this day invites Gandhi supporters from India, the United States, and other countries to contribute their views on nonviolence. And in 1956, the Indian media began highlighting the similarities between events in Montgomery and the Indian satyagraha movement. The Hindustan Times (February 27, 1956: 1), for instance, commented:

Gandhi’s shadow watches over Alabama...as thousands of Negroes in Alabama’s capital, Montgomery, preferred to walk to their jobs than ride in busses, where segregation is practiced, and the U.S. Negro leaders thought of launching a “Mahatma Gandhi-type movement” against the racial crisis in Alabama...

...Gandhi is anything but dead today. It is a pity that officials do not realize how alive he is. They would know they were pitted against time-tested strategies of the great Indian mystic as applied and interpreted here and ready to be applied elsewhere by some of the most learned, intelligent and consecrated Negro minds in the U.S.A.

From then on, the same newspaper kept the story alive for its readers: when the bus boycott ended, it reproduced an article by American activist Homer Jack entitled “One Year of American Gandhism” (idem, December 23, 1956: 1); in 1961, one of its journalists compared the “satyagrahis” participating in the Freedom Ride to those participating in Gandhi’s campaign for the rights of Indian untouchables in 1924 and the one hand, and the local and national political opportunity structure, on the other, was continuous and reciprocal.
1925 (idem. June 2, 1961: 9); and in 1963, a foreign correspondent reported on the Birmingham campaign and the March on Washington (idem. July 25, 1963: 7, 9; idem. August 29, 1963: 1). As these examples indicate, Indian publications notified their readers that the most important collective experiments with the Gandhian repertoire were now taking place in the United States, not in India.

Acknowledging the significance of events in faraway Montgomery, the Gandhi Peace Foundation formally invited King and his wife Coretta to visit India (Garrow 1986: 113; Branch 1988: 250-255). In a letter dated December 27, 1958, G. Ramachandran, the secretary of the Gandhi Peace Foundation, wrote: “It would be good if you could share with the Indian people your own experiences and thoughts and, at the same time, study how Mahatma Gandhi evolved the techniques of peaceful action to solve innumerable social and national problems in India” (Vishwananda 1959: 2). For King, the trip represented an opportunity to learn more about the principles of satyagraha and contemplate the future role of the Gandhian repertoire in the African-American struggle. Escorted by Swami Vishwananda of the Gandhi National Memorial Fund, James Bristol of the AFSC, and the MIA’s Lawrence Reddick, the Kings arrived in February of 1959 and traveled across India for nearly a month, meeting with Prime Minister Nehru and numerous disciples of Gandhi (Branch 1988: 251; Vishwananda 1959; Lewis 1978). They discussed the constructive program with prominent Gandhian Jayaprakash Narain (JP), at his ashram in Sokhodeora; they visited several Gandhian villages, where untouchables lived and worked; they went to the Sabarmati ashram, a training center for satyagrahis during the Salt March; and they interviewed Vinoba Bhave, the spiritual heir of Gandhi.

But their most important encounter was with Ranganath Diwakar, chairman of the Gandhi National Memorial Fund and Gandhi Marg. Diwakar, himself an accomplished Gandhian scholar (see esp., Diwakar 1946), had come to Montgomery in August of 1958 to witness the site of the bus boycott and convince King that satyagraha not only involved intellectual and psychological agony, but also physical suffering and jail-going (Lewis 1978: 97). Several months later, in India, Diwakar once again stressed the disciplinary prerequisites for nonviolent direct action and reminded King that satyagraha:
...differs from passive resistance as the North Pole from the South. The latter has been conceived as a weapon of the weak and does not exclude the use of physical force or violence for the purpose of gaining one’s end, whereas the former has been conceived as a weapon of the strongest and excludes the use of violence in any shape or form (quoted in idem: 103).

The significance of King’s trip, however, went far beyond his personal pilgrimage to nonviolence: it both reinforced previous transnational brokerage processes and established new links between the American civil rights movement and Gandhian veterans in India.

Transnational brokerage during these years was not limited to developments in India. From the other direction, Lohia returned to the United States in May of 1964 and met with SNCC workers in Mississippi (King 1971: 277). One day after his arrival in Jackson, the Indian leader initiated a one-man sit-in at Morrison’s Café to protest the owner’s refusal to serve him the previous evening. Local policemen quickly arrested him but, after calling state officials, decided not to imprison him. Following these events, Lohia talked to Robert Moses and other SNCC workers involved in the voter registration project, and told them that the Indian satyagraha movement had experienced similar dilemmas, problems, and internal conflicts as the civil rights movement was facing at the time. He described how many activists in India had also doubted the effectiveness of nonviolent ideas and practices against a powerful opponent—just as activists were beginning to do in the United States. He also praised their willingness to spend time in jail and expressed keen interest in their plans for Freedom Summer, which he described as “one of the most significant things he had heard about the American Movement” (idem: 274). Like in 1951, however, Lohia was not afraid to criticize SNCC organizers for their lack of a long-term vision and their eagerness to prevail in every battle instead of concentrate on winning the war. If Gandhi’s movement had taken nearly three decades to achieve independence, who were they to expect actual desegregation within a few years? Although Lohia’s visit came too late to prevent the SNCC’s subsequent drift toward Black Power, it clearly represented yet another human bridge between the Indian independence movement and the American civil rights movement.

*Domestic brokerage*
Transnational brokerage in turn reinforced intergenerational ties among American Gandhians. For King, traveling to India was an opportunity to follow in the footsteps of his advisor Rustin, his teacher Gregg, and his theological mentors Johnson, Mays, and Thurman. He was particularly eager to gain some of the same insights as Thurman, whose *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949) had provided spiritual guidance during the Montgomery bus boycott and now served as a source of inspiration for expanding nonviolent direct action across the South (Moses 1997: chapter 4, 144-184). Domestic brokerage also involved the construction of ties among movement halfway houses: people like Smiley and Rustin were obviously essential brokers linking the religious-pacifist critical community with emerging civil rights organizations, while Lawson was a key liaison connecting the SCLC and the SNCC. Highlander played an important role as training center and retreat for SNCC students and SCLC activists, while its citizenship schools became an integral part of the SCLC’s program and an influential model for the Freedom Schools in Mississippi (Morris 1984: 141-166; McAdam 1988: 84).

Yet brokerage between critical communities within the civil rights movement had the most immediate impact on their ability to implement the Gandhian repertoire. A few months after the sit-ins broke out, for example, the SCLC’s Ella Baker initiated the conference that led to the creation of the SNCC, whereas the NCLC’s James Lawson drafted the new organization’s statement of purpose. About a year after its foundation, in 1961, SNCC activists convinced CORE to continue the Freedom Ride, after the original demonstrators had barely surviving mob attacks and a bus bomb. That same year, the SNCC’s Bob Moses began voter registration efforts in Mississippi and set up the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) to coordinate cooperation between the participating civil rights organizations, with the Mississippi NAACP’s Aaron Henry as president, CORE’s David Dennis as head of the Steering and Financial Committees, and Moses himself as director (Meier and Rudwick 1973: 178).68 The SCLC contributed to the

---

68 While director Roy Wilkins made clear that the national NAACP “is not involved in COFO” and had “grave misgivings” about the Mississippi Summer Project, some local NAACP members did participate in the COFO and the MFDP, most prominently Aaron Henry. The national NAACP was consistently against direct confrontations with the power structure—whether through nonviolent direct action or community organizing in the Deep South—and argued that entering Mississippi was too dangerous and only made its traditional forms of protest (court action, fund-raising, and lobbying of political leaders) more difficult. Yet it could not prevent members of its Youth Council and local chapters from initiating and joining direct
Mississippi campaign—and later Freedom Summer and the MFDP—through two of its staff members, former SNCC member James Bevel and Andrew Young (King 1987: 308). And finally, SNCC leaders such as John Lewis, James Forman, and Diane Nash helped plan and lead all three “community-wide protest campaigns” sponsored by the SCLC: the Albany campaign in 1961 and 1962, the Birmingham campaign in 1963, and the Selma campaign in 1965 (Carson 1981: 158-159; Garrow 1986: 197; Watters 1971; Morris 1993; McAdam 1983). Clearly, then, brokerage among the SCLC, the SNCC, and CORE was a key prerequisite for successful nonviolent direct action and a durable constructive program. When these critical communities worked together despite underlying organizational differences and internal tensions, they constituted the Gandhian infrastructure that enabled the civil rights movement’s full implementation of the Gandhian repertoire. Each successful round of full implementation, moreover, reinvigorated brokerage among the three critical communities within the civil rights movement.

Collective appropriation in free spaces
Collective appropriation during the civil rights movement basically took two forms: critical communities not only used the Gandhian repertoire to plan and carry out dramatic nonviolent direct action, but also to develop enduring constructive programs in the poorest parts of the American South. Although Gandhians in the United States acknowledged that these two dimensions of the Gandhian repertoire were inextricably related, the constructive program did not become an integral part of the civil rights movement until 1961, when the SNCC’s Robert Moses set up a project aimed at organizing the poor African Americans in the Mississippi Delta who had not participated in the NAACP’s legal struggles or the bus boycotts, Freedom Ride, and sit-ins (Burner 1994; Payne 1995).

Moses derived his approach to community development from several experienced nonviolent resisters. From his early association with Rustin, Moses learned to strike “a balance between attacking the causes and healing the effects of segregation” (see This is...
From his mentor and role model Ella Baker, he learned to appreciate group-centered leadership and local people's ability to help themselves (Grant 1998). And from Horton and Clark, he learned how to stimulate oppressed African Americans to rely on their own cultural resources, develop their own leadership, and provide their own teachers (Carson 1981: 46; Burner 1994: 229, 19, 72, 99; Payne 1995: chapter 3). Based on the insights and methods of such predecessors, Moses and his associates began working with indigenous activists, engaging in door-to-door canvassing, founding empowering educational institutions, organizing training sessions in nonviolent resistance, holding mass meetings, and encouraging collective activism (idem: chapter 10; McAdam 1988). In short, like Gandhi and his coworkers, they created constructive programs that were in tune with the actual problems faced by local African-American communities in the most segregated and dangerous parts of the country.

Civil rights scholars tend to interpret the constructive program created by Moses, and coordinated by the COFO, as an "un-Gandhian" alternative to the Gandhian forms of protest popularized by the SCLC, CORE, and direct action proponents within the SNCC. They point out that the main people behind the Mississippi Voter Registration Project—Horton, Clark, Baker, and Moses—regarded nonviolence as a useful tactic rather than a way of life, and that the majority of local African Americans refused to renounce armed self-defense (Carson 1981: 40-42; McAdam 1988: 122-123). This argument ignores, however, that Gandhi's notion of nonviolence did not exclude the use of violence under all circumstances, and that most Congress members and peasants participating in the Indian independence movement were not Gandhians either. In the early 1940s, for instance, Gandhi called for nationwide civil disobedience against British rule even though he knew that the Indian population would probably respond to repression with violence. Francis Hutchins (1973: 205) explains why Gandhi's decision did not contradict his understanding of satyagraha:

As a believer in nonviolence, he could not throttle the nation's will. If the nation chose a violent course, he was prepared to accept it. He was prepared to describe as nonviolence a spontaneous resort to violence in self-defense. He was also prepared, as an individual believer in nonviolence, to acquiesce in the use of organized violence by sincere men pursuing good ends, even though he could not approve of such violence or directly associate himself with its use. Whatever might be the consequences, and whatever might be the appeal of Gandhi's personal preferences, Gandhi was determined that India must now act for herself.
Following the same logic, Gandhi accepted the leadership of Nehru and other Indian nationalists despite their expedient view of nonviolence, and encouraged the Indian masses to get involved despite their limited understanding of satyagraha (idem: 133; see also, Wittner 1969). Similarly, I contend that the Mississippi Voter Registration Project originally represented a Gandhian initiative, despite the fact that most of its participants neither presented themselves as Gandhians nor objected to armed self-defense by local residents. I hope to demonstrate that, particularly during Freedom Summer, these “non-Gandhian” activists in the Deep South successfully appropriated the Gandhian repertoire’s constructive program, while self-professed “Gandhian” leaders such as King, Rustin, Lawson, and Farmer had failed to do so.16

The Mississippi Summer Project—also known as Freedom Summer—consisted of three major action forms: voter registration, community centers, and Freedom Schools. Moses’ plan for voter registration involved the creation of an independent political party, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), to challenge the state’s established politicians at the Democratic National Convention. Volunteers working on this issue not only tried to persuade African Americans to register as official voters, but also as MFDP voters. In the process, they prepared local people for participation in the present political system and planted seeds for that system’s transformation. The community centers allowed children and adults to use facilities from which mainstream society excluded them: libraries, day care, basic health care, arts and crafts, and literacy classes. In addition, the Freedom Schools offered an academic curriculum to students requiring remedial classes in reading, math, debate, or science, while teachers discussed subjects like African-American history, nonviolence, and American politics. Like at Highlander Folk School, moreover, Freedom School volunteers led activities such as running a student newspaper, writing and performing drama, playing music, singing, and dancing (McAdam 1988: 77-86; Burner 1994: 123-124). Without drawing much public attention.

16 Moreover, as Burner (1994: 103) points out: “in Mississippi voter registration was direct action, as defiantly direct as sitting in at a white lunch counter, often provoking the most violent reactions of the white community.” He also notes that the SNCC and the SCLC, and voter registration and direct action, differed less in kind than in emphasis and strategy, embodying the dual character of the civil rights movement: “immediate liberation in empowering personal action and permanent liberation through the redistribution of power. They were, as Moses had originally realized, both practicing direct action” (idem: 106).
therefore, these action forms were fundamentally nonviolent and fulfilled the two core functions of a Gandhian constructive program: they generated the moral strength and grassroots leadership required for nonviolent direct action and helped convert the drama created by nonviolent direct action into concrete community development.

The organizational styles applied during Freedom Summer were also compatible with Gandhi's constructive program. In the first place, COFO workers emphasized the need to gain intimate knowledge of the conditions, attitudes, and individuals in the communities they wanted to organize. Rather than expecting short-term results, they lived in villages for months, studying their cultures and experimenting with various approaches, before initiating ambitious projects or negotiating with local authorities. Secondly, they did not rely exclusively on middle-class resources or traditional leaders. Volunteers in Mississippi frequently found that the real leaders were not the people in places of position. An elderly woman of no title and with no organizational support might be highly influential simply because she was noted as a kind of personal problem-solver. Sometimes, such a person, because of her effectiveness in small matters and the trust consequently built, could be a key figure in efforts to persuade people to register to vote in a difficult area (Payne 1995: 248-249).

Gandhi similarly believed that qualities like courage, honesty, endurance, fearlessness, and self-sacrifice produced good leaders and organizations—not social status:

A person belonging to the suppressed classes exhibiting these qualities in their fullness would certainly be able to lead the nation; whereas the most finished orator, if he has not got these qualities, must fail...A leader is only first among equals. Someone may be put first, but he is no stronger than the weakest link in the chain (quoted in Iyer 1973: 139).

Thirdly, mass meetings provided settings for powerful speeches or sermons, heartbreaking stories, humorous tales, emotional recuperation, strategy sessions, news updates, and freedom songs (Payne 1995: 256-264; Eyerman and Jamison 1997; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001). In other words, these regular gatherings:

...attracted people to the movement and then helped them develop a sense of involvement and solidarity. By ritually acting out new definitions of their individual and collective selves, people helped make those selves become real. Informed and challenged by the speakers, pumped up by the singing and the laughing and the sense of community, many of those who only meant to go once out of curiosity left that first meeting thinking they might come once more, just to see (Payne 1995: 263).
And finally, like the Gandhian movement in India, the Mississippi Summer Project led to the construction of “parallel institutions” (Shridharani 1939: 42, 148-149; Burner 1994: 123; Payne 1995: 302): Freedom Vote and MFDP were alternative forms of politics, while the Freedom Schools and community centers were alternative forms of education and social organization (Burner 1994: 192-193; Payne 1995: chapter 8).

Discursive language promoting Gandhian constructive programs in the United States was not new. As early as 1942, James Farmer (1985: 358-359) had written:

> Another critical matter deserving a great deal of special thought is the matter of a cooperative community. Toward the building of such a cooperative community, I offer the following preliminary suggestions: That interracial housing cooperatives, interracial cooperative farms, and interracial eating cooperative be [...] developed. That plans be developed for the cooperative production and cooperative marketing of folk craft and art by Negroes and whites alike. Such development of folk craft and art would supply to participants a tremendous spiritual value, by virtue of their working with their hands to produce useful objects. Obviously, to develop a meaningful cooperative community, we shall have to place great emphasis upon drawing in persons from lower classes, black and white. Far too many movements for racial justice have virtually confined their activities to the middle classes.

Similarly, the SCLC’s basic program stressed the need for nonviolent resistance as well as “imaginative, bold constructive action to end the demoralization caused by the legacy of slavery and segregation—inferior schools, slums, and second-class citizenship.” During her brief stint at the SCLC, therefore, Ella Baker had developed four “constructive” steps in her plan for a “Crusade for Citizenship.” The first step urged the SCLC to find and sponsor indigenous leaders in the rural South who were already involved in voter registration; the second asked SCLC ministers to volunteer for house-to-house canvassing; the third recommended a campaign to reduce illiteracy and promote social action through basic education; and the final step advocated the creation of teams that went around local communities to train people in nonviolent resistance (Payne 1995: 94-95). But while CORE and the SCLC paid lip service to the constructive program, in practice they focused more on dramatic leadership and direct action campaigns than gradual community organizing in poor Southern villages. Bob Moses and COFO workers were the first to actually implement Gandhian constructive programs in the dangerous state of Mississippi, and their discursive language was based on personal experience and practical reality rather than lofty idealism.
For Moses, nonviolence was not a dogmatic ideology that could be imposed on repressed African-American farmers and workers, but a practical means for transforming concrete relationships and situations (Burner 1994: 193-194). Although he insisted that COFO workers remain nonviolent and—like Horton, Clark, and Baker—valued open discussions about the actual implications of nonviolence (idem: 207), he never criticized the traditions or private behavior of rural African Americans:

I don’t know if anyone in Mississippi preached to local Negroes that they shouldn’t defend themselves....Self-defense is so deeply ingrained in rural southern American that we as a small group can’t affect it. It’s not contradictory for a farmer to say he’s nonviolent and also to pledge to shoot a marauder’s head off. The difference is that we on the staff have committed ourselves not to carry guns (quoted in idem: 151).

In this, he was remarkably similar to Gandhi, whose statements had always emphasized that nonviolence and truth were relative rather than absolute concepts. During the Quit India movement, for instance, Gandhi had endorsed violent resistance as a means of self-defense, without advocating or associating with it: “If a man holds me by the neck and wants to drown me, may I not struggle to free myself directly? ...We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see perpetuation of our slavery” (Tendulkar 1960: 167, 161; Hutchins 1973: 201). Thus, when Moses explained that the underlying goal of efforts in Mississippi was not to popularize a nonviolent doctrine, but “to teach the lowest sharecropper that he knows better than the biggest leader what is required to make a decent life for himself” (Burner 1994: 198), his words were as Gandhian as King’s—if not more so.

**Collective appropriation in direct action campaigns**

Brokerage produced a Gandhian infrastructure for sustained collective protest, while the COFO’s constructive programs allowed the poorest African Americans to participate in and benefit from the civil rights movement. Both these processes, though, derived their significance from the collective appropriation of satyagraha in the context of recurring nonviolent direct action campaigns. In other words, without the occurrence of a Gandhian social movement, neither brokerage nor constructive programs could have led to full implementation of the diffusion item in the United States. This subsection gives an impression of the diverse ways in which the Gandhian repertoire propelled and guided
the civil rights movement. It starts with an illustrative discussion of the Montgomery bus boycott, student sit-ins, and Freedom Ride, and proceeds with a more comprehensive analysis of the Birmingham campaign of 1963—the peak event in the civil rights movement’s appropriation of the Gandhian repertoire. Finally, it demonstrates that critical communities not only enabled full implementation of the diffusion item, but also precipitated its eventual rejection. In effect, therefore, the following paragraphs represent the culmination of my historical analysis of transnational diffusion from the Indian independence movement to the American civil rights movement.

The Montgomery bus boycott, sit-ins, and Freedom Ride

The Gandhian repertoire did not become the civil rights movement’s guiding force until the Montgomery bus boycott was several months old. Initially, the MIA relied on the personal charisma of King and other local ministers to maintain internal discipline, and on familiar means of protest to reform seating arrangements (Burns 1997: 19). After the arrival of Rustin and Smiley in February of 1956, however, the Montgomery movement began employing the Gandhian repertoire to abolish the local bus company’s segregated policies. It was not just King who referred to Gandhi’s ideas in his speeches and writings, but the Montgomery movement as a whole that adopted Gandhi’s practices to organize and conduct collective action. The depth of satyagraha’s impact on African-American activists in Alabama was never more obvious that at the end of the bus boycott, in December of 1956, when Smiley drafted a code of conduct that included the following suggestions:

1. Not all white people are opposed to integrated buses. Accept goodwill on the part of many.
2. The whole bus is now for the use of all people. Take a vacant seat.
3. Pray for guidance and commit yourself to complete non-violence in word and action as you enter the bus.
4. Demonstrate the calm dignity of our Montgomery people in your actions.
5. In all things observe ordinary rules of courtesy and good behavior.
6. Remember that this is not a victory for Negroes alone, but for all Montgomery and the South. Do not boast! Do not brag!
7. Be quiet but friendly; proud, but not arrogant; joyous, but not boisterous.

Let me repeat that I do not claim to be comprehensive in my treatment of the numerous campaigns during the civil rights movement. Rather than discussing all events (which would result in an even longer chapter), I have selected only the events that demonstrate the role of the Gandhian repertoire most clearly. For more on Albany, Selma, and other campaigns, see e.g., Watters (1971), Garrow (1978, 1986), Webb and Nelson (1980), McAdam (1982), Morris (1984), and Fager (1985).
Inspired by Gandhi’s rules in India and CORE’s rules in 1942, this code of conduct clearly reflected the adaptation of the Gandhian repertoire to the specific circumstances in Montgomery.

Similarly, the Gandhian repertoire’s role in the student sit-ins grew as the event progressed. Although the four African-American students in Greensboro knew about Gandhi and the Indian independence movement, they did not use Gandhian guidelines to plan and execute their first demonstration on February 1, 1960 (Wolff 1970). In contrast, the group of African-American students in Nashville had been preparing for nonviolent direct action for more than a year before they initiated their own sit-ins on February 13, 1960. Trained by Kelly Miller Smith, founder of the Nashville Christian Leadership Council (NCLC), and James Lawson, head of NCLC’s direct action committee, these student leaders did use Gandhian guidelines to plan and execute their demonstrations in Nashville (Morris 1981: 760-764; Halberstam 1998; Polletta 1998; Lewis 1998). Their leadership style was much less formal and hierarchical than that of the ministers in the MIA and the SCLC. Whereas the preachers instructed their followers to obey the principles of satyagraha, student activists in Nashville formulated their own “Dos and Don’ts”:

**DO NOT:**
1. Strike back nor curse if abused.
2. Laugh out.
3. Hold conversations with floor walker.
4. Leave your seat until your leader has given you permission to do so.
5. Block entrances to stores outside nor the aisles inside.

**DO:**
1. Show yourself friendly and courteous at all times.
2. Sit straight; always face the counter.
3. Report all serious incidents to your leader.
4. Refer information seekers to your leader in a polite manner.
5. Remember the teachings of Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Love and nonviolence is the way (Lewis 1998: 98).

And while the religious boycott leaders served as role models for their congregations, the Nashville demonstrators were no less committed to nonviolence than their elders. Thus the youths inspired community leaders to join them from the bottom up, instead of waiting for the adults to initiate the sit-ins from the top down.
Unlike the Montgomery bus boycott and the sit-ins, the Freedom Ride in 1961 was self-consciously Gandhian from the outset. During the initial planning sessions, CORE strategists pictured it as a more militant version of the Journey of Reconciliation: unlike the 1947 campaign, participants would concentrate on waiting rooms, travel through states in the Deep South, and adhere to the “jail-no-bail” principle introduced during the sit-ins (Meier and Rudwick 1973: 135-136). CORE activists closely followed the Gandhian steps they had been implementing since 1942: investigate the facts, attempt negotiations, internal preparation, and nonviolent direct action. A white CORE member made a preparatory trip through the Deep South to gather relevant information, get a sense of the situation, and request assistance from local leaders (Meier and Rudwick 1973: 136). Director James Farmer wrote letters to the U.S. president, the attorney general, the director of the FBI, the chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission, and the two bus companies involved to inform them of CORE’s plans and allow time for a settlement (Farmer 1985: 197). One week before departure, the thirteen recruits came to Washington D.C. for rigorous training, intense role-playing sessions, and heated discussions about the Gandhian repertoire’s practical implications (Farmer 1985: 198; Lewis 1998: 133-134). And during the campaign, none of the Freedom Riders retaliated when attacked—not when white men struck participants with metal pipes, not when a bomb engulfed one of the buses in flames, and not when prison guards assaulted them with cattle prods (Farmer 1985: 202; Meier and Rudwick 1973: 137-138).

The Birmingham campaign of 1963...

As the preceding paragraphs indicate, participants in the Montgomery bus boycott, sit-ins, and Freedom Ride successfully appropriated the Gandhian repertoire to desegregate local bus companies, lunch counters, and interstate travel in the South. In 1963, the SCLC merged the insights gained during these single-issue events and mobilized a community-wide campaign against racial segregation in the city of Birmingham (McAdam 1983: 748). In terms of intentions, execution, as well as effects, the Birmingham campaign represented the zenith of the civil rights movement’s implementation of the Gandhian repertoire and, therefore, deserves more exhaustive treatment than the previous campaigns.
From the moment that movement leaders started planning for massive nonviolent direct action in Alabama, in May of 1962, they complied with satyagraha’s guidelines and adapted its steps, action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language to local conditions. Like CORE and the Nashville students earlier, they deliberately followed the three basic steps preceding nonviolent direct action: gathering facts, negotiations with authorities, and internal preparation. The facts were quite clear. Often referred to as “the Johannesburg of North America” (Grant 1968: 285; Raines 1977: 141), Birmingham was arguably the most segregated city in the United States and “the country’s chief symbol of racial intolerance” (King 1963: 54; Raines 1977: 139-145). It had Jim Crow hospitals, facilities, schools, parks, lunch counters, and churches; most of its African-American residents lived in ghettos and worked as menial laborers in one of America’s industrial centers, with no prospects for promotion; whereas two-fifth of its population was African-American, only one-eight of its voters was not white; its power structure openly defied the federal government and ignored national legislation; and its Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene “Bull” Connor, was a proud racist who maintained an atmosphere in which violence against African Americans went unpunished (King 1963: 47-50).

The Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) led preliminary negotiations with Birmingham’s segregationist authorities. Inspired by the Montgomery bus boycott and the recent ban of the NAACP, it initiated its own bus boycott in December 1956 and continued to fight against Jim Crow thereafter. After desegregating the buses in 1959, it turned to parks, schools, airport facilities, and police harassment in 1960 and 1961 (Grant 1968: 284-289). And in 1962, when African-American students organized an economic boycott of downtown merchants with Jim Crow signs and policies, the ACMHR joined their struggle and persuaded the local business community to discuss changes. Initially, the merchants pledged to alter their racist policies in exchange for a moratorium on demonstrations, but after Bull Connor intervened they broke their promises.

In response, the ACMHR invited the SCLC (its parent organization) to help prepare for a joint satyagraha campaign against Birmingham’s power structure (King 1963: 70, 78-79). In the months prior to the event, the SCLC and the ACMHR leaders recruited and trained volunteers, mobilized the local African-American community,
raised the necessary funds, set up various public meetings, and asked for support from sympathetic groups like the NAACP, the Southern Regional Council (SRC), CORE, the SNCC, SCLC affiliates, and the churches (idem: 65-68). And finally, they publicly announced the campaign's starting date as well as four concrete demands:

1. The desegregation of lunch counters, rest rooms, fitting rooms and drinking fountains in variety and department stores.
2. The upgrading and hiring of Negroes on a nondiscriminatory basis throughout the business and industrial community of Birmingham.
3. The dropping of all charges against jailed demonstrators.
4. The creation of a biracial committee to work out a timetable for desegregation in other areas of Birmingham life (idem: 102-103).

In line with Gandhian principles, therefore, Birmingham leaders ensured that potential participants were ready for satyagraha, that sympathetic groups knew how to contribute, that mainstream media and audiences were well informed, and that opposing authorities were fully aware of plans before the onset of nonviolent direct action.

On Wednesday, April 3, 1963, the Birmingham campaign kicked off with three days of modest yet well-organized sit-ins at downtown lunch counters, which led to thirty-five arrests (King 1963: 68). The size and intensity of the action forms grew rapidly. Starting on April 6, waves of disciplined demonstrators marched towards City Hall every day, refusing to obey orders to disperse. After Connor's police forces subsequently arrested them for "parading without a permit," they willingly went to jail, singing freedom songs on the way. Meanwhile the economic boycott of downtown merchants, an action form previously employed by Lawson's students in Nashville, was amazingly effective: during the Easter shopping season, the second largest of the year, less than twenty African Americans entered downtown stores while the number of white shoppers also dropped sharply. The following days witnessed a proliferation of tactics and targets, as activists held kneel-ins at churches in the area, sit-ins at the local library, and a march to inaugurate the voter registration drive.

Then on Good Friday, April 12, King and Abernathy led a group of fifty marchers that, for the first time, deliberately disobeyed a court injunction to cease demonstrations and voluntarily submitted to imprisonment. By doing so, they took the final step from mass non-cooperation to mass civil disobedience, raising the civil rights movement's implementation of the Gandhian repertoire to a new level (Morris 1993).
unprecedented move involved the enlistment of elementary school children aged nine and older. Through their input, the Birmingham campaign finally achieved the Gandhian aim of filling up the jails: by early May nearly 2,500 demonstrators were behind bars, including about 1,000 youths. On May 4, faced with persistent nonviolent activists and the prospect of defeat, Bull Connor ordered his troops to commit the brutal acts that would capture the imagination of newspaper readers and television viewers throughout the world (Raines 1977: 139). As Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963: 100) later wrote, that day the American and foreign media carried

pictures of prostrate women, and policemen bending over them with raised clubs; of children marching up to the bared fangs of police dogs; of the terrible force of pressure hoses sweeping bodies into the streets across the United States and throughout the world.

Soon after these dramatic events, the relentlessness of the SCLC and the ACMHR, the economic losses caused by the boycott, the negative publicity, and the pressure exerted by the federal government finally convinced local power holders to return to the negotiation table and accept the protest leaders’ four demands. In the months that followed, African-American communities in numerous other Southern cities successfully adopted the action forms applied in Birmingham, and on June 19, 1963 President Kennedy sent a proposal to Congress that, in July of 1964, resulted in the Civil Rights Bill (Morris 1993: 633).

Besides guiding the choice of action forms, the Gandhian repertoire also helped shape the organizational styles employed before, during, and immediately after the Birmingham campaign. First of all, the SCLC got involved in this struggle because it could build on a vibrant local movement, with well-organized local networks and leadership (Morris 1993: 624)—not because Birmingham was the best place to provoke violence, win the American public’s sympathy, and coerce federal intervention as civil rights scholars usually assume (Howard 1966; Hubbard 1968; Lipsky 1968; Garrow 1978; McAdam 1983; Barkan 1984). Just as the Indian noncooperation movement of 1919 had relied on strong beachheads throughout the country (Kumar 1971), therefore, SCLC wanted to take advantage of strong brokerage links with its affiliate in Alabama. As King put it: “I am here because I have organizational ties here” (1963: 77). Secondly, like Gandhi before the Salt March (Dalton 1993: chapter 4), King and other leaders took
nearly a year to study the situation and develop a strategy that accounted for all foreseeable contingencies. SCLC planners were no less eager to avoid the mistakes made during the Albany campaign of 1961 and 1962 than Gandhi wanted to prevent “the Himalayan miscalculation” of 1922. Thirdly, the Birmingham organizers recognized that the quality of volunteers was even more important than the quantity. Although their training centers were not as advanced as Gandhi’s ashrams, they held workshops on nonviolent methods long before April 3 and carefully recruited 250 local African Americans, who pledged to abide by the rules of conduct and submit to imprisonment for at least five days (King 1963: 56).

After initiating direct action on April 3, moreover, SCLC and ACMHR arranged nightly meetings at various African-American churches. Each of these meetings (sixty-five in all) followed a recognizable pattern: on a daily basis, respected leaders fueled the activists’ enthusiasm and dedication through infectious humor, gripping narratives, and fiery rhetoric; as often as possible, King himself spoke about the philosophy and practical implications of nonviolence; from time to time, local speakers described their personal experiences and suffering; and occasionally, visitors relayed messages of support from other parts of the country. But, as King (1963: 61) noted, singing was by far the most important aspect of these mass gatherings:

In a sense the freedom songs are the soul of the movement. They are more than just incantations of clever phrases designed to invigorate a campaign; they are as old as the history of the Negro in America. They are adaptations of the songs the slaves sang—the sorrow songs, the shouts for joy, the battle hymns and the anthems of our movement. I have heard people talk of their beat and rhythm, but we in the movement are as inspired by their words. “Woke Up This Morning with My Mind Stayed on Freedom” is a sentence that needs no music to make its point. We sing the freedom songs today for the same reason the slaves sang them, because we too are in bondage and the songs add hope to our determination that “We shall overcome. Black and white together. We shall overcome someday.”

In other words, the mass meetings and especially the freedom songs replenished the “soul force” that was such a crucial component of Gandhian collective action (King 1987; Eyerman and Jamison 1997).

At the end of mass meetings, leaders invited volunteers to serve in “the nonviolent army.” They stressed, however, that all participants in direct action had to suffer violence without retaliation, turn in their weapons, and make an appointment with the Leadership Training Committee for rigorous screening and training sessions the
following day. Led by prominent American Gandhians such as James Lawson, Diane Nash, and James Bevel, these classes prepared potential activists for the practical realities of nonviolent protest through socio-dramas and role-plays (King 1963: 63). After passing the necessary tests, volunteers had to sign the following Commitment Card:

I HEREBY PLEDGE MYSELF—MY PERSON AND BODY—TO THE NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT. THEREFORE I WILL KEEP THE FOLLOWING TEN COMMITMENTS:

1. MEDITATE daily on the teachings and life of Jesus.
2. REMEMBER always that the nonviolent movement in Birmingham seeks justice and reconciliation—not victory.
3. WALK and TALK in the manner of love, for God is love.
4. PRAY daily to be used by God in order that all men might be free.
5. SACRIFICe personal wishes in order that all men might be free.
6. OBSERVE with both friend and foe the ordinary rules of courtesy.
7. SEEK to perform regular service for others and for the world.
8. REFRAIN from the violence of fist, tongue, or heart.
9. STRIVE to be in good spiritual and bodily health.
10. FOLLOW the directions of the movement and of the captain on a demonstration.

I sign this pledge, having seriously considered what I do and with the determination and will to persevere (reproduced in idem: 63-64).

Particularly the second, third, sixth, eighth, and tenth “commandments” were essential organizational procedures for maintaining discipline during protest events in Birmingham. In addition, the SCLC and the ACMHR encouraged people who could not commit to nonviolence under all circumstances to help the local movement by running errands, driving their car, fixing food, doing clerical work, distributing leaflets, and performing other administrative tasks—just as Gandhi had done in South Africa and India (idem: 62-64; see Bondurant 1971: 91). The collective action campaigns inspired by the Birmingham campaign adopted similar organizational styles: they relied on local networks and leadership, emphasized careful planning, continuously stressed preparation and commitment, frequently held mass meetings, and urged participants to obey the rules of nonviolent conduct.

Despite civil rights activists’ obvious preference for nonviolent methods, mainstream opinion makers generally objected to the timing of their events, the militancy of their strategy, and the role of outsiders. While members of the SCLC and the ACMHR expected negative publicity from conservative media and opinion leaders, the intensity of opposition from religious leaders and moderate liberals came as a shock to them. During the Indian independence movement, Gandhi had maintained an ongoing dialogue with
friends and foes through countless personal letters, articles, and speeches. The *discursive language* that evolved through these interactions often startled and confused his admirers as much as (if not more than) his enemies. During the Birmingham campaign, it was King who led the civil rights movement's dialogic struggle with "people of ill will" and "people of good will" in the mainstream field of reception. While the linguistic style and word choice betrayed his position as a Baptist and African-American minister, the kinds of arguments King employed to contest hegemonic discourse were clearly Gandhian (Dalton 1993: 99; Mukherjee 1993: 148-149). Influenced by mentors like Howard Thurman, Benjamin Mays, and William Stuart Nelson, by advisors like Bayard Rustin and Harris Woford, and by religious pacifists like Richard Gregg and A.J. Muste, King entered into a "multivocal" dialogue with mainstream critics by translating Gandhian discursive language into Christian terms that fellow activists as well as the American public-at-large could understand (Bakhtin 1981: 291-292; Steinberg 1999: 744; Miller 1992; Terdiman 1986). Other African-American spokespersons used similar arguments, but different words, in their dialogue with dominant discourse.

King's most significant statements regarding the Birmingham campaign appear in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," a response to a declaration by eight white clergymen urging African-American activists to return to the negotiation table (King 1963: 76-95). Ostensibly, the text dealt exclusively with the local clergymen's criticism, but it actually addressed a much wider audience. Without referring to Gandhi's name directly, it clearly drew on Gandhian discursive language to defuse the mainstream field of reception's three major objections to nonviolent direct action in Birmingham: timing, outside involvement, and militancy. Of course, King and other civil rights activists had already faced very similar objections during the Montgomery bus boycott, sit-ins, Freedom Ride, and Albany movement.

First of all, the clergymen argued that Bull Connor's recent defeat in the election for mayor demonstrated that race relations in Birmingham were improving. Direct

1 In other words, I argue that King did not merely employ Gandhian language or philosophy to appeal to Northern liberals, as various civil rights scholars claim. Instead, I argue that, as in "Letter from Birmingham Jail," he usually translated Gandhian arguments into familiar Christian terms and employed these terms to answer critics, win sympathy among white moderates in the North and South, gain support from African-American groups outside of Birmingham, and mobilize the local community. Thus, Gandhian discursive language was not just "exotic intellectual patina," as McAdam (1996b: 347) puts it, but the fundamental source for King's arguments.

212
action, in their eyes, would only endanger these positive developments and harm the African-American cause (Lentz 1990: 79-80). King replied to this typical liberal argument by pointing out that Bull Connor was undertaking legal action to delay his removal from office and that the newly elected mayor, Albert Boutwell, was equally segregationist and really "just a dignified Bull Connor," as the ACMHR's Fred Shuttlesworth put it (King 1963: 59, 80). He added that the African-American community had diligently gone through the Gandhian steps to ensure internal discipline and, to avoid interference with the run-off between Boutwell and Connor, had already postponed demonstrations twice before initiating contentious protest (idem: 78-79). But most importantly, he shared Gandhi's opinion (CWMG 38: 1-2; CWMG 37: 250-251) that the oppressed must win their own freedom rather than wait for the oppressor to give it to them:

Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see...that justice too long delayed is justice denied....We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter...There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience (King 1963: 80-82).

The choice of Easter season as starting date indicated that King appreciated the importance of timing, but he effectively transformed this issue into an argument favoring the continuation of nonviolent direct action and rejecting any more patient submission to injustice.

Secondly, like most mainstream observers, the eight clergymen condemned SCLC activists for meddling in local affairs and ignoring the opinions of respectable African-American leaders in Birmingham (Time, April 19, 1963: 30-31). King, who had faced similar opposition during the Albany campaign, went to great lengths to neutralize this attack:

I think I should indicate why I am here in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the view which argues against "outsiders coming in."...Several months ago the [SCLC] affiliate here in Birmingham asked us to be on call to engage in a nonviolent direct-action program if such were deemed necessary. We readily consented, and when the hour came we lived up to our
promise... But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here... Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny... Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds (King 1963: 77).

With these words, he highlighted that racial segregation in the United States was not a localized or incidental problem, but a national and embedded one. Like the Indian independence movement, the American civil rights movement aimed at eradicating an unjust system rather than just resolving its worst excesses.

And finally, complaints about the extremism of nonviolent direct action and especially civil disobedience were a recurring theme since the beginning of the Montgomery bus boycott. Mainstream conservatives readily labeled any visible resistance as "unpatriotic" or "Communist-inspired," while mainstream liberals commonly believed that collective action outside of institutionalized political or legal channels endangered the prospects for gradual reform. King once again employed the Gandhian "discursive repertoire" to contest the clergymen's arguments and inflect them with his own interpretations (Steinberg 1999: 753-754). He acknowledged that nonviolent direct action aimed at producing a crisis, but maintained that such a crisis was creative rather than destructive or coercive, because it "bring[s] to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with" (King 1963: 85). Instead of being insulated by the clergymen's usage of the term extremist, therefore, King turned it into a badge of honor:

Was not Jesus an extremist for love: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."...So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?...Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists (idem: 88-89).

Based on his redefinition of crisis and extremism, he insisted that the kind of civil disobedience practiced in Birmingham was not a sign of lawlessness, but a prerequisite for justice and democracy:

One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws...[A] just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow and that it is willing to follow itself...A law is unjust if it is inflicted on a minority that, as
a result of being denied the right to vote, had no part in enacting or devising the law... I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law (idem: 82-84).

Far from appeasing the liberals who opposed civil disobedience, moreover, he openly disapproved of their feeble stance on the African-American freedom struggle: “Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection” (idem: 85). In short, King adopted a Gandhian line of reasoning to legitimate events in Birmingham, respond to the clergymen’s critical remarks, and take moderate supporters in mainstream society to task for underestimating the urgency of the situation.

The Birmingham movement’s collective appropriation of the diffusion item was consistent, encompassing, and highly successful. By fully implementing the Gandhian repertoire’s action forms, organizational styles, and discursive language from the initial planning sessions in May of 1962 until the final agreement in May of 1963, it demonstrated that nonviolent direct action was both morally admirable and politically effective (Morris 1993). The internal strength of the Birmingham movement was not the only reason for its effectiveness, though. The actions and reactions by other actors in the contemporary political context were equally important factors. Each of these actors was initially opposed to the direct action campaign, but eventually pressured into conceding to it.

Local businessmen, for instance, remained recalcitrant for a long time, but during a meeting on May 7 the most stubborn negotiator realized that the African-American activists would not give up and announced: “You know, I’ve been thinking this thing through. We ought to be able to work something out” (King 1963: 105). A few days afterwards, movement leaders and local elites came to an agreement. Similarly, the Kennedy administration originally opposed the Birmingham campaign, but after white extremists bombed the house of King’s brother to protest the agreement, the president addressed the nation on television to express his support of the pact, and ordered federal troops to restore peace in Birmingham (idem: 107; Newsweek, May 13, 1963: 28). Most mainstream media and white intellectuals, moreover, only sided with the campaign after
it had proven successful and even then they primarily supported King because he was more moderate than Malcolm X, not because they agreed with his approach. Walter Lippmann, a prominent liberal and Newsweek columnist, wrote:

the crucial question is whether these moderate men will continue to be followed, or whether the movement will become explosive in a mood of desperation... if moderates do not solve the race problem... the Negro advocates of nonviolence will give way to extremists who teach violence (idem. May 27, 1963:23).

And finally, bystander publics did not become a positive force until after they had seen the dramatic images of May 3. King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” indicates that convincing white and African-American moderates (not to mention conservatives) to stand behind the demonstrators had been an uphill battle.

The Birmingham campaign was the last time that the African-American freedom struggle could fully implement the Gandhian repertoire and simultaneously mold the political context in its favor. Afterwards, protest leaders either diluted the militancy of the Gandhian repertoire to appease authorities, media representatives, and bystander publics, or failed to maintain “unity in diversity” among the civil rights movement’s critical communities. Although it was originally intended as a civil disobedience campaign, possibly including sit-ins in the Senate and the House of Representatives, the March on Washington in August 1963 became a symbolic event that celebrated American ideals without directly challenging the national government or the status quo (Lentz 1990: 98-104; Garrow 1986; Branch 1988). To preserve an image of respectability, moderation, and interracial harmony, director A. Philip Randolph and his assistants eliminated all radical tendencies from the agenda, including a passage in the draft of the speech by the SNCC’s John Lewis that stated:

We will march through the South, through the heart of Dixie, the way Sherman did. We shall pursue our own “scorched-earth” policy and burn Jim Crow to the ground nonviolently....We will take matters into our own hands and create a source of power, outside any national structure, that could and would assure us a victory (quoted in Lentz 1990: 105; see also, Carson 1981: 91-95; Zinn 1964: 190).

After the march, prominent figures like Rustin (who had been Randolph’s right hand) started calling for more conventional means of influencing national authorities, that is, for a strategic move “From Protest to Politics” (Rustin 1965; Steinberg 1997). At the other
end of the spectrum, radical activists in the SNCC and CORE increasingly doubted whether political reform was worth the deaths and sacrifices, particularly after the Selma campaign and the Watts riots in 1965. They criticized the SCLC and traditional civil rights organizations for accommodating the “white” power structure, while the majority of African Americans continued to suffer from racial discrimination and poverty (Umoja 2003). As the political context underwent dramatic shifts, they began looking for an alternative repertoire of contention, with new action forms, new ways of organizing African-American communities, and new discursive language.

...and its aftermath

The same diffusion mechanisms that had enabled full implementation until the summer of 1965, now contributed to the Gandhian repertoire’s decline and rejection. While the SCLC regarded the Selma campaign as an important political victory, for example, most SNCC activists were disappointed by its failure to improve local conditions (Viorst 1979; Carson 1981; Umoja 2003). Without constructive brokerage between the two critical communities, and without additional attempts at transnational brokerage, the civil rights movement could no longer galvanize for massive nonviolent direct action or Gandhian community projects.

Instead, Stokely Carmichael and other SNCC members founded an independent political party, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO), with action forms and organizational styles that were explicitly “un-Gandhian.” The party’s emblem, the black panther, signified that local African Americans no longer believed in nonviolent persuasion: “[The] black panther is a vicious animal...He never bothers anything, but when you start pushing him, he moves backwards, backwards, and backwards into his corner, and then he comes out to destroy everything that’s before him” (Grant 1968: 407). Soon afterwards, African-American militants in Oakland, California and other parts of the country similarly adopted the Black Panther symbol to advocate cultural nationalism, armed struggle, and political revolution (Carson 1981: 278-286). And in 1966, during an event sponsored by the SCLC, former Freedom Rider and Mississippi organizer Carmichael started using the Black Power concept that symbolized the end of the Gandhian repertoire’s discursive dominance among African-American activists. The
emergence of Black Power caused an irreparable rift among the civil rights movement's critical communities (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967; Foner 1970; Button 1978; Viorst 1979; Frye 1980; Umoja 2003). After Farmer's departure, CORE joined the SNCC in supporting African-American separatism and power politics, while the SCLC remained integrationist and—following Rustin's advice—increasingly focused on forming coalitions within the national Democratic Party (Steinberg 1997). In the end, therefore, the same critical communities that had activated the mechanisms enabling full implementation of the Gandhian repertoire could not prevent the eventual demise of the civil rights movement, the rejection of the diffusion item, and the decline of the transnational diffusion process.