

GANDHI AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION:
NONVIOLENT TACTICS IN THE EARLY CIVIL
RIGHTS MOVEMENT

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APPROVED BY THE DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES
AND VICE PROVOST FOR RESEARCH:

Eun K. Park, Ph.D.

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

Robert C. Cottrell, Ph.D., Chair

Robert S. Tinkler, Ph.D.

Jeffery C. Livingston, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

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In the late 1930s and early 1940s, more than twenty years before the height of the civil rights movement, a group of pacifists known as the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) contested injustices facing African Americans in the United States. Prominent members of FOR, including George Houser, Homer Jack, and A.J. Muste, were close followers of Mahatma Gandhi's teachings, especially the nonviolent tactics he employed in the fight for Indian independence. Members of FOR began developing tactics shaped after Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy, holding race relations institutes and interracial workshops to teach activists in different communities how to tackle segregation through demonstrations including sit-ins and boycotts. Although FOR made progress with its demonstrations, its members wanted to have a greater effect in the community so they

created the nonviolent, direct-action organization, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), in 1942. Along with FOR, CORE took part in nonviolent demonstrations to fight segregation. These smaller demonstrations eventually led members of FOR and CORE to plan a large demonstration in 1947 known as the Journey of Reconciliation. That demonstration, as well as the sit-ins and boycotts started by the members of FOR, influenced the members of CORE and the post-Brown civil rights movement, culminating in national figures on the order of Martin Luther King Jr. and demonstrations such as the Freedom Rides of 1961.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The civil rights movement proved groundbreaking in the United States, resulting in, among other things, a challenge to the long-held belief that African Americans were inferior to whites. Much of the opposition to that sensibility during the civil rights era was expressed through nonviolent demonstrations. Demonstrations, carried out by activists and national organizations, included sit-ins, boycotts, and defiance of Jim Crow segregation laws pertaining to public transportation in the South. While much of the literature dedicated to these demonstrations focuses on the 1950s and 1960s, nonviolent demonstrations in the United States were conducted earlier. One organization involved in such protests was the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), a pacifist organization founded in England in 1914 and in the United States the following year. During the late 1930s, members of FOR, including A.J. Muste, George Houser, and Homer Jack, began using the organization as a tool to fight racial injustices throughout the United States, focusing primarily in the South, New York, Chicago, Illinois, and Washington, D.C.

The teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and his use of nonviolence to fight for Indian independence greatly influenced these men. They not only read and studied

Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy and techniques, they embodied them. They fostered nonviolent practices in other members of FOR and eventually helped to inculcate them within local communities. Starting in the late 1930s, they organized a series of sit-ins at restaurants, and, in 1947, led a multi-state demonstration known as the Journey of Reconciliation to fight segregated buses and trains. In doing so, the members of FOR created a nonviolent foundation that would buttress the civil rights movement for years to come.

In addition to conducting nonviolent demonstrations, members of FOR held workshops and institutes to instruct activists about Gandhi's philosophy and how to stay peaceful during demonstrations. Through such workshops activists dedicated themselves to nonviolence. They learned how to prepare for violence perpetrated by those who opposed them and how to refrain from reacting violently. They learned to protect their bodies from beatings, without fighting back, no matter how brutal the experiences. In doing so, participants acquired a deep understanding of Gandhi's teachings. This knowledge eventually spread beyond the members of FOR and permeated the civil rights movement through the 1960s.

Along with their shared nonviolent philosophy, the members of FOR created a nonviolent direct action group, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), in 1942. This organization, much like FOR, emphasized nonviolence in its demonstrations. In contrast to FOR, however, its members were more invested in demonstrations. The members of CORE, including George Houser, Homer Jack, Bayard Rustin, and Bernice Fisher,

organized protests in the form of sit-ins and demonstrations against segregation in such public establishments as pools and movie theaters. As the organization grew over the years, activists decided in the early 1960s to conduct a highly publicized series of bus rides that followed the same design as the Journey of Reconciliation. The Freedom Rides of 1961 became the most acclaimed events in CORE's history and were among the most renowned of the entire civil rights movement. Ultimately, FOR's reach went beyond just CORE; its nonviolent philosophy reached to Martin Luther King Jr., who implemented nonviolence in his demonstrations.

Although historical literature pertaining to the civil rights movement emphasizes nonviolent tactics and philosophy, scholars typically concentrate on nonviolence in relation to well-known figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., John Lewis, Julian Bond, and Diane Nash, as well as organizations like CORE, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Much of this literature spotlights demonstrations conducted during the 1950s and 1960s, which fits the chronology of popularized narratives of the civil rights movement. Harvard Sitkoff's brief but instructive *The Struggle for Black Equality 1954-1992*, for instance, highlights nonviolence within the civil rights movement but fails to fully discuss the origins of nonviolent philosophy. Sitkoff's analysis of nonviolence centers on its use by CORE, SNCC, SCLC, and civil rights leaders, including King. In his exploration of nonviolence, Sitkoff does mention FOR on many occasions, but he does not deliver an in-depth analysis or point to the organization's importance in the formation of CORE or

the nurturing of nonviolence, either tactically or philosophically. He does, however, note that the Freedom Rides of 1961 were “consciously modeled...on the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation.”¹ Sitkoff also mentions nonviolence in reference to Gandhi’s teachings, but does little to show the connection between the members of FOR and their devotion to those teachings. Much of his discussion of Gandhi’s nonviolence refers to King’s use of the philosophy.

Another overview, Aldon Morris’s *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, focuses on FOR more extensively. Morris mentions FOR at many points and dedicates a nine-page section to the organization, underscoring its extolling of nonviolence through the movement and its part in the creation of CORE. However, Morris largely discusses FOR in the context of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the participation of African American activist James Lawson. While Morris offers important information about the Fellowship, he avoids an exhaustive discussion of its development of nonviolent philosophies and its myriad demonstrations.

Robert Weisbrot’s *Freedom Bound: A History of America’s Civil Rights Movement* also omits a detailed explanation of FOR, its nonviolent philosophy, and its demonstrations. He mentions organization members Bayard Rustin and Glenn E. Smiley’s discussing nonviolence with Martin Luther King Jr., whom they attempted to convince to

¹ Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 90.

feature nonviolent demonstrations. Weisbrot also refers to Lawson, and the connection between FOR and CORE, but lacks crucial information regarding the Fellowship.

In addition to general studies of the civil rights movement, other scholars have produced studies on the national organizations that participated in the civil rights movement. August Meier's and Elliott Rudwick's *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* explores CORE's creation and the multitude of demonstrations carried out by its members. Meier and Rudwick emphasize FOR's role in the creation of CORE, but they fail to discuss the important part played by FOR in turning Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy into an appropriate tactic for the fight against racial injustice. This omission is not surprising, however, since their work is a study of CORE, not FOR. While they may not feature the ways in which FOR utilized Gandhi's philosophy, Meier and Rudwick do highlight how important Gandhi was to the members of FOR and eventually to those of CORE. In describing the founders of CORE, they write, "Within the FOR, they belonged to a group which was intensely committed to applying Gandhian techniques of Satyagraha, or nonviolent direct action, to the resolution of racial and industrial conflict in America."² Meier and Rudwick follow the use of Gandhian nonviolence within CORE and its demonstrations but they do not expand beyond that. Nor do they look at how Gandhi's philosophy affected King.

² August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 4.

One work that does examine Gandhi's influence on King is Michael Nojeim's *Gandhi and King: The Power of Nonviolent Resistance*. Nojeim emphasizes what August and Meier lacked; he focuses solely on King's use of Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy in demonstrations. While he does show that nonviolence permeated the entire movement, Nojeim does not trace the beginnings of nonviolence in the movement to FOR, even disregarding the fact that King was a member of FOR.

While each of these works contains key information regarding nonviolence and the civil rights movement, they all fail to provide a comprehensive study detailing the growth of nonviolent tactics in FOR and the spread of those tactics to national organizations such as CORE and their adoption by nationally recognized leaders, including Dr. King. Scholarly works tend to discuss FOR only in conjunction with CORE. If the Journey of Reconciliation is mentioned, it is typically only discussed as the precursor to the Freedom Rides.

This thesis seeks to trace the progression of FOR from the implementation of Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy to the creation of CORE and the appeal of nonviolence at the height of the civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s. The following chapters will demonstrate that FOR, through its practice of Gandhian nonviolent tactics, constructed CORE and made nonviolence a centerpiece of the civil rights movement. Chapter 2 discusses the development of Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy, along with his early life experiences and his early demonstrations. This leads to an exploration of the

initial stages of FOR and the crucial members who studied Gandhi's philosophy and made it the central viewpoint of the organization.

Chapter 3 delves into the ways in which FOR implemented its nonviolent tactics. This included race relations institutes and interracial workshops. Members of FOR also conducted sit-ins and pickets in an attempt to end segregation. These workshops and institutes proved to be the training ground for FOR's largest demonstration, the Journey of Reconciliation, in 1947. The Journey of Reconciliation, in turn, afforded FOR its greatest amount of publicity and provided a model for later demonstrations, most specifically the Freedom Rides of 1961 conducted by CORE.

Building on these previous chapters, Chapter 4 shows how members of FOR helped to create CORE and how CORE applied the nonviolent foundation shaped by FOR to become one of the most important organizations in the civil rights movement. Nonviolence also proved influential to Martin Luther King Jr., who, after discussions with FOR members Bayard Rustin and Glen E. Smiley, decided to incorporate nonviolence into his civil rights work.

CHAPTER II

GANDHI, THE IDEALS OF NONVIOLENCE,
AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF
RECONCILIATION

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the outspoken proponent of nonviolence, was born on October 2, 1869, in Porbandar, India.³ As a child, he focused on his studies and kept to himself for fear that his classmates would make fun of him. Even though Gandhi spent much of his time on his schoolwork, he was not a particularly successful student and did not have much interest in his classes. At a young age he became fascinated by plays and the messages they contained. One in particular, *Harishchandra*, stood out to him. In his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, he recalls seeing the play numerous times and taking from it the virtue of truth. “‘Why should not all be truthful like Harishchandra?’ was the question I asked myself day and night,” Gandhi wrote. “To follow truth and to go through all the ordeals Harishchandra went through was the one ideal it inspired in me.”⁴

Gandhi’s truthfulness led to his first interactions with the principle of Ahimsa, or nonviolence. At the age of fifteen, Gandhi stole bits of gold from a friend.

³ Mahatma Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan, 1996), 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

The guilt eventually consumed him, and he decided to confess his crime. He wanted to admit it to his father but was too afraid to tell him what had happened. Instead, he wrote down a confession and gave it to his father to read. Rather than punish Gandhi for his actions, his father shed tears. At the time, Gandhi considered this reaction as nothing more than love, but looking back he realized it was Ahimsa. He asserted, "When such Ahimsa becomes all-embracing, it transforms everything it touches. There is no limit to its power."⁵

Gandhi had not practiced religion as a child, so at the age of seventeen he began exploring it for himself. He was not drawn to Christianity because he disliked the missionaries he knew. He heard of a Hindu man who converted to Christianity and was made to eat meat, drink alcohol, and wear European-styled clothing. This bothered Gandhi because he did not believe in eating meat or drinking alcohol and did not want to support a religion that made its followers do so. While unable to find a religion with which he agreed, Gandhi still sought out truth. He recalled, "Truth became my sole objective. It began to grow in magnitude every day, and my definition of it also has been ever widening."⁶

After completing high school, Gandhi moved to London in 1888 to continue his education at University College London. There, he was again confronted with the issue of religion. This time he was asked about the Bhagavad Gita, or simply Gita, which

⁵ Ibid., 24.

⁶ Ibid., 29.

was a Hindu scripture. He confessed that he had never read it, but would be willing to do so. After reading many verses, Gandhi admitted that the book and its messages were invaluable. He continued praising the classic work, regarding it “as the book par excellence for the knowledge of Truth.”⁷ His time in London also opened his eyes to Christianity thanks to his encounter with a man who apologized for Gandhi’s previous unhappy experiences with the religion and explained that he, a Christian, abstained from both meat and alcohol. His new acquaintance also encouraged Gandhi to read the Bible. Gandhi obliged but was unimpressed with the writings of the Old Testament. Once he began reading the New Testament, however, he was drawn in much like he had been with the Gita. These experiences fueled his desire to continue learning about other religions and to explore further truth and nonviolence.

In his quest for nonviolence, Gandhi coined a term to explain his viewpoint: Satyagraha. He admitted the principle of Satyagraha existed before the term itself. There were English words to describe it, such as passive resistance.⁸ Gandhi thought this characterization implied weakness or helplessness.⁹ Gandhi wanted Indians to come up with a word that properly expressed their struggle. He could not think of an expression on his own so he started a contest for others to do so, which led to the creation of the word “Sadagraha (Sat: truth, Agraha: firmness)” by Maganlal Gandhi, a follower and distant

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 266.

⁹ Sean Scalmer, *Gandhi in the West: The Mahatma and the Rise of Radical Protest* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 73.

relative of Gandhi.¹⁰ To make the term even clearer, Gandhi changed it to Satyagraha, literally meaning “holding to Truth.”¹¹ Gandhi closely followed the ideal of Satyagraha for the rest of his life.

Even before Gandhi created Satyagraha and the movement it empowered, he stood up for those who were viewed as inferior. William Borman, author of *Gandhi and Non-Violence*, explains that Gandhi did not give in to the beliefs of social inequality, beginning with his refusal to recognize the supposed inferiority of a young boy who cleaned the house’s lavatory.¹² Gandhi believed that everyone should ““treat all as one’s brother.””¹³ To do this, nonviolence, which he considered far more powerful than violence, must be utilized. Borman explores Gandhi’s belief that “no amount of brute-force or violence could remove evil at its root from the individual, much less from the corporate and mass realities. Brute-force could only amplify and multiply evil by natural reaction.”¹⁴ Gandhi considered passive resistance as a form of personal suffering and the antithesis of violence. Although some writers held that passive resistance exemplified weakness and passivity, Gandhi believed there was nothing more powerful than

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ William Borman, *Gandhi and Non-Violence* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 62.

¹² Ibid., 57.

¹³ Ibid., 24.

¹⁴ Ibid., 57.

nonviolence. He assumed that passive resistance, or “soul-force,” was inimitable, greater than the force of weapons.¹⁵

Along with his belief in Satyagraha, Gandhi’s nonviolent philosophy contained a strict ideology composed of six characteristics. The first characteristic embodied the contrast between violence and nonviolence. The second characteristic was the link between violence and evil, which he saw as necessarily coexisting. At the same time, he contended that nonviolence was always right and violence always wrong. The third characteristic involved the “universal applicability of non-violence.”¹⁶ Gandhi taught that there was no solution for the misfortunes of life except nonviolence. In his mind, the world had to adopt nonviolence in order to stop the spread of evil and violence. The fourth characteristic highlighted truth’s standing as “moral authenticity.” Moral authenticity drew on “the effort to bring inner states and outer conduct in congruence by speaking and acting one’s convictions.”¹⁷ The fifth characteristic was the connection between truth and nonviolence. While Gandhi spoke many times about how nonviolence was the way to realize truth, he contended that in order to achieve nonviolence one must cling to truth. The sixth characteristic pertained to employing “his definitions to answer arguments” and to “formulate a course of experimental moral action.”¹⁸ These

¹⁵ Mahatma Gandhi, “Passive Resistance,” in *The Gandhi Reader*, ed. Homer Jack (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1956), 114.

¹⁶ Borman, *Gandhi and Non-Violence*, 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

six characteristics were crucial to the way Gandhi acted in line with his nonviolent philosophy.¹⁹

In 1893, Gandhi traveled to South Africa for the first time. During his visit, he booked a first-class train ticket to travel from Durban to Pretoria. Not long into the journey, a railway worker approached Gandhi and ordered him to move out of the first-class car. Gandhi refused and showed his ticket to the worker, who nevertheless informed Gandhi that if he did not move, the police would be called. Gandhi still refused; the police arrived and attempted to move him from his seat. Rather than move to a different train car, Gandhi left the train. This incident opened Gandhi's eyes to racial prejudice and sparked a desire to effectuate change. "The hardship to which I was subjected," said Gandhi, "was superficial—only a symptom of the deep disease of color prejudice. I should try, if possible, to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process."²⁰

Subsequently, Gandhi experienced another instance of racial discrimination. In 1906, the Transvaal government in South Africa proposed a law known as the "Black Act," which would require Indians to register with the government and carry documentation at all times, or face imprisonment or deportation.²¹ Gandhi attended a meeting denouncing the act and proposed that everyone in attendance should refuse to submit to the law. He believed if the government passed a law that citizens did not agree with,

¹⁹ Borman, *Gandhi and Non-Violence*, 4-5.

²⁰ Mahatma Gandhi, "On the Way to Pretoria," in *The Gandhi Reader*, ed. Homer Jack (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1956), 30.

²¹ Mahatma Gandhi, "The Advent of Satyagraha," in *The Gandhi Reader*, ed. Homer Jack (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1956), 59.

they should use “soul-force” and refuse to obey the law rather than employing “body-force,” or violence.²² This was Gandhi’s first involvement in a nonviolent protest; more instances, of course, would follow. Seven years later, Indians in South Africa had even greater grievances. They were fighting against a ban on Asian immigrants, a tax on indentured laborers in South Africa who stayed in the country as free men, and a ruling that only Christian marriages were legal.²³ Gandhi planned a march in defiance of these laws.

In October 1913, Gandhi arrived in Newcastle, South Africa, along with others who intended to march. He warned them about the possible dangers of doing so, given the likelihood of violent reactions from those who did not agree with their viewpoint. But despite the looming violence and near certainty of arrest, thousands of men and over one hundred women marched.²⁴ With so many people involved, Gandhi felt it was necessary to instruct them on how to properly conduct themselves. He wanted to ensure that the march would remain nonviolent. Gandhi told the marchers that they “were to bear it patiently if any official or non-official European met them and abused or even flogged them. They were to allow themselves to be arrested if the police offered to arrest them.”²⁵ On October 28, after he delivered the instructions, the demonstration began. The group planned to march a total of thirty-six miles from Newcastle to

²² Gandhi, “Passive Resistance,” 112.

²³ Mahatma Gandhi, “Preparing for the March,” in *The Gandhi Reader*, ed. Homer Jack (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1956), 85.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁵ Gandhi, “Preparing for the March,” 86.

Charlestown and then to the Natal-Transvaal border where the participants expected to be arrested on entering the Transvaal.

During the first day of the march, the police arrested Gandhi, but he insisted the group continue without him. Gandhi was promptly released and rejoined the demonstrators. Police arrested Gandhi several more times, but each time the march continued. Although this was Gandhi's first march, it was a great success. The Indian Relief Act of July 1914 made non-Christian marriages legal and abolished the tax on free indentured laborers.²⁶ Gandhi had proven that nonviolence was a powerful tool to achieve change. Shortly after this successful protest, he returned to India, where he spent a year traveling around the country to discover the issues facing Indians.

During his travels Gandhi found Indians living in poverty and observed corruption within the government. In response, Gandhi created a religious community known as the Satyagraha Ashram, located near Ahmedabad in Northwest India. As part of his ashram, Gandhi welcomed "untouchables" from the community, which created a bit of controversy. In 1916, after establishing the ashram, Gandhi traveled to Lucknow to attend the annual meetings of the Indian National Congress, a major political party in India. During the meetings, a peasant approached Gandhi and informed him of the mistreatment of peasants in Champaran, near Nepal. The man explained to Gandhi that the peasants' English landlords treated them like sharecroppers. This disturbed Gandhi and

²⁶ Mahatma Gandhi, "Farewell Speech," in *The Gandhi Reader*, ed. Homer Jack (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1956), 97.

he eventually became involved. Gandhi met with the governor of Champaran and told him he either needed to compensate the peasants or appoint an inquiry commission. The governor created the commission and appointed Gandhi as the representative for the peasants. After investigating the situation, the commission recommended that the government repay the peasants; the government agreed. This marked Gandhi's first major win in India.

Following this success, Gandhi led another protest in India. This time, he protested the Rowlatt Act. The act, passed in 1919, extended measures set in place during World War I to control public unrest and any type of conspiracy. The act gave the British government the power to imprison anyone suspected of terrorism. In protest, Gandhi called for a mass non-violent movement in April, but the demonstration did not stay free of violence. Indians turned to mob violence and looting. In an attempt to maintain order, the government banned all public meetings. In defiance, a large group of Indians gathered in the city of Amritsar on April 13. Without warning, British troops opened fire on the group, killing over 350 people. Gandhi did not immediately respond because, as he explained, he lacked adequate information regarding what to do next. After the failure of the demonstration and the massacre, Gandhi realized the people of India needed further training before they would be ready to practice nonviolence; he called off the movement on April 18.

One year later, in an attempt to establish an independent Indian government, citizens of India, led by Gandhi, began boycotting government activities, including

schools. These boycotts lasted for more than two years. In response, the British government arrested Gandhi and charged him with sedition. During his trial, known as the Great Trial, Gandhi pled guilty to three counts of seditious acts. Gandhi was sentenced to six years in jail, but was released after just two. Four years after being released, in 1928, Gandhi organized a tax strike and began voicing his desire for an independent India.²⁷

In 1930, tensions were rising over the struggle for Indian independence. The British failed to create a constitution for India so Gandhi organized another nonviolent demonstration. He decided on a salt march because the British government maintained a monopoly on salt, a highly taxed commodity. Gandhi alerted British officials of his intentions to march to the sea to take salt from the water illegally, which would symbolize the Indians refusing to recognize the government's authority.²⁸ On March 12, Gandhi started his march with seventy-nine volunteers. They began in Ashram and headed toward Dandi, a village on the coast of Jalalpur.²⁹ The trek took Gandhi and his volunteers twenty-four days to complete by foot. All along the route Gandhi stopped at villages and encouraged others to join the march and show their disdain for the British government.

²⁷ Mahatma Gandhi, *The Gandhi Reader*, ed. Homer Jack (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1956), 160-97.

²⁸ H. Polak, "Toward Dandi," in *The Gandhi Reader*, ed. Homer Jack (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1956), 236.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

On April 5, Gandhi arrived in Dandi. He and his followers walked to the sea the next morning for a bath and to collect seawater to make salt. At the beach, Gandhi noticed grains of salt in the sand and picked them up, an illegal act. Gandhi then addressed the people of India and urged them to manufacture salt wherever they desired. He said it was not to be done secretly, because he was openly attacking the government. Once his fellow Indians saw Gandhi taking salt, masses of them went to the sea to collect salt for themselves. He especially encouraged women to participate because, as H. Polak, editor of *The Gandhi Reader*, wrote, Gandhi believed women would be more successful nonviolent protestors, “not because they are weak as men, in their arrogance, believe them to be, but because they have greater courage of the right type, and immeasurably greater spirit of self-sacrifice.”³⁰ The demonstration continued for another month before police arrested Gandhi, but this did not stop the other demonstrators, one of whom was his son, Manilal Gandhi.

On May 21, sixteen days after Gandhi’s arrest, his son and many demonstrators attempted to take salt from the Dharasana salt mine. Roughly 2,500 of Gandhi’s followers gathered about a half-mile from the salt mine. Webb Miller, a foreign correspondent for the United Press, attended the march and wrote his account of the events that took place. When Miller arrived, Sarojini Naidu, the Indian poet and a close follower of Gandhi, was instructing the demonstrators on how to conduct themselves. Miller recalled Naidu’s telling the men, “Gandhi’s body is in jail but his soul is with you.

³⁰ Ibid., 241.

India's prestige is in your hands. You must not use any violence under any circumstances. You will be beaten but you must not resist; you must not even raise a hand to ward off blows."³¹

As the crowd drew nearer to the saltpans, they approached more than four hundred policemen brandishing a variety of weapons including rifles and clubs (*lathis*).³² Officers ordered the men to disperse as the marching continued. The police orders went unanswered and the men continued. Suddenly, the officers rushed the marchers and began beating them with the *lathis*. None of the marchers made any defensive moves; they let the guards beat them. As soon as the first row of men was completely beaten down, a crew of men with stretchers ran in to remove them. They were untouched by the officers, but the second row of men who continued their march was promptly beaten. Again, the marchers, in line with Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence, did not resist the officers, despite being brutally beaten. Their efforts were not in vain because, in 1931, the three Round Table Conferences, conducted by the British government, began to discuss the creation of an Indian constitution, which Gandhi had sought when he initiated his nonviolent protests in his homeland in 1930. Gandhi's actions led to negotiations with Lord Irwin, the Viceroy of India from 1925 to 1931. These discussions concluded

³¹ Webb Miller, "Dharasana Salt Raid," in *The Gandhi Reader*, ed. Homer Jack (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1956), 248.

³² *Ibid.*, 250.

with the Gandhi-Irwin pact, which opened debates during the second of the Round Table Conferences.³³

As Gandhi conducted his nonviolent demonstrations, the world watched. Whether he was aware of it or not, he influenced a multitude of people inside and outside of India. He inspired others to adopt a new course of action in their fights against injustice. He had seemingly demonstrated that violence was not always the answer and that nonviolent demonstrations could bring about results. Those involved in the early years of the American civil rights movement quickly adopted this nonviolent philosophy. One organization in particular, FOR, utilized Gandhi's philosophy and tactics to fight for equality beginning in the late 1930s and influenced the movement through the 1960s. Although the organization was founded with the intention of opposing the First World War, FOR soon battled against racial discrimination too. With the help of both black and white activists, the pacifist organization would become an influential and irreplaceable part of the civil rights movement.

Henry Hodgkin, an English Quaker, and Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze, a German Lutheran, founded FOR in England in December 1914 to oppose World War I. The U.S. branch of FOR was established the following year in New York City. Glenn Smiley, a regional secretary of FOR during the mid-to-late 1940s, stated the organization's goals: "to eliminate war and the occasions of war, and to change the attitudes that

³³ Jack, *Gandhi Reader*, 254-59.

dominant social groups held toward minority groups and other less powerful groups.”³⁴ Beginning in the 1930s and 1940s, white members, including A.J. Muste, George Houser, and Homer Jack, and African American members, including James Farmer and Bayard Rustin, began using the organization to promote nonviolence to combat racial discrimination. They were dedicated to employing Satyagraha, or nonviolent direct action, to combat racial injustices.³⁵ Each of these men was important in his own right, and within FOR all proved influential.

Once FOR turned its attention to civil rights, its members adopted a Gandhian, nonviolent philosophy. During his time as secretary of FOR, Houser, along with other activists, marched for Gandhi’s freedom. Gandhi had once again been jailed for advocating India’s independence; Houser demonstrated not only to free Gandhi, but India as well. Later that year, in 1943, Houser wrote a memo to the members of FOR detailing the need for a nonviolent movement. He noted the lack of such a movement and the ways in which FOR should go about creating one. He claimed that while the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was the largest and most prominent interracial group, the group was not involved in “direct action.” He asserted, “Very rarely do the local branches of this organization initiate any kind of direct action in which the masses of Negroes and sympathetic whites participate, in

³⁴ Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), 157.

³⁵ Meier and Rudwick, 4.

order to challenge racial injustice."³⁶ Houser knew it was up to the members of FOR to take the lead in the fight for social justice.

Houser believed Gandhi's idea of nonviolence was the best means to combat racism and segregation. He wrote that any mass movement "must stress the use of non-violent techniques. In fact, there must be a final reliance on non-violence as over against violence in such a movement."³⁷ He went on to explain that this sort of movement needed leadership and that "this leadership needs to be committed to non-violence. If leaders of such a movement direct it along non-violent channels the chances are that the rank and file in the movement will remain non-violent."³⁸

In order to inculcate nonviolent ideas, Houser produced multiple pamphlets for FOR. One, "Non-Violence Versus Racism," included information on the philosophy of nonviolence and how nonviolence would prevail. Houser wrote:

Non-violent power is effective in winning support and in challenging injustice either on a small scale or on a large scale basis. Its essential strength is that of challenging the right of any kind of injustice to exist. It does this by refusing to cooperate with wrong, by mobilizing public opinion against Jim Crow and through all this it relies upon an attitude of good will.³⁹

³⁶ George Houser, "Memo on a Mass Non-Violent Movement," Congress of Racial Equality Collected Records (Swarthmore, PA: Swarthmore College, 1943), 1. (Hereafter, CORE SC)

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ George Houser, "Non-Violence Versus Racism," Fellowship of Reconciliation Records, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore, PA, 4, n.d. (Hereafter, FOR SC)

He acknowledged the success of nonviolent tactics in India. He discussed the fight for independence there and noted “the struggle...went on for many years, but that independence became inevitable when the Gandhian non-cooperation arose.”⁴⁰ Houser closely followed Gandhi’s demonstrations and learned from them. He recognized the accomplishments Gandhi had attained and desired that same success for the civil rights movement and FOR.

George Houser was not the only member of FOR to follow Gandhi’s lead. In the mid-1940s, A.J. Muste, FOR’s chairman, and James Farmer, the secretary of FOR, circulated a call for volunteers to picket for the freedom of India and the release of Gandhi, who had been arrested once again. Muste and Farmer proclaimed, “India must not lose her battle,” and the members of FOR “must lend her sympathy and support.”⁴¹ The connection between members of FOR and Gandhi, and between FOR and Indians fighting for their independence, was strong. Members of the Fellowship wanted to emulate Gandhi’s nonviolent tactics. They watched his demonstrations in South Africa and India, and learned how to use nonviolence in their movement.

Bayard Rustin, a prolific activist and FOR member, echoed the sentiments of Muste and Farmer, writing and speaking about the power of Gandhi and nonviolence. He stated, “Gandhi reveals again that one man standing on the fulcrum of truth may

⁴⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁴¹ A.J. Muste and James Farmer, “A Call to Action for the Cause of Freedom,” FOR SC.

become the lever and the revolution which frees men from want and fear.”⁴² In 1949, Rustin delivered a speech detailing his visit to India with one of Gandhi’s sons, Devadas Gandhi, during which he saw the work of Gandhi for himself.

Of all the members of FOR, Homer Jack studied and wrote about Gandhi most extensively. Following Gandhi’s death in 1948, Jack was in touch with Gandhi’s son, Manilal Gandhi, regularly visiting him in India. While much of their correspondence was of a personal nature, they did discuss events that took place in South Africa, India, and the United States. In terms of South Africa, Manilal and Jack analyzed the issue of apartheid and the ways in which the United States was trying to get involved. In a letter dated October 8, 1952, Jack wrote to Manilal and enclosed an article of his about to be published in *Indian Opinion*, a newsletter started by Gandhi. In the article, Jack highlighted America’s failure to recognize the issue of apartheid in South Africa. He mentioned the creation of a new organization to address the matter and wrote about Houser, whom he called “a leader in the adaptation of Gandhian techniques of satyagraha to problems with racial discrimination in the United States.”⁴³

Manilal responded to Jack’s letter with appreciation for his endeavors and a desire to carry on his father’s efforts. He told Jack, “You are doing wonderful work for which we are deeply indebted to you. I only hope and pray that God may give us all the strength,

⁴² Bayard Rustin, “Operation Calcutta,” FOR SC.

⁴³ Homer A. Jack to Manilal Gandhi, October 8, 1952, Homer Jack Papers, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore, PA. (Hereafter, Jack Papers SC)

wisdom and courage to remain steadfastly to the path of Truth and non-violence.”⁴⁴

Manilal appreciated the difficulties of carrying on a nonviolent movement and explained to Jack, “This great achievement is possible only if we have an outstanding leader like father whose presence we all sorely miss. But his spirit is there to guide us. May we deserve that guidance by living a pure life as he did. Without the grace of God we shall never win and to get that grace we have to deserve it.”⁴⁵ Lacking the leadership of his father, it was harder to maintain a nonviolent strategy, but Manilal knew it was still possible.

In addition to his close relationship and correspondence with Manilal, Jack wrote numerous articles, pamphlets, and speeches about Gandhi and his nonviolent philosophy. Jack produced one pamphlet, “In the Footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi,” in the early 1950s. It detailed his journey to India to trace Gandhi’s life and work. During this trip, he met Manilal and the two began their friendship. Jack recounted visiting the sites of Gandhi’s marches and demonstrations and speaking with those who were close to Gandhi during his life. The trip was eye opening for Jack; it gave him a better sense of Gandhi and his philosophy. Jack ended his pamphlet with these powerful words:

The world will continue to remember [Gandhi] as the creator of the tool of non-violent resistance, a religious tool in a militaristic, anything-but-religious world. The world will continue to remember him as a man who insisted that

⁴⁴ Manilal Gandhi to Homer Jack, January 13, 1953, Jack Papers SC.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

ends can never justify means, that freedom can never justify war, that independence can never justify violence.⁴⁶

In his speeches, Jack examined Gandhi's life and legacy and the ways in which civil rights activists carried on his nonviolent theory. In the wake of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, "Great Soul: The Mahatma and Montgomery," delivered on December 7, 1956, at the Institute on Non-Violence and Social Change in Montgomery, Alabama, described both Gandhi's life history and the manner in which he perfected his nonviolent strategy. Referring to Gandhi's death, Jack insisted, "Gandhism did not die with the Mahatma. It is very much alive today."⁴⁷ He proclaimed, "Gandhi taught courage...love...non-violence...social justice."⁴⁸ In Jack's estimation, Gandhism was making itself felt in the American South.

Jack directly related the teachings and desires of Gandhi to what was happening in Montgomery at the time of his speech. He said, "The connection between Gandhi and Montgomery is obvious, and has been obvious to most of you these past twelve months. You have read, since last December, how journalists the world over have said that Gandhi is walking the streets of Montgomery, that Gandhism has penetrated the Magnolia Curtain."⁴⁹ Thus, over ten years after Houser had written about the influence of Gandhi and nonviolence, both continued to help shape the American civil rights movement.

⁴⁶ Homer Jack, "In the Footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi," Jack Papers SC, n.d., 13.

⁴⁷ Homer Jack, "Great Soul: The Mahatma and Montgomery," Jack Papers SC, 1956, 4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

Although Gandhi was not the first to employ nonviolence tactically, he did revolutionize the practice and made it his own. He used his life experiences to tailor his philosophy and use it to help not only the people of India, but also those in South Africa and beyond. He influenced countless people around the world, including the small group of FOR members who decided to take the fight for civil rights into their own hands. Their desire to utilize nonviolence led to nonviolent workshops and demonstrations, such as the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation, which greatly impacted the American civil rights movement.

CHAPTER III

THE FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION

AND GANDHIAN NONVIOLENCE

When the Fellowship of Reconciliation first appeared, its pacifist members largely focused on protesting World War I. Once the war ended and new members, including George Houser, Bayard Rustin, Homer Jack, and A.J. Muste, became involved, FOR switched its primary focus to fighting injustices against African Americans in the United States. Beginning in the late 1930s, FOR's members, most of them white, hoped to help African Americans gain equal rights. Houser, Rustin, Jack, and Muste began with small programs such as race relations institutes and interracial churches. These institutes and churches provided both members of FOR and community participants, white and black, an opportunity to learn about racial inequality throughout the country and what they could do to counter it. Even within churches, integration was frowned upon and whites in several communities were unhappy that ministers were attempting to fight segregation in their congregations.

While working through institutes and churches, members of FOR also created larger programs such as interracial workshops. Like institutes, interracial workshops involved organizers teaching activists about injustices and how to fight them, but

workshops differed in the way participants responded to these injustices. Workshops centered primarily on tactics participants could use to confront segregation directly. This type of activism led to the largest demonstration created by FOR, the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation. The Journey of Reconciliation consisted of over a dozen members of FOR traveling across the country by bus to fight Jim Crow laws pertaining to public transportation.

A key factor in all of these programs was the employment of nonviolence as a tactic. All members of FOR trained in nonviolence. They learned how to keep demonstrations peaceful and how to resist retaliating if they were assaulted while protesting. Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy was at the center of all the demonstrations sponsored by FOR. By remaining nonviolent, activists fought for what they believed in without giving their opponents another reason to denounce their protests. As members of FOR witnessed the success of nonviolence, demonstrations gradually grew in size, from something as small as an interracial church to something as large as the Journey of Reconciliation.

In the early 1940s, Homer Jack, a Unitarian minister and theological student, turned his focus to interracial churches. Jack used his position as a minister and a member of FOR to utilize his church as a hub for desegregation. In 1943, while a student at Meadville Theological School in Chicago, Illinois, Jack wrote to Edward J. Jeffries Jr., the mayor of Detroit, Michigan. Jack, citing his fellow students and faculty members, requested, "in the name of brotherly love, justice, and democracy, that [Jeffries] uphold

the plan to allow Negroes to occupy the Sojourner Truth Housing Project in Detroit.”⁵⁰

Jack continued his desegregation efforts and created an interracial college group within his church in Kansas. In a 1944 letter, Jack updated his friends on his progress:

We have a strong Negro-white college-age group in this church and it's been fun getting it started, although the barbs from the community (and even my church) have been swift (even if they didn't hurt!). We have inter-racial dancing and that is taboo in "Free" Kansas. But we're going right on dancing (inter-racially) and very soon now we'll pull a Core, either on the Jim Crow theaters here or the restaurants.⁵¹

Jack's depiction of the events in Kansas included a reference to "pull[ing] a Core." This referred to the events put on by FOR and by the Congress of Racial Equality, which included sit-ins at publically segregated places such as movie theaters and restaurants.⁵² These types of demonstrations were the cornerstone of first FOR, and eventually CORE.

Other members of FOR also recognized the need for a mass interracial movement. Around 1943, Houser wrote and distributed a memo to members of the organization detailing both the need for a movement and the steps required to create such a movement. Houser emphasized that African Americans were ready for such an undertaking. He wrote that they were prepared to take action against indignities they suffered, and that it was important for the action to involve a group effort. Houser

⁵⁰ Homer A. Jack to Edward J. Jeffries Jr., March 11, 1942, Jack Papers SC.

⁵¹ Homer A. Jack to Dear Friends, March 23, 1944, Jack Papers SC.

⁵² In 1942, members of FOR created CORE as a direct-action, nonviolent organization. See Chapter 4 for more detail.

asserted that it was “impossible for any injustice to stand up against the demands of the masses of people.”⁵³ He also stressed the importance of adhering to nonviolence. He highlighted nonviolent techniques such as “investigation, negotiation, demonstration, and such non-cooperation as striking and boycotting, if necessary with a final reliance upon a refusal to respond with violence even when attacked.”⁵⁴

While focusing on nonviolence as a main principle of the movement, Houser also emphasized the importance of maintaining interracial demonstrations. Houser believed that by including both whites and blacks in the movement they were less likely to encounter “race-baiters [saying] that they were being persecuted simply by Negroes.”⁵⁵ Houser also believed biracial engagement “undermine[d] the racist theory that the two races [could not] mix.”⁵⁶ He acknowledged the fact that African Americans would create the base for the movement, but affirmed that whites were willing and eager to participate. Houser closed his memo with a call to action for interracial community groups. He outlined the need for a leadership base to host conferences and “a series of interracial non-violent week-end institutes and two- to three-week work-shops in key communities across the country.”⁵⁷ These plans soon turned into reality in the mid-1940s when FOR began running its race relations institutes.

⁵³ Houser, “Memo on Movement,” 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 2.

In a letter to friends, Lawrence Scott, member of FOR and secretary of the Kansas City Area Race Relations Institute, detailed the aims of the institutes. He described the four major aims:

- 1) to consider areas of racial tension: jobs, housing, education and the problem of discrimination in general;
- 2) to discover the dynamic part Religious and Social groups must play in the great struggle for economic, social, and political freedom;
- 3) to plan creative methods of facing conflict and achieving political and economic justice through reconciliation;
- 4) to build brotherhood by working together toward the solution of problems that are common to all Americans.⁵⁸

These aims provided the basis for the institutes set up by FOR, beginning with the race relations institute in April 1944, at the Grand Avenue Methodist Temple in Kansas City, Missouri, and the Central Christian Church in Kansas City, Kansas. Events during the institute included fellowship through music and addresses by FOR members James Farmer and John Nevin Sayre. The speeches covered topics such as "The Race Situation Today," "Techniques of Good Will Direct Action," "A Non-Violent Program for Today," and "The Spiritual Basis of Non-Violence."⁵⁹ In addition to the addresses and fellowship, participants engaged in an interracial dinner and discussions of workshops aimed to remove racial discrimination and ease tensions within communities. This institute was just the beginning of a series of institutes conducted around the country over the next several years.

⁵⁸ Lawrence Scott to Dear Friends, February 18, 1944, FOR Records SC.

⁵⁹ The Fellowship of Reconciliation, "Race Relations Institute Program," FOR SC, April 1944.

In a series of letters with Shizu Asahi Proctor, a former secretary of FOR, Houser detailed the success of institutes in Cleveland, Ohio, and Toledo, Ohio. In January 1945, Houser wrote Proctor about the Cleveland institute and the fact that there were more than 350 people in attendance. He also discussed the work projects put on during the institute. Participants polled local stores about whether they would hire African Americans and Houser reported that 68 percent of those polled were not opposed to hiring African Americans, while 5 percent had no opinion on the topic.⁶⁰ In another letter to Proctor, Houser informed him that the Toledo institute, which ran from February 23-25, was also a success. He mentioned that in one of the evening sessions alone there were over 250 people present. With the success of these first institutes, the members of FOR planned many others in hopes of garnering even more participants.⁶¹

The latter part of 1946 and the beginning of 1947 witnessed the emergence of more race relations institutes. Following the end of World War II, racial tensions were on the rise. African American men returned from the war, which seemingly involved a fight for democracy and freedom overseas, and were eager to experience those same ideals at home. Race relations institutes appeared to offer hope of bringing about a change in the treatment of blacks in the United States. Members of FOR conducted institutes on various weekends from November 1946 through February 1947 in Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Ohio. Events included speeches by Homer Jack, A.J. Muste, and many

⁶⁰ George Houser to Shizu Proctor, January 24, 1945, FOR SC.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, March 1, 1945.

more influential members of FOR. They also included action projects such as handing out flyers to spark awareness of discriminatory hiring practices and directly testing to see if African American patrons would be welcomed at restaurants and other public places.

Whereas race relations institutes included one or two action projects, interracial workshops almost exclusively consisted of activism and demonstrations. The aims of interracial workshops centered on discussing racial tensions and planning activities to combat such tensions. The following were listed as objectives:

to demonstrate that persons of differing backgrounds can live harmoniously together; to apply non-violent methods to social change; to dramatize effective techniques of combatting discrimination.⁶²

In order to meet these goals and make a strong impact, many of the workshops lasted longer than a weekend. Some continued for a few weeks while others took up a whole summer.

One weeklong workshop, for example, took place in February 1947 in Toledo, Ohio. During this workshop, an unexpected opportunity for a sit-in arose. During a break in the workshop, Rustin and Houser visited a local restaurant, not expecting any problems. However, employees at the restaurant refused to serve them. Rather than leave the restaurant, Rustin and Houser stayed for two-and-a-half hours, but were never served. When the time came for the workshop to reconvene, they called the other

⁶² The Fellowship of Reconciliation, "The Interracial Workshop," FOR SC, 1947.

attendees over to the restaurant. Fifty men and women made their way to the restaurant and, as they were filing in, the restaurant manager closed the door and locked them out. The manager called the police who informed the owner that he was in the wrong and needed to serve both the black and white patrons. The owner reluctantly served all the workshop members. The following day, some of the members returned to the restaurant to speak with the owner and discuss the previous day's events; they came to an understanding and rectified the situation.

Attendees of a 1947 summer workshop in Washington, D.C., made headlines for their efforts to combat racism within the local Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). A coffee shop, run by the YMCA, refused service to African Americans. According to the radical daily New York newspaper *PM*, the members of the workshop "began centering [their] pressure on the 'Y' Coffee Shop, reasoning that an institution with a self-proclaimed 'Christian' philosophy was 'vulnerable' to protests."⁶³ In order to put pressure on the coffee shop, the interracial group visited the shop and sat down at tables even after the employees refused them service. A "presumably sympathetic waitress" gave three members of the group food, but they refused to eat until all other members received their meals.⁶⁴ The rest of the group never received service. After two hours of waiting the group left, returning the next day to sit-in for seven hours. The group planned to continue sitting-in until the coffee shop served all the members, but the

⁶³ Willard Shelton, "Gandhi-like Tactics Used Against Bias At Capital YMCA," *PM*, July 18, 1947, CORE SC.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

manager refused to comply. As was the case with this coffee shop, not every establishment caved to the demands of the demonstrators.

During the same Washington workshop, four participants visited multiple restaurants throughout the city to discover which served black patrons and which turned them away. The four members visited restaurants in two interracial groups. Through multiple visits, they found there was not a clear trend among the businesses. On July 26, Margaret Draper, a white woman, and Leroy Fennell, a black man, visited three different restaurants and asked to be served. At the first restaurant they visited, Ruby Foo's Den, the waiters refused to help them, stating that they served either only Negroes or only whites. The manager explained that they served both whites and blacks at their New York restaurant, but not at their D.C. location.

At the next restaurant, The Olmstead, the headwaiter refused to serve them, but when Draper spoke to the manager he informed her that the restaurant did serve black patrons and that the headwaiter was mistaken. She and Fennell were seated, but they were seated in the back of the restaurant that was partially obscured from the main dining area. Once they were seated, they were treated well by the waiters and by the other customers, except for a few occasional unhappy glances. Employees at the final restaurant, New Athens Restaurant, refused to serve them. Draper and Fennell asked to speak to either the headwaiter or the manager, but they were told that both employees were out for the day so the two activists left the restaurant.

The same day, Ethel Philpott, a black woman, and Miriam Keeler, a white woman, visited three different restaurants with more unfavorable results. The wait staff at the first restaurant, Ceres Grill, seated the women at the back of the restaurant, but no waiter came to take their order. When they informed the hostess that they had not been waited on, she ignored them so they left. At the next restaurant, Child's Restaurant, the women encountered a similar situation. They were seated at an obscure table and were given water, but no one came to take their order. When they questioned the hostess, they were informed that the restaurant only served white customers so the women left the restaurant. They experienced similar service at the final restaurant, Willard Coffee Shop; they were seated at a table, but were refused service. The manager explained that the restaurant did not serve Negroes.⁶⁵

While those attempting to receive service at restaurants endured certain indignities, the summer workshop members, as a whole, experienced success in late July. After being refused service at the Methodist Building Cafeteria on July 7, members of the workshop sat down with the management and explained their position on inter-racial dining. When black members of the workshop revisited the cafeteria on July 24, they were served without incident. Sit-ins and visits to local businesses were vital to the work of FOR and the institutes and workshops they sponsored. It allowed the members to see which businesses embraced social equality, and which businesses needed to

⁶⁵ Testimony from the four activists, FOR SC, 1947.

change. They successfully changed the minds of some business owners, such as the operator of the Methodist Building Cafeteria, but clearly much work remained.

The race relations institutes and interracial workshops brought much needed attention to the work of FOR, but Houser and Rustin knew FOR needed a large scale demonstration to gain more attention. In 1946, planning for the Journey of Reconciliation began. The demonstration involved a two-week journey through the Upper South using public transportation. Sixteen members, eight black and eight white, participated.

Until 1946, state laws throughout the South strictly enforced segregated public transportation. While organized groups had yet to challenge Jim Crow laws, individuals, including FOR member Bayard Rustin, took it upon themselves to battle against legal discrimination. In 1944, Irene Morgan had defied Virginia's local and state segregation laws and eventually took her case to the United States Supreme Court. Morgan, a twenty-seven-year-old African American woman, was traveling to see her husband when she boarded a Greyhound bus bound for Baltimore. Having recently suffered a miscarriage, Morgan was feeling particularly weak and needed a seat so she could rest. She stood for the first few miles of the trip, but eventually had to sit so she took a seat near the back of the bus, in front of some white passengers. The bus driver demanded that she give up her seat in accordance with both local and state Jim Crow laws. She refused to move, and when the bus driver attempted to remove her from her seat, she began screaming and kicking him. She was eventually forcibly removed, arrested,

charged, and convicted of violating section 4097dd of the Virginia Code. She appealed her case, but the appellate court of Virginia upheld the decision.⁶⁶

In October 1945, her case, *Irene Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia*, went to the Supreme Court. Lawyers from the NAACP, including Thurgood Marshall, represented Morgan. Author Derek Catsam explains how Marshall and his fellow lawyers argued that “the Virginia statute requiring segregation on interstate carriers (and others like it) placed an undue burden on interstate commerce and thus violated the Commerce Clause of the Constitution.”⁶⁷ This same argument had successfully been used in an 1878 case, *Hall v. DeCuir*, which declared that segregated interstate travel placed an undue burden on passenger steamboat operators traveling down the Mississippi River.⁶⁸ Given these arguments, on June 3, 1946, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 6-1 that segregation in interstate transportation was unconstitutional. While African Americans considered it a victory, southern whites were unhappy that the court nullified a Jim Crow ordinance. This monumental decision was the catalyst Houser and Rustin needed to begin planning the Journey of Reconciliation.

Soon after the Supreme Court handed down the *Morgan* decision, it became clear that not all states would enforce desegregation of public transportation. Once

⁶⁶ Derek Catsam, *Freedom's Main Line: The Journey of Reconciliation and the Freedom Rides* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 14.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Rustin and Houser realized this, they knew a trip to the South was necessary. Members of FOR and CORE devised a plan. According to Homer Jack:

The Journey was not meant to be just another testing of existing laws. It was primarily to ascertain whether an unpopular court decision could be enforced by using the spirit of aggressive good will, or more accurately, non-violent direct action."⁶⁹

Jack explained that the Gandhi-inspired participants would not be "passive non-resisters," but rather "active resisters of segregation in a non-violent manner."⁷⁰ In addition to being able to test their nonviolent techniques, Houser and Rustin highlighted three specific reasons that motivated the Journey. First, the Journey appealed to Houser and Rustin as "segregation in transportation in the South was an issue important to tackle. It touched virtually every black person, was demeaning in its effect and a source of frequent conflict." Second, "a campaign to resist segregation in transportation, [they] thought, would get some attention ... by striking a raw nerve." Finally, they believed the Journey "would have the force of law behind it."⁷¹

Because FOR and CORE considered this project crucial, an immense amount of planning and preparation went into it. The discussions within CORE focused on how the trip would help expand the reach of the organization, whereas FOR members emphasized the Journey itself and its purpose as a way to utilize nonviolence. In a 1992

⁶⁹ Homer Jack, "Journey of Reconciliation," *Common Ground* (Autumn 1947): 21, CORE SC.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

⁷¹ George Houser, "A Personal Retrospective on the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation," CORE SC, September 1992, 3.

paper that reflected on the Journey, Houser highlighted the multifold purpose of the movement:

To gather data in a planned and scientific fashion on what is happening when Negroes and whites travel together without heed to patterns of segregation in states where Jim Crow laws prevail; to develop techniques for dealing creatively with possible conflict situations that will arise when segregation patterns are ignored on buses and trains; to do an educational job by passing on the experiences and data obtained on the trip.⁷²

In contrast to sit-ins and previous demonstrations, members of FOR designed the Journey of Reconciliation to simply observe what happened when participants did not sit in segregated sections. Demonstrators wanted to see if state and local governments would uphold the Supreme Court's ruling and how southern whites reacted.

The first step of preparing for the Journey was to find a group of volunteers, something that proved to be harder than anticipated. Originally, Houser and Rustin planned for both men and women to participate in the Journey, but they decided that mixing races and sexes would lead to an even more hostile situation. Houser and Rustin reached out to everyone they knew, but had a difficult time recruiting volunteers for several reasons. First, the risk of violence was high, and many men did not want to put themselves in such a situation. Second, volunteers, black or white, needed to be "committed to nonviolence in the face of provocation and possible violence." Finally, a volunteer had to be willing to dedicate at least a few days to the fourteen-day Journey.⁷³

⁷² Ibid., 5.

⁷³ Ibid., 7.

After reaching out to their contacts, Houser and Rustin secured fourteen volunteers in addition to themselves. The eight black participants were Dennis Banks, a musician from Chicago; Conrad Lynn, a New York lawyer; Andrew Johnson, a student from Cincinnati; Wallace Nelson, a lecturer; Bayard Rustin; Eugene Stanley, a student at A. and T. College, Greensboro, North Carolina; William Worthy, a member of the New York Student Council for a Permanent FEPC; and Nathan Wright, a church worker from Cincinnati.⁷⁴ The eight white participants were Louis Adams and Ernest Bromley, Methodist ministers from North Carolina; Joseph Felmet, a member of the Southern Workers Defense League; George Houser; Homer Jack; James Peck, Workers Defense League News Bulletin editor; Worth Randle, a biologist from Cincinnati; and Igal Roodenko, a horticulturalist from New York.⁷⁵

With the sixteen participants chosen, the group planned the specific details of the Journey. They decided to stay within the Upper South, as the Lower South seemed too dangerous. As Peck recalled in his book, *Freedom Ride*:

To penetrate the Deep South at that time would simply have meant immediate arrest of all participants, an end to the trip—and possibly us. As a Negro told us on the first lap, “Some bus drivers are crazy; and the farther south you go, the crazier they get.”⁷⁶

Several months before the Journey, Rustin and Houser traveled through the Upper South to plan the route. During these months they also retained lawyers and

⁷⁴ George Houser and Bayard Rustin, “We Challenged Jim Crow!: A Report on the Journey of Reconciliation,” 1947, 2, CORE SC.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ James Peck, *Freedom Ride* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 16.

collected money for bail. The NAACP offered legal services for anyone arrested during the trip. In addition to making legal and financial preparations, planners also needed to train volunteers in nonviolent techniques. On April 7, 1947, two days before the Journey, the men reported to a two-day training session in Washington. Over the course of the workshop, the men took turns playing the roles of bus drivers, angry segregationists, police officers, and the protestors themselves.⁷⁷ After each scenario, the group discussed whether they performed the roles correctly and handled the situation properly. The key to all of the scenarios was for the participants to remain nonviolent, but strong. Peck recalled being instructed that if a bus driver or police officer told anyone to move out of the segregated section, that individual should refuse and tell the officer or bus driver that he was within his rights under the *Morgan* decision.⁷⁸ If a police officer ordered volunteers to relinquish their seat, the men were instructed to stay seated unless they were arrested. Organizers made it clear that the activists should not let police officers intimidate them.⁷⁹ Volunteers were made aware that police officers would make people leave their seats without placing them under arrest and keep them occupied until the bus left the passenger stranded; once the bus pulled away, the officer would typically leave without charging the passenger or arresting him.

Once the nonviolent workshop ended, Houser and Rustin finalized the travel plans. They scheduled overnight stops in certain cities where they had arranged

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

meetings in local churches. The NAACP orchestrated the majority of the meetings. They scheduled meetings with the intention of spreading the Journey's message to the public. Volunteers hoped to gather support not only for their trip, but also for the Supreme Court's 1946 *Morgan* decision itself. In all, the Journey leaders planned several meetings featuring more than thirty speeches.⁸⁰

On the morning of April 9, 1947, the two-week Journey of Reconciliation began. Leaving from Washington, the men split into two groups and boarded a Greyhound bus and a National Trailways bus, both heading to Richmond. The two buses in Richmond had already eliminated segregated seating so there were no incidents. On buses outside Richmond that still practiced segregated seating, it was imperative that some of the men sat in their segregated seating so that everyone was not arrested at once. One or two men would sit in designated sections while the rest of the men would sit in the opposite section; white men sat in the back, or the black section, and black men sat in the front, or the white section. Sometimes black men would share a seat in the front with the white demonstrators. As the group traveled farther South, its members were likely to face far more opposition from bus drivers and the general public.

The first two legs of the Journey, from Washington, D.C., to Richmond, Virginia, and Richmond to Petersburg, Virginia, did not entail any incidents. None of the members were arrested and they did not face much resistance. There was some concern

⁸⁰ Homer Jack, *Homer's Odyssey: My Quest for Peace and Justice* (Becket, MA: One Peaceful World Press, 1996), 143.

that their trip would prove disappointing, but this attitude changed when the travelers headed from Petersburg to Durham, North Carolina. The driver of a Greyhound bus told Rustin to move from his seat and threatened to throw him off the bus. The driver “backed down when several passengers, black and white, expressed support for Rustin.”⁸¹ Conrad Lynn, a black rider on a Trailways bus heading to Raleigh, North Carolina, from Petersburg, was not as fortunate. Lynn was arrested for sitting in the front of the bus. Houser recalled that the bus driver was apologetic when telling Lynn to move from his seat. The bus driver told Houser and the other passengers that “he was in the employ of the bus company, not the Supreme Court ... I don’t care where you sit, but I have my orders.”⁸² This type of hesitation and seeming desire to comply with the Supreme Court ruling did not last long. As the men continued the Journey, attitudes toward the black travelers became increasingly negative.

Peck recalled the inequality between black and white facilities upon his arrival in Durham. He wrote:

One glance at the Durham bus station was enough to illustrate the separate and unequal treatment which Negroes receive in the South. On one side of the ticket window was the “white” waiting room, well painted and with seats, telephone booths, and all necessary conveniences. On the other side of the ticket window was the “colored” waiting room, completely bare, unpainted, without seats, telephones, or conveniences of any kind.⁸³

⁸¹ John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 136.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 136-37.

⁸³ Peck, *Freedom Ride*, 18-19.

The inequality spread beyond just the bus station. Peck observed inequality within the city of Durham. The black section of town lacked sidewalks and phone booths; all of the restaurants and the only hotel were completely run down. In Durham, police arrested Peck and Rustin but soon released them. The group was separated due to the arrests in Durham but they reorganized in Chapel Hill.

While attempting to depart Chapel Hill on April 13, more passengers, including Rustin and Roodenko, were arrested. Peck followed them off the bus to bail them out. As he made his way back to the bus, a bus driver approached him and voiced his disapproval of the Journey. He then struck Peck in the head. Peck remained calm and simply asked the man what the issue was. The man was confused by Peck's refusal to respond with violence and walked away. Many of the onlookers chastised the driver for hitting a man who did nothing to provoke him. Peck later learned that the majority of passengers on the bus supported the activists' cause.⁸⁴ This incident was the only instance of violence, which can likely be attributed to the group's adherence to nonviolence.

The next few days of the trip were uneventful. Drivers made slight objections to the integrated seating arrangements, but no arrests were made until April 17. As the group was traveling from Asheville, North Carolina, to Knoxville, Tennessee, Peck and Banks sat next to each other in the front of the bus. The driver told Banks to move and when he refused the police were called on to arrest him. Peck stood up and declared that

⁸⁴ Ibid., 21.

the two men were traveling together and that he should be arrested as well. The police arrested both men and released them later that day.

On April 17, Jack joined the Journey in Knoxville. Group leaders selected Jack and Nathan Wright to ride a bus from Knoxville to Louisville, Kentucky. Houser accompanied them as an observer. When the two men boarded the bus, the driver asked them to move but they refused, stating that they had every right based on the Supreme Court decision. The driver left the bus to speak to bus officials and the police, but received no support and drove the bus without another word to the two men. Although they had made it through the first obstacle, the most tense part of the trip was approaching. The men took part in the first overnight ride of the Journey. Jack explained, "The Southern night, to Northerners at least, is full of vigilant justice and the lynch rope from pine trees if not palms."⁸⁵ Jack and Wright, fearful of violence, were pleased to find that no vigilantes were waiting for them at their two rest stops. They made it to Louisville the next morning with no incidents and only minimal resistance.

In addition to testing bus transportation, Wright and Jack tested trains. On April 19, they bought tickets for the white car on a train traveling from Nashville to Louisville. There were no problems boarding, but once they were seated one of the conductors approached them and instructed Wright to move to the Jim Crow car; Wright refused. The conductor said he would be back and continued collecting tickets from other passengers. A bit later, the conductor returned and told Wright, "If we were in

⁸⁵ Jack, *Homer's Odyssey*, 145.

Alabama, I and the other passengers would throw you out of the window.”⁸⁶ The conductor threatened to have Wright arrested at the next stop, but he did not follow through on his threat.

The remainder of the Journey, from April 19 to 23, included bus trips through North Carolina, Ohio, and multiple cities in Virginia, including Roanoke and Lynchburg, before returning to Washington, D.C. A few arrests occurred in those cities, but no violence or major incidents. Overall, police made twelve arrests during the Journey of Reconciliation.

Once the Journey concluded, many of the participants, including Jack and Houser, wrote about the impact the venture had on segregation and Jim Crow laws. In his discussion of the Journey, Jack wrote that it became clear the *Morgan* decision and the idea of unsegregated travel had yet to reach the South beyond Richmond. Although the travelers did not encounter much violence, they did experience resistance as they neared the Lower South. Jack also explained that the nonviolent technique employed by the men was extremely successful because it allowed them to react calmly to resistance and understand the viewpoint of those who did not agree with them. According to Jack, the Journey of Reconciliation showed Americans that the *Morgan* decision could be implemented through tests like the Journey. He said the Journey spread word of the *Morgan* decision to bus drivers and law enforcement and showed blacks and whites that,

⁸⁶ Houser and Rustin, “Journey of Reconciliation,” 6.

through nonviolence, they could create their own Journey of Reconciliation and help further integrated bus travel.⁸⁷

In his reflection forty-five years after the Journey, Houser wrote that it was clear the Journey of Reconciliation did not usher in any groundbreaking changes. He explained that it did not end segregated travel, it did not bring about any other landmark cases like the *Morgan* case, and it did not inspire people to start a massive uprising to end segregation. He did, however, explain that it was important in many other ways. Houser highlighted the publicity the Journey received and the hundreds of newspaper articles written about it. These helped call attention not only to the movement, but also to the *Morgan* case and the ruling against segregated travel. Houser argued that the Journey shed light on nonviolent demonstrations and showed that nonviolence was a successful technique. This example of nonviolent activism left a lasting impression on countless Southerners and became a key tool in future demonstrations.⁸⁸

In addition to participants delivering reflections on the Journey, Southern newspapers published articles, many negative in scope, discussing events involving FOR activists. "Racial Incidents Provoked to 'Educate' Southerners," which appeared in the *Gaffney Ledger*, a local South Carolina newspaper, insisted that racial incidents were

⁸⁷ Jack, "Journey of Reconciliation," CORE SC.

⁸⁸ Houser, "Personal Retrospective," CORE SC.

“planned and deliberately provoked.”⁸⁹ The author claimed that the hope of the Journey’s participants was to provoke a reaction from Southerners to test adherence to the *Morgan* decision.

While the Journey of Reconciliation alone did not have as large an impact as the participants hoped, the ideas it spread as well as those from the interracial workshops and race relations institutes provided seeds for the postwar civil rights movement, and underscored the importance of nonviolent tactics. Race relations institutes also allowed members of the public in multiple cities to learn about segregation and the issues that African Americans faced. Participants learned how to combat segregation and racism through nonviolent techniques.

The interracial workshops put the ideas from the institutes into practice. Participants had opportunities to take part in demonstrations such as sit-ins and picket lines. All of these protests centered on nonviolence. Organizers gave demonstrators lessons on how to resist the temptation to answer violence with more violence. Demonstrators learned the philosophy behind nonviolence, including the beliefs of Gandhi and actual nonviolent tactics to employ. While early sit-ins garnered a good amount of publicity and public attention, members of FOR seized the opportunity to gain greater exposure through the Journey of Reconciliation.

⁸⁹ “Racial Incidents Provoked to ‘Educate’ Southerners,” *Gaffney Ledger* (South Carolina), August 5, 1947, accessed April 8, 2015, <http://www.newspapers.com/image/78095358>.

The Journey provided the volunteers with their biggest nonviolent challenge thus far. It was imperative that the travelers never react with violence. By adhering to nonviolent techniques, volunteers attempted to integrate transportation without tarnishing their reputations. Utilizing nonviolence kept the majority of the Journey free of violence.

Whether participants of the institutes, workshops, and the Journey realized it, their efforts, especially those that focused on nonviolence, would greatly influence future events in the civil rights movement. As FOR faded to the background and CORE came to the forefront of the movement, it was clear that much of its foundation came from the work laid down by FOR. No demonstration was more clearly influenced by FOR than the Freedom Rides of 1961, which drew direct inspiration from the Journey of Reconciliation fourteen years earlier.

CHAPTER IV

THE FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION'S

LASTING IMPACT

In 1942, as the Fellowship of Reconciliation continued to grow in both size and prominence, activists in Chicago created a nonviolent organization of their own. The activists, many of whom belonged to FOR, wanted to establish an independent organization focused on direct action and Gandhian nonviolence. These desires culminated in the creation of the Congress of Racial Equality. In its early stages, CORE received support from FOR, both financially and through co-sponsorship of demonstrations. It became clear, however, that CORE needed to be a separate entity in order for its membership to grow and to achieve its lofty goals through nonviolent direct action. After receiving preliminary guidance and support, CORE eventually stood alone and became one of the most influential organizations involved in the civil rights movement.

Beginning in 1941, members of FOR, including Bernice Fisher, Homer Jack, George Houser, and James Farmer, and students at the University of Chicago, met regularly as a cell. Jack recalled the group discussing three key issues:

- 1) opposing the draft and the growing effort by President Roosevelt to enter the existing world war, 2) helping India become independent, and 3)

understanding the racism we saw all about us in the University neighborhood of Hyde Park.”⁹⁰

Once the war began, Jack and the other activists realized there was little they could do about violence overseas, so they decided to focus on combatting racism in their own community. They began reading books about Gandhi and his nonviolent philosophy, including Krishnalal Shridharani’s *War Without Violence*, which centered on using Satyagraha and nonviolent techniques in America. After reading such works, the group decided to move beyond reasoning with people in their community; they felt the need to “penetrate the heart of the racists who were [their] neighbors.”⁹¹

With this newfound determination to combat racism in the community, Jack and the other activists tackled the matter of segregated housing. Specific residential districts had housing deeds that restricted African Americans from buying or residing in properties in various areas. In response to the “restrictive covenant,” the activists established a cooperative house in a racially segregated area. Jack described the house as “a university version of a Gandhian ashram.”⁹² Whites signed the lease for the building, but both whites and blacks moved into the residence, known as the Men’s Interracial Fellowship House. Members of the community questioned why blacks lived in the neighborhood, but no one took action against them. Nevertheless, the black tenants faced discrimination at local businesses.

⁹⁰ Jack, *Homer’s Odyssey*, 114.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁹² *Ibid.*

In late 1941, James Farmer and James R. Robinson, both African American, left the Fellowship House to get a cup of coffee at a local restaurant, Jack Spratt. The employees refused to serve the two men. In response, Farmer and Robinson wrote letters and called the owner, but no change occurred. They decided direct action was their best chance to effectuate change. After some planning, Farmer and Robinson put their idea into action. On the day of the demonstration, a group of white men entered the restaurant and sat down. They were followed by a group of white and black men, who were refused service. Then a group of black men entered the restaurant and were also refused service. All of the men continued sitting in the restaurant despite being ignored. A reporter from the black newspaper *Chicago Defender* was in the restaurant and witnessed what happened. Although the sit-in garnered publicity, the restaurant refused to change its policy.

Based on his experience, Farmer wrote a memorandum titled "The Brotherhood Mobilization," which detailed his plan for a "'distinctive and radical approach' to American race relations."⁹³ He based his plan on the philosophy of Gandhian nonviolence. His goals included "not to make housing in ghettos more tolerable, but to destroy residential segregation; not to make Jim Crow facilities the equal of others, but to abolish Jim Crow; not to make racial discrimination bearable, but to wipe it out."⁹⁴ Farmer presented his ideas at a FOR meeting held in Cincinnati in April 1942. The members at the

⁹³ D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 53.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

meeting felt Farmer's plan would lead to conflict, so they rejected his proposal. As a compromise, A.J. Muste decided Farmer could stay in FOR while building a separate organization to carry out plans for nonviolent direct action.

In forming their organization, the activists derived three principles: "interracialism, nonviolence, and direct action."⁹⁵ They wanted whites and blacks to work together and they wanted the actions of their organization to be nonviolent, even in the event of immense opposition and violence. Before creating a permanent organization, the group decided to create an action project, and after drawing in participants, to shape a "hard-hitting" organization.⁹⁶ The group chose to center its first project on Chicago's White City Roller Rink, which excluded African Americans. The owner based such discrimination on the false claim that the rink was a private club. One night in April, a group of twenty-four men and women, including Farmer, attempted to enter the rink. The black members of the group were not allowed entrance while the white members were. In response, a subcommittee formed to negotiate with the manager. This led to a meeting of fifty people in late April in which a permanent organization was created. The majority of the participants were unmarried college students in their thirties, pacifists, and blacks.⁹⁷ At this meeting, Bernice Fisher was named chair. In June, the members decided on the name: the Committee of Racial Equality. This name would eventually

⁹⁵ Jack, *Homer's Odyssey*, 117.

⁹⁶ Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 7.

⁹⁷ Jack, *Homer's Odyssey*, 117.

denote the local chapters, whereas the national federation would be known as the Congress of Racial Equality.

After the formal creation of CORE, its members needed to decide how the organization would be run and to define its goals and values. In a July 1942 letter to Houser, Muste emphasized that the newly formed organization's main focus was on the restrictive covenant in Chicago.⁹⁸ CORE members responded to the covenant nonviolently and opened another Fellowship House. In 1943, the members of CORE created a statement of purpose to convey its nonviolent philosophy. In "Erasing the Color Line," a pamphlet written by Houser, CORE's statement of purpose listed two main points: "CORE has one purpose—to eliminate all racial discrimination. CORE has one method—interracial, direct action."⁹⁹ In addition to delivering this statement of purpose, the members of CORE published a pamphlet and a memo highlighting the methods of the organization and the structure of both the local and national chapters as well as the responsibilities an individual owed to CORE.

The pamphlet, titled "This is CORE," stated that "racial discrimination in the United States affects all Americans adversely. Segregation is a problem that everyone – and not merely the members of minorities—should seek to solve."¹⁰⁰ The pamphlet also highlighted CORE's belief in direct action and carrying out that action:

⁹⁸ A.J. Muste to George Houser, July 13, 1942, FOR SC.

⁹⁹ George Houser, "Erasing the Color Line," 1945, CORE SC.

¹⁰⁰ Congress of Racial Equality, "This is Core," 1961, CORE SC.

CORE first investigates to learn all the facts; second, discusses the grievance with those responsible for the practice in an effort to bring about a change of policy; third, appeals to the wider public for support in the action; fourth, publicizes the unjust racial practice through picketing, leaflets and press releases; fifth, if all the foregoing fail to end discrimination, uses direct challenge, such as Sit-Ins, Standing Lines, and boycotts.¹⁰¹

In order for its members to carry out nonviolent direct action, CORE organized into local chapters under the direction of the national organization. As part of its responsibility to the local chapters, CORE carried out such specific tasks as maintaining “a national office and a field staff to stimulate organization of new groups and to encourage the growth of established locals,” and publishing literature, including “the CORElator, to give wider circulation to action stories of local groups and of projects sponsored by national CORE itself.”¹⁰² One of the most important tasks of the national chapter was sponsoring training programs, including workshops, where members learned how to successfully employ nonviolent tactics; CORE conducted many of these workshops in cooperation with FOR.

Much of what was taught at the nonviolent workshops was detailed in a memo written in 1943 by the members of CORE. The members highlighted four points that described the potency of nonviolence:

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

- the power of active good-will;
- the power of public opinion against a wrong-doer;
- the power of refusing to cooperate with injustice, such non-cooperation being illustrated by the boycott and the strike;
- the power of accepting punishment if necessary without striking back by placing one's body in the way of injustice.¹⁰³

If CORE and its members were to succeed in their demonstrations, the members of the group had to be responsible for their actions and to the group as a whole. The memo described the various responsibilities for members within the group. The organization held the activists to certain responsibilities, such as investigating facts before deciding if racial injustice existed, and understanding the attitudes of those committing racial injustices. Members of CORE were also expected to "suffer the anger of any individual or group in the spirit of good will." If a member experienced such anger, "he will submit to assault and never retaliate in kind, either by act or word."¹⁰⁴ No matter how much violence demonstrators encountered, they had a responsibility to embody nonviolent philosophy. CORE members were also held accountable to their fellow demonstrators. The memo stated, "If in the course of non-violent action any person is violently assaulted, the CORE member will non-violently defend such person even at the risk of his own life."¹⁰⁵ The founding members of CORE made it clear that all members needed to be responsible for their actions and to hold fast to their nonviolent philosophy even when faced with violence.

¹⁰³ Congress of Racial Equality, "CORE Action Discipline," CORE SC, c. 1943.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Once the organizing committee expressed the expectations of CORE and its members, it was time for nonviolent tactics to be taught and put into practice. During its first years, CORE co-sponsored many of its demonstrations with FOR. Together, the organizations held multiple race relations institutes, including those in Missouri, Kansas, and Ohio. They also co-sponsored multiple interracial workshops, including the one held in February 1947 in Ohio. One of the largest workshops sponsored by both organizations was the month-long interracial workshop in Washington, D.C., in July 1947. Beyond the co-sponsored workshops, the members of CORE planned many sit-ins and demonstrations of their own. To carry out these demonstrations, CORE divided into three different action groups: the Public Places Unit, which focused on combatting segregation within businesses, including restaurants, theaters, and pools; the Hospitals and Schools Unit, which fought inequality and segregation within schools and the Red Cross blood bank; and the Housing Unit, which challenged restrictive covenants through its Fellowship Houses.¹⁰⁶

One of the first sit-ins orchestrated by the Public Places Unit occurred in Chicago at Stoner's Restaurant. In October 1942, three members of CORE went to Stoner's for lunch. As they walked into the restaurant, Mr. Stoner stopped them and told them they would not be seated because he did not serve African Americans. In defiance, the three sat on a sofa near the entrance and waited for forty-five minutes. They asked to be seated several times, but each time the wait staff refused. The three left and wrote

¹⁰⁶ Bernice Fisher, "Summary of CORE Conference," June 1943, CORE SC.

letters, but Mr. Stoner ignored all requests to have a meeting. Eventually, a group decided to meet with the owner. Two white women went to the restaurant to eat and speak with him. He claimed that he refused service to blacks because he would lose all of his white customers. He said that the majority of his customers were white women and they would not eat next to black customers. Mr. Stoner also claimed “if members of the two races ate in the same restaurant, it would lead to interracial marriages,” the possibility of which he adamantly opposed.¹⁰⁷

After this meeting, many more CORE members, black and white, attempted to reason with Mr. Stoner. Several meetings occurred, but he refused to alter his stance. After much time passed, Mr. Stoner eventually allowed interracial groups to be seated, but only after an unreasonably long wait time. Once they were seated, they were served “meat with egg shells scattered on it, or a plate of food salted so heavily that it could not be eaten, or a sandwich composed of tomato cores and lettuce picked out of the garbage in the kitchen. (So the group was told by Negro bus girls who witnessed the making of the sandwiches).”¹⁰⁸ In response, members of CORE passed out leaflets for a week in December 1942, to draw attention to the blatant discrimination practiced by Mr. Stoner. Patrons of the restaurant asked the members why they were focusing solely on Stoner’s Restaurant; they were certain other restaurants in the area discriminated as well. To

¹⁰⁷ Peck, *Freedom Ride*, 46.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

prove their point, CORE researched the policies of other restaurants in the area but found that no other restaurants in the area practiced total discrimination.

Based on their findings, the activists staged a sit-in at Stoner's. In June 1943, after much planning, sixty-five people participated in the sit-in. Of the sixty-five, sixteen were African American. Beginning in the late afternoon, activists entered the restaurant in small groups. At first, several all-white groups entered the restaurant and were seated immediately. Then interracial groups entered the restaurant in attempts to be served. The first group, comprising six blacks and two whites, entered the restaurant only to be ignored by the hostesses. After waiting for half an hour, the group was seated at a table in the middle of the restaurant. Once they were seated, the waiters attended to them immediately.

Soon after, a second interracial group entered the restaurant. This time, the group consisted of nine blacks and only one white activist. Mr. Stoner threatened the group and refused to seat them. They stood in the front of the restaurant for an hour-and-a-half. Throughout that time, Mr. Stoner called the police three times. When the police arrived, they were friendly toward the activists and told Mr. Stoner there was nothing they could do because the activists were not causing any sort of disturbance. The third time Mr. Stoner called, the police warned him that if he did so again, he would be arrested.

During the sit-in, white patrons, not affiliated with the demonstrators, seemed supportive of the group. Peck wrote about one of the hostesses whispering in

the ear of one of the demonstrators, “Keep it up—we’re all with you.”¹⁰⁹ At one point, a white customer walked over to the table of demonstrators and asked if she could sit with them. They told her she was more than welcome. After witnessing this, the demonstrators waiting at the front of the restaurant walked back to the tables and sat down. “Then,” Peck described, “a very unexpected, spontaneous demonstration took place—wild applause broke out. Practically everyone in the restaurant took part in this sustained acclamation. It was a fitting climax to a well-executed nonviolent demonstration for racial justice.”¹¹⁰

Even with such a successful demonstration, Stoner’s Restaurant did not immediately change its policies. There were reports that interracial groups were served, but only after explaining to Mr. Stoner why they should be allowed to eat at the restaurant. Three years after the sit-in, however, interracial groups patronized the restaurant with no trouble from Mr. Stoner or any of the staff.

While CORE’s members conducted demonstrations of their own, such as the sit-in at Stoner’s Restaurant, FOR still provided support with finances and demonstrations. Eventually, both organizations decided it was best for CORE to stand as an independent group. Within two years of the formation of CORE, members of FOR, specifically Muste and Houser, began discussing the role FOR performed within CORE. In multiple letters, Houser made it clear that while members of FOR were encouraged to participate in

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

CORE's demonstrations, CORE would become a separate entity. In a letter dated July 1, 1943, Houser wrote to John Swomley, a member of FOR and executive secretary from 1953 to 1960, to discuss the need for CORE to remain an independent organization. He highlighted the fact that CORE was created independently because it was believed that the organization would gain a larger following if unattached to FOR. He explained:

I don't think that people in the FOR have to be so worried about keeping themselves pure and to think that the FOR name must be attached to everything which FOR people are interested in." He continued, "We ought to work through channels which will get the greatest number of people working against injustice in a non-violent manner. I feel that we can do this by starting independent organizations where there is the possibility of getting new persons, not necessarily pacifists, into the work."¹¹¹

Although Houser wrote that pacifists were not essential to the movement, in a later letter to Muste he emphasized the important role of pacifists. Houser's 1944 letter discussed Bernice Fisher's leaving FOR so that she could focus her attention on CORE and the direct action movement. Houser reminded Muste that:

Bernice has always bent over backwards to deny any relationship between FOR and CORE, and this will simply reinforce something she already believes. On the other hand, she seems to understand that the nonviolent base in CORE depends to a great extent upon having a good nucleus of pacifists."¹¹²

Just a few months later, the members of FOR received a memo regarding the relationship between FOR and CORE. The memo stated:

The Congress of Racial Equality, CORE, is organizationally completely independent of FOR. CORE is not, either locally or nationally, under the direction

¹¹¹ George Houser to John M. Swomley, Jr., July 1, 1943, FOR SC.

¹¹² George Houser to A.J. Muste, April 28, 1944, FOR SC.

of FOR. FOR on its part does not take responsibility as an organization for CORE.¹¹³

In its conclusion, the memo reiterated Houser's feelings that:

while FOR has no organizational connection with CORE, we have been strongly sympathetic toward the CORE organization and in practically every instance it is the FOR members in a locality who have taken the initiative in forming the CORE groups and in carrying forward the CORE work.¹¹⁴

In August 1946, the separation of FOR and CORE became final when, in a letter to John Nevin Sayre, a leading member of FOR, Muste informed him that "FOR is not going to put any more money and time into an effort to build a national CORE."¹¹⁵

Even without funding from FOR, CORE's members expanded the organization and conducted large-scale demonstrations. After the successful sit-in at Stoner's Restaurant, the members of CORE began a several-months-long demonstration without the assistance of FOR. Their attention focused on the Palisades Pool in New Jersey, which did not welcome African Americans. In 1947, members of CORE, including James Peck, began demonstrating at the Palisades Pool. The owner of the pool, Irving Rosenthal, refused to allow blacks to use the pool for fear that he would lose business. Beginning in the summer of 1947, Peck and other members of CORE visited the pool every Sunday. The activists lined up at the ticket window but were refused entry. During their protests, the demonstrators faced excessive amounts of violence. The first

¹¹³ The Fellowship of Reconciliation, "Memo on CORE and Relation to FOR," July 21, 1944, CORE SC.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ A.J. Muste to John Nevin Sayre, August 13, 1946, FOR SC.

instance of violence occurred on July 13, when a police officer violently grabbed Melba Valle, a black female protestor. This was just the beginning of the violent encounters the protestors would endure.

On July 27, park guards attacked the line of activists. The guards punched and shoved activists while police officers watched and did nothing. After weeks of dealing with the protestors, the clearly irate Rosenthal ordered police to remove the demonstrators from the premises. Peck recalled "the order [being] carried out so brutally that even [Rosenthal] protested, only to be told by Police Chief Fred Stengel, 'We're handling this.'"¹¹⁶ The officers hauled the demonstrators to a bus and instructed the driver to take the group to the New York ferry. The violence continued on August 3, when park guards beat seven protestors. During this altercation, police officers grabbed Peck and as one held Peck's arms behind his back, another officer belted him, causing a fractured rib and laceration above his left eye. The violence was so relentless that each time the activists approached the pool to demonstrate, they braced themselves for the impending beatings.

Over the course of two-and-a-half summers, the members of CORE continued demonstrating while enduring violence, including beatings, death threats, and being spat on by police officers. In addition to their demonstrations, the members of CORE undertook legal action. With the help of Hiram Elfenbein, a local attorney, the

¹¹⁶ Peck, *Freedom Ride*, 30.

activists initiated suits against the park in both state and federal courts. The federal suit resulted in a decision by the Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia, which ruled that “the sale of tickets constitutes a contract and that, constitutionally, a Negro must have the same right to make a contract as does a white.”¹¹⁷ This led to a statute, the Freeman Law, which assured that the ruling specifically applied to swimming pools. With the enactment of the Freeman Law in 1949, Rosenthal announced that he would comply with the law. He followed through with his promise. When African Americans gained entrance to the pool, Peck and the other demonstrators recalled “that as recently as closing day of the previous year’s season, Rosenthal had told one of our pickets: ‘You’ll all drop dead before I change my policy.’”¹¹⁸

Although the CORE activists lacked financial assistance, they still had the nonviolent foundation FOR instilled in them. CORE’s members spread their nonviolent practices and philosophy through demonstrations for years to come, including the highly publicized and influential Freedom Rides of 1961.

In addition to the demonstration at the Palisades Pool, CORE activists engaged in smaller organized protests specific to their organization. Members of CORE participated in what they called “the standing line.” This was a tactic in which members of CORE would stand in line at a theater, cafeteria, or any public establishment where patrons waited in line to be served. If a black activist was refused service, he remained

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 34.

¹¹⁸ James Peck, “The Proof is in the Pudding”; reprinted from *The Crisis* (NAACP) (November, 1949), CORE SC.

in line and activists behind him refused to skip ahead of him to get service; this would sometimes bring service to a halt. This was one of the techniques used at the Palisades Pool and it was also successfully employed at movie theaters in Kentucky.¹¹⁹ Another technique CORE featured was the “jail-in.” The Tallahassee chapter of CORE created the jail-in in 1960. When students from Florida A&M University and the local high school sat-in at a Woolworth’s, many were arrested and taken to jail. Rather than pay their fines and be released, Patricia Stephens, a student at Florida A&M, and four other activists decided to stay in the county jail. They remained in the jail for sixty days, becoming the first activists to participate in a jail-in.¹²⁰ As authors August Meier and Elliott Rudwick explain:

Reflecting the religious and Gandhian arguments articulated by Martin Luther King, which provided the philosophical underpinning for the southern student movement in this period, the jailed youth believed that their example of unmerited suffering would help to convert the oppressors and bring about social change.¹²¹

However, while jail-ins garnered some attention, they hardly ushered in the overwhelming change for which organizers hoped.

In February 1961, after taking office as national director of CORE, James Farmer and his fellow members searched for a cause that would bring greater attention to the organization and make it a crucial part of the civil rights movement. The Freedom Rides of 1961, described by Meier and Rudwick as “the most momentous single event in

¹¹⁹ Congress of Racial Equality, “This is CORE.”

¹²⁰ Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 107.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

CORE's entire history," did just that.¹²² As was true for its precursor, the Journey of Reconciliation, the motivation behind the Freedom Rides was a U.S. Supreme Court decision. In this instance, it was the 1960 case *Boynton v. Virginia*, in which the Supreme Court upheld the desegregation of interstate travel on buses and trains, and instated desegregation at terminals.¹²³ In contrast to the Journey of Reconciliation, the Freedom Rides would breach the Deep South. The organizers decided they would travel from Washington, D.C., to New Orleans, Louisiana.

Thirteen activists participated in the Ride. James Farmer and Jim Peck volunteered first. Organizers carefully chose eleven other participants so that their opponents could not uncover negative information to be used to disparage the demonstration.¹²⁴ The group of activists included seven African Americans and six whites. Peck described many of the activists as embodiments of "the new Negro—Southern students who took part in the sit-in movement and for whom arrest or the threat thereof had become commonplace."¹²⁵ Although very few of the participants identified themselves as pacifists, they were still committed to nonviolence. On May 4, 1961, after a week of nonviolent training, the participants left Washington, D.C., with the intention of arriving in New Orleans on May 17. The travel plans, which were similar to those of the Journey of Rec-

¹²² *Ibid.*, 135.

¹²³ Henry Hampton, Steve Fayer, and Sarah Flynn, eds., *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (New York: Batnam Books, 1990), 74.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹²⁵ Peck, *Freedom Ride*, 115.

conciliation, consisted of participants traveling by bus during the day and attending mass meetings at night. The proposed itinerary was:

Washington, D.C.; Richmond and Petersburg, Virginia; Greensboro and Charlotte, North Carolina; Rock Hill and Sumter, South Carolina; Augusta and Atlanta, Georgia; Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama; Jackson, Mississippi; New Orleans, Louisiana.¹²⁶

The activists' first stop in Fredericksburg, Virginia was uneventful. Peck used the bathroom marked "Colored," while black activist Charles Person went into the bathroom marked "White" without incident. Riders encountered a little trouble in Danville, Virginia, when Ed Blankenheim, a white activist, sat at the "colored" counter for ten minutes while waiting for his bus, but was refused service. After arriving on a later bus that day, Peck and Genevieve Hughes, another white activist, attempted to be served at the same counter, but the manager refused. After another activist, Walter Bergman, joined them, they spoke to the manager and he eventually agreed to serve them.¹²⁷ From there, the riders traveled to Greensboro, where segregation in the terminals was far more prevalent. "Colored" lounges were clearly marked with large signs and the lunchroom was "no bigger than a good-sized closet and equally gloomy."¹²⁸ From Greensboro, the riders traveled to Charlotte, which was farther south than the participants of the Journey of Reconciliation traveled. Once in Charlotte, the group experienced their first arrests.

¹²⁶ Gordon Carey, "Freedom Ride 1961—Preliminary Draft," March 13, 1961, CORE SC.

¹²⁷ Peck, *Freedom Ride*, 117.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

While in Charlotte, Person created a new protest known as a "shoe-in."

While at a stop, Person sat in a shoeshine chair, but was refused service. He continued sitting there until a police officer arrived. Person left the shoeshine station without being arrested. Initially, Person was not attempting to make his experience a test; he simply noticed his dirty shoes and wanted them shined. After his experience, the group decided to create a test and sent Joe Perkins, a black activist, to sit in the chair. The officer arrested Perkins moments later. Two days later, Perkins was acquitted and rejoined the group.

The riders encountered violence for the first time in Rock Hill, South Carolina. After departing the bus, John Lewis, a black activist, and Albert Bigelow, a white activist, headed for the white waiting room. As they waited in line, a group of white men approached and began striking them. Lewis recalled in an interview, "We were met by a group of white young men that beat us and hit us, knocked us out, left us lying on the sidewalk in front of the entrance of the waiting room."¹²⁹ As a result, Bigelow received a cut on his cheek and bruise on his face and Lewis had a lump over one of his eyes.¹³⁰ The police arrived and asked the two men if they wanted to press charges, but Bigelow and Lewis refused. After traveling from North Carolina to Augusta, the activists stopped at both Trailways and Greyhound terminals and used all the facilities without any incident. Peck recalled, "It marked the first time that Negroes had ever eaten at

¹²⁹ Hampton, Fayer, and Flynn, eds., *Voices of Freedom*, 76.

¹³⁰ Associated Press, "Two Members of Bi-Racial Group Attacked," *Bee* (Danville, Virginia), May 10, 1961, accessed March 12, 2015, <http://www.newspapers.com/image/45777692>.

the terminal restaurants. In fact, only a few months before, a Negro serviceman had been arrested for trying to eat there."¹³¹

The trip did not remain as peaceful or successful once the riders arrived in Alabama. Before leaving for Birmingham on May 14, Peck spoke with the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth to let him know what time they expected to arrive. Reverend Shuttlesworth informed Peck that there was talk of a mob gathering in Birmingham, but that there was no word of a gathering in Anniston so the riders should be safe during their stop there. However, when the riders arrived in Anniston, a mob of protestors surrounded the Greyhound bus and began hitting it with iron bars, leaving dents and breaking the windows. Eventually, the police arrived and the bus was able to leave the station. A few miles later, the bus suffered a flat tire and pulled over at a gas station. Soon after, the angry mob caught up with the riders and attacked the bus again. This time, someone threw a bomb through the broken back window, immediately filling the bus with smoke. The riders dropped to the floor and attempted to leave the bus, but part of the mob held the door shut. The riders managed to escape just before the bus burst into flames. The news of the attack made the front page of the *Anniston Star* newspaper. Reporter Sam Jones reported that of the seven Freedom Riders on the bus, four were

¹³¹ Peck, *Freedom Ride*, 123.

sent to the hospital and treated for smoke inhalation.¹³² After the riders regrouped, they drove to Birmingham in cars provided by Reverend Shuttlesworth.

The same day, the second group of riders, on a Trailways bus, encountered problems in Anniston as well. As they departed Anniston, a group of white men boarded and ordered all of the riders to the back of the bus. When they refused, the men violently grabbed all of the riders and forced them to the back. The riders left for Birmingham, only to be faced with even more violence. When they arrived, Peck and Person exited the bus first and headed for the white waiting room. On their way, a mob of men grabbed them and shoved them into an alleyway. In an issue of the *CORElator*, Peck recalled the attack. He wrote, "Six of the mob assaulted me with fists and lead pipe. Five others attacked Person." Once Peck and Person were found, Peck was taken to the hospital where "53 stitches were sewed into [his] face and head."¹³³ Relaying his story to the *New York Post*, Peck wrote:

The thing you must remember to do when you get involved in one of these things is to always remain non-violent. Another thing you should remember is to protect your head and face with your hands. I remembered the first—and I think I remembered the second, too—but I guess I just didn't do too good of a job covering up.¹³⁴

¹³² Sam Jones, "Mob Rocks, Burns Big Bus in County Racial Incidents," *Anniston Star* (AL), May 15, 1961, accessed March 12, 2015, <http://www.newspapers.com/image/19348430>.

¹³³ Peck, "Freedom Ride," *CORElator* (May 1961), FOR SC.

¹³⁴ James Peck, "A Freedom Rider's Story: Incident in Alabama," *New York Post*, May 16, 1961, FOR SC.

Even while being beaten almost to death, with what doctors assumed were brass knuckles and chains, Peck had remained nonviolent. He attempted to cover his face as best he could, but refused to fight back. His commitment to nonviolence showed how much he believed in keeping the movement centered on Gandhian nonviolence.

The Freedom Ride concluded three days later in New Orleans, but not without more violence in Birmingham. In addition to the burning of the Greyhound bus in Anniston and the brutal beating of Peck, a white mob assaulted riders departing a bus in Montgomery. Later that day, an angry mob surrounded a church and intimidated the group that was assembled inside to listen to Martin Luther King Jr. express his support for the demonstrators.¹³⁵ As the Freedom Riders attempted to make it to New Orleans for the mass rally, drivers for both Greyhound and Trailways refused to transport any more demonstrators. Peck and the other riders, with the help of Reverend Shuttlesworth, drove to the airport in an attempt to fly to New Orleans. While awaiting their flight, a mob formed at the airport to threaten the Freedom Riders. A bomb threat was announced on the loudspeaker, and their flight was canceled. After hours of waiting, the riders boarded another flight and made it to New Orleans.

When the first Freedom Ride ended, participants, including Peck, had not realized that Peck and the Freedom Ride had achieved public notoriety.¹³⁶ Newspapers around the world circulated the image of Peck's bloodied and bandaged head. Although

¹³⁵ Steven Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in American Since 1941* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 77.

¹³⁶ Peck, *Freedom Ride*, 133.

the Freedom Ride gained national attention, black students in Nashville were disappointed that the original demonstration could not be completed by bus, so they decided to create a Freedom Ride of their own. Unfortunately, it was cut short due to the group getting attacked by a large mob while attempting to leave a Montgomery bus terminal. In response, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke out on the violence and, along with Farmer, proclaimed that in spite of the threats, the Ride would continue.¹³⁷

King's encouragement of the nonviolent demonstration came from his understanding of Gandhi's nonviolent tactics and his interest in Muste's efforts on behalf of FOR. When Martin Luther King Jr. first joined the civil rights movement, he was not necessarily committed to the notion of nonviolence. King had been exposed to Gandhi's philosophy earlier but at the time of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in late 1955, he had yet to commit to nonviolence. It was at this time, according to political scientist Michael J. Nojeim, that Bayard Rustin and Glen E. Smiley, another member of FOR, "found in King an eager pupil who increasingly possessed a Gandhi-like view, but who had not yet fully incorporated nonviolence into his philosophical operational code."¹³⁸ Although Rustin and Smiley planned a short visit with King, they stayed with him and, as historian Harvard Sitkoff explained, "became indispensable to King, prodding him to articulate the bus boycott in Gandhian terms and persuading him to form a regional network

¹³⁷ Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 139.

¹³⁸ Michael Nojeim, *King and Gandhi: The Power of Nonviolent Resistance* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 183.

of African-American ministers."¹³⁹ From then on, "King would face all conflicts, violent or otherwise, based on his faith in God, the power of love, and his commitment to non-violence."¹⁴⁰

King became a member of FOR and CORE. He also contributed articles to FOR's publication, *Fellowship*. Through his membership in these organizations, King learned more readily how to use Gandhi's nonviolent tactics. Nonviolence became the center of King's demonstrations, including the Albany Movement of 1961-1962, the 1963 March on Washington, and the multiple marches through Selma, Alabama, in 1965. King explained his support for nonviolence in his 1967 speech "Where Do We Go From Here?":

Through violence, you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish truth...Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that. The beauty of nonviolence is that, in its own way and in its own time, it seeks to break the chain reaction of evil.¹⁴¹

King's transmitting of nonviolent ideas to the new generation of demonstrators, many of whom were unaware of the nonviolent efforts put forth by FOR over twenty years earlier, proved crucial. Sitkoff stressed, "King's words energized the black community, dispelling feelings of helplessness, insignificance, and powerlessness."¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Sitkoff, *Struggle for Black Equality*, 55.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 55.

By modeling the Freedom Rides after the Journey of Reconciliation and harnessing the power of nonviolence, the members of CORE brought not only their organization, but the ideas of Gandhi's nonviolence, to the forefront of public attention. In doing so, they opened the door for Martin Luther King Jr. to elevate the power of nonviolence, infiltrate the South, and begin to expel hate-fueled racism.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In 1960, twenty years after the Fellowship of Reconciliation conducted its first sit-ins, a group of college students staged a sit-in at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. Four black students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College—Ezell Blair, David Richmond, Franklin McCain, and Joseph McNeil—entered Woolworth's on February 1, 1960. They bought items from the non-segregated counter, and sat down at the lunch counter where they were told that blacks were not served. They continued sitting there until the store closed. The following day, twenty-nine students arrived at Woolworth's and sat at the lunch counter in protest.¹⁴³ These protests drew national attention to the civil rights movement and the use of Gandhian nonviolent tactics.

Three years later, Martin Luther King Jr., continuing the path of nonviolence forged by FOR, participated in the March on Washington. The march, organized by activist A. Philip Randolph, included over 250,000 individuals peacefully congregating in front of the Lincoln Memorial in the nation's capital, to demand both racial and eco-

¹⁴³ Rebekah Kowal, "Staging the Greensboro Sit-Ins," *TDR* 48, no. 4 (2004): 135, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4488599>.

nomic equality.¹⁴⁴ King delivered his “I Have a Dream” address at this mass demonstration. In his speech, King echoed the nonviolent philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi when he told his supporters not to:

satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.¹⁴⁵

King reiterated the importance of nonviolence, this time in a speech that was soon publicized around the world.

The nonviolent civil rights protests of the early 1960s drew direct inspiration from the nonviolent demonstrations conducted twenty years before by FOR. The influence of FOR activists A.J. Muste, George Houser, Homer Jack, Bernice Fisher, and Bayard Rustin was obvious. FOR’s members learned from Gandhi’s teachings and his work in India. They spread these ideas through pamphlets and books. They also took Gandhi’s philosophy and taught activists how to use nonviolence in demonstrations and protect themselves without devolving into violent actions of their own. These teachings proved crucial to FOR’s demonstrations. Segregationists confronted activists at nearly every demonstration and bombarded demonstrators with hateful words and physical aggression. Even when faced with such hatred and violence, however, members of FOR remembered their training and remained nonviolent. The activists faced their greatest

¹⁴⁴ Nojeim, *Gandhi and King*, 196.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

test, perhaps, during the Journey of Reconciliation. Mobs hurled insults at the riders and even violently attacked some, including James Peck.

In addition to workshops and demonstrations, the members of FOR created the direct action group the Congress of Racial Equality, to carry out Gandhian nonviolent philosophy. Devising that organization in 1942 enabled members of FOR to take part in direct action demonstrations. These demonstrations exemplified the nonviolent tactics taught by the leaders of FOR. The members of CORE took the sit-in used by FOR and made it their own. From the sit-in, they subsequently created the standing line and the jail-in. The activists also took inspiration from FOR's Journey of Reconciliation to devise the Freedom Rides of 1961. The Freedom Rides brought national attention to CORE and the nonviolent tactics that originated in FOR. Members of CORE faced even more violence than members of FOR because of the decision to travel through the Lower South during the Freedom Rides. Nevertheless, much like the members of the Journey of Reconciliation, the Freedom Riders retained their nonviolent principles. Mobs destroyed two of their buses and beat the activists but the riders adhered to nonviolence and did not retaliate. In remaining true to nonviolent tenets, Freedom Riders piqued national awareness regarding nonviolent demonstrations and seemed to accentuate the power of nonviolence.

CORE turned to the nonviolent tactics of FOR in conducting its demonstrations from 1942 well into the 1960s, long after FOR faded from the public eye. During the 1950s and 1960s, other organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating

Committee and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference joined the fight for racial equality. These organizations embodied Gandhian nonviolence in their own fashion. Their demonstrations included sit-ins, modeled after those conducted by FOR and CORE. Sit-ins, like the one at Woolworth's in Greensboro on February 1, 1960, garnered widespread attention and inspired other activists to join the movement. As momentum continued to build, the federal government eventually felt pressured to establish legislation addressing segregated practices. In 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, which outlawed discrimination based on many factors, including race and color. The following year, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act, which outlawed racial discrimination in voting. Although these legislative enactments did not bring about a complete end to racial discrimination, they certainly made a difference in the lives of African Americans, effectively terminating de jure segregation.

Despite the successes ushered in by nonviolent practices, the goals and attitudes of many civil rights leaders, frustrated by the continuing discriminatory practices and spurred by rising expectations, shifted course by the midpoint of the 1960s. Rather than working in tandem with white activists, black leaders called for black power and, in some cases, the discontinuation of blacks working with whites. With new leadership in the movement and organizations like the Black Panther Party emerging, along with tremendous anger and distress fueled by the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., nonviolent tactics faded into the background. An influx of violence, however, did not prove markedly successful and the civil rights movement appeared to fade.

Nevertheless, the work of FOR, beginning in the late-1930s, dramatically impacted the civil rights movement. From the earliest workshops and sit-ins to the Journey of Reconciliation, members of FOR embodied Gandhian nonviolence and fought for what they believed. Their faith in nonviolence was so strong that they created an organization for the sole purpose of carrying out nonviolent demonstrations. Through CORE, the groundbreaking work of FOR made its way to the center stage of the civil rights movement. FOR's nonviolent tactics were adopted by SNCC, SCLC, and Martin Luther King Jr. Although FOR failed to achieve the acclaim or notoriety of groups like CORE, its members' belief in Gandhian nonviolence cultivated a legacy of nonviolent tactics that helped shape the civil rights movement.

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