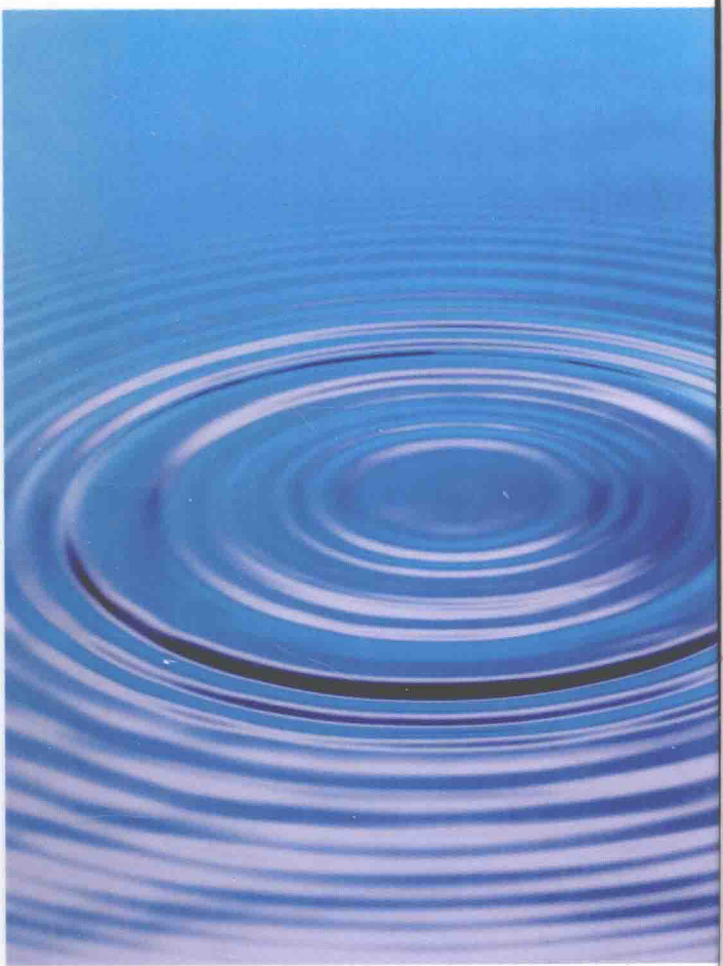
TRANSNATIONAL ROOTS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

African American Explorations of the Gandhian Repertoire

Sean Chabot



Transnational Roots of the Civil Rights Movement

African American Explorations of the Gandhian Repertoire

Sean Chabot

LEXINGTON BOOKS
Lanham • Boulder • New York • Toronto • Plymouth, UK

Published by Lexington Books
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.lexingtonbooks.com

Estover Road, Plymouth PL6 7PY, United Kingdom

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Chabot, Sean, 1969–
Transnational roots of the civil rights movement : African American explorations of the Gandhian repertoire / Sean Chabot.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-7391-4577-7 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-7391-4579-1 (ebook)
1. African Americans—Civil rights—History—20th century. 2. Civil rights movements—United States—History—20th century. 3. Gandhi, Mahatma, 1869-1948—Influence. I. Title.
E185.61.C48 2012
323.1196'073—dc23
2011036293

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

Acknowledgments

The transnational roots of this book run deep and wide. My family in the Netherlands has taught me what it means to cross borders and differences. My mother embodies the idea and practice of translation by bridging cultural divides between Japanese, Dutch, and American people. My father is responsible for the Dutch attributes of my character and is my most reliable reader. And my brother is the epitome of the global artist, allowing me to see glimmers of beauty in an ugly world. I thank them for their love, inspiration, and support.

The University of Amsterdam is my original academic home. I am grateful to Kees van der Pijl, Henk Overbeek, Otto Holman, Gerd Junne, Alex Fernandez-Jilberto, and others at the Research Centre of International Political Economy (RECIPE) for assisting and encouraging my project during its preliminary stages. And I will never forget the weekly meetings with Paul Blokker, René Wiering, and Marieke Rietfhof, who showed me that intense intellectual dialogue does not need to ruin friendships.

Faculty, staff members, and fellow Ph.D. students at the Amsterdam School for Social Research (ASSR) allowed me to grow as a sociologist, develop my dissertation, and make the most of my years of research. Only in retrospect do I realize how unique and nurturing the ASSR family was. I particularly appreciate the contributions of Jan Breman, Bram de Swaan, Nico Wilterdink, Johan Goudsblom, Ali de Regt, Kees Schuyt, Peter Pels, Talja Blokland, Bowen Paul, Sikko Visscher, Marcel Maussen, Don Weenink, Jose Komen, and Hans Sonneveld, among others. My mentors Peter van der Veer, Rosanne Rutten, and Jan Willem Duyvendak—who is also my collaborator and loyal friend—deserve special mention.

My current academic home is Eastern Washington University in Cheney, Washington, far away from the global flow of scholars and ideas that I encountered in Amsterdam. Here, discussions with Theory Committee members, parties with Mosaic and McNair friends, and cherished relationships with Todd Hechtman and Majid Sharifi remind me of my intellectual self. I also want to express appreciation to Charise DeBerry, María Morales, Ian Kelly, Gabriel Chávez García, and other sociology students, whose joy of learning makes being a teacher and colearner at EWU worthwhile.

While academic roots are important, I could not have written this book without relying on and responding to the insights and imaginations of social movement scholars throughout the world. Let me mention just some of the outstanding authors who shape my thinking and writing: Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, Doug McAdam, James Scott, Robin Kelley, Michael Hardt, Naomi Klein, George Lakey, Vandana Shiva, Boaventura de Sousa, Arundhati Roy, Lesley Wood, James Jasper, Jeff Goodwin, Jackie Smith, John Foran, Marc Steinberg, Colin Barker, Stellan Vinthagen, and Jan Willem Duyvendak.

I have come full circle, to my family in the state of Washington. I couldn't have asked for more hospitable and helpful parents-in-law than Ronald and Barbara Ross. They have been there for me from the beginning and are now fabulous grandparents. Watching our three boys learn and grow is an amazing experience. There is no greater pleasure than watching Eli working on his math or dribbling with a soccer ball; watching Jamel doing handstands or cuddling a dog; and watching Julian singing a Simon & Garfunkel song or hitting a baseball. But at the heart of our family is Robyn, my fellow traveler in life. She has accompanied me all over the world and guided my intellectual search from the initial outlines to the final drafts. When I am weak, she is strong. When I am desperate and frustrated, she is patient and persistent. While I think and write about love, she practices it every day. And while I need words to express myself, her life is her message.

I dedicate this book to my first love.

Contents

ONE
Introduction

There is a famous photograph of Martin Luther King, Jr., standing in his office, with his arms crossed and a picture of Mohandas Gandhi on the wall beside him. King is holding a pen in his right hand and books are scattered across the desk in front of him.[1] The image leaves the impression that Gandhi directly influenced King's nonviolent ideas and actions. The African American leader confirmed this interpretation in his book *Stride toward Freedom*, especially in the chapter "Pilgrimage to Nonviolence."[2] Here he describes his own intellectual journey to Gandhi's protest methods. He discusses experiencing racism in personal life, reading Thoreau and other philosophers, and listening to a speech by Fellowship of Reconciliation's A.J. Muste on revolutionary pacifism. He shares that, at this time, his faith in the power of love to solve deeply ingrained social problems was limited—until he heard a sermon by Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University, about his trip to India and views on Mahatma Gandhi. King tells us that he began exploring the Indian leader's concept and campaigns of nonviolent resistance right afterward. He writes:

> Prior to reading Gandhi, I had about concluded that the ethics of Jesus were only effective in individual relationships. . . . But after reading Gandhi, I saw how utterly mistaken I was. Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale.[3]

And in the final pages he reviews how this discovery shaped his thinking and leadership during the Montgomery bus boycott, and outlines his own philosophy of nonviolent resistance based on the Greek notion of *agape*, which refers to love of humanity. Both the photograph and the chapter imply that the intellectual pilgrimage from Gandhi to King is sufficient to understand how Gandhi's protest methods traveled from the Indian independence movement to the American civil rights movement.

Historical reality, however, is not quite so neat. What King's photograph and chapter hide are the decades of *collective struggle* that produced the Gandhian approach to nonviolent resistance, and the decades of *collective learning* that enabled African Americans to reinvent and apply this

approach in their own context. For a better understanding of how innovative protest methods travel between social movements as different and distant as the Indian independence movement and American civil rights movement, we need to know more than just the intellectual connections between prominent individuals—no matter how brilliant and exceptional these individuals might be. We need to know how collective struggles contributed to the Gandhian repertoire's development in India, and how collective learning contributed to the Gandhian repertoire's transnational diffusion to the United States.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Historians have made great progress in exploring the significant individuals, relationships, stories, texts, and events involved in the Indian independence movement, American civil rights movement, and transnational linkages between them. The wide range of research and writings they have produced are crucial sources of evidence for anyone working on these subjects, including me.[4] Most historical narratives, however, lack theoretical frameworks for analyzing collective struggles and also lack detailed descriptions of collective learning, especially concerning transnational diffusion between social movements. While many studies identify and document connections between Gandhi and King, and between Indian nationalists and African American activists, few (if any) develop concepts for examining Gandhian protest methods and tracing their long journey to the civil rights movement, all the way from initial exposure to full implementation.

Take for example Sudarshan Kapur's *Raising Up a Prophet*, probably the most relevant historical book.[5] Kapur depicts the background of King's personal pilgrimage to nonviolence by illustrating how African Americans started making connections with Gandhi and other Indian nationalists in the early 1920s. He argues that several generations of leaders, journalists, intellectuals, and activists helped prepare African American people for adoption of Gandhi's ideas and strategies during the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. He pays special attention to African American pioneers like W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, African American journals and newspapers, trips to and from India, and religion. His book's main point is that:

> African-Americans did not wait idly by for a prophet to deliver them to the promised land. Rather, by way of discussion, debate, and activism in the decades leading up to the Montgomery bus boycott, they helped to create the circumstances that made possible the emergence of Martin Luther King, Jr. In thought and action they were hard at work. In the process they raised a prophet who at a critical moment in their ongoing struggle helped an entire nation move close to freedom.[6]

Kapur's work offers a wealth of examples of cross-cultural encounters between African Americans and Indians, but it does not show *how* "discussion, debate, and activism" contributed to application of the Gandhian repertoire in collective struggle. It asserts rather than demonstrates collective learning. While *Raising Up a Prophet* discusses all kinds of mediating individuals and texts, in the end it still highlights the flow of ideas and actions from Gandhi the inventor to King the prophet. Other historians similarly tend to focus more on sketching linkages between individuals and texts than on analyzing their effects on African American understandings and applications of the Gandhian repertoire.[7]

Political sociologists studying social movements fill some of the theoretical gaps plaguing historians. They have developed sophisticated concepts and models for explaining transnational diffusion between social movements, and applied them to a wide variety of cases. But while social movement scholars have much to say about collective struggle, they generally pay less attention to the process of collective learning. As social scientists, they generally prefer to identify and illustrate causal mechanisms of transnational diffusion between social movements, without pursuing in-depth explorations of how contentious communities interpret and employ foreign repertoires.[8]

The most comprehensive and influential work on the subject is Sidney Tarrow's *The New Transnational Activism*. His model for analyzing the pathways of transnational diffusion between social movements starts with a "localized" protest action in a particular national context. If activists in another country perceive it as successful and innovative, they might initiate transnational *communication* on the ideas and practices associated with the protest action, facilitated by the *internationalization* of contemporary political actors, networks, and structures. In a world with widely available technologies like the internet, activists can easily and quickly exchange information across great distances. Tarrow argues that, as a result, internationalization and communication are now "the large impersonal processes that lie in the background of all forms of transnational diffusion."[9] Once the transnational diffusion process is under way, it evolves along one or more of three pathways. *Relational diffusion* occurs when activists in one country consider themselves similar to activists in another country, allowing protest information to spread from transmitters to receivers via existing interpersonal relationships and direct communication channels. *Non-relational diffusion* occurs when cultural differences or distances between activists are great, forcing receivers to rely on simplified interpretations of unfamiliar protest information, which spread along indirect channels like mass media, internet, or word of mouth. And *mediated diffusion* occurs when third parties build bridges between social contexts, acting as brokers of protest information from transmitters to receivers. According to Tarrow, *emulation* is the final mechanism in transnational diffusion and occurs when receivers imitate

transmitters' ideas and practices, adopting them to initiate "non-localized" protest action in their own context.[10]

Tarrow's model and concepts are certainly useful for studying transnational diffusion between social movements. But they do not allow for deep understanding of how people and social groups interact with and learn from each other. By asserting that communication is a "large impersonal process," Tarrow excludes what activists involved in collective struggles feel, think, say, and do when they form interpersonal and social relationships across borders. Implicitly, he relies on a transmission model of diffusion, assuming that information spreads linearly and predictably from transmitters to receivers—from innovators to imitators. This transmission approach does not pay sufficient attention to the more intense and enduring communication required for protest groups in one country to gain understanding of a foreign repertoires of contention and use it to wage collective struggles in their own contexts.[11] Tarrow is correct when he argues that, in the modern world, communication often means transmission of abstract facts from one actor or place to another. But I suggest that studying such impersonal communication is not enough to understand how the Gandhian repertoire crossed the "great divide" between the Indian independence movement and American civil rights movement. The spread of information was only a small part of the collective learning process that allowed African Americans to grasp and eventually adopt Gandhi's approach to nonviolent resistance.

COLLECTIVE LEARNING AND THE GANDHIAN REPERTOIRE

It should be obvious by now that, in contrast to historians like Kapur and political sociologists like Tarrow, my approach highlights the process of collective learning. What exactly do I mean with collective learning? For the purpose of this book, *collective learning* refers to growth in the ability of African American groups and their allies to understand, reinvent, and communicate the Gandhian repertoire of nonviolent resistance, and apply it in collective struggles against racial segregation in the United States. Collective learning allowed students of the Gandhian repertoire to examine oppressive situations from new perspectives, develop new strategies for challenging those situations, and use new criteria for evaluating strengths and weaknesses of each perspective or strategy. It did not merely rely on transmission of facts and emulation of the Indian independence movement's protest methods, but also required creative interpretation of and practical experimentation with these protest methods in specific social contexts.[12]

Various forms of dialogue between Indian and African American activists, and among African Americans and their allies, were particularly important for collective learning. *Dialogue* occurred when communication

involved horizontal and reciprocal relationships between transmitters and receivers, speakers and listeners, leaders and followers—that is, between Self and Other—who were exploring the meanings and implications of the Gandhian repertoire for the African American freedom struggle.[13] While monologue involved hierarchical interaction between an active and knowledgeable Self and a relatively passive and ignorant Other, dialogue involved inclusive interaction among active selves, who freely expressed their own unique insights, and respectfully validated as well as responded to those of other participants. Although in practice communication never entailed either extreme, collective learning benefited most from communication that was more dialogic than monologic.[14]

This book primarily focuses on contentious communities and support groups as the key actors engaging in collective learning. *Contentious communities* are groups of intellectuals and activists that identify an urgent social injustice, analyze its causes, develop possible remedies, and critically reflect on their ideas and actions. While members agree on the existence of a social injustice, they do not necessarily favor the same interpretations, worldviews, or strategies. Contentious communities might emerge within or outside of the context of a *social movement*, which is a sustained and large-scale collective struggle guided by a common repertoire for contentious interactions with authorities, fellow citizens, and audiences.[15] But to be contentious, they must challenge oppressive systems, authorities, and power relations through their words and deeds. Some contentious communities envision transformation of current institutions and situations, while others seek reform or inclusion within existing social structures. Most of the contentious communities seeking to reinvent and adopt the Gandhian repertoire in the collective struggle against segregation were predominantly African American. But African American contentious communities often benefited from the resources, networks, safe spaces, influence, personnel, and activities of predominantly white *support groups*, which shared their cause of racial and social justice, but were not necessarily on the frontlines of resistance. In practice, though, the lines between these two types of collective actors were often fluid and blurred, as members of support groups joined campaigns led by contentious communities, or members of one contentious community served as support group for another contentious community.[16]

In this book, the main focus of collective learning by contentious communities and their allies was the Gandhian repertoire of contention. What made the Gandhian repertoire an innovative and distinct approach for fighting systems of oppression like colonialism in India and racism in the United States? The next chapter explores this question in historical detail, but an initial sketch suffices for now. Political sociologists often use Charles Tilly's concept of *contentious repertoire* to explain how activists decide on the protest methods to use for challenging authorities and achieving social change. They argue that people within specific contexts

only have access to a limited set of protest methods that they have learned from past collective struggles. This repertoire emerges from activities in everyday life and includes familiar ways of opposing powerful leaders and institutions, constraining what activists are capable of doing within particular circumstances. Although participants constantly improvise in the heat of contention, they follow shared scripts that prescribe their choices, expectations, and performances within a particular environment.[17] The *Gandhian repertoire* was an invention that transformed the meanings and implications of familiar nonviolent protest methods. Unlike earlier forms of nonviolence, it was not a "weapon of the weak" but relied on the strength of activists to develop moral force by engaging in self-suffering and courageous resistance, not hateful acts against opponents. Whereas most activists highlighted ends over means, Gandhian activists saw means as "ends-in-the making." They learned to respond to oppression with loving words and constructive deeds rather than with submissive or destructive methods. The Gandhian repertoire therefore represented an alternative to "moderate repertoires" favoring legal methods for reform within the system, and an alternative to "extremist repertoires" favoring violent approaches for destroying the current system.[18]

The Gandhian love ethic shaped all three major components of the Gandhian repertoire: contentious discourse, contentious organizing, and contentious action. It guided internal and public communication, institutional decision-making and coordination, and various forms of nonviolent resistance throughout the Indian independence movement. Each Gandhian campaign involved careful preparation and strict discipline among participating individuals as well as groups. Before engaging in confrontational protest, activists negotiated with authorities, publicized their cause, staged preliminary demonstrations, issued an ultimatum, and pledged to accept self-suffering and avoid violent retaliation. After giving opponents every chance to address the social injustice, activists then staged increasingly forceful forms of *nonviolent direct action*, applying methods ranging from strikes and boycotts to mass noncooperation and civil disobedience, until the authorities met the campaign's essential demands. At the same time, though, they also pursued ongoing *constructive work* aimed at transforming the sources of economic, social, political, and cultural oppression in everyday life and grassroots communities. In short, what made the Gandhian repertoire innovative and unique was that it enabled application of the love ethic in all dimensions of mass social movements, as guide for dramatic public campaigns as well as for painstaking community building.

COLLECTIVE LEARNING AND TRANSNATIONAL DIFFUSION

Collective learning by contentious communities and support groups enabled transnational diffusion of the Gandhian repertoire over a time span of about forty-five years. When African Americans and their allies first started paying attention to the Indian independence movement in the 1920s, they were not sure what to make of Gandhi's novel ideas and strategies. They received relevant facts and information via mainstream media or word of mouth, but generally lacked an adequate conceptual frame for interpreting the distinct qualities of the Gandhian repertoire. As a result, they tended to rely on negative or positive stereotypes, and sometimes both. Some fell in the perceptual trap of *hyper-difference*, exaggerating the cultural gap between Self and Other—between Indians and Americans, or between India and Western countries like the United States. Others adopted frames of *over-likeness*, denying or erasing the uniqueness of Self and Other by equating Gandhi with Jesus Christ, or Gandhian nonviolence with Christian nonresistance, for example. Both hyper-difference and over-likeness seriously impeded collective learning about the content and relevance of the Gandhian repertoire. Although transmission of news from India helped initiate transnational diffusion during the 1920s, therefore, it would have remained superficial and short-lived if these stereotypes had continued to distort images and impressions of the Gandhian repertoire.

Gradually, some (but certainly not all) African Americans and their allies moved beyond hyper-difference and over-likeness during the 1930s, as they engaged in *translation* of the Gandhian repertoire into language that their audiences understood. Translation was not a mechanical process of converting the author's fixed set of words and texts into the exact same set of words and texts for readers. At best, translators served as creative mediators between authors (Gandhi and Gandhian activists in India) and readers (African Americans and allies in the United States), who were able to express the original meanings and implications of the Gandhian repertoire in equivalent and accessible terms. By traveling to India, meeting with Gandhi and associates, encountering cultural similarities and differences, and discussing new insights at home, they encouraged American audiences to imagine *dislocation* of the Gandhian repertoire beyond Indian soil. Such intellectual and discursive dislocation was an important step forward in the collective learning process.

Translation and dislocation in turn set the stage for *experimentation* and *relocation*. Assisted by support groups, contentious communities experimented with nonviolent direct action in preliminary, small-scale, and local campaigns during the early 1940s. In the process of trial and error, they gained practical knowledge for adopting Gandhian forms of discourse, organizing, and action on American soil. They learned from expe-

rience how to reinvent the Gandhian repertoire to suit their needs and circumstances, how to interact with authorities and audiences, and how to respond to specific challenges and opportunities. The pioneers of this era performed the creative and courageous labor required for the relocation of protest methods from the Indian independence movement to the African American struggle for civil rights. Without their radical vision and groundbreaking efforts, transnational diffusion of a complex and unfamiliar contentious repertoire would not have been possible.

Transnational diffusion was not a linear process that proceeded smoothly and predictably from one stage to the next. Collective learning went through numerous twists and turns, ups and downs, as social conditions and human lives changed. After making significant progress in the late 1930s and early 1940s, contentious communities faced serious obstacles and setbacks from 1945 until 1955. They made *survival in the doldrums* possible by strengthening solidarity and deepening commitment to their vision of a Gandhian civil rights movement.[19] Although nonviolent direct action campaigns in the early-Cold War era did not receive much public attention, they "pre-figured" transformative events that would take place in the early 1960s. Behind the scenes, moreover, contentious community members were able to preserve and expand past knowledge by participating in workshops with other civil rights activists, sharing stories and experiences in relatively safe spaces, traveling to India to meet with Gandhi and Gandhians, and encountering Indian activists visiting the United States. They relied on the resources and assistance of support groups for each of these activities. All in all, the "fallow years" were crucial for enforcing bonds among American Gandhians and building a strong foundation for collective struggles in the future.

Unexpectedly, thirty-five years of collective learning paid off when the Montgomery bus boycott evolved into a Gandhian campaign and later into a Gandhian social movement. With the help of experienced translators and experimenters, Martin Luther King, Jr., and other civil rights activists rapidly gained the necessary knowledge for *full implementation* of the Gandhian repertoire, using it as guide for contentious discourse, contentious organizing, as well as contentious action. Collective learning continued throughout the heyday of the civil rights movement, between 1955 and 1965, shaping how the contentious communities on the frontlines of collective struggle reinvented and performed Gandhi's protest methods. Leaders and activists participated in countless mass meetings, workshops, strategy sessions, and discussions—before, during, and after major campaigns. They communicated their views on nonviolence internally as well as publicly, through speeches, interviews, appearances on television, and various writings. They recruited newcomers, created and revived organizations, and forged cross-cutting ties and extensive networks among contentious communities and allies. And they gradually became experts in preparing, mobilizing, waging, and sustain-

ing nonviolent direct action campaigns, including boycotts as well as diverse forms of noncooperation and civil disobedience.

The decline of collective learning and transnational diffusion seemed to come as suddenly as the heyday. While civil rights movement leaders and activists mastered nonviolent direct action in the early 1960s, they were less successful at *sustaining full implementation* of the constructive work component of the Gandhian repertoire. While some of them—especially SNCC activists—devoted their lives to empowering local people and constructing parallel institutions in the Deep South, they often lacked the resources and recognition they deserved. These courageous organizers supported the growth and welfare of many poor African Americans. But faced with constant threats and brutal violence, they eventually burned out, withdrew, gave up on nonviolence, or started promoting armed self-defense and Black Power. By the end of 1965, the Black Power repertoire began undermining the consensus on the Gandhian repertoire, precipitating the conclusion of transnational diffusion from the Indian independence movement to the American civil rights movement. Afterward, it was up to other contentious communities and social movements—in other times and places—to continue with transnational diffusion of the Gandhian repertoire.

My main argument is that collective learning was crucial at every step of the transnational diffusion process, from the very beginning until the very end. It was limited in the 1920s, but started growing due to translation efforts in the 1930s. It broke new ground with experimentation during the early 1940s, but then slowed down in the repressive climate of the late 1940s and early 1950s. It surprisingly led to full implementation of the Gandhian repertoire in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but ended when activists turned to Black Power and away from the Gandhian repertoire. Thus, collective learning was a driving force for the rise *and* fall of transnational diffusion between the two social movements.

APPROACH TO HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

How did collective learning shape transnational diffusion of the Gandhian repertoire from the Indian independence movement to the American civil rights movement? This central question guides not only my analysis, but also my approach to identifying and making sense of relevant historical evidence. Fortunately, the amount of high-quality work on both social movements and their contexts is impressive, ranging from primary sources and biographies to historical narratives and sociological scholarship. Available descriptions by activists and analyses by scholars offer ample material for my project. To explore the book's central question, I examine texts, situations, and events that are particularly significant for understanding the process of collective learning. I do not claim to be comprehensive in my

discussion of texts, situations, and events, but focus on capturing how participants in the African American liberation struggle perceived and responded to the Gandhian repertoire.

My general approach is both interpretive and critical. Instead of seeking abstract facts or objective explanations, I try to gain new insight into the ideas, perspectives, strategies, and actions of participating individuals and groups. At the same time, though, I acknowledge that everyone's view on what actually happened is partial and incomplete, including my own. For each major argument and illustration, therefore, I consult multiple sources and carefully consider their reliability. I also do not see my scholarship as disinterested or neutral. My values and political ideas clearly influence my choice of subject, way of thinking, and style of writing. I admire much of what participants in the Indian independence movement and American civil rights movement achieved, and suggest that we have much to learn from the Gandhian repertoire's journey between these social movements. Yet taking sides with these oppressed groups does not mean that I idealize or idolize them; I recognize and reflect on their strengths as well as flaws. The purpose of this project is not just to add to academic knowledge about the transnational roots of social movements, but also to contribute to practical wisdom that allows activists and movements throughout the world to learn from each other. More generally, I hope that my writing somehow enhances our understanding of oppression and contributes to meaningful social change, even if in small and invisible ways. Like Howard Zinn, I seek to write history and sociology "in such a way as to extend human sensibilities, not out of this book into other books, but into the going conflict over how people shall live, and whether they shall live."[20]

The historical evidence I use depends on the collective learning and contentious communities that prevailed during each period. When I discuss the Gandhian repertoire's invention in South Africa and development in India, for example, I primarily rely on Gandhi's own writings as well as the extensive secondary literature on Gandhi and the Indian independence movement. When I examine initial American exposure to the Gandhian repertoire, I refer to actual newspaper and journal articles to illustrate hyper-difference and over-likeness stereotypes. When I consider translation by African American theologians and religious pacifists, I consult autobiographies and essays by the translators themselves. When I explore experimentation by contentious communities, I highlight firsthand accounts of nonviolent direct action events by leading activists. When I write about survival in the doldrums, I draw especially on historiographies of the contentious communities. And when I deal with full implementation of the Gandhian repertoire during the civil rights movement, I study historical and sociological books on the subject as well as memoirs by participants and organizational documents. In other words, I first soak in all the pertinent material that I can find, before

attempting to re-create what happened and evaluating how this mattered for collective learning and transnational diffusion in that specific context.

To limit the book's length and maintain my focus, I do not pay much attention to the wider historical contexts of each period. This certainly does not mean that structural conditions in American society and the world were insignificant. The aftermath of World War I and economic growth of the early 1920s powerfully affected initial images of Gandhi in the United States, while the depression and New Deal policies of the 1930s undoubtedly influenced translation efforts during this era. The outbreak of World War II in Europe and subsequent participation by American soldiers were clearly important as backdrop for Gandhian experiments during the first half of the 1940s, whereas the emergence of the Cold War and McCarthyism definitely stifled civil rights activism in the ten years that followed. And the contrast between relative prosperity in mainstream society and continued racism suffered by African Americans obviously shaped how the civil rights movement evolved between 1955 and 1965. Instead of incorporating detailed discussions of historical forces in each chapter, though, I highlight how collective learning shaped the Gandhian repertoire and its transnational diffusion. Although this choice is far from ideal, I think it is justified by the quality and range of existing literature on the forty-five years covered by my case study. But I fully acknowledge that whatever insights my book might offer strongly rely on the work of many other scholars and authors.[21]

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Before addressing how transnational diffusion evolved, I must first clarify what traveled from India to the United States. Chapter two introduces the Gandhian repertoire, starting with the birth of "satyagraha" in South Africa, before exploring its development during the Indian independence movement. While Gandhi was clearly the author of satyagraha, the Gandhian repertoire emerged from collective struggles, especially from three national campaigns: the first targeted the oppressive Rowlatt Bills (1919–1920), the second involved noncooperation with British rule in India (1920–1922), and the third started with the famous Salt March (1930–1931). By the early 1930s, Indian activists were familiar with the basic steps, strategies, and dimensions of Gandhian nonviolent direct action. From the beginning, though, Gandhi also stressed the importance of nonviolence in everyday life. He founded several self-sufficient communes or "ashrams," where residents learned to implement the habits and practices associated with satyagraha. He also promoted the constructive program, which aimed at enhancing the welfare and autonomy of poor peasants in rural villages. According to Gandhi, personal and social transformation depended as much on nonviolent direct action to chal-