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“MOVEMENT SCHOOLS” AND DIALOGICAL DIFFUSION OF NONVIOLENT PRAXIS: NASHVILLE WORKSHOPS IN THE SOUTHERN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT[☆]

Larry W. Isaac, Daniel B. Cornfield,
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ABSTRACT

While it is generally well known that nonviolent collective action was widely deployed in the US southern civil rights movement, there is still

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much that we do not know about how that came to be. Drawing on primary data that consist of detailed semistructured interviews with members of the Nashville nonviolent movement during the late 1950s and 1960s, we contribute unique insights about how the nonviolent repertoire was diffused into one movement current that became integral to moving the wider southern movement. Innovating with the concept of serially linked movement schools – locations where the deeply intense work took place, the didactic and dialogical labor of analyzing, experimenting, creatively translating, and resocializing human agents in preparation for dangerous performance – we follow the biographical paths of carriers of the nonviolent Gandhian repertoire as it was learned, debated, transformed, and carried from India to the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) and Howard University to Nashville (TN) and then into multiple movement campaigns across the South. Members of the Nashville movement core cadre – products of the Nashville movement workshop schools – were especially important because they served as bridging leaders by serially linking schools and collective action campaigns. In this way, they played critical roles in bridging structural holes (places where the movement had yet to be successfully established) and were central to diffusing the movement throughout the South. Our theoretical and empirical approach contributes to the development of the dialogical perspective on movement diffusion generally and to knowledge about how the nonviolent repertoire became integral to the US civil rights movement in particular.

Keywords: Civil rights movement; Nashville civil rights movement; nonviolence; Gandhian repertoire; movement schools; diffusion

It is generally well known that the southern civil rights movement made effective use of nonviolent civil resistance (or collective action) strategy from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s (McAdam, 1982; Morris, 1984). But we know much less about how the diffusion of such a foreign praxis¹ – the Gandhian nonviolent repertoire – was even possible. Two oceans, more than two decades, and vastly different cultural and political systems separated the famous Dandi Salt March in India from the emergence of the mass southern civil rights movement in the United States. How did the Gandhian nonviolent repertoire come to form the strategic heart of the southern struggle against the Jim Crow system?

Social movement scholars have long been interested in the important role of movement diffusion, the process by which some movement-related innovation in oppositional culture is carried or transmitted to new or existing members of a movement (Andrews & Biggs, 2006; Conell & Cohn, 1995; Givan, Roberts, & Soule, 2010; Myers, 2000) or from one movement to another movement (Isaac & Christiansen, 2002). In simplest terms, a movement in one temporal-spatial site is influenced by a movement in a different temporal-spatial location. Conventional social science theories and models of diffusion have generated useful insights into the question of “how movements move” (Isaac, 2008), but also contain limitations, including a representation of simple information transmission based on questionable assumptions (more below).

Important research also exists on the diffusion of the Gandhian non-violent repertoire globally and especially into the US civil rights movement (Chabot, 2000; Chabot 2010; Dickerson, 2005; Fox, 1997; Isserman, 1993; Kapur, 1992; Scalmer, 2002, 2011). Some of this work contains a dialogical approach that attempts to move beyond conventional information transmission models in an effort to understand the difficult interactive process that diffusion of movement elements often, and especially the repertoire in this case, entails (Chabot, 2010).

We pursue a strategy designed to unpack (not the only but) one of the central avenues for the diffusion of nonviolent praxis from the Gandhian independence struggles in India into the southern civil rights movement. This “unpacking” is assisted by addressing three core questions about the movement diffusion process (see Givan et al., 2010, p. 2): (1) what specifically is being diffused, (2) how does the diffusion occur (i.e., what channels, relations, carriers, or mechanisms are operating in the process), and (3) what is the impact of the diffusion?

First, we focus on the diffusion of both the ideational (philosophy) and the behavioral (tactical) applications of nonviolence, the Gandhian repertoire.² Second, to get at the “how” of this diffusion process, we make use of the conventional concepts of “direct” personal and “mediated” channels (Tarrow, 2005), but we also push deeper into those relationships to illustrate more than just contact and the simple transmission of information. Information was being carried and reworked through the structured biographical trajectories of individuals who, in the process, were being transformed themselves as they transformed others. These key players acquired, learned, debated, taught, practiced, struggled, and carried the nonviolent praxis with them from one key *movement school* – the Nashville workshops – to struggles in Nashville and campaigns across the South.

To understand the diffusion process, it is important to know not only about contacts – direct and mediated – but also about biographical trajectory (including the migration of individuals) – before and after said “contact” – and what was done *in* the “contact.”

We locate the movement of key individuals as carriers of nonviolent praxis within and between movement schools. Each “school” was forged by special conditions of institutional location as well as the development of the movement itself: Our first major stop focuses on an institution of higher education and black religious intellectual activity, Howard University. From Howard University and the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) we trace a key path of diffusion to Nashville, Tennessee, and the development of perhaps the most impressive nonviolent workshops in the entire movement. This school was an organized, underground site where the deeply intense work took place, the dialogical labor of analyzing, experimenting, and resocializing human agents who had previously been shaped by a culture of violence.

What about the third key dimension – diffusion impact? We argue that the diffusion path of nonviolent praxis that traveled from India through FOR and Howard University was most effectively cultivated in the Nashville workshops. We trace the driving role of these workshop “graduates” as they carried nonviolent praxis extending the movement across the South. The committed, disciplined young activists trained in the Nashville workshops served both as an inspirational and practical model, actively maintaining movement momentum at critical moments in the struggle, a major impact of the diffusion process.

Much of our empirical foundation is drawn from our study of the Nashville civil rights movement during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Our unique primary data consist of lengthy semistructured interviews of Nashville movement participants (more below). Detailed interview data allow us to unpack and exploit the richness of the dialogical perspective on movement diffusion.

SOCIAL MOVEMENT DIFFUSION THEORY AND RESEARCH

In general, diffusion directs our attention to the “socially mediated spread of some practice within a population” (Strang & Meyer, 1993, p. 487). In social movement studies, diffusion typically refers to the flow or spread of

an innovation in movement culture (e.g., strategy, organizational form, tactic, frame, symbolism, or slogan) from one geographical location to another or from one movement to another. Key questions addressed by movement scholars center on the social conditions that facilitate diffusion and the mechanisms or channels through which an innovation travels (Andrews & Biggs, 2006; Conell & Cohn, 1995; Kim & Pfaff, 2012; Myers, 2000; Oberschall, 1989; Roscigno & Danaher, 2001; Soule, 2004).

The dominant diffusion paradigm in social movement studies is some variant of the “transmission model” (Chabot, 2010). An exemplar of this approach, Tarrow’s (2005) *The New Transnational Activism* represents an impressive synthesis of movement diffusion research into an integrated model that presupposes “the large impersonal processes that lie in the background of all forms of transnational diffusion” – internationalization and communication (Tarrow, 2005, p. 103). Once an innovative event occurs, diffusion moves along one or more of three major pathways that connect it to new members or a different movement in a different temporal-spatial site. In *relational diffusion*, based on an attribution of similarity, information about innovative movement culture travels through direct contact embedded in bonds of affiliation and personal networks. *Mediated diffusion* works through an intermediary, a third party, who brokers or bridges individuals or organizations who do not have direct contact with each other. Finally, *nonrelational diffusion* is involved when there is no direct or personal mediated contact, but instead information flows through electronic technologies like mass media or the Internet. The central focus, irrespective of channeling mechanism, is the *transmission of information*. All mechanisms lead to the same basic outcome: *emulation* – the adoption of the transmitter’s ideas, symbols, or practices by new receivers; and *generalization of action* – the spread of movement frames, strategies, tactics, or campaigns beyond its initial local setting (Chabot, 2010).

There is value in this transmission model, which has been employed in studies such as Andrews and Biggs (2006) on the diffusion of the 1960s sit-ins. It allows the analysis of key mechanisms across many diverse cases (here, cities) with potential for isolating relatively important conditions. It is useful for mapping a set of relations/channels through which a certain kind of diffusion and conditions of its existence might operate. Of course, there are limitations to the transmission model too. For one, it is not especially helpful for analyzing in-depth interactive processes people experience in acquiring knowledge of complex ideas and practices regarding social change-directed collective action. It does not tell us how the underlying philosophy and practice of nonviolence – so central to the sit-ins – arrived in

the American South, how actual people acquired, explored, debated, taught, and learned from each other, carrying the nonviolent praxis across the region designing specific tactical innovations like sit-ins. The transmission model, with its superficial information flow, says nothing of the struggle, the labor involved in acquiring proficiency with the nonviolent habitus, a predisposition and way of acting to confront oppressive conditions and to face direct assault in the process.

The emerging “dialogical perspective” offers a different approach to diffusion in social movement studies, one that problematizes awareness, understanding, agency, and implementation of new movement culture. Earlier conceptual developments – *Strang and Meyer’s (1993)* “theorization” of both movement innovations as well as transmitters and adopters, and *Snow and Benford’s (1999)* focus on the location of agency in the transmitter/adopter relationship – prefigured some features of the dialogical model. But this perspective has been most clearly developed by studies of the diffusion of nonviolence into the southern civil rights movement (e.g., *Chabot, 2000, 2010; Fox, 1997; Isserman, 1993; Kapur, 1992; Scalmer, 2002, 2011*).

The work of *Chabot (2000, 2010)* and *Scalmer (2002, 2011)* in particular have significantly advanced the dialogical diffusion model. *Scalmer (2002)* conceptualizes diffusion as “sustained labor of cultural, intellectual, and practical translation.” He stresses that Gandhian ideas and tactics were transmitted, reinvented, and reinterpreted across the globe. This process was actualized in various movements where nonviolence was adapted to particular national contexts in activities of “framing and experiment.” *Scalmer* highlights the active role of US civil rights advocates in adopting the Gandhian praxis even after Gandhi was dead, and how that repertoire was transformed as it entered southern civil rights discourse.

The Gandhian repertoire was known, at least by some in the US, as early as 1920, and penetrated intellectual and activist circles during the 1930s and 1940s, but did not begin to appear in practice until the 1940s and 1950s. Why such a slow sequence of adaptation? A combination of conditions help explain this lag in actual implementation and suggest the value of the dialogical theory. First, because modern international electronic media did not exist, most serious carrying of the Gandhian repertoire was done by individuals who visited India with a distinct purpose of learning about the approach. Second, there were cultural impediments to rapid adoption, even among those who were interested and eager to do so. As *Fox (1997)* has argued, both “Orientalist hyper-difference” (extremely exaggerated Otherness) and its opposite, “Western over-likeness” (an assimilation of identity

with Christian nonresistance, reducing it to the more familiar pacifism in the West), worked to delay the diffusion of the Gandhian praxis into the southern civil rights movement. Finally, the implementation on the ground was shaped, in part, by conditions stimulating mass movement actions (e.g., political, organizational, mass consciousness – see [McAdam, 1982](#); [Morris, 1984](#)). However, the decade between the late 1940s and the 1955–1956 Montgomery bus boycott should not be understood as a period of Gandhian hibernation. The civil rights commitments of Gandhian adherents were seldom singular. Prominent black Gandhian advocates – such as Mordecai Johnson, Benjamin Mays, Bayard Rustin – were equally fervent in their support for a range of civil rights organizations. Rarely in those early years did Gandhian adherents restrict themselves solely to non-violent direct action strategies for black advancement, as activists tended to divide their time and energies among multiple initiatives and methodologies in the fight for black equality of which Gandhian advocacy was only one.

Dialogical diffusion theory complicates the picture painted by the transmission model with its monological (unidirectional), usually rapid, superficial communication flow from transmitters to adopters. The dialogical perspective sees diffusion of movement culture (especially when it is moving transnationally from one culture to another) as typically controversial and labor intensive. “For complex tactics and repertoires to travel across vast distances without losing their substance requires meaningful dialogue – not just impersonal communication” ([Chabot, 2010, p. 104](#)). Chabot offers a dialogical process theory that involves four basic phases of diffusion development – awareness, translation, experimentation, and movement application – and notes that this process “is never certain or easy for the individuals or groups involved; it requires high levels of political agency and endless collective struggle” (p. 108), especially by adopters.

Chabot’s dialogical perspective is valuable for understanding the diffusion of the Gandhian repertoire into the US southern civil rights movement. At the empirical level, Chabot does a fine job of tracing key lines of nonviolent relocation and development in the United States up to the 1950s. However, the weakness in his study is that the empirical analysis (especially beyond the 1950s) does not always live up to the theory – i.e., the analysis does not really unpack the dialogical learning process which his model, rightly in our judgment, posits as essential to the diffusion of the nonviolent repertoire. The intensive labor, debate, struggle involved in learning, translating, and applying the foreign repertoire would require not only tremendous effort but also places – *movement schools* – to struggle with the difficult ideas before ever applying them in confrontations with Jim Crow.

MOVEMENT SCHOOLS AND DIFFUSION THEORY

The difficult processes of translating, learning, experimenting, and adopting unusual oppositional repertoires to a new cultural context – like nonviolent praxis from Gandhian use in India – required organized *places* where intense interaction could take root, where active agents could challenge and learn from each other. There is recognition of this concern in some social movement diffusion theory. For example, a “critical community,” according to Rochon (1998, p. 22), is where innovative ideas for social change are generated among a “relatively small community of critical thinkers who have developed a sensitivity to some problem, an analysis of the sources of the problem, and prescription for what should be done about the problem,” while movements “bring the new ideas of critical communities to a wide audience” (Rochon, 1998, p. 30). Some portions of the diffusion of non-violent praxis into the civil rights movement do, indeed, seem to resemble this dual division of labor described by Rochon. But the process was, in fact, more complex and variegated.

The concrete social organization of movement schools can take a variety of specific forms. Scholars have long pointed to the significance of segregated black institutional development – especially churches and centers of higher education – in the emergence of the mass movement (e.g., McAdam, 1982). These venues were important because they served as hubs of discussion and diffusion of new movement-related ideas. “Movement churches” were typically headed by young, movement-oriented preachers (often SCLC-connected) linked to “local movement centers” (Morris, 1984, pp. 283–86). These churches had features of movement schools where congregations would be engaged with gospel *and* movement-related issues. Some black universities were also key centers of movement debate and learning, including nonviolent praxis. Howard University was a prime example (more below) of an important black educational institution that housed intellectuals who *theorized* (Strang & Meyer, 1993) the Gandhian repertoire and its agents, especially critical in the early “awareness and translation” phases in foreign oppositional culture diffusion. These were movement schools in the sense that they worked, at least in part, as centers where movement concerns, issues, and oppositional culture became integrated with other aspects of their main institutional mission.

Movement schooling also took place in well-known national-level social movement organizations – like NAACP, CORE, SCLC, and SNCC. Other movement schools took the form of “movement halfway houses,” like the Highlander Folk Center in Montevallo, Tennessee, and the FOR (Morris,

1984). As Edwards and McCarthy (1992, p. 549) put it, these movement mentoring organizations “encourage, support, and facilitate collective action, but typically are not the organizational vehicles of that action.” Mentors in this arena help prepare potential activists, but then recede into the background when movement begins to take off (p. 542).

The Nashville workshops (featured most centrally below) were yet another but more direct and distinctive form of movement school. They were different because they were exclusively about teaching oppositional culture for change and training insurgents to do it; they engaged in nonviolent direct action; they were organically embedded *in* not peripheral to a local community “movement center” (Morris, 1984); the chief mentor was a teacher *and* a participant in nonviolent direct action; and they had regularity and duration running in Nashville from 1958 through 1961. These dimensions of distinction were keys to the Nashville movement’s success and to its cadre’s impact in and beyond Nashville.

DATA AND METHODS

To unpack the dialogical diffusion process, ideally one needs access to ethnographic observational data and in-depth interviews with those who moved through intensive learning inside movement schools. The ethnographic opportunity has past, in this case, but the detailed interviews with participants are precisely what we provide in the analysis.

Much of our empirical foundation is drawn from our long-term study of the early Nashville civil rights movement spanning the late 1950s and early 1960s. Our unique primary data consist of lengthy (ranging from 1 to 8 hours) semistructured interviews of a demographically and socioeconomically diverse, purposive snowball sample of 38 Nashville movement core cadre and grassroots participants conducted between 2007 and 2012. We identified the interviewees from previous work on the Nashville movement (Halberstam, 1998), discussions with the Reverend James M. Lawson, Jr., and referrals from interviewees. In the present study we feature mostly members of the core cadre. Our detailed interview data allow us to unpack and exploit the richness of the dialogical approach to understand the diffusion process as these activists experienced it.

Cognizant of the limitations of retrospective interviews, we have taken measures to minimize shortcomings that could derive from interviewees’ recall of events that transpired over four decades prior to our interviews. First, we developed and piloted the semistructured interview schedule with

the Reverend Lawson who, as a key player in the Nashville movement, provided insider knowledge and access to interviewees.³ Second, for topics in our interviews that were also covered in previous treatments of the Nashville movement, we discerned that our interviewees provided reliable information with similar content to that of prior sources. Third, in recalling experiences they shared with other movement participants, we checked that our interviewees provided consistent and reliable responses to our questions. If a response seemed especially unusual, we checked it against other sources.

HOWARD UNIVERSITY AND FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION: SCHOOLS OF EARLY INTELLECTUAL FERMENT

Kelly Miller Smith and James M. Lawson, Jr., key leaders in the Nashville movement, though learning about Gandhi from different sources, traced important links between themselves and India. Smith's was mediated by black intellectuals at Howard University, while Lawson's was both mediated by FOR and also direct. Smith, the pastor of Nashville's First Baptist Church – Capitol Hill, was a graduate of Howard's School of Religion, which housed black religious scholars who were deeply engaged in discourse about Gandhian strategy and civil rights. A core of four professors and deans – Mordecai Johnson, Benjamin Mays, Howard Thurman, William Stuart Nelson – had traveled to India and met with (or studied) Gandhi on multiple occasions, and Mays envisaged the seminary as a training ground for an “insurgent Negro professional clergy,” a vision shared by the others (Dickerson, 2005, pp. 219–223, 228; Jelks, 2002, pp. 32, 35).

In addition to teaching students, like Kelly Miller Smith, these black scholars reached wider audiences with their written work. Their books – e.g., Nelson's *The Christian Way in Race Relations* (1947) and Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949) – explored connections between Christianity and Gandhian nonviolence. At the core of this provocative discourse lay Gandhian nonviolence, which offered a philosophy and praxis that helped colonial India defeat their British oppressors. Perhaps, this methodology could do the same for African Americans (Dickerson, 2005, pp. 228–232).

After Martin Luther King and others organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957, Smith and Andrew White, another 1940s

graduate of Howard's School of Religion, determined that SCLC's first affiliate should start in Nashville, leading to the Nashville Christian Leadership Conference (NCLC) in 1958 with Smith president and White secretary (De Gregory, 2007, pp. 57–60; Dickerson, 2009, p. 186; Smith, 1960). Although Smith was president of the Nashville NAACP, he saw a need for the NCLC because it would “emphasize the moral and spiritual implications of the struggle.” Nonetheless, he had yet to decide that nonviolence would be the group's preferred methodology. His meeting with James M. Lawson, Jr., and Glenn Smiley of FOR resolved this issue for him. Lawson and Smiley convinced Smith to allow them “to present the idea of nonviolence [to] the group.” Though many NCLC members “were totally unfamiliar with anything that had to do with nonviolence,” the method was ultimately adopted because “it belonged in the context of the Christian faith.” Smith's exposure to Gandhian nonviolence lay within his relationship to Nelson and in his admiration for King and the Montgomery bus boycott. Though vaguely committed to an organization associated with moral and spiritual values, Lawson convinced Smith to ground these principles in Gandhian *satyagraha* (Smith, 1960), literally “clinging to Truth.”

Lawson was raised in Massillon, Ohio, the son of a militant minister who served as a pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. As an undergraduate at Baldwin-Wallace College in Ohio, Lawson attended a lecture by FOR's executive director, A. J. Muste, that stressed that pacifism originated within Christianity. Lawson became a FOR member and remembered that Muste credited Gandhi with “helping the pacifist movement [to] understand that pacifism was not passivity or nonresistance, but was really an active, militant theory of struggle.” Lawson agreed, noting that nonviolence “had its spiritual, biblical, [and] theological mores in Jesus and the Bible.” Meeting Muste proved to be a pivotal moment in Lawson's intellectual development because it helped Lawson refine his understanding of nonviolence and how it extended beyond pacifism. He juxtaposed FOR pacifism and Gandhian nonviolence and determined that Muste mainly stood for noncooperation with evil while Gandhi promoted courageous confrontation with inhumane structures and practices. As a result, Lawson saw a need “to understand Gandhi” even more by “reading his autobiography” and other writings about his philosophy and praxis. Dialogue with Muste helped to transform Lawson into a Gandhian adherent (Lawson interview, 2007).

As a result of his encounter with Muste and his deepening exploration of Gandhi's ideas, Lawson became a conscientious objector during the Korean

War. He remembered that “by 1949 I recognized that I could not follow Jesus and fight anybody’s war” (Lawson interview, 2007). After a trial, Lawson was sent to federal prison. After his release, he worked for the Methodist Youth Fellowship and then he was off to India. He became a coach and chaplain at Hislop College in Nagpur, India, from 1953 to 1956, where he also studied the Gandhian repertoire, the implications of the Bible for nonviolence, and the world history of nonviolent struggles. His enrollment at Oberlin Seminary brought him in contact with King, who was invited to speak about the Montgomery campaign. Lawson, who had read about the bus boycott while in India, explained to King why his achievements had international significance. King convinced Lawson to move south to work in the burgeoning civil rights movement. Lawson agreed and became a FOR southern field agent.

BIOGRAPHICAL CONVERGENCE IN NASHVILLE

The political culture and institutional infrastructure of Nashville were important for drawing key players to the city. Methodist Church headquarters, clergy contacts, and the relative autonomy of the black middle-class from the white power structure were all important to Lawson’s decision to use Nashville as his laboratory for “making many Montgomerys” (Lawson interview, 2007). The extensive black higher educational complex was central to attracting a sizeable pool of young, bright, energetic black students, the source of key personnel for Lawson’s workshops and the bodies for local insurgencies.

C.T. Vivian moved from Peoria, Illinois, to Nashville’s American Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS), bringing experience with restaurant sit-ins sponsored by CORE in Illinois (Vivian interview). Other key student members of what would eventuate into Lawson’s core cadre included John Lewis (from rural Alabama), James Bevel (from Mississippi), Bernard Lafayette (from Tampa), all three to ABTS; Rodney Powell (from Philadelphia) and Gloria Johnson (from Roxbury, Massachusetts) to Meharry Medical School; Diane Nash (from Chicago), Marion Barry (from Memphis), Angelina Butler (from South Carolina), and white exchange students Paul LaPrad (from Indiana) and Jim Zwerg (from Wisconsin), all to Fisk University along with others from Tennessee A&I, Peabody and Scarritt Colleges. Moving from various parts of the country because of Nashville’s schools, these young people were now (unwittingly) in close physical proximity to a very different sort of school.

NASHVILLE WORKSHOPS AS AN UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT SCHOOL

After Lawson entered Vanderbilt Divinity School in 1958, he met Kelly Miller Smith. Two results followed their encounter. First, Smith invited Lawson to conduct nonviolent workshops under NCLC auspices and appointed him to the NCLC executive committee as Actions Director. Second, Smith and Lawson tested and refined, through these workshops, critiques and reflections about the deployment of Gandhian nonviolence in the Nashville movement. Lawson also continued to work for FOR, traveling around the South, lecturing, doing workshops, and coordinating action plans with grassroots activists – in short, “seeding” the southern region for the sit-in wave that was to come.

Initially, the workshops started as an “adult movement.” Films about the Montgomery bus boycott were shown, and nonviolence was discussed as a strategy that might be used to redress Nashville’s racial issues. Smith enlisted Lawson’s assistance because he “had more know how in the practical application of nonviolence than anybody we knew.” Lawson instituted the workshops “on a continuing basis” as decisions were made in 1959 to focus on the desegregation of lunch counters. “It seem[ed],” according to Smith (1960), that lunch counters could be “an opening wedge” and “would lend itself to good nonviolence technique.” Smith noted that Lawson “came to me and asked what would I think about asking some students from the campuses to the workshops.” This “wonderful idea” exceeded Smith’s expectations because “students came and they became interested beyond the interest of the adults who had begun it” (Smith, 1960). Yet, the Nashville campaign was never only a student movement; it was always linked to the NCLC, Kelly Miller Smith, and wider black community (Lawson interview, 2012).

Smith and Lawson experimented with nonviolent tactics. Despite their eventual success, Smith said these nonviolent techniques “developed out of our situation” and at times “we were fumbling [and] making mistakes.” Smith indicated that the application of Gandhian nonviolence was imperfect and not everyone fully comprehended its principles and objectives. When invited by his Howard University mentor, William S. Nelson, to speak at Howard about the Nashville movement, Smith poignantly observed that “it [nonviolence] is developing into a way of life for some of the persons who have participated,” but it has been “chiefly a technique, an instrument that has proved successful in attacking certain problems.” Yet, few nonviolent followers morphed into American Gandhians (Smith, 1960).

Although Smith initially discussed nonviolence as an opportune technique, Lawson used the workshops to infuse black religious culture with Gandhian principles. He presented nonviolence as intrinsic to understanding the Bible, the ministry of Jesus, and as a salient theme in scriptural interpretation. “The thing that I had done,” Lawson recalled, “probably more than a good number of people who were pacifists,” centered on translating “the Bible into nonviolent pacifist terms with the critique of violence.” This perspective allowed Lawson to articulate “the theory and philosophy that undergirds nonviolence.” His view emphasized “the spirit of forgiveness [and] the spirit of not wanting to do injury to others even though they had done injury to you.” These ideas, Lawson argued, lay “at the heart of nonviolent theory” (Lawson interview, 2007). But importantly, the praxis being taught was not pacifism, but rather militant nonviolent direct action.

Smith and Lawson required Gandhian principles and praxis to speak to the African American context. They brought *satyagraha* into the Nashville movement and addressed it to the black activist tradition and religious culture. Smith believed that black Nashville activists accepted Gandhian techniques because of their preference for usable ideas and tactics to defeat Jim Crow. Lawson recognized that African Americans, whatever the depth of their Christian spirituality, understood and appreciated the language and culture of the black religious heritage. Therefore, he communicated Gandhian nonviolence through the medium of scripture and presented Jesus and others as Biblical proponents of nonviolence and as precursors to Gandhi. Smith and Lawson integrated Gandhian philosophy and techniques into the Nashville movement. They also compelled the advocates of competing strategies to react to its dynamic development and diffusion into other organizations and initiatives in the broader black freedom struggle.

There were no specifically designed texts. For the pedagogical content in workshop teachings, Lawson drew from an amalgam of sources and methods: Biblical scriptures pertaining to Jesus and pacifism; anecdotes from John Wesley’s journals in which the Methodist founder faced down hostile mobs; Gandhi in South Africa and India; episodes in the American Revolution and from American labor strikes; nonviolent responses to Nazi occupation in Denmark; and details of the Montgomery bus boycott. Lawson and Vivian also drew on previous experiences with CORE. Mock lunch counter scenes were used in a role-playing approach to teach and select those who would be best able to execute the nonviolent tactics in practice (Lawson interview, 2012; also documentary films by Hampton, 1987; York, 2000). Lawson emphasized a four-step process in Gandhian

protest, including (1) focus – what issue/problem would be identified; assessment of the issue, planning, and selection of a target; (2) planning the campaign; (3) launching the campaign and negotiations; and (4) follow-up, including the development of agreements for change (Lawson interview, 2012).

One of the truly remarkable features of the Nashville movement was the organizational infrastructure built by Smith, Lawson, and others (see Fig. 1). Not only was Lawson one of the architects but he was the lynchpin – present in each node of the organizational network – that linked student leaders from local colleges (via the Student Central Committee) to the movement church (via Smith’s Church) and the broader Black community (via NCLC), both sides feeding into Lawson’s workshops which served as “command central” for recruiting, training, planning, organizing, and eventually launching the insurgent actions of the Nashville movement. This set of organizational linkages constituted a local movement center (Morris, 1984, p. 40), with workshops embedded in and fueled by the local student and community organizations. The NCLC provided community support, revenue, legal, and medical assistance; the Student Central Committee mobilized the young bodies that would be put on the line; and Lawson’s workshops were literally *local movement schools*.

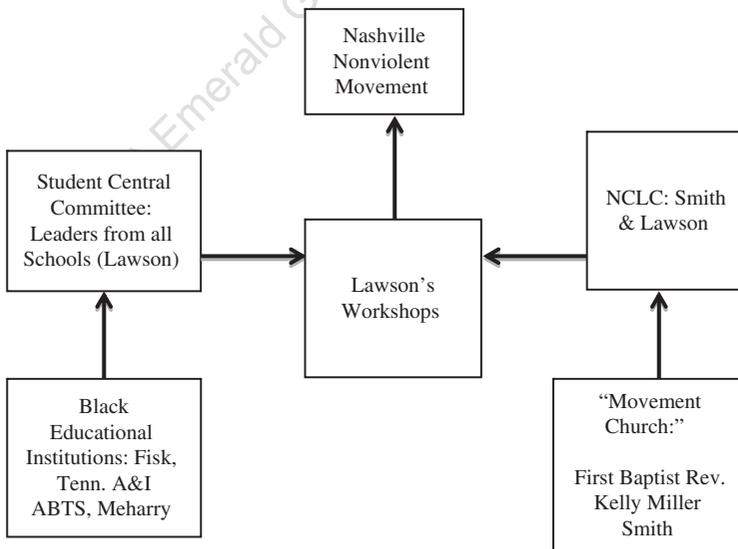


Fig. 1. Nashville Movement’s Local Organizational Infrastructure.

It is important to understand the ways in which the workshops functioned as schools. First they were, in a Deweyian (Dewey (1944/1916, pp. 18–19) sense, deliberately constructed and regulated environments within which the “mental and moral disposition of their members” could be shaped and influenced. The deliberately constructed environments, the physical places, were important. The oppositional culture and philosophical and practical conversations that were to lead to insurgent actions were largely hidden in relatively safe spaces of basements and backrooms of various black churches, especially Clark Memorial United Methodist (near Fisk University) and Smith’s First Baptist.

Second, there was a curriculum of sorts, an intentionally designed but fluid lesson plan that consisted of an oppositional culture centered on the praxis of nonviolent direct action. It was that praxis which would be animated through the students in the form of confrontations with specific laws and norms of the local Jim Crow system. The workshops were the little incubator, the laboratory to experiment with and cultivate the beginning of “many Montgomerys,” Lawson’s hope for expanding and accelerating the pace of the movement into a nonviolent revolution.

Lawson faced major challenges before he and his students were to confront local Jim Crow. The students who came to his workshops already carried hot emotions – anger and resentment – and Lawson was careful not to fuel these feelings (Hogan, 2007). He moved carefully, slowly, and deliberately to channel youthful energy and emotion into a resocialization process that would transform them into disciplined nonviolent warriors. But before they could be schooled in the praxis of nonviolent direct action, Lawson had to first persuade these mostly skeptical young people – who clearly understood the power asymmetry between themselves and the system they hoped to change – of several difficult truths. First, he had to convince them that they were somebody. Years of internalized racism – feelings of self-doubt, inferiority, shame, and anger – had to be converted into an engine of pride, strength, and determination. Second, he had to show them that because their idea for change was big and just (also Halberstam, 1998, p. 61), so too would the numbers who would follow them be large and carry tremendous force. Finally, Lawson had to convince them that nonviolence provided the answer, the key, to the age-old riddle – how do the relatively powerless confront power without succumbing to its violent tactics (thus perpetuating a vicious cycle) and without committing self-annihilation in the process? Embedded in and products of a dominant violent American culture, this would be no small task. Many⁴ students fully admitted that they were initially very skeptical of this philosophy, especially the idea of

absorbing a violent attack without an in-kind counter-response. Yet, they continued to attend the movement school. They wanted to fight for change and were truly attracted to their mentor. For instance, John Lewis (interview) said of Lawson:

He was very smart, brilliant. He persuaded us. He came across as the embodiment, as the personification of the philosophy and the discipline of nonviolence. He was not just preaching a sermon. In a sense he was living it. ... the concept of the beloved community ... making Nashville an open city ... an all-inclusive community ... it was very appealing to me ... That ordinary people, students, could change the world.

Others commented on Lawson's teaching abilities in similar ways: "a remarkable teacher-facilitator-leader" (Murphy interview); "he was very brilliant ... careful, caring, sophisticated ... very intense" (Lafayette interview).

The young participants described the workshops as typically consisting of two segments: one in which Lawson would teach world history and philosophy of nonviolence drawn from the Bible, Thoreau, Niebuhr, Gandhi, and others; the other portion would be focused on the practical, dealing with role-playing, staging little "sociodramas" within which the students would try-on the positions of demonstrator and antagonist; and there were lessons on how to best protect their bodies during attacks (Lewis interview). James Floyd (interview) described a "sociodrama."

Like I said, we role played. They would choose one of us from the group ... and say come up here, let me show you, here's how we do it. One of the facilitators would say, [N word]! And they'd push you, and they gave us an example of how to act.

James Murph (interview) described a workshop on marching protocol:

[the workshop leaders would] say now what we want you to do is when we leave the church we want you in files of two, you're not to be looking to the left or the right, just look straight ahead. And even if the person beside you get hit, just don't react, just keep moving. Just keep moving, don't talk back, don't do any words that would cause any kind of disturbances, just keep moving.

The curriculum of sociodramas expanded as the protestors returned from live demonstrations to debrief at workshops. Angelina Butler (interview) explained how the debriefings shaped a cumulative workshop curriculum of increasingly violent sociodramas in the face of mounting live violence from antagonists in downtown Nashville during early "test sits" in late 1959:

Students in Nashville were testing downtown area restaurants in small groups, going back to the workshops, reporting what happened to them on the journey, reporting how they felt about the interaction where the people had threw something at them on a counter or put a cigarette butt out on their back, or whether a person spat on them for

sitting at the counter. But [initially] the idea was not to get arrested, it was to go back to the workshops when threatened with arrest and now let's talk about what happened, because that's part of the training for preparedness of having a nonviolent demonstration and movement. So we'd not only go back and talk about it, we would then place ourselves in a position of pretending to be on the demonstration where now people would do even worse things to you than had happened to you on the day that you went downtown to practice ... Now the problem is how do you feel, what's your reaction, this is how it's going on.

At a personal level, the workshop experiences, even before the crucible of actual confrontation with real antagonists, were profoundly transformative. There is substantial evidence from social movement scholarship that direct involvement in movement collective action (protests, confrontations, etc.) can have both short- and long-term transformative influence on participants' lives (e.g., Fendrich, 1993; McAdam, 1988). But seldom have scholars found that schooling in preparation of actual insurgent involvement can be as transformative as it was for Lawson's workshop protégés. Curtis Murphy (interview) knew that he was going through a major change when it was happening. He moved from deep skepticism about nonviolence to then accepting it as at least a strategy for social change and became a major movement recruiter on the Tennessee A&I campus. Murphy described the change in his attitude about nonviolence:

But the first meeting as I recall, I think there were 7 or 8 of us students there and Jim [Lawson] started talking about this Mahatma Gandhi and this philosophy of nonviolence. And I'm thinking that's whacked, somebody hits me, I'm creaming them. Nonviolence? No. That's not even logical. I'm sitting there listening but I'm thinking this doesn't make sense. But obviously it's something he said that stuck with me, and after the next enough to get me to come back to the next meeting. Then the more I thought about it, I said let me do a little research, that's when I started to see there's some merit there. But my initial reaction was nonviolence? What are you, scared? You coward! Only a coward would allow people to attack them and they don't defend themselves. But then the more I went to the meetings the more I began to learn from Jim and my readings, I realize that it took a much braver person to practice nonviolence than one to strike back.

The workshops also imparted the practical message of the futility of violent resistance. The movement could never match the violence of their antagonists, and the workshops stressed the importance of not fighting back if only to protect fellow protestors from a violent reaction by antagonists. This message partly informed Murphy's (interview) acceptance of nonviolence as a "tool":

I began to see [nonviolence] as a very practical tool ... I oftentimes would say to the other participants, I am not a pacifist. I am not nonviolent. But when I am with you I am

those things, because ... I knew that I would never do anything that would hurt the group.

Learning to exercise self-restraint in the face of piercing insults was especially challenging for workshop participants. Bernard Lafayette (interview), for example, could endure physical pain more than emotional pain:

I got to these workshops in Nashville, the whole business of turning the other cheek and that kind of thing, I thought about it, but it wasn't my style, turning the other cheek. But that wasn't the issue for me. The more important issue for me was how would I feel after someone had maybe slapped me or spat on me. My biggest struggle was internal. The outside physical pain, I had endurance for that, and a great deal of tolerance for pain.

Joe Goldthreate (interview) explained that the workshops had helped him to control his inclination to respond violently to deep insults and instilled in him the message that the security of the group depended on his exercise of self-restraint. The workshops prepared him for his eventual violent removal from a lunch counter:

We went to the meetings and we started to learn how to be nonviolent, people knocking you around ... I could handle everything but spitting, the white guy walked by and spit in my face, if you want to be a part of the program at that time, you couldn't fight back. You put everybody in jeopardy of getting hurt or killed. So I had to accept it if I wanted to be a part ... Don't give them a reason to turn to violence. That was the number one thing that was preaching. I guess when they knocked me out of the chair and spit on me and drug me, I was prepared for that because I'd been trained day in and day out.

Diane Nash, also initially very skeptical, was transformed: "I found beautiful things in people who would care enough about other people to put their bodies between another person and danger" (Powledge, 1991, p. 208). Jim Zwerg (interview) spoke of acquiring strength from others in the group that changed him deeply, "an incredible, spiritual bond ... what Lawson used to call a soul force." John Lewis recounts that once he began attending those workshops "in the basement of Clark [Memorial United Methodist Church] [they] became the focus of my life" (Lewis, 1998, p. 76). He described the experience as "the most exciting, and most moving time as a student, as a young person" and attributes his loss of shyness and leadership growth to the workshops and the sit-ins resulting from them. It was here that "...I discovered something about myself that I didn't know I had" (Lewis interview). Bernard Lafayette, too, found the workshops to be a "life-changing experience" (Lafayette interview). Novella Page (interview) spoke of gaining strength from her peers, noting especially the courage and calm she observed in another young woman, Diane Nash. She pointed to the group's solidarity as a deep

source of excitement. Lawson's movement workshops took angry, skeptical, shy, self-doubting young people and thoroughly resocialized them into effective leaders and an effective fighting force. The workshops worked, in the words of Lafayette (2008), to fundamentally "educate our emotions."

But did this personal transformation matter for the movement? The participants felt strongly that it did. The leadership produced by the workshops and their impact was crucial to the movement's strength. Marion Barry (interview) concluded that it was the leadership that made the Nashville movement so unique. Jim Zwerg (interview) credits Lawson as the key reason for the Nashville movement's development and success. C.T. Vivian (interview) also attributes the special place of the Nashville movement – "producing more leaders than the rest of the movement combined" – to the Lawson workshops. As John Lewis (interview) put it: "It is fair to say that more student leaders and more nonstudent leaders emerged out of the Nashville movement than any other [local] movement." They came through Nashville for a "period of training" [in movement school] before they matriculated bringing the fight to Nashville, then across the South.

As complex dialogically intense processes, the Lawson workshops were many things. They were a place to confront self-doubt and fears; where world history, philosophy, and practical tactics of nonviolent direct action could be taught and practiced; where raw emotion would be channeled and shaped; to cultivate many grassroots leaders; to create solidarity among bright, determined cadre of young activists; to begin imagining and working towards the utopic "beloved community"; to build a clear intentional design for assault on Nashville's Jim Crow system, the beginning of Lawson's hope and inspiration for "making many Montgomerys." At root, the workshops were truly schools for the performing arts of nonviolent protest and James Lawson was the headmaster, one who insisted not only on nonviolence, but also the importance of organization, participatory democracy in deliberation, and discipline.

The Nashville movement quickly emerged as the model local movement, an exemplar of what could be done and how to do it. By May 1960 the local movement had successfully desegregated the lunch counters of six downtown stores. Dr. King had proclaimed the Nashville movement his inspiration and shining example for the larger movement – "the best organized and the most disciplined in the Southland" (quoted in Lewis, 1998, p. 111). By the end of 1962, many downtown commercial establishments and public accommodations had been desegregated – a major blow to

the local Jim Crow system and another crack in the edifice of white supremacy throughout the South, two years before the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. Lawson was being featured in movement literature for his militant, forward-looking model of “nonviolent revolution” launched by a growing “nonviolent army” (Lawson, 1961, pp. 2–3).

MOVING THE MOVEMENT BEYOND NASHVILLE

The impact of the Nashville cadre extended far beyond the city limits. The movement that took organizational form in 1958 and then went into the implementation of movement phase in February 1960 did not stop with local accomplishments. The diffusion of Gandhian nonviolence from India to Nashville spread to civil rights activities elsewhere in the American South. Smith, Lawson, and other activists, by reinventing *satyagraha* in a new cultural context, provided both physical and intellectual energy to several derivative movements that emerged out of the Nashville campaign. Just as they viewed the Montgomery bus boycott and King as inspirational paradigms for the Nashville movement, these lessons were absorbed and a new synthesis emerged in Nashville for others to adapt. The Nashville campaign, by sharing its personnel and principles in other southern settings, helped energize a dynamic diffusion. Trained by Lawson, learning the Gandhian repertoire and earning their “movement credentials” in Nashville, much of the core cadre went on to carry knowledge and action of nonviolent oppositional culture across the South, a key path of diffusion.

The first major step was the founding of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in April 1960 at Shaw University in Raleigh, N.C. Most colleges sent one or two representatives. Sixteen came from Nashville, including James Lawson, Diane Nash, John Lewis, James Bevel, Bernard Lafayette, and Marion Barry (Carson, 1981; Hogan, 2007). Following Ella Baker’s sage advice, the young warriors formed their own autonomous organization, related to but distinct from the church elders and leadership of the SCLC. “The fiery Lawson, the young peoples’ Martin Luther King, as some called him, received a standing ovation from the students” when he addressed the group (Payne, 2007, p. 96). The SNCC founding statement, drafted largely by Lawson, “affirmed the philosophy or religious ideal of nonviolence as the foundation of our purpose, the presupposition of our faith, and manner of action.” The Nashville group played a key role in shaping the founding session. Others present noted the

distinctiveness of the Nashville cadre – the disciplined commitment to “militant nonviolence” and emphasis on participatory democracy – marks of the Nashville workshops, movement culture brought into the SNCC (Hogan, 2007; Polletta, 2002). The Nashville group’s influence steered the course of the SNCC for the first half of the Sixties. First national chairman (1960–61), Marion Barry, and third chairman (1963–66), John Lewis, were both core members of the Nashville cadre trained by Lawson. Situated between these two, Charles McDew (1961–63) was quickly drawn to the Nashville group as if he were a member of it. From inception to 1966, the daring youth organization would be clearly stamped by the Nashville cadre (cf., Hogan, 2007, pp. 34–38).⁵ During the Nashville era of SNCC, the organization also inspired the formation of and helped teach movement culture to northern movements – the Students for Democratic Society (SDS) and the Northern Student Movement (NSM) – and inspired the formation of the largely white Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC) founded in Nashville in 1964 (Hogan, 2007). Without the Nashville cadre, it is uncertain whether there would have ever been a SNCC, the organization that played a dynamic role as daring shock troops throughout the southern struggle (Carson, 1981; Hogan, 2007; Payne, 2007).

The next major step in moving beyond Nashville came the following spring. In May 1961, the first CORE-launched freedom ride, to test southern compliance with recent federal law desegregating interstate bus travel, met with white violence outside Anniston where one bus was fire-bombed, and the other was attacked by a white mob in Montgomery. Concerned about continuing violence and the safety of the riders, the CORE leadership halted the rides. Because there had not been a significant tactical innovation since the sit-in wave the previous year, the wider movement could have easily come to a halt itself with the violence-induced cancellation of the rides, a conclusion quickly drawn by the Nashville group. As Diane Nash, who would assume the role of coordinator of the Nashville-led freedom rides, put it: “The students [Nashville group] have decided that we can’t let violence overcome. ... If they stop us with violence, the movement is dead.”⁶

In short, the Nashville cadre picked up where CORE left off. They traveled to Alabama and then continued the freedom ride, facing significant danger throughout (see Arsenault, 2006). SNCC Mississippi campaign veteran, Bob Moses, thought that “only the Nashville student movement had the fire to match that of the burning bus” (quoted in Hogan, 2007, p. 45). Historian Wesley Hogan’s (2007, p. 45) assessment is on mark: “The difference between what had been accomplished in the

Nashville sit-ins and the impromptu sit-ins that occurred across the South now became vividly evident in the students' response to white violence in Alabama." The organization, training, schooled discipline and commitment – products of Lawson's workshops – were, once again, contributing powerfully to the continued flow of the overall movement. Conventional approaches to modeling movement diffusion would miss this critical heterogeneity, differences in the diffusion of the sit-in wave (Andrews & Biggs, 2006), the freedom rides, and other forms of movement-related collective action.

Undeterred by the brutal mob violence they faced in Montgomery, which was now under martial law, the Nashville Freedom Riders resolved to complete their mission by boarding a bus to Jackson, Mississippi, on May 24, 1961. The Alabama National Guard accompanied them in the bus to the state line, leaving the Freedom Riders to enter Mississippi without police or military protection on the bus. They arrived in Jackson without incident, were instantly arrested as they desegregated the Jackson bus station, jailed in the Hinds County prison in Jackson, refused bail and refused to pay a \$200 fine, and then transferred to the Hinds County prison farm where they suffered horrid prison conditions for about two weeks. In the middle of the night of June 15, they were abruptly transferred in a windowless truck trailer to the gulag-like Parchman maximum-security state penitentiary in a remote delta location some 100 miles northwest of Jackson, where they served 60-day hard sentences (Lewis, 1998, pp. 154–172).

In Parchman, the Nashville Freedom Riders, who were now joined by Freedom Riders from throughout the South and the nation, endured racism of all sorts and the severe repressive measures of intimidation, confinement, harsh physical conditions, water hosing, humiliation, and mail censorship. Incarcerated two to a cell and segregated by race and gender, the insurgents developed a repertoire of nonviolent resistance with acts that reflected the constraints and possibilities afforded them by the physical and social organization of their confinement (Lewis, 1998, pp. 168–172). Nonviolent resistance entailed reading and reinterpreting prison-provided bibles, communicating with Nashville activists in secret written code, and singing spiritual and movement songs. The Nashville cadre worked to convert the oppressive prison conditions to an ongoing makeshift workshop on nonviolent struggle for less experienced among them (Arsenault, 2006, p. 349; Nelson, 2011 documentary). When released from Parchman, some stayed in Mississippi to do organizing, training, and voter registration. Bernard Lafayette and James Bevel stayed in Jackson, joined by Diane Nash, Catherine Burks, and Paul Brooks, while

Marion Barry, Lester McKinnie, Charles Jones, and John Hardy worked in the McComb and other regions of Mississippi (Hogan, 2007; Payne, 2007).

Through the remainder of the movement heyday and beyond, the Nashville cadre were present in every flashpoint and city campaign driving the movement forward. This roll call includes the Albany campaign of 1961–62 – Charles Jones, Cordell Reagon, James Bevel, and Diane Nash (Halberstam, 1998; Hogan, 2007, p. 67); the “Rock Hill Four” jailings – Diane Nash, Charles Jones (Hogan, 2007, pp. 51–52); the Birmingham campaign (1963) – James Lawson and Diane Nash led nonviolent workshops, and James Bevel was responsible for mobilizing the nonviolent direct action through his “children’s campaign” that directly confronted Bull Connor’s dogs, clubs, and fire hoses (Hogan, 2007, p. 242); the March on Washington (1963) – John Lewis gave a speech as SNCC chair; Freedom Summer campaign 1964 – James Lawson ran nonviolent workshops at the boot-camp for the white volunteers in Oxford, Ohio, before they embarked for Mississippi (Hogan, 2007, p. 162); the Selma campaign (1965) – John Lewis, C.T. Vivian, James Bevel, and Bernard Lafayette, among others, were engaged; and Memphis sanitation workers’ strike (1968) dovetailed with Martin Luther King’s “Poor Peoples’ Campaign” – James Lawson, now a Memphis pastor, was integral in bringing Dr. King to the city to support the strikers. By the mid-1960s, members of the Nashville cadre were also serving on the Executive Board of SCLC, including James Lawson, C.T. Vivian, James Bevel, Diane Nash, and Bernard Lafayette.

Any one of these involvements would rank as significant movement activity. But the overall record of the Nashville cadre stands out among all the courageous actions by so many throughout the civil rights movement. The “Greensboro Four” launched the famed sit-in on February 1, 1960, that ignited a mass wave of student sit-ins across the South that spring. But the movement engagement of those four was short lived in contrast to the extended record of Nashville cadre. In historian Clayborne Carson’s (1981, p. 16) words, “It was these Nashville activists, rather than the four Greensboro students, who had an enduring impact on the subsequent development of the southern movement.” Movement schools – the workshops – were the key for the Nashville cadre whose commitment kept them traveling, carrying, using, and spreading the nonviolent praxis as they challenged Jim Crow across the South. This was simultaneously the content, the vehicle, and the impact of their diffusion process, one that was deeply dialogical.

CONCLUSION

Our most general goal has been to further illuminate one of the central pathways through which nonviolent praxis diffused from India into the southern civil rights movement. Building on social movement diffusion scholarship in general and the diffusion of the Gandhian repertoire in particular, our contribution centers the conceptual significance of biographical trajectories (including individual migration and movement of carriers of oppositional culture through space), the role of movement schools, and unique data consistent with demands of the dialogical model. These theoretical and empirical strengths have allowed us to offer important insights into the southern civil rights movement. We conclude by elaborating the significance of these claims.

We begin with the theoretical contribution. We have contributed to the dialogical model of diffusion. That perspective emphasizes the often difficult interactive labor involved in the process of diffusing a complex movement culture, like the Gandhian repertoire. In all phases – acquisition, translation, experimentation, and application – people must invest time, energy, emotion, and other resources in learning to understanding, creatively modifying, teaching, and employing a foreign movement repertoire in a different political-cultural setting. This often means painful unlearning of prior knowledge, as was the case in the Nashville workshops, a process that not all participants could successfully accomplish. We have also shown that biographical trajectories are crucial for understanding the carrier, teacher, and activist roles essential to the diffusion process of a foreign movement culture. Movement of individual biographies and their convergence in space is essential to fully developing the dialogical theory of diffusion. Carriers of a novel movement culture cannot do much individually with their new insights if they lack an appropriate platform that allows for convergence with potentially interested others – social spaces or environments that give the dialogical process a chance to unfold. Our concept of movement schools fills this important gap in the dialogical model. The School of Religion at Howard University and Lawson's workshops both operated as movement schools, but in quite different ways. The intellectual ferment at Howard was central to the early learning – awareness and translation – of the Gandhian repertoire. The Lawson workshops had to focus on initial learning as well as implementation of direct action praxis – an Americanized Gandhian repertoire – designed to tear down Jim Crow and to move closer to the beloved community.

Movement schools can take a variety of specific forms, but they are frequently locations where the most intense emotional dialogue and creative labor take place. We believe the concept is an essential addition to the dialogical perspective on movement diffusion.

Second, our study makes a methodological-empirical contribution to the dialogical perspective. Because the dialogical approach emphasizes the role of in-depth face-to-face interaction during the travails of translation, experimentation, and application of novel movement culture, it makes strong data demands. Ethnographic data, detailed documents recording such schooling sessions (e.g., film), and/or in-depth interviews with those having experience in such movement schools are necessary if we are to get the most from and continue to develop the dialogical diffusion perspective. Our detailed interviews with many of the Nashville cadre fit this requirement well.

Finally, our analysis contributes to knowledge of the southern civil rights movement – how nonviolent oppositional culture diffused through two main paths and the role of movement schools in the process.⁷ We have illuminated the formation of the Nashville movement center (building on Morris, 1984) but have gone beyond previous research by highlighting the inner workings of an important movement school, the Lawson workshops. We have shown how the Gandhian repertoire diffused to Nashville through key players and how it was dialogically labored over in the workshops, how students in those workshops gravitated to Lawson, struggled with the ideas he presented, put those ideas into action, and in the process transformed the ideas as well as themselves, and helped transform American society.

The Nashville movement school was distinctive because of the (a) powerful and committed mentorship of James Lawson, (b) organic formation and employment of participatory democratic culture, (c) local embeddedness in and support from Nashville's black student and community leaderships, and (d) regularity and duration of the workshops. The workshops were centerpiece schools of the southern movement – the most well-organized, most continuously functioning, and the most well-taught. Consequently, they produced a highly successful local movement – an exemplar for the wider southern struggle – and the largest number of highly disciplined and committed nonviolent leader-activists and teachers of any local movement in the struggle. They carried (diffused) the fight using an Americanized Gandhian repertoire throughout the South. The success of the southern civil rights movement was due, in no small part, to the movement school in Nashville.

NOTES

1. By “praxis” we mean a philosophy (of engagement or action) and the action itself.

2. We use the term “Gandhian repertoire” to signify the essential elements (not the entire culturally specific features of Gandhi’s praxis) that were eventually adapted by the US southern civil rights movement. These include an alternative conceptualization of “power” based on three principles: (1) respect for one’s opponents as persons, (2) refusal to cooperate with unjust power, and (3) the struggle to create alternative systems of power through nonviolent direct action (see Kurtz, 2008, p. 840; 2012). “Nonviolent direct action” is social action directed at changing evil/oppressive/unjust social arrangements by directly confronting/resisting/challenging and not cooperating with such arrangements through nonviolent means, which includes suffering violence at the hands of the opposition but never retaliating with violence (see Sharp, 2010, Appendix One, for a lengthy inventory of specific forms of nonviolent direct action). This action is rooted in the tradition of civil disobedience that deliberately violates unjust social arrangements for purposes of expressing a moral and political message. The creativity of the Gandhian repertoire is that it offers a new paradigm for social change predicated on the synthesis of two traditional, yet orthogonal, perspectives – violent warfare and pacifism. The Gandhian nonviolent activist “fights like the warrior but avoids harming like the pacifist” (Kurtz, 2008, p. 840; 2012).

3. James M. Lawson, Jr. was a participant-observer in the Nashville movement and the broader southern civil rights movement. He was also a key informant and interviewee in our project as well as a co-author of this chapter. While he provided crucial information, our characterization of the importance of his participation comes from testimony of other participants who we interviewed, not his own self-assessment.

4. For example, Marion Barry (interview), Bernard Lafayette (interview), Charles Murphy (interview), Diane Nash (Powledge, 1991, p. 208), and Jim Zwerg (interview) all admitted to this initial difficulty.

5. In 1961, SNCC formed a five-person executive committee, three of whom were drawn from the Nashville cadre – James Bevel, Diane Nash, and Charles Jones – in addition to McDew and Moses (Hogan, 2007, p. 65).

6. Nash quoted in Arsenault (2006, p. 184). Not only did the Nashville cadre contribute significantly to maintaining overall movement momentum (Arsenault, 2006; Hogan, 2007), but those connected to the Nashville movement supplied more freedom riders than any other city and launched more intercity freedom rides (Arsenault, 2006, Appendix).

7. Diffusion was assisted by mass media coverage of protest events, like the sit-ins, once they began to unfold in February 1960 (Andrews & Biggs, 2006). However, prior diffusion processes set the stage for the rapid take-off of the sit-ins: During the second half of the 1950s, the South had been “seeded” for the adoption of the sit-ins once they emerged in other locations, like Greensboro. That seeding came from several sources: (1) The diffusion of information about local successes in places like Montgomery (1955–56) and Tallahassee (1956) had been spreading by word of mouth; (2) movement culture was spreading through literature; FOR wrote,

published, and distributed a comic-book style pamphlet – “Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story” – that was considered a subversive and exciting source of information, especially among young black students (see Isaac, 2008; Lewis, 1998, pp. 74–5) and Dr. King wrote *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (1957) documenting the key lessons of that campaign; and (3) there were traveling movement evangelists, like FOR field representatives Glenn Smiley and James M. Lawson, Jr., who performed nonviolent workshops across the South during the late 1950s.

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