A More Durable Weapon:
Religion and Nonviolence in the Black Freedom Movement, 1918 - 1960

By

Anthony C. Siracusa

Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the

Graduate School of Vanderbilt University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

History

August 31, 2017

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

Dennis. C. Dickerson, Ph.D

Sarah E. Igo, Ph.D

Paul A. Kramer, Ph.D

Larry W. Isaac, Ph.D

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Introduction

"By a positive program I am here referring to a flesh and blood program which deals with physical realities of social relationships. I am not here concerned with that perverted pietism which ignores the facts of life and preaches disembodied spiritualism."[1]
Bayard Rustin, 1943

In his March 1955 report to the national office of the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), Fellowship Field Secretary Glen Smiley told his bosses in New York that Martin Luther King, Jr. wanted to "do it right," but King was "too young" and "some of his close help is violent." Smiley reported that King's entourage of bodyguards had recently sought a "permit...to carry guns," and he described King's home as "an arsenal." Smiley told his New York bosses that "King sees the inconsistency" between his nonviolent ideals and the armed reality of the situation, "but not enough. He believes and yet he doesn't believe. The whole movement is armed in a sense, and this is what I must convince him to see as the greatest evil." Concluding his report without acknowledging the irony in his final statement, Smiley wrote "this stuff on arms is deadly. Treat it in the strictest confidence."[2]

Glenn Smiley's effort to convert Martin King to nonviolence is, by now, a well known episode in scholarly literature on the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Black Freedom Struggle. But Smiley's role in Montgomery was as much an ending as a beginning - a turning point in a decades long effort by white pacifists to apply their politics to the problem of racial violence and discrimination in the US South. Smiley and his late 1950s counterpart, FOR Southern Secretary James M. Lawson, Jr., were part of a third generation of Fellowship staff

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[1] Bayard Rustin, "Forward from Pacifism, Part I, Session #3 "Our Need to Shift Our Emphasis from Pacifism to a Program of Positive Social Goals," April 2 1944," John H. Bracey, Jr. and August Meier, eds., Bayard Rustin Papers, (Microfilm, 23 reels, University Publications of America, 1988) [hereafter 'BRP'], Reel I.
[2] Glenn Smiley, Letter to John and Al, 29 February 1956, Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) Papers [hereafter FOR], Series E, Box 17, Folder Correspondence Martin King 1954 - 1967; see also, Christopher Strain, *Purefire: Self Defense as Activism in the Civil Rights Era*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 40.

concerned with Jim Crow and white violence in the United States. Since the First World War, American pacifists had decried lynching and racial discrimination, citing it alongside the violence of the labor struggle as a domestic problem of critical importance. But until Montgomery, this group of largely white pacifists failed to demonstrate how the politics of pacifism – predicated on a commitment to doing no violence – might actively undermine and ultimately end Jim Crow violence and racial discrimination.

This dissertation charts how and why the pacifist movement influenced the Black Freedom Struggle between the First World War and the sit-downs of 1960. It locates the intellectual roots of nonviolent US politics in religious ideas about ethical being, religious ideas to which both white pacifists and black religious intellectuals found themselves committed. It chronicles the history of failures that preceded the successful effort by Smiley and his black pacifist colleague Bayard Rustin to convince King to use the weapon of nonviolence in Montgomery. And it shows how religious ideas were successfully grafted onto direct action tactics deployed by US labor activists, a process of "movement spillover" and tactical "borrowing" that led to the widespread deployment of the sit down in the black freedom struggle by 1960.[3] In exploring the space between religious ideas about nonviolence and nonviolent tactics, this dissertation challenges the conceptual approach that characterizes scholarly discussions of nonviolence – a typical bifurcation of nonviolence as either tactic or a way of life. This study locates a vibrant lineage of people for whom ethical being was also a tactically effective method of politics.

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[3] David S. Meyer and Nancy Whittier, "Social Movement Spillover," *Social Problems* 41, no. 2 (1994): 277–98; Larry Isaac and Lars Christiansen, "How the Civil Rights Movement Revitalized Labor Militancy," *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 5 (2002); Larry Isaac, Steve McDonald, and Greg Lukasik, "Takin' It from the Streets: How the Sixties Mass Movement Revitalized Unionization," *American Journal of Sociology* 112, no. 1 (2006): 46–96.

Beginning with the rise of a white pacifist movement in the United States during the First World War, this dissertation tracks how Howard Thurman, Bayard Rustin, and James M. Lawson, Jr. envisaged pacifism and navigated its inadequacies between 1918 and 1960. The way these influential black intellectuals linked personal religiosity and social politics is perhaps best captured by what I call a 'politics of being,' a conceptual framework that explores the relationship between religious being and nonviolent direct action in modern America. Defining the politics of being as embodied acts of mercy, kindness, and forgiveness in the face of violent white hostility, this dissertation argues that an influential lineage of thinkers and activists came to believe that such practices could transform social relations between white and black Americans in the United States. These ideas and practices – the politics of nonviolence - flowed out of a domestic pacifist movement. But neither pacifism nor nonviolence fully capture the praxis of resistance devised and diffused by Thurman, Rustin, and Lawson for challenging Jim Crow. These men rejected the idea of pacifism as a methodology of resistance for white supremacy, opting for the 'force' of nonviolence just as Gandhi did. But the politics of being became a way of doing nonviolence in modern America for these religious activists and the students they inspired. The politics of being were at once a political methodology and a religious commitment to take action against Jim Crow. This dissertation documents how Howard Thurman derived these politics of being from pacifism, and how Bayard Rustin and Jim Lawson showed forth how this nonviolent religious framework could be used tactically to challenge Jim Crow in modern America.

While pacifists and black religious intellectuals belonged to distinct movement traditions, they collaborated in taking nonviolent political action that put their lives at risk. Key figures from each movement searched continually for a "suitable past" to animate their

vision for a nonviolent, interracial politics, and in this way white pacifists and black religious intellectuals "invented tradition." They harnessed new ideas about nonviolent interracial politics to older religious ideologies in order to cement a commitment to practices and behaviors with serious personal cost.[4] The courage to be nonviolent - to accept the often-violent consequences of nonviolent action - came from seeing oneself as part of a longer lineage of religious people committed to similar forms of personal sacrifice. Specifically, both white and black thinkers reframed ideas about the life of Jesus to take courageous action against contemporary injustice – specifically the global conflicts of the First and Second World Wars and the domestic terror of Jim Crow.

Key figures within the distinct movement traditions of pacifism, black religious thought, and labor were joined together by a commitment to a politics of being - a set of practices that were at once legibly religious and political in their impact. Moving beyond the imprecise and culturally freighted terminology of nonviolence, the politics of being is intended to draw attention to the essential connection between ontology and social politics for generations of religious activists. By centering religious being in the history of resistance to racism, the politics of being opens up space for querying the political meaning of religious being in Modern America - both for individual practitioners and for the racist American society to which these practitioners belonged.

Endemic to this project is the challenge of examining black agency within US History, a challenge articulated well by historian Walter Johnson. Although a scholar of slavery, Johnson's treatise "On Agency" is helpful for thinking about religious being and black politics

[4] Hobsbawm defines invented traditions as "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and or a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past." Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

in the age of Jim Crow. Cautioning scholars against emphasizing even the most basic personal acts among the enslaved as modes of resistance to slavery, Johnson cites the challenge of writing about the "agency" of the enslaved alongside their obvious "humanity."[5] "To speak of 'enslaved humanity' in this context," Johnson writes, "is to try to imagine a history of slavery which sees the lives of enslaved people as powerfully conditioned by, though not reducible to, their slavery." Johnson's point is that scholars must work to understand the system of slavery and its conditions in order to understand the life of the enslaved - but we cannot apprehend the life of the enslaved by understanding slavery alone. Imploring social historians against "reformatting" the most subtle acts of the enslaved as a "liberatory gesture which paradoxically reduces even the most intimate actions of human beings to (resistant) features of the system that enslaved them," Johnson concluded that "the condition of enslaved humanity, it could perhaps be said, was a condition that was at once thoroughly determined and insistently transcendent."[6]

Johnson's analysis of slavery points to the care which must be taken in understanding the relationship between religious being and political action for black Americans in the age of Jim Crow. Just as slavery sought to limit the physical and social mobility of the enslaved and used violence to enforce this isolation, Jim Crow sought also to confine black Americans socially and economically through law and violence. White supremacy, undoubtedly, pervaded nearly every aspect of American life in the first half of the twentieth century. But caution is required not to define white supremacy in the late 19th and early 20th century as a

[5] Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History,* Vol 37, No 1, Special Issue (Autumn 2003), pp. 113 – 124; 114.
[6] Johnson, "On Agency," 116.

"totalizing" force.[7] The risk of making white supremacy the centerpiece around which we understand black politics, black culture, and black religion risks suggesting that black life was conditioned primarily by the demands and effects of white supremacy and Jim Crow. The tendency to do just this in historical literature is evident in the preponderant use of the term "protest" to characterize black politics in the twentieth century. Black life and culture should not be reduced to protest, especially in an examination of black religious ideas in the age of Jim Crow.[8] The terminology of protest suggests a reaction to the political disfranchisement and routine violence and insidious discrimination that characterized the United States in the decades following Reconstruction. This dissertation suggests that the politics of being were not simply a protest – or a reaction. They were, instead, ancient modes of religious being that became political only because white supremacy had, since its inception, criminalized and violated free black being in the United States. These ways of being can and have been

[7] The issue of how slavery was a "total" system of social domination, and the degree to which black life and culture was or was not determined by white supremacy, has long been a source of fruitful scholarship. Literature on this issue in slavery, for example, has shifted. Orland Patterson's notion of slavery as an "extreme form of the relation of domination" (1) wherein "the slavemasters's power over his slave was total." Orland Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1, 26; More recently, scholars have explored a kind of radical agency among the enslaved as seen in the work of Stephanie Camp. Camp writes that "every day resistance occupied, as political scientist James Scott has argued, the wide terrain between consent, on one hand, and open, organized opposition, on the other." Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 2; For much earlier work that engages the issue of the agency the enslaved, see Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: the World the Slaves Made*, 1st ed. (New York,: Pantheon Books, 1974). Most recently, Ashon Crawley has examined the tension between the violence meted out against black Americans in the late 19th and 20th century and the free expression of identity and culture in the late 19th and early 20th century from the ethicist perspective. Crawley calls for "an ethics project that recognizes that the violence of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy as a response to the ongoing refusal of black life, of otherwise possibility." Ashon T. Crowley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 72. All of this work points to the complex relationship between black being and political agency in the decades following slavery, amidst what Douglas Blackmon has called 'Slavery by Another Name.' See Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery By Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, (New York: Anchor books, 2008).

[8] The notion of transcendence was, perhaps, a more dominant theme in black religious thought than the notion of protest as evidenced in the rise of the largest African American denomination in the US, the Church of God in Christ. See Anthea D. Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); See also *The Rise to Respectability: Race, Religion, and the Church of God in Christ*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2012).

interpreted as protest, but such characterizations elide the deeper meaning of these religious practices.

To be clear: white supremacy guided the economic, political, and social development of the United States since its founding - an intrepid mission that Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds have shown to be an inspiration for the creation of "white men's countries" across the globe.[9] But black Americans also claimed ways of being, created culture, and forged politics by drawing on ideas and traditions that began well before the particular brand of white supremacy common to the modern United States. Inspired by Leon Litwack's "history of being," a treatise on how individuals in the first generation of black Americans born outside of slavery dealt with the day to day realities of Jim Crow violence and discrimination, this dissertation documents specifically how Howard Thurman, Bayard Rustin, and James M. Lawson, Jr. articulated and claimed nonviolent ways of religious being because they saw in them a path to freedom and liberation - for themselves, their families, and their communities.[10] They choose to be fully themselves - and implored their students to do the same - because this way of being nonviolent aligned with their deepest religious ideals. The nonviolent acts of mercy, kindness, and forgiveness in the face of violent white hostility were borne from self reflection, personal contemplation, and collective conversation about how to live one's deepest convictions despite the pervasive intrusions of racism and empire.[11]

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[9] Larry Isaac, Steve McDonald, and Greg Lukasik, "Takin' It from the Streets: How the Sixties Mass Movement Revitalized Unionization," *American Journal of Sociology* 112, no. 1 (2006): 46–96, doi:10.1086/502692.

[10] Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind : Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1998,), xv

[11] This dissertation remains deeply conscious of the particular ways that black culture and politics cannot be separated from the strictures and structures of Jim Crow. As Tera Hunter has shown, for example, black washerwomen used "segregated spaces" in Jim Crow Atlanta to "bolster their autonomy and collective power and to escape exploitation by whites." Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 100; Glenda Gilmore has emphasized how non-working class black women utilized the segregated space of Bennett College to professionalize themselves and seek local power. See Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow:*

Over time, these ways of being were devised as a political form that could overthrow Jim Crow. Locked out of electoral politics before 1965 - banished from city councils, state legislatures, the US congress, and the White House – the politics described here were not politics in the electoral sense. As Doug Rossinow has written, "cultural meanings and possibilities are bounded by political realities," and the political reality of black disfranchisement before 1965 requires an exposition of how religious culture could itself function as a way of generating power.[12] Locked out from formal democratic processes but refusing to remain complacent, Thurman, Rustin, Lawson, and the students they trained sought to align their "desire for a life of meaning" with new and innovative political practices geared at "participatory democracy."[13] "Blacks in the deep south gave us models of how to be," historian Doug Rossinow argues, a quest for "power" that goes well beyond electoral politics.[14]

Building an analysis around what Doug Rossinow has called the "dialectics of politics and culture," this dissertation shows how interracial nonviolent activism became a meaningful way of being in the world and a potent form of power in modern America.[15] Just as E.P.

Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 1996; And an emerging strain of scholarship focuses on the long and vibrant tradition of black self-defense arms in America - noting that black Americans, like Americans more generally, armed themselves for both personal and political reasons. This work suggests Jim Crow was not a "totalizing" social structure, a term historian Orlando Patterson used to describe the violence of slavery and the 'social death' created by such violence. But this work also makes clear that we cannot apprehend black life and culture, indeed black being in the epoch of Jim Crow, without careful attention to the way black Americans navigated the imposing structures of white supremacy. See also Jane Elizabeth Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon, *Jumpin' Jim Crow : Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[12] Douglass Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 20.

[13] ibid, 338.

[14] ibid, 272.

[15] This dissertation sees politics as the contentious encounters that flow from contests for power, expanding the idea about what counts and politics as well as the sites where politics take place. As Glenda Gilmore has written, "the idea of public and private spheres as articulated by Jurgen Habermas and modified by Nancy Fraser and other feminist theorists suggested questions about how political sites and boundaries changed as black men lost

Thompson has accused economic historians of being "guilty of a crass economic reductionism, obliterating the complexities of motive, behaviour, and function" to rely instead on "an abbreviated view of economic man," social and intellectual historians of modern America have been similarly guilty of "obliterating the complexities of motive, behaviour, and function" of religious people in the twentieth century - perhaps most especially those religious people in socialist and radical movements.[16] As a result, we have failed to take seriously the very real connection between religious being and contentious politics in twentieth century US History, and our analysis of the black freedom struggle has suffered as a result.

"Church histories" have documented the rise of black religious institutions, their clerical leaders, their physical spaces, and their histories. But in building on the work of Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, this dissertation seeks to give more attention to the ideas that emerged in these spaces – and how these ideas animated black politics and social movement activities.[17] Black religious intellectual history, the history of black religious people thinking

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the right to vote, as the state institutionalized segregation, and as women gained the ballot." Gilmore, *Gender and Jim* Crow, xvii – xviii; The politics of resistance to racism intersected with the culture of American religion in America, and I argue that black people were powerful political actors – contentiously challenging the power of whites and white supremacy – even as they were disfranchised. Indeed, the fact of black disfranchisement was the starting place and warrant for an innovative political methodology - which I call the politics of being. As Leon Litwack makes clear, black Americans actively sought non-electoral ways to influence social and political structures. While Litwack has suggested that politics had become, by the 1920s, "white folks business," this dissertation aligns with Gilmore in suggesting that black Americans were busy thinking through how to generate significant political power without a reliance on the ballot box. This search for political power outside of electoral politics was a necessity given the near complete disfranchisement of African Americans before 1965. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 373.

16 Edward Palmer Thompson, *The Essential E.P. Thompson*, (New Press, 2001), 317.

17 Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, *Setting Down the Sacred Past: African-American Race Histories* (Harvard University Press, 2010); Among the first 20th century studies of the black church came from W.E.B. DuBois, whose *Negro Church* assessed quantitatively and qualitatively the significance of the black churches in 1903. See W. E. B. Du Bois,*The Negro Church Report of a Social Study Made under the Direction of Atlanta University: Together with the Proceedings of the Eighth Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems,* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, *1903*); But this intrepid history was soon followed by Carter Woodson, whose 1921 History of the Negro Church built on and expanded the work of DuBois to understand the rise and expansion of black churches in the United States. Carter Godwin Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church*, (Washington, D.C.: The Associated

together in both religious and non-religious space, helps explain how and why religious being came to occupy a central place in the Black Freedom Struggle.[18] Explicating this link between religious being and nonviolent politics is especially important amidst expanding work on the "black tradition of arms." Akinyele Umoja's *We Will Shoot Back* and Charles Cobb's *This Nonviolent Stuff Will Get You Killed* have rightly suggested that it was quite common for black activists to own guns and use them for self-defense - even if they were also involved in nonviolent direct action campaigns. Simon Wendt's *The Spirit and the Shotgun* has also shown that self-defense and spiritual values were not incompatible for many black Americans fighting off routine white violence in the 20th century.[19]

Publishers), 1921; Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph W. Nicholson did a further study of this period in their 1933 work "The Negro's Church," again quantifying the black churches in America and examining their leadership. Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph William Nicholson, *The Negro's Church*, (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research), 1933. And E. Franklin Frazier continued this work in 1964 with his book on the "Negro Church in America." E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1964) Most recently, C. Eric Lincoln built on this long tradition of black church history - first with his "The Negro Church Since Frazier" in 1974 - and then later with his 1990 work The Black Church in the African American Experience. C. Eric Lincoln, *The Negro Church Since Frazier,* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974); C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Scholars of social movements like Aldon Morris have emphasized the very practical nature of black church support for black organizing through the provision of "enterprise tools," phones, safe meeting spaces, and later mimeographs, fax machines, and other basic tools needed to organize. See Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. (New York: The Free Press, 1986); See also Aldon D. Morris. "A Retrospective on the Civil Rights Movement: Political and Intellectual Landmarks." *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (1999): 517-39. The work of black theologians on the ethical imperatives of challenging segregation and racism has been concurrent with much of this historical scholarship, but this work has tended to focus more on the normative than the empirical - the ethics of how one ought be contemporaneously given the historical nature of racism and its ongoing legacy. For a good introduction to this work in ethics, see James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986); For a more recent book, see J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[18] Clarence Taylor has noted that African American religious history has been chiefly a "secular endeavor," but new work on Africana religions in comic books and the rise of evangelical black religious politics in the United States point positively in the direction of taking seriously the role of religious thought in the black experience. Clarence Taylor, *Black Religious Intellectuals: The Fight for Equality from Jim Crow to the 21sst Century*, (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2002); Resurgent interest in African American Intellectual History in recent years mean the writings of DuBois, Garvey, Fanon, Angela Davis have been revisited - while new queries on transnational Black Atlantic thought have been situated alongside work on black nationalism in 19th century Haiti and the evolution of black political ideologies in the twentieth century. The African American Intellectual History Society (AAIHS) blog has featured much of this work.

[19] See Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Strain, *Pure Fire: Self-Defense as Activism in the Civil Rights Era*. Wesley C. Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC's*

But this literature on the "black tradition of arms" raises sharp questions about nonviolence: where did the ideas and tactics associated with nonviolence come from? And how did they come to occupy a central place in the black freedom struggle.[20] Historical literature has, for decades, relied heavily on Gandhi to explain the rise of nonviolence in the 1950s and 1960s Black Freedom Struggle. These excellent historical works in this field go well beyond simply explaining that the writings of Mohandas Gandhi influenced Martin King. Well documented is the use of Gandhian rhetoric by A. Philip Randolph in the 1940s March on Washington Movement, while Sudarshan Kapur's detailed history of black newspaper coverage of Gandhi proves that the Mahatma was well known to black audiences across the US.[21] Sean Chabot has, most recently, focused on the mechanism by which Gandhian ideas

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Dream for a New America, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Another more recent cohort of scholars has directly engaged the questions of armed self-defense relative to nonviolence both during the civil rights era and in the years before. See Simon Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun: Armed Resistance and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007). Akinyele Omowale Umoja, *We Will Shoot Back: Armed Resistance in the Mississippi Freedom Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2013). Charles E. Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed : How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*, (Boston: Basic Books, 2014); Nicholas Johnson, *Negroes and the Gun: The Black Tradition of Arms*, (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2014).

20 As Charles Cobb writes in his 2014 book *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get you Killed*, "Simply put: because nonviolence worked so well as a tactic for effecting change and was demonstrably improving their lives, some black people chose to use weapons to defend the nonviolent Freedom Movement. Although it is counterintuitive, any discussion of guns in the movement must therefore also include substantial discussion of nonviolence, and vice versa. This book does that." Charles E. Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*, (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 2. Yet any substantive discussion of nonviolence, and in particular the history of how nonviolence became such a prominent political choice for black activist, is missing from Cobb's otherwise exemplary study. Cobb admits as much later, writing that among other things the book is not about nonviolence. Cobb suggests, instead, the book is about people – "especially the young people – who participated in a nonviolent movement without having much commitment to nonviolence beyond agreeing to use it as a tactic." Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed*, 11. Cobb's otherwise astounding study does little to interrogate the development of nonviolence before 1955, especially among those widely influential figures for whom nonviolence can be understood as a religious commitment..

21 Jervis Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph; a Biographical Portrait* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974); Cynthia Taylor, *A. Philip Randolph: The Religious Journey of an African American Labor Leader*,(New York: New York University Press, 2006); Cornelius L. Bynum, *A. Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Sudarshan Kapur, *Raising up a Prophet: The African-American Encounter with Gandhi,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

and tactics were diffused to local activists, arguing that 'collective learning' took place between black leaders who met Gandhi and their domestic church audiences.[22]

But while black Americans may have encountered Gandhi in newspapers or study groups, few black Americans traveled to India and even fewer met the Mahatma. As an explanatory model for the diffusion of nonviolence and nonviolent direct action in the Black Freedom Struggle, Gandhi is not sufficient. This dissertation does not discount Gandhi completely, but argues that his most important contribution to the black freedom struggle was a modeling of religious being.[23] Gandhian ideas about religious being – and in particular his interpretation of how the Sermon on the Mount could be a politics of being - proved deeply influential for some freedom movement activists and intellectuals.[24] Gandhian religious being served to join white pacifists and black religious intellectuals around what social theorist David Snow has called a shared frame.[25]

Utilizing Snow and sociological theory more broadly, this dissertation accounts for the intersections between distinct social movements – and how these overlaps contributed to the politics of being. Situating Gandhi and the Indian Independence, for example, within the

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[22] Sean Chabot, *Transnational Roots of the Civil Rights Movement: African American Explorations of the Gandhian Repertoire* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2012). Sean Scalmer has linked Gandhian ideals and their importance to domestic activists to the rise and fall of the New Left, and Quinton Dixie and Peter Eisenstadt have also examined Howard Thurman and the so-called 'Negro Delegation' to India in 1934. See Sean Scalmer, *Gandhi in the West: The Mahatma and the Rise of Radical Protest*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); see also Quinton Hosford Dixie and Peter R. Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World: Howard Thurman's Pilgrimage to India and the Origins of African American Nonviolence*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011).

[23] An emphasis on tactics in social movement literature, and in particular how "repertoires of protest" tactics are developed over time, has created a theoretical foundation for a focus primarily on how tactical nonviolence and Gandhi's role in the Indian Independence Movement influenced the Black Freedom Struggle. This theoretical literature emphasizing nonviolent tactics includes Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Nonviolence,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Charles Tilly, *Regimes and* Repertoires, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, Second Edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[24] For an introduction to the way Gandhi interpreted Christian religious ideas through his own experience as a Hindu, see Arvind Sharma, *Gandhi: A Spiritual Biography* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013).

[25] For an explanation of Frame Alignments in social movements, see David A. Snow, et al., "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," *American Sociological Review 51*, no. 4 (1986): 464.

pacifist movement borne of the First World War and the decolonization that continued through the Second World War illustrates what sociologist Doug McAdam has described as a "political opportunity," a chance for black Americans to join a global revolt against colonialism and white supremacy.[26] This opportunity belonged to a larger "political process" that afforded antiracist activists across the globe a political advantage, a point perhaps made most clear by Mary Dudziak in her pioneering work on "Cold War Civil Rights."[27] But explaining the influence of global anti-racist organizing simply in terms of a Cold War opportunity risks obscuring the critical role played by domestic movements in giving rise to a politics of being in modern America.

Treating the emergence of the US pacifist movement as part of a larger explosion of institutional growth and associational life in the Progressive Era, this dissertation seeks to bridge a divide in the scholarship that has tended to mimic the segregation of American life.[28]

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[26] The "political process" model, also known as the "political opportunity model," has been used by Doug McAdam to explain the development of black insurgency in twentieth century US history. It proves useful here in explaining how distinct domestic movement traditions took advantage of wartime changes in US Society as well as American religiosity to make religious being a locus for developing political power in modern US society. See Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930 – 1970*, Second Edition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[27] Mary L. Duziak, Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); A bevy of newer literature has expanded on the transnational linkages between the US Black Freedom Struggle. See Nico Slate, "From Colored Cosmopolitanism to Human Rights: A Historical Overview of the Transnational Black Freedom Struggle," *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 1, no. 1 (2015): 3-24; Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); *Nico Slate, Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); James Hunter Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Kevin Kelly Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Carol Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals: The NAACP and the Struggle for Colonial Liberation, 1941-1960*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[28] Part of the Progressive Era in the US, the US peace movement belonged to a broader global movement that featured women activists. See Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); This global movement dealt also with issues of temperance and morality. See Ian Tyrell, *Woman's World/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880* – 1930, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina

White pacifists and black political activists both belonged to this shared moment in US life, what Robert Wiebe has described as the "end of island communities" as Americans came together in associational life and in cities and towns across the country.[29] This coming together for the good of society among progressives, however, was punctuated by the reality of rigid segregation in American life - a segregation that was true even among the most prominent progressive American causes.[30] Nancy Cott, for example, has shown that the white National Women's Suffrage Association was willing to concede continued black disfranchisement if it meant that white women could claim the ballot - and the much of the early twentieth century labor movement was rigidly segregated.[31]

But this progressive moment nonetheless produced important tributaries for the politics of being in American life, and social movement theory helps to explain why. In the wake of the First World War, white pacifists and black activists developed a frame alignment, a theory developed by social movement scholars to explain the links and overlaps between otherwise discrete movements. Frame alignments can emerge from shared economic or

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Press, 1991); Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Joyce Blackwell has argued that black women were also a part of this global movement of women seeking peace and temperance. See Joyce Blackwell, *No Peace Without Freedom: Race and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915 – 1975*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991).

[29] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*, (New York,: Hill and Wang, 1967).

[30] Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Who Were the Progressives?*: *Readings*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002).

[31] Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). The marginalization of black Americans and the violence perpetrated against them reached new lows in 1901, as the Progressive Movement was gaining steam, a period that historian Rayford Logan described as the "nadir" of black life in the twentieth century. Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal Of The Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes To Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1997). However, as Elliot Rudwick and others have shown, violence against Black Americans was widespread and vicious in the summer of 1919. White violence directed particularly at black war veterans, black workers, and their families after the First World War that the summer of 1919 became known as the Red Summer as blood flowed in the streets of cities across the US. See Elliot Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis, July 2, 1917,* (Urbana/Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1982); See also, Cameron McWhirter, *Red Summer: the Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America*, (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 2012); William M. Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919*, (Urbana/Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Robert Whitaker, *On the Laps of Gods: The Red Summer of 1919 and the Struggle for Justice that Remade a Nation*, (New York: Crown Publishing, 2008).

political interests and shared geographical interests among a variety of other factors. In the case of early 20th century white pacifists and black political activists, a frame alignment was created not only by Gandhi but also by a commitment to ending violence in American society. For white pacifists in the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a commitment to Christian practice underwrote their collective efforts to end violence. While for black Americans, ending the brutal reality of routine lynching drove interest in ending violence in American life. This shared concern with violence forged an important alliance between a group of black political activists and white pacifist in the age of segregation.

But as chapter one shows, this shared frame did not erase significant fault lines between movements divided by race. The Fellowship struggled for decades to recruit black members, and this lack of representation prevented white pacifists from developing a political philosophy that dealt honestly and effectively with the reality of black life in the United States. Widespread gun ownership for the purpose of self-defense against, for example, became a deal breaker for some white pacifists and led to failed Fellowship incursions in the interwar US South.[32] But as the Fellowship increased modestly the number of black staff and board members, this frame alignment around a commitment to a nonviolent politics deepened. Howard Thurman was a key figure in this process. Joining the Fellowship as a sophomore at Morehouse College in 1919, Thurman lauded what he called "the genius of pacifism" but called counsels to black pacifism "mere quietus" for a minority population facing tremendous violence and almost no political recourse. Chapter two shows how Thurman's religious critique of pacifism, as well as the ideas forged by his students, became essential to the rise of a politics of being in the postwar black freedom struggle.

[32] This point is also important because it reveals the limits of shared frames in animating social movement activity.

These religious ideas about how to practice nonviolence were intentionally syncretized with direct action tactics from the labor movement in forging the politics of being. In their path breaking work on the history of nonviolent direct action in the black freedom struggle, August Meier and Elliot Rudwick have argued that little clear continuity exists between the bus boycotts of the early twentieth century and the nonviolent activism of the 1950s and 1960s.[33] Meier and Rudwick are correct in their assessment, as the tactics common to the 1950s and 1960s black freedom struggle were not endemic to the black freedom struggle - but were instead borrowed from the direct action campaigns and labor strikes of the early twentieth century. The sit-down, in particular, which first surfaced in the US at a 1906 General Electric plant strike in Schenectady, New York grew to become a popular tactic in the labor struggles of the early 1930s. By 1935, the sit down was a tactic of choice for auto-workers - black and white - across the Midwest.[34] The urgency to acquire better wages and working conditions amidst the Great Depression led to increased militancy in the interwar years, and gave the sit-down a place of prominence in what Charles Tilly has called the "repertoires of contentious politics" in the modern United States.

As chapter three shows, the wartime years proved important to crystalizing how the pacifist commitment to nonviolence could be wed to these direct action tactics. Five years

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[33] Meier and Rudwick write that "later activists were rarely aware of what their predecessors had done or attempted" with regards to direct action tactics in the Black Freedom Struggle. August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *Along the Color Line: Explorations in the Black Experience*, First Paperback Edition, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 265

[34] The GE Strike was led by the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers of the World (IWW). Violence was far more common than nonviolence in the 'labor wars' of the early twentieth century, and the sit down as a direct action tactic was often defended by labor activists willing to fight public and private police. The tactic burst back onto the labor scene in the Great Depression, and sit-downs were also later used by black tobacco workers in North Carolina. For the origins of the sit-down in the GE strike, see Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988). For the emergence of the sit-down in the Great Depression, see Lewis Perry, *Civil Disobedience: An American Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University, 2013). For the use of the sit-down among black workers in North Carolina, see Robert R. Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South,* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

before his significant Freedom Ride of 1947, Bayard Rustin was working in interracial spaces at the behest of both the white Fellowship of Reconciliation and the all black March on Washington Movement to build local "cells" of individuals dedicated to the study of nonviolence and the deployment of nonviolent direct action. This dissertation treats these "nonviolent institutes" as what sociologist Larry Isaac calls "movement schools," places where collective, interracial learning about movement goals and tactics intersected powerfully with discussions of personal religious practice.[35] These nonviolent institutes were, in many cases, forerunners to the development of local chapters of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) across the United States. The Rev. James M. Lawson, Jr. - who would emerge as a leader in the study and use of nonviolence and nonviolent direct action by the late 1950s - belonged to the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the CORE in the 1940s. Chapter four situates Lawson and his work across the US south in the late 1950s within this lineage of black religious intellectual activists, and suggests that he built on Rustin's intellectual and organizing activities in developing nonviolent workshops to diffuse the politics of being. Lawson became the fulcrum upon which years of intellectual and institutional development tipped towards a decade defined by nonviolent direct actions oriented at ending Jim Crow segregation. The nonviolent workshops Lawson developed and hosted in Midwest and southern cities belong to the same tradition of movement schools pioneered by Rustin a decade before.

Finally, this dissertation is an effort to explain the evolving relationship between religious being and political power in the United States - an analysis that reveals major

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[35] Larry W. Isaac, , Daniel B. Cornfield, , Dennis C. Dickerson, , James M. Lawson, , Jonathan S. Coley, (2012), "Movement Schools" and Dialogical Diffusion of Nonviolent Praxis: Nashville Workshops in the Southern Civil Rights Movement, in Sharon Erickson Nepstad, Lester R. Kurtz (ed.) *Nonviolent Conflict and Civil Resistance* (Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change, Volume 34) Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp.155 – 184.

historical problems. Examining the relationship between the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Black Freedom Struggle, for example, has revealed how and why interracialism emerged as a movement goal and movement strategy for a sizeable number of twentieth century anti-racist activists. Black and white thinkers alike shared religious ideas about ethical political action - namely restraint from violence and a commitment to working across lines of race - and found themselves united in an interracial effort to end violence and discrimination in the US. This process of collaborating across racial lines became, itself, an act of political defiance of Jim Crow law and custom. But being together in interracial space, acts motivated initially by religious sensibility, grew to take on political importance and made public interracialism itself a form of power and resistance. Replicating this process of interracial being in segregated spaces thus became a tactical decision, an effective movement strategy to put pressure on Jim Crow customs and laws. And as interracial teams began "testing" segregation in parks, restaurants, skating rinks, zoos, pools, and other public places across the US in the late 1940s and 1950s, interracialism - which began as an effort to live a religious conviction for a dedicate group of people - transformed into a central movement strategy and, ultimately, a movement goal.[36]

The history outlined here suggests that because white religious activists played a major role in driving discussions about nonviolent method and strategy, interracialism as a goal and strategy in the black freedom movement became problematic. Interracialism flowed, in part, from an emphasis on improving social relations between whites and blacks. As Martin Luther

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[36] In addition to the seminal study produced by Meier and Rudwick, a number of new histories of local CORE groups emerged detailing movements using nonviolent direct action to target segregation. See August Meier and Elliott M. Rudwick, *CORE; a Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York,: Oxford University Press, 1973). Joan Singler et al., *Seattle in Black and White: The Congress of Racial Equality and the Fight for Equal Opportunity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011). Brian Purnell, *Fighting Jim Crow in the County of Kings: The Congress of Racial Equality in Brooklyn*, Civil Rights and the Struggle for Black Equality in the Twentieth Century (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2015).

King, Jr. wrote in quoting Paul Tillich in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," Christians ought to understand that "separation is sin" - an idea to which white pacifists and black religious intellectuals both gave assent.[37] Thus for some Christian activists, it was imperative to challenge customs and laws required separation by race. In this way, black and white people being together in public spaces became a religious way of being that could challenge and, potentially, upend the social sin of segregation. The politics of being became a way to embody this idea that white and black people could and should be together peacefully in public space: it was the world as it could be, what the Fellowship called 'The World Tomorrow' - here and now, today.[38]

But this focus on being together in public space, on interracialism as a movement strategy and as a movement outcome, was predicated on the idea that altering social relations - the way people interacted with one another – could alter the deeply structured racism of American society. This focus on social relations was, ultimately, a more narrow focus given other major themes in the Black Freedom Struggle. The 1963 March on Washington, for example, focused primarily on ending discrimination in employment. Black nationalists in the late 1960s built on the legacy of Martin Delaney and Marcus Garvey in emphasizing links between diasporic black activists. The politics of being, focused more tightly on transforming social relations, did not necessarily come at the expense of thinking about this larger edifice of white supremacy. But in their focus on transforming social relations, the politics of being were limited in their ability to deal with larger structural challenges - discrimination in

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[37] King wrote: "Paul Tillich has said that sin is separation. Isn't segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, an expression of his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness? So I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court because it is morally right, and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances because they are morally wrong." Martin Luther King, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington, Reprint edition (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2003), 294.

[38] The Fellowship of Reconciliation named their newsletter *The World Tomorrow*.

housing and jobs, for example. The interracial character of these politics and the emphasis on social relations that flowed from this emphasis seemed to slow the urgency around ending larger structural problems. But between the great wars of the twentieth century, indeed ironically because of the great wars, the politics of being emerged as an ethical form of insurgency that contributed directly to the end of Jim Crow segregation in the United States.

Chapter 1

Race and the Problem of Pacifism in the United States

As the leading pacifist organizing in the United States, the primary concern for the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) was the use of violence in social and political conflicts both at home and abroad. Founded in 1916, in its first three decades the Fellowship sought to develop a political technique that could replace violence in domestic conflicts between capital and labor, and bring to an end the lynching and racial violence used to enforce Jim Crow. This decades-long search for a political "method" that squared with the religious "principles" of the Fellowship shaped indelibly the politics of race in modern America.[39] The search brought together a small cohort of African Americans with the largely white pacifist movement, and cemented interracialism as both a movement outcome and a movement strategy for a strong religious wing of the black freedom movement. This emphasis on inter-racialism stemmed from the conviction that violence resulted from social divisions, and that only by uniting across such social divides might violence be dissolved. This conviction, by 1941, had spurred the Fellowship of Reconciliation to dedicate staff and resources to waging an interracial and nonviolent effort to end Jim Crow, solidifying pacifism as an unlikely but important tributary for the nonviolent tactics and ideas seen during the peak years of the Black Freedom Movement. For pacifists, being nonviolent was a religious commitment – a commitment to avoiding violence. The politics of pacifism flowed from this way of being in the world.

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[39] Fellowship of Reconciliation Executive Committee, "Some General Considerations," 1916, FOR Records, Series A, Subseries A-2, Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, 2 Reels, Swarthmore College Peace Collection (SCPC), Reel 102.01, Minutes, 1915-1932.

But the Fellowship failed in the interwar period to make clear how this way of being nonviolent could mitigate the violence perpetrated routinely against black Americans and workers, a failure that exposed fatal flaws in the Fellowship's pacifist ideology. The problem emerged because a stance of noncooperation defined the Fellowship's policy towards war. As the Great War faded into memory, pacifists focused on the domestic issues of racial discrimination and labor organizing as arenas where they might pilot a 'positive' nonviolent social force. But the grim specter of routine violence directed at workers and, in particular, the barbaric violence directed at Black Americans rattled the philosophical foundations of Christian pacifism and chastened the pacifist ambition to develop a positive nonviolent force. The firing of Southern Field Secretary Howard Kester, in particular, exposed profoundly the limits of pacifism in interwar America. Dismissed late in 1933 for organizing striking southern workers who possessed guns, Kester's intrepid work to organize both white and black Americans around nonviolent methods to end wage cuts and lynching was rejected by his pacifist bosses in New York.

The limitations of pacifism exposed by the firing of Kester became the warrant for a more aggressive "social force" to fight racial discrimination and violence. The Fellowship brought in a critical cohort of black religious intellectuals to serve in staff and leadership positions - Howard Thurman, Bayard Rustin, and James Farmer – and these men joined the larger pacifist project of aligning personal religious ideals with effective political practice. They hastened the Fellowship's fledgling effort to develop a political "technique" that "expressed" a nonviolent philosophy, and carved out institutional space for experimentation with such techniques in local communities across the United States.[40] By the

[40] ibid, 13 February, 1923.

early 1940s, building on their longstanding commitment to develop "techniques which are themselves immediate ends," the Fellowship was actively experimenting with nonviolent political methods in what it described as the "field of race relations."

This chapter begins by tracing the development of those religious ideals that inspired nonviolent political action as a positive force for social change. It shows clearly that pacifism in it self was not sufficient for developing a politics of being that could fight racial violence and discrimination in the United States, and that nonviolence became a more effective methodology for challenging Jim Crow. But this chapter also suggests that the Fellowship contributed invaluably to the politics of being, a way of doing nonviolence for religious activists, by arguing that one's way of being in the world was indistinguishable from the political tactics used and the movement outcomes sought. Yet it would take a group of black intellectuals deeply familiar with pacifism and its discontents to show how public acts of mercy, kindness, and forgiveness - a politics of being - could be used as a nonviolent method to transform social relations predicated on violence and racism in the United States.

Origins of the US Fellowship

The Fellowship of Reconciliation was founded in England one week after Germany and Russia declared war on each other in August 1914.[41] The group came together after the English Quaker Henry Hodgkin's "Message to Men and Women of Goodwill," a letter wherein Hodgkins stated, "war spells the bankruptcy of much that we too lightly call Christian."[42] He implored his fellow Christians to find better methods than war to solve the world's major conflicts, and nearly 70 United States activists heeded Hodgkins call at Garden

[41] Jill Wallis, *Valiant for Peace: History of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1914-89* (London: The Fellowship of Reconciliation, England, 1991), 4.

[42] Henry Hodgins, "Quakers and Peace," p. 41 in Grotius Society, *Publications: Texts for Students of International Law* (London, Sweet, 1921), http://archive.org/details/publicationstext00unknuoft.

City, Long Island in early November 1916. These US pacifists, while previously "unknown to one another" and emerging from "different social groups and various faiths," found themselves "drawn together by a common feeling that the time was ripe for a deeper expression of the Christian message." These founders belonged chiefly to existing Christian peace organizations - the Student Christian Movement, the World Alliance of Churches for Promoting International Friendship, and the Women's international League for Peace and Freedom among others - but they believed the Fellowship of Reconciliation offered the best change to meet the "profound need of uniting men and women of all nations."[43]

Establishing an office in New York City in 1916, the Fellowship named the Quaker Edward W. Evans as its first secretary and appointed YMCA youth leader Gilbert A. Beaver to the General Affairs Committee. Helen S. Daley was appointed head of the Study Group Committee, and Haverford Philosophy Professor Rufus Jones was appointed to head the Conference Committee.[44] While their chief commitment was a refusal to "take part in war," the Fellowship believed their charge "clearly involves...very much more than the question of War." Such conflicts were not an "isolated phenomenon," but were rather "one out of many unhappy consequences of the spiritual poverty of society." Acknowledging "the gulf between the present state of society and the ideal conceived," Fellowship members stated in 1916 that they believed that the "immediate realization of that ideal" was possible by acting in a "spirit of love" in all aspects of one's "personal and social life."[45]

Calling "the life and teaching and death of Jesus" a "revolutionary principle," the Fellowship implored its small but growing membership to live like Jesus "here and now, in

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[43] "Some General Considerations, 1916" Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, SCPC, Reel 102.01; The US chapter of the Fellowship joined a global group of about 4,000 members in 1916
[44] FOR Executive Committee Minutes, 16 April 1916, SCPC, Reel 102.01.
[45] ibid.

every relationship," across the spectrum of "personal, social, commercial, national, and international life."[46] Fellowship leaders believed their unique charge was discovering the "full implications" of applying this way of being "to all the great problems of industrial and social life," and sought the "development of local groups" to apply Fellowship principles to domestic conflicts in the United States. Citing the unremarkable tactics of "conversation," "correspondence," and "the use of literature," the Fellowship of Reconciliation nevertheless named as their charter to "enlist and develop spiritual and intellectual leaders who can make special contributions to Christian thought and practice."[47]

This exclusively white group of pacifists belonged to a much wider movement in the early 20th century United States seeking to square Christian ideas with the "scientific revolution" and an emerging positivism. Such shifting epistemologies gave rise to a religious modernist movement replete with intellectuals who placed the bible in a historical context to explain its meaning. The Fellowship's claim that "the life, death, and teachings of Jesus" provide a "revolutionary principle," for example, was part of a broader intellectual movement to understand the historical figure Jesus of Nazareth within the political and social context of first century Palestine. This effort to understand what Albert Schweitzer called the "historical Jesus" challenged the biblical literalism of fundamentalist Christians who argued that the bible was the direct and infallible word of God. This religious modernist movement was buoyed also by positivist notions of social perfectibility, a vision that aligned with the work of Social Gospel advocates Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden. These religious men and the thousands of others who preached the social gospel coordinated outreach programs that provided clothes, food, and health services for increasingly urban populations

[46] ibid.
[47] ibid.

concentrated in subpar living conditions. Some of these figures linked to the political discourse of early 20th century America in arguing that Jesus was the forerunner to socialism. It was in this Progressive Era moment of "suberabundant organizations" that the Fellowship of Reconciliation arose and staked out its claim as the "central organization" to facilitate the "growth of the Movement" that would bring together people of all classes and races in a "common quest" to apply the revolutionary and nonviolent principles of Jesus of Nazareth "to the problems of social and national and international life."[48]

The Fellowship's primary charge was opposing war, which they saw as among the most acute problems in 'social and international life.' "As Christians we are forbidden to wage war," Fellowship founders wrote in 1916, seeking instead "the application of the broad and fundamental principles of Christianity to International Affairs."[49] But for the vast majority of black Americans, opposing war was neither a spiritual imperative nor an activist commitment – chiefly because American wars tended to produce major advancement for African Americans. Crispus Attucks, a New England man of African descent was among the first casualties of the Revolutionary War - shot down in opposing the British during the Boston Massacre of 1770.[50] More than 200,000 black union troops had fought for freedom in the American Civil War, what Frederick Douglass called 'an abolition war' In 1864 Douglass called the abolition of slavery "the comprehensive and logical object of the war, for it includes everything else which the struggle involves."[51] At the turn of the 20th century, more than

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[48] ibid.

[49] ibid, 19 February 1916; ibid, "FOR Commission on International Problems," ibid, 5 February 1918,

[50] See Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence*, Reprint edition (University Of Chicago Press, 2013).

[51] Frederick Douglass in Constance Polin and Raymond Polin, *Foundations of American Political Thought* (Peter Lang, 2006), 428. See also Joseph T. Wilson, *The Black Phalanx: African American Soldiers In The War Of Independence, The War Of 1812, And The Civil War* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994); Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865*, Reprint edition (Lawrence, Kan:

3,000 African Americans fought in the Spanish American War both in Cuba and the Phillipines to demonstrate bravery and commitment to country. And in the First World War, the conflict that produced the Fellowship, more than one million African Americans responded to draft calls from the US government - and more than 370,000 served in the US Army.[52] And although he later regretted the decision, W.E.B. DuBois called for blacks to "close ranks" and support President Woodrow Wilson in the war effort.[53] By 1920, war had often led to black advancement in the United States – a fact that meant pacifists counted few black converts among their ranks.

But in the opening decades of the twentieth century, it was not simply the violence of war that commanded the attention of pacifists. Among the most disturbing violence in the early 20th century was the lynching of black Americans by white American with impunity. Lynching and other forms of violence were used to disenfranchise Black Americans politically and exploit them economically in the decades following the end of Reconstruction. Expected to "accommodate white expectations" under threat of death, black Americans were routinely lynched with no consequences for their killers – and they were often killed regardless of whether they accommodated the staggeringly complicated demands of Jim Crow in early 20th century United States.[54] As Richard Wright has written, African Americans in the opening decades of the 20th century "were shot, hanged, maimed, lynched, and generally hounded until they were either dead or their spirits broken," a grim reality that

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University Press of Kansas, 1987); James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War: How American Blacks Felt and Acted During the War for the Union* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

[52] See Gary Gerstle, "Theodore Roosevelt and the Divided Character of American Nationalism," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (1999): 1280–1307; Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[53] David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 1st ed. (New York: H. Holt, 1993); David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, 1st ed. (New York: H. Holt, 2000).

[54] Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 322.

led a generation of historians to characterize this early 20th century moment as the "nadir" of black life in America.[55]

The response of Black Americans to this daily violence varied widely. A Great Migration led to an exodus of nearly 2 million black Americans from the former confederacy between 1915 and 1940.[56] For those that stayed in the US South, many moved from rural to urban areas. Black Americans also committed themselves to developing their own institutions - rural and urban, north and south - as segregation hardened in the early 20th century. Black banks and businesses, schools and churches expanded dramatically before 1940 and provided critically important space for day-to-day life in black America.[57] Some African Americans launched the Niagara Movement in 1905 in hopes of waging a legal war against the violence and discrimination meted out against black Americans daily, while Jamaican leader Marcus Garvey cultivated pan-African sensibilities and organized a massive grassroots network of local groups to encourage self-organization for those in the United States and a journey "Back to Africa" for others.[58] These processes of emigration and immigration, institutional

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[55] Richard Wright as quoted in Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 439.

[56] As Isabel Wilkerson has written, "estimates vary for the number of blacks who left the South during the Great Migration," a phenomenon typically separated into a first migration before 1940 and a second migration after 1940. Wilkerson suggests that, between 1910 and 1970, more than 5.5 million black Americans left the former confederacy for the Northeast, Midwest, and West coast. Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*, Reprint edition (New York, NY: Vintage, 2011), 556.

[57] Much work remains to be done in chronicling the rise of associational and institutional life among black Americans. For examples of local studies that chart the growth of black institutions, see St Clair Drake, Horace R. Cayton, and Mary Pattillo, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, Enlarged edition (Chicago ; London: University Of Chicago Press, 2015); Preston Lauterbach, *Beale Street Dynasty: Sex, Song, and the Struggle for the Soul of Memphis*, First edition. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2015); Otis L. Sanford, *From Boss Crump to King Willie: How Race Changed Memphis Politics* (Knoxville: Univ Tennessee Press, 2017). For the rise of black newspapers in Jim Crow, August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915; Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor,: University of Michigan Press, 1963).

[58] See Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey*, 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Adam Ewing, *The Age of Garvey : How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics*, America in the World (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014).

development and litigation, all proved vitally important for Black Americans living in a hostile environment in early 20th century America.

It was also common for black Americans to prepare for white violence directed at their homes or communities by arming themselves for self-defense. "The Winchester rifle deserves a place of honor in every Black home," wrote the courageous anti-lynching journalist Ida B. Wells. Run out of Memphis in 1898 after exposing what she called the "old threadbare lie" that black men rape white women, Well's newspaper *The Free Speech* was burned to the ground by a lynch mob intent on taking her life. Wells' had, by then, escaped for Chicago, but her favorable view of guns reflected a common commitment to self-defense among Black Americans throughout the nadir of black history.[59] A young professor at Atlanta University in 1906, W.E.B. DuBois "bought a Winchester double-barrelled shotgun and two dozen rounds of shells filled with buckshot. If a white mob had stepped on the campus where I lived," DuBois wrote after the lynching of Sam Hose, "I would without hesitation have sprayed their guts over the grass."[60] Mordecai Johnson, the famed black minister who later became the first black President of Howard University, wrote in 1921 that "the swift succession and frank brutality" of Reconstruction's end and Jim Crow's beginning was "more than Negro people could bear….multitudes took weapons in their hands and fought back violence with bloody resistance. If we must die, they said, it is well that we die fighting."[61]

Many Black Americans chose armed self-defense because they were forced to respond to routine and vicious violence in the opening decades of the twentieth century. In Brownsville, Texas in 1906 a scuffle between black veterans of the Spanish American War

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[59] Johnson, *Negroes and the Gun*, 105.
[60] ibid, 151.
[61] ibid, 157.

and local white police that led to the death of a white bartender. Subsequently, 167 black infantrymen were dishonorably discharged for refusing to speak out against fellow black veterans who acted in self-defense.[62] Historian Tom Sugrue's has concluded that, for those black Americans leaving the South as part of the first Great Migration, whites generally met their newly arriving black counterparts in northern and Midwestern cities with violence and hostility.[63] In East St. Louis, for example, where thousands of black Americans were arriving during the years of the First World War, hordes of white men marched in May of 1917 through black neighborhoods and attacked black men, women, and children with impunity. Angered that black Americans were filling jobs at the Aluminum Ore Company and American Steel Company historically held by whites, violence against black Americans continued throughout the summer in East St. Louis - culminating in the firebombing of dozens of buildings in the black district in early July 1917 and leading to the deaths of at least 39 black Americans.[64] A clash between black soldiers in the 24th US infantry and white authorities in Houston in 1917 would lead, ultimately, to the deaths of 13 black men by hanging and life in prison for 60 black men.[65] This violence presaged the so-called "Red Summer" of 1919, a period wherein more than 25 'anti-black riots' in cities across the country was punctuated, ultimately, by the unprecedented killing of black women, men, and children in Elaine,

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[62] James N. Leiker, *Racial Borders: Black Soldiers along the Rio Grande* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2002).

[63] The black population in Detroit, for example, exploded from 5,000 in 1910 to 660,000 in 1970. Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, 1st Princeton Classic ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 23.

[64] For the authoritative study of the 1917 massacre in St. Louis, see Elliot Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis, July 2, 1917,* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964). Chapter five, "The July Riot," deals specifically with the violence of July 2, including approximated death tolls and the difficulty of determining an exact death count. Rudwick notes that many "East St Louisians disputing the Congressional figures (of 39 dead) claimed that the true number of Negro fatalities would never be known because many corpses were note recovered." Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis,* 50.

[65] Robert V. Haynes, *A Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976).

Arkansas.[66] More than 200 African Americans, most of them poor sharecroppers, were killed at the hands of white mobs and federal troops in Elaine following the death of a white man.[67]

For the white Fellowship activists concentrated primarily in northeastern cities, the brutality of white violence in the midwest and US South was, quite literally, a distant concern. But by charter, the Fellowship sought to address the social divisions that produced violence. So this small band of white pacifists partnered with the Federal Council of Churches to launch a literature program on what it called the "The Negro Question," and established a sub-committee on lynching charged with considering "whether there is any action as is desirable for the Fellowship to take."[68] NAACP Secretary James Weldon Johnson and New York attorney L. Hollingsworth Wood were asked to spearhead the effort, and the two men eventually produced a "Statement on Christianity and the Negro Problem," which FOR Secretary and Quaker leader Edward W. Evans delivered to Fellowship members.[69]

"We are not dealing with a subject race," Evans wrote in 1919, tapping into the discourse of self-governance for colonized populations at the Versailles Peace talks, "but a body of our own citizens with a record of real achievement and with a promise of great contributions to our common treasure of democracy."[70] Black Americans are seeking "all the rights of American citizenship guaranteed to him by the constitution," Evans told Fellowship

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[66] Genna Rae McNeil, "Before Brown: Reflections on Historical Context and Vision," American University Law Review, Volume 52, #6, (2003), 1435-36, p. 1431.

[67] Robert Whitaker, *On the Laps of Gods: The Red Summer of 1919 and the Struggle for Justice That Remade A Nation*, Broadway Books, (2009).

[68] Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, 22 September 1918, SCPC, Reel 102.01; The Federal Council of Churches created its own division to deal issues related to race in 1920.

[69] Wood was a dynamic figure who co-founded the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and the National Urban League, (NUL). Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, 22 September 1918, SCPC, Reel 102.01.

[70] Edward W. Evans, "Christianity and the Race Problem," 1919, Series E, Box 16, Folder Race Relations Misc. 1920s and 1930s, FOR Papers, SCPC, 2; For a global analysis of Wilsonian Rhetoric related to self government and civilization, see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, 1 edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

members, "the fulfillment of the rights already guaranteed him and the impartial interpretation and application of existing laws." So to treat black Americans as citizens is not, Evans argued, to "grant a privilege or bestow a favor. It is to cease withholding from him that which is rightfully his, that of which he is being illegally deprived. The withholding of the rights of citizenship from the American Negro is both a moral and a legal wrong."[71] Evans argued that black Americans were "denied the opportunity to earn their bread in may of the lines of labor and industry," and noted that they faced "humiliating discriminations" across the pantheon of public life. "All of these practices" Evans described as "not only undemocratic and unchristian," but "unjust and cruel." Calling the US effort "to spread democracy abroad" as "hypocrisy" Evans called these international efforts meaningless "until we have faced and are attempting to remedy these conditions at home."[72]

But the most "severe indictment" Evans, one of "positive barbarity and inhumanity," was the lynching of more than 3,000 black Americans in the 35 years since the end of Reconstruction. Calling lynching "a great national disgrace and danger," Evans wrote:

> It must strike every American who has regard for the good name of his country with unutterable shame that the United States is the only civilized country in the world, more than that, the only governed land on the face of the globe where human beings are burned alive, and with impunity. It is the business of men and women, north and south, to crush out this vile thing, the growth of the mob spirit, the outgrowth of intolerance and prejudice, which otherwise will in time undermine all law and order in our land.[73]

Evans called "upon the ministry and membership of the churches throughout the country to strive earnestly to create and arouse a public sentiment, which will include our Negro fellow citizens within the meaning of the 'Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man.'" He

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[71] Edward W. Evans, "Christianity and the Race Problem," p. 2-3.

[72] ibid, 3.

[73] ibid, 4.

concluded that the "negro question" was not merely "a problem" for Christians in the United States, but the "supreme test both of our democracy and our Christianity."[74]

But turning this clearly articulated opposition to lynching and Jim Crow into a programmatic assault on white supremacy through the Fellowship's local groups proved to be a severe test. Developing chapters in Boston, Detroit, Minneapolis, New York City, Philadelphia, Seattle, and across the state of California in the early 1920, the Boston Fellowship chapter summed up much of the shared sentiment among Fellowship people: "we repudiate the present world order. We believe that it is doomed."[75] Gesturing to "the masses of workers, condemned under our industrial system to a wretched existence," the Boston Fellowship decried the "atrocious crimes" perpetrated by "so called Christian nations" against largely non-white peoples living in colonized nations. But Boston Fellowship members still described these peoples in the white civilizing discourse of their day - calling them "backwards peoples" and suggesting that some kind of civilizing influence was needed.[76]

More than sixteen hundred people had subscribed to the Fellowship's newsletter *New World* by the middle of 1918, but the group struggled to grow in the US South and among black Americans.[77] The Morningside Heights Fellowship chairman in New York wrote of a "vast longing for international brotherhood, freedom for the oppressed peoples under every flag, elimination of the forces that repress the free expansion of the spiritual life of men and women and children," but did not speak specifically to the plight of black New Yorkers.[78]

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[74] ibid, 5.
[75] "General Statement of Views, Boston FOR," 1918, Series A, Section III, Box I, Folder Early Records from Local Groups Pt. I., FOR Papers, SCPC.
[76] ibid.
[77] Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, 26 April 1918, SCPC, Reel 102.01
[78] Cedric Long, From Chairman Morningside Heights FOR Group NYC, 19 July 1917, Series A, Section III, Box I, Folder Early Records from Local Groups Pt. I, FOR Papers, SCPC.

Philadelphia members argued for a "progressive interpretation of this spirit and way of life as applied in the complexity of personal, social, industrial and international relationships in the modern world," naming their goal as "the constructive application of this spirit and way of life in service creative of personality and of personal relationships which satisfy Christian ideals." Yet no emphasis was given to race in the by FOR members in the city of Brotherly Love.[79]

In New York City, where most Fellowship members were concentrated in 1920, the Fellowship seemed to make progress in crossing lines of race by organizing "Religious Forums" to unite "radicals" and "religious people." Citing the separation between these groups as "clear cut as with a knife," the Reverend Clarence V. Howell said the forums were meant to "reconcile" the two groups and increase the "spiritual dynamic" radical movements while imbuing churches and their members with a "new social vision."[80] Launched in Harlem as an interracial effort, the Religious Forums brought together Harlem's 62 churches and 17 synagogues with what Howell estimated to be 100,000 labor radicals. Initially organized as open-air forums featuring a socialist speaker who was also religious, these events grew to include a midweek devotional meeting and the organization of a speaker's bureau. By the late 1920s, the forums included tours of both black and white churches and labor centers. The forums "worked so well" in their first year that the Methodist Episcopal church had offered to pay Howell's salary for the year 1922. A "group of praying radicals….is the heart of this service," Howell reported, asking the Fellowship to supply "speakers with a spiritual message for labor groups and speakers with a social message for church groups.[81]

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[79] FOR Philadelphia District Meeting, 31 May 1917, Series A, Section III, Box I, Folder Early Records from Local Groups Pt. II, FOR Papers, SCPC.

[80] "Religious Forums," 1920, ibid.

[81] From Rev Clarence V. Howell to members of FOR at Belmar Conference, 16 September 1921, Series A, Section III, Box I, Folder Early Records from Local Groups Pt. II, FOR Papers, SCPC; In 1923, Howell featured

The Religious Forums, which Howell later continued as interracial "Reconciliation Trips" throughout the 1920 and 1930s, were among the first programmatic efforts by Fellowship members and friends to cultivate interracial collaboration. But in their first ten years, while lynching and white violence meted out against black Americans continued, the Fellowship struggled to make "the race question" more than a "subject for papers" or studies. Fellowship leaders and members did not have a clear approach to addressing what Edward Evans called the "supreme test of both our democracy and our Christianity," and the 1920s were defined, instead, by the search for "practical ways in which members of the fellowship might express their principles in action."[82] Encouraging "practical experiments" for "constructive service," Fellowship staff began to "aid individuals and groups who wish to undertake such service or make such experiments," making the Fellowship's initial decade an important era spent searching for a nonviolent "method" that might bring about a new society.[83]

The Primacy of Personality and The Search for Methods

By March of 1922, the Fellowship had 2000 members who believed that war "inevitably involves violation...and disregard of the supreme value of personality." But the Fellowship sought more than an end to war. They believed that "fundamental changes" both "in the spirit of man and in the structure of the social order" were needed to end war. In a letter to President Woodrow Wilson in February of 1923, they articulated that their mission was not simply "to prevent war" but to "secure peace...by methods which shall not increase hate but which shall help to create a spirit of forgiveness and goodwill." While this language

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an anarchist lecturer, a communist, a socialist, and an IWW representative, from the marine transport workers union. Unknown Author, "Religious Forum Flier," 17 February 1923, ibid.

[82] FOR Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, 8 March 1917, SCPC, Reel 102.01.

[83] ibid, 13 April, 1917.

echoes the language of activists in the black freedom struggle decades later, in the early 1920s the Fellowship was focused on "investigations and experiments" in an effort to devise a concrete "technique" that might "grip people and transform them into individuals fired with an enthusiasm for that way of life which eliminates all bitterness and conflict."[84]

FOR members debated fiercely whether "the distinctly Christian emphasis of the fellowship" was useful, as it often jeopardized their relationship with those in radical movements "outside the Christian church." Fellowship member A.J. Muste called on the Fellowship to develop a "new creed" that made clear the "intellectual formulation" of Fellowship "principles" while somehow avoiding religious dogmatism. "We must have some statement of our aims and purposes," Muste told the New York Committee, urging leadership to reaffirm the "Christian" basis of the Fellowship while emphasizing "the militancy of our policy."[85] In a 1923 Statement of Purpose vetted by the Fellowship's members, these "Fellowship principles" included "a worldwide family of men and women of different races, combinations and classes" all bound by a "desire to recognize this true unity and to find out more and more all that it implies." The Fellowship named its guiding principle as "love as disclosed in the Life, teachings and death of Jesus," and described the application of the life of Jesus to contemporary life as an "effective power for overcoming evil and accomplishing the purposes of God." Claiming that "reverence of personality" was central to "creating a world order" where no person "or race" is "exploited for the profit or pleasure of others," the Fellowship named a clear ambition to "reconcile race and race," stating that social divisions like those engendered by "the color line" in the United States are the primary predicate for

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[84] ibid, 9 - 13 February, 1923; The War Resisters League was discussed as being "distinct from the Fellowship" in an Executive Committee meeting in March 1923, ibid, 15 March 1923.

[85] FOR Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, 3 November 1923, SCPC, Reel 102.01

violent conflict. Calling on members to "take risks" in living these principles in "a world which does not yet accept it," the Fellowship encouraged their secretaries to begin approaching their work in a more "experimental way."[86]

Critically, the Fellowship rejected "theories of non-resistance" as useless in matching the tremendous violence facing the United States and the world. Calling a "prohibition on the use of force…insufficient...to cure social diseases or eradicate war," Fellowship members were asked to act in "humility, honor, and love" – the "constructive" work of building a new world and a rejection of "minor protest." Citing industrial conflicts and racial violence as primary areas of domestic focus, Fellowship leaders said that the widespread "intolerance, hatred, and violence of the Ku Klux Klan" that arose in the 1920s would be "combatted" by "going directly into the field with meetings of goodwill" and through "dramatic protest to the Klan officials" in "counter parades in meetings."[87] The "future of the movement" depended upon a small but committed group of people who "will give time individually and in groups to thinking out" the implications of this principled approach to violence.[88]

A modest start at moving beyond a "simple prohibition of violence" and towards a "constructive approach" to social violence was made in the early 1920s. At their fall 1924 conference where "Imperialism and Race Relationships" were the focus, FOR member Jerome Davis implored those gathered to explore how the "method of Fellowship" could be applied "in industrial [conflicts], internationalism, and racial relations."[89] The Fellowship began also to engage more youth in integrated spaces, with 715 young people from 34 states

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[86] "Revised Committee of FOR Statement," ibid, November 1923.

[87] FOR Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, "Appendix to the Report of the Committee Dealing with pacifist strategy of the FOR," 1923, Reel 102.01.

[88] "Proposed Revised Committee of FOR Statement," ibid, November 1923.

[89] ibid, 7 February1924; ibid, 20 February 1924

joining more than 3,000 other Fellowship members by the summer of 1924.[90] When a young black minister joined the Fellowship executive committee in the Spring of 1925, Howard Thurman found an organization with a unique approach to racial conflict in the United States that still struggled to coherently articulate the "Fellowship point of view" through an active social "expression."[91]

But critically, the Fellowship "method" was centered on a reverence for "personality," a respect for the diversity within the character of humans that had the potential to transform both individuals and social relationships. This discourse belonged to a larger set of important intellectual currents in the early 20th century. The emerging field of psychology, with its emphasis on individual behavior and how these behaviors might be manipulated or change, was an important driver of Fellowship thinking. Another influence was the emerging field of the social sciences - especially anthropology and sociology – and in particular the focus on how groups of people thought about and organized themselves. The work of Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict was cited regularly and distributed widely by the Fellowship in their effort to break apart what they saw as the arbitrary social divides of race. Perhaps most important was American Pragmatism, defined concisely by Louis Menand as the notion that truth is not *a priori* but instead "happens to an idea." In aligning these with a nonviolent "method" that expressed "supreme reverence for human personality," the Fellowship emphasized trial and error, continuing experimentation in social conflicts, throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s.[92]

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[90] ibid, 7 June 1924.

[91] ibid, 14 May 1925. Howard Thurman was also present at this meeting at Bible House in New York City. ibid, 18 Feb 1926. Kirby Page also noted that he had persuaded Reinhold Niebuhr to dedicate all time to FOR, Speaking, writing, counsel, and mission in Europe.

[92] For an introduction to the rise of psychology, see Daniel N. Robinson, *An Intellectual History of Psychology*, 3rd edition (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995). For works on the relationship between the

In early 1925, the Fellowship began to send representatives to "hot spots" in "industrial" and "racial" "difficulties...to demonstrate the Fellowship way in such situations."[93] Jerome Davis and A.J. Muste both traveled to the bloody textile strike at the American Thread Company in Williamantic, Connecticut in the Fall of 1925, and the Fellowship sent staff to a cotton mill strike in Utica New York in December of 1925.[94] National Secretaries sent letters of appeal to their Northeastern members in the areas surrounding these conflicts to encourage the convening of worker and employer councils in resolving these violent labor conflicts, and asked local members to discern together "how they could help…in expressing most fully our principles" and "act for the non-violent method of adjustment."[95] These early experiments raised more questions than answers about "the type of action which would be most effective," and the Fellowship struggled to deploy new and effective methods in these violent conflicts.[96]

This search for a unique method that could be used in violent situations, a method that went beyond simply negotiation in conflict, led George Collins and A.J. Muste to emerge as Fellowship leaders. Hired to be a traveling Industrial Secretary by the FOR in 1923, Collins traversed the US in the 1920s seeking "conciliation" among "groups in conflict" and advocated for "non violent methods of adjusting such difficulties."[97] A.J. Muste urged the

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ideas of Boaz and Benedict and the fight against racism, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, Women in Culture and Society edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). For an excellent intellectual history on the rise of American Pragmatism, which also outlines the broader intellectual terrain for the emerging fields of psychology and anthropology in the US, see Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*, Reprint edition (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002).

[93] ibid, 3 November 1925.

[94] ibid, 19 November 1925; ibid, 17 December, 1925.

[95] ibid, 23 December 1925.

[96] ibid; Nathaniel Parker was also writing about "the Religious Basis of the Movement" for the international Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR).

[97] It's possible that Collins also completed duties related to youth secretary.

Fellowship to "to define what nonviolent methods in such situations are," to which the Fellowship's national council responded that they had "not yet enough experience...to say just how we can best express the fellowship principles in the industrial struggle." They urged Collins to organize a "small conference for the purpose of getting more light on the subject," and to "make a trip into the South" in an effort to survey the problems there and seek student contacts.[98]

With Collins taking a leadership role, the national FOR began to make "interracial principles" a priority in the mid-1920s.[99] Collins noted "a special need for the development of organization in the labor ranks in the South," citing an opportunity to "overcome the antagonism to colored groups in labor" through this work.[100] While the national council "could not make definite recommendations as to the exact ways of handling this work," they expressed to Collins "the importance of the interracial work which he had been doing." Collins began to dig in deeply on the interlocking issues of race and labor, engaging in a discussion at Woolman School on "the effect of bribery, sabotage, etc." in the search for new nonviolent methods. Collins visited 17 colleges across the South in early 1928, and reported on the formation of "new interracial groups and a greater readiness to receive the message…"[101] Collins and national council leaders sought actively more venues for experimentation with the "Fellowship Method," and interracial spaces seemed increasingly to be a generative venue.[102]

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[98] Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, Women in Culture and Society edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
[99] As with similar efforts in the past, the FOR cooperated with the Federal Council of Churches in these efforts.
[100] Ibid, 21 May 1927.
[101] ibid, 21 May 1927; Notably, The National Fellowship Committee did not endorse the Sleeping Car Porters when asked. Ibid, 21 May 1927; ibid, 8 March 1928.
[102] ibid, August 1930.

This shift to focus on interracial organizing was concurrent with a process of restructuring Fellowship secretaries and staff.[103] As the FOR continued to ponder "the scope and function" of the organization with regards to "race" and "other areas of conflict," Fellowship leaders wanted clarity about where it carried on work and for whom this work was carried out.[104] A Committee on Administration called for "a distinct and specialized branch of the work in the south," and ultimately a decision was made to create budget allowances for "an additional man" to take on work dealing the US South. Fellowship Central Council Member Amy Blanche Greene was appointed to handle "race relations."[105]

Perhaps most importantly, a young divinity student at Vanderbilt University named Howard Kester was hired by the Fellowship to help with the rapidly growing youth section in the Fall of 1927 at a salary of $2800.[106] Kester worked part time with YMCAs and YWCAs throughout the South in the late 1920s, and told the FOR central committee that there was a real "need" for a Fellowship staffer to work specifically on "race issues."[107] Kester presented the Fellowship with a plan for a dedicated southern office in Feb 1929 that was, at least initially, unsuccessful. The Fellowship believed it faced bigger questions than whether to set up an office in the South. But questions about the efficacy of pacifism in a world that was not at war compelled the organization to focus more seriously on tackling Jim Crow in the US South.[108]

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[103] ibid, "Report of Special Committee," 25 May 1929.
[104] ibid, 23 May 1929.
[105] ibid, "FOR Committee on Administration Personnel, Report 1," May 1929; ibid, 25 May, 1929
[106] ibid, 20 October 1927
[107] Collins and Kester were both working on Race Relations literature in March 1923. Ibid, 22 March 1928; ibid, November 2, 1928.
[108] Ibid, April 1929.

"Techniques which are in themselves immediate ends..."

More than 15 years removed from its founding and nearly a decade from the end of the Great War, the Fellowship reassessed its charter and leadership. Much of this reconsideration was precipitated by the resignation of Secretary Paul Jones in March of 1929. "The fellowship was born out of the war," Jones wrote to his colleagues, but found itself struggling in the effort to prove the "application of (FOR) principles to current problems." Jones called for a new kind of "leadership" in the organization, admitting honestly "my experience gave me a good vantage point in meeting those who were up against the same situation. But for the best development in the future a different person is required."[109] Before leaving, Jones wrote that the Fellowship must "make a more definite demonstration of inter-racial fellowship."

Incoming Fellowship Secretary John Nevin Sayre, an Epicopal Priest and long time member, made interracial organizing a priority. In the "Development of the Fellowship in the Next Ten Years," Nevin Sayre wrote that Industrial Secretary George Collins had "blazed a trail for our witness on race relations in the South," and that Howard Kester was "following" this trail. He quoted a recent editorial from C.F. Andrews in the Fellowship's organ, *The World Tomorrow*, to make the case that much work remained to be done on this issue critical the Fellowship's mission.

> Race arrogance is the curse which destroys all that is simple and beautiful and natural in those divinely appointed human relationships which are called 'races.' This wonderful thing, race, which was meant by God to give Harmony in color to human life and to prevent uniformity, is turned into a vast an awful fanaticism leading to war, cruelty, loss…and every other evil.[110]

Early Christians "stood out boldly for racial equality" Nevin Sayre wrote, but just as contemporary Christians had abandoned their ancestors' pacifist position so too had they

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[109] Ibid, March 23 1929.

[110] John Nevin Sayre, "Development of the Fellowship in the Next Ten Years," FOR Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, 1929, SCPC, Reel 102.01.

abandoned their commitment to racial equality. Calling on the Fellowship to "lead a Christian Movement for the recovery of the Gospel made real in life and race relations," John Nevin Sayre asked Fellowship members to "invade the South on this issue." He called for the appointment of "a special secretary" to work on the application of a Fellowship method to the injustice of Jim Crow, and cautioned against waiting "too long for slower educational processes." Nevin Sayre said the Fellowship must be willing to "dramatize the issue" of racial violence and injustice across the US South and to be "witnessing in action" rather than just preaching.

National FOR Council Member Amy Blanche Greene believed the Fellowship had a unique contribution to make in this area. Calling Fellowship principles "a way of life which binds people of many races and nations into the consciousness of a common purpose," Blanche Green called the "application of the spirit of love to conflict situations" the "fundamental philosophy" that guides "techniques which are in themselves immediate ends." Concluding that such a method was a "positive action rather than a negative emphasis," Blanche Green captured concisely what the Fellowship had been working towards for decades: a politics of being that immediately asserted social relations as they could be rather than simply registering a protest against the world as it was.[111]

But translating this principle into action on the issue of racial violence and discrimination in the US South, as had been the case since the Fellowship's founding, proved to be a severe test in the 1930s. While the "first" great migration of black Americans led more than 1.6 million African Americans out of the South by 1930, nearly 80% of the black population still lived in the former confederacy when Nevin Sayre took over the

[111] "Memorandum on Paul Jones Challenge to the FOR," May 1929, FOR Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, 1929, SCPC, Reel 102.01.

Fellowship. Recognizing the opportunity to recruit new members in this southern black population, Nevin Sayre declared that a "special effort" would be made in the area of interracial work in 1931. He stood up a Southern Advisory Committee in October of 1930 with forty-three representative from twelve states - including Atlanta University Professor Howard Thurman. This Southern Committee was intended to support the part time work of Howard Kester, who organized the Fellowship's first serious interracial conference at Lemoyne College in Memphis in December 1929. With sixty-two registered participants from eleven states, thirty of them white and thirty-two of them black, the participants came from 17 different colleges and universities. Luanna J. Bowles of Fisk University called the conference "a laboratory experiment from which one can draw many conclusions." Participants discussed "The Economic Status of the Negro," "The Negro in Industry" and debated "Suggested Techniques" for combatting racial violence and discrimination in the South.[112]

In an essay called "The Meaning of LeMoyne," Bowles explored how a politics of being might be applied to Jim Crow and segregation. Writing that "regardless of seeming differences we are all seeking the same thing, namely a way of life that surmounts outward barriers and frees the spirit to experience the richness and fullness of life." Bowles noted that her world was "made bigger" by the conference, which had given her the feeling that she was part of a "beloved community." George Collins described the conference as an effort to move beyond the "easy" and "sentimental" approaches to the "race question" to engage tougher issues about why black Americans were "prohibited from joining the union" amidst the grinding hardship of the Depression. "Is the Negro coming in on the ground floor," he asked,

[112] Luanna J. Bowles, "Report from Interracial Conference in Memphis at LeMoyne Jr. College," 27 - 30 Dec 1929, John Nevin Sayre Papers [hereafter JNSP], Series A, Box 9, Folder John Nevin Sayre and Howard Kester, Correspondence, SCPC.

"or is he going to be left out of the question of Labor?" Noting that Communists were the "only political party which frankly faces the question of race" with a "straightforward program," many still wondered to "what extent has (the community party) been able to carry its program out."[113]

Of particular importance was developing "a technique for a minority group" that is "quite willing to do something to right this injustice." But participants struggled with the practical aspects of how to move forward – of how to turn a way of being into a an effective politics.

> What is the best way to meet such situations of the following: negro women not being allowed to try on hats and gloves, shoes and other wearing Apparel in stores, discrimination on public conveyances, discrimination in hospitals, stores, in newspapers Etc. An effort should be made in each Community to work out a technique that will meet their community's needs. A study should be made of attitudes exhibited by various organizations, institutions, stores, companies, in order to work out such as such a technique...We must find ways for carrying our ideals of Brotherhood into action.[114]

The conference report suggested that in "every community of any size a few people could be found who would be willing to follow such a technique," citing specifically Atlanta, Birmingham, and Nashville as places where it might be possible to "get a group of considerable size" to "struggle for interracial justice" in "various perplexing situations." Benjamin Mays, then completing his dissertation at the University of Chicago, called for the creation of "machinery whereby our technique may be carried out," and led a discussion among participants about what tactics might be used.[115] Practical ideas included establishing a clipping service, additional conferences, an interracial speakers bureau, and a coordinated campaign to "insist on people respecting other people's personalities" by capitalizing the letter "N" in negro and by calling for all black women and men to be referred

[113] Ibid.
[114] ibid.
[115] ibid.

to as Mr., Miss, and Mrs. But participants were left searching for a more innovative technique capable of transforming both people and structures, a method that might bringing about what Luanna Bowles called the "Beloved Community." Concluding with a final report from the conference, Kester told the Fellowship that it was of the utmost importance that white people be "willing to sacrifice many of their privileges in order to increase...opposition to the many injustices."[116]

In February of 1931, Kester organized another major interracial meeting at Birmingham's Black Masonic Temple.[117] With eighty-five people representing eighteen schools, the conference included fifty-three black Americans and thirty-two whites.[118] H.W. Pope of the National YMCA Council called the conference "another epoch in the history of race relations in the South," praising the "the leadership of (FOR) Southern Secretary Howard Kester." Calling it "one of the finest interracial programs that I have ever witnessed," Pope said the conference was "calculated to mould [sic] sentiment, provoke thought, and stimulate action on the part of those directly touched." Naming the goal of the conference as the creation of "right human relationships...predicated upon understanding and goodwill," Kester said such a "goal for the South" would require "changes of attitudes on the part of both white and black."[119]

But this idea that both black and white people should change their attitudes seemed also to minimize the deeper structural supports for white supremacy. Despite expressing concern for black Americans, the Fellowship largely failed to impact larger economic and social structures organized specifically for the exploitation of black Americans. A focus on

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116 ibid.

117 Howard Kester, "March 1931 - Interracial Work," Sayre and Kester Correspondence, JNSP, SCPC.

118 ibid.

119 ibid.

attitudes and interpersonal relations did not have to come at the expense of actions taken against economic and political domination by whites, but taking effective action in those realms proved much more challenging than a focus on changing attitudes. Moreover, the Fellowship had, from its inception, suggested that individual behaviors were the foundation of society, maintaining belief that simply being differently in the world was a method that could produce structural changes. Fellowship people - both black and white - organized these interracial conferences not simply to debate ethical political strategies. They organized these conferences because they believed that egalitarian interracial spaces in and of themselves were a different way of being in a country organized around the principle of white supremacy. When Kester wrote of a new "attitude" being essential for "the building of a new social order," arguing that this attitude would flow from "certain theories" and underwrite innovative nonviolent "techniques," he was suggesting that ideas and attitudinal dispositions were the path towards ending the white violence and discrimination that plagued black Americans.

The Fellowship's efforts to battle white supremacy in the US South were, ultimately, hamstrung by this idea that one had to be nonviolent - an ideological commitment to pure pacifism. In the Fall of 1931, Howard Kester reported that the Scottsboro trial had created an unprecedented level of violence for black men in the South. He reported that an African American man had been killed and a Tallapoose County sheriff was "seriously wounded" as police broke up a meeting of "alleged Negro communists" organizing a sharecroppers union. These sharecroppers, Kester reported, are living "a hair's breadth away from slavery." As thirty-four black men awaited trial as a result of the police siege, Kester reported that the communist organizers had been "driven from cities" and were provoking

"considerable unrest" in rural areas in Alabama. "Armed men are patrolling the district," Kester wrote to his bosses, "attending all meetings and trying to prevent any further outbreaks."[120]

Communists in the South, Kester told John Nevin Sayre, were "making every effort to capture the Negro." But Kester believed "the Communists are hurting themselves, hurting the Negroes, and hurting those of us who are trying to build interracial Goodwill and cooperation" by "trying to bulldoze the state and to turn the Negroes against everyone who is not lined up with them. To my mind the NAACP and the interracial commission follow the only logical political method they could under the existing circumstances."[121] Continuing to emphasize interracialism and improved social relations between whites and blacks, new ways of being as both method and outcome, Kester wrote "it is not the economics of Communism that frightens the white Southerner; it is the racialism of Communism..." Kester called on Fellowship members in the South to forge ahead, saying: "we cannot pussyfoot. We must go on. That there will be serious troubles I haven't any doubt," but the Scottsboro trial was just "a moment in our drama." The Fellowship, Kester wrote, must focus on winning "the respect, loyalty and affection of negroes and whites."[122]

Privately, however, Kester confided to his Fellowship supervisors in New York that "conditions in the South are worse than they have been at any time since reconstruction."

> The conditions under which Negroes live in the south are so severe that it is questionable whether they will continue to rely upon evolutionary methods in attempting to secure the rights and privileges guaranteed to them by the Constitution. It is clear that unless Negroes are convinced in no uncertain ways that the evolutionary method is best that they will turn to violent methods. It is, therefore, of Paramount importance that the fellowship insert every

[120] "To Friend from Howard Kester," 15 August 1931, Sayre and Kester Correspondence, JNSP, SCPC.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.

> ounce of strength it possesses and demonstrating the effectiveness of aggressive pacifism for social and economic revolution.[123]

Communist "tactics have thus far been open to serious criticism," Kester wrote, but "they have nevertheless succeeded in arousing many hitherto despondent and lethargic Spirits. It is a well-known fact that the Communists are bidding strongly for negro support...They are winning adherents everywhere." Both the Fellowship and the Communists maintained a common commitment in "accept[ing] the negro and the white on the same bases, with no discrimination whatsoever." But the battle between the Communists and the Fellowship to organize blacks and whites in the South was very real, Kester reported. "The question," he said, "is which will win." Describing 1932 "a year of testing," Kester said "we are faced with a conflict situation the proportions of which one cannot imagine without being in it. The future of The Fellowship depends upon how we meet this situation."[124] He implored the Fellowship to remain "as 'crazy' for our cause," the cause of nonviolent solutions, "as the Communists for theirs." Without a dedicated program to organize blacks and whites in the South, Kester wrote, "we are lost."[125]

But a major challenge in this work was organizing people who were armed. Kester wrote that he personally was not "so emotionally wedded to the idea of pacifism that I'm blind to the positive benefits of violence in certain situations. I am, however, so wedded to the practical benefits of aggressive pacifism in this particular instance that I am absolutely convinced that any attempt on the part of negroes to attain their rights through violence at this stage would be a colossal failure and the result suicidal." Kester cautioned his bosses to understand that armed self-defense in the US South was an issue steeped in racial

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[123] Howard Kester, "The Interracial Situation," Report to the FOR National Council, Oct. 1931, JNSP, SCPC.
[124] ibid.
[125] ibid.

politics. "Negroes are being disarmed wholesale," Kester told Fellowship leaders in New York, stating that "hardware stores, pawnshops, and other dealers in firearms have been instructed not to sell firearms or ammunition to Negroes." And yet, Kester reported, "no attempt has been made to disarm whites."[126] A close friend told Kester "we Negroes have taken all we can stand and we are determined to go down shooting," an interaction that led Kester to conclude that the "young [black] intellectuals" are "increasingly sceptical [sic] of evolutionary methods and are thinking more and more of violence." He called upon the FOR to "improve and enlarge our tactics," a set of pacifist political techniques which Kester described in late 1931 as "woefully inadequate."[127]

As the Fellowship under Nevin Sayre's leadership increased its focus on this issue of racial violence and racial discrimination in the US South, it partnered with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in 1931 to co-publish an interracial newsletter edited by Sarah DuBois.[128] Howard Kester traveled 4,500 miles across the South in 1931 speaking in Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia, and he planned additional interracial conferences at Memphis, Nashville, Montgomery, Atlanta, and Lynchburg, Virginia.[129] Late in 1931, Kester reported that a Mr. Boaz, a Professor at State Teachers College in Huntsville, "was brutally murdered by white men on streets of Birmingham." Kester said the "beastly affair, of which no accounts ever appeared in the white press," had created a "great stir" across Alabama and led many African Americans to be "afraid to get out upon the Highway,"

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[126] ibid.

[127] Howard Kester to John Nevin Sayre, 20 Nov 1931, Sayre and Kester Correspondence, JNSP, SCPC; Howard Kester, "The Interracial Situation."

[128] FOR Minutes of National Council, April 1931, SCPC, Reel 102.01.

[129] ibid, 19 December 1931.

accentuating further the problematic of counseling to pacifism a black population under siege by violent white Americans.[130]

Nevertheless, Kester reported in March of 1932 that the Fellowship was in a "stronger position" in the South than "it has ever been before." Letters from Montgomery, Durham, Chapel Hill, Memphis, Chattanooga, Montgomery, and Shreveport expressed "appreciation...for the organization of local FOR groups" and "its radical approach to the race issue, labor, and peace." Some suggested that the Fellowship's efforts in the US South had "given heart to those who have grown cynical and despondent."[131] John Nevin Sayre and African American YMCA leader Ned Pope joined Kester in March of 1932 for an "interracial tour" that "broke over Jim Crow restrictions all along the line." The group stayed in black hotels and "interracial FOR meetings were held in seven cities." Pope spoke at white institutions Birmingham Southern College, Maryville College, the Lynchburg YMCA, Durham University, and Pullman Memorial.[132] Nevin Sayre spoke at thirty-eight meetings, twenty in African American spaces and eighteen in white spaces, and reached more than 4000 people directly. Kester, Pope, and Nevin Sayre garnered seven hundred and fifty new Fellowship members, and new local chapters were organized in Montgomery, Durham, Atlanta, Lynchburg, Raleigh, Maryville, and Chattanooga.[133] At the conclusion of the trip, Sayre called for the creation of "a youth group study course...on the interracial problems and specific suggestions of action and strategy that might be tried out by young people who were in earnest." The team also called for "action by the Fellowship stimulating churches

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[130] Ibid.
[131] ibid.
[132] John Nevin Sayre, "Trip Memo Spring 1932," Series E, Box 16, Folder Race Relations Misc. 1920 – 1930s, FOR Papers, SCPC.
[133] ibid.

throughout the country on the evil of segregation and the duty of the Christian Churches to take its stand for unity in interracial worship and fellowship."[134]

As the Great Depression deepened in the 1930s, and as racial violence in the South grew worse, John Nevin Sayre continued to press the Fellowship's unique role in developing "methods of social persuasion." Other political groups may excel at fomenting political pressure, Sayre argued, but the Fellowship should continue "experiments in persuasion" and develop a new kind of political methodology for resolving conflict by unifying groups that were separated.[135] Yet the Wilder Coal Strike of 1932 would painfully expose the inadequacies of pacifist "persuasion." In the summer of 1932, miners and workers launched a strike at the Fentress Coal and Coke Company in Wilder, Tennessee. Workers had their pay reduced twice by ownership earlier in the year, and when their wages were reduced a third time in the summer of 1932 they walked off the job. Fentress had operated as an open shop mine until workers struck during that summer of 1932, but when Fentress reopened in July it employed exclusively nonunion workers - locking out the previously unionized workforce. A court injunction made illegal any attempt to interfere with the scab workers brought in to work at Fentress, but Kester and his colleagues nevertheless provided aid to the workers by creating the "Wilder Emergency Relief Committee," collecting food and clothes that they distributed to more than 300 locked out families.[136] Before the end of the labor conflict, Kester and the Emergency Relief Committee provided three tons of food and six thousand pieces of clothing to the locked out workers in Wilder.

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[134] ibid.

[135] "Report of John Nevin Sayre, Oct. 1931 – Oct. 1932," October 1932, FOR Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, SCPC, Reel 102.02.

[136] Unknown Authors, "Report of Wilder Emergency Relief Committee," 31 December 1932, Sayre and Kester Correspondence, JNSP, SCPC; Helen Dahnke, "Their Leader Dead, Wilder's Striking Miners Say their Cause 'Goes Marching On," *The Tennessean*, 7 May 1933. Found in Sayre and Kester Correspondence, JNSP, SCPC.

Kester saw in the Wilder strike an opportunity to do what the Fellowship had envisioned for so long – a chance to "to discover the applicability of Christian principles to the settlement of (violent) situations."[137] When Wilder Union leader Barney Graham was shot ten times and killed by local police, the young minister stepped up his efforts to organize in Wilder.[138] Telling his bosses in New York that he had been identified as one of six people that should be killed at Wilder, he told them that because he had been targeted he "was always guarded" when going into the striker's camp. "When going into the camp I was usually met by a group of the strikers who accompanied me until I left…"[139] Kester explained further that he believed "the task of the fellowship is that of a revolutionary movement which must approach its work with the abandon, enthusiasm and realism of the Revolutionary." Claiming no more important venue for this work than the US South, Kester wrote: "I dogmatically assert that no great change is possible in the status of the millions of peons and wage slaves in the South as long as the present economic system endures."[140] The Fellowship, he stated boldly, was failing to address these larger structural questions:

> To attempt to emancipate the mass of white and Negro workers in the South, employed in mill, mine, farm and factory only through the methods of goodwill, moral suasion and education is to invite the continued exploitation, misery and suffering of generations not yet on board. The extreme callousness of the white South to the brutalities of life in relation to the Negro and disinherited white dictates for us a policy of developing those social forces which will not only undermine its present position of power and authority but help usher in The Cooperative Commonwealth.[141]

Drawing on the story of Jesus, as Fellowship leaders had done since their founding, Kester argued that the Nazarene had "defiantly recognized the class struggle" and worked

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[137] Howard Kester, "Trouble in the TN Coalfields, December 1932," Sayre and Kester Correspondence, JNSP, SCPC.

[138] Dahnke, "Their Leader Dead, Wilder's Striking Miners Say their Cause 'Goes Marching On.'"

[139] Howard Kester, "Annual Report of Southern Secretary, October 1933," Sayre and Kester Correspondence, JNSP, SCPC.

[140] Ibid.

[141] ibid.

"steadfastly against the oppressors of the poor, the weak, and the disinherited." Concluding his report to the Fellowship somewhat cryptically, Kester wrote: "your Secretary has aligned himself with those forces making for a revolutionary change." [142]

Kester's report was marked up in red pen, presumably by FOR Secretary John Nevin Sayre, who immediately wrote Kester to register his concern with the young secretary's report. If Sayre's response was direct, it was also clearly condescending:

> Although you do not say so, I presume that the strikers who guarded you had guns (of course for self defense). I must say that I consider it seriously wrong for a fellowship secretary to have to depend on the 'private gunman' at his side to defend him. To admit the validity of such a procedure would come pretty close to sanction for self-defense. It would not be what Jesus believed in when in the Garden of Gethsemane he commanded Peter to put his sword away. Therefore, I should feel that in the future no Fellowship secretary should go into situations of danger like those you describe unless he goes alone, unarmed, or with a group of friends who will go unarmed also and be prepared, like Gandhi's followers, to offer no violence themselves to opponent to maybe or shoot them down.[143]

Kester also told Nevin Sayre that he had used spies to gather information from the Ku Klux Klan, to which Sayre responded: "I am dead against that practice. Unless the Fellowship can fight its battles by holding on to truth and refusing deception and undercover crookedness, and unless we can do our work without the support of armed guards, I think we are licked before we begin."[144]

In the 1933 annual report published by the Fellowship, Sayre reiterated a commitment to pure pacifism - the absolute prohibition of violence and a prohibition, a prohibition that extended to not organizing those who were armed. Taking up specifically "the question of violence in the class struggle," Sayre told members "the fellowship should always advocate and have faith in methods of non-violence, persuasion and self-sacrificing love." He encouraged individual Fellowship members to "pioneer and experiment increasingly with

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[142] ibid.

[143] John Nevin Sayre to Howard Kester, 30 October 1933, Sayre and Kester Correspondence, JNSP, SCPC.

[144] Ibid.

nonviolent ways of affecting social justice," stating that while he often sided with workers in violent struggles these workers must remain nonviolent. "If this cannot be done or cooperation compromises the clear setting forth of our ideal," Sayre wrote, "we should withdraw cooperation."[145] J.B Matthews, the Fellowship's Industrial Secretary, said this "question" as to whether to "hold to nonviolence in the class struggle as (the FOR) did in international war" was a complicated one. "Is violence never curative," Matthews wrote provocatively, "but always destructive and its effects? May not violence sometimes be protective and the failure to use it simply an acquiescence in the suffering of others by violence as when armed forces used to protect one from a mob bent on lynching?"[146] The issues faced by Kester on the ground in Wilder belonged to a deeper set of questions about how the Fellowship organized, with whom they would work, and what the goal of their efforts ought to be.

In an effort to seek a resolution on the issue, the FOR sent a referendum to it members in November 1933 with a question about "your own position as to the struggles of workers and other underprivileged groups." They asked members to weigh in on how "far" secretaries "should go" in creating a new social order where "no individual or groups" will be "exploited for the profit or pleasure of another."[147] Members were given 6 options, but the clear dividing line came between options 4 and 5. Option 4 asked if secretaries should be "dissociating themselves from any group that used armed violence," while option 5 asked if secretaries

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[145] John Nevin Sayre, Written Statement in Conference of FOR Bulletin, November 1933, Sayre and Kester Correspondence, JNSP, SCPC.
[146] Sayre to Kester, 30 October 1933, Sayre and Kester Correspondence, JNSP, SCPC.
[147] "Please Answer this Referendum Immediately," 22 November 1933, FOR Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, FOR Papers, SCPC, Reel 102.02.

should "consent to the use of armed force if necessary to secure the advantage of the workers, but regretfully and only while the necessity for it continues."[148]

Kester's work in the South was the precipitating cause of this national debate. "I have never entered Wilder or any other dangerous situation possessing arms or in any way rely upon the arms of Associates or friends for protection," Kester told Sayre weeks before the issuing of the referendum, saying that "nonviolence is the only practical weapon for strikers to use, and in my conversations with individuals and when I talked before the unions I have repeatedly taken this position."[149] But, Kester added, "every man, woman and child in the mountains of Tennessee knows the use of firearms. The use of a rifle is as natural to them as the use of a knife and fork. The women are frequently as expert as the men." Pivoting to Sayre's admonition that he ought look to Gandhi as an example, Kester wrote: "What you say about Gandhi and his mass following in India leaves me cold." Gandhi was certainly waging an admirable movement, Kester conceded, but "the problems confronting those who are working in violent situations are not greatly relieved by referring to Gandhi." Kester concluded his rebuttal to Sayre by addressing openly the issue of organizing black and white people in the US South. "I can't work with Negroes here in the South like you can in the East," Kester wrote. "To announce our work 'in the open' simply means that our work is terminated here." Kester told Sayre that the Fellowship in the US South was seen as a real threat to the racial oligarchy, writing of his "wish to reach the strawberry pickers in Southern Tennessee and Mississippi this spring," groups that Kester described as "little better than

[148] ibid.

[149] Kester to Sayre, 6 November 1933, Sayre and Kester Correspondence,JNSP, SCPC.

chattel slaves...if you know anything about southern life on the plantations, and you do, you will not wonder why it is necessary to work in secret."[150]

In this work to "develop certain social forces to combat other social forces," Kester believed there are "no ready-made patterns upon which to work." Some pacifist "theories" might be used to "govern a perfect society," Kester said, but "I am living in a society possessed of many devils who have their abode in this hell we call Earth. I'm trying to be intelligent and honest and working with the fellowship. I make mistakes often enough and will probably continue to make them. If anyone has a better way let him demonstrate it and I will be the first to follow."[151] Sayre responded flatly with a continuing admonition to condemn violence and armed self-defense. "It is right for you to urge non-violence is the only practical weapon for Strikers," Nevin Sayre wrote, but "I hope you will also make clear that you, as a fellowship secretary are dead opposed to being defended by anybody's guns in any situation, that you are endeavoring to stand one hundred percent for a nonviolent way of life and that you would rather to be hurt and bearing witness to this principle that you would to escape but have your testimony be clouded."[152]

The Wilder affair ultimately cost Kester his job as a paid staffer with the Fellowship, and Kester received the news that he had been fired on the same day of an "atrocious lynching" in Tennessee.[153] Confronted yet again with continuing and savage white brutality against black Americans, Kester sardonically asked Nevin Sayre to "advise me regarding use of persuasive love" in the face of the lynching.[154] "Appeal to newspapers and public opinion

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[150] Ibid.
[151] ibid.
[152] Sayre to Kester, 21 November 1933, Sayre and Kester Correspondence, JNSP, SCPC.
[153] Kester to Sayre, Telegram, 18 December 1933, Sayre and Kester Correspondence, JNSP, SCPC.
[154] Ibid.

of city and state for cessation of further violence and upholding good name of state and peaceful support of process of law," Sayre wrote in an urgent telegram, but the advice rang hollow for Kester. He called his dismissal from the Fellowship "a horrible mistake and one that will have far-reaching consequences."[155] He told Nevin Sayre that he had strictly adhered to nonviolence in conflict situations, but had remained open to working with people who owned guns. "My position was not achieved in a day nor was it born out of an emotional bias for the working class," he explained, "but was wrought from the furnace of Southern life."[156] He told Nevin Sayre that he was "sorry to be severed from the work of the fellowship here in the South. I feel that we were beginning to make a really effective and most worthwhile contribution in this area."[157]

Kester's wife and partner in the work, Alcie Kester, wrote Nevin Sayre to register her complaint about a group of New Yorkers overreaching into the work she and her husband had done in the South. Calling Kester's dismissal another example of "the incapacity of a local committee" in New York "to direct a National Organization," Alice Kester told John Nevin Sayre that "one has to be a part of a scene to realise its needs." She and Howard had "thought, talked, and preached only non violent methods" in their time with the Fellowship, but Howard had wrestled deeply with how and whether to organize armed people for months. She registered her disappointment that "a so-called liberal group could be so intolerant," and likened the firing of Kester to the actions of "the old fashioned Church groups with which I worked as a young girl. It is rather disillusioning," Alice continued, "to find that

[155] Kester to Sayre, 4 January 1934, Sayre and Kester Correspondence, JNSP, SCPC.
[156] ibid.
[157] ibid.

there is no freedom of thought even for a FOR secretary."[158] In closing, Alice Kester lamented the loss of "the interracial side" of the work, which she believed had the capacity for "real success."[159] In his final letter to John Nevin Sayre in 1934, Howard Kester echoed a continuing commitment to this work. "I shall stay in the South...unless starved out, and do a more vigorous job than I have ever done before. I can't quit because some people go haywire over the question of violence."[160]

The Color of Pacifism

Fellowship secretary Claud Nelson took over much of Kester's responsibilities in the South. In 1935, Nelson wrote a pamphlet provocatively titled 'Can Guns Settle Strikes?'[161] The answer from the Fellowship was, of course, no, but increasingly, the Fellowship continued to try and work in the armed South with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). Throughout the late 1930s, the two groups hosted a series of interracial institutes similar to the Kester conferences in Memphis and Birmingham.[162] "We were united," wrote AFSC Industrial Secretary Ray Newton, "in feeling that the institute is as concrete and promising a step in the development of the Fellowship program in the South as could be devised and carried out at present."[163]

The institutes explored how "friendly relations," a type of social interaction that could express reverence for personality and nurture what the Quakers called the "inner light,"

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[158] Alice Kester to Sayre, 11 January 1934, Sayre and Kester Correspondence, JNSP, SCPC.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Alice Kester to Sayre, 16 January 1934, Sayre and Kester Correspondence, JNSP, SCPC.
[161] FOR Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, 24 June 1935, SCPC, Reel 102.02.
[162] Charles F. Howlett, "American Friends Service Committee and Peace Education," in *2008 Encyclopedia of Peace Education*, (2008: New York, Columbia University).
[163] Ray Newton to Claud Nelson, September 28, 1935, in Allan W. Austin, *Quaker Brotherhood: Interracial Activism and the American Friends Service Committee, 1917-1950*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

mitigate violence. Co-sponsored by the FOR and AFSC, these institutes became spaces where methods could be explored for "eliminating racial injustice using non-violent means."[164] Like the Fellowship, the Quakers saw these interracial institutes as the foundation for a better world, what the historian Allan Austin has called a "technique in interracialism" that was, itself, an outcome.[165] The Quakers and the Fellowship both agreed on "a definite emphasis on the religious approach to race," and the institutes were an effort to focus more on the "practical" questions of improving race relations.[166]

But in their interwar emphasis on improving race relations through improved social relations, the Fellowship and Quakers struggled to attract widespread interest among black Americans. The color of pacifism was white, and this was a major problem for interracial organizing around nonviolence in the US South. By the late 1930s, however, the racial dynamic of the organization began to change. Howard Thurman was elected to the FOR's Executive Council in December of 1939, and by the end of 1940 he had become Council Vice-Chairman.[167] The presence of A.J. Muste, who had abandoned the FOR during the early 1930s as he waded through the welter of radical labor activism, also pushed the Fellowship towards interracial action in the 1930s as Executive Secretary. Muste implored Fellowship members early in 1941, as his predecessors had before him, to move beyond what he called a "negative protest" to a nonviolent technique for "achieving a new social order in the spirit and by the method of nonviolence." To that end, the Fellowship's Executive Committee

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164 Austin, *Quaker Brotherhood*, 98.

165 ibid, 103.

166 ibid, 105.

167 FOR Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, 12 September 1939, Reel 102.02; ibid, September 8, 1940.

authorized "the setting up of a Committee on Nonviolent Techniques of the FOR" early in 1941.[168]

Providing its first report on the "application of nonviolent techniques to problems of race" in September of 1941, the Committee on Nonviolent Techniques noted the tension between the "scarcity of negroes in the Fellowship and the urgency of the problem of racial reconciliation." Yet in his meetings with "younger members of Harlem churches," Fellowship Secretary John Haynes Holmes noted "an interest has been awakened in the study of the possibility of the application of the way of non-violent action to the real emancipation of the Negro. Who knows when and where an American Negro Gandhi may catch the vision!"[169] This increasing emphasis on utilizing nonviolent techniques to battle racial discrimination attracted to the Fellowship Bayard Rustin - a black Quaker raised in Pennsylvania - and James L. Farmer, a recent Howard School of Religion graduate. A.J. Muste hired both of these young men as Fellowship Secretaries in September of 1941.[170] Together, Thurman, Rustin and Farmer - the Fellowship's first dedicated black leadership – began to think about how to apply nonviolent techniques to the problem of racial violence and discrimination in the United States. Nearly thirty years after the Fellowship's first secretary Edward Evans called racial violence and lynching the "supreme test both of our democracy and our Christianity," the Fellowship of Reconciliation recruited black board members and hired black staff to focus squarely on Jim Crow.

In the fall of 1941, John Haynes Holmes reported that the "Youth Conferences had decided to make the exploration of nonviolent action in connection with the race relations

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[168] ibid, 11 February, 1941.

[169] J. Holmes Smith, "Report of Secretary of Committee on Non-Violent Techniques, March 25 to November 25 1941," FOR Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, SCPC, Reel 102.02.

[170] FOR Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, 7 September 1941, Reel 102.02.

issue...an important emphasis in the new year." Recently minted Youth Secretary James Farmer recommended "that all Fellowship cells should be made interracial…that one cell should be given the specific emphasis of Race Relations, with one member of that Cell (possibly the convenor) being given the responsibility, on a volunteer basis, of local race relations secretary."[171] Farmer argued that deemphasizing pacifism was essential, noting that he encountered only one black American who had registered as a Conscientious Objector in his travels across the United States. Farmer told the FOR that he had introduced black college groups "to nonviolent direct action" instead of pacifism, "and have suggested their further study of such techniques in relation to their application to racial problems in America." Framed this way, Farmer found, "the response to a treatment of such ideas was enthusiastic."[172]

Farmer, Thurman, and Rustin proved critical not simply to changing the complexion of the pacifist FOR, but in challenging pacifists to take seriously the experience of black Americans facing daily violence, discrimination, and disfranchisement. Thurman, in particular, did important work in building on the pacifist ideas that nonviolence was not simply a political tactic but also a way of being. In his speeches and writings, Thurman articulated how the politics of being might an effective way of doing nonviolence. He articulated a way of being nonviolent that cleaved tightly to the pacifist principle of reverence for personality, but which simultaneously proved to be an insurgent methodology for chiseling away at racial violence and discrimination. As the Dean of Chapel and a Professor of Religion at the Howard University School of Religion, Thurman belonged to an intellectual

[171] ibid; "Report of Youth Field Worker," FOR Minutes of National Council & Executive Committee, 29 November 1941, Reel 102.02.
[172] ibid.

space that proved critical in discerning how the politics of being could become a way of doing nonviolence.

Chapter 2

From "Mere Quietus" to "Prophetic Religion"
Howard Thurman and the Politics of Being

Reflecting on his decision to join the Fellowship of Reconciliation as a sophomore in college, Howard Thurman wrote that he felt as if someone had told him a "secret." The "affirmation of mind and personality" Thurman felt as a second year student at Morehouse College in 1922 combined with the "vast possibilities of reconciliation between black and white" in the Fellowship to give him a sense that he had "a place to stand...a place so profoundly affirming that I was strengthened by a sense of immunity to the assaults of the white world of Atlanta, Georgia." Despite having "no particular interest in the peace movement *per se*," Thurman found in the Fellowship "the strength to affirm my own life and the way that I should take to walk." In a rigidly segregated nation that routinely used violence to disfranchise and exploit black citizens, the young Morehouse valedictorian saw the possibility for social transformation in interracial reconciliation.[173]

But as his involvement with the Fellowship deepened, Thurman's critique of pacifism sharpened. In a 1929 essay, Thurman issued a scathing indictment of the insistence that black Americans adhere to passive resistance. "It is a very simple matter," Thurman wrote, "for people who form the dominant group in society to develop what they call a philosophy of pacifism that makes few, if any, demands upon their ethical obligations to minority groups with which they may be having contacts. Such a philosophy," Thurman continued, "becomes a mere quietus to be put into the hands of the minority to keep them peaceful and

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[173] Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman*, 1st ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 265 - 266.

controllable."[174] Thurman was, in 1929, emerging as a nationally renowned religious intellectual when he issued this challenge to pacifists. He spoke regularly at both black and white colleges and churches across the United States, and accomplished something that a generation of pacifists could not: he articulated how a religious way of being could become a powerful way of practicing the politics of nonviolence.

Thurman called for a way of being that was grounded in the ethics of pacifism, but defined by insurgent, nonviolent action. Thurman claimed that to be free, all people ought be allowed to fully develop their personality, to flourish and grow into the unlimited creative capacity that was the promise for all humans. Pointing to the life and mind of Jesus, Thurman argued that being free in this way emerged from contemplation about one's self and one's relationship to both God and society. The consequence of this contemplation was a religious experience that inspired a courageous refusal to adhere to the immoral demands of an unjust society. By placing religious experience at the center of ideas about ethical political resistance, Thurman and this intellectual cohort began to articulate how a politics of being could be a way of using nonviolence to challenge Jim Crow. They did this by actively exploring the notion that Christianity was, in its genesis, a "technique of survival for an underprivileged minority," an insurgent way of being for a people facing regular violence with little political recourse. Describing the life of Jesus of Nazareth as a third way for those who refused to submit to the disfiguring demands of empire and who also did not want to endure the fatal recrimination that awaited violent resistance, Thurman and his students claimed Christianity a way of being that required adherence to the highest religious ideals of the Judeo-Christian tradition: mercy, kindness, and forgiveness. They argued that Jesus' way

[174] Howard Washington Thurman, "Relaxation and Race Conflict," 1929, in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman* [hereafter PHWT]*: Volume I: My People Need Me, June 1918 - March 1936*, ed. Walter Earl Fluker, (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 145.

of being in the world, a proactive adherence to the religious ideals of humility and brotherhood, transformed social relations and changed the course of world history.

This intellectual approach to the life of Jesus was undertaken in a black institutional space dedicated to expanding the black religious imagination – the School of Religion (SOR) at Howard University. Thurman joined a distinguished faculty of black religious scholars at Howard who were dedicated to graduating black women and men with "integrity of character and social imagination." The Howard SOR played an important role in expanding the social imagination of black religious people in the 1930s, a role that underscores the centrality of black institutions to black intellectual life in the first half of the twentieth century and reveals the indelible link between intellectual work and movement activity in the Black Freedom Struggle. The SOR at Howard University afforded the institutional space needed to outline how the Hebrew Bible and New Testament might address the daily violence directed at black Americans. And the work of Howard Thurman and students of religion at Howard served to enlarge the *episteme* of black religious thought before 1941, creating a sound intellectual foundation for a way of being that underwrote the nonviolent struggle against Jim Crow.

The Howard University School of Religion

The development of the School of Religion at Howard University was preceded by a number of smaller efforts oriented towards preparing black Americans for ministry. The original seminary at Howard University was born from a special conference held in Washington D.C. on November 20, 1866. The conference outlined a plan for "a theological seminar, having in view the training of colored men for the ministry," but it was not until 1871 that the trustees of Howard formally authorized the teaching of "students accredited as preachers and others looking forward to that work" through the commission of an official

Theological Department.[175] In 1897, an "evening institute" was established to "aid preachers and workers" in teaching Sunday School classes, but this institute was discontinued in 1916. Such fits and starts were actually important preludes to the establishment of a formal seminary dedicated to preparing black Americans for ministry in the years following the Civil War, a larger effort to define what Eric Foner has called "the meaning of freedom" for black Americans by developing public and private educational institutions.

Although Howard established a "School of Theology" in 1906, it was not until 1918 that Howard finally established a School of Religion focused on post-baccalaureate study. The decision in 1928 by the board of governors to authorize the administration of the graduate school to hire its own faculty significantly bolstered this effort to improve graduate education in religion.[176] With newfound autonomy borne from the formal creation of the graduate school as a separate division within the University in 1928, the Graduate School of Religion began to grow and expand – moving into a new facility at 5460 Sixth Street NW late in 1928.[177] More than 500 graduates had passed through the doors of the School of Theology since it had opened in 1906, and the School of Religion Bulletin boasted in 1931: "Who can estimate the influence which they have exerted in elevating the standards of the Christian ministry in serving the communities to which they have gone?"[178]

But the best days lay ahead for the Howard School of Religion. In his inaugural address on June 10, 1927, newly minted Howard University President Mordecai Wyatt Johnson stated that professional preparation for the ministry would be a central task for his

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[175] Bulletin for 1928 – 1929 Academic Year, Howard University School of Religion Bulletins (HUSORB) 1928 – 1936, Howard University School Records, Moorland Spingarn Research Center (MSRC), Howard University (HU).

[176] William Stuart Nelson, "School of Religion Annual Report Covering Period from 1931 – 1941," June 30, 1941, Howard University School Records, MSRC, HU.

[177] Ibid, HUSORB, 1930 - 1931; ibid, HUSORB 1932 - 1933; ibid, HUSORB bulletin, 1928 – 1929.

[178] ibid, HUSORB bulletin 1930 – 1931.

administration. Johnson stated that of the many groups capable of uniting black Americans, "there is no organization and no combination of organizations that can, at this stage in the history of the Negro race, begin to compare with the fundamental importance of the Negro church. And yet," he continued, "we can see what is going to happen to that church if only sixty college men are preparing to enter the Negro pulpit."[179] Noting the complexity of black Christianity in America, Johnson told the thousands gathered in Washington for his inauguration that the "religion of the Negro cannot continue to endure unless it is reinterpreted over and over to him by men who have a fundamental and far reaching understanding of the significance of religion in its relations to the complexities of modern civilized life."[180] Citing his ambition to create a "great nonsectarian school of religion," Johnson claimed the charter of this school as "seeking truth about the meaning of life without bias," an institution dedicated to "releasing" the "energies" of its students "for constructive service to the common good."[181]

As Johnson prepared to pursue these dedicated improvements at the School of Religion, Howard celebrated 60 years of training black Americans in religious study in November of 1931. Officials reported that over the course of those six decades, 1,612 students had matriculated, more than 500 ungraded correspondence students had attended classes, and 112 instructors had taught religious studies classes at Howard since 1871.[182] Heeding President Johnson's focus on improving graduate training, the School of Religion officially ended much of this programming in 1934 – specifically the evening school,

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[179] Mordecai Wyatt Johnson in Richard I. McKinney and Mordecai W. Johnson, *Mordecai, the Man and His Message: The Story of Mordecai Wyatt Johnson*, (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1997), 257.
[180] ibid, 258.
[181] ibid.
[182] HUSORB bulletin, 1932 – 1933, MSRC, HU.

the correspondence courses, and ultimately the theological college itself – and began to admit only students with a bachelors degree for graduate studies in religion.[183]

The transformation of the School of Religion into a professional graduate training program in the 1930s was commensurate with strong institutional growth across Howard in the interwar period - growth occasioned by President Mordecai Johnson. Of particular importance in the School of Religion's growth was the hiring of Howard Thurman as Associate Professor of Systematic Theology and Thurman's appointment as Dean of Rankin Chapel in 1932. During Johnson's tenure, Dr. Benjamin E. Mays was also appointed as the School of Religion's eighth dean in 1934.[184] Mays, who graduated from the University of Chicago with a Ph.D in 1935, was especially important to Johnson's mission of developing the highest quality graduate training in religion for black Americans.[185] Administrators by 1938 noted with some pride that the Howard "School of Religion has 39 college graduates enrolled during the second semester of this year," which was one more than the total number of black students in seminary training in the mid 1920s.[186] By the end of 1939, Howard boasted more African American college graduates in Masters level religious training than any other institution in the United States, with forty-three black Americans enrolled at the School of Religion in the spring of 1939 and all of them possessing college degrees.[187]

The growth and professionalization at the Howard SOR in the 1930s was concurrent with similar efforts to grow the Howard University School of Law. Led by Harvard Law

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[183] Nelson, "School of Religion Annual Report Covering Period from 1931 – 1941."

[184] HUSORB bulletin, 1932 - 1933**;** HUSORB bulletin, 1934 – 1935. **M**ays replaced Rev. D. Butler Pratt after 17 years of service.

[185] Rufus Jones, one of the Quaker founders of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, was penciled in to the bulletin of 1936 – 1937 as a convocation speaker.

[186] William Stuart Nelson, "School of Religion Annual Report, July 1938 - 30 June 1939," School of Religion Records, MSRC, HU, p. 5.

[187] ibid; Gammon had 67 students enrolled - but only 34 were college graduates; Notably, Oberlin has 13 African Americans, ibid.

graduate Charles Hamilton Houston, the law school at Howard set out to intentionally challenge the *de jure* mandates of Jim Crow by training a cadre of young lawyers prepared to wage legal battles against racial discrimination.[188] As students in the school of law examined the legal architecture of racial violence and discrimination and searched for ways to probe the weaknesses of legal discrimination, faculty and students at the Howard SOR focused on the role of religion in the maintenance of – and possible dissolution of – Jim Crow. Segregation and discrimination were not simply legal problems, they argued, but also spiritual problems to which religious people and religious institutions must address themselves.

In 1939, just as the School of Religion became fully accredited by the American Association of Theological Schools, the SOR moved into the Carnegie Library building at the center of the Howard Campus.[189] The "whole tone of religion will be raised to a new height and dignity when the university opens in the fall," Dean Benjamin Mays wrote of the move, stating "the school of religion alumni are rejoicing all over the nation."[190] Emphasizing the importance of academic religious training for black women and men, Mays wrote that "in times like these, when anti-religious forces are rife even on our own campus, and when the status of religion is not high in the thinking of the average person in the university community, it is quite necessary to make religion respectable in every particular."[191]

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[188] See Genna Rae McNeil and A. Leon Higginbotham Jr, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984); Rawn James Jr, *Root and Branch: Charles Hamilton Houston, Thurgood Marshall, and the Struggle to End Segregation*, Reprint edition (Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

[189] James Nabrit, "From Prayer Meeting to University," *Faculty Reprints*, September 1, 1942, 29–34, p. 32.

[190] Nelson, "School of Religion Annual Report, July 1938 - 30 June 1939," p. 13.

[191] Ibid, p. 16 – 7.

By 1941, the School of Religion had grown to 4 full time professors and 7 part time faculty.[192] It stated its purpose as "to prepare men and women for Christian service," to train "ministers and Christian workers whose integrity of character and social imagination are superior to those of the average citizen." Emphasizing preparation of its students to "interpret the Christian message in a convincing manner," the SOR made clear that its graduates would be trained to "draw no fundamental distinction between men." SOR students should recognize and call out "the farce that caste built upon color, intellect, wealth or ancestry is both vicious and ungodly," and cited the growth and development of human "personality" as the key to fostering social change. The SOR declared that it would produce students "who can interpret religion and theology in a changing world so as to make religion an effective agency in developing personality and a vital force in perfecting social change."[193]

The idea of personality was at the core of the Howard SOR's understanding of how religious training could produce social change. Citing "personality" as "a vital force for perfecting social change" and claiming the cultivation of personality as central to Christian ministry, administrators and faculty at the Howard SOR belonged joined a broader religious intellectual discourse in the opening decades of the 20th century in their thiking. And Howard Thurman, who spent a year training with the pacifist Rufus Jones at Haverford College, provided an important link to this larger discourse. As will become clear below, Thurman believed that contemplation of those things which are foundational to all of human experience - vulnerability and need, longing and tragedy, joy and love - could produce an understanding that humans were fundamentally joined together. But, each individual also possessed a unique and distinct personality with an infinite capacity for creative expression. Authentic

[192] Nelson noted growth from 2 full time professors and 8 part time instructors in 1931. Ibid.
[193] HUSOR Bulletin, 1937 – 1938, MSRC, HU.

religious experience, Thurman believed, could emerge from contemplation of this paradox – the paradox of fundamental sameness and infinite diversity – in collective conversation. Discussion, prayer, and conversation about the universality of human need and the infinite diversity of human personality could, Thurman believed, foster a religious experience. And it was this religious experience that might inspire individuals and communities to recognize that political systems and cultural expectations that disfigure social relations through enforced separation are unjust. Community contemplation of the fundamental truth of human unity and the infinite spectrum of human diversity was, for Thurman, the antidote to bigotry and violence.

Thurman brought this innovative religious vision to Howard in 1932 at just the moment when the school was focused on improving academic training for black clergy in America. Reporting on the need for growth in the religious training of black Americans, Howard administrator William Stuart Nelson cited the 1936 Census of Religious Bodies. 40% of the total African American population – or 5,176,689 black Americans – were gathered in 35,339 churches in 1936.[194] Citing the seminal study undertaken by SOR Dean Benjamin E. Mays and his colleague Joseph Nicholson, "The Negro Church," Nelson wrote that 27% of the 591 black ministers surveyed had completed 'the grades' of primary school while only 34% had finished high school. Of the high school graduates, 22% had some "normal training," and 90% had some college. 20% of high school graduates in ministry held a Bachelor's degree, but Mays and Nicholson found that 72% of black ministers

[194] Nelson, "School of Religion Annual Report Covering Period from 1931 – 1941," p. 1.

had no academic degree of any kind. Out of the total number of black ministers in the United States in 1934, 81% were entirely without formal seminary training.[195]

"To what kind of fate are the five million negro church members being led," Nelson wrote in 1941. Citing this question as among "the most vital and difficult problems of Negro life today," Nelson drew on Mays and Nicholson's report to provide "a picture of the task which faces a school of religion among Negroes and the task which faces the School of Religion at Howard University." Nelson called for "a frank review and in some instances a thoroughgoing reconstruction of (the black church's) philosophy and techniques," citing "a spirit of secularization" that seemed to be "running athwart the most powerful forces which religion has been able to develop during all of its history." Arguing that the SOR at Howard should play a vital role in the reconstruction of the Black clergy class in America, Nelson argued that religion must be put into the service of black communities seeking to address the violence and discrimination meted out against black life in the United States.[196]

When Nelson replaced Benjamin Mays as Dean of the SOR in 1941, he continued the professionalization of the SOR. The library at the SOR had grown to 46,527 from a starting point of 1,443 in 1936, and was quickly emerging as the premiere site for the post-baccaluareate religious training among black Americans.[197] The SOR reported that of the 248 total black students attending schools of religion across the US in 1942, 106 were in white schools and 102 were in black institutions. Of those attending black schools, 54 - more than half - attended Howard.[198] Thanking President Mordecai Johnson, William Stuart Nelson

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[195] Ibid.

[196] ibid, p. 2.

[197] This was due to a purchase of 39,000 volumes from Auburn Theological and Union Theological schools in New York City. "School of Religion NEWS," 1941, Howard University School Records, MSRC, HU.

[198] William Stuart Nelson, HUSOR Annual Report Covering 1941 - 1942, July 1942, MSRC, HU.

noted in 1942 that he could "think of nothing for which we might reasonably have asked which you have not stood ready to provide."[199] As racial violence and discrimination continued to run amok in cities and towns across the United States, the SOR at Howard grew into a beacon of black intellectual activity in a nation defined by white supremacy. In the institutional space at the Howard SOR, ideas about how the Religion of Jesus might become a nonviolent force for upending white supremacy became a focus for Howard Thurman and a cohort of students.

Howard Thurman and the Politics of Being

By the time Howard Thurman came to the SOR in 1932, he had known Mordecai Johnson for nearly 15 years. In the spring of 1918, 18 year-old Thurman wrote the young pastor Johnson who then served at First Baptist Charleston in West Virginia to seek a "cheering word from a man like you." Thurman conveyed the grind of his day-to-day life in the small town of Dayton, Florida where his mother raised him with three other small children. He told Johnson he was the first African American from his county to receive a "Certificate of Promotion" from middle school, and only attended high school in nearby Jacksonville because, miraculously, he received baggage fare from a stranger while standing forlorn on the train's boarding platform. Sharing a room with his cousin in Jacksonville, Thurman won the scholarship medal in his high school and sought desperately to attend college. "I want to be a minister of the gospel," he told Johnson. "I feel the needs of my people, I see their distressing condition, and have offered myself upon the altar as a living sacrifice, in order that I may help the 'skinned and flung down' as you interpret. God wants

[199] Ibid.

me and His precious love urges me to take up the cross and follow him. I want advice from you as to how to direct my efforts."[200]

Johnson's reply three weeks later marked the beginning of a long friendship between the two men. Johnson implored Thurman to "go on with your preparatory and college work," writing that "it will be far better for you to enter the ministry after you have completed a college course than to make a shortcut." Johnson told Thurman to "keep in close touch with your people, especially those who need your service. Take every opportunity to think over all that you learn, in relation to them and to their needs. Make yourself believe that the humblest, most ignorant and most backward of them is worthy of the best prepared thought and life that you can give."[201] Johnson's reply represents the emphasis on formal education among black Americans in the early 20th century, a core tenet in what Walter Fluker has called the "dominant theories of black uplift" common to African American life in the opening decades of the twentieth century. Johnson believed that the acquisition of education - and the development of black institutions to provide that education and to employ educated people – was among those effective strategies for battling the white violence, discrimination, and political disfranchisement.

In the decade and a half between his first letter to Johnson in 1918 and his official appointment as the Dean of Rankin Chapel at Howard University in 1932, Thurman grappled with what the historian Fluker has called "modern methods of critical reflection to pursue truth." He belonged to a cadre of religious intellectuals that treated the bible both as a living document that required continual reinterpretation and as a historical text produced within a particular historical moment. But Thurman was exceptional even among these modern

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[200] Howard Thurman to Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, 18 June 1918, in PHWT, 2.
[201] Mordecai Wyatt Johnson to Howard Thurman, 8 July 1918, PHWT, 4.

religious thinkers - both black and white - in suggesting that contemplation of ancient religious texts could produce a force that could transform contemporary conditions of injustice. Building his intellectual activity around the "centrality of personality and primacy of community," Thurman believed that in contemplation of one's relationship to the infinite - God – and to the temporal – society – one could develop a way of being in the world that might transform cruelty and injustice.[202] He pointed to the story of Jesus as proof that such a way of being could simultaneously confront violence and discrimination and produce a profound social rupture capable of redeeming a society defined by unjust power relationships. Generating such personal spiritual power became a central preoccupation for Thurman in the 1920s, and it became foundational to his understanding of the "Christian Way in Race Relations."

The origins of Thurman's intellectual journey lay in coursework at Morehouse College. Thurman matriculated for baccalaureate studies at Morehouse in the fall of 1919 under President John Hope at a time when Morehouse Dean Samuel Archer sought to attract the nation's leading black scholars. In his study of Economics at Morehouse, Thurman sparred with sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, who Thurman remembers "would ridicule certain scriptural stories with bitter sarcasm" and challenge Thurman to strengthen his use of religion in intellectual discourse. Wrestling also with the secular pragmatists, Walter Fluker has described Thurman's years at Morehouse as a time of "broad, encompassing education," a moment when Thurman came to believe that "one must reform American society as a whole" in order to end the specific oppression of black Americans.[203] It was at Morehouse that

[202] PHWT, xix.
[203] ibid, lii.

Thurman first came to believe that reforming society was indistinguishable from reforming individuals, and idea that was central to the politics of being.

In his post baccalaureate studies at Rochester Theological Seminary, where social gospel advocate Walter Rauschenbusch had taught until his death in 1918, Thurman's emerging ethics confronted a major challenge: for the first time in his life, Thurman lived, worked, and labored among white people.[204] This experience of living and studying with whites at Rochester pushed Thurman to think not simply about the role of ethics in the life of black Americans, but urged him to consider how this "magnetic field of ethical awareness applied" to those "other than my own people."[205] The only black student at Rochester, Thurman's experience led him to consider how a system of how ethics could be determined directly by race - but also how ethical systems might transcend race. This relationship between race and ethics became important to Thurman's preaching and writing, particularly as he began to speak at white churches in the mid-1920s and write in nationally distributed white publications.

In the April 1924 edition of *Student Challenge*, for example, Thurman wrote an essay called "College and Color" that outlined for the first time what he described as "the Christian way in race relations." Describing the Christian Way in Race Relations as "the way of sympathetic understanding - which leads to respect for personality," Thurman captured in a single sentence two of the core tenets of the politics of being.[206] First, in claiming that there was such a thing as a Christian way in race relations, Thurman joined a small but critical group of thinkers and activists who believed that Christians living in the early 20th century

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[204] Ibid, liii; Fluker has also called Rochester a seminary built around "modernistic liberalism," ibid.
[205] ibid.
[206] Howard Thurman, "College and Color," April 1924, PHWT, 37.

United States had a religious and ethical obligation to wrestle with race. The early 20th century progressive Christian movement to which the Fellowship of Reconciliation belonged had, in particular, called loudly for temperance and outreach to the urban poor but remained short on Christian responsibility amidst the regular violence and discrimination meted out against black Americans. In calling for a "Christian way in race relations," Thurman staked out new and important intellectual territory for the development of an ethical framework to address white violence and the political disfranchisement of black Americans, calling especially for an end to the silence of white Christian churches on this fundamental social problem.[207]

Secondly, in emphasizing a "respect for personality," Thurman drew directly on the language used by his mentor Rufus Jones – the Quaker who served as an intellectual architect for the political ethics espoused by the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). Personality was, in the framework of Jones, fundamentally interracial: it was not predicated on race but fundamental to the basic capacity for creativity that all humans possessed. It was precisely the iterations and discrepancies of human personalities that made this a fundamentally human characteristic - a characteristic shared by all but given distinction by the difference of individual personalities. Thurman argued that racism "strangles personality and inhibits its highest growth and development," claiming that "any attitude, regardless of its basis" that prevents the full development of one's personality is not only "wrong," but "for a Christian believer to have that kind of attitude is a crime against God."[208] Targeting the social demands of segregation and Jim Crow, social demands of black subservience enforced by violence,

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[207] William Stuart Nelson edited a 1948 book entitled *The Christian Way in Race Relations*. Howard Thurman was a contributor. See Williams Nelson, ed., *Christian Way in Race Relations*, Unabridged Edition (Freeport, N.Y: Ayer Co Pub, 1948).

[208] Thurman, "College and Color," PHWT, 39.

Thurman wrote that "it is only in a relationship of primary contact that the individual emerges."[209] Thurman believed that as individuals grew to be themselves in community, through meaningful interaction with other people. If an individual is to truly and genuinely be oneself, Thurman argued, individuals must be freed from the mediating demands of Jim Crow to interact with full license to personal expression and growth.

Thurman's 1924 essay was significant for another reason. In "Color and College," Thurman argued that "it is more or less true that an idea held in mind tends to express itself in action."[210] The notion that what people do is indistinguishable from what they think was also foundational for the politics of being. Critically, this idea also linked Thurman with the efforts of contemporary pacifists in seeking to align religious beliefs with a way of being in the world. Urging his readers to understand discrimination and bigotry not simply as what people do, but as reflections of how they thought and what they believed, Thurman wrote:

> We cannot properly appreciate and understand what is going on in objective experience unless we somehow get back to the great world of ideas - intangible, unseen - which controls human activity. As Mumford in his Story of Utopias points out, "Man walks with his feet on the ground and his head in the air; and the history of what has happened on earth - the history of cities and armies and all things that had had body and form - is only one half the Story of Mankind." For the other half we must address ourselves to the realm of ideas which lie behind deeds and action.[211]

Thurman believed that intellectual activity was a predicate to ethical human action, and he argued that preparing oneself for ethical behavior required contemplation, study, and discernment. This insight underwrote Thurman's assertion that one's ideas about oneself in the world must be squared with one's own way of being in the world.

In the 1925 essay "Let Ministers Be Christians," Thurman continued to emphasize the "sacredness of human personality" and the "interdependence of men." He called for "all acts

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[209] ibid, 40.
[210] Ibid, 37.
[211] Ibid, 37.

to be motivated and actuated by passionate good-will or love," and outlined how to develop "personal spiritual power" to act in loving good-will.[212] Personal spiritual power emerged from authentic religious experience, Thurman argued, and this spiritual power afford support for being good and loving at times when it seemed impossible to do so. Eschewing "immature piety" borne of platitudes as "the presentation of words without the possession of the experience," Thurman called for "an attitude" which grows out of "the richness of our own lives," out of personal experience. He believed that words and ideas were important, but by themselves they created an immature piety that could not address the greatest issues pressing down on contemporary life. Words and ideas must address themselves to the social and political context within which individuals are living, and must express themselves through a way of being in the world.[213]

Thurman's writings in the 1920s put him at the forefront of a broader intellectual movement that focused on the "experiential basis of religion." Yet Thurman was still quite unique among this modernist protestant intellectual movement in writing about "a realm that is above sense phenomena." It is precisely these puzzling statements that have led scholars to characterize Thurman as a "mystic," but such characterizations often elide the clear relationship between the ethereal and the concrete in Thurman's writing. Thurman explained that there is "a unity of relationship" that existed between the subject of experience (humans) and the object of experience (the experience itself). Humans, he contended, are uniquely endowed with the creative capacity to reflect on the relationship between oneself, one's

[212] Howard Thurman, "Let Ministers Be Christians," January 1925, PHWT, 44.
[213] ibid, 50.

experience, and the "Being of whose plan and purpose (both are) such a significant part."[214] Humans are uniquely endowed with the ability to continually and creatively interpret the meaning of their life experience, a gift given by a "Being" that is continually "creative" rather than "a static infinite." Religious experience which transforms one's life flowed from personal contemplation of this triad – one's self, one's experience, and the creative being that permeates all – and this contemplation could produce the spiritual power needed to act creatively and be courageously.

This contemplation could also produce clarity the ethical nature of legal and social requirements that force people to behave in ways that betray their infinite worth. "If a normal individual has to stretch himself out of shape in order to be proper and acceptable to society," Thurman wrote, "then the standards of society are such that the individual becomes immoral in conforming to them...It must be in relation to society that the individual discovers what is the criterion of conduct for him."[215] Within Thurman's intellectual system, contemplation and experience were intertwined – and both were required to produce a religious experience. Echoing the Pragmatists he studied closely at Morehouse, Thurman argued that ethical behavior could only be worked out through contemplation of one's own self within society in confrontations with its laws, its standards, and its customs. And like the Pragmatists, Thurman emphasized that action, reflection, and discernment about personal being amidst the mores and laws of society were a way at arriving at truth. Truth isn't *a priori*, but instead

[214] Howard Thurman, "Can it Truly be Said that the Existence of A Supreme Spirit is a Scientific Hypothesis," Fall 1925, PHWT, 60.
[215] Howard Thurman, "The Basis of Sex Morality: An Inquiry into the Attitude Toward Premarital Sexual Morality and Analysis of Its True Basis," April 1926, PHWT, 99.

emerges through a social and individual process.[216] The power borne from recognition of one's own worth before God, despite the cruel ways of treatment by one's society, could produce a way of being that might transform society one person at a time.

Howard Thurman and the Politics of Nonviolence

When Mordecai Wyatt Johnson was appointed president of Howard University in 1926, his old friend Howard Thurman was among the first to know. Ten years after writing Johnson "seeking a kind word of encouragement," Thurman had established a national reputation as a leading religious thinker and writer concerned with justice. "We are fed and clothed by a system built upon deceit and adulteration," Thurman wrote to Johnson in 1927, writing of the futility he felt when he would "talk the talk about sincerity, about purity and honesty" while people are "eating, seeing, reacting to a mighty array of lies!" Pivoting to a hopeful vision, Thurman told Johnson that "of course this is not the whole story. I believe with all my heart that our task is two fold - seek how we may release to the full our greatest spiritual forces that there may be such a ground swell of spiritual energy that existing systems will be upset from sheer dynamic --- and make whatever temporary adjustments may prove helpful in relieving intolerable situations until there is a genuine uprooting...the new kind of education has a very 'Jesus' contribution to make to this whole problem."[217]

In the late 20s and 1930s, Thurman became increasingly concerned with the spiritual power he found in the life and ministry of Jesus, seeing in the life of Jesus of Nazareth an anchor for developing further his ideas about the relationship between personality,

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[216] William James, lecturing about pragmatism in 1907, stated that "truth happens to an idea…it *becomes* true, is *made* trued by events. Its verity *is* in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying self." Quoted in Menand, *The Metaphysical Club,* 353.

[217] Howard Thurman to Mordecai Johnson, 23 September 1927, Handwritten, Mordecai Wyatt Johnson Papers, Box 178-11, Folder Correspondence with Howard Thurman, MSRC, HU.

individuals, society, and God. In a 1927 essay entitled "Finding God," Thurman called personality that "which is at once the source of life and the goal of life," arguing that all people are bound together in "kinship" and that "true" and "genuine" kinship depended on the ability to express one's own self – fully and freely – without unjust inhibitions and strictures.[218] As Thurman explained, "I can never be the kind of person that I ought to be until everybody else is the kind of person that everybody else ought to be."[219] Emphasizing such interdependency as critical to the flourishing of all people, Thurman wrote "there is something that each one has to say to me that will make my life what it cannot be unless that person says it." Personal well being was, for Thurman, linked inextricably to the web of social relationships.[220]

Scholars have routinely cited the intellectual impact of interwar thinkers Reinhold Niebuhr, Richard Gregg, and Krishnalal Shirdharani on the development of a nonviolent politics in the 20th century.[221] But Howard Thurman's intellectual activity preceded these thinkers and, most importantly, Thurman established a link between religion, personal experience, and ethical action that would prove central to the politics of being that Bayard Rustin and James Lawson would later teach. His unique intellectual contributions surfaced from his ability to bring the experience of black Americans to bear directly on discussions of how one ought to live amidst the routine, legal, and systematic dehumanization of minority populations. In linking the personality, the individual and society, and the development of

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[218] Howard Thurman, "Finding God," 1927, PHWT, 111.

[219] ibid, 112.

[220] ibid, 112.

[221] See, for example, Perry, *Civil Disobedience: An American Tradition*, 182 - 216, 249, 285, and 314; Joseph Kip Kosek, *Acts of Conscience: Christian Nonviolence and Modern American Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 9, 179 - 181, and 239; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 171; Sean Scalmer, *Gandhi in the West: The Mahatma and the Rise of Radical Protest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 32; Meier and Rudwick, *CORE; A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968*, 6 and 13.

spiritual power, Thurman articulated in the 1920s how contemplation of one's infinite worth before God could beget courage, and how being one's self fully and freely could itself be an impactful social action amidst the disfiguring demands of Jim Crow. Thurman's intellectual work aids significantly our understanding of how the politics of being became a way of practicing nonviolent politics, adding a dimension of religious being missing from Richard Gregg's 1934 tactical treatment of "moral jiu jitsu" and augmenting significantly Rienhold Niebuhr's thesis about the struggle of "moral man" to be ethically in an "immoral society." By focusing on how religious experience could produce spiritual power, Thurman was concerned less with nonviolent "tactics" than the political implications of religious being amidst systematic and structural injustice.

In the late 1920s, Thurman developed an ethical framework specifically for black Americans who had, for centuries, faced white violence and discrimination. This deepening analysis led him to the premiere theme of his later work - "the religion of Jesus."[222] "If the religion of Jesus cannot purify human relations," Thurman wrote in 1928, "if it cannot teach men reverence for life and personality, then one of two attitudes is forced upon us: men have misunderstood its genius and upon embracing it discover that it is impotent, or they have deluded themselves into believing that they have embraced it when they have not."[223] Thurman's critique of Christians in 1920s America, a critique informed directly by the experience of black Americans, was becoming increasingly clear: like the pacifists with whom he maintained close contact, Thurman believed that the life of Jesus contained within it ways of being that so-called "Christians" either misunderstood or ignored. Black ministers,

[222] Among Thurman's most prominent work in this era is a reinterpretation of the spirituals. Walter Fluker has written that Thurman emphasized the "relevance of the spirituals as religious documents," suggesting that in them it is possible to evidence "the primacy of religious experiences" as "the basis of hope and the tools for survival in an otherwise hopeless situation." See Fluker in PHWT, 127.

[223] Howard Thurman, "The Message of the Spirituals," October 1928, PHWT, 132.

Thurman argued, should "assert continually the ethical demands of the religion of Jesus upon those who would walk on the earth by the light in the sky."[224] But this required a move away from creedal religion and a move towards lived religious experience – religious being. "It may be a very strengthening exercise to be concerned about the Trinity and the Apostle's Creed," Thurman wrote sardonically, "but a precise theological statement of what is involved in these may make no ethical demands upon him who states it."[225]

This call for a religion that makes ethical demands upon its practitioners is precisely what gave rise to Thurman's indictment of Christian pacifism and nonresistance. Pacifism, the refusal to fight, was too easily conceived as an excuse for a pious few to preserve their holiness at the expense of great evil's expansion. If one does not participate in war, the thinking went, then the stain of war is not upon one self. But Thurman argued that "the man who *attends* to evil that he may not fall heir to it becomes like it."[226] Pointing directly to Jim Crow, Thurman argued that whites must acknowledge their role as a dominant group in the US and must recognize also the attendant power that comes with this status. Whites possessed the power to legally control the behavior of black people in America, and they possessed the ability to muster both state violence and mob violence to enforce this mandate. If this very same white group develops "what they call a philosophy of pacifism that makes few, if any, demands upon their ethical obligations to minority groups with which they may be having contacts," then "such a philosophy becomes a mere quietus to be put into the hands of the minority to keep them peaceful and controllable."[227] To prescribe nonresistance to African Americans, to ask black Americans to subscribe to pacifism without

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[224] Howard Thurman, ""The Task of the Negro Minister," October PHWT, p. 142
[225] ibid.
[226] Thurman, ""Relaxation and Race Conflict," 146.
[227] Ibid, 145.

fully abandoning the power of white supremacy, meant that white pacifists were replicating the form of paternalistic domination inherent to Jim Crow and racism event if not its precise content.

Thurman's 1929 criticism of pacifism was an important advancement in thinking about how to use nonviolent politics in the struggle against white supremacy and Jim Crow. He rejected the idea that a passive philosophy developed and practiced by whites could be used by black Americans on the grounds that black Americans were routinely forced to contend with both the legal and mob violence. Given these circumstances, this counsel to passivity was, by itself, simply a counsel to accept such violence. Encouraging a minority group to adopt a "philosophy of pacifism" developed and encouraged by a "dominant group" harden replicated the paternalism that whites required black Americans to accept. And most critically, Thurman's critique contained within it the idea that the unique experience of black people in America might serve as the foundation for a way of being capable of transforming discrimination, violence, and cruelty.

Yet Thurman lauded also what he called the "genius" of pacifist thinking. "The philosophy of pacifism implies the will to share joyfully the common life and the will to love all - healing and creatively," he wrote, and this aligned well with Thurman's notion that human interdependence was key to human liberation. Because pacifism "springs out of a sense of the unity, the basic interrelation and the vast sacredness of all life," Thurman wrote, all people were bound together at the level of being – but capable also of growing and developing a unique personality. Pacifist thought also "has its roots in a primary *self-estimate*," Thurman wrote, "a self-awareness from which it gets its key to the life around it."

Hatred, on the other hand, "seems to spring out of a warped self-estimate."[228] The genius of pacifism was thus a rejection of the false premise of superiority – including race superiority – and it was this insight that might constitute the core of a "minority technique" for challenging racial injustice. Expanding further on the idea of a "primary self estimate," Thurman wrote that "white people who make up the dominant majority in American life must relax their will to dominate and control the Negro minority," a rejection of primary self estimate. "Second," Thurman continued, "Negroes must develop a minority technique, which I choose to call a technique of relaxation, sufficiently operating in group life to make for vast creativity with no corresponding loss in self respect."[229] Thurman called for black Americans to claim a new political technique, but noted that this technique could not contribute in any way to the continued degradation of black personality. Pacifism, therefore, could not be this technique because it seemed to confirm the idea that white people know best what black people ought do. However if the "will to dominate and control" is relaxed, Thurman wrote, "then the way is clear for spontaneous self-giving, for sharing all gratuitously." This "relaxation" could become a "very positive and dynamic" process, as "a group so disposed finds its security in a new kind of relationship." This new kind of relationship, this new set of social relations, could be built around mutuality undiminished by a warped self estimate of superiority.[230] Concluding his article sharply, Thurman wrote that "anything less than" a complete

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[228] ibid, 147.

[229] Thurman stated also: "perhaps this was is in the mind of the spiritual geniuses of the race who felt that a man *ought* to love his neighbor as he *ought* to love himself. This conception of pacifism means at least two things for Negroes and white people who must live together in America." ibid, 147.

[230] ibid, 149.

abandonment of superiority in mind or action "on the part of the dominant group is mere patronizing."[231]

Thurman's 1929 article was the first and most clear call for a move from the politics of pacifism towards a politics of nonviolent being in the black freedom struggle. Thurman called for a technique to "spring out of the life of the minority group itself," and suggested that "individual creative experimentation along with the actual harnessing of social forces" was necessary for developing this technique. He called for practices that were "formal and informal, direct and indirect, studied and spontaneous," but made clear that the successful use of this technique would require a "unique concept" of "indigenous" education – a key part of his attraction to a professorate at the Howard University School of Religion.[232]

In August of 1932, after Thurman accepted an invitation from Mordecai Johnson to serve at Howard University, Dean D. Butler Pratt formally welcomed Thurman with a letter indicating that the faculty at Howard sought to "avoid dogmatism." He noted that professors at the School of Religion are "distinctly modern" in their "attitude toward the Bible and theological questions," and Pratt told Thurman that faculty at Howard see their role as "searchers for the truth, rather than of the closed mind."[233] Citing the challenges faculty faced in teaching biblical literalists, Pratt told Thurman that the Howard approach to theological education must be done "sympathetically to some who hold to the literal views of tradition and need." Emphasizing the "actual study of the facts" as the best strategy "to open their minds to the historical method of approach," Pratt welcomed Thurman to Howard.[234]

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[231] ibid.
[232] ibid.
[233] D. Butler Pratt to Howard Thurman, 30 August 1932, PHWT, 168.
[234] ibid.

This historical approach to the study of the bible was a central tenet of Protestant modernist thought in the early 20th century. The historical approach to biblical studies also underwrote the new orientation of the Howard SOR as it sought to strengthen itself as a premiere site for the academic training and development of black clergy. Faculty and students at Howard grappled with the meaning of Jesus life within Jesus' own historical moment, attempting to understand how this understanding of the life of Jesus might be applied to contemporary religious life and problems. As the nation's oldest historically black university, Howard offered a unique context for discerning what Thurman called "the basic spiritual issues of our generation...the points of great tension" that defined much of modern life for black Americans. Articulating the "need to discover a sound hypothesis with reference to our attack" on racial violence and discrimination, Thurman cited as imperative the need to "enlist the youth as to name and spirit in our enterprise…creating machinery as the need arises..."[235] With old friend Mordecai Johnson at the helm, and with Benjamin E. Mays steering the School of Religion as Dean beginning in 1934, Thurman saw in Howard just the 'machinery' needed for mustering a youth cohort focused on using religion to topple Jim Crow.

Using a biblical historical methodology, Thurman issued his clearest articulation to date of how the religion of Jesus might combat racism in 1934. Returning again to the "social force" he first described in his 1928 indictment of pacifism, Thurman wrote that Christianity could be the spiritual force needed for mustering courageous personal action against oppressive regimes. Citing what he called the "historical facts" of Jesus of Nazareth's status as a "poor Jew" who was also "a member of a minority race, underprivileged and to a great

[235] Howard Thurman to Winnifred Wygal, 24 March 1934, PHWT, 179.

degree disinherited," Thurman declared that "Christianity" was "in its social genesis…a technique of survival for a disinherited minority."[236] Rather than a balm for the pain of a persecuted race, Thurman used historical context to make clear that the social and political forces facing the Nazarene in the first century were not terribly dissimilar to those facing black Americans in the 20th century.

Thurman was careful in arguing that Jesus' way of being in the world was not political by design, but instead provoked political and religious authorities of his day because his primary allegiance belonged to a power that transcended both state and religious figures. Jesus lived from "a transcending basis of security which locates its center in the very nature of life," Thurman argued, writing that Jesus was able to "act...as though his deeds were of the very essence of the eternal."[237] He harnessed spiritual power by acting from place of deep security - a security borne from a sober confrontation with "the hungry hound of hell that rarely ever leaves the track of the dispossessed," namely fear. As the basic principle of control used to dominate and determine the behavior of black Americans since 1619, fear was inculcated through the lash in slavery, the lynch rope in Jim Crow, and through routine sexual assault since the beginning of the African American journey. This fear - a fear familiar to Jews living beneath the pagan Roman Empire in the time of Jesus - led to what Thurman called "self-deception," an "intricate" and "subtle defense mechanism" that was inspired by "the terror of his present existence." Thurman argued that the continuing terror of slavery and Jim Crow inspired black Americans to "become a candidate for a glorious to-morrow, under a

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[236] Howard Thurman, "Good News for the Underprivileged," in Sterling Allen Brown, Arthur Paul Davis, and Ulysses Lee, editors, *The Negro Caravan: The American Negro, His History, and Literature* (New York: Arno Press, 1970), 687.
[237] Ibid, 688.

different order of existence," an otherworldly religion that flowed from the fact that the average black Americans was "having his hell now."[238]

Thurman called "sincerity" the antidote to this self-deception amidst terrifying and violent circumstances.[239] Calling sincerity the "cardinal virtue" of religion, Thurman argued that an honest personal assessment demands that every individual see "the far reaching significance of many of his simplest deeds" despite the violence and terror that seemed ubiquitous. Such an understanding, Thurman wrote, could lead to a "type of action [that] inspires courage and makes for genuineness at increasingly critical points," displacing the reflexive behaviors flowing from fear and leading instead to a commitment to "absorb violence...by the exercise of love."[240] In the life of Jesus, Thurman wrote, we can see a sincere belief in one's ability to act from a deep sense of security, a refusal of "compromise" with the disfiguring demands of state and religious leaders even unto death.

It was here that Thurman located the "good news for the disinherited" in the life of Jesus, clear evidence that Christianity should be understood as "a technique of survival for a disinherited minority." Jesus showed that accommodation and violence were not the only two ways to live beneath a violent and repressive regime. "Jesus was compelled to expand the boundaries of his citizenship out beyond the paltry political limitations of a passing Empire," Thurman wrote, claiming the identity "Son of God" and declaring allegiance to the infinite force that "caused his sun to shine upon Roman and Jew, free and bond."[241] All people are subservient to this infinite force far greater than "passing" state power, Thurman argued, and this was the good news. In claiming the identity "children of God," all people can act

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[238] Ibid, 690.
[239] Ibid, 691.
[240] Ibid, 691.
[241] Ibid, 687.

confidently in kindness and mercy amidst extraordinarily hostile conditions - just as Jesus did. Jesus' way of being amidst the violence and hostility of the Roman Empire were undergirded not only by "a healthy self-estimate" that flowed from "an inner-togetherness," but by a belief that "that *vengeance belongeth to God*." Judgement, retribution, punishment, and violence also, therefore, belonged to God.[242]

Thurman used this essay to make clear that the life of Jesus had much to say to black Americans facing violence and repression in 1934. He challenged forcefully the idea that the story of Jesus was one of patient suffering, of pacifism, and argued instead that Jesus was a political insurgent who defied the demands of an empire unto death. This thesis, produced while Thurman taught at Howard and served as Dean of the Chapel, inspired a number of young black religious intellectuals to probe deeper into the meaning of Jesus of Nazareth for the African American experience. This work among key students at Howard expanded Thurman's analysis and went further in arguing that Judeo-Christian thought emerged from an insurgent prophetic tradition. These ideas proved influential for a black clergy class committed to upending white supremacy in a nation that had long since routinized the practices of exploitation, discrimination, and violence directed at black people.

Dialectics in Black Religious Education

Three students of religion picked up on major themes in Thurman's work, a dialectical process of intellectual activity at Howard about how a nonviolent religious politics might be applied to the problems of white violence and racial discrimination in America. Each student picked up the principle of personality at the heart of Thurman's thought, concurring with Thurman that reverence for human personality was the anchor for ethical action. James

[242] Ibid, 689.

Russell Brown, who published his thesis in 1935, argued that an ethical way of being in the world ought not be grounded in reactions to oppressive regimes, but motivated instead by adherence to the "highest ideals" of the Judeo Christian tradition – citing Jesus of Nazareth as *leitmotif*. In his 1939 thesis, Lee C. Phillip wrote primarily about the ethical dimensions of nonviolent tactics like the boycott, emphasizing the possibilities of conversion in these pressure tactics over a politics of being. The possibility for conversion of one's enemy inherent in these nonviolent tactics were also of primary concern to Charles M. Campbell, whose 1941 thesis sought to square the psychosocial and religious ideas impacts of nonviolence with effective nonviolent political techniques. Taken together, these three students utilized the Howard School of Religion as a space for rigorous intellectual interrogation of how religious ideas might be joined to political practice in the struggle against racial violence and discrimination in the United States. They also suggest that by 1941, the alignment of nonviolent tactics with religious being was moving towards a more legible form.

In 1935, James Russell Brown published a Master's thesis entitled "An Examination of the Thesis that Christianity in its Genesis was a Technique of Survival for an Underprivileged Minority." Using a historical approach to the Bible, Brown wanted to prove Thurman's 1934 claim that Christianity was, in its origins, a way of being for a marginalized Jewish population in Greco-Roman that proved politically insurgent. But Brown also expanded on key themes in Thurman's work. In his interpretation of the Hebrew Bible, Brown emphasized the constant incursion of state power and economic forces into the religious and cultural life of the Jewish people, arguing that the Jewish prophets implored their people to live the highest ideals of Judaism amidst these secular encroachments. This

"prophetic tradition," Brown argued, included protest and self-sacrifice unto death for the cause of religious freedom.

Brown began his case with a clear and easily verifiable claim. "Christ was a Jew," Brown wrote, and "his religion was Judaism." But explaining the meaning of this statement required Brown to dive deeply into the long history of Judaism in the centuries before the birth of Jesus. "For generations," Brown wrote, "the Jews found themselves the political pawns of the large civilizations surrounding them." The challenge for this fledgling Jewish civilization was, according to Brown, maintaining their "democratic ideals of living" amidst the "dominating and 'crude' civilizations" in their midst.[243] Calling Israel "a minor nation" subject to the commercial interests of its unscrupulous neighbors, Brown wrote that Israel "found herself constantly subjected to the politics and living standards of her encroaching neighbors."[244]

Brown's effort to articulate "the political condition of Jews immediately before the birth of Jesus" included an explanation that religious freedoms were subsumed regularly to economic considerations and overrun by the violent requirements of a colonizing imperial power. By the first century BCE, Brown wrote, the Jewish people were "an underprivileged minority that had been politically, economically and religiously frustrated." They were taxed by the Roman state at the polls and they were taxed on salt. They paid a tax on land and a head tax on cattle, and they paid both a fruit tax and a crown tax. "Without their religion they could not live," Brown wrote, but "with their religion civilization would not let them live." Struggling to balance the mandate of their financial obligations to the state with their

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[243] James Russell Brown, "An Examination of the Thesis that Christianity in its Genesis was a Technique of Survival for an Underprivileged Minority," 1935, Howard University School of Religion Records, Masters Thesis, MSRC, HU, 15; 9.
[244] Ibid, 18.

"religious obligation to support Judaism," Brown stated that "it was in this situation that Jesus found himself and his people" dealing with a set of problems both "psychological" and "material" in nature.[245] The particular nature of this challenge meant that a personal religious solution must also be squared with a tactical political solution.

By the time Jesus of Nazareth was born in Bethlehem between 7 and 3 BCE, Rome was dealing with a Jewish people that was "economically exploited and religiously persecuted." But because a healthy contingent of the Jewish people simply refused to be "politically dominated," the Roman imperial state "was now dealing with the type of Jew who," in Brown's telling, "preferred death to Roman rule." This "Jewish underclass" was receptive to the message that Jesus delivered "about the disinherited, the outcasts and the underprivileged," and Jesus of Nazareth quickly isolated "the inadequacy" of the "solutions" proposed by other Jewish leaders to make clear to his people that the "Jewish Ethic...necessitated an entirely new approach" to the problem of Roman domination.[246] "The Jewish nation was facing utter annihilation at the hands of Rome during the first half of the first century, A.D," Brown writes, and it was in this context that Jesus developed "a technique of survival."[247]

"The reactions of Jesus" to this situation was, in Brown's words, "so different from that of the violence of the Zealots, the asceticism of the Essenes, the cultural compromise and political intrigue of the Sadducees, the legalism, self righteousness and hatred of the Pharisees that he must have had some basis for his different reactions."[248] Jesus possessed "a unique intellectual insight," Brown argued, an idea that Howard Thurman took up years later in great

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[245] Ibid, 36.
[246] Ibid, 51; ibid, 54.
[247] ibid, 54.
[248] ibid, 57.

detail in his description of the "personality of Jesus." Brown argued that the "mind of Jesus" was motivated by the desire to reclaim the highest religious ideal of Judaism, the predicate for Jesus' ability to act in kindness in the face of Roman cruelty.[249]

> The interplay of the mind of Jesus motivated by the highest Jewish ethic upon the facts involved in the problem lifted him above the standardized organization of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy could not hold within its banks 'the rushing freshets' of a life quickened by admitting the facts in the Jewish-Roman situation, the conservatism of Judaism, and the urgency of the Jewish ideal to reach a transcending moral quality sufficient to invalidate and annul the Jewish response of bitterness and hatred toward the Romans.[250]

Invalidating and annulling the reflexive reaction of bitterness and hatred, Brown argued that the response of Jesus flowed from a "proud spirit" having "exhausted itself" in the socio-political environment he faced. It was in this "state of humility," facing squarely what Brown called "the problem of extinction," that Jesus developed an active nonviolent response.

With "the highest ethic" surfacing in the mind of Jesus, his mind "was cleared of the habitual responses" of anger and violence – making way for "new insights." Employing a psychological analysis of the mind of Jesus, Brown wrote that

> Jesus was relieved....of the private forces of decay -- orthodox nationalism and chauvinism, and thus his natural capacities -- mind and emotions -- then could be absorbed and utilized by the higher power of his ideal, God. It was in this state of humility and insight that Jesus perceived that the method employed by the Jews was absolutely the reverse of what it should have been.

Jesus recognized that Jews, like their opponents, "were sinners and needed to repent." Such an admission of self-fault, Brown argued, led Jesus to approach Roman rulers with a mercy and forgiveness animated by humility.[251] Exhausted and contemplative before his God, Brown wrote that Jesus had discovered "a principle by which the highest religious ideal could

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[249] ibid.

[250] ibid, 58.

[251] ibid, 59.

survive and be utilized by mankind," a breakthrough that served to "open the kingdom of heaven to those who would believe and use this principle...to maintain their ideal."[252]

Much of Brown's thinking reflected Thurman's own intellectual work over the course of the 1920s and early 1930s. Brown's 1935 argument that Jesus' state of "humility" was produced by "exhaustion" with the demands of empire resembles Thurman's call for black and white people to "relax" will towards domination and violence. And like Thurman, Brown suggested that a majority attempt to impose its will on a minority was not only unethical, but raised the necessity of creative action for the minority. This new way that refused violence in an effort to "relieve" the "antagonism between the Jews and Romans" included the "forbidding [of] violence," and it was this nonviolence that made possible the "physical survival" of the Jewish people.[253] This "method" flowed from the "highest ideal" of the Jewish religion, namely the "principle which morally tied man to God," and mercy and kindness were practiced because all were "sons of the Father morally along with Jesus," and as "sons of the Father" all people were joined also "as brothers."[254] For Brown, this was the genius in the mind of Jesus: he showed the world how to embody the principle of "agape" love, what Brown called the "brotherliness of all men..." In the life of Jesus of Nazareth there was "a proposal to treat all men with this brotherly attitude," a requirement of "non-violence to Rome" but also "that the Jews should even love the Romans."[255] Brown argued that Jesus of Nazareth showed "the way" by which the Jewish people might "maintain their ideal": through acts of kindness, mercy, and forgiveness towards those who persecuted

[252] ibid, 60.
[253] ibid, 60.
[254] ibid, 60.
[255] ibid, 61.

them.[256] Brown showed that in the life of Jesus of Nazaeth, "love becomes the dominant working activity and principle," the embodiment of the Jewish commitment to live the "highest ethics possible" and thereby revealing the "highest moral relationship between the Jewish ideal and mankind."[257]

Brown's historical analysis of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament undergirded his major claim that it was the "peculiar position of the Hebrew nation among other nations that provoked Jesus' new insight." Amidst the failure of other religious strategies for dealing with the demands of empire, Brown argued "the disinherited" among the Jewish population "were especially in need of a new integrating attitude and force." And it was to this group that Jesus "first addressed his new attitude."[258] Concluding his thesis by suggesting that Jesus's life and work was an effort "to validate the integrity of the Jewish nation in the face of vast political, social, economic and religious frustrations," Brown argued that Jesus' life ought be understood as a "technique of survival" for a "disinherited religious minority." This, Brown argues, "became the genius of the Christian religion."[259]

Just four years after Brown completed his interrogation of the thesis that Christianity was in its origins a technique for the disinherited, Lee C. Phillip conducted "A Critical Study of Two Minority Techniques in the Light of Christian Principles" as a student of religion at Howard. Phillips had studied Christian Ethics at Union Theological Seminary under Reinhold Niebuhr from 1931 to 1933, and started his career as a chaplain at Prairie View A&M College where he taught classes in philosophy, psychology, and black history before returning to his studies at Howard. Beginning his thesis with the observation that "the average ministers feels

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[256] ibid, 60.
[257] Ibid, 61.
[258] ibid, 64.
[259] ibid, 64.

that it is in his duty to preach the Gospel and not bother with the social, economic, and political life of those to whom he ministers," Phillip set out to claim a new vision for black Christian ministry: "a minister is not preaching the Gospel if he pretends to look after men's souls and allows their bodies to go to hell."[260] Phillip interrogated the question of whether non-violent resistance and non-violent coercion might be ethical strategies for addressing the forces creating a hell on earth for black Americans. And while he sought to prove that "the dominant note in the teachings of Jesus was in favor of non-violent resistance," Phillip's treatise contrasted significantly with the work of Brown in its focus on acquiescence – rather than resistance – as a strategy of survival for persecuted populations.[261]

Phillip claimed "the genius of Christianity lies in reverence for personality."[262] Using the parable of the Good Samaritan, Phillip argued that Jesus' ethic commanded protection of human personality above all other considerations. Jewish law prohibited interaction between the Samaritan traveler and the priest who was robbed and left for dead, but Phillip argued that Jesus' ethic required that "HUMANITY took precedence over race, which again demonstrated the value placed upon ANY personality...ANYTHING which was contrary to man's freedom and fullest growth called forth his bitterest resentment."[263] Citing a second New Testament example, Phillip pointed to the parable of the Jewish man commanded to carry the load of a Roman sentry. Arguing that Jesus implored his followers to "resist not" such commands from authority, Phillip suggested that the Jewish man's willingness to carry the load should be understood as an effective technique for "a minority group who actually had to live with a

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[260] Lee C. Phillip, "A Critical Study of Two Minority Techniques in the Light of Christian Principles," 1939, Howard University School of Religion Records, Masters Thesis, MSRC, HU, iii.
[261] ibid, iv.
[262] ibid, 3.
[263] ibid, 4; ibid, 6.

majority group who actually imposed tasks upon them."[264] There were few options available to the individual commanded to carry the sentry's pack, Phillip argued, suggesting that a "person who uses this method of defense" – nonresistance – is unable to either "fight with violence" or "run away."[265] Pointing to the ethical impact that "going the extra mile" had on the Roman Sentry, Phillip argued that such accommodation can "invoke a sense of justice in the aggressor" and "save the personality of the user of non-resistance."[266] Bearing the load allowed and abiding by the command was an ethical response, Phillip argued, a way of being merciful and kind in the face of unjust demands.

And yet Phillip was less clear about how this method of non-resistance could be effectively used as a politics of resistance for Jewish people subject to often the violent demands of an empire. Throughout his thesis, Phillip's interpretation of Jesus life bordered on acquiescence as a method of survival - a method of "nonresistance to evil" disconnected from ideas about how this method could resist unjust majority state power. While Phillip argued that persecuted minorities ought to do "something constructive in the place of the destructive" – an idea that proved foundational to the politics of being – Phillip continually emphasized the importance of provoking sympathy from an aggressor or oppressor.[267] This strategy contrasts significantly with Brown's interpretation of Jesus' life. Brown emphasized that Jesus' way of being in the world became a new method for social transformation but Phillip, in emphasizing an 'opponent's' conversion, located the locus of transformation within the opponent – outside of the individual practitioner – and thus beyond one's own being.

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[264] ibid, 6.
[265] ibid, 12.
[266] ibid, 13.
[267] Ibid, 16.

Phillip did, however, advance discourse around nonviolent politics by contrasting nonresistance with nonviolent resistance. Calling nonviolent resistance "a more aggressive technique," a forceful and coercive method clearly evident in a boycott, Phillip argued that "some form of pressure must be used by minorities to secure their ends."[268] Yet he ultimately derided boycotts as "difficult for the Negro en masse to use because generally he is too completely dependent upon the people against whom it would have to be directed."[269] Perhaps predictably, Phillip's chief critique of boycotts centered around their inability to convert the opponent. "The true basis of nonviolent coercion results ultimately in changing the purpose and desires of the opponent so that finally they both realize that the results are for both of their common good." In levying an opponent's livelihood against him or her, Phillip argued, the boycott ultimately failed to produce the recognition of common purpose essential to an effective politics of conversion.[270]

While Phillip, like Brown, concerned himself with a strategy for liberation, his analysis differed significantly with regard to the issue of conversion. Phillip concerned himself with how tactics of resistance could lead to a conversion, a change in the other, while Brown wrote about how to change oneself and one's own way of being in the world. The external political impact of this way of being was, in Brown's telling, secondary to the personal importance of reclaiming a religious ideal. For Brown, Jesus' decision to be merciful, loving, and kind was the end itself – and this line of argumentation about how to be in the world linked him directly to a prominent strain of thought in the pacifist intellectual tradition. But Brown expanded significantly on the thinking of white pacifists by beginning

[268] ibid, 27.
[269] ibid, 28; ibid, 34.
[270] ibid, 38.

his analysis with the fact that Jesus was a persecuted minority. This lens of analysis allowed Brown to see in the story of Jesus a context that resembled the situation facing black Americans in the 1930s, the first step to envisaging an innovative, nonviolent response that could be used by black Americans. Brown's work also underlined a core ethic in the politics of being: just as war resisters did not fight because it betrayed their religious beliefs, Jesus could not be violent because it violated the highest ideal of his religion. This ethic of Jesus was grounded in a way of being that was itself an articulation of the world as it should be, and Brown's ability to express this way of being as politically insurgent was pioneering.

This distinction between the intellectual work of Brown and Phillip is crucial as it reflects a larger inflection point in black religious approaches to white supremacy. Brown and Thurman, like white pacifists, emphasized the living one's highest religious ideals despite the restraints of one's political and social culture. These ways of being were not a reaction to the world as it was, a response to the incursion of Imperial Rome or white supremacy, but were instead an attempt to live fully and vibrantly one's most deeply held beliefs in a society that sought to control nearly every aspect of one's life. This work by Thurman and Brown suggested that a religious being could become a way of doing nonviolent politics. But these politics were not simply "a protest" against Rome or white supremacy as they were not, in their intent, a reaction to their context. Instead, Brown and Thurman began to articulate how living fully and freely in the context of an empire was an effective form of political insurgency.

The term "protest" thus does not adequately capture the meaning of such politics. Characterizing the religious politics articulated by Thurman and Brown as "protest" misses what these thinkers described as "the genius" of the religion of Jesus. These thinkers saw the

mercy and kindness and active forgiveness in the life of Jesus of Nazareth as a way of being that protected human personality – one's own and one's enemy – and which proved more powerful than the violence of empire as embodied in the crucifixion of Jesus. This way of being created a profound rupture in human history, splitting time in two, and establishing also a profound example for black Americans seeking to end Jim Crow. Neither Romans nor white people were the motivation or the target of these ways of being, although Bayard Rustin and James Lawson would concern themselves more directly with how to use these religious ways of being for purposes that were explicitly political. In the work of Phillip work of Phillip, concerned as it was with the tactics of conversion, there is a hint at how these ways of nonviolent being would begin to be used for explicitly political purposes.

Finally, in his 1941 thesis, Charles M. Campbell attempted a kind synthesis between the work of Brown and Phillip. Campbell joined the religious ideas at the heart of Brown's work with the tactics under consideration in the work of Phillip, drawing on historical precedents to argue that these nonviolent ideas and methods that worked across the world ought to be imparted immediately to black youth in America. In "Educating Young People on the Philosophy and Technique of Nonviolence," Campbell called nonviolence "a social concept that has at its basic and paramount objective a social order without tanks, long-range guns, bombing planes, battleships; a social order that places supreme worth on human personality."[271] Campbell emphasized human personality as the connective tissue between races – just as the pacifists and Thurman and Brown and Phillip did before him – and Campbell gestured to Gandhi's Hindu background in defining "complete non-violence" as the

[271] Charles M Campbell, "Educating Young People on the Philosophy and Technique of Nonviolence," 1941, Howard University School of Religion Records, Masters Thesis, MSRC, HU, preface.

"complete absence of ill-will against all that lives."[272] Calling for "the use of social pressure or moral force to settle a conflict," Campbell defined nonviolent methods as the practice of "humility, love, compassion and forgiveness."[273]

Campbell's work stood out from the work of the other two Howard students in its survey of early 20th century sources on nonviolence. He echoed Phillip in emphasizing the impact of nonviolence on one's opponent, drawing on what Richard Gregg called "moral jiu-jitsu," and he argued that the use of "kindness" and "voluntary suffering" means "the attacker loses his moral balance."[274] He credited pacifists with originating the idea that nonviolent politics must not be "divisive," and ought only include those things "consistent with spiritual unity."[275] And he drew on the labor movement for examples of nonviolent conflict, writing that the boycott had been their chief tactic. But like Phillip before him, Campbell remained skeptical of the boycott – suggesting that labor activists were largely "retaliatory" in their use of the boycott.[276] Arbitration, civil disobedience, and non-cooperation rounded out Campbell's typology of non-violent methods, a succinct effort to give "a comprehensive meaning" to the many forms of nonviolent conflict.[277]

Like Phillip, conversion was the driving principle of Campbell's argument about nonviolence. But unlike Phillip, Campbell gave significant attention to the ideas that animated nonviolent tactics. He also did pioneering work at Howard by drawing on historical precedents from a variety of global contexts to articulate how a religious way of being in the world could, itself, become a political force. Unsurprisingly, foremost among Campbell

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[272] Ibid, 22;
[273] ibid, 22.
[274] ibid, 23.
[275] ibid, 24.
[276] ibid, 24.
[277] Ibid, 38.

examples of this principle was Gandhi's work in South Africa and India. Quoting Gandhi, Campbell wrote that "Satyagraha excludes the use of violence because man is not capable of knowing absolute truth and therefore not competent to punish."[278] Campbell emphasized how Gandhi integrated religious being with nonviolent political action, perhaps the Mahatma's most significant accomplishment. Gandhi's nonviolence grew from his belief that people depended on one another to apprehend truth. A physical assault on another person was, therefore, tantamount to coercing an individual person to see the world a certain way. Truth is something people attain together, Gandhi argued, through social processes that – in the words of some of the black students and faculty at the Howard School of Religion - might only emerge through a mutual respect for personality. It was this idea, the notion that social relations predicated on a mutual reverence for personality led to a better society, which joined students of religion at Howard with Gandhi, with Howard Thurman, with the early 20th century pacifists, and with the larger discursive projects of American pragmatism and Protestant Modernism.

The Christian Antithesis – American Christianity

In a 1941 study entitled "The Relation Between Religion and Racism with Special Reference to the American Scene," James L. Farmer, Jr. examined "the racial brotherhood idea by religion in general" with a dedicated focus on "Christianity with reference to the American scene." Like his classmates in the School of Religion at Howard that preceded him in writing about the relationship between social action and religion, Farmer addressed whether "religion is eternally allied with the status quo." It is "not infrequently the case among oppressed peoples," Farmer argued, that if "their life values are of revolutionary content, then

[278] ibid, 37.

their religion tends to possess revolutionary character." Farmer accused Karl Marx of being "mistaken in his observation concerning religion," arguing that religion in general had not been a social opiate. Had Marx been "speaking to a specific situation and had no intention of declaring a universal principle," Farmer wrote, then perhaps he would have been right. But Marx was speaking of religion in general - to which Farmer took exception – claiming that Judaism and Christianity were revolutionary systems of thought and action.[279]

Like James Russell Brown, Farmer - whose thesis benefited from the criticism and input of Howard Thurman - drew on the Hebrew Bible to document how religion inspired social insurgency. "Had Marx forgotten about the revolutionary Jewish sect, the Zealots?" he asked rhetorically. "Had he forgotten about the radicalism of Jesus and the early Christians? Was he unaware of the Peasant Revolt, unmindful of the many utopian sects which were in (Marx's own) time tearing through the Old World and the New, proclaiming a fierce, millennialist communism which terrified the ruling classes…" Concluding pointedly, Farmer wrote that "only the ridiculously obtuse will contend that they are mere exceptions to the rule."[280]

Farmer did concede, however, that it was possible that "the social role of religion has been to bridle the reactions of the people." But "its functional purpose," he argued, "has been to conserve the life values accepted by the dominant element within the religious group at any given time." In the United States, for example, a "priestly religion" had "maintained the racial values of the secular world which, in the American scene, is a rigid color caste system." This meant that "American Christianity," Farmer continued, had accepted "the

[279] James L. Farmer, Jr., "The Relation Between Religion and Racism With Special Reference to Christianity and the American Scene," 1941, Howard University School of Religion Records, Masters Thesis, MSRC, HU, ii.
[280] ibid, 112.

validity of racial distinctions, and placed the stamp of God upon an enforced division of mankind."[281] Calling this tendency fundamentally "opposed...to the teachings of Christ," Farmer suggested that America's racialized Christianity was the opposite of "the racelessness which (Jesus') religion was designed to foster...the true purpose for the very existence of Christianity has now given way to its antithesis."[282] Farmer called for a prophetic religion to "drive the non-prophetic group onto the progressive requirements of a new age." And speaking specifically of "the masses of American Negroes, particularly in the South, despite many efforts to turn their eyes to radical secular movements," these black southerners "continue to look to the church for leadership. But," he cautioned, "under the prevailing conditions, their loyalty cannot permanently endure; the bidders are too many, and the bidding too high."

On the eve of the Second World War, as A. Philip Randolph began to call for a March on Washington and the *Pittsburgh Courier* called for a double victory – victory over fascism at home and abroad - Farmer's call to head off "radical secular movements" echoed Howard Kester's warnings to the Fellowship of Reconciliation in the mid 1930s. The appeal of Communism for Americans both black and white had diminished significantly following the 1939 non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and fascist Germany, and the persistence of racial violence in the United States and the continued segregation of nearly all aspects of US life pushed black Americans to look for effective mobilization options in wartime America. Searching for new political methods, Randolph called for widespread nonviolent direct action in the MOWM while the interracial Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized itself around the principles of nonviolence in the early 1940s.

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[281] ibid, 114.
[282] ibid, 114.

But in 1941, the method by which nonviolent religious ideas might be linked to a political strategy for ending racial violence and discrimination had yet to be clearly established. As a way of being nonviolent in the world, pacifism provided an ontological framework that, when combined the insurgency in the lives of Jesus and Gandhi, established new precedents for how nonviolent being could be sharpened into social movement politics. But deploying these religious ways of nonviolent being as a domestic movement strategy took required collective learning and practice. Interracial nonviolent institutes sponsored by the Fellowship of Reconciliation in cities across the Midwest became movement spaces where activists learned and practiced the politics of being as a active nonviolent insurgency against Jim Crow. The pacifist notion of reverence for human personality, the idea that Christianity was in its origins a religion for the persecuted, and the reclamation of a centuries-long prophetic tradition were ideas that Quaker activist Bayard Rustin linked intentionatlly with the direct action labor tactic of the sit-down. With the Second World War raging half a world a way, in these nonviolent institutes this direct action tactic was fused to inter-racialism and Christianity as movement ideals – a joining of religious ideas and nonviolent tactics which that animated the politics of being.

Chapter 3

From Pacifism to Resistance:
The Evolution of Nonviolence in Wartime America

The scholarly work produced on Black insurgency outside the U.S. South prior to the Montgomery Bus Boycott has served not simply to change the spatial origins and chronology of Black resistance to white supremacy in the years before *Brown v. Board of Education* – effectively shattering any linear narrative of a singular "civil rights movement."[283] This literature has also shifted causal explanations for much of the massive mobilization of African Americans in the 1950s and 1960s toward interwar developments that took place outside the former confederacy.[284] A growing body of transnational literature has been particularly effective in suggesting that organized resistance to U.S. racism linked American activists to their anticolonial counterparts in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. Studies on the role of the United Nations in effecting a global shift in racial discourse after 1945 and the links between Black Americans and African independence movements have proven especially strong.[285]

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[283] Much of this work was well underway or completed before Jacquelyn Down Hall called for "longer and broader narratives" of the Black freedom struggle in "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History*, 91, no. 4 (2005). See, for classic examples, Meier and Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement*; Meier and Rudwick, eds., *Along the Color Line, Explorations in the Black Experience*; August Meier and Elliott M. Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*.

[284] Risa Lauren Goluboff, *The Lost Promise of Civil Rights*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North*, (New York: Random House, 2008); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation before the Civil Rights Movement in the South*, (New York: Knopf, 1994); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008).

[285] Nico Slate, "From Colored Cosmopolitanism to Human Rights: A Historical Overview of the Transnational Black Freedom Struggle," *Journal of Civil and Human Rights*, 1, no. 1 (2015): 3-24; Duziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*; Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Penny M. Von Eschen, Satchmo *Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play*

Missing, however, from this otherwise excellent work about organized resistance to white supremacy before 1955 is a sustained exploration of two critical phenomena: first, how pacifism evolved into nonviolence, and second how the politics of being became an effective way of doing nonviolence for religious people in The United States. Characters critical to the intellectual and strategic evolution of nonviolence and nonviolent direct action appear regularly in these studies--Pauli Murray, A. Philip Randolph, and Bayard Rustin.[286] But this chapter illuminates the process by which the idea of pacifism -- a notion rooted clearly primarily in white religious traditions -- evolved into a legible political philosophy of nonviolence with broad appeal for activists in the Black freedom struggle. Secondly, this chapter suggests that the politics of being emerged as an effective way of doing nonviolence as black activists under the leadership of A. Philip Randolph joined with white pacifists from the Fellowship of Reconciliation to experiment with nonviolent direct action tactics across the industrial Midwest. Relying broadly on social movement theory and original archival research, this chapter argues that nonviolence in the 1940s made a clear break from pacifism due primarily to the intellectual and organizational work of Bayard Rustin. It suggests also

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the Cold War; Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*; Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*; Kevin Kelly Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana*; Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize*; Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals*.

[286] For examples, see Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); William Powell Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013); David Lucander, *Winning the War for Democracy: The March on Washington Movement, 1941-1946*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Kevin Michael Kruse and Stephen G. N. Tuck, eds., *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*; Bynum, *A. Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights*; Paula F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); Andrew Edmund Kersten, *A. Philip Randolph: A Life in the Vanguard*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007); Sarah Azaransky, *The Dream Is Freedom: Pauli Murray and American Democratic Faith*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*, (New York: Free Press, 2003). See also Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*;

that in wartime nonviolent institutes, the politics of being crystalized as a way of practicing nonviolence to undermine Jim Crow.[287]

This chapter examines these "interracial and interchurch" workshops held in communities across the United States beginning in 1943. Founded by the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) under the leadership of A. J. Muste and John Swomley, and in collaboration with A. Philip Randolph and the March on Washington Movement (MOWM), these "nonviolent institutes" were organized around the ambitious goal of ending racial discrimination through nonviolent direct-action campaigns in local communities.[288] While other scholars have taken note of this collaboration between the FOR and the MOWM, this study suggests that their partnership sparked an important moment of interracial collaboration, an intentional movement strategy designed to bolster local efforts to develop nonviolence into a political weapon used in cities across the United States to erode Jim Crow segregation.[289] The methodology required being nonviolent while practicing direct action tactics. In a moment of total war and facing increasing racial violence domestically, radical pacifists and

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[287] Dennis C. Dickerson, "African American Religious Intellectuals and the Theological Foundations of the Civil Rights Movement, 1930-55," *Church History*, 74, no. 2 (2005): 217-35; Leilah C. Danielson, "'In My Extremity I Turned to Gandhi': American Pacifists, Christianity, and Gandhian Nonviolence, 1915-1941," *Church History*, 72, no. 2 (2003): 361-88; Leilah Danielson, *American Gandhi: A. J. Muste and the History of Radicalism in the Twentieth Century*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Kip Kosek, *Acts of Conscience*; Sean Chabot, *Transnational Roots of the Civil Rights Movement: African American Explorations of the Gandhian Repertoire*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012); Scalmer, *Gandhi in the West*; Kapur, *Raising Up a Prophet*; Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, (New York: Free Press, 1986); Morris, "A Retrospective on the Civil Rights Movement: Political and Intellectual Landmarks."

[288] Both Bayard Rustin and the FOR were explicit about the importance of building an interracial and interchurch movement. As Rustin wrote in 1943, "The formation of an inter-racial, inter-church organization" in communities across the United States "is of great importance not only because as a demonstrated united group your expressions of concern carry more weight but also because of the personal inspiration such an organization offers meeting individual parish problems." Bayard Rustin, "What Can Ministers Do to Forward the Cause of Inter-Racial Hebrew Christian Brotherhood?" October 1943, BRP, folder "Race Relations Institutes 1940s," reel 5.

[289] For more on this, see Chabot, *Transnational Roots of the Civil Rights Movement*, 2.

African American activists hastened the development of what Bayard Rustin called the "moral equivalent of war."[290]

Rustin was the primary national organizer of these local institutes, and he served as the intellectual architect of their content. Conceived as a blend of instruction, debate, and active experimentation with nonviolent being and direct action tactics in a variety of local contexts, these institutes were early iterations of what social movement scholars have called "movement schools," spaces where debate about nonviolence and experimentation with direct action tactics contributed to the diffusion of new movement ideas and practices within local populations.[291] The most critical process within these institute movement schools was what social theorist Sean Chabot has called "collective learning."[292] For national organizers, collective learning outcomes included increased clarification about the ideas that best motivated activists to take personal risks, which nonviolent tactics are most readily learned and practiced, and which sites might be most effectively targeted by nonviolent tactics. For local organizers, this collective movement learning in nonviolent institutes across the United States in the early 1940s was critical to harnessing the political potential as well as understanding the limitations of interracial nonviolent action in the struggle against Jim Crow segregation. The ideas, tactics, and workshop formats devised in these 1940s institutes proved also to be a critical precursor to Fellowship staff member James M. Lawson, Jr., a

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[290] Rustin writes, "[T]he failure of pacifist organizations in this country who have concerned themselves with denunciations of war and the causes of war has been to develop a moral equivalent of war." Bayard Rustin, "The Green Revolution--'Forward to the Land' or Recentralism--A Way Out," session number 5, April 16, 1944, BRP, folder "FOR," reel 5.

[291] For a discussion of how this process worked in a different context, see Larry W. Isaac, Daniel B. Cornfield, Dennis C. Dickerson, James M. Lawson, Jonathan S. Coley, "'Movement Schools' and Dialogical Diffusion of Nonviolent Praxis: Nashville Workshops in the Southern Civil Rights Movement," *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, 34 (2012): 155-84.

[292] Chabot, *Transnational Roots of the Civil Rights Movement*, esp. 3-4. Chabot defines collective learning in part as the "growth in the ability of African American groups and their allies to understand, reinvent, and communicate the Gandhian repertoire of nonviolent resistance, and apply it in collective struggles against racial segregation in the United States."

figure who was essential to diffusing the politics of being as a methodology for nonviolent revolt against Jim Crow in the late 1950s.

Streams of Intermovement Influence

Historians have begun recently to explore the links between India's struggle against the British Empire and the Black freedom struggle in the United States. Nico Slate has argued that resistance ideology flowed mutually between the United States and India in the decades before the Second World War, citing the anticolonial sensibilities of Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. DuBois as evidence that connections between India and the United States are part of a "larger history of racism and anti-racism, of empire and anti-imperialism, of civil rights and human rights."[293] Sean Scalmer has done important work documenting how Gandhi was perceived by Western audiences during his life, arguing that the *Pittsburgh Courier* and *Chicago Defender* were two among many Black newspapers serving as primary sources of diffusion for Gandhi's image and ideas among Black Americans. Scalmer, like Slate, argues that understanding the relationship between India and the United States requires "a history not just of individuals and nations, but also of connections, campaigns, and international flows."[294] Sudarshan Kapur rightly privileges the flow of people--and in particular Black religious intellectuals--as a critical conduit for the exchange of movement ideas and tactics between India and the United States. Kapur argues that these teachers and preachers transmitted the ideas they encountered in India to large Black audiences on their return to the

[293] Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitan*, 3.
[294] Scalmer, *Gandhi in the West*, 5.

United States, suggesting that these 1930s pilgrimages were important precursors to what radical pacifist Muste called the "Gandhian Moment" of 1941.[295]

But while each of these historians offers ample evidence for linkages between anticolonial movements in India and the struggle for Black freedom in the United States, less attention has been given to the question of "how [these] different social movements affect one another."[296] In his book *Transnational Roots of the Civil Rights Movement*, Chabot takes up precisely this question by looking for the mechanisms by which ideas about nonviolence and nonviolent tactics were dispersed transnationally in the years before the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Chabot suggests that U.S. activists intent on "adopting Gandhian forms of discourse, organizing, and action on American soil" developed a "Gandhian Repertoire" of contentious politics through "trial and error" using noncooperation techniques.[297] He argues that U.S. activists in the early 1940s engaged in "collective learning" about Gandhi's social movement techniques through experimentation with this "foreign repertoire" while on domestic soil.[298]

But nonviolent noncooperation and mass mobilization were not completely foreign to U.S. activists with backgrounds in the church, the labor movement, and the long struggle for Black freedom. Chabot's suggestion that collective learning was critical to the diffusion of

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[295] Kapur, *Raising Up a Prophet*; Kosek, *Acts of Conscience*, 85-112; A. J. Muste, "The World Task of Pacifism" in *The Essays of A. J. Muste*, ed. Nat Hentoff (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 215 - 234. Also see Quinton Hosford Dixie and Peter R. Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World: Howard Thurman's Pilgrimage to India and the Origins of African American Nonviolence*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011); Gerald Horne, *The End of Empires: African Americans and India*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 98-124; Chabot, *Transnational Roots of the Civil Rights Movement*, 74.

[296] David S. Meyer and Nancy Whittier, "Social Movement Spillover," *Social Problems*, 41, no. 2 (1994): 278. See also Larry Isaac and Lars Christiansen, "How the Civil Rights Movement Revitalized Labor Militancy," *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 5 (2002): 722–46; Larry Isaac, Steve McDonald, and Greg Lukasik, "Takin' It from the Streets: How the Sixties Mass Movement Revitalized Unionization," *American Journal of Sociology* 112, no. 1 (2006): 46–96. Also see Peter Stamatov, "Activist Religion, Empire, and the Emergence of Modern Long-Distance Advocacy Networks," *American Sociological Review*, 75, no. 4 (2010): 618; Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[297] Chabot, *Transnational Roots of the Civil Rights Movement*, 4.

[298] Ibid., 3-4.

contentious nonviolent techniques for fighting racial discrimination in the early 1940s is correct, but the most significant collective learning occurred within and among white religious pacifists and African American activists interested in organizing and sustaining local nonviolent campaigns. This chapter instead argues that a Gandhian "frame alignment" sparked by the Second World War initiated concerted interracial collaboration between these otherwise distinct movements.

Defined as the "linkage" or coupling of "interpretive orientations" among both individuals and social movement organizations, movement theorists describe frame alignment as a process wherein the "interests, values and beliefs" as well as the "activities, goals, and ideology" of distinct movement actors become aligned.[299] The early 1940s and, in particular, the Second World War were critical to aligning a primarily white pacifist movement and the all black March on Washington Movement (MOWM). For A. Philip Randolph and the MOWM, Gandhi's militant challenge to British imperial power during the Quit India campaign of 1942 offered a stunning example of effective mass mobilization for a nonwhite population facing racialized discrimination and violence. For A. J. Muste, Bayard Rustin, and the pacifist FOR, Gandhi's religious commitment to nonviolence became a world-renowned illustration of a nonviolent politics that could serve as the "moral equivalent of war." Because a religious politics of nonviolent mass mobilization was at the heart of Gandhi's 1942 "Quit India" campaign, this international precedent drew together these previously divided movements and ignited an interracial and nonviolent effort to end racial discrimination and violence in the United States.

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[299] David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford Jr., Stephen K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford, "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," *American Sociological Review*, 51, no. 4 (1986): 464.

In the summer of 1942, unconvinced by British promises of independence after the Second World War, Mohandas Gandhi and the All-India Congress Committee demanded immediate independence from Britain and threatened a national campaign of civil disobedience if British authorities refused. This call to "Quit India" included localized noncooperation campaigns across the country, a phenomenon historian Judith Brown has characterized as "a flotilla of rafts colliding with a battleship."[300] More than ninety thousand were arrested as Indians made salt, boycotted British courts and schools, avoided the use of foreign cloth and liquor, and--in extreme cases--refused to pay taxes and rent to British authorities.[301]

The Quit India campaign of 1942 energized Randolph's long-standing commitment to the politics of collective action and mass mobilization--strategies endemic to the American labor movement of which he had long been a part. Randolph's threat to bring thousands of African Americans in a march on Washington led President Franklin D. Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941. The executive order required any military contractor doing business with the federal government to desegregate its workforce, and it created the Fair Employment Practice Committee to ensure compliance. Randolph responded to Roosevelt's action by canceling the march on Washington, but he channeled the energy of his well-established network of local activists into mass meetings across the U.S. North in 1942. The largest of these meetings took place in June 1942 as more than eighteen thousand people gathered in Madison Square Garden to demand an end to "all discriminatory practices in jobs,

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[300] Judith Brown, *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 311-12.

[301] Arthur Hernan, *Gandhi & Churchill: The Epic Rivalry That Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age*, (New York: Random House, 2008), 495; Bidyut Chakrabarty, "Political Mobilization in the Localities: The 1942 Quit India Movement in Midnapur," *Modern Asian Studies*, 26, no. 4 (1992): 791-814.

housing or otherwise."[302] In his address to the crowd, Randolph cited the spiritual fortitude of Gandhi in imploring the assembled group to "fight, sacrifice, go to jail and, if need be, die" to win freedom from ongoing racial violence and discrimination. He called on Black Americans to recognize their "moral obligation . . . to demand . . . civil and political rights" and cited India as proof that "the Negro people are not the only oppressed section of mankind. . . . India's fight is the Negro's fight."[303]

Gandhi's ability to mobilize large numbers of Indians illuminated new possibilities for Randolph and his mass movement of local delegates, a Gandhian appeal palpable among black thinkers as early as the 1920s. This ethical mobilization of a massive grassroots network proved to be a powerful alternative to violence. For the radical pacifists seeking for decades an effective "method" that squared means and ends, the Indian leader's commitment to a militant politics of nonviolence proved particularly inspiring.[304] "There is a mantra, a short one," Gandhi told the Indian National Congress at Gowalia Tank in Bombay shortly before it voted to support the Quit India campaign of 1942. "You imprint it on your heart and

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[302] "Wake Up Negro America" flier, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Library of Congress (LOC) Manuscript Collections, Washington, DC [hereafter Randolph Papers], box 26, folder "MOWM Press Releases 1942–1946."

[303] A. Philip Randolph keynote address, MOWM Proceedings of Conference Held in Detroit, September 26–27 1942, Series A-3, box 15, folder "March on Washington," FOR, SCPC, 1-4.

[304] The Quit India campaign revealed concentric movement space between Randolph's movement and the pacifist FOR. This moment of collaboration between the MOWM and the FOR has either been incorrectly chronicled or, more commonly, dismissed. Despite the quality of her work on A. Philip Randolph, Cynthia Taylor incorrectly posits that A. J. Muste spoke at the MOWM's first national meeting in 1943. See Taylor, *A. Philip Randolph*, (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 170. JoAnn Robinson says simply that the MOWM and the FOR "used" one another to pursue their distinct goals. See JoAnn O. Robinson, *Abraham Went Out: The Biography of A. J. Muste*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 115. Joseph Kip Kosek cites meeting minutes from a FOR meeting to assert that Muste believed the MOWM was "a challenge to us," Kosek, *Acts of Conscience*, 184. Although Taylor at times gets the facts wrong, she does more than either Kosek or Robinson to explain the connections between the FOR and the MOWM. Kosek argues that "race logic" prevented important collaboration between the MOWM and the FOR, and Robinson underplays the significance of their intermovement exchange in crafting and diffusing a new protest ideology. Neither of these approaches captures this important attempt at intermovement collaboration between the FOR and MOWM.

let every breath of yours give an expression to it. The mantra is 'do or die.'"[305] Such militant politics of collective nonviolence had earlier divided pacifists in the United States and Britain, with British pacifists claiming that Gandhi used coercive tactics during his 1930 "salt satyagraha" to bend British authorities to his will. Citing the idea of "nonresistance" from the fifth chapter of Matthew in the New Testament, British pacifists argued that Jesus called for the complete denunciation of force. They suggested Gandhi's forceful notion of satyagraha was not "pacifism in the Christian sense. . . . His is not the way of Christ as we have seen it."[306]

A. Philip Randolph disagreed with these British pacifists in his understanding of Jesus, an important factor that also linked him to A.J. Muste and the Fellowship in the 1940s.[307] As historian Cynthia Taylor contends, most scholarship on Randolph "as an atheist and anti-religious distorts the complexities of his relationship to African American religion." Taylor points to the role of local churches across the US in Randolph's effort to organize the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) - the nation's "first successful black trade union" - arguing Randolph "never strayed far from his African Methodist roots."[308] Randolph saw in the life of Jesus a "revolutionary ministry of the brotherhood of man," and he pointed to Richard Allen's walkout during a segregated Methodist church service in 1787 as the first step

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[305] Mohandas Gandhi, "Do or Die" Speech, August 8, 1942, http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/indians-campaign-full-independence-quit-india-campaign-1942-1943, accessed April 27, 2014). For examples of how some Christians actually interpreted such forceful action as following in the way of Jesus, see *Matthew and Empire*: *Initial Explorations*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2001)

[306] Wallis, *Valiant for Peace*, 83. For Gandhi's contention that satyagraha is the opposite of pacifism, see M. K. Gandhi, *Nonviolent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, (Mineola: Dover Press, 2001), 6.

[307] Paula Pfeffer calls Randolph an atheist multiple times throughout her 1996 text despite Randolph's intimate relationship with religious thought and the church throughout his life. Paula Pfeffer, *A Philip Randolph: Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement*, (Baton Rogue, 1996), 7, 63, 84.

[308] Taylor, *A. Philip Randolph: The Religious Journey of an African American Labor Leader* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 2. On the all black character of the BSCP see Bynum, *A. Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010): "Randolph never considered the organization of all-black unions as an end unto itself. Rather, he viewed the Brotherhood as one key step in the process of drawing black workers more deeply into the American labor movement," p. 105.

in bringing down the "iniquitous partition wall of racial proscription and segregation in the Christian Church."

These religious sensibilities created a link between Randolph and A. J. Muste, a Congregationalist minister frustrated by passivity in the face of state-sanctioned violence against labor demonstrators and searching for a way "forward from pacifism."[309] From his role in founding the US-FOR in 1918 with the hopes of ending violent conflict, the Dutch-born Muste drifted toward a "qualified defense of labor violence" as a Trotskyist before returning to pacifism.[310] In his 1936 essay, "Return to Pacifism," Muste suggested that only the complete abolition of violence could be a true revolution for humanity.[311] Just a year later, Muste reflected positively on the political potential of recent factory occupations by industrial workers. He expressed trepidation with the relatively new tactic of "sit-downs and lie-downs" but lauded "the spiritual qualities of men who will subject themselves for over forty days to the stern rigors of a sit-down."[312]

The sit-down strike proved to be a critical development for nonviolent mass mobilizations in the United States and an inspiration for both Muste and Randolph, Following a strike at the Akron Rubber Plant in February 1936, sit-downs, lie-downs, and stay-ins increased rapidly. By the end of 1938, the "sit-down strike" had been used in more than five hundred labor conflicts across the United States.[313] These tactical innovations aligned well

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[309] Bayard Rustin used this phrase in his 1944 prison seminars to describe his belief in the need to develop new nonviolent methodologies. See Bayard Rustin, "Seminar Material Proposed in Prison, Crime Prevention and Pacifist Philosophy and Action," n.d., Rustin Papers, folder "FOR," reel 5.

[310] Robinson, *Abraham Went Out*, 64. The FOR was founded in England in August 1914. Muste founded the U.S. affiliate in November 1915. The distinction is an important one, as the organizations would reach different conclusions about pacifism and nonviolence over time--especially in regard to Gandhi.

[311] A. J. Muste, "Return to Pacifism," in *The Essays of A. J. Muste*, 196.

[312] A. J. Muste, "Sit-Downs and Lie-Downs," in *The Essays of A. J. Muste*, 206.

[313] Lewis Perry, *Civil Disobedience: An American Tradition*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 175.

with A. Philip Randolph's call for the "weapon of Negro mass power." Speaking at the national NAACP convention in 1941, Randolph argued that "the old weapon of the conference" must be replaced by "some other technique of action"--a sentiment with which A. J. Muste agreed.[314] Muste called efforts by labor activists to use sit-down strikes and nonviolent resistance "a glorious opportunity for those of us who believe in the way of love and nonviolence."[315] Challenged by continuing racial violence at home and the deepening reality of the Second World War abroad, Gandhi's Quit India campaign combined with the explosion of the sit-down strike to align Randolph and the MOWM with Muste and his pacifist colleagues in a search for new political weapons in the fight against anti-Black discrimination.

The Fellowship launched "study and experimentation" of nonviolence as a method of tackling "social issues" as early as March of 1941 in commissioning a Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA) Committee.[316] But from the outset, it was clear that an exclusively pacifist movement would be impossible to build – particularly if the Fellowship wanted to join with African American movements. Asking his newly-hired Race Relations Secretary and Howard School of Religion graduate James Farmer to give "very special consideration to the race relations field" in early 1942, Muste noted that it might be "one of those fields" in which the FOR could "play some such role as Gandhi and his Satyagraha volunteers have played in the India National Congress." Muste envisioned "a nonviolence movement…in which the masses can have real faith, and to which they can therefore turn whenever they no longer have any confidence in any of the elements that believe in war and violence." And the pacifist believed

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[314] Bynum, *A Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, 170-71.

[315] A. J. Muste, "Sit-Downs and Lie-Downs," 206.

[316] A.J. Muste, Memo, 14th March 1941, FOR Papers, Section II, Series A, Sub-Series A-1, Box 3, Folder Nonviolent Direct Action Program, SCPC.

the Second World War afforded the best opportunity for "the [nonviolent] revolution" to "really get somewhere."[317]

While Farmer agreed with Muste that a focus on white violence and discrimination against black Americans during the war was key to building a nonviolent national movement, he also told Muste that jettisoning pacifism was essential. In his outline for the effort, "Provisional Plans for the Brotherhood Mobilization," Farmer advocated individual and local experimentation with "relentless non-cooperation, economic boycott" and "civil disobedience," emphasizing that such tactics enabled people to be "thrown into swing wherever and whenever necessary." Building a mass movement around such tactics is possible, Farmer told Muste, but the key was "to 'mobilize' all persons who want to see an end to racial discrimination in America, and are willing to commit themselves to a disciplined non-violence in working toward that goal…" Farmer established here an essential link between being nonviolent and using direct action tactics. By focusing intensely on "specifically Negro channels" like the black church, black fraternal organizations, and black schools, Farmer believed it might be possible to recruit African Americans to such a nonviolent movement. But Farmer told Muste the mass movement could not be avowedly "pacifist."[318]

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[317] A.J. Muste to James Farmer, 3 January 1942, FOR Papers, Section II, Series A-3, Box 2, Folder A.J. Muste Correspondence with James Farmer, SCPC.

[318] All quotes from James Farmer, "Memorandum to A.J. Muste on Brotherhood Mobilization," January 8 1942, Series C, Box 3, folder misc. material, FOR, SCPC. Farmer's Brotherhood Mobilization coalesced into the interracial Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which scholars have referenced extensively for decades – but only recently have we seen in depth local studies of CORE. Meier and Rudwick argue CORE "articulated the philosophy and applied the tactics of nonviolent direct action for nearly two decades before the 'civil rights revolution' burst upon the national scene in 1960," Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 3. Chabot also deals extensively with CORE in his work on the Transnational Roots of the Civil Rights Movement. Newer works detailing local CORE chapters on the east and west coasts offer a promising look into the development of this grassroots organization in places outside the US South. See Purnell, *Fighting Jim Crow in the County of Kings;* Singler, *Seattle in Black and White*.

A year and a half after Farmer outlined his plans for the Brotherhood Mobilization, Randolph took a significant step towards building networks for nonviolent mobilization. He announced that the MOWM would host its first national meeting in Chicago in July 1943 and called on "every militant Negro with pride of race" to make the claim "I Am An American, Too."[319] Delegates to the conference would debate "a broad national program of non-violent civil disobedience and non-cooperation" with a focus on using nonviolent action in "the interest of abolishing jim-crowism in America."[320] Muste immediately wrote Randolph to offer his "personal word of congratulations at the vision, intelligence and courage" represented by Randolph's call for a national program of nonviolent civil disobedience. "I should only be too glad to render any help possible in the achievement of your goal," Muste wrote to Randolph, seeing tremendous potential in Randolph's attempt at nonviolent mobilization.[321] Randolph's response was brief but endearing: "Brother Muste . . . I appreciate your interest in this problem and suggested cooperation."[322]

Randolph also invited Muste to offer a keynote address at the "I Am an American, Too" conference, asking the white pacifist to "map a strategy of non-violent techniques for

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[319] "Calling All Negroes to Attend 'We Are Americans, Too,' Conference," undated, box 26, folder "Press Releases 1942-1946, MOWM," Randolph Papers, LOC. At the MOWM's national policy conference in Detroit in September 1942, participants discussed how nonviolent civil disobedience might be treated: "Where no civil rights legislation is in force, disciplined and trained leaders, students and young people should use a carefully planned non-violent technique of refusal to accept such discriminations; such groups must be prepared in advance to face the consequences of civil proceedings; test cases should be developed and handled by existing legal agencies; refusals should be organized and continuous until the pattern is broken down, or public action is taken to eliminate such discriminations." Strategy committee participants included Pauli Murray, Theodore Brown, J. L. McLemore, and J. Conyers. See "Techniques for Breaking Down Discrimination in Restaurants, Hotels, Busses, Movies, etc." in *MOWM Proceedings of Conference Held in Detroit*, September 26-27, 1942, series A-3, box 15, folder "March on Washington," FOR, SCPC. 35.

[320] Press Release, "March on Washington May Conference Will Pioneer Program of Civil Disobedience and Non-Cooperation," December 30, 1942, box 26, MOWM, press release folder 1942–1946, Randolph Papers, LOC.

[321] A. J. Muste to A. Philip Randolph, January 11, 1943, series A-3, box 15, folder "March on Washington," FOR, SCPC.

[322] A. Philip Randolph to A. J. Muste, January 26, 1943, series A-3, box 15, folder "March on Washington," FOR, SCPC.

mass action" that might "awaken the consciousness of America to this whole problem of Jim-Crowism." He told Muste he was uniquely equipped to speak to this first national meeting of the MOWM on the topic of "race and non-violent solutions."[323] Though Muste declined Randolph's offer to speak, asking the Rev. E. Stanley Jones speak in his place, Muste underscored a commitment to provide the MOWM with FOR staffers Bayard Rustin and James Farmer in the months leading up to the conference.[324] Rustin, a Quaker pacifist who had begun to develop a very strong mentor relationship with Randolph in the early 1940s, was convinced Randolph "is really concerned to develop an understanding and use of non-violence by the American Negro," noting the MOWM leader was "anxious" to work closely with Muste and the FOR.[325]

In a press release that largely supported the MOWM's planned program, the FOR Executive Committee nevertheless offered muted praise for Randolph's efforts. "Such a program is…a serious undertaking," the press release admonished, and "much thought needs to be given at the very outset and through the period of preparation and execution to Gandhi's clear and insistent teaching that non-violent action requires the most careful training and

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[323] A. Philip Randolph to A. J. Muste, 30 April 1943, Series A-3, Box 15, Folder March on Washington, FOR, SCPC.

[324] A. J. Muste to A. Philip Randolph, 21 May 1943, FOR Papers, Series A-3, Box 15, Folder March on Washington, SCPC; Rev. E. Stanley Jones worked with Gandhi throughout the 1920s and penned *Christ of the Indian Road* in 1925.

[325] Bayard Rustin to A. J. Muste, 22 Feb 1943, FOR Papers, Section II, Series A-3, Box 4, Muste Correspondence, Rustin folder, SCPC. This letter is also quoted also in JoAnn Robinson, *Abraham Went Out,* p. 112. Robinson tracks the relationship between Randolph and Muste and, more broadly, the links between the FOR, CORE and the MOWM throughout the 1940s. Bur Robinson concludes her discussion of the relationships between each movement succinctly, claiming "in one sense or another each side (FOR and MOWM) probably did incline to 'use' the other, but the integrity of both leaders kept that inclination in check," p. 116. Robinson diminishes the importance of this cooperation between the MOWM and the FOR by focusing on personalities. The cooperation between each movement was integral to developing praxis that super-ceded the discrete aims and ideologies of either movement. In particular, Rustin labored for both organizations throughout 1943 and developed a pamphlet outlining non-violent action that was distributed throughout the MOWM network. See minutes of NVDA committee, 25 Jan 1943, Section II, Series A-1, Box 3, Non-Violent Direct Action Folder, FOR, SCPC.

severe discipline, including spiritual discipline." The Fellowship's admonition that Randolph and the MOWM see the process as a "serious undertaking" that requires "much thought" and "preparation" suggests that the pacifists remained skeptical that Randolph viewed nonviolence as a form of political resistance that flowed from religious ideas about ethical being. And yet Randolph's understanding of Richard Allen, Jesus, and Gandhi suggests that he likely did, in fact, understand that the pressure politics of nonviolent direct action were most effective if practitioners were committed to being nonviolent.

Regardless, this connection would become apparent when the MOWM and the FOR began hosting nonviolent institutes in local communities across the country in 1943. The institutes were a critical mechanism for collective learning between pacifists and African Americans on ideas related to nonviolence and nonviolent direct action.[326]As founder and executive secretary of the March on Washington Movement, A. Philip Randolph presided over the largest contemporary organization committed to the mass mobilization of African Americans in the United States. A. J. Muste was cosecretary of the largest pacifist organization in the United States. The joining of these two organizations seized upon the political opportunity of the Second World War to introduce local activists to nonviolent ideas and strategies that could expose and challenge racial discrimination in local communities across the country.

Rustin had introduced the idea of these institutes at the MOWM's July 1943 national meeting in Chicago. The gathering included 109 delegates from fourteen states, including

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[326] Chabot offers little empirical evidence to explain what was transmitted between pacifists and African American civic organizations in the nonviolent institutes these groups hosted together that were the most significant sites of collective learning in the early 1940s. Chabot, *The Transnational Roots of the Civil Rights Movement*, 78. For a relevant theoretical framework that considers the idea of collective learning, see Colin Barker and John Krinsky, "Movement Strategizing as Developmental Learning: Perspectives from Cultural-Historical Activity Theory," in *Culture, Social Movements, and Protest*, ed. Hank Johnston (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 212, 225.

FOR activists, representatives from the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the National Young Men's Christian Association, the United Mine Workers, and members of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.[327] On the final day of the meeting, before singing the "Star Spangled Banner" and attending an "inter-denominational, inter-racial service" themed "We Shall Not Fail Our Boys," the 109 national delegates from across the country approved the "adoption of the method of non-violent, good will direct action to be developed in specific areas of injustice in protest against employment, transportation discrimination, civil rights violations, armed forces segregation and constitutional injustices." The MOWM called for "local institutes in various localities to educate people to this program."[328]

According to Rustin, because "the National Conference of MOW went on record to use NVDA [nonviolent direct action] in its struggle for racial justice" at the "We Are Americans, Too" conference, it was important that "campaigns be started in the grass roots of the organization." Rustin envisioned training leadership in the intellectual and spiritual basis of nonviolence, on nonviolence as religious practice and being, and believed he could connect these ideas to direct action tactics by starting with local trade union leadership. The training in the Nonviolent Institutes included "various segments of negro thinking in facing this problem," but Rustin sardonically in-toned that "the conclusion will, of course, be that NVDA is the most applicable and logical answer."[329] Rustin wanted to launch a Race Relations

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[327] "Mapping a Broad National Program in the Interest of Abolishing Jim Crow," July 1, 1943, box 24, folder "MOWM Conferences," Randolph Papers, LOC.

[328] "Town Hall Meeting Tonight," 2 July 1943, box 24, folder "MOWM Conferences," Randolph Papers, LOC; "Flier for Independence Day Service," box 24, folder "MOWM Conferences," Randolph Papers, LOC; B. M. Philips, "Chicago Convention Votes for a New March on Capital: Randolph Says," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 10, 1943, 1.

[329] Bayard Rustin, "Race Relations Department of the FOR Plan, 1943 - 1944," No Date, BRP, Folder FOR, Reel 1

News Bulletin and focus also on what he described as the non-violent meaning of the spirituals.[330]

Concurrent with the launch of the Nonviolent Institutes was a wave of white violence directed at black Detroiters in the summer of 1943. In "A Statement on the Race Relations Crisis," Rustin and Muste and Randloph joined dozens of leaders in calling for Americans to "open wide the doors of all churches, all schools, all unions, all fraternal bodies and all businesses to people of every race and color." The organizations emphasized interracial practices in their statement – "working, playing and worshipping together, day by day," in order to "wipe out the misunderstandings which are fertile soil for race hatred."[331] With white violence in the United States unlikely to ebb, Rustin "immediately set about" the "formations of interracial fellowships" that did not maintain a "strict emphasis upon pacifist membership" and asked for a focus on at how to aid and ally with "such groups as the MOW…by identification with them in their cause."[332]

Rustin was told by A. J. Muste that he was "ready and authorized" to work actively to create these local nonviolence institutes under the joint auspices of the FOR and the MOWM in the summer of 1943, and Muste appeared alongside Randolph at the first "Institute on Race and Non-violent Solutions" held at Lincoln Congregational Church in Washington, DC, in August of 1943. The institute included addresses from Randolph, Rustin, FOR Youth

[330] Among those Rustin hoped to have write for the bulletin were Walter White, Rabbi Cronbach, Thurman, George Schuyler, Phil Randolph, Algernon Black, Cary McWillians, Dr. Riddich, Pearl Buck, Frances Gunther, Haridas Muzumdar, Otto Kleinberg, Ruth Benedict, Charles Wesley, Hideo Hasimoto. Maurice Dawkins would serve as associate editor. ibid

[331] Bayard Rustin, "A Statement on the Race Relations Crisis in June of 1943," BRP, Folder FOR, Reel 1.

[332] Bayard Rustin, "FOR Draft Report - Commission on Inter-racial and minorities," BRP, Folder FOR, Reel 1. The report contains a mention of the so called 'Zoot Suit Riots,' which means it was likely written during the early summer – May or June – of 1943

Secretary James Farmer, and FOR Co-Executive Secretary John Swomley.[333] Muste spoke on "the spiritual basis of non-violence," while Randolph made the case for nonviolent action as a practical "program for today" – a clear joining of the pacifist notion of nonviolent being with direct action tactics as a practical strategy.[334] The DC institute was the first of many organized by Rustin in churches across the United States in collaboration with local FOR chapters and MOWM affiliates. These institutes served not only to introduce people to the idea of nonviolent direct action, but also provided movement space for individuals and organizations to debate the religious ideas that undergirded nonviolence. They also affording communities time to plan, execute, and reflect on small-scale, direct-action campaigns targeting nearby establishments. The content was also a blend of tactical and spiritual discussion, an indication of the effort to inject the religious underpinnings about nonviolent being with the tactics of nonviolent direct action.

In September 1943, local activist W. Astor Kirk reported that Washingtonians had "formed a non-violent direct action institute on Race Relations to further work on problems of discrimination and segregation in our city." Kirk noted that the group began its weekly meetings at 5:30 on Saturday evenings with an interracial meal at the Lucy Slowes Dormitory on Third and U Street NW, and at 6:45 the group met to "study the theories and applications and examples of non-violence and direct action," which included reflection on "what techniques we should try and what changes we should make." At 8 p.m., multiple groups flanked out to local institutions where racial discrimination was taking place. These local actions were staged at a half-dozen drug stores and dime stores. Kirk reported:

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[333] Bayard Rustin to A. J. Muste, October 18, 1943, FOR Papers, section II, series D, box 51, folder 2; "Mixed Groups Test Capital's Jim Crow," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 14 August 1943, 13.
[334] "Institute for Race Relations," March 1943, section II, series D, box 51, folder "Rustin 2," FOR, SCPC.

> All racial barriers have been broken down at the People's Drug Store at 14th and U Sts., and colored people are served at the counter without discrimination. A mixed group has also been serviced without trouble at the Thompson's restaurant, but the manager said later that he had been unaware of the incident and that it is not the policy of the chain to serve colored people. All the other places refuse to serve colored people.

Summarizing the work, Kirk wrote, "[T]hrough direct action, we are trying to show people, instead of merely preaching it at them, that the brotherhood of man is real and present now."[335]

By October of 1943, the *New York Amsterdam News* reported that a Race Relations Institute in DC had coalesced into neighborhood cells planning "a concerted attack" against Jim Crow in local restaurants. Navy serviceman Clyde Ashby said groups of 35 or more were occupying segregated restaurants until they were either served or the restaurant closed its doors. Occupying the restaurant would, according to Ashby, reduce the number of paying customers and thus place pressure on the restaurants to "adopt a more liberal policy." A local police chief admitted he was powerless under the law to stop the "sit-down," but he discouraged the demonstrators for fear of violence against the demonstrators. Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) activist Bernice Fisher, however, argued that such methods were preferable to traditional tactics like court battles. In a legal battle, Fisher argued, legal decisions were the most important factor. Nonviolence produced a more lasting change: "voluntary capitulation" by whites that emerged from a combination of pressure and kindness in the face of white hostility and opposition.[336]

These efforts in the DC area were part of a coordinated campaign by Rustin and the FOR to create and sustain local nonviolent movements in "several northern industrial areas

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[335] W. Astor Kirk, "Institute on Race Relations Progress Note," 11 September 1943, BRP, folder "Fellowship of Reconciliation," reel 1.

[336] "Non-Violent Direct Action Group Girds To Break D. C. Restaurant Ban," 9 October, 1943, *New York Amsterdam News*, p. 12.

and at least one southern city." Rustin envisioned local FOR chapters working with "Negro Church groups" as well as MOWM and CORE chapters to organize nonviolent "experimentation in local communities." Rustin emphasized "the use of art, music, and drama in African American churches" to communicate "the message of nonviolence." Particular emphasis was given to "preparation in the local community" for "action programs . . . to study local needs." In addition to Washington, a bevy of industrial cities in the Midwest offered Rustin and the FOR "a wide variety of soils on which to plant our nonviolent experimental seed, and each of these cities has a FOR group, and MOW group, or both."[337] Importantly, these midwestern cities had been home to dozens of sit-down strikes throughout the 1930s.

These nonviolent institutes can be understood as what sociologist Larry Isaac describes as "movement schools," spaces where the "dialogical diffusion" of ideas about nonviolent being and risky direct action tactics were joined together through debate, practice, and reflection. While Isaac and his coauthors focus on the growth and evolution of a sustained nonviolent movement in Nashville in 1960, questions about "what specifically is being diffused," how exactly diffusion occurs, and "the impact of the diffusion" are all important for understanding the collective learning that took place in the nonviolent institutes of the 1940s. Isaac's emphasis on "key individuals as carriers of nonviolent praxis within and between movement schools" speaks especially to the work of Bayard Rustin. Rustin was an essential link between FOR pacifists, African American churches, and civic organizations.[338] His ability to syncretize pacifist ideas about nonviolent being with direct action tactics from the

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[337] Bayard Rustin, "Race Relations Department of the FOR Plan for 1943-1944," undated, BRP, folder Race Relations Institutes/Workshops, reel 5. Rustin and the FOR also hoped that local chapters would form partnerships with the NAACP, ACLU, the Urban League, War Resisters League, and the Women's Defense Leagues. Among the cities mentioned as targets by Rustin and the FOR were Kansas City, Pittsburgh, Toledo, St. Louis, Baltimore, Chicago, Dayton, Indianapolis, Cleveland, Detroit, Richmond, Philadelphia, and Syracuse.
[338] Isaac et al., "'Movement Schools' and Dialogical Diffusion of Nonviolent Praxis," 158.

labor movement proved essential to the diffusion of the politics of being as a way of doing nonviolence in interracial movement spaces. Grounding examples of nonviolent tactics in Christian parables, Rustin would often use hymns and litanies to engage participants in enacting past dramas of biblical nonviolence. These methods of diffusion, common to local nonviolence institutes in the 1940s, suggest that implementing a "Gandhian repertoire" was less important than grounding interracial collective learning in the shared domestic traditions the church and labor movement.

Forward from Pacifism

Advertised as an opportunity for local people to "live racial justice," the nonviolent institutes on race relations were held in myriad U.S. cities in 1943.[339] The "Institute on Race Relations and Non-Violent Solutions" at Bethel AME Church in Detroit, Michigan, in mid-April 1943 was followed by a "Conference on Creative Non-violence as an Aid to Racial Understanding" at Avalon Boulevard Christian Church in Los Angeles in early May.[340] The Los Angeles conference was described as "not just a study, but an experience in race relations," a signal of how importance being was to the diffusion of nonviolence. Participants debated the question of whether "the church is serious in its race relations program" and conducted a workshop on how to create interracial fellowships. The weekend also included a panel on the labor movement and nonviolence, as well as a workshop on the specific use of

[339] Bayard Rustin, "FOR Draft Report--Commission on Inter-racial and Minorities," BRP, folder "FOR," reel 1.
[340] Program, "Institute on Race Relations and Non-Violent Solutions, April 16–18, 1943, Detroit Michigan," Rustin Papers, folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5.

"non-violent techniques in the West." Sponsors, participants, and speakers for the Los Angeles event were all based in California.[341]

Institutes continued during the late spring and early summer of 1943 in midwestern industrial cities, organized largely by local pacifists in partnership with African American civic organizations and churches. The primary foci of the institutes were the initiation of local action projects. An "Institute on Race Relations and Non-Violent Solutions" in Indianapolis on June 12, 1943, featured Henry Richardson, one of the first two African Americans elected to the Indiana legislature in the twentieth century. Richardson called those attending the institute "friends of liberty" who were "willing to shoulder their responsibilities . . . to the cause . . . of true liberty for all citizens."[342] Just days later, 125 people attended the FOR-sponsored "Dayton Inter-Racial Institute" at the Bethel Baptist Church in Dayton, Ohio. Dr. Alfred Emerson from the University of Chicago addressed the crowd in Dayton on "What Science Has to Say about Race."[343] James Farmer outlined the "Race Situation Today in the US and Abroad," and *Dayton Herald* editor Michael Bradshaw and *Ohio Express* editor William Dunn explored "The Race Problem in Dayton." John Swomley offered a talk on "Nonviolent Techniques for the US," and the Saturday program included a "work project" focused on "experimental non-violent direct action in conflict situations in Dayton . . . under the leadership of Bayard Rustin, special field secretary, FOR."[344]

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[341] Program, "Conference on Creative Non-violence as an Aid to Racial Understanding, Avalon Boulevard Christian Church, Los Angeles California, April 30–May 2 1943," BRP, Folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5.
[342] Henry J. Richardson Jr., "Speech Delivered before the Indianapolis Institute on Race Relations and Non-Violent Solutions at the Senate Avenue Research Branch of the YMCA," June 12, 1943, Rustin Papers, folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5.
[343] "Report from Dayton Race Relations Institutes," June 14–15, 1943, Rustin Papers, folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5.
[344] Program, "Dayton Inter Racial Institute," Rustin Papers, folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5.

On June 16, 1943, another "Institute on Race Relations and Non-Violent Solutions" was held in Ohio at the Second Baptist Church in Columbus.[345] The format was similar to that of the Dayton Institute, but local speakers from Columbus were slotted alongside national speakers--including MOWM Executive Secretary Pauline Meyers. A worship service "arranged and conducted by Mr. Bayard Rustin" was also held as part of the institute. Inside the program was an institute introduction, which stated that "no issue before mankind today is more important than that of the relations between the white and the colored peoples." The program juxtaposed escalating global violence with the rise in racialized violence in the United States to suggest that both were the result of nonwhite populations remaining "in a status of inferiority" while a war was being waged worldwide for democracy. This contradiction, the program intoned, would create a "major crisis"--a crisis the nonviolent institute hoped to mitigate by acquainting "people of both races with the work that is already being done, and to study the possible application of non-violent methods in the United States."[346]

But facilitating interracial collaboration on nonviolent solutions proved especially difficult for a pacifist movement long dominated by whites. Mrs. Eleanor Perry Moore, an employee of the War Relocation Authority in Washington and an attendee at the first institute in Washington, DC, remembered that Bayard Rustin "conducted a symposium" and "sang several hymns beautifully" in August 1943. She remembered Swomley's speech. She also recalled that A. Philip Randolph addressed the group and that the March on Washington Movement, she wrote candidly, "scares me to death." Moore expressed fear that the MOWM

[345] Program, "Columbus Institute on Race Relations and Non-Violent Solutions at the Second Baptist Church," June 16, 1943, Rustin Papers, folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5.
[346] Ibid.

"will be so misunderstood as to strike the white population here with horror. It may even be the worst race riot the country has ever had." Moore suggested that "a white man's March on Washington in [sic] behalf of the negro" might be more prudent than Randolph's planned march on the capital. She wrote that any "concerted effort to disrupt Washington at this time," in addition to the summer heat and the racial tension surfacing from the forced relocation of Japanese Americans, "could well be called sabotage."[347]

While jettisoning such fear and ignorance among whites and transforming the obvious mistrust this racism engendered among African Americans were among the goals of the nonviolent institutes, actually achieving these outcomes remained a struggle. In October 1943, the FOR organized a month-long workshop in San Francisco to deal precisely with the difficulties of such widespread interracial organizing. In one of his many addresses to the San Francisco institute, Rustin told the interracial group that the MOWM must be understood as the most recent response to a long-standing question at the heart of the African American experience: "How can we win freedom?" Rustin suggested that the unifying theme of strategies for Black advancement since slavery--from electoral success during Reconstruction to Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and W. E. B. DuBois's ongoing advocacy--was the creation of "strong pressure groups" through which African Americans might "obtain their rights." Recalling that "many objected" to Randolph's initial call for "non-violence and civil disobedience," Rustin said the Detroit uprisings of 1943 made "clear that [Randolph's] basis is the only sound one. However, the difficulty now," he continued, "is that Negroes do not believe in it or support it because they do not understand it." He cautioned white pacifist "talking groups" to avoid any attempt to show African

[347] "To Bayard, AJ and John from Jean," August 11, 1943, BRP, folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5.

Americans the way forward on these issues, suggesting instead that, "if pacifists and socialists were concerned enough and live enough to take a lending part in the MOWM, they might do so. But at this point," Rustin concluded, "they are not ready for it." As Randolph sees clearly, it is the communists who would take over: "[The Communists] fear a movement of non-violence and would do their best to oppose it and change it."[348]

The caution A. Philip Randolph exercised in organizing the MOWM emerged, in part, from his experiences with white communists attempting to take over the National Negro Congress in the mid-1930s. Rustin was all too familiar with this recent history, and in cooperation with the FOR, he hoped the interracial nonviolent institutes might become sites where a positive--not paternalistic--interracial movement for racial justice could be forged. But the question remained: how? In emphasizing a combination of instruction, debate, interracial action, and shared reflection, Rustin outlined the mechanisms by which the diffusion of nonviolence might take place. "The discipline of non-violence cannot be talked about," Rustin implored; "it can be learned only by doing. Nonviolence," he argued,

> believes in action. It says that the question of whether you will act or not act is academic. You will act in certain situations because you are forced to act when confronted with social issues. . . . [I]n the past non-violence has been too close to non-resistance with its fear of action. Now the element of resistance in non-violence is daring to come to the fore, with its challenges to action.[349]

Rustin made clear that the politics of pacifist non-resistance were both un-appealing and insufficient for challenging Jim Crow. In his "Lesson Plan on Nonviolent Action," Rustin said that the five necessary steps preceding direct action--investigation, negotiation, education, ultimatum, and self-examination--meant that nonviolent direct action was not simply a tactic;

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[348] "Workshops on Race and Nonviolence, Lecture and Discussion, Sunday Evening, 17 October (1943), the March on Washington Movement and the Detroit and Harlem Riots," BRP, folder "Race Relations Institutes 1940s," reel 5.
[349] Ibid.

it was a personal and political process, political insurgency that flowed from one's way of being. Rustin showed local people in San Francisco how to put these steps to work in experimental action projects at the Hasting's Clothing Store, the Ambassador Skating Rink, the Crystal Baths, Woolworth's, the Recreation Department at the City of San Francisco, and a number of restaurants in the Bay Area.[350] Six months after Rustin's month-long visit, local activist Peg Deuel reported to Rustin that the San Francisco CORE chapter had twenty-two pledged members with a regular attendance of twenty-five at weekly meetings.[351]

Rustin worked extensively in San Francisco on a curriculum for teaching nonviolence in interracial spaces.[352] Rustin wrote that "one must bear in mind that non-violence is more than direct action -- boycott, etc. -- it is made up of preceding steps which can be carried out in millions of ways and which have always been going on throughout the course of history."[353] Echoing Howard University student Charles Campbell, Rustin argued that "changing the attitude of the other person" is the "highest form" of nonviolence while "non-violent coercion" is "a less high form."[354] To change another person's attitude required a personal disposition, a way of being that could effect personal transformation. Echoing Howard Thurman, Rustin wrote that practitioners must learn to "have no fear, tell the truth, admit [your] own share of guilt, behave creatively, (and) raise the struggle from a physical to a moral plane." In his 'lesson plan on faith, discipline, action," Rustin emphasized the personal disciplines required the practice of nonviolent direct action. It included praying for

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[350] Bayard Rustin, "Workshops on Race and Nonviolence, Discussion--14 October," 1943, BRP, folder "Race Relations Institutes 1940s," reel 5. The list of targeted businesses and institutions comes from "Workshops on Race and Nonviolence, Discussion--31 October," BRP, folder "Race Relations Institutes 1940s," reel 5.
[351] Peg Deuel to Bayard Rustin, February 9, 1944, BRP, folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5.
[352] Bayard Rustin, "Workshops on Race and Nonviolence, Project No. 1. An Interracial Primer for Negroes," BRP, Folder Race Relations Institutes 1940s, Reel 5.
[353] Bayard Rustin, "Workshops on Race and Nonviolence, Panel Discussion, Saturday Evening October 30," 1943, BRP, Folder Race Relations Institutes 1940s, Reel 5.
[354] Ibid.

"at least one-half hour daily," belonging to a community - a "cell or group" – and making a commitment to "simplifying" one's life.[355]

Pointing to these practices in the life of Jesus, Rustin outlined the "five kinds of nonviolent direct action Jesus used," including an act of civil disobedience in defying the Sabbath laws, non-cooperation by refusing to answer King Herod, a Mass March when Jesus entered Jerusalem with a "large procession of his followers," and the "personal appeal and nonviolent direct action" used to drive money changers from the temple. "Attitudes change" through the practice of nonviolence, Rustin agued, and he shared examples of how to personally engage individuals who had never socialized with African Americans. Using as a baseline the attitudinal dispositions of courage, truth telling, and humility, Rustin linked these personal ways of being to the nonviolent direct action tactics of the "non-violent strike, economic boycott, picketing, non-payment of taxes, mass emigration, non-cooperation," and "civil disobedience." [356] He also used historical examples of nonviolent campaigns, which in addition to Gandhi's work in India included resistance by "Norwegian and Finnish governments" to Nazi occupation and "the labor movement in America," to argue that individuals committed to a nonviolent way of being could use nonviolent tactics collectively in social movements.[357] Rustin was, for the first time in the United States, outlining how

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[355] Bayard Rustin, "Workshops on Race and Nonviolence, Sheet No. 6 'Lesson plan on faith, discipline, action," BRP, Folder Race Relations Institutes 1940s, Reel 5.

[356] Interestingly, Rustin suggests using the 'why' method in the US South – by which he meant questioning whites who ask African Americans to remove themselves to segregated seating areas on street cars. "One reason why racial prejudice has flourished in the South," he writes, "has been the docile acceptance by Negroes of segregation in principle. Another reasons is the consequent conditioning of white people since childhood to be unaware of segregation as an issue." The why method, Rustin suggests, challenges whites to think about their participation in a system they have not considered carefully. Bayard Rustin, "Workshops on Race and Nonviolence, Sheet No 1 Lesson Plan on Nonviolent Action," BRP, Folder Race Relations Institutes 1940s, Reel 5.

[357] ibid

nonviolent ways of being could be joined with direct action tactics. He was articulating the politics of being.

Rustin also developed a primer on "the American Racial Scene today." He pointed to what he called "colored allies in the fight against fascism," citing "Japanese propaganda to the darker races" in the Second World War and "India's demand for freedom" in linking American efforts to the global work to end colonialism. These "colored allies," he argued, were an example to American activists seeking to rectify the "disparity between our democratic aims and our undemocratic treatment of the Negro." Pointing to a "failure by all to set up a program to meet present revolutionary social change," Rustin argued that the global push to fight white supremacy fueled in the mid-1940s had not been utilized effectively by activists in the United States.[358] Speaking specifically to the clergy class, Rustin outlined an extensive of suggestions that included the organization of an interracial ministerial alliance, the use of radio and press by clergy, the organization of workshops in churches, an educational program designed specifically for whites, and the use of the arts like "modeling in clay, painting, singing, dancing" so that "people of all ages can find and enjoy special interests" across racial lines.[359] More practical worksheets in Rustin's lesson plan included suggestions on what to do in specific instances of discrimination or aggression – including being served drinks in a rusty tin cup or being overcharged for coffee.[360]

When Rustin was imprisoned in February of 1944 for refsing compliance with the Federal Conscription Act, he continued teaching interracial seminars while a prisoner at

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[358] Bayard Rustin, "Workshops on Race and Nonviolence, Sheet No. 5, The American Racial Scene Today," BRP, Folder Race Relations Institutes 1940s, Reel 5.

[359] Bayard Rustin, "Workshops on Race and Nonviolence, Suggestions to Ministers," no date, BRP, Folder Race Relations Institutes 1940s, Reel 5.

[360] Brown, McKay, Berger, and Bayard Rustin, "Workshops on Race and Nonviolence, Workshop Report on Action in Specific Instances of Discrimination," BRP, Folder Race Relations Institutes 1940s, Reel 5

Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary in Pennsylvania. He attempted to model the ideas he taught by unifying white conscientious objectors at Lewisburg with African American prisoners through the integration of prison education spaces.[361] In one class at Lewisburg, Rustin emphasized the need to move "forward from pacifism." We "remember the strikes, boycotts and sit-down strikes of American labor," Rustin wrote, but "our strikes and battles will always be conducted with full respect for our opponents, and without violence or terrorism of any kind."[362] Rustin wrote of a "moral force" built around "positive activities," a program constructed around a way of being rather than a reaction to segregation or violence that itself mimicked violence or segregation.[363] He envisioned a "flesh and blood program which deals with physical realities and social relationships" rather than the "perverted pietism" that "preaches disembodied spiritualism." Rustin hoped that the study of nonviolence might produce "a network of moral force to promote that which . . . is best for all."[364]

Rustin believed that the politics of nonviolent pressure could chisel away at Jim Crow – perhaps even end it. But he believed also that a 'flesh and blood program' dealing with the 'physical realities and social relationships' must be built around 'positive activities' – meaning nonviolent action could not simply be protests or disruptions. Nonviolent direct action as a way of creating pressure did not sufficiently capture what Rustin envisioned. Protests, the act of organizing for an end to something, were not capacious enough to capture Rustin's vision. Instead, Rustin envisioned a 'moral force' generated through collective acts of nonviolence expressed through direct action tactics. Courage and firmness were essential,

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[361] From Bayard Rustin to Doris Grotewohl, 5 May 1944, BRP, folder "FOR," reel 1.

[362] Bayard Rustin, "Basic Principles," no date, Rustin Papers, folder "FOR," reel 1.

[363] Bayard Rustin, "Forward from Pacifism, Our Need to Shift Our Emphasis from Pacifism to a Program of Positive Social Goals, part I, session #3," 2 April 1944, BRP, folder "FOR," reel 1.

[364] Bayard Rustin, "Sunday Seminar, 16 April 1944, "The Green Revolution - 'Forward to the Land' or Recentralism - A Way Out," Session Number 5," BRP, folder "FOR," reel 1.

but so too were kindness, mercy, and forgiveness in the face of hostility and violence. Rustin envisioned a set of nonviolent direct action tactics not geared simply at creating the political pressure required to end segregation and discrimination. He envisioned nonviolent direct action tactics that were themselves an expression of the world as it should be: white and black people together in integrated spaces, separated not by the strictures and imposition of Jim Crow custom and law but instead interacting with one another in a spirit of openness and honesty.

Rustin's experimentation with these politics of being in prison are exemplified in an incident that occurred when a man named Huddleston attacked Rustin with a mop handle for sitting with white Conscientious Objectors (COs) in the prison's typically segregated recreational hall. When Rustin's fellow inmates tried to stop the attack, Rustin asked them to step away and let the man beat him. A white CO named Bronson Clark called Rustin's actions "a perfect example of what Richard Gregg described in his POWER OF NONVIOLENCE. Huddleston was completely defeated and unnerved by the display of non-violence and began shaking all over and sat down.'[365] In a spirit of forgiveness and mercy, the COs requested the man not be punished – a move that earned them good standing with the administration and allowed Rustin to earn a regular spot in the prison's education program.[366]

The prison seminars that Rustin led enabled him to continue refining his workshops on nonviolence, refinement that included a deeper exploration of the structure of society and human behaviors. "How universal in every individual heart is the quality of mercy," Rustin reflected. "This is the strange riddle of the individual versus society, of the conscience of the

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[365] John D'Emilio also covers this episode in his book, *Lost* Prophet. D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet,* 84 - 85. Bayard Rustin, BRP, Folder FOR, Excerpts from Letter to Doris Grotwohl from Eleanor Clark, 3 May 1944

[366] Bayard Rustin, BRP, Folder FOR, Excerpts from Letter to Doris Grotwohl from Eleanor Clark, 3 May 1944

individual versus that of society, and of the action of the individual and that of society…"[367] In his writing, Rustin focused on the relationship between how an individual behaves and how social change is created, asking "what method of change is necessary to do away with exploitative oppressive measures of national and international economics and politics?"[368] Citing "the failure of pacifist organizations in this country who have concerned themselves with denunciations of war and the causes of war," Rustin declared firmly that these pacifists had been unable "to develop a moral equivalent of war."[369] How, Rustin puzzled in prison, can individuals create "fundamental change which does not necessarily involve violent methods?"

Rustin's denunciation of pacifism is notable because he was in prison as a CO for refusing to participate in the Second World War. But Rustin also understood that a denunciation of violence, the simple refusal to fight, was not itself a force powerful enough to be considered "the moral equivalent of war." Simply refusing to do violence was not enough. Through careful study, through experimentation inside and outside of prison, Rustin began to pinpoint how active nonviolent being expressed through humility, mercy, kindness, and forgiveness could be methods of political resistance to the violence and malevolence of Jim Crow. Rustin's essential contribution to the politics of being was to show that these nonviolent acts could, themselves, be politically powerful. And he did this by combining the commitment to doing no violence endemic to pacifism with the direct action tactics in

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[367] Letter from William Greiner to Peton Price quoted by Bayard Rustin, "Sunday Seminar, 16 April 1944, The Green Revolution - 'Forward to the Land' or Recentralism - A Way Out, Session Number 5," BRP, Folder FOR, Reel 1.
[368] ibid.
[369] ibid.

resistance movements to show how a politics of being could effectively challenged white supremacy.

When Rustin was released from prison in the summer of 1945, he continued to organize study and experimentation in local institutes across the Midwest. Kansas City held a second major institute in April 1945, and Toledo organized a first interracial institute on nonviolence in February 1946.[370] A "Race Relations Institute Emphasizing Democratic and Non-violent Solutions of Present Day Race Problems" was held in Toronto in May 1947, and Rustin facilitated the month-long Interracial Workshop in Washington, DC, in July 1947 that was similar to the San Francisco workshop.[371] The month-long DC workshop required participants to live in interracial housing and share meals and included sustained action projects across the city. Thirty-one people participated in the DC institute, coming from New York, Canada, California, Florida, New Jersey, Ohio, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Kansas.[372]

Finally, in early 1948, the FOR hosted an "All Ohio Collegiate Workshop in Minority Problems." Rustin assembled an exhaustive list of more than a hundred contacts from a dozen colleges and universities across Ohio--among them a first-year college student at Baldwin-Wallace College in Ohio named James M. Lawson Jr.--with the stated goal of stimulating "college students to take an active role in eradicating injustice to minority groups" through the

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[370] Program, "Kansas City Race Institute, 14–16 April 1945," Rustin Papers, folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5. For information on the Toledo Institute, see George Houser to Shizu Proctor, January 24, 1946, BRP, folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5. A Race Relations Institute in Cleveland with no recorded date included more than 350 participants. See "Statistics on Cleveland Race Relations Institute," BRP, folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5.

[371] Program, "Race Relations Institute Emphasizing Democratic and Non-violent Solutions of Present Day Race Problems," undated, BRP, folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5; "The Interracial Workshop, Washington DC," July 1947, Rustin Papers, folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5.

[372] "List of Interracial Workshop Participants," undated, BRP, folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5.

"study [of] positive non-violent techniques." The Ohio workshop reflected the general approach to nonviolent institutes since they were first organized in 1943. Participants studied "methods and programs for breaking down discrimination in housing, theatres, restaurants, jobs, barber shops on and off the campus," and then examined "the principles of non-violence in preparation for the afternoon action projects." The afternoon action projects would be "determined by the conditions in the community where the workshop is being held," directed by local leaders, and could serve as "just a beginning" or "a campaign of duration." The ultimate decisions about targeted locations and methodologies, however, were to be "made by student representatives in cooperation with local leadership." At the conclusion of the workshops, participants provided "a report to the community of the unique aspects of the workshop--the action program," a process of reflection and refinement that was intended to sustain local campaigns of nonviolent resistance.[373]

Reflecting on the month-long nonviolence institute held in Washington, DC in July 1947, Rustin identified three women--Lynn Seitter, Sydney Irwin, and Emily Josif--who were "seriously concerned with remaining in Washington to help provide the kind of leadership which is so necessary for effective nonviolent action." Rustin said these women had come to believe that violence between people emerges from separation and ignorance, from a lack of interaction and fellowship, and that such separation is precisely what produces the major violent conflicts wracking the United States and the world. Frank Kavjka of Illinois, a veteran of the Second World War, concurred. He noted that the DC institute equipped him with "very great experiences in the use of non-violent direct action" and that he was "now convinced that such methods are very effective. My whole thinking pattern has been challenged." Margaret

[373] "Front Cover of Program Announcements--New York (or Boston, St. Louis, Detroit) Institute on Race Relations and Non-Violent Solutions," BRP, folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5.

Boos of Canada said the lived interracial experience was central to the institute's effectiveness. She deeply "appreciated the opportunity of living for a couple of weeks with an interracial group." For while she had previously "contended that it was possible, now I know it can be done."[374] Boos had experience with active nonviolence: she had learned to utilize a politics of being alongside others in resisting Jim Crow in D.C.

This chapter has suggested that Gandhian ideas and strategies proved less important to the diffusion of nonviolence and nonviolent direct action in the early 1940s than did interracial strategizing between domestic movement organizations and actors. The ideas mobilized to support the diffusion of nonviolence were decidedly Christian, and they were typically debated in the domestic movement spaces of American Christian churches. These Christian underpinnings for nonviolence, fleshed out in local institutes in the 1940s, worked to preserve this political philosophy in a nation where religious sensibilities were rapidly rising.[375] For these religious actors, the practice of nonviolence could not be separated from one's way of being in the world. Integration, being together in typically segregated spaces became a movement goal for activists within these nonviolent institutes because it was both an expression of political resistance and an example of America as it should be. Integration as a movement goal and desegregation as a movement strategy both flowed from and contributed to a shared hope among pacifists and MOWM activists for a national nonviolent movement to end Jim Crow. But this focus on integration meant that, perhaps ironically, local nonviolent

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[374] Bayard Rustin, "The Interracial Workshop, Observations," BRP, folder "Race Relations Institute/Workshops," reel 5.

[375] A host of scholars have noted the rapid and widespread rise of American religiosity in the postwar era. See, among others, Paul Harvey and Philip Goff, eds., *The Columbia Documentary History of Religion in America since 1945*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011); James David Hudnut-Beumler, *Looking for God in the Suburbs: The Religion of the American Dream and Its Critics, 1945-1965*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

activists were part of a Cold War strategy to craft a new racial image abroad through desegregation at home -- an image that often eclipsed the reality of a more just and fair society for all Americans. Taken together, the movement strategies of desegregation and integration as and the emergence of Christian ideas in local nonviolent institutes were foundational for activists seeking to live -- rather than simply talk about -- ideas they considered most central to American democracy and religious practice.[376]

This chapter suggests the tremendous analytical promise of examining the relationship between ideas and action in the oscillating space between local, national, and transnational movements. The desire of local and national activists to develop and diffuse nonviolence as a political weapon for challenging racial discrimination in the early 1940s was not simply a process of relocating and translating a "Gandhian Repertoire" from a foreign context to a domestic one. Instead, the diffusion of nonviolence was attempted through intermovement collaboration and collective learning between well-established domestic organizations – the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the March on Washington Movement. The interracial collaborations in these nonviolent institutes--treated here as movement schools--afforded white and Black local activists opportunities to engage together in the steps organizers saw as most critical to dialogical diffusion: debate about past nonviolent precedents, practice with the repertoire of nonviolent strategies, and critical reflection on the outcomes of nonviolent direct action. This last piece--reflection--enabled activists to identify which institutions might be targeted, which strategies might be most effective, and which ideas could be mobilized publicly to support their direct action efforts. Such collective learning in nonviolent institutes in the early 1940s, inspired by a Gandhian frame alignment between white pacifist and

376 Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*.

African American civic and religious movements, became the primary mechanism for the development and diffusion of nonviolent ideas and strategies for challenging racial discrimination and violence in wartime America.

These nonviolent institutes in the 1940s belonged also to the longer tradition of religious activists developing interracial institutional space for the debate and diffusion of ideas related to nonviolence detailed in this dissertation. As seen in chapter one, Howard Kester and the Fellowship of Reconciliation first brought together a team of interracial students together at LeMoyne College in Memphis December of 1929 to determine how pacifist ideas might be joined with nonviolent direct action tactics in fighting Jim Crow segregation. Howard Thurman wrote about and lecture on these themes in interracial publications and institutional space, and by the early 1940s Bayard Rustin was dedicating workshop spaces to instructing black and white activists on how a nonviolent way of being could be joined to direct action tactics. The learning and experimentation that took place in Rustin's nonviolent workshops in the 1940s was a critical precursor to the nonviolent workshops led by the Reverend James M. Lawson, Jr. in the 1950s. Lawson, working for the Fellowship of Reconciliation as their Southern Field Secretary, became an intellectual architect for the nonviolent sit-in revolt against Jim Crow – a revolution that flowed from a politics of being.

Chapter 4

Disrupting the Calculation of Violence: James M. Lawson, Jr. and the Politics of Nonviolence

On a cold Saturday morning in late February of 1960, Bernard Lafayette and Solomon Gort walked next to one another on their way to Nashville's downtown department stores. The sit-in movement had transformed the city over the last ten days as waves of interracial student teams filled the city's segregated lunch counters. Most of the students had been arrested peacefully, but the two seminarians from American Baptist were prepared for violence. Their teacher, James M. Lawson, Jr., told them to anticipate such violence – had even facilitated drills to hone and test their nonviolent responses. But as they marched to Woolworth's on that Saturday morning – a day later remembered as Big Saturday – Lafayette worried he could not resist returning a punch for a punch.[377]

Gort and Lafayette were part of two massive columns of students marching from First Baptist Capitol Hill to the downtown business district. By the end of the day, more than 400 would participate in the city's largest sit-in to date.[378] The long lines of stoic students were taunted as they walked by small groups of young white men. But just as they'd been trained to do, the students ignored the heckling. Seeing the end of the line and a last chance to provoke the students, one of the young white boys jumped onto Solomon Gort and began to beat him. "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*." Bernard Lafayette knew the Sermon on the Mount well. He'd been taught that refusing to respond to violence with violence was among the highest expressions of Christian love, but he still doubted his

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[377] David Halberstam, *The Children*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1998), 136 – 37.
[378] Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart*, 38.

ability to respond nonviolently to violence. In the melee erupting before him, Lafayette had no time to think. He simply reacted – throwing his body onto his friend Solomon to protect him from the blows.

Lawson approached the situation with utter calm. He politely asked the men to stop beating his colleagues. Looking up only long enough to spit in Lawson's face, the assailant continued to assault Lafayette. Lawson asked him for a handkerchief. Amazingly, the young white man obliged. Wiping the spit from his face, Lawson realized he now had control over the situation. Seeing the young man's leather jacket and ducktail haircut, Lawson asked if he owned a motorcycle or a hot rod. A motorcycle. Was it modified? It was. As the young white man described his customized motorcycle to the black Methodist minister, the two seminarians picked themselves up off the ground and scrambled to rejoin the students marching downtown.[379]

In his interaction with the young white tough, James Lawson embodied a religious form of political action that students in Nashville would collectively deploy to challenge Jim Crow. Lawson's response was predicated on a spiritual discipline that enabled him to respond creatively to his attacker, and his careful intervention in this violent episode connected him to a decades long effort among intellectuals and activists to discern a courageous form of nonviolent action capable of challenging the disfiguring demands of Jim Crow. Lawson's response also exemplified the politics of being: a merciful and nonviolent intervention in a violent and racist attack intended that was calculated to challenge white supremacy. The response was rooted in a religious understanding about how to be in the world, and the efficacy of this approach led students in numerous other Southern communities to take similar

[379] Halberstam, *The Children*, 136 – 137

actions during the sit-in movement of 1960. It was in this late 1950s period that this long developing and innovative political form became legible.[380]

As this dissertation has shown, the politics of nonviolence were distinctly religious and interracial in their domestic American origins. Nonviolence emerged from pacifism, and a pacifist disposition was joined intentionally with direct action tactics to create an overtly political nonviolence in the 1940s. This process of joining nonviolent ideas to direct action tactics, led primarily by Bayard Rustin, was both intellectual and action-oriented. This work of joining ideas to tactics occurred primarily in interracial workshops spaces across the industrial Midwest and US South, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation was a leader in hosting these workshops. This chapter argues that James M. Lawson, Jr. built on these past efforts to make legible how a nonviolent way of religious being could be politically powerful when practiced collectively. But he also made a distinct break with pacifism in rejecting completely any passive approach to challenging Jim Crow. Often described as the leading "tactician" of nonviolence in the United States, this chapter argues Lawson's primary contribution to nonviolence was the intellectual adaptation of religious ideas to an insurgent way of being calibrated to the particular racial and political context of the US South. These politics of being were intended to contrast sharply with the system of violence used by white Americans to intimidate, marginalize, and dehumanize African Americans in the decades following Reconstruction.[381]

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[380] The late 1950s were not dissimilar to the 1930s, a moment Harvard Sitkoff described as "a time of planting, not harvesting" for black Americans. Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), ix. The long process of attempting to develop a moral form of nonviolent political action among black intellectuals is perhaps best evidenced by a collection of essays published in 1949. See Nelson, ed., *The Christian Way in Race Relations*.

[381] Lawson appears frequently throughout historical and sociological literature, but little work has been done on his intellectual contributions to nonviolence. Eminent Sociologist and Historian of the Civil Rights Movement Aldon Morris described Lawson as "an expert tactician of nonviolent protest." See Morris *The Origins of the*

This history of nonviolence is intended to augment an increasingly voluminous literature on "The Black Tradition of Arms," a robust turn in histories of black resistance which has shown that African Americans, like Americans more broadly, owned guns for both personal and political purposes – including during the peak years of Black Freedom Struggle activity in the 1950s and 1960s.[382] This "armed turn" has shattered Manichean notions of violence or nonviolence as distinct political options among black Americans by suggesting the politics of nonviolence often depended on armed black communities.[383] This dissertation builds on these histories of black resistance by accounting for the development and evolution of nonviolence as a cornerstone in 20th century US politics and black political thought. It argues that James M. Lawson, Jr. was among the most critical figures in this history of nonviolence because, like Thurman and Rustin before him, Lawson did not conceive of

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Civil Rights Movement, 204. Many scholars cite the importance of Lawson's nonviolent workshops in Nasvhille in the late 1959 and 1960, but there is less explanation about the theoretical work Lawson did in arranging the curricula for these workshops. For the most recent work on the Nashville movement and Lawson's workshops, see Benjamin Houston, *The Nashville Way Racial Etiquette and the Struggle for Social Justice in a Southern City*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), p. 83. For Lawson's workshops as a model of how ideas are diffused, Isaac et. al., "'Movement Schools' and Dialogical Diffusion of Nonviolent Praxis." See also Larry W. Isaac, Jonathan S. Coley, Daniel B. Cornfield, and Dennis C. Dickerson (*2016*) Preparation Pathways and Movement Participation: Insurgent Schooling and Nonviolent Direct Action in the Nashville Civil Rights Movement. Mobilization: An International Quarterly: June 2016, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 155-176. Hogan's *Many Minds, One Heart*, has an excellent treatment of how Lawson's ideas impacted a cadre of Nashville students, Hogan, *Many Minds, One Heart,* pp. 13 – 45. For older work on the Nashville movement and Lawson's workshops, see Halberstam, *The Children*, pp. 4 – 10; 40; 50 – 90; For work on how the Nashville students carried lessons from Lawson's workshop to the wider southern movement after 1960, and for a brief treatment of the workshops, see Arsenault, *Freedom* Riders, especially pp. 53 – 55. See also John Lewis and Michael D'Orso, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1998), pp. 70 - 190. Taylor Branch also follows the Nashville students in his history of America in the King years and describes Lawson as the "mentor of the Nashville movement," Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65*, (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 122. For detailed information about King's relationship to the Nashville movement in 1960, see Branch, *Parting the Waters*, especially pp. 260 - 297; 391 – 395; For a brief but important overview of Lawson and his relationship to Gandhism, see Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality,* pp. 67 – 84. Chappell calls Lawson "a veteran of nonviolent warfare" in his work on black religion and the challenge to Jim Crow. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*, 68. Lawson is also mentioned regularly in David J. Garrow's book *Bearing the Cross,* but little attention is given to the ideas Lawson synthesized and diffused. David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, Collector's ed. (Norwalk, Conn.: Easton Press, 1989).

[382] See Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*; Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun*; Umoja, *We Will Shoot Back*; Cobb, *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed*; Johnson, *Negroes and the Gun*.

[383] See Litwack, *Trouble in* Mind, 404 – 79.

nonviolence as either a way of life or a set of tactics. For Lawson, nonviolence was a way of being: at once an attitudinal disposition grounded in religious faith and a tactically effective method of political resistance tailored to atrophy the social and legal support for Jim Crow and white supremacy.

This chapter links to earlier discussions of Mohandas Gandhi by arguing that it was the Indian leader's religious ideas – not the Mahatma's nonviolent tactics – that proved most consequential to advancing a politics of being in the Black Freedom Movement. The politics of being became a way of doing nonviolence in the US South for religious people, a form of power that flowed from the domestic movements of pacifism and labor but was modified significantly for the struggle against Jim Crow by Jim Lawson through an articulation of how these politics were themselves Christian practice.[384] Drawing on Howard Thurman's 1949 book *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Lawson taught his students that if they could fortify themselves internally against the fear of white violence they could effectively practice insurgent nonviolent direct action techniques. Lawson joined Thurman, and Thurman's student at Howard Charles Brown, in describing the life of Jesus of Nazareth as a creative and insurgent nonviolent challenge to the demands of an unjust and coercive empire. The first section of this chapter details how Thurman's late 1940s ideas aligned with Gandhian religiosity to solidify the intellectual foundations for nonviolence as a politics of being. It emphasizes also the significance of emplacing black bodies in public spaces forbidden to them, a practice essential to the efficacy of the politics of being. The occupation of

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[384] Gandhi combined *satya*, truth – or that which is unchangeable – with *graha,* to clutch or hold firmly – in creating *satyagraha*. It's also sometimes translated as "truth-force." Jal Mehta and Christopher Winship have devised the term "moral power" to describe "the degree to which an actor, by virtue of his or her perceived moral stature, is able to persuade others to adopt a particular belief or take a particular course of action." This term does not deal with the internality, the willingness to master one's fear, at the heart of the politics of being. See Jal Mehta and Christopher Winship, "Moral Power," Harvard University http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/cwinship/files/moral_power--final_1.pdf, p. 4

segregated public spaces by interracial teams of disciplined students who tried to steel themselves internally against the consequences of violent retaliation became an effective political form because it was attenuated to exposing the ultimate weakness of of Jim Crow segregation: legal and extralegal violence.[385] The interracial occupation of these segregated public spaces served to engender a form of political power in the United States at a time when black Americans were disfranchised from electoral politics. Drawing on the pacifist commitment to do no violence, and building on Rustin's work that linked nonviolent being to the sit-down strike, Lawson and the Nashville students proved that the politics of being were an effective way to use nonviolence to challenge Jim Crow. Drawing together Thurman's historical Jesus and Gandhian religiosity, Lawson and a cadre of students practiced a politics of being that – at least for a time – drained the power of the violence used by whites to perpetuate Jim Crow.

White Violence and Nonviolence in the US South

Historians of the African American experience have long emphasized the significance of land and education for black Americans in the US South who had "nothing but freedom" in the wake of slavery.[386] But the push for land and education amidst sharecropping and economic disfranchisement cannot be separated from efforts to internally and externally resist racial violence. Eric Foner and Glenda Gilmore have persuasively argued that Jim Crow was not inevitable in the years after Reconstruction, but once segregation and disfranchisement arrived – borne of physical intimidation at the polls in the 1870s and 1880s – its durability

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[385] David Chappel has begun to unravel the way religion was used to battle Jim Crow in *Stone of Hope*. Steve Haynes has also done important work on the role of the kneel-ins as public religious ritual. See Stephen R. Haynes, *The Last Segregated Hour: The Memphis Kneel-Ins and the Campaign for Southern Church Desegregation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[386] Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy*, The Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007).

was shored up by violence. As Joel Williamson has shown, "between 1889 and 1946…almost 4,000 black men, women, and children had been mobbed to their deaths."[387] Mark M. Smith has estimated more than half of these lynchings took place in the US South between 1885 and 1903.[388] Andrew Zimmerman cites the stunning regularity of racial violence: "white mobs, often with the consent of police and other local authorities, lynched two or three black southerners every *week* in the period between 1890 - 1917."[389] The reality of racial violence and the threat of racial violence was the most widely used technology of control to enforce black poverty, political disfranchisement, and social segregation between the end of Reconstruction and the Second World War.[390]

Historian and sociologist Charles Payne sardonically assessed the persistent and wanton use of racial violence in his study of the black organizing tradition in Mississippi. When it came to such violence, Payne argues, "the point was there didn't have to be a point; Black life could be snuffed out on a whim, you could be killed because some ignorant white man didn't like the color of your shirt or the way you drove a wagon."[391] Such capricious daily violence against black Americans lasted well beyond the highly calculated public ritual

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[387] Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race : Black/White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 120. For a collection of primary sources dealing with lynching, see Ralph Ginzburg, *100 Years of Lynchings* (Black Classic Press, 2013). For work on how criminality and blackness were linked, often through accusations of rape leveled against black men, see Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness* (Harvard University Press, 2010). See also James Allen, *Without Sanctuary : Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, N.M.: Twin Palms, 2000); Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America*, Reprint edition (Modern Library, 2007).

[388] Mark M. Smith, *How Race Is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 60.

[389] Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South*, America in the World (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 40.

[390] Amy Wood focuses on the lynching of men, suggesting 3,200 black men were killed between 1880 and 1940. Wood, *Spectacle and Lynching*, 3.

[391] Payne, *I've got the Light of Freedom*, 15.

of spectacle lynching.[392] Indeed, the ever-present possibility of white violence in the late 19th and early 20th century had the effect of inscribing a lasting meaning of fear and intimidation onto perceived racial transgression that overlapped with the modern Black Freedom Struggle.

Despite decades of effort, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) failed to pass federal legislation that would explicitly end lynching and racial violence in the United States.[393] Law was never the singular arena of resistance for black Americans combatting white violence – a point articulated eloquently in the new histories on the black tradition of arms. But by the early 1920s, a critical contingent of black Americans shifted their gaze to India in search of forms of resistance to institutionalized white supremacy. Two years after spectacle lynching its height in the Red Summer of 1919, Reverdy C. Ransom wrote an article about an "Indian Messiah and Saint" in the *A.M.E Church Review*. Ransom suggested a skinny Hindu in colonized India might deliver his shackled nation from British imperial rule "through the peaceful method of non-cooperation."[394] Ransom called this "awakening of Asia…one of the great historic movements of our time," noting the Indian struggle "deserves the sympathetic understanding of every man who waits for a new birth of freedom in every land."[395]

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392 Beverly Guy Shefftal has described lynching as "public ritual" in Wilma Pearl Mankiller and NetLibrary Inc., *The Reader's Companion to U.S. Women's History*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 351.

393 The Dyer anti-lynching bill failed in 1922 after years of work by the NAACP to pass such a bill. More than a decade later, in 1935, lacking support from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt Southern lawmakers again prevailed and defeated the Costigan-Wagner Act that would have targeted lynching with federal law.

394 Reverdy C. Ransom, "Gandhi: Indian Messiah and Saint," in *A.M.E. Church Review*, October 1921, XXXVIII: 150, p. 87. See also Dennis C. Dickerson, "African American Religious Intellectuals and the Theological Foundations of the Civil Rights Movement, 1930-55," *Church History*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (Jun., 2005), p. 221; See also Kapur, *Raising Up a Prophet*, 26, 28, 48-49; and Leilah Danielson, "'In My Extremity I Turned to Gandhi': American Pacifists, Christianity, and Gandhian Nonviolence, 1915 1941," Church History 72:2 (June 2003): 361-88.

395 Ransom, "Gandhi: Indian Messiah and Saint," 88

Ransom was only among the first of a generation of black religious intellectuals who looked to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi for an ethical form of political resistance to white political rule. Scholars have documented well the rise of the Howard University Law School as a training ground for black lawyers waging legal battles against Jim Crow under the tutelage of Charles Hamilton Houston, but this dissertation has given more attention to the School of Religion at Howard as a site where religious intellectuals worked on an ethical methodology for challenging Jim Crow.[396] It has shown that foremost among this group of intellectuals was Howard Thurman, first hired as a professor of Religion at Howard in 1932. Thurman and his wife Sue Bailey Thurman led more than a dozen associates to India on a "Pilgrimage of Friendship" in 1935 with the support of the Federation of Student Christian Movements, and the 1935 delegation marked the first of many trips to India by a cadre of African Americans religious leaders in the years before the civil rights movement: Benjamin Mays, Mordecai Johnson, and William Stuart Nelson – all Thurman's colleagues at Howard – traveled to India in the years leading up to the state's 1946 partition with Pakistan.[397]

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[396] For detailed analysis of the role of Howard faculty and administrators in advancing Gandhism and discerning a moral methodology for challenging Jim Crow, see Dickerson, "African American Religious Intellectuals and the Theological Foundations of the Civil Rights Movement, 1930-55." See also Randall Maurice Jelks has recently published a book on Mays, but scholars still draw heavily from Mays autobiography. See Randal Maurice Jelks, *Benjamin Elijah Mays: Schoolmaster of the Movement*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). For Mays Autobiography, see *Benjamin E. Mays, Born to Rebel: An Autobiography*, (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2003); For a biography on Johnson, see McKinney and Johnson, *Mordecai, the Man and His Message*. For the most thorough work to date on this cohort of black religious intellectuals, see Taylor, *Black Religious Intellectuals*. For additional literature on Houston and the role of Howard Law School in ending legal segregation, see Gordon Andrews, *Undoing Plessy: Charles Hamilton Houston, Race, Labor, and the Law, 1895-1950*, (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014); for an older work on Houston, see McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights*; For more information about Thurgood Marshall's tutelage under Houston at Howard Law School, see James, Jr., *Root and Branch*. For a critical history of Houston, Marshall and the NAACP, see Goluboff, *The Lost Promise of Civil Rights*.

[397] Kapur, *Raising up a Prophet*, pp. 72 – 101; See also "The Negro Pilgrimage to India" in Quinton Hosford Dixie and Peter R. Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World: Howard Thurman's Pilgrimage to India and the Origins of African American Nonviolence*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011). For more on Thurman's encounter with Gandhi as well as the trips by Johnson and Mays, see Horne, *The End of Empires*, pp. 88 – 119.

On his 1935 trip, Howard Thurman lectured and learned at more than 40 institutions across the South Asian subcontinent over two months. On his first night in India, the chairman of the Law Club at the Law College of Ceylon interrogated Thurman about the long history of racial violence in the US. His query was pointed: how could Thurman call himself a Christian when it was Christians who sold black people into slavery and sought to preserve the "peculiar institution" through a bloody civil war? Lynched by people who often called themselves Christian, the young man asked the Baptist minister Thurman, "how can you account for yourself being in this unfortunate and humiliating position?" Thurman responded: "My judgment about slavery and racial prejudice relative to Christianity is far more devastating than yours could ever be."

> From my investigation and study, the religion of Jesus projected a creative solution to the pressing problem of survival for the minority of which He was a part in the Greco Roman world. When Christianity became an imperial and world religion, it marched under banners other than that of the teacher and prophet of Galilee.[398]

Thurman's response was predicated on an idea he worked out in detail in a 1935 article, "Good News for the Underprivileged." There is a difference, Thurman argued, between the "Religion of Jesus" and "American Christianity." Thurman explicated more fully this distinction in his 1949 book *Jesus and the Disinherited* by treating Jesus "as a religious subject rather than religious object."[399] Thurman wrote about the historical Jesus, the poor Jew living in a region recently annexed by Syria for Roman rule, and suggested – as his student Charles Brown had also done – that Jesus' Jewishness became a problem in this geo-political context where a powerful military state imposed its own religion. Jesus of Nazareth was a religious target of the state's violent legal power, Thurman argued, describing the

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[398] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 113-114.
[399] ibid, 15

religion of Jesus as a methodology for responding to the violent and oppressive force of the state.[400]

In *Jesus and the Disinherited,* Thurman likened Jesus' political environment to the one facing black Americans in 1949. Both black Americans and first century Jews faced "the problem of creative survival" as a persecuted minority with no protection from violence – whether state sanctioned or extralegal. Like Rome, the US used a host of technologies to control its population: taxation and registration, regulation of land, limited access to education, control over labor. But what lay behind all of these was violence. In such a climate of "deep insecurity," and "faced with so narrow a margin of civil guarantees," Jesus and the disinherited "had to find some other basis upon which to establish a sense of well-being."[401] Scorned and threatened with no protection from the state, security and power must come from somewhere else.[402]

While Thurman had begun to develop many of these ideas in the 1930s, they crystalized in his 1949 book. Thurman argued that violence could not be the source of security for Jesus and the disinherited because a minority was unlikely to successfully overpower the state using violence. But he went further in decrying violence as unlikely to alter the distrust at the core of oppressive human relations. Such distrust fortified hatred of another person and guaranteed "final isolation from one's fellow." The alienation between people borne of hatred and fear had the effect of obliterating the "creative residue" needed to give rise to the "great ideas" that might bring human beings closer together and transform

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[400] Thurman believed American Christianity "lacked much that was fundamental to the genius of the faith itself." All quotes from Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 104.
[401] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 35
[402] Ibid

oppressive social relations.[403] The problem with violence for Thurman was that it limited creative thinking about how to effectively transform human relationships - and for those with their backs against the wall, survival depended on creativity. And creativity depended on courage – the mastering of fear.[404]

In the interwar period, Mohandas Gandhi became an important example for religious Americans seeking a solution to the problem of creative survival for the disinherited. As Reverdy Ransom suggested in his 1921 article, Gandhi's allure emerged from his appearance as a Christ-like and saintly figure practicing an innovative and effective response to oppressive state power.[405] Gandhi's seeming resemblance to Jesus was no accident. Jesus was himself an inspiration for Gandhi's own activism, an example of how to avoid passive responses or violent responses to overwhelming oppression. Gandhi was creative in his re-appropriation of Jesus' life, suggesting that the Jewish Jesus embodied the Hindu principle of *ahimsa* – literally "no violence" - in his way of being.[406] Gandhi interpreted Jesus' counsel in Matthew 5:40 – "If any man take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also" – as an illustration of how one might actively and nonviolently "disarm" an aggressor by giving "your opponent all in the place of just what he needs."[407] Jesus' parable resembled for Gandhi the Hindu practice of *dharna*, an action meant to shame a debtor by sitting nearly naked on his stoop. Both acts were intended to have "a wholesome effect upon evildoers." Gandhi

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[403] Ibid, 86 - 88.

[404] It's also critical to acknowledge that violent insurrection as an imminently anticipated and easily quelled response was countered by a host of authors who argued that a nonviolent response would destabilized their attacker to quickly re-consider their method of intimidation and control. These tactical expressions were popularly presented in Richard Gregg's 1934 book *The Power of Nonviolence* as "moral jiu-jitsu." See Richard Bartlett Gregg, *The Power of Non-Violence*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Publishing, 1934).

[405] For an extensive discussion of the ways in which prominent black intellectuals and writers discussed Gandhi in Jesus like terms, see Kapur, *Raising up a Prophet*, 35 – 45; 98 – 102; 140;

[406] See Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is Within You: Christianity not as a Mystical Teaching by as a New Concept of Life*, (Rockville, Maryland: Wildside Press, 2006), 17

[407] Gandhi, *Nonviolent Resistance*, 6; 375.

interpreted the life of Jesus as "a picturesque" and "telling" example of "the great non-violent doctrine of non-cooperation."[408]

Both Gandhi and Thurman looked to Jesus' life as an example of ethical being that posed a creative challenge to state power. Each saw in Jesus a life lived without violence, a life that drew its strength from a relationship with God rather than the domination of other people or creatures. In Jesus, Thurman and Gandhi both saw a form of ethical being that was more powerful than physical violence. And by linking the life of Jesus to his own Hindu principles, Gandhi claimed the Christian story as part of his nonviolent politics - effectively cementing Gandhi's story alongside Jesus of Nazareth as a model for religious activists looking for an insurgent and ethical force in the fight against Jim Crow.[409] While these Gandhian politics certainly inspired the development of a spiritual form of political power in the United States, as this dissertation has shown the politics of being emerged primarily from domestic movement tributaries as a way of doing nonviolence – a methodology calculated to expose the unjust violence that had long perpetuated white supremacy in the United States.

James M. Lawson, Jr. and The Remaking of Racial Politics in the US South

From critical local campaigns in Nashville and Memphis to large-scale SCLC campaigns in Birmingham and Selma, James M. Lawson, Jr indelibly influenced the politics of civil rights in the 1960s with his religious approach to nonviolent insurgency.[410] Before

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[408] Ibid, 375.

[409] Ibid, 3

[410] A cohort of contemporaries celebrated Lawson's work on nonviolence. Martin King called Lawson one of the world's most important "theorists and practitioners of nonviolence" in a speech in Memphis on March 18 1968. John Lewis said Lawson's trainings in Nashville "turned my world around…Jim Lawson knew--though we had no idea when we began--that we were being trained for a war unlike any this nation had seen up to this time, a nonviolent struggle that would force this nation to face it's conscience," John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind,* 70 and 78; Dianne Nash was skeptical of nonviolence when she first attended Lawson's workshops, but concluded "in the process of using it…I finally became convinced," Lisa Mullins, *Dianne Nash: The Fire of the*

these moments of high drama in the peak years of the movement, Lawson travelled across the South and Midwest refining and diffusing nonviolence as a politics of being, working out ideas and tactics in interracial spaces with hundreds of local people.[411] He visited students in colleges and churches across the South and Midwest in an effort to discern how Gandhism and ideas about Jesus might become a way of being with the political power to destabilize Jim Crow. Historians have long recognized Lawson's centrality to the advancement of nonviolence among local and national activists in the 1960s, but this chapter explicates how Lawson diffused the politics of being as a way of doing nonviolence in the years before the sit-in movement.[412]

From an early age, James Lawson knew he would be forced to choose how he would be in his response to racism. He grew up on heroic stories of his great-grandparents' flight from slavery in the US South, and Lawson's father – a Canadian born African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) preacher – continued the tradition of resistance to white supremacy by founding an NAACP chapter in every town he pastored. The Rev. James M. Lawson, Sr. encouraged his son Jimmy to fight, to stand up for himself and never back down if challenged. The elder Lawson carried a .38 caliber pistol on his hip and made clear he would not

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Civil Rights Movement, (Miami: Barnhadt and Ashe Publishing, 2007). P. 18; Marion Barry said "…Jim Lawson was the foremost proponent of the philosophical construct around nonviolence…" Henry Hampton, Steve Fayer, and Sarah Flynn, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 63. Julian Bond described Lawson's vision as "a militant nonviolence, an aggressive nonviolence…" *Voices of Freedom,* 63. Tom Kahn, a close assistant to Bayard Rustin and co-organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, told Lawson he was "most impressed and appreciative" of his role in the sit in movement of 1960. From Tom Kahn to James Lawson, 29 June 1960, Box 39, Folder incoming and outgoing correspondence, James M. Lawson Manuscript Collection (hereafter JLMC), Jane and Alexander Heard Library (hereafter JAHL), Vanderbilt University.

[411] After visiting her home in Dover Delaware, Pauline Morris told Lawson she believed "non-violence is the best practice" for the difficult process of advancing integration. Pauline Morris to James Lawson, 20 May 1958, Box 36, Folder incoming correspondence, JLMC, JAHL.

[412] Lawson consistently maintained the importance of religion to nonviolence. He wrote Tom Kahn, "your point about the religious character of the struggle is highly complex and, to be treated justly, would require considerable discussion." Tom Kahn to James Lawson, 21 July 1960, Box 39, Incoming and Outgoing correspondence, JLMC, JAHL. The final section of this chapter details the religious ideas running throughout Lawson's conception of nonviolence. See also, Isaac et. al, 2012.

acquiesce if challenged. Lawson's mother, Philane May Cover Lawson, was the counter-ballast to the elder Lawson. She believed Christian love prohibited physical and verbal violence. So when Jimmy Lawson, Jr. smacked a white child in elementary school for calling him a "nigger," Lawson's mother asked him: "'Jimmy, what good did that do?'" Lawson remembers it this way: "She went on talking quietly in that vein, among other things mentioning the love of God, the love in our family, Jesus and our commitment as Christian people. In the process of this conversation, I remember only the two sentences: 'Jimmy, what good did that do?' and 'Jimmy, there must be a better way.'" Lawson called this "a numinous experience," the moment his life became an "experiment with finding the better way."[413]

In the Fall of 1947, Lawson heard A. J. Muste lecture on the history of nonviolence at Baldwin Wallace College in Ohio during his first semester of school. As the Executive Secretary for the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), Muste introduced the 19-year-old Lawson to Reinhold Niebuhr, John Paul Sartre, Leo Tolstoy and Mohandas Gandhi. Lawson was inspired by this "other way" of doing political resistance, and he dedicated the balance of his college course work to understanding the long global history of non-cooperation and nonviolent action. Muste had become known nationally as "America's Number One Pacifist by 1947, a Dutch-born immigrant who co-founded the American affiliate of the British-FOR with sixty-seven other US pacifists in 1916.[414] Muste was radicalized by the violence against workers in the Lawrence Textile Strike of 1919, and consistently positioned himself to the left of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) throughout the 1920s. Like his ministerial counterpart Reinhold Niebuhr, Muste was active

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[413] Vincent Harding and Rosemarie Freeney Harding, eds. "James M. Lawson Jr.: The Seamless Cloth of Faith and Struggle" in *The Veterans of Hope Pamphlet Series Vol. 1, No. 2*, (Denver: Center for the Study of Religion and Democratic Renewal at Iliff School of Theology, 2000), p. 9

[414] *Time Magazine* called Muste the "number one U.S. pacifist" in 1939.

with the FOR throughout the 1920s and, like Niebuhr, Muste grew frustrated with Christian passivity in the face of state violence against workers.[415] But Muste was quite unlike Niebuhr in that he did not abandon his pacifist principles for a "just war theory" on the precipice of the Second World War, devoting himself to advancing what Dave Dellinger later called "revolutionary non-violence."[416] As the Fellowship Executive Secretary in the 1940s, Muste directly supported the formation of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1942, and he actively counseled CORE students as they experimented with the sit-in as a method of pursuing racial integration. As seen in previous chapters, the Fellowship was at the leading edge of nonviolent theory and practice in the early 1940s with Bayard Rustin and CORE co-founder James Farmer working for the Fellowship to nurture the rise of nonviolent leaders in the struggle against Jim Crow.[417]

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[415] For Gandhi's contention that *satyagraha* is the opposite of pacifism, see Gandhi, *Nonviolent Resistance*, 6. The broader debate on passive and active resistance stems from differing interpretations of Jesus' sermon on the mount in the biblical book of Matthew Chapters 5 - 7. The British FOR, for example, interpreted Jesus admonition to "resist not evil" as a counsel to passively accept violence against oneself. Other writers and activists, perhaps first among them the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, believed Jesus counseled followers to "resist not evil in the way of evil." Tolstoy was among the first to argue the use of non-violent force in resisting evil was a Christian idea. In his 1894 text *The Kingdom of God is Within You: Christianity not as a Mystic Religion but as a New Theory of Life*, Tolstoy described "passive" interpretations of Jesus teachings in the face of evil as "a perversion" of Christian doctrine, arguing instead non-resistance should be interpreted "in the exact sense of our Saviour's teaching—that is, not repaying evil for evil. We ought to oppose evil by every righteous means in our power, but not by evil," p. 18 in Tolstoy. For full text of *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (recovered 27 April 2014); Tolstoy's ideas deeply impacted Gandhi. In Part II of his autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*, Gandhi wrote "Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* overwhelmed me. It left an abiding impression on me. Before the independent thinking, profound morality, and the truthfulness of this book, (most other books) pale into insignificance." See Ch. 15 in Gandhi's autobiography, "Religious Ferment." For the full text Gandhi's *My Experiments with Truth* (1925), see: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00litlinks/gandhi/#part2 (recovered 27 April 2014); For a more full discussion of this debate see Anthony C. Siracusa, *Developing an American Ahimsa*, (Memphis, 2009), pp. 42 - 45, https://dlynx.rhodes.edu/jspui/handle/10267/7416 (accessed 27 April, 2014)

[416] By 1932, Muste had become a self-described Trotskyist who embraced a "qualified defense of labor violence" before returning to an un-qualified position of Christian pacifism by 1936. Robinson, *Abraham Went Out*, 64 David T. Dellinger, *Revolutionary Non-Violence*, (Indianapolis, 1970). See also A.J. Muste, *Nonviolence in an Aggressive World,* (Harper Press: New York, 1940).

[417] For more on Rustin and Farmer, see Kip Kosek, *Acts of Conscience*, pp. 146 - 191. For the best work on Rustin, see D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*. Jervis Anderson also has an earlier biography on Rustin. See Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen, A Biography*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). For excellent primary sources from Rustin himself, see Bayard Rustin, *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected*

Muste's 1947 talk at Baldwin Wallace tapped in to Lawson's childhood commitment to avoid violence just as this commitment was sternly tested.[418] At the end of his senior year, Lawson refused to register for the draft. He consulted with Muste, as Bayard Rustin had done before him during the Second World War, before sending back all his federal draft materials with a letter explaining why he could not cooperate. "I felt that the free man must maintain his right to determine those laws that are absolutely contrary to the meaning of freedom and justice," Lawson recalled, concluding both conscription laws and segregation laws were "a complete denial of the meaning of freedom."[419] On April 25, 1951, just weeks before he was to receive his degree from Baldwin Wallace College, Lawson was sentenced to three years in a federal prison for violating the Conscription Act of 1947.[420] He would spend 14 months in two federal penitentiaries serving a partial sentence before being paroled to Nagpur, India to coach sports and mentor youth at Hislop College.[421]

In India, Lawson read about the Montgomery Bus Boycott on the front page of the *Nagpur Times*. He did "some jumping up and dancing and shouting" as he believed the seeds of Gandhian movement were finally taking root in United States soil.[422] When he returned to the United States in the fall of 1956, he enrolled at the Oberlin School of Theology where less than a month into his studies he met Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The two men sat beside each other at dinner after King's speech, King aged 26 and Lawson 27, and as Vincent Harding

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Writings of Bayard Rustin, Devon W. Carbado, and Donald Weise, eds., *(San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2003).* For more on Farmer's experience founding CORE, see James Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), pp. 101 – 117.

[418] James M. Lawson, Jr. interview with Joan Turner Beifuss, September 10, 1968, Sanitation Strike Collection, University of Memphis Library, Folder 29, p. 20; As seen in previous chapters, FOR was at the forefront of nonviolent theory and practice with regards to race in America during the 1940s.

[419] ibid, folder 130, p.7

[420] ibid.,folder 129, p. 19

[421] ibid, folder 130, p. 19 – 24

[422] Lawson interview with Harding, 11

writes "when King realized that Lawson had spent three years in India absorbing the teachings of the Mahatma, King knew that he had met his soul brother."[423]

After a decade of study and experimentation, Lawson was ready to seriously apply nonviolence to the problem of race in the United States – and he would do this by drawing on the fusion of nonviolent being and direct action tactics that Rustin refined in the 1940s. In January 1958, after some urging from King, Lawson moved to Nashville with the intention of beginning work with Muste's Fellowship of Reconciliation. He transferred to Vanderbilt Divinity School and began to deepen his inquiry into religious being and the politics of nonviolence. Lawson shared Gandhi's belief that all the "great living religions" counseled a life of nonviolence in order to know God, and like Gandhi Lawson used the Hindu notion of *ahimsa* – nonviolence as a way of being the world – in arguing prohibitions against violence were endemic to most major religious philosophies in Asia: Taoism,[424] Mohism,[425] Buddhism,[426] and Sufi mysticism.[427] Lawson's time in India convinced him that devotion to God required a life of nonviolent being.[428]

But Lawson also made critical adjustments to Gandhian thought in tailoring it to the US South. He didn't fully embrace the Gandhian practices of abstinence (*bramacharya*),

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[423] ibid, 10

[424] *Wu-wei*, the idea of "not forcing," is likely the idea Lawson emphasized from the Daodejing. The practice of wu-wei is supposed to explain the path of harmony with the Dao, or ziran.

[425] The idea of universal love, or *jiān ài*, is likely the idea from Mohism that Lawson emphasized. *Jiān ài* was the idea Mozi used to capture an emphasis on loving across clan or family structures, a response to his belief that Confucius over-emphasized loving people within clans and family structures.

[426] In addition to ahimsa, the notion of truth, or no illusion in word or thought – the Sanskrit work *satya* – was drawn from Pantanjail and the Baghavad Gita.

[427] Sufism included a set of inner laws, *fiqh*, intended to govern one's own behavior as well as outer laws, *qanun*, which referred to social concerns like marriage and criminal law. Early Sufis, like Christian monks and Hindu mystics, professed the subjugation of selfish desire in order to know God.

[428] The document from FOR spelled it out this way: "the goal is God; the second thing is that He can be directly known in this life and in this body; the third thing is that spiritual practices are imperative if one is to know God…" "The Basis and Power of Love, Preliminary Reading for Feb 1959 Boston FOR discussion Group," Box 36, Folder FOR I, JLMC, JAHL. The FOR document cites these quotes as originally printed in Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda: A Biography*, 24th re-print edition (Advaita Ashrama, India, 2010), 181.

vegetarianism, or communal living in an ashram. He didn't pursue complete poverty or spin his own clothes. Lawson also was not, by the late 1950s, preaching pacifism. Instead, Lawson drew on what he called a "broad Christian tradition" and the long-standing anti-communist reputation of the Fellowship to teach "the theological and practical aspects" of nonviolence, religious ideas about being nonviolent and effective tactics of nonviolent direct action.[429] He worked in black Christian churches and black colleges rather than seeking to rekindle the shallow but "radical roots" of labor organizing in the South, piloting a form of nonviolent politics that can be understood as a mode of ethical being capable of generating political power for a disfranchised population.[430]

As FOR's first "Southern Secretary," Lawson reported to National Field Secretary Glenn Smiley, a figure who alongside Bayard Rustin had been critical in convincing Martin

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[429] Letter from James Lawson to Dr. George Brown, 15 April 1958, Box 36, Folder Outgoing Correspondence, JLMC, JAHL.

[430] Lawson described his work as the FOR's Southern Secretary as "a unique task in the South today…Only the FOR has the broad Christian tradition which can appeal to the churches leaders of the South…" Lawson estimated that between 75 and 90% of Negro leaders are clergy or laymen and see the struggle as part of their "Christian witness," ibid. Lawson was not the first FOR staff member to work in the South. Howard Kester, a FOR staffer and former Vanderbilt Divinity student in the late 1920s, had organized sharecroppers in communities across the South – but he struggled not only to preach nonviolence in the 1930s but faced the constant threat of personal violence against himself. For more on Howard Kester, see Chapter One as well as Howard Kester, *Revolt Among the Sharecroppers*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997). UNC also has extensive oral histories with Kester. See: http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/B-0007-1/menu.html. Lawson did not tap the "radical roots" common to 1930s popular front organizing because the anticommunist efforts of the late 40s and 1950s had effectively eroded many of those relationships, though people radicalized by their experiences were often essential to the Southern civil rights movement. See Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*. Gilmore cites the local Newspaper in Chapel Hill, North Carolina in 1935, which wrote "we can use a few more radicals whose roots are set deeply into native soil," *Defying Dixie*, 204. Gilmore's book does excellent work on the role on the communist alliance with labor and black Americans in the South during the 30s, but the largely failed efforts of both communists and organized labor in the 30s to advance racial equality made new approaches all the more significant by the late 50s– a time when, arguably, anti-communist crackdowns were at their height. For more on the failure of organized labor to advance civil rights in the south, see Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988). For work on smaller victories by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in Memphis, see Michael K. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers*, (Urbana-Champaigan: University of Illinois Press, 1993). Robin Kelley has done excellent work on communist organizing in the 1930s, particularly in response to the Scottsboro trials where the NAACP faltered. See Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 23 - 43.

King to commit to nonviolent action in the Montgomery Bus Boycott.[431] Beyond this limited experience in Montgomery, and as outlined in Chapter 1, the Fellowship had struggled to work for black equality in the US South. While Muste supported Farmer, Rustin, and CORE in the 1940s,the FOR – like most other national organizations – had failed to implement a sustained strategy of nonviolent action for confronting Jim Crow in the US South before the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955. Discerning how the "spirit of Montgomery" might be carried forward was Lawson's unique challenging in working with in the segregationist South.[432]

Lawson's strategy was to inject religious ideas about ethical being into direct action tactics calibrated to exploit white supremacy's weakness: legal and extralegal violence. As a mode of ethical being, nonviolence required mercy, kindness, and forgiveness in the face of tremendous violence and malice. These acts became a way of doing nonviolence, nonviolent direct actions that were themselves a way of being faithful to one's religious principles. Nonviolent direct action tactics – the boycotts, pickets, and sit-downs common to early 20th century protest – were just that: tactics. They were methods for practicing nonviolent politics - just as the politics of being were a method for religious people to practice nonviolence. This distinction is essential to understanding the role of religion and religious actors in the late 1950s and early 1960s black freedom struggle.[433] Historian David Chappell has an excellent

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[431] For a discussion of Rustin and Smiley's role in convincing King to remain nonviolent, see Strain, *Purefire*, 40.

[432] Smiley notes that members who were "inactive" after a few years were dropped from the list of supporters...Lawson was essentially building a new organization. Glenn Smiley to James Lawson, 23 June 1958, Box 26, Folder Incoming Correspondence, JLMC, JAHL. For the best work on the way the South was expanding as part of the Sunbelt, see Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

[433] In their history of nonviolent direct action among African Americans, especially since Reconstruction, August Meier and Elliot Rudwick suggest nonviolent direct action tactics have long been a part of black struggle. They argue the "discontinuity" in the protest tradition belies any kind of argument about ideological

re-assessment of the role "prophetic religion" played in the death of Jim Crow, defining prophetic religion as a religious language of political transformation that contrasts sharply with the civic language of liberal reform. Chappell suggests the rise of "nonviolent soldiers" in the civil rights movement cannot be disentangled from what he calls the persistence of "Christian and Jewish myth" among a cohort of expressly religious leaders who believed only "catastrophic changes" might prevent the collapse of human society.[434] This chapter builds on Chappell's work by suggesting that the politics of being, as a way of doing nonviolence, was not simply a political strategy but a vision for social relations anew, ways of being drawn from narrative portrayals of Jesus and Gandhi that were themselves expression of the world as it should be. For Jim Lawson and a critical cohort of student leaders, the politics of being became an active rejection and reformatting of the deforming social prescriptions of Jim Crow.

A series of major social and political changes at home and abroad, many of them set in motion by the Second World War, hastened the process of ending Jim Crow.[435] Law had

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commitments to nonviolence. This essay, however, suggests the late 1950s were an outlier in this longer history of nonviolent direct action, largely because of Lawson's work to create a form of moral politics he called nonviolence, a form of politics which a critical number of students – many of them minsters, seminarians, or faith based actors – adopted and practiced. See Meier and Rudwick, *Along the Color Line,* 265.

[434] Chappel, *Stone of Hope*, 3

[435] A host of broader national shifts help us account for the ascent of this unique form of politics in the post-war US South. Sociologist Aldon Morris has suggested that the NAACP's blossoming in the immediate post-war years contributed greatly to the development of widespread black protest beginning in 1960 and, indeed, following Ruby Hurley's appointment as Southeast Region Director of the NAACP in 1951 the total number of NAACP chapters across the former confederacy rose to more than 500See Library of Congress online Manuscript Collection, *http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naacp/the-civil-rights-era.html#obj14.* But the rise of the NAACP should be understood alongside the near complete banishment of black Americans from electoral politics in the US South. The more than four million black Americans leaving the US South for the North and West during the Great Migration often sought to join the Republican Party, but their arrival served only to hasten the pursuit of a "lily-white" strategy in "the party of Lincoln." Slowly ostracized from their base of formal political power in the Republican Party, black Americans began joining FDR's Democratic party in the late 1930s and early 1940s. But the cumulative effect of these party realignments for black Americans in the US South was a doubling down on black exclusion by a group of Southern Democrats waging the "Dixiecrat Revolution" in 1948. Bruce Schulman suggests, however, that a new breed of "whiggish" southern businessmen would emerge as a more moderate and stable force in the Southern Democratic party. See Schulman, *From*

proven to be a slow and limited method of ending discrimination and segregation and rigid segregation in schools remained a fact of life in the late 1950s despite the 1954 *Brown* decision. The widely publicized lynching of Emmett Till in 1954 was a reminder that abrupt and lethal white violence against black people remained a constant threat in the United States. The Montgomery Bus Boycott, a strong local movement defined by a nonviolent ethic, resulted in yet another unenforced Supreme Court decision and continued to cast doubt on the NAACP's strategy of pursuing litigation. Despite the *Smith V. Allwright* (1944) decision outlawing the white primary, the *Shelley v. Kramer* (1948) decision striking down racially restrictive housing covenants, and both the *Brown* (1954) and *Browder* (1956) decisions that seemed to undermine the legal regime of segregation, white supremacists continued to evade the law and use violence to control black labor and politics.

James Lawson maintained that only in going "beyond the law" to confront "the public mind with the necessity" of ending white supremacy would genuine progress be possible.[436] "We do not have the atmosphere in which the constitutional or democratic framework has relevancy," Lawson told a group of students at Penn State in 1960.[437] Debated by elite actors in insulated courtrooms, the law was not – for Lawson – the most democratic form of change

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Cotton Belt to Sunbelt, 133. Regardless, with the exception of Memphis, black voting was almost nonexistent in the former confederacy before the Voting Rights Act of 1965. As Hasan Kwame Jefferies points out about Lowndes County, Alabama, for example, more than 5,000 voting age black Americans lived in the county at the beginning of 1965, and not one was on the voting roles. See Hasan Kwame Jefferies, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Bely*, (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 1. By the time the 1956 "Southern Manifesto" was issued by southern lawmakers engaged in "massive resistance" to integration, blacks were almost completely disfranchised from formal electoral politics in the US South. The City of Memphis was an exception to this rigid political exclusion. Wayne Dowdy has, for example, written about the massive voter registrations among black Memphians in the lead up to the 1959 election, which Black Americans called a "great crusade for freedom." See G. Wayne Dowdy, *Crusades for Freedom: Memphis and the Political Transformation of the American South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010).

[436] James M. Lawson, Jr., "Address at Penn State University," 30 March 1960, Box 45, Folder Students vs Segregation, JLMC, JAHL, p. 3. Lawson went on to say "what we in the movement in Nashville understand is that we are committed to this building of a climate in which democratic law will have some real relevance. We see ourselves trying to persuade people, to change the attitudes of people, in such a fashion that the Supreme Court decisions can really be relevant."

[437] Ibid, 2

for disfranchised black Americans. Nonviolence, Lawson suggested, was a more effective and democratic form of engagement because it is "involving many, encountering all."[438] This innovative political form, he suggested, might bring about the "radical reversal of perspective" needed to confront and transform white supremacy in the United States.[439] The "present openness" to the politics of nonviolence Lawson encountered as he traveled the South in the late 1950s was borne, in part, from the seemingly slow progress of legal reform compared with the relatively rapid success of nationalist movements in non-white nations.[440]

The hunger for different political models was confirmed on Lawson's first trip to Memphis in early 1958. Meeting with a group of "highly respected" leaders in the black community, Lawson learned that Church of God in Christ (COGIC) founder Rev. Charles H. Mason had a cross-burned in his front yard, his church sanctuary had been torched, and his newly built home had also been set to flame. Dr. Hollis Price of Lemoyne College in

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[438] James M. Lawson, Jr., "The Measure of a Movement, The Gandhi Memorial Lecture at Howard University," 10 April 1961, Box 21, Folder - Speeches on NV Movement (race), JLMC, Vanderbilt University. Lawson also wrote that "Negro leadership has not been amenable to an approach which would not only change the laws and customs but transform the power structures which made and sustains [sic] those laws and customs." Box 45, Folder Backdraft Ch 1 draft, JMLC, JAHL.

[439] James M. Lawson, handwritten note, no date, Box 38, Folder NV Workshops 1958, JLMC, JAHL.

[440] Lawson wrote: "there is a powerful and significant reception to the idea of non-violence. When I spoke on campuses in Texas in 1953, I did not find this openness to the ideals of pacifism at all. I suggest that recent months (Montgomery, Orangeburg) has paved the way for responsible Negro leaders to see the unlimited possibilities in what we of the Fellowship (of Reconciliation) have been preached [sic] for 43 years." From James Lawson to Dr. George Brown, 15 April 1958, Box 36, Folder Outgoing Correspondence, JMLC, JAHL. Lawson also remarked "I strongly believe that the FOR has an opportunity to make the ministry of reconciliation felt as never before in its history," Letter from James Lawson to Dr. George Brown, 23 June 1958, Box 36, Folder Outgoing Correspondence, JLMC, JAHL. He also told Brown of his intent to remain in the south for a "number of years." "While there are dangers involved in the work, there is also realization that right now I belong there." Letter from James Lawson to Dr. George Brown, 15 April 1958; A host of movements in non-white countries shifted discourse on race and resistance in the United States. Gandhi's rise in international politics, despite never being elected to office, was already a strong source of inspiration for black Americans by the late 1950s. The high politics of Gandhi's friend Jawaharlal Nehru and the collection of non-aligned nations at the Bandung Conference of 1955 signaled to the Soviet Union and the United States that non-white peoples across the globe would not simply be folded into their geopolitical calculations. The South African Defiance Campaign of 1948, the armed Mau Mau uprising of the mid 1950s, and Kwame Nkrumah's successful push for Ghanaian independence in 1960 proved to be only the beginning of independence movements in Africa. By 1962, 25 new nations emerged in formerly colonized territories and effectively shifted global discourses on race, freedom, and resistance in the United States. See Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961*.

Memphis told Lawson such incidents indicated the need to "change the entire nature of" activism in Memphis to focus on "stiffening the will to resist evil" and "effectively overcoming fear."[441] Racial terror in Memphis led Price to suggest "a different and newly oriented leadership" for challenging white supremacy.[442]

In his first full year of work, Lawson made trips like this to colleges and churches in every former confederate state but Florida.[443] In his first three months he travelled through Mississippi, Kentucky, West Virginia, North Carolina, Maryland, Arkansas and Ohio.[444] By the spring of 1958, sensing weariness in the young seminarian, Glenn Smiley told Lawson "we feel a great confidence in your work in the South," urging him to keep up his feverish schedule in the faith that it would pay off.[445] But Lawson wasn't so sure. He reported to Smiley his trip through Virginia in early May of 1958 was vastly underwhelming, noting Richmond had "fallen flat." "The Nashville group still lags behind," he wrote Smiley, and "I really do not know what to do."[446]

By the summer of 1958, however, Lawson had gathered a group of regular students for an ongoing series of workshops in Nashville. They covered topics ranging from the "religious and psychological basis of nonviolence" to practical aspects of "nonviolent methods" to the process of "preparation for nonviolence." Lawson provided extensive bibliographies on

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441 James M. Lawson, "Memphis Report," Box 38, Folder NV Workshops 1958, JLMC, JAHL.

442 Ibid

443 "Minutes of National Council of the FOR, 21 - 23 April 1960," Box 39, Folder 1961 Clippings/King, JLMC, JAHL.

444 Lawson was also sought for a number of tasks across the country in places to which he did not travel. Lawson was asked by the Ohio United Campus Christian Fellowship to write an article on world problems and student challenges. David Shaw, Pastor of St. Luke's in Odessa TX requested "The Montgomery Story" and "Walk to Freedom" comic books for his congregation. Letter from David Shaw to James Lawson, 2 April 1959, Box 36, Folder Incoming Correspondence, JMLC, Vanderbilt University; Lawson also turned down a Danforth Foundation request to be at conference with 325 kids in August 1959.

445 Letter from Glenn Smiley to James Lawson, 19 May 1958, Box 36, Folder Incoming Correspondence, JLMC, JAHL.

446 James Lawson to Glenn Smiley, 2 July 1958, Box 36, Folder Outgoing Correspondence, JLMC, JAHL.

religion and nonviolence to spark continued dialogue in preparation for a sustained movement, and the consistency of interaction in the Nashville workshops was a revelation to him.[447] It created a space where he could actively work through ideas and strategies with a dedicated group of students in a specific location – an innovation on Rustin's 1940s workshops format that led to sustained and deep training. As he told the Rev. S.M. Smiley, Jr. of Cory Methodist Church in Cleveland, Ohio, "I am now convinced that the FOR has been born for a moment like this." His belief that a nonviolent politics of being could address "the problems of the South" was growing stronger – despite the hardships of travel and the FOR's relative anonymity in the South. Lawson's first six months on the job as a FOR staffer convinced him that the politics of being were a force capable of effectively transforming social relations ordered by white supremacy.[448]

The power of nonviolence was, for Lawson, its ability to change people – lots of people – and thus to change the structure of society. Lawson explained how Christian ethical practices – kindness, mercy, and forgiveness – could be used as a political form that exposed the violence and malice used to maintain white supremacy. For Lawson and the students he worked with, these personal religious practices became a form of collective politics intended to transform social relations disfigured by the demands of Jim Crow. The remaking of individual social relations through practicing the politics of being was the method by which practitioners of nonviolence might transform the super structure of race in the United States. By injecting personal religious practice into a public political practice, Lawson devised a

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[447] James Lawson to Dr. Major Jones, Chattanooga, 10 March 1960, Box 36, Folder Outgoing Correspondence, JLMC, JAHL.

[448] James Lawson to Rev. S.M. Riley, Jr., 5 July 1958, Box 36, Folder Outgoing Correspondence, JLMC, JAHL. Lawson also told Riley that much could happen if "ministers could be jarred out of their fear and see the possibility for creative preaching and action."

method by which to move a critical contingent of students "from idea to action" – generating significant political power in a time when black Americans were electorally disfranchised.[449]

Nonviolence and Being

James Lawson believed Gandhi and Thurman had correctly interpreted the New Testament as counsel to actively resist violence and oppression through nonviolent means. Echoing the fiery language of Thurman before him, Lawson openly castigated continuing counsels to Christian passivity in the face of racial oppression as "theologies of realism" that made God "anemic" and "defenseless" in the face of great evil.[450] Lawson rejected interpretations of Jesus' teachings as "impossible ideals," calling instead on Christians to see that Jesus did "on the cross…what he says in the Sermon on the Mount": he showed how personal suffering was a more powerful force than state violence.[451] In abandoning status quo religious politics of comfort to embrace the pain and suffering of Jesus, Lawson believed Christians could recover the cross as good news for the disinherited.[452]

The suffering Jesus was, for Lawson, an illustration of how individual religious practice could engage and transform broader social forces. Because Jim Crow made personal demands of both black and white people, Lawson described segregation's attempt to condition and warp how one is in the world as "spiritual violence." Refusing to cooperate with such social conditioning was the first step in abandoning the externally imposed but often

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[449] Hogan, *Many Minds One Heart*, 9.

[450] James M. Lawson, Handwritten Notes, Box 45, Folder Notes for Chapter Three Theology and Social Change, JLMC, JAHL, p. 5.

[451] James M. Lawson, "The Theological Basis of Nonviolence," Box 45, Folder – Chapter 3, JLMC, JAHL.

[452] "Jesus was nailed to a cross," he wrote, "six bullets were pumped into Gandhi," JLMC, Box 38, Folder NV Workshops 1958, "Non-violence: A Relevant Power for Constructive Social Change,"1958; Lawson argued these men had become world historical figures precisely because they chose suffering and sacrifice. Lawson intoned sardonically: "perhaps your crucifixion will come out alright as well." James M. Lawson, Handwritten Notes, Box 45, Folder Notes for Chapter Three, JLMC, JAHL.

personally internalized "emotional complexes" of fear, hatred, and inferiority that Jim Crow sought to nestle within black women and men. Refusing to abide by the demands of segregation was, for Lawson, a refusal to internalize the externally imposed inferiority. By reformulating Jim Crow as a social force of violence, Lawson effectively narrowed the distance between self and structure: one could not "deny consciously" one's inferiority while simultaneously "testifying" to such inferiority in abiding by Jim Crow laws.[453] Simply put, political resistance to Jim Crow required one to be differently.

Because nonviolence was grounded in a conception of how to be within a social structure ordered by violence, this way of doing nonviolence described by Lawson was an mode of ethical being with political valences. Refusing to obey Jim Crow laws was both a rejection of personal inferiority and a public challenge to Jim Crow demands. No person or law could make a person inferior, Lawson argued, because individuals always retained a choice about how to be. This choice took on clear political valences for black Americans who were confronted with a "colored" restroom, segregated pool, or divided lunch counter.[454] Refusing to use so-called "colored" facilities was an act of political noncooperation, but it was also a choice to fortify against the "emotional and spiritual violence" of Jim Crow. Lawson told his students they had a choice: perpetuate white supremacy and one's own inferiority, or refuse cooperation with segregation and enforced inferiority by being in segregated public spaces. Lawson described this as the "serious and concrete alterations of persons in the social

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[453] Mullins, *Dianne Nash: The Fire of the Civil Rights Movement*, 18

[454] James M. Lawson, "Non-violence: A Relevant Power for Constructive Social Change," 1958, Box 38, Folder NV Workshops 1958, JLMC, JAHL. "With the exception of a distinctive segment represented by Mary McLeod Bethune, the Negro has not been non-violent, but rather acquiescent. We, in part, suffer from decades of perpetrating violence against ourselves," Ibid.

order" that was, itself, the remaking of the social order. It was an explanation of how then politics of being created social transformation.[455]

Because being nonviolent in segregated public spaces was likely to provoke violence, Lawson used the idea of Christian moral atonement to persuade students that suffering in the face of unjust violence was a world-changing force. The moral theory of atonement posits that Jesus' unearned suffering was a redemptive event for human society. Freed from fear in entering into crucifixion, Jesus' power was borne from a faith in the primacy of nonviolent suffering over violent power. Jesus' courageous martyrdom created a profound rupture in human society, and along with the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus provided a clear and practical methodology for overcoming state power and violence through ethical being. Lawson described this as the "character of resistance" in the life of Jesus: an alternative form of creative being that was more powerful than violence.[456]

By linking the idea of moral atonement to nonviolent being in segregated spaces, Jim Lawson devised an innovative form of religious power with clear political valences in the United States. He sharpened significantly the formulation outlined by Rustin in the 1940s, and in the years before children were attacked by dogs in Birmingham or marchers were assaulted by police in Selma and Memphis, Lawson told students and ministers to take "responsibility for igniting" the "tension" in the United States by encouraging people to actively engage white supremacy and publicly endure suffering through nonviolent being in segregated spaces.[457] This did not mean passively accepting the often-brutal violence

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[455] James M. Lawson, "The Womb of Revolution," August 1961, Box 39, Folder 1961 (SCLC) Annual Meeting, JLMC, JAHL.

[456] James M. Lawson, "The Theological Basis of Nonviolence."

[457] James Lawson to Rev. L.C. Roberts, 5 February 1959, Box 36, Folder Outgoing Correspondence, JLMC, JAHL.

precipitated by the public ritual of sit-ins, kneel-ins, and freedom rides. It meant, instead, entering into violent situations prepared to practice humility, forgiveness and mercy.[458] Amidst decades of wanton white violence directed at black people, this distinction between active nonviolence and pacifism is crucial. Like Thurman's historical Jesus, Lawson explained to his students that their backs were against the wall. Segregation forced black Americans to obey and participate in segregation or refuse and resist through non-cooperation. Doing nothing, however, was not an option. Pointing to Gandhi and Jesus, and drawing on Thurman and Rustin, Lawson suggested that active nonviolent noncooperation – being together in segregated spaces - could challenge white supremacy while also preserving the ethical character of nonviolent practitioners.[459]

But Lawson's social and religious ideas cannot be disentangled from a set of careful political calculations. As evidenced in the opening story of this paper, the politics of being were an effort by demonstrators to use violent encounters as a moment for social transformation. Lawson showed little fear in approaching the man who attacked Gort – even if he was actually afraid – and Lawson's personal discipline allowed him creative control even with spit on his face. This mastery over a violent environment enabled Lawson to take control over his encounter with the young white man, and it was this kind of personal control that Lawson believed groups of demonstrators might possess if they could be nonviolent in segregated department stores or public pools. If demonstrators were prepared to confront racial violence with a politics of being, they could destabilize the calculation of violence and

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[458] James M. Lawson, "Cruciality of the Cross," Handwritten Notes, Box 45, Folder Notes for Chapter Three, JLMC, JAHL.

[459] "We have (a) choice to share (the) load" of pain, Lawson argued, "or increase (the) burden (of pain) on others." In his teaching and preaching, Lawson argued that Jesus exposed the short-sightedness, and thus the weakness of violence, by creating a world-changing event through willingly accepting the pain of violence onto himself. Ibid.

reclaim control over the tenor of social relations to creatively reimagining how white and black people interacted.[460]

And yet these considerations about power and politics cannot, for Lawson, be separated from personal nonviolent being. Violating Jim Crow strictures in public places was meant to confront the deep memory of racial trauma and violence built into the social structure of the US South, and it was in those places where the memory of violence was greatest and the threat of violence most imminent that nonviolent being might do the most work. The politics of being drew their curious efficacy from public confrontations with violence largely because the kindness and mercy of nonviolent demonstrators contrasted sharply with the violence used as the primary defense of white supremacy.[461] The use of kindness and humility by nonviolent demonstrators was a strategic move given white supremacy's goal was public humiliation. Mercy and forgiveness became weapons to be used against white violence – the 'moral equivalent of war' Rustin had written about in prison.[462]

In the late 1950s, James Lawson articulated these politics of being by drawing on stories of Gandhi and Jesus. Just as Rustin and Thurman had done before him, Lawson rejected notions of Christian "non-resistance" and pacifism – but he went a step further to articulate how nonviolence could be an active form of ethical being that simultaneously

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[460] James M. Lawson, "Raleigh Institute of Religion Lecture on Non-Violent Solutions of South & Its Effects Abroad," January 30 1961, Box 21, Folder Speeches on NV Movement (race), JLMC, JAHL. Lawson was militant, perhaps to a fault, in emphasizing the importance of accepting violence and suffering by remaining in jail. Lawson argued that nonviolence "does not debate" whether to go to jail and stay there. "Jail going and staying symbolizes the cross," he told his students, it "represents (the) cheerful suffering" at the "heart" of nonviolence. As has been demonstrated above, suffering was at the heart of the politics of revolutionary nonviolence, and "accepting jail sentences tests the fiber of love," which Lawson called "the root law and sustaining spirit of *insistent resistance*. Cut out jail-occupation and you of necessity cut out suffering - cut out suffering and you no longer have n-v." James M. Lawson, Handwritten notes from SNCC Conference, Fall 1960, Box 21, Folder Speeches on NV Movement (race), JLMC, JAHL.

[461] JLMC, Box 45, Backdraft, Folder - Chapter 3 The Theological Basis of Nonviolence, "A Christian Theology of Nonviolence" Handwritten notes.

[462] Gregg, *The Power of Non-Violence*.

provided internal protection while proving politically "forceful."[463] In the post-war US South, the politics of being proved themselves – if only for a time – an effective weapon for curbing fear and gaining a political advantage for nonviolent activists. At work in the years between the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the sit-in revolution of 1960, James Lawson was the architect for a forceful and novel form of ethical politics.

Building a Nonviolent Army

In his 1961 keynote address at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) annual retreat, themed 'The Deep South in Social Revolution," James Lawson forcefully indicted "the American Way of Life." He charged the United States with affording "structural support" to both segregation and slavery, and he implored the ministers gathered in Nashville to apply "moral, spiritual, and political pressure" to political and social institutions in the US to make Jim Crow an issue "the president, nation, and world cannot ignore." Lawson called for the organization of "a non-violent army" made up of local cells, and he envisaged dozens of platoons and thousands of volunteers participating regularly in mass meetings, practicing the disciplines of fasting and prayer, and staffing work camps for the continued training of nonviolent soldiers.[464] Like Gandhi's satyagrahis, these nonviolent soldiers would engage in collective acts of civil disobedience across the United States and go to jail and stay there until their demands were met.[465] "We can stand it in here for as long as you can stand it out there,"

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[463] Lawson argued for four categories of force: physical, spiritual/moral, psychological, and socio-political. JLMC, Box 45, Folder Chapter II, "Clarifying Nonviolence, Violence and Nonviolence."

[464] Lawson self-control, as counseled by Gandhi, "includes this element of meditation and other forms of training." He cites "simple living, recognition of the unity of all life and disinterested service. the vows were: truth, nonviolence, chastity, fearlessness, control of the palate, non-possession, non-stealing, bread-labor, equality of religions, anti untouchability and self-rule. By these daily observances was truth-force to be developed," "Preliminary Reading for Feb 1959 Boston FOR discussion Group," Box 36, Folder The Basis and Power of Love, JLMC, JAHL.

[465] Lawson, "The Womb of Revolution."

Lawson often reminded his students.[466] He told the group assembled at Clark Memorial Methodist Church in Nashville that only "healthy minded citizens" prepared to enter prison instead of acquiescing to "forms of political evil" could bring about a "democratic society."[467]

By the time of this 1961 speech, James Lawson was a political insurgent who contributed to a profound rupture in US history by practicing and diffusing the politics of being. During the 58 days between the beginning of February 1960 and the end of March, student-led sit-ins were launched against Jim Crow segregation in more than 70 cities across the US South. Historian William Chafe called this the "civil rights revolution," a three month period that permanently changed the trajectory of modern US history. For his part, James Lawson was expelled from Vanderbilt University for his role in the Nashville sit-down movement in March of 1960. His old friend A.J. Muste delivered the sad news that SCLC president Martin Luther King, Jr. could not offer him a job – despite King's desperate longing to do just that - because NAACP National Director Roy Wilkins threatened to withdraw support from SCLC if King hired Lawson or Lawson's friend from Greensboro – the Reverend Douglass Moore. The sit-ins had re-ordered US society, and the politics within the Black Freedom Struggle had not been excluded. In his speech at the SCLC Lawson doubled down on his reputation as a firebrand and told the clergy gathered to seize the political moment and assemble a nonviolent army in 12 months. "The Deep South can scream rape and invasion if it wishes," he told the SCLC leadership, "but the moment of truth is not far off." Lawson believed this nonviolent army could precipitate "a world wide crisis" that would

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[466] James Lawson, handwritten notes for SNCC conference fall 1960. Lawson Quotes Philippians 1:12-14 in the speech: "Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear."

[467] James M. Lawson, NV workshop materials, JLMC, Box 38, Folder NV Workshops 1958, JLMC, JAHL.

overshadow the recent standoff between Russia and the US over missiles in Cuba. It might shift attention from the "distractions" in Berlin or Moscow to focus attention on "the cancer at home." With "jails…full of free men refusing to back down," Lawson told the men, the world would shift its eyes to the racial revolution in the United States.[468]

This moment in September of 1961, while steeped in the urgency of the student sit-down revolution, was actually decades in the making. Jim Lawson built on the movement schools piloted from the 1920s by the Fellowship of Reconciliation, drew extensively on the insights of Howard Thurman and Bayard Rustin, and capped off a decades long struggle to show how being nonviolent effectively challenge white supremacy in the former confederacy. Just as Thurman had shown with the historical Jesus, and as Gandhi had shown with his life, Lawson demonstrated that true self-governance was borne from the discipline to refuse acquiesce to the immoral demands of state and society. He and the students he organized showed that breaking laws, enduring violence, and accepting jail were ways of living the highest principles of the Judeo-Christian tradition – ways of being political that could generate significant power.

Such active insurgency, often waged by well-dressed students carrying books, was not a politics of respectability. They were a politics of being: a religious form of political resistance that drew its power from courageously confronting violent white supremacists with kindness, mercy, and forgiveness. These actions destabilized white supremacy by undoing its seeming vouchsafe – violence – and created new possibilities for social relations between white and black Americans. To echo Leon Litwack and Glenda Gilmore, this praxis – amidst the near complete electoral disfranchisement of black Americans – redefined politics in the

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[468] James M. Lawson, "The Womb of Revolution,"

modern United States.[469] They jettisoned the typical pattern of aggression and retaliation common to courts, elections, and mob violence in favor of a direct confrontation between segregationist and segregated. Student practitioners in the 1960s used a way of being to disrupt and transform the social politics of domination and acquiescence that undergirded white supremacy in the US, and their efforts represented the apex of a decades long process of discerning how nonviolence could become a politics of being.

James Lawson – a religious intellectual and political innovator – was critical to the development of these politics. His was not a messianic leadership common to stories of Martin King, but neither was it the radical egalitarian leadership of Ella Baker that proved so powerful for so many. Lawson was, instead, a didactic religious teacher who sought to convince his students that their way of being in the world was a mode of politics. Lawson taught a form of political being that was demanding, perhaps too demanding, but which for a time in the early 1960s made the biblical vision of a "new creation'" ushered in by "the new heart and spirit" of nonviolent practitioners quite compelling.[470] He drew on the world's "great living religions" to convince them that nonviolent being could be an effective form of ethical being, not simply a "Gandhian method" or a political technique.[471] And as the "years of hope and days of rage" wore on in the 1960s, these politics of being would fall out of favor among the very generation of students that found them so attractive.[472]

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469 Litwack, *Trouble I've Seen*, 373

470 Ibid

471 All quotes Lawson, "The Womb of Revolution."

472 Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1987).

Conclusion

"Agnostic Nonviolent Technicians"[473]

In June of 1964, more than 650 college volunteers traveled to Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio to prepare for Freedom Summer. On the morning of Wednesday, June 17th, James M. Lawson, Jr. was a featured speaker. As he had done since the late 1950s, Lawson implored the students in Oxford to claim nonviolence as their way of being amidst the hatred and violence that would surround them in Mississippi and Georgia. Ellen Barnes, a white volunteer in her early 20s at the Oxford Conference, described Lawson as "a young Negro pastor from Memphis" who was "well dressed, good looking, and had a very commanding speaking voice. He began to speak, and I immediately knew there would be some fireworks today."[474] Calling nonviolence "a fundamental organizing principle of life," Lawson told the students at Oxford that to practice nonviolence required "a fundamental belief in God." Such belief did not have to be in the Judeo Christian God, Lawson stated, so "long as the possibility of transcendence is present through the object of your faith." This faith prevented us from seeing a human being as a means to an end, urged us to see "one's goals are wrapped up in the methods used." Citing the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Lawson told the students that religious nonviolence was not new. "Groups such as the Fellowship of Reconciliation" had been "advocating" the use of nonviolence for more than fifty years.[475] Pointing to the interracial character of the students at Oxford, Lawson argued that both "The

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[473] A phrase coined by a participant in Oxford in 1964. See Perry, *Civil Disobedience*, 244, footnote 88.
[474] Ellen Barnes, "Journal of Ellen Barnes experiences at Western College during the Mississippi Freedom Project," June 1964, Freedom Summer Text & Photo Archive, Miami University Digital Library, 18.
[475] Barnes, "Oxford Journal," 20

New Negro and the New Caucasian have both been born within the achievements of the Movement," and the movement had been forged by nonviolence. Concluding his comments pointedly, Lawson called those who "advocate the use of violence" both "intellectually and spiritually dishonest."[476]

After a ten-minute break of shared singing, participants regrouped and posed a number of tough questions to Lawson. One student challenged his constant use of "religious terms," stating he was interested in "challenging and bringing change to the political, the institutional, and economic structure of the society." The reason he accepted nonviolence, he told Lawson, was simple: "it seems to work. But I don't see the need for making an absolute commitment in order to accomplish my intent. It seems to me that this thing has its limitations, a point beyond which nonviolence won't work anymore." In his response to the student, Lawson rejected the premise that nonviolence was simply a tactic that could be used sometimes and discarded other times. The problem with this approach, Lawson stated, is that "if non-violence is only employed because of its pragmatic virtues then it is implied that there is a point at which you will be willing to switch to violence because now it is successful." Pivoting to the student's concern with changing the "structures of society," Lawson explained that the Freedom Struggle was about "the creation of a different order. We accept non-violence because it has the power to move in a CONstructive, a creative fashion to persuade, to influence, to resolve conflict, to bring change."[477]

In his comments at Oxford, Lawson doubled down on one's way of being as an expression of nonviolent insurgency. He suggested to the student that one's behavior must itself be a manifestation of the new order. Kindness, mercy, and forgiveness – practices that

[476] Ibid, 20
[477] Ibid, 22

themselves constituted the new order - were also acts of political insurgency because they were a revolt against the meanness, violence and prejudice that were the pillars of American society in the 1960s. Barnes remembers that and "an uproar" followed Lawson's response to the student until the well-respected activist Bob Zellner got up and made this statement. "I can understand how difficult it is today to buy a thing like non-violence, but we're in grave danger of losing sight of something important." He asked the students to remember one thing, an "idea expressed into equations:

politics minus morality = destruction
morality minus politics = irrelevance.[478]

With this simple explanation, Zellner explained succinctly what pacifists, black religious intellectuals, and activists in the Black Freedom Struggle had sought for decades: an ethical praxis capable of generating political power in an era when black Americans faced near universal disfranchisement.

While the morning workshop in Oxford concluded somewhat amicably. Lawson was scheduled to present practical strategies for running a nonviolent campaign to students again in the evening. This time, Stokely Carmichael was given a chance to respond to Lawson's evening talk, and Barnes remembers Carmichael's point was simple: "there were very practical reasons why the movement succeeded with nonviolence and equally practical reasons now why nonviolence was losing its hold," Carmichael explained. "Success was certainly not due to any great transformation in the minds and hearts of men!" As the evening session began to border on bedlam, another well-respected Mississippi activist, Bob Moses, again restored order. He stood up addressed the group, and in his slow and methodical tone, Barnes remembered that "no human being could have been less dynamic. Yet as he spoke -

[478] ibid, 24

slowly, gently - a subtle and, I believe permanent change came over the room." She called Moses "the Ultimate Reality and ultimate possibility," and remembers that he responded to Carmichael this way: "In Mississippi we have two ground rules: 1) no weapons are to be carried or kept in your room. 2) if you feel tempted to retaliate, please leave."[479]

Bob Moses may have had the last word in this conflict between Lawson and Carmichael in Oxford, but the debate about the role of nonviolence in the Black Freedom Struggle raged throughout the Freedom Summer of 1964. The contours of the debate followed the themes presented in the Oxford Workshop: what are the fundamental goals of the movement, and what is the relationship between these goals and the tactics used to achieve them? But there was also an older question driving these discussions in the 1960s, a question that the Fellowship struggled with in the years following the First World War, and a question that Howard Thurman and Bayard Rustin grappled with also. It was a question stated succinctly and effectively by Bob Zellner: how to wage a political struggle against white supremacy that was both ethical and effective?

This dissertation has tracked how the politics of being emerged as both an ethical and efficacious way of practicing nonviolence in the struggle against white supremacy in the United States. It is a prehistory to the bevy of historical queries on the 1960s that are concerned with explaining the complicated interplay of Black Freedom Struggle with the variety of other social movements that emerged in the 1960s – what Larry Isaac has called the "movement of movements" that spanned from the New Left to the Second Wave of Feminism to the American Indian Movement to the Gay Rights and Anti-Poverty Movement. A raft of literature has made clear that the Black Freedom Struggle was the *avant-garde* of this

[479] ibid, 24.

movement of movements, and it was the Black Freedom Struggle that inspired so many activists to take a leading role in the political, cultural, social, and economic upheaval of the 1960s. Some historical work has suggested that the fractures within the Black Freedom Struggle that began appearing in the mid 1960s contributed to the unraveling of collective struggles between the sit-downs of 1960 and the March from Selma to Montgomery in 1965.[480] Scholars have suggested that disagreements over the role of whites and women, generational differences, debate about the role of black nationalism, and questions about the role of nonviolence all served to split the Black Freedom Movement into a number of sects. And such fissures within the movement belonged to a greater "age of fracture" that led to an increasing bifurcation in US society along the lines of public and private, black and white, poor and rich.

This dissertation does little to challenge the idea that the modern US can be characterized by what Daniel Rodgers called an "Age of Fracture," an era defined more by individual choice and market forces than collective disciplines and social movement

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480 Literature on the rise and fall of the nonviolent wing of the Black Freedom Struggle, and literature on the rise and fall of the New Left, is voluminous. For an introduction to the way the Black Freedom Struggle led to overlapping and interlocking movement structures in the 1960s, see Larry Isaac, "Movement of Movements: Culture Moves in the Long Civil Rights Struggle," *Social Forces* 87, no. 1 (2008): 33–63; Isaac has also suggested that the Civil Rights movement specifically revitalized the labor movement. See Larry Isaac and Lars Christiansen, "How the Civil Rights Movement Revitalized Labor Militancy," *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 5 (2002): 722–46, For an analysis of how movement overlap contributed to fissures within both the Black Freedom Struggle and the Women's Movement, see Sara M. Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Seth Rosenfeld has rightly argued that the FBI as at the leading edge of disrupting the movement in the mid 1960s, using declassified documents to challenge the idea that the fracture of the Left in the 1960s was only about internal differences. See Seth Rosenfeld, *Subversives: The FBI's War on Student Radicals, and Reagan's Rise to Power*, (New York: Picador, 2013); Forthcoming work builds on Rosenfeld's pioneering research to talk specifically about the targeted intervention of the FBI in the Memphis Sanitation Strike of 1968. See Anthony C. Siracusa, "Nonviolence, Black Power, and the Surveillance State in Memphis' War on Poverty," in *An Unseen Light: Black Freedom Struggles in Memphis, Tennessee*, Aram Goudsouzian and Charles McKinney, editors, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2018); Mike Honey has shown how, amidst this fracture, the 1968 Sanitation Strike in Memphis was a vital nonviolent movement. See Michael K. Honey, *Going down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007).

structures.[481] Indeed, Ellen Barnes further reflection on Stokely Carmichael's Oxford address seems to confirm this unraveling. "Nonviolence had been successful in the South because the South had been unprepared," Carmichael said in Oxford, "and because there had been a hard core of well-disciplined workers. Now the movement is assuming a mass character," a suggestion that the Freedom Movement was subsumed by broader forces that undermined the collective discipline of earlier campaigns.[482] What this dissertation has done, however, it to outline how religious being became revolutionary mode of politics for this 'hard core of well-disciplined workers' referenced by Carmichael. It suggests also that a commitment to religious being, to a politics of being, faded in the mid 1960s. While this dissertation has made clear that protest was not an adequately descriptive category for capturing the ethics and outcomes envisaged by the actors in this dissertation, it is nonetheless fair to suggest that some Black Freedom Struggle activists followed the lead of Bayard Rustin in 1965 in a move "from protest to politics." James Lawson, John Lewis, and Dianne Nash among others continued to claim religious being as a mode of social insurgency against unjust orders. But this "hard core of well disciplined workers" was increasingly exceptional. As the mostly white New Left arose, and as white college students became increasingly part of this 1960s movement of movements, the commitment to finding political advantage and securing political power took precedence over a commitment to ethical being. In short, politics had been prioritized over religious being.

The result was that in a short period of time, between March of 1960 and June of 1964, the student movement organized around the "the philosophical or religious ideal of non-violence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our faith, and the manner of

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481 Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).
482 Barnes, "Oxford Journal," 24.

our action" gave way to students who looked only for the political advantage they could achieve by using nonviolent direct action.[483] This disposition stands in contrast to the politics of being examined in this dissertation. The use of nonviolent direct action as a political tactic used for the purpose of developing and wielding power is more akin to the politics of the labor movement than the politics of being developed and practiced by the lineage of religious activists and thinkers presented here. For Lawson and those he taught in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the primary commitment driving their public witness was an aspiration to live freely according to their highest religious ideals. This meant living as black and white people free to grow into the most authentic expression of their personality, uninhibited by the disfiguring demands of Jim Crow. This way of being clearly engendered significant political power, a calculation that Lawson made, as it exposed a mean system of social control predicated on the use of violence to preserve itself. But power over others was not the goal of Thurman, Rustin, or Lawson. They did not seek to develop social power to wield over another person, an aspiration that would have effectively duplicated the form of Jim Crow if not its precise content. These ways of religious being clearly had political valences, increasingly part of the calculation as Rustin began his work in the early 1940s. And James Lawson, perhaps better than anyone before or since, made clear how the politics of nonviolent religious being could powerfully disrupt the social order of Jim Crow and white supremacy.

But from the First World War, when pacifists struggled to make their religious commitment to no violence, the search for an effective nonviolent politics was a struggle. So it is unsurprising that the struggle to imbibe a widespread commitment to nonviolent being in the 1960s was limited also. The sit-downs of the early 1960s soon gave way to a variety of

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[483] James M. Lawson, Jr., "Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Statement of Purpose," in *Black Protest*, Joanne Grant, ed., (New York: Random House, 1968), 273. See also Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 23-24.

political tactics intended to create obstructions - wade-ins, lay-ins, play-ins – and the growing lack of success of these "tactics" seemed to culminate, tragically, in the death of the white minister Rev. Bruce Klunder. On April 7, 1964, an interracial team of activists in Cleveland blocked a bulldozer preparing to build a school that would be used mostly by white children. Activists blocking the front of the bulldozer were spared, but when the bulldozer backed up, Klunder – who was laying behind the bulldozer – was crushed to death.[484] Subsequent investigations have revealed the death was probably unintentional, but the damage was done: a white minister lay dead, crushed by the treads of white supremacy. Nonviolent direct action demonstrations in the mid to late 1960s seemed increasingly predicated on a politics of disruption rather than a politics of being - attempts to interrupt larger social and political processes by, in the words of white Berkeley Free Speech activist Mario Savio, throwing one's own body upon the gears and sacrificing oneself in order to try and stop larger injustice. But the school that Rev. Blunder sacrificed his life to stop – like so many other schools that would remain segregated in the decades following the 1960s – was ultimately constructed and used. The politics of nonviolent disruption seemed not to disrupt white supremacy or discrimination or violence at all. Instead, activists were killed and jailed as racism and segregation continued rampant, north and south.

To return, then, to Carmichael: he was both right and wrong in his assessment of the decline of nonviolence in his 1964 Oxford speech. He over-emphasized the element of surprise in arguing that nonviolent activists gained an advantage because "the South was unprepared for nonviolence." But he was right in suggesting that there was less of a "hard core of well-disciplined workers" engaged in the movement. As stated in the final chapter of

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[484] Meier and Rudwick, *CORE; a Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968*, 249.

this dissertation, the violence used to enforce Jim Crow operated according to a calculation: white officials and white supremacists were willing to use violence to suppress demonstrators because they knew that if demonstrators responded – predictably – to violence with violence, they would be killed, beaten, or arrested. This was the primary problem facing what Howard Thurman called the disinherited. How to resist when one had so few good options?

Rustin and Lawson understood that to disorient this calculation of violence meant accepting that violence into one's own body – even unto death – just as Jesus and Gandhi had done. The issue was not that nonviolence was no longer novel by the mid-1960s. It was not that demonstrators had lost the element of surprise. The problem was, by the mid-1960s, fewer people embraced the religious belief that individual and collective public suffering was the most constructive gateway to social change. This problem was accentuated as more young white activists joined the movement – activists who arguably had a lot more to lose than the black student class that had led the sit-downs in the early 1960s. Carmichael became a spokesperson for this sentiment in the movement after his now famous 'Black Power' speech in Greenwood.[485] Scholars have spent a good deal of time discussing what Black Power meant, both for Carmichael and for the raft of local black power groups that would emerge across the country between 1965 and 1968. But in examining the rupture between the movement traditions of Lawson and King and that of Carmichael, the most significant rift was religious: Thurman, Lawson, Nash, Lafayette, Billy Kyles, and the hundreds of other local leaders associated with SNCC in the early 1960s and SCLC believed that suffering as Jesus

[485] "This is the twenty-seventh time I have been arrested--and I ain't going to jail no more!...The only way we gonna stop them white men from whuppin' us is to take over. We been saying freedom for six years and we ain't got nuthin'. What we gonna start saying now is Black Power!" Stokely Carmichael, Ekwueme Michael Thelwell, and John Edgar Wideman, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael*, Reprint edition (Scribner, 2005), 507. For an excellent treatment of the Meredith March Against Fear, see Aram Goudsouzian, *Down to the Crossroads: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Meredith March Against Fear*, 1 edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014).

did could lead to a profound rupture in human society – the kind of rupture that separated time in two. But for Carmichael and many of those he inspired and worked beside, religion was less important. The Quaker, Methodist, Baptist, AME, Congregationalist, and Unitarian traditions that had been so essential to the development of mobilization networks, that had created space for nonviolent institutes and movement workshops, faded into the background of the youth movement in the mid-1960s. In short, Carmichael may have been interested in nonviolent direct action, but he was not – and never hade been – interested in the politics of being.

That does not mean that this lineage of politics was unimportant, or that this lineage was abandoned in the mid to late 1960s. The politics of being belonged to a polity quite different than that which underwrote the white majority rule in the first half of twentieth century US life. The politics of being emerged from religious traditions that were inseperable from the political orders past and present within which they were conceived and practiced. But these religious acts took on political significance when they were intentionally injected into the 20th century American context ordered by prejudice and white supremacy. James Lawson understood this, and he successfully convinced students that they could transform the social structure of the US by seeing little distance between themselves and the structure of society. He showed his students how their personal religious acts could alter the attitude and disposition of another person, and he argued that this process of changing individuals could then change the structure of society – its laws, its social order, and its culture. By the mid 1960s, however, there was little patience or appetite for this kind of change. By the late mid to late 1960s Lawson was an outlier – a nonviolent insurgent convicted by religious principles but surrounded by a broader set of youth movements that prioritized individuality over

collective endeavor. The appetite for the suffering needed to sustain change had diminished significantly.

But Lawson, in particular, remained committed to the movement ideal of engaged and nonviolent, collective activity. He remained committed to church work, and remained committed to the idea that nonviolent ways of being could be a source of profound power. In the Sanitation Strike of 1968 Lawson reflected that "in Memphis you had something you could do. Not only could you support the strike, but you could fail to go downtown. You could proceed to boycott the stores downtown and you could proceed to support the relief effort of the strikers. You could go to mass meetings. You could get on the marches. You could start spreading the word...there were things you could get people to line up behind."[486] This movement work was, for Lawson, not simply about the tactics that would achieve political power. It was about what it meant to be a minister, what it meant to be a church for the community, what it meant to be a religious person. "The main role (of the local church) is to try to develop the kinds of moments that will help reconciliation to take place, and this doesn't take place by pretending problems aren't there," Lawson stated in 1968. Reconciliation, Lawson argued, "takes place in confrontation, and of course, I think very clearly non-violent confrontation…I take this very seriously from the prophetic tradition," Lawson wrote, "the word doesn't precede the demonstrations, the word follows the demonstrations."[487] The politics, then, flowed from being nonviolent. It was this commitment to nonviolent religious being that underwrote Lawson's role in fomenting the nonviolent insurgency of the early 1960s. And it was a decline in interest in claiming nonviolent being as

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[486] James M. Lawson, Jr. Interview by David Yellin and Joan Turner Beifuss, September 24, 1969, container 22, folder 139, p. 18

[487] Ibid, folder 134, p. 22; Ibid, folder 137 p. 32

a durable weapon in the fight for a more just social and political order that led, in part, to the decline of nonviolent insurgency.