# Building the Most Durable Weapon:
# Rethinking The Origins of Non-Violence in the U.S. Struggle for Civil Rights

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*Only if the human being is a creation of spirit, a being capable of making moral decisions and therefore of governing himself, is the dream of a free democratic society capable of fulfillment.*

*The movement for social change will have to make a radical decision for or against violence.*

A.J. Muste, 1940

In September of 1958, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. outlined his "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence" in an article published by the Fellowship of Reconciliation. King's journey to embrace nonviolent resistance, a force he described as among "the most potent weapons available to oppressed people in their quest for social justice," began as an intellectual encounter with Karl Marx, Friederich Nietzsche, Reinhold Niebuhr and G.F.W. Hegel. But the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 marked a turning point for King. Following the 381-day boycott, King moved from offering "intellectual assent" to non-violence to embracing the spiritual philosophy as "a way of life."[1] This commitment to non-violence poised the gifted preacher to become the most well known non-violent activist in American history. But it also cemented an indelible association between King and non-violence, effectively obscuring historical apprehension of the long process of intellectual, tactical and spiritual experimentation that produced a new kind of weapon in the United States.

Kingian origin stories of non-violence in the civil rights movement began crystallizing in the historical imagination with Taylor Branch's 1988 Pulitzer Prize winning tome, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954 - 1963*. Branch gestures to the work of non-violent activists in the early 1940s, but his focus on King leaves little room for historical explanation of the experimental activism of volunteers from the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). David Garrow's *Bearing the Cross* and Adam Fairclough's *To Redeem the Soul of America* also record the work of this interracial cadre of CORE volunteers and they document the Fellowship of Reconciliation's (FOR) role in shepherding King to non-violence. But all of these works, while detailing poignantly the many things King was to the movement - a mobilizer, an energizer, a synthesizer – do little to trouble his role as an originator of non-violence.

[1] Martin Luther King, Jr. "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," 1 September 1958, *Fellowship*, pp. 473 – 480

This paper will argue the origins of non-violent action in the civil rights movement lay in a generation of activists that preceded King, activists at work in what Richard Dalfiume has called "The Forgotten Years of the Negro Revolution."[2] It will build on August Meier and Elliot Rudwick's path-breaking 1973 study of CORE, but instead of giving minimal attention to the FOR this paper will argue A.J. Muste and the FOR were essential to the development of a non-violent praxis.[3] In too easily dismissing the connections between the mostly white FOR and the all-black March on Washington Movement (MOWM), scholars have minimized this moment in the development of the intellectual and tactical foundations undergirding non-violent action in the modern civil rights era. Although Cynthia Taylor's recent work on A Phillip Randolph makes a strong case for a link between the FOR and the MOWM, scholars of both organizations have minimized this connection.[4] Building on Taylor's work, this paper will suggest the MOWM and the FOR were united in experimenting with non-violent direct action in a national struggle for racial equality.

Their collaboration can be defined as a dialogical process of intellectual exchange and tactical experimentation that made legible a non-violent direct action praxis in the United States.[5] The alliance was messy and unsteady, with each movement separated on questions of race and war, but the experimental welter of civil rights action in the early 1940s

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[2] Richard M. Dalfiume, "The "Forgotten Years" of the Negro Revolution," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Jun., 1968), pp. 90-106

[3] While Meier and Rudwick note the reciprocal influence between the MOWM and the FOR, they spend little time discussing the collaboration. August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942 - 1968*, (New York, 1973), 15.

[4] Cornelius Bynum's otherwise excellent history of MOWM founder A. Phillip Randolph, *A Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, makes no mention of the FOR. See Cornelius L. Bynum, *A. Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (Urbana, IL, 2010). JoAnn Robinson's book on Muste does little with this connection, and Joseph Kipp Kosek has quickly dismissed it.

[5] James C. Scott has used the idea of legibility to describe the repeated failure of nascent states to render their power over people and terrain clearly recognizable. Legibility is used in this paper to explain the process of experimentation, tenuous collaboration, and failures required to make Gandhian notions of non-violent resistance a practical option that black Americans might recognize and adopt. See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (Newhaven, 1999)

and the political opportunity of the Second World War facilitated cooperation. While A.J. Muste saw non-violence as a moral methodology capable of redeeming people and social systems, A. Phillip Randolph believed the power of non-violence lay in its ability to impact public policy. But the religious background of both Muste and Randolph and their unique journeys through the radical milieu of organized labor bound them in their vision for a national non-violent movement. This mutual interest cemented into a partnership during the "Gandhian Moment" of 1943, a moment inaugurated by the revolutionary tenor of Gandhi's Quit India Campaign and the social rupture of the Second World War.[6] And while the FOR's ideological pacifism and the all-black character of the MOWM made collaboration unlikely, members of each organization successfully crossed movement boundaries. This paper will argue such movement interpenetration was the work of building an intellectual and tactical framework for a non-violent praxis powerful enough to attack Jim Crow, a praxis diffused to local communities through established the established networks of the MOWM and the FOR nearly two decades before the sit-in movement swept across the U.S.

**I. The Gandhian Moment**

A host of scholars have explored the links between India's struggle against the British Empire and the Struggle for Black Freedom in the United States. Nico Slate has recently argued resistance ideology flowed mutually between the United States and India in the decades before the Second World War, citing the anti-colonial sensibilities of Marcus

[6]Joseph Kipp Kosek has used the term "Gandhian Moment" for chapter 3 of his text, *Acts of Conscience.* See Joseph Kipp Kosek, *Acts of Conscience: Christian Nonviolence and Modern American Democracy*, (New York, 2005). But the phrase originally comes from Muste's treatise "The World Task of Pacifism," wherein he describes 1941, the time he wrote the essay, as a "Gandhian Moment." See A. J. Muste, "The World Task of Pacifism" in Nat Hentoff, ed. *The Essays of A.J. Muste,* (New York, 1967)

Garvey and W.E.B. DuBois as evidence that connections between India and the US are part of a "larger history of racism and anti-racism, of empire and anti-imperialism, of civil rights and human rights…"[7] Sean Scalmer has done important work in documenting how Gandhi was perceived by western audiences during his public life, arguing the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *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 the connection between India and the US requires "a history not just of individuals and nations, but also of connections, campaigns, and international flows."[8] Sudarshan Kapur, however, rightly privileges the flow of people - in particular black religious intellectuals - as a critical conduit in the exchange of movement ideology between India and the U.S.[9] Kapur reveals how these teachers and preachers transmitted the ideas they encountered to large black audiences upon their return to the US, a process that made their pilgrimages to India an important pre-cursor to the Gandhian Moment of 1943.

In 1935, seven black Americans embarked on a "Pilgrimage of Friendship" to India under the auspices of the Student Christian Movement of India, Burma and Ceylon. Howard Thurman and his wife Sue Bailey Thurman were among the organizers of this first delegation of African American leaders to India, and their trip nearly ended without a visit to Gandhi. In a remarkable moment at the Bombay post office, Howard Thurman was composing a telegram to Gandhi when a man in a *khadi* hat approached Thurman with a meeting request from the Mahatma himself.[10] Thurman and his wife traveled quickly to Gandhi's ashram at Bardoli to enjoy an audience with the Indian leader, an encounter

[7] Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitan: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and* India, (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 3.
[8] Sean Scalmer, *Gandhi in the West: The Mahatma and the Rise of Radical* Protest, (Cambridge, 2011), 5.
[9] Sudarshan Kapur, *Raising up a Prophet: The African American Encounter with Gandhi* (Boston, 1992)
[10] *Khadi* was the homespun Indian cloth that was the symbol for the Indian Independence movement.

Howard Thurman later described as "the most thorough-going interrogation" of his life. For more than three hours, Gandhi questioned Thurman about the African experience in America - from the horror of the middle passage to the terror of Jim Crow. Seizing Gandhi's offer to answer a question, Sue Bailey Thurman asked the Indian leader if he might travel to America to teach his political and spiritual philosophy someday. Gandhi told Mrs. Thurman that only after the Indian Independence struggle succeeded would he consider making "some helpful contributions toward the solution of the racial trouble in your country."[11] Howard Thurman then asked Gandhi, "is nonviolence, from your point of view, a form of direct action?" Gandhi's reply is worth quoting at length:

> It is not one form, it is the only form…without direct active expression of it, non-violence is meaningless…(it is) the greatest and the activest [*sic*] form in the world…a force which is more powerful than electricity and more powerful than even ether…*Ahimsa* means love in the Pauline sense, and yet something more than "love" defined by St. Paul, although I know St. Paul's beautiful definition is good enough for all practical purposes. Ahimsa includes the whole creation, and not only human…one person who exercises ahimsa in life exercises a force superior to all forces of brutality.[12]

Thurman's trip to India was the first of more than a half dozen pilgrimages to India by black religious leaders intent on better understanding this force that was "superior" to all forms of "brutality." YMCA leader Channing Tobias and Howard School of Religion Dean Benjamin Mays traveled to India two years after the Thurmans, and William Stuart Nelson - also the Dean at the Howard School of Religion during his trip to India - marched with Gandhi to Bengal in 1947. Mordecai Johnson, President of Howard University during his pilgrimage to India in 1950, lectured at Howard on his trip to a crowd that included a young Martin Luther King, Jr.[13]

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[11] Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart*: *The Autobiography of Howard Thurman*, (New York, 1981) 132.
[12] Kapur, *Raising up a Prophet,* 88
[13] Ibid., 147

But the process of incorporating a Gandhian ethic into US political protest had scarcely begun when the Thurmans visited Gandhi in 1935. This process was, as Sean Scalmer argues, "uneven and particular;" Decades were required to discern how Gandhism might inform collective struggle for civil rights, and success was "by no means assured."[14] The challenge for black activists was making legible a Gandhian form of non-violence in America. This process demanded debate about the religious elements of Gandhian ideology, disputes about the political efficacy of non-violent action, disagreements about non-violence as a tactic or way of life, and it required the diffusion of this protest ethic through well-established U.S. movement networks.[15] While scholars have long noted A. Phillip Randolph was among the first black leaders to publicly call for Gandhian non-violent resistance in 1942, almost no focus has been given to the "Gandhian Moment" of 1943 that united the MOWM and the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR).[16] This un-likely alliance between the MOWM and the FOR hastened the development and dissemination of the non-violent force Gandhi described to Thurman in 1935.[17]

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[14] Scalmer, *Gandhi in the West,* 240.

[15] Aldon Morris has detailed the function of movement networks in facilitating widespread non-violent protest in 1960. See Aldon D. Morris, "A Retrospective on the Civil Rights Movement: Political and Intellectual Landmarks," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 25 (1999), pp. 517-539.

[16] 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. Phillip Randolph, Cynthia Taylor incorrectly posits that A.J. Muste spoke at the MOWM's first national meeting in 1943. See Cynthia Taylor, *A. Philip Randolph: The Religious Journey of an African American Labor Leader*, (New York, 2006), 170; JoAnn Robinson says simply 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, 1981), 115; Joseph Kipp Kosek cites meeting minutes from a FOR meeting to assert that Muste believed the MOWM was "a challenge to us," Kipp Kosek, *Acts of Conscience*, 184; Although Taylor gets the facts wrong, she does more than either Kipp Kosek or Robinson in explaining the connections between the FOR and the MOWM. Kipp Kosek argues "race logic" prevented important collaboration between MOWM and FOR, and Robinson underplays the importance of inter-movement exchange in crafting and diffusing a new protest ideology.

[17] During his time at Howard University (1932 - 1944), Thurman informally mentored a host of black leaders - including A. Phillip Randolph. Additional inquiry into the relationship between Randolph and Thurman would allow for a better understanding of Randolph's relationship to the spiritual dimensions of Gandhi's *satyagraha*. For limited details on Thurman and Randolph's relationship, see Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 82 - 85.

Gandhi's call to "Quit India" precipitated this partnership between the MOWM and the FOR. In the summer of 1942, un-placated by British promises of Independence after the Second World War, Gandhi and the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) demanded immediate independence from Britain and threatened a national campaign of civil disobedience if British authorities refused. "There is a mantra, a short one," Gandhi told the Congress at Gowalia Tank in Bombay shortly before the AICC voted to support the national campaign of civil disobedience. "You imprint it on your heart and let every breath of yours give an expression to it. The mantra is 'do or die.'"[18] Gandhi, AICC chairman Jawaharlal Nehru, and much of the Congress was quickly imprisoned following Gandhi's speech. But Indians across the colony heeded the call to "Quit India." Although hundreds of police stations and government buildings were burned in un-restrained mob violence, localized non-cooperation movements also spread quickly across India - a phenomenon Judith Brown has characterized as "a flotilla of rafts colliding with a battleship."[19] More than 90,000 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.[20]

The Quit India campaign revived A. Phillip Randolph's commitment to collective protest. Randolph had threatened to "March on Washington" with 100,000 black Americans in the spring of 1941 if President Franklin D. Roosevelt did nothing to end segregation of the military and open a booming wartime job industry to black workers. In

[18] Mohandas Gandhi, "Do or Die" Speech, 8 August 1942, http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/indians-campaign-full-independence-quit-india-campaign-1942-1943 (accessed 27 April, 2014)
[19] Judith Brown, *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy*, (Delhi, 1985), 311-312.
[20]For information on looting during the Quit India Campaign, see Arthur Hernan, *Gandhi & Churchill: The Epic Rivalry that Destroyed an Empire and Forged Our Age*, (New York: Random House, 2008) p. 495; For information on arrests and localized tactics in the Quit India Campaign, see Bidyut Chakrabarty, "Political Mobilization in the Localities: The 1942 Quit India Movement in Midnapur," in *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 26, No. 4 (Oct., 1992), pp. 791-814, p. 797

June of 1941, Roosevelt arguably conceded to Randolph's demands by issuing Executive Order 8802 and creating the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) to tackle discrimination by federal contractors.[21] Pleased with this development Randolph postponed the 1941 march – a move that earned him criticism and praise in equal amounts – but he maintained a "skeletal" organizational framework of local March on Washington Movement (MOWM) affiliates.[22] Throughout 1942, Randolph used this skeletal movement structure to host mass meetings across the northern U.S., the most notable of which included more than 18,000 people gathered in Madison Square Garden in June of 1942 to demand an end to "all discriminatory practices in jobs, housing or otherwise" and "the right to fight and serve and work in all branches and departments" of the U.S. military.[23]

But Randolph's cancellation of the first March on Washington in late 1941 and the speech making throughout 1942 left some impatient for action. "There must be an actual March on Washington," chairman for the MOWM Finance Committee Eardlie John wrote to Randolph, "for there must be follow-through. If there is not, the majority will conclude that we are the same docile, begging, cringing, handkerchief-head uncle Toms of yesterday."[24] John conceded logistics for the march presented an immense challenge, particularly as blacks sought food and lodging in the segregated city of Washington, D.C. But action was imperative. "Our people do not know their strength…(and) we are in a strong position. The vulgar screeching's of (U.S. Representatives) Talmadge, Dixon,

[21] The FEPC was by no means an immediate success. The power of the FEPC to impact the hiring and firing practices of defense contractors was limited, and Randolph's MOWM would spend much of the 1940s pressuring Roosevelt and, later, President Harry Truman to strengthen the regulatory power of the FEPC against conservative efforts to abolish it altogether. For a detailed history of the decades long battle over the FEPC, see William P. Jones, *The March on Washington Movement: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights*, (New York, 2013).
[22] John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*, (New York: 2003), 59.
[23] "Wake Up Negro America" flier, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Box 26, Folder MOWM Press Releases 1942 – 1946, LOC Manuscript Collections, (Washington, DC).
[24] Eardlie John letter to A. Phillip Randolph, 1 August 1942, A Philip Randolph Papers, MOWM 1942, Folder Corr. H – N, Box 24, Library of Congress (LOC) Manuscript Division, (Washington, DC).

Etheridge, Graves et. al. show that they realize their backs are to the wall. You must deliver the knockout blow! Mr. James Crow is about to die!"[25] The force required to deal a "knockout blow" to Jim Crow was the "power" Gandhi described to Howard and Sue Bailey Thurman in India. But could Gandhian non-violent action effectively mobilize black Americans in a national movement against Jim Crow? The intermovement work between the MOWM and the Fellowship of Reconciliation during the Gandhian Moment of 1943 would begin to address this question by making legible the spiritual and tactical elements of an American *ahimsa.*

Founded in the British city of Cambridge in 1914 by a diverse group of Christian activists, the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) believed Christianity was fundamentally about peace.[26] Sixty-eight pacifists established the U.S. affiliate of the FOR in 1915 - among them A.J. Muste and Jane Addams - but a clear difference soon emerged between the US-FOR and the British-FOR. US-FOR activists offered strong support for Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha following his arrest in 1930 while the British-FOR remained reticent. Historian Jill Wallis argues the British activists believed Gandhian non-cooperation to be a less "barbarous and stupid weapon than that used by other champions of independence," but ultimately they did not believe Gandhian non-cooperation was "pacifism in the Christian sense…His is not the way of Christ as we have seen it."[27] The issue that divided these pacifists was whether Gandhi used coercion or force to achieve his purpose. British-FOR activists interpreted the idea of "non-resistance" as described by Jesus in the 5th chapter of

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[25] ibid

[26] Jill Wallis cites the early Christian writings of Justin, Martyr, Tertullian, and Lactantius to explain the elements of peace with early Christian doctrine. See Jill Wallis, *Valiant for Peace*: *History of the Fellowship of Reconciliation*, (Wales, UK, 1991), 1 - 3.

[27] UK FOR activists claimed "we cannot ignore the fact that it is highly provocative and, challenging its opponents as it does, to resort to violence or surrender it has actually some of the characteristics of war…….. That we have deep sympathy for the cause which Mr. Gandhi leads and real admiration for the many saintly qualities in his character, recent numbers of *Reconciliation* (newsletter) have made evident. Nevertheless, we cannot unreservedly agree with him." Wallis, *Valiant for Peace*, 83.

Matthew as requiring the complete denunciation of force, a notion that ran precisely counter to Gandhi's idea of *satyagraha*, or truth force, which he described as the polar opposite of "passive" action.[28]

A.J. Muste, frustrated by the seeming contradiction of passive action, did significant work to advance what Dave Dellinger later called "revolutionary non-violence."[29] Muste's journey through the rebellious thicket of organized labor during the 1920s and 1930s made him uniquely qualified to contribute to this novel protest ideology. From his role in founding the FOR with the hopes of ending violent conflict, the Dutch-born Muste would drift towards a "qualified defense of labor violence" as a Trotskyist before returning to an un-qualified Christian pacifist position in 1936.[30] Muste's rocky journey through turbulent political terrain made him a unique American radical, an activist with revolutionary zeal and a commitment to non-violence in equal parts. In his 1936 essay "Return to Pacifism," Muste decried the Marxist-Leninist conception that a massive war might lead to a revolution as "fatalistic," arguing instead only the complete abolition of violence would bring a true

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[28] For Gandhi's contention that *satyagraha* is the opposite of pacifism, see M. K. Gandhi, *Nonviolent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, (Mineola: Dover Press, 2001), 6. The broader debate on passive and active resistance stems from differing interpretations of Jesus' sermon on the mount (Gospel of Matthew Chs. 5 - 7). The British FOR interpreted Jesus admonition to "resist not evil" as counsel for a passive position, or the acceptance of violence and evil unto 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." For full text of *The Kingdom of God is Within You* see http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/4602/pg4602.html (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." Full text Gandhi's *My Experiments with Truth* (1925), 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)

[29] David T. Dellinger, *Revolutionary Non-Violence*, (Indianapolis, 1970)

[30] Robinson, *Abraham Went Out*, 64

revolution.[31] Muste believed individuals might give birth to such an order through active non-cooperation - in particular through refusing cooperation with war conscription - but he also believed, like Gandhi, only the most spiritually disciplined were capable of accepting the consequences of active non-violence. Muste argued the willing acceptance of suffering was integral to a theology of non-violence, and he connected this theology to the crucifixion of Jesus:

> If evil rises up in its final, least rational, least excusable, most hideous form, then accept suffering at its hands and on its behalf. Let it nail you to the cross. Take suffering into your soul; do not drive its sword into the flesh or soul of an erring child of God. Thus you will be showing the power of Divine Love, for God is Love, to outlast and outwit all opposition; not even death can force it from its path.[32]

The spiritual dimensions of A. Phillip Randolph's activism, largely overlooked by scholars, signals the black labor leader had some religious commonality with Muste.[33] As 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."[34] Randolph saw the life of Jesus as 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 in bringing down the "iniquitous partition wall of racial proscription and segregation in the Christian

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[31]A.J. Muste, "Return to Pacifism," in Nat Hentoff, ed., *The Essays of A. J. Muste*(Indianapolis: 1967), 196.
[32] A. J. Muste, *Non-Violence in an Aggressive World*, (New York, 1940), 19.
[33] 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 Phillip Randolph: Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement*, (Baton Rogue, 1996), 7, 63, 84.
[34] Cynthia Taylor, *A. Philip Randolph: The Religious Journey of an African American Labor Leader* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 2. On the all black character of the BSCP see Joseph Bynum, *A. Phillip 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

Church." Randolph believed Christianity - and democracy more broadly - were only as authentic as they were open and accessible to people from all races.[35]

While Muste's non-violent theology of the cross was distinctly more radical than Randolph's belief in the institutional church, the experiences of both men with labor and religion fed their tenuous effort to develop a non-violent praxis during the Gandhian Moment of 1943.[36] Randolph cited Gandhi's spiritual fortitude following his arrest in late 1942 to argue black Americans must "fight, sacrifice, go to jail and, if need be, die…These rights will not be given. They must be taken." Randolph called on black Americans to recognize their "moral obligation…to demand…and make use of their civil and political rights," citing India as proof that "the Negro people are not the only oppressed section of mankind…India's fight is the Negro's fight."[37]

But despite this powerful rhetoric, Randolph was still attempting to make sense of Gandhi's spiritually rigorous program of *satyagraha*, a way of life Gandhi believed only the strongest and most disciplined might practice. Could *satyagraha* be the catalyst for a national movement against Jim Crow? Solving this puzzle was precisely the work Randolph, Muste and the FOR undertook in 1943. Calling upon "every militant Negro with pride of race," to make the claim "I Am an American, too," Randolph organized the MOWM's first national

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[35] "Verily, the test of Christianity is the test of the color line, as the test of democracy is the test of the color line," all quotes Taylor, *A Phillip Randolph*, p. 224

[36] Despite sharing formative experience in labor and religion, fundamental differences between the Randolph and Muste remained. While Randolph worked throughout the 1930s to received formal recognition of his union by the American Federation of Labor (AFL), Muste feuded bitterly with the organized labor giant. The distinct relationship between the AFL and each man has been treated well in a host of other texts, but for the purposes of this paper the distinct perspectives each had on the AFL points to a fundamental difference between the two men: Randolph sought to reform major American institutions while Muste sought to build new American institutions, or abolish and re-create traditional reform organizations like the AFL. This can be seen as the difference between a reform movement and a revolutionary movement. As Randolph wrote in 1943, "we want to maintain American civil government because wherever it ceases to function, mob law reigns and Negroes are the victims," A. Philip Randolph, "Randolph Tells Technique Of Civil Disobedience: Started Civil Disobedience," *The Chicago Defender*, Jun 26, 1943, p. 13.

[37] A. Philip Randolph Keynote Address, "MOWM Proceedings of Conference Held in Detroit, September 26 - 27 1942," FOR Papers, Series A-3, Box 15, Folder March on Washington, pp. 1 - 4

meeting for July of 1943.[38] Delegates to the conference would debate "a broad national program of non-violent civil disobedience and non-cooperation" with a focus on using non-violent action in "the interest of abolishing jim-crowism in America."[39] Muste quickly 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 Gandhian civil disobedience. "If some such movement as this is carried forward in the true spirit of nonviolence and by the Gandhian methods, this action of yours may well prove as epoch-making as Gandhi's own inauguration of a similar movement in South Africa in 1906..." Muste concluded his letter with an offer: "I should only be too glad to render any help possible in the achievement of your goal."[40] Randolph's response was brief but endearing: "Brother Muste…I appreciate your interest in this problem and suggested cooperation."[41] While many FOR staff members were skeptical that Randolph understood the "true spirit" of Gandhian non-violence, Muste included, this correspondence marked the beginning of a tenuous collaboration that made legible a non-violent direct action praxis in the U.S.

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[38]"Calling All Negroes to Attend 'We Are Americans, Too,' Conference," undated, A. Phillip Randolph Papers, Folder Press Releases 1942 – 1946, Box 26, MOW, LOC Manuscript Collection; At the MOWM's Detroit Conference in September of 1942, participants discussed how non-violent 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, J. Conyers. "Techniques for Breaking Down Discrimination in Restaurants, Hotels, Busses, Movies, etc." in *MOWM Proceedings of Conference Held in Detroit,* September 26 - 27 1942, FOR Papers, Series A-3, Box 15, Folder March on Washington, 35

[39]Press Release, "March on Washington May Conference will Pioneer Program of Civil Disobedience and Non-Cooperation," 30 December 1942, Randolph Papers, LOC Manuscript Collection, Box 26, MOWM, Press Release Folder 1942 – 1946

[40] A. J. Muste to A. Phillip Randolph, 11 Jan 1943, Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) Papers, Series A-3, Box 15, Folder March on Washington, Swarthmore College Peace Collection (SCPC)

[41] A. Phillip Randolph to A. J. Muste, 26 Jan 1943, FOR Papers, Series A-3, Box 15, Folder March on Washington, SCPC

## II. Constructing a Legible Praxis

In 1937, only months after his re-conversion to Christian pacifism, A.J. Muste wrote an essay reflecting on the recent occupation of factories by workers. He expressed trepidation with the relatively new tactic of "sit-downs and lie-downs" and revealed his traditional pacifist tendencies in agreeing with critical assessments of the method as "physical possession of property and physical coercion." He lauded, however, "the spiritual qualities of men who will subject themselves for over forty days to the stern rigors of a sit-down," and described a "standing commission to study the merits and possibilities of using nonviolent resistance in labor disputes" as "a glorious opportunity for those of use who believe in the way of love and nonviolence." He ended his article with a word of caution: the sit-in should not be accepted without rigorous interrogation. "It will require very clear and responsible thinking on our part to devise techniques of nonviolence."[42]

The popularity of sit-downs, lie-downs, and stay-ins increased dramatically following a strike at the Akron Rubber Plant in February of 1936. By 1937, the tactic had been used in 50 strikes. Within two years, the "sit-down" had been deployed in 500 labor conflicts across the United States.[43] Physical occupation of prohibited space, described succinctly as a sit-in, became a new tactic in what sociologist Charles Tilly calls the "repertoire of contentious politics."[44] This novel form of non-cooperation, sandwiched between Gandhi's 1930 Salt Satyagraha and his 1942 call to Quit India, was among the forces driving fresh consideration of protest tactics by A. Phillip Randolph and the MOWM. As Randolph told the National NAACP convention in 1941, petitioning alone was inadequate. The time had come for "some other technique of action…The old weapon of the conference," Randolph argued,

[42] A. J. Muste, "Sit-Downs and Lie-Downs," in *The Essays of A. J. Muste,* 204 - 06.
[43] Lewis Perry, *Civil Disobedience: An American Tradition* (New Haven, 2013), 175.
[44] Charles Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires*, (Chicago, 2006), 39.

must be replaced by the new "weapon of Negro mass power…"[45] Randolph's interest in collective non-violent action was aligned, if imperfectly, with Muste's desire to discern how new tactics might be the key to a national non-violent movement. And for a time, although the MOWM and the FOR remained separated on questions of race and war, their shared interest proved stronger than their differences.

A. J. Muste and the FOR were, at least publicly, elated by Randolph's call for a national program of civil disobedience. In a press release supporting the MOWM's planned program, the FOR Executive Committee offered muted praise for the MOWM - an underwhelming response likely fueled by the perception among FOR staff that Randolph did not possess a firm grasp of Gandhian action. "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 severe discipline, including spiritual discipline." Nevertheless, as the MOWM ramped up their program of non-violence FOR challenged its members across the nation "to intensify efforts to provide (non-violent) training and guidance."[46]

It's likely FOR leaders also resented Randolph's late arrival to non-violent action and his ability to attract immediate national attention. FOR had launched "study and experimentation" on non-violence in March of 1941 by commissioning a Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA) Committee to devise new methods of tackling "social issues" without using violence.[47] But from the outset, FOR staff struggled to build an exclusively

[45] Bynum, *A Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights,* 170 – 171
[46]"Executive Committee Statement on March to Washington," undated, FOR Papers, Series A-3, Box 15, Folder March on Washington
[47] Memo from Muste, 14th March 1941, Swarthmore Peace Collection, FOR Papers, Series A, Sub-Series A-1, Box 3, Folder Nonviolent Direct Action Program

pacifist movement. It was difficult, Muste wrote, to find pacifists who would "adopt a corporate discipline, agree to stick to it for a certain period, check on the degree to which it is observed, and thoughtfully evaluate the experience."[48] In early 1942, Muste asked his newly-hired Race Relations Secretary James Farmer to give "very special consideration to the race relations field," as 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 was eager to develop a revolutionary movement using non-violence, and he believed the Second World War offered the best opportunity "that the (non-violent) revolution will really get somewhere." Muste vision for "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" was a deeply ambitious goal that seemed to hider his faith in Randolph.[49]

Muste was unconvinced Randolph's program of non-cooperation was grounded in any meaningful spiritual discipline, and his growing commitment to a theology of the cross only increased his apprehension about Randolph's program. Moreover, Muste was not simply interested in a movement to end Jim Crow. Instead, he saw a movement to end segregation as a catalyst for a broader spiritual revolution aimed at ending violence. Farmer, who wrote a master's thesis on Gandhism and non-violence under the mentorship of Howard Thurman, agreed with Muste that race was the key to building a non-violent national movement and he sketched an outline for such an effort in a memo entitled "Provisional Plans for the Brotherhood Mobilization." Farmer celebrated the experiments of an ad-hoc group of interracial volunteers from Chicago seeking alternatives to violence

[48] A.J. Muste, Memo of 17 February 1942, Swarthmore Peace Collection, FOR Papers, Series A, Sub-Series A-1, Box 3, FOLDER Program, Nonviolent Direct Action
[49]James Farmer, "Memorandum to A.J. Muste on Brotherhood Mobilization," January 8 1942, FOR Papers, Series C, Box 3 OR 4, misc. material folder, SCPC.

for tackling social problems. He noted the group had studied closely the "Gandhian movement" and, in particular, Krishnalal Shridharani's seminal study of Gandhi: *War Without Violence*, and he reported their dialogue had opened up "new vistas" for social action: "In general terms," Farmer wrote, "we have spoken of the new technique as non-violent direct action."[50]

Farmer's five-page memo was novel in its synthesis of familiar ideas. He 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." Echoing Gandhi, Farmer underlined the importance of active experimentation in "perfecting" discipline and training. It's possible to build a mass movement around such techniques, Farmer wrote to Muste, but the movement must "try to 'mobilize' all persons who want to see an end to racial discrimination in America, and are willing to commit themselves to a disciplined non-violence in working toward that goal…" Farmer believed it would be particularly challenging to recruit black Americans to such a movement, noting "specifically Negro channels" like the black church, black fraternal organizations, and black schools must be used to draw African Americans into the movement. Perhaps most importantly, Farmer told Muste the mass movement must not be exclusively pacifist.[51]

But could the mostly white FOR and the all black MOWM collaborate in crafting Farmer's idealized non-violent movement against Jim Crow? Beyond racial divides, the two

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[50] James Farmer, January 8 1942, "Memorandum to A.J. Muste on Brotherhood Mobilization," Swarthmore Peace Collection, FOR Papers, Series C, Box 3 OR 4, misc. material folder; For more information on the impact of Shridharani's text on these early activists see: Meier and Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement*, 12 - 14; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954 - 1962* (New York, 1989), 171; Joseph Kipp Kosek, *Acts of Conscience*, pp. 179 - 187 and pp. 230 - 239; Lewis Perry, Civil *Disobedience: An American Tradition*, (Newhaven: 2013) 182 is the first mention of Shridharani though he is mentioned throughout the remainder of the text.

[51] All quotes from James Farmer, "Memorandum to A.J. Muste on Brotherhood Mobilization," January 8 1942, FOR Papers, Series C, Box 3 OR 4, misc. material folder, SCPC.

organizations faced fundamental disagreements on the question of war. Muste was deeply committed to pacifism by 1943, believing the problem of human civilization was the problem of violence. He argued race, like nationalism, was simply used to justify violence, and Muste remained unconvinced that abolishing Jim Crow was enough to solve this deeper problem. At the height of the most brutal war in modern history Muste sought nothing short of an end to violence altogether; and this ambition ran precisely counter to the MOWM's stated goals. "The March on Washington Movement is not against war," MOWM secretary Pauline Meyers wrote in 1943, "and has no intentions of obstructing the war effort." Perhaps ironically, while the MOWM publicly lauded Gandhi's efforts to win independence from the British, Randolph remained curiously quiet about Gandhi's effort to stymie British conscription of Indians for the war effort in the Pacific. Instead, the MOWM emphasized the defeat of the "Hitlerites at home" in an effort to aid the Allied Powers' goal of winning "democracy for the world."[52]

In addition to fundamental differences on war, Farmer's conception of non-violent direct action was neither indigenous nor intuitive to the all-black MOWM. Since Reconstruction, black Americans had faced the constant specter of un-mitigated racial violence in the United States. Spectacle lynching became common in America in the years following legalized segregation, an era Rayford Logan has described as the "nadir" of African American History, and as Charles Payne has argued such extra-legal public violence "underscored how tenuous black life was."[53] When it came to white violence against blacks, "the point was that there did not have to be a point; Black life could be snuffed out on

[52] Pauline Meyers, "The March on Washington and Non-Violent Civil Disobedience," 23 February 1943, A. Philip Randolph Papers, Box 26, MOWM, Press Release Folder 1942 – 1946. "Hitlerties" was the pejorative term the MOWM assigned to the architects of domestic segregation.
[53] Rayford Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877–1901*, (New York, 1954)

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."[54]

The challenge for Farmer, Randolph, Muste and members of both movements was distinguishing the active and powerful force Gandhi described to Thurman from a simple acquiescence to white violence. As Farmer's Brotherhood Mobilization coalesced into the interracial Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the issue was not simply articulation, perfection, and application of non-violent action; it was the development of a legible protest technique, conversion of others to that technique, and diffusion of this technique in black communities across the U.S.[55] In Randolph and the MOWM, Farmer and his CORE volunteers saw an opportunity to collaborate on making legible to a black national base this new form of power. In the experimental work of CORE volunteers, Randolph and the MOWM saw a living example of his call to "negroes and their white liberal friends to refuse to obey any law…which violates the fundamental, human and citizenship rights of the Negro people."[56] In short, despite critical differences between the two movements, collaboration between the MOWM and the FOR during the Gandhian Moment of 1943 created powerful new possibilities in the fight against Jim Crow.

FOR members actively supported the MOWM through a "Friends of the March on Washington Movement" committee. The group affirmed the importance of black Americans raising their own money for the MOWM, "at least at this stage of their struggle," and pointed to the MOWM's slate of successful mass meetings throughout 1942 as a

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[54] Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*, (Berkeley, 1995), 15.

[55]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," August Meier and Elliott M. Rudwick, *Core; a Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 3.

[56] Press Release, "I Am an American, Too Week of Defeat Hitler, Mussolini and Hirohito by Enforcing the Constitution and Abolishing Jim Crow," undated, Randolph Papers, LOC Manuscript Collection, Box 26, MOWM, Press Release Folder 1942 – 1946

testament to the growing strength of the movement. FOR members also suggested the work of CORE volunteers set into motion an "interesting pattern of interracial cooperation." The successful integration of a restaurant, coffee shop and public pool by CORE activists using tactics of non-violent confrontation might be, they suggested, a paradigm for future interracial demonstrations.[57]

In April of 1943, Randolph sought a formal alliance with the FOR by inviting Muste to offer a keynote address at the "We Are Americans, Too" conference planned for July of 1943. Randolph told Muste delegates to the convention would "map a strategy of non-violent techniques for mass action" that might "awaken the consciousness of America to this whole problem of Jim-Crowism," and he believed Muste was uniquely equipped to speak to the first national meeting of the MOWM on "race and non-violent solutions."[58] Although Muste declined Randolph's offer to speak, suggesting 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.[59] Letters from Rustin indicate this early collaborative work was positive. Rustin 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 more closely with Muste and the FOR.[60]

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[57]Ruth Reynolds and J. Holmes Smith, "A Memo on The Friends of the March on Washington Movement," April 1943, FOR Papers, Series A-3, Box 15, Folder March on Washington; for information on the integration of the coffee house and restaurant in Chicago, see Kipp Kosek, *Acts of Conscience*, 189.

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

[59]A. J. Muste to A. Phillip 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.

[60] 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

But forging an alliance with the MOWM required Muste to walk a fine line. Could he legitimately support the MOWM while opposing the war? Tenuous a position though it was, the answer appears to be yes. In March of 1943, Muste appeared alongside Randolph at the first "Institute on Race and Non-violent Solutions," a collaborative event sponsored by the FOR and the MOWM. Muste spoke on "the spiritual basis of non-violence" while Randolph made the case for non-violent action as a practical "program for today."[61] Muste's position grew more shaky, however, in May of 1943 when MOWM members asked him to support the legal case of Wilfred Lynn, a black soldier refusing military service in protest of the U.S. army's policy of segregation. Muste responded to the request in a measured tone: "We approve of such efforts as these of the MOWM to secure the abolition of Jim Crow practices in the armed forces…[but] this does not involve any change in our opposition to war or imply that we will approve of armed forces if only racial discrimination were not practiced within them."[62] Joseph Kipp Kosek rightly asserts "Muste ran the risk of legitimating the 'Armed Forces'" by supporting the Wilfred Lynn case, but it was a risk he was willing to take to retain a partnership with a promising – if imperfect – non-violent movement.[63]

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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, FOR Papers, Section II, Series A-1, Box 3, Non-Violent Direct Action Folder, SCPC.

[61]"Institute for Race Relations," March 1943, Swarthmore Peace Collection, FOR Papers, Section II, Series D, Box 51, Rustin, Folder 2, SCPC.

[62]A.J. Muste, "Hand-written note on the back of Wilfred Lynn case outline," May 1943, FOR Papers, Series A-3, Box 15, Folder March on Washington, SCPC. Muste's draft response continued, saying "but we deem it right and necessary to combat the evil of racism where it manifests itself…from the pacifist point of view, it is important to bring home to our fellow-citizens the contradiction at the very heart of a war in which a nation purports to be engage in a war to destroy racism in the world when it organizes its own armies on a basis of racism." Muste officially endorsed the Lynn case in a Letter to Lawrence M. Ervin, 2 June 1943, FOR Papers, Series A-3, Box 15, Folder March on Washington, SCPC.

[63] Kosek, *Acts of Conscience*, 184

In the weeks leading up to the "We Are Americans, Too" conference, Muste relied more heavily on Bayard Rustin to assist Randolph in developing a national campaign of non-violence. Muste wrote Bryn Mawr faculty member E. A. Schaal to ensure Rustin would be relieved of his duties at Bryn Mawr to be present throughout the MOWM's planned summer meeting.

> You know that the main theme of this convention is to be the study of non-violent techniques in working against segregation, etc., in the United States, and also that Bayard, Jim Farmer, and others of us, in connection with our Race Relations Institutes in committee work with the MOW etc. have been working very hard on this thing. From the standpoint of the whole religious pacifists movement as well as from the point of view of race relations in the United States, it is of great importance that we maintain this contact and that we render the maximum contribution to the MOW as it tries to work its way through this problem.[64]

Rustin played a leading role in not only developing a legible form of non-violent action but in teaching and diffusing this praxis in local communities. Rustin's ability to straddle the MOWM and the FOR was a testament to his unique talent, but such reliance ultimately imperiled the tenuous collaboration between the MOWM and the FOR and marked the end of the Gandhian Moment.

**III. "We Are Americans, Too!"**

The MOWM's first national meeting in July of 1943 can be defined as the moment when non-violence became a legible strategy for ending Jim Crow. The Chicago conference included debates on the future of the FEPC, a discussion of "The World and Race Today," a "memorial to Negro soldiers," and a town hall meeting on "Fighting the War's Biggest Scandal – Jim Crow in Uniform."[65] 109 delegates from 14 states joined FOR activists and representatives from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the National YMCA,

[64] Muste to E. A. Schaal, 21 May 1943, FOR Papers, Section II, Series A-3, Box 4, Rustin folder, SCPC.
[65] "Program, We Are Americans, Too Conference," Randolph Papers, Box 24, Folder MOWM Conferences, LOC Manuscript Collection.

the United Mine Workers, and members of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) in debating the efficacy of non-violent action and civil disobedience in a national campaign to end Jim Crow.[66] 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,"[67] the 109 national delegates to the March on Washington Movement 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 had officially endorsed the experimental tactics of Chicago CORE volunteers and called for "local institutes in various localities to educate people to this program."[68]

The FOR's J. Holmes Smith, among a handful of whites attending the conference, issued a favorable report to Muste. Smith described the vote to adopt non-violent action in the fight against Jim Crow as a "historic decision," noting the "warm response among the delegates" to the idea. He also praised Randolph and Rustin for their ability to speak "most effectively" on the subject. In private conversation with Randolph, Smith said the MOWM leader showed "a real grasp of the spirit of non-violence and sincerity about being true to that spirit." Holmes closed his letter by cautioning Muste against forcefully pushing FOR or CORE onto the MOWM. "I feel that this hurdle of white cooperation is by far the highest the MOWM faces and that we dare not gamble at that point."[69]

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[66] "Mapping a Broad National Program in the interest of Abolishing Jim Crow," July 1 1943, Randolph Papers, Box 24, Folder MOWM Conferences, LOC Manuscript Collection.
[67] "Town Hall Meeting Tonight," 2 July 1943, Randolph Papers, Box 24, Folder MOWM Conferences, LOC Manuscript Collection; "Flier for Independence Day Service," Randolph Papers, Box 24, Folder MOWM Conferences, LOC Manuscript Collection.
[68] B. M. Phillips, "Chicago Convention Votes for a New March on Capital: Randolph Says," Jul 10, 1943, *The Baltimore Afro-American*, p. 1
[69] J. Holmes Smith to A. J. Muste, 8 July 1943, FOR Papers, Series A-3, Box 15, Folder March on Washington, SCPC. Bayard Rustin explained the MOWM's all black policy this way: "if pacifists and socialists were concerned enough and live [*sic*] enough to take a leading part in the MOW, they might do

Muste heeded Holmes advice and entrusted the young and dynamic Bayard Rustin to represent the FOR. Rustin's powerful baritone singing voice and his enchanting public speaking skills made him a centerpiece of the "We Are Americans, Too" program. His keen tactical sensibilities also made him uniquely suited to connect the nascent non-violent praxis developed by members of FOR and CORE within the established black networks of the MOWM. Following Muste's suggestion that Rustin "do a little creative thinking" on developing a "non-violence education program,"[70] the MOWM created a "Suggested Pattern for Good Will Direct Action to Take," an outline of a half dozen cities where segregation might be targeted in restaurants, hotels, theatres, and churches.[71] Rustin would use his exhaustive "Lesson Plan on Non-violent Action" to introduce local volunteers to nonviolent action, explaining the psychological impact of non-violence, outlining non-violent action scenarios, and providing volunteers with an extensive list of suggested readings on the history of non-violence.[72]

Perhaps most importantly, Rustin began collaborating with MOWM delegates on small-scale, local non-violent campaigns. "I have been thinking what Baltimore needs is a non-violent, direct action campaign about which you spoke," *Baltimore Afro American* City Editor B.M. Phillips' wrote to Rustin following the MOWM conference.[73] Rustin agreed: "It

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so. But at this point they are not ready for it. As Randolph sees clearly, it is the Communists who would take over. They fear a movement of non-violence and would do their best to oppose it and change it," Bayard Rustin, "The March on Washington Movement and the Detroit and Harlem Riots," October 17 1943, FOR Papers, Section II, Series D, Box 51, Folder 1, SCPC.

[70] A. J. Muste to Bayard Rustin, 29 September 1943, FOR Papers, Series A-3, Box 15, Folder March on Washington, SCPC.

[71] "Suggested Pattern for Good Will Direct Action to Take," No Date, Randolph Papers, MOWM, Box 30, Misc. folder.

[72] Bayard Rustin, "Lesson Plan on Nonviolent Action," 1941, FOR Papers, Section II, Series D, Box 51, Rustin, Folder 2, SCPC. These workshops appear to be very similar to similar workshops offered by the Rev. James M. Lawson, Jr. under the auspices of FOR in the late 1950s.

[73] B.M. Phillips to Bayard Rustin, 8 October 1943, FOR Papers, Section II, Series D, Box 51, Folder 2; Rustin sent a copy of the "Institute on Race and Nonviolence for the Pittsburgh Area" to Ms. Doris Grotwhol, See also Bayard Rustin to Doris Grotwohl, 14 October 1943, FOR Papers, Section II, Series D, Box 51, Folder 2, SCPC.

seems to me that little work has been done in border cities like Baltimore, and they offer the greatest possibilities for an approach to a southern pattern."[74] Rustin told Muste he was "ready and authorized" to create the first local institute on non-violence under the joint auspices of the FOR and the MOWM,[75] and within a month the *Baltimore Afro-American* reported "racial barriers" in a number of Washington D.C. restaurant "tumbled" when interracial teams sponsored by the FOR were served food in "lily-white establishments." The paper mentioned three groups of interracial teams sought service at three separate restaurants, and the action was described as "an experiment" resulting from a Race Relations Institute held at Lincoln Congregational Church in D.C. featuring addresses from Randolph, Rustin, Farmer, and future FOR Executive Secretary John Swomley.[76]

In October of 1943, the *New York Amsterdam News* reported the Race Relations Institutes were coalescing into local 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 a race riot. CORE activist Bernice Fisher, however, argued such methods were preferable to traditional tactics like court battles. In a

[74] Bayard Rustin to B.M. Phillips, 18 October 1943, FOR Papers, Section II, Series D, Box 51, Folder 2, SCPC.
[75] Bayard Rustin to A. J. Muste, 18 October 1943, FOR Papers, Section II, Series D, Box 51, Folder 2, SCPC.
[76] "Mixed Groups Test Capital's Jim Crow." 14 August, 1943, *The Baltimore Afro-American,* p. 13.

legal battle, Fisher argued, legal decisions were the most important factor. Non-violent direct action produced a more lasting change: "voluntary capitulation" by whites.[77]

And yet for all the promise of this experimental work, much of it would ebb by 1944. On 28 February 1944, Bayard Rustin began a three-year prison sentence for refusing to register for military service. Rustin told the Draft Board in November of 1943 he was "convinced that conscription as well as war" are "equally inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus." He was thus bound morally "to resist conscription."[78] Lacking Rustin's constant attention and capable presence, the dissemination of a non-violent praxis in local communities across the United States slowed considerably. Small-scale non-violent action continued among CORE activists in cities across the U.S., but the MOWM pivoted towards pressuring the federal government to strengthen the FEPC. Muste and the FOR turned their attention to supporting war-resisters like Rustin. But the collaboration between the FOR and the MOWM during the Gandhian Moment of 1943 was an essential – if incomplete – developmental stage in making legible a non-violent direct action praxis.

**Conclusion: Slow Movement Work**

One week after the "We Are Americans, Too" conference in Chicago, the *Baltimore Afro-American* published the names and hometowns of the 109 delegates attending the conference. Five former confederate states were represented at the Chicago conference – including Alabama – and among the local representatives from Montgomery was Edgar D. Nixon, a local organizer for Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP). When Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus in

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

[78] Bayard Rustin, "Letter to the Draft Board," 16 November 1943, accessed at https://afsc.org/sites/afsc.civicactions.net/files/documents/Rustin%20letter%20to%20Draft%20Board.pdf

December of 1955, Nixon was the first person she called. Serving as president of the Montgomery NAACP in 1955, Nixon asked Parks if they might use her case to test segregation on busses in Montgomery. Parks agreed, so Nixon set to work drumming up support among Montgomery's local activists. Among the 20 people Nixon called that afternoon was a freshly minted 26 year-old Ph.D from Boston University: Martin Luther King, Jr. King requested time to consider the issue. "I went ahead and called eighteen other people," Nixon remembered, "and I called (King) back and he said, 'yeah, Brother Nixon, I'll go along with it,' and I said, 'I'm glad of that, Reverend King, because I talked to eighteen other people, and I told them to meet at your church at three o'clock.'"[79]

King's initial reluctance to be involved with an insurgent force against Jim Crow is well documented.[80] Rev. King dreamed of teaching and preaching, not protesting and marching. But he accepted the chairmanship of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) in 1955 reticent and aware of the consequences for tilting against Jim Crow in "The Cradle of the Confederacy." And, indeed, both King's home and E.D. Nixon's home were firebombed in early 1956. When Bayard Rustin arrived in Montgomery following these bombings, he was amazed by the deep commitment to the boycott he found among local people. But he was also concerned about the ability of this indigenous non-violent

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[79] E.D. Nixon in eds. 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, 1990), 20-21.

[80] Clayborne Carson writes "by the time the Montgomery Improvement Association chose the 26-year-old Luther King Jr. as its leader, the hours-old bus boycott by the black citizens of Montgomery, Ala., was already an overwhelming success. King would later write that his unanticipated call to leadership 'happened so quickly that I did not have time to think it through. It is probable that if I had, I would have declined the nominations.'… His subsequent writings and private correspondence reveal a man whose inner doubts sharply contrast with his public persona. In the early days of his involvement, King was troubled by telephone threats, discord within the black community and Montgomery's 'get tough' policy, to which King attributed his jailing on a minor traffic violation. One night, as he considered ways to 'move out of the picture without appearing a coward,' he began to pray aloud and, at that moment, 'experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced Him before…'" This moment of inspiration was critical in cementing King's commitment to non-violent struggle. Clayborne Carson, *New York Times Magazine*, 7 January 1996.

movement to sustain itself.[81] Rustin phoned FOR Executive Secretary John Swomley, who then dispatched FOR National Field Secretary Glenn Smiley to Montgomery to offer assistance to King in sustaining what would become "the boycott heard round the world." Arriving at King's home, the armed guards, floodlights, and guns scattered throughout the house surprised Smiley. But as Hasan Kwamie Jefferies has argued, armed self-defense was a normal response for southern black communities living with the constant specter of white violence. Non-violence was the exception – not the rule.

In his 1958 book about the Montgomery Bus Boycott, *Stride Towards Freedom*, King's description of non-violent action as "redeeming good will for all men" sounded like A. Philip Randolph's 1943 description of non-violence as "good will direct action" because King's ideas emerged from the activist tradition forged by Nixon, Randolph, Rustin, A. J. Muste, and an entire generation of activists that preceded King.[82] This non-violent praxis King popularized originated in a tenuous collaboration between the largely white Fellowship of Reconciliation and the exclusively black March on Washington Movement. Their collaboration – inspired by Gandhi's Quit India campaign – suggests the fetters of ideology, nation, and personality do not bind the "repertoire of contentious politics."[83]

Translating a civil disobedience campaign for Indian Independence into an American struggle for civil rights required the revolutionary Christian ontology of the FOR and the political tactics favored by the MOWM. In this unlikely developmental welter, the space between the all black MOWM and the ideologically pacifist FOR, half-measures and experimentations superseded disagreements over larger issues of race and war to make legible a non-violent praxis. The success of this experiment depended on the networks of

[81] Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters*: *America in the King Years*, *1954-63*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 179
[82] D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 266.
[83] Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires*, 39.

each movement - networks of printed material, regular mass meetings, and the organization of local workshops - to offer channels of diffusion through which non-violence might be tested and refined.

This messy space of experimentation during America's Gandhian Moment suggests a broad set of tensions seen in the modern civil rights era were also present in the generation that preceded it. The relationship between ideas and action, the role of local and national people, choices about politics or protest, and non-violence as a way of life or non-violence as a political tactic were all present in the early 1940s. In locating the origins of non-violence in these earlier debates, this paper has not simply argued for what Jacquelyn Down Hall calls a "longer" civil rights movement; this paper has argued for a new conception of movement work that might explain why major movement moments did not happen sooner. Would the sit-in movement of 1960, the drama of Birmingham, or the brutality of Selma's Bloody Sunday been possible without the debates and intermovement experiments of the early 1940s? This paper contends these major movement moments were a direct result of decades of doubt, dispute, and dissemination punctuated by half-starts and failures among black and white activists in the un-tidy space between local and national activism. This messy and long work, this work of refining ideas in preparation for action and diffusion, is the place where non-violent action originated: the origin territory for the slow work of building a civil rights movement.

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