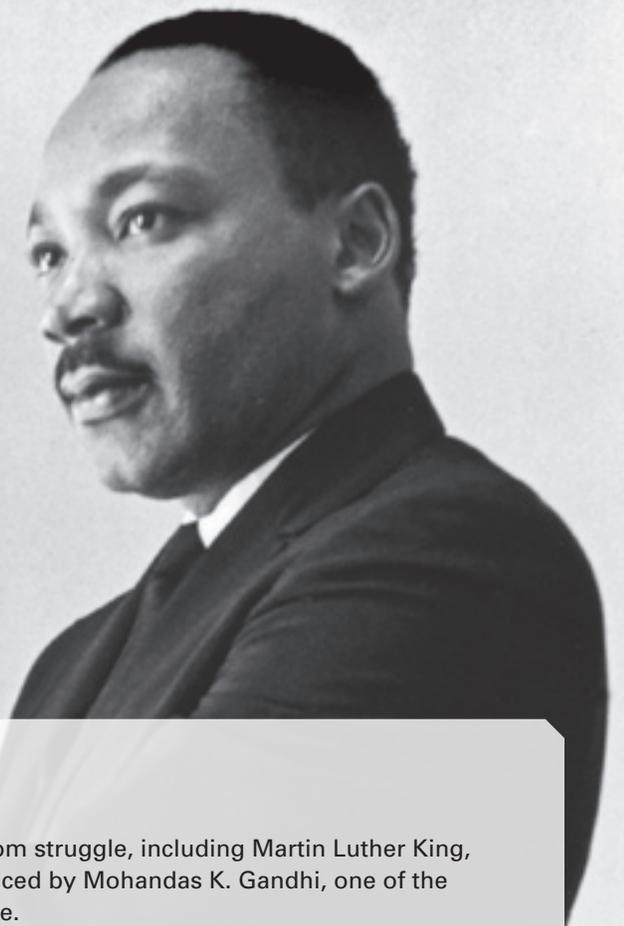
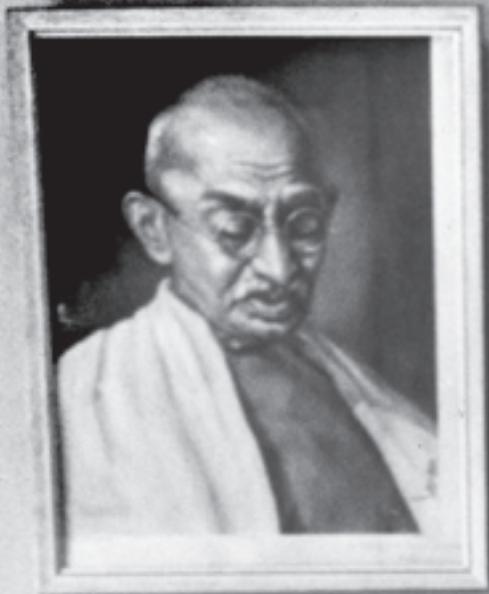


# Nonviolence in the Indian and African-American Freedom Struggles

By Ashni Mohnot



## Introduction

Many people and organizations involved in the African-American freedom struggle, including Martin Luther King, Jr., were influenced by the concept of nonviolence advocated and practiced by Mohandas K. Gandhi, one of the leaders of the Indian struggle for independence from British colonial rule.

In Part One of this unit, students will explore Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy and practice of 'satyagraha' ('truth-force' or 'love-force'), the application of nonviolence to fight injustice. In Part Two, students will compare Martin Luther King, Jr.'s ideas of nonviolence with those of Gandhi, an individual that greatly influenced him. Students will also learn of the different people and organizations that influenced King's conception of nonviolence and introduced the nonviolent direct action tactics used in the African-American freedom struggle.

In Part Three, students will explore what it means to carry on Gandhi's legacy of nonviolence in today's world by identifying people and organizations that embody nonviolent philosophy and developing tactics of nonviolent direct action they can use to combat injustice in the world.

**Essential Question:** How did nonviolent philosophy and practice influence the Indian and African-American freedom struggles?

**Sub Questions:**

- What were Gandhi’s core ideas on nonviolence?
- How was nonviolent philosophy put into practice in events of the Indian freedom struggle? What were some of the nonviolent direct action tactics used?
- What were King’s core ideas on nonviolence? What was the relationship between King and Gandhi’s ideas on nonviolence?
- Who were the people and organizations that influenced King’s ideas on nonviolence and introduced Gandhian nonviolent philosophy and practice into the African American freedom struggle of the 50s and 60s?
- How was nonviolent philosophy put into practice in events of the African-American freedom struggle? What were some of the nonviolent direct action tactics used?
- What were some of the similarities and differences between the use of nonviolent direct action in the Indian and African-American struggles?
- How are nonviolent direct action tactics adapted to suit particular situations and issues?
- What are the attributes, thoughts, and actions of a nonviolent person in today’s world?
- Who are some of the people and organizations engaged in Gandhian nonviolence today?
- What are some ways in which students can continue the tradition of nonviolent direct action in their communities?

*Note:* In this unit, we have chosen to use ‘non-violent direct action’ to describe the use of non-violent tactics to fight injustice because of the active nature of the term ‘direct action.’ Students may come across different terms in readings and other resources for the use of non-violence to fight injustice.

**Unit Parts:**

1. Gandhian Nonviolence in the Indian Freedom Struggle
2. Gandhian Nonviolence in the African-American Freedom Struggle
3. Continuing the Legacy of Nonviolence

Part One:

## Gandhian Nonviolence in the Indian Freedom Struggle

**Materials:**

- Current local and national newspapers
- 34 minute film: *India: Defying the Crown*, from the six part *A Force More Powerful* series. More information: <http://aforcemorepowerful.org/films/afmp/index.php>.

**Activities/Instructions:**

1. **Opening Activity:** Ask students to work with a partner to identify a recent violent event that took place in their community, in the nation or in the world. Students should be encouraged to draw from their own knowledge of current events. Teachers can circulate local or national newspapers as a resource.
2. **What would Gandhi say?** Students are given **Handout A: Quotes** containing quotes by Mohandas K. Gandhi. Working in pairs, students read through the quotes and choose two that express ‘what Gandhi would say’ in response to the recent violent event they identified. Students then make a short presentation to the class describing the event, sharing their chosen quotes, and illustrating how the quotes are an appropriate expression of what Gandhi might say in response to the event.
3. Students choose another quote in Handout A and write a short reflection applying it to their own lives. Some questions to consider: Do you agree or disagree with the view expressed in this quote? Why or why not? Describe how the quote applies to an aspect of your life.
4. Explain to students that Gandhi called the use of nonviolence to fight injustice ‘satyagraha,’ which means ‘truth-force’ or ‘love-force’. It can also be called nonviolent direct action. List on the board and ask students to write in their notebooks the following italicized steps taken (not necessarily in order) in a satyagraha or nonviolent direct action campaign. Explain the steps to your class using the guidelines below each step. Explain the steps to your class using the guidelines below.
  - 1) *Investigation*  
Determining the actual grievance or unjust situation
  - 2) *Negotiation and arbitration*  
Trying established channels to resolve the conflict
  - 3) *Preparation of group for direct action*  
Examples: Raising awareness, planning strategy, training
  - 4) *Agitation*  
Examples: Meetings, marches, demonstrations
  - 5) *Issuing an ultimatum*  
A final appeal to the opponent that offers widest scope for agreement, presents a constructive solution and details next steps if an agreement is not reached.

- 6) *Nonviolent direct action*  
Examples: Sit-ins, strikes, economic boycotts
- 7) *Non cooperation*  
Examples: Not complying with functions of government or public institutions
- 8) *Civil disobedience*  
Disobeying unjust laws central to the issue at hand
- 9) *Parallel government*  
Taking over government functions

Note: These steps have been adapted from Joan Bondurant's *Conquest of Violence, Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* and from the memo *The Meaning of the Sit-Ins* from Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), dated 1 August, 1960.

5. Students watch the film *India: Defying the Crown* on the 1930-31 Salt Satyagraha in India. Using the nine steps listed above as a guideline, students note relevant tactics used in the campaign. Pause the film periodically to allow students to take notes.

*Discussion Questions:*

- What were some of the nonviolent direct action tactics used in the Salt Satyagraha? Which of the steps would they fall under?
- What influence did Gandhi have on the masses of India? How did Gandhi's personal influence contribute to undermining the British Empire?
- Why did Gandhi accept Viceroy Lord Irwin's compromise? Do you think he should have accepted? What do you think might have happened if he refused to accept it?
- How did Gandhi's leadership and the participation of ordinary people both contribute to the success of the Salt Satyagraha? Were these factors equally significant in the campaign? Why or why not?

6. **Human Barometer:** Students read **Handout B: 1920-22 Non Co-operation Campaign** for information on the 1920-22 nationwide non-cooperation campaign Gandhi conducted and write a response to the prompt on the handout. Ask students: "Do you believe Gandhi called off the movement because of the violent Chauri Chaura incident?" Students imagine a line drawn along the entire front wall of the classroom or create a line using tape, with one end designated as 'do not believe' and the other as 'believe'. Students stand at the spot that aligns with whether they believe that Gandhi called off the movement or not. Students who are ambivalent can choose to stand in the middle or slightly skewed towards either end. Drawing on what they know about Gandhi's philosophy and the Indian struggle so far, students articulate why they agree, disagree, or are unsure of Gandhi's decision, based on their written response in the handout. When students return to their seats, inform them that Gandhi chose to call off the campaign.

*Discussion Questions:*

- Are you surprised at Gandhi's choice? Why or why not?
- In response to this incident, Gandhi said: "The tragedy of Chauri Chaura is really the index finger. It shows the way India may easily go if drastic precautions be not taken...Suspension of mass civil disobedience and subsidence of excitement are necessary for further progress, indeed indispensable to prevent further retrogression." Do you agree or disagree with his reasons? Why or why not?

*Note:* The quote above was taken from Gandhi's article 'The Crime of Chauri Chaura'. If you choose to assign the whole article for reading in your class, it is available in Dennis Dalton's *Mahatma Gandhi: Selected Political Writings* on pages 32-34.

## Part Two:

# Gandhian Nonviolence in the African-American Freedom Struggle

### Materials Needed:

- Projector to display the chart in **Handout D** on the classroom wall.
- 33 minute film: *Nashville: "We Were Warriors"* from the six part *A Force More Powerful* series. More information: <http://aforcemorepowerful.org/films/afmp/index.php>.
- For the extension activity: 1) Film: *Gandhi*, directed by Richard Attenborough (1982) and 2) Documentary series: *Eyes on the Prize* produced by Henry Hampton (1987).

### Activities/Instructions:

1. **Opening Activity:** Cut out the boxed quotes in **Handout C: King and Gandhi Quotes** and hand each student a strip of paper with either a Gandhi or a King quote. Students walk around the room and interact with each other till those with King quotes find those with Gandhi quotes that are similar in theme/content to their own, and vice versa. Partners read their quotes out loud to the class, explain the quotes in their own words, and discuss how they are similar in theme or content. After students have heard all the quotes, ask them if there were any King quotes that seemed to contradict any Gandhi quotes in their essence. Discuss any differences or dissimilarities that are noticed.
2. Use the chart in **Handout D: How Nonviolence Entered the African-American Freedom Struggle** to illustrate to students the various people and organizations that practiced nonviolent direct action in the African-American freedom struggle. Explain their role in introducing Gandhian nonviolent philosophy to the U.S. Some of the relationships that facilitated the transfer of Gandhian ideas are underlined in the text. More information on these people and organizations can be found in *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Encyclopedia* on the King Institute website.
3. Students watch the film *Nashville: "We Were Warriors"* on the Nashville student sit-in movement in 1960, thirty years after the Salt Satyagraha in India. Using the nine steps listed in Part One as a guide, students note relevant tactics used in the campaign. Pause the film periodically to allow students to take notes.  
*Discussion Questions:*
  - What were some of the nonviolent direct action tactics used in the Nashville student sit-ins? Which of the steps would they fall under?
  - Was King involved in the Nashville sit-ins? What role did ordinary people play in this campaign? Can a nonviolent movement occur without grassroots participation?
  - Imagine you are one of the students participating in the sit-ins. What Gandhi quote(s) (from the list in **Handout A: Quotes**) would you choose to describe the philosophy behind your campaign?
4. Students work with partners to identify at least two similarities and two differences in tactics used in the Salt Satyagraha and Nashville campaigns. Students participate in a class discussion comparing the two campaigns.
5. **Homework Activity:**  
Students write a response to the following prompt:  
*Drawing from the two films you have watched, compare and discuss the role of one of the following factors in the Salt Satyagraha and Nashville campaigns: media, laws/legal help, the tactic of jail-going, or top down leadership vs. grassroots participation.*
6. **Extension Activity:** The Salt Satyagraha and the Nashville sit-ins are only two of many nonviolent direct action campaigns in the Indian and African-American freedom struggles respectively. Using Richard Attenborough's film *Gandhi* and the *Eyes on the Prize* video series, similarly compare and contrast other events in these freedom struggles, e.g. the 1922 Non Co-operation movement (India), the 1942 Quit India movement (India), the Montgomery Bus Boycott (US), and the Selma to Montgomery March (US), among others. Compare the roles of Gandhi and King vs. the participation of ordinary citizens at the grassroots level. Please note that the Attenborough film is an enacted version of these events while *Eyes on the Prize* contains actual historical footage.

## Carrying on the Legacy of Nonviolence

### Activity / Instructions:

1. Students do a five minute free write on the following prompt:  
*Are Gandhi's ideas of nonviolence realistic in today's world?*  
Students are encouraged to think at local, national and global levels. Students share responses with the class. Using Gandhi's ideas as a starting place, discuss with students the qualities, thoughts, and actions of a nonviolent person in today's world. Make a list of the attributes your students come up with on butcher paper and tape this list to the classroom wall.
2. Students identify a person in their community or a local, national, or global organization that they believe is carrying on Gandhi's legacy of nonviolence. Students may need the teacher's help with this task. Those students who chose a community member as an example will interview their subject about how they incorporate nonviolent philosophy in their work and life. The 'Great Questions' list at the Story Corps' website (<http://www.storycorps.net/record-your-story/question-generator/list>) is a great resource for generating interview questions. Those students who chose an organization will visit its website to identify examples of nonviolent philosophy in its work. Students should consider core ideas and beliefs as well as tactics of nonviolent direct action informing the organization's work. The mission and programs sections of the websites are good places to start. Students write an essay on the following prompt:  
*How does the person you interviewed or the organization you researched carry on Gandhi's legacy of nonviolence? Use at least two Gandhi quotes to make your case.*  
*Options:* This activity can be tailored to the needs and interests of your classroom. If students choose local organizations to research, they can interview people working there. If students are interested in the continuation of Gandhi's legacy in his birth country, India, they can choose to research Indian organizations. Some examples are: Sahr Waru, Women's Action and Resource Unit (<http://www.sahrwaruindia.org/>), Manav Sadhna (<http://www.manavsadhna.org/>), Pratham (<http://www.pratham.org/>), Childline, India (<http://www.childlineindia.org.in/>), and C.R.Y. (Child Relief and You), India (<http://www.cry.org/index.html>), among many others. Inform students that Gandhi was concerned about many issues such as education, uplifting women, communal and religious harmony, rural industry development, sanitation, and economic equality.
3. Students work in small groups of 3-4 to choose an injustice at the local, national or global level. Encourage students to choose issues of personal relevance or concern to them. Using the nine steps outlined in Part One as a guideline, students develop and write out a sequence of actions that can be taken to address the injustice, as if planning a nonviolent direct action campaign.
4. **Extension Activity:** Interested students can work with their schools, communities or local organizations to put these steps they developed into practice against their chosen injustice. Refer students to the Albert Einstein's Institute's '198 Methods of Nonviolent Action' (<http://www.aeinstein.org/organizations103a.html>) to identify possible nonviolent actions they can take against injustice. Here are some additional suggestions for activities: lunch hour teach-ins, 'Day of nonviolence', and honoring community members who carry on Gandhi's legacy.

### References

- A Force More Powerful*. DVD. Directed by Steven York. PBS, 2000.  
The films from this series that are used in this unit are *India: Defying the Crown* and *Nashville: "We Were Warriors."*
- Bondurant, Joan. *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.
- Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). *The Meaning of the Sit-Ins*. 1 August 1960.

## Handout A: Quotes

*"It is a million times better to appear untrue before the world than to be untrue to ourselves."*

- Gandhi, 16 February 1922

*"When millions become untruthful and violent, it will mean self-destruction."*

- Gandhi, 28 May 1931

*"Slavery consists in submitting to an unjust order, not in suffering ourselves to be kicked. Real courage and humanity consist in not returning a kick for a kick."*

- Gandhi, 18 November 1909

*"In its negative form, [ahimsa/nonviolence] means not injuring any living being, whether by body or mind. I may not therefore hurt the person of any wrong-doer, or bear any ill will to him and so cause him mental suffering... In its positive form, ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of ahimsa, I must love my enemy. I must apply the same rule to the wrong-doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong-doing father or son. A man cannot then practice ahimsa and be a coward at the same time. The practice of ahimsa calls for the greatest courage."*

- Gandhi, October 1916

*"Nonviolence is therefore, in its active form, goodwill towards all life. It is pure Love. I read it in the Hindu scriptures, in the Bible, in the Koran."*

- Gandhi, 9 March 1922

*"I do not say that the possibility of nonviolence excludes the possibility of revenge when the policy is abandoned. But it does most emphatically exclude the possibility of future revenge after a successful termination of the struggle."*

- Gandhi, 9 March 1922

*"I am an uncompromising opponent of violent methods even to serve the noblest of causes. There is, therefore, really no meeting ground between the school of violence and myself."*

- Gandhi, 11 December 1924

*"For experience convinces me that permanent good can never be the outcome of untruth and violence."*

- Gandhi, 11 December 1924

*"I believe in the power of suffering to melt the stoniest heart."*

- Gandhi, 8 December 1921

*"For no power on earth can stop the onward march of a peaceful, determined and godly people."*

- Gandhi, 8 December 1921

## Handout B: 1920-22 Non Co-operation Campaign

The 1920 – 22 Non Co-operation movement was organized by Gandhi and adopted by the Indian National Congress to compel the British colonial government in India to grant ‘swaraj’ (self-government or self-rule) to Indians. It partially arose in response to the British government’s massacre of innocent Indians in Jallianwalla Bagh, Amritsar in April 1919. Initially, Gandhi promised ‘swaraj’ within a year of the onset of the movement which was supposed to be nonviolent. The program included boycott of foreign goods and British-made cloth, promotion of swadeshi (home-grown) goods and industries, surrender of posts and titles conferred by the British, boycott of elections, government run educational institutions, law courts, and government service, with the eventual goal of refusal to pay taxes. Many students left British schools to join national educational institutions that emerged at the time. Faced with a united Indian front for the first time, the British government was shaken.

In February 1922, an incident of mob violence occurred in the town of Chauri Chaura. After a crowd of protesters were troubled by the police, an angry mob set fire to the police station where the constables taking shelter inside were trapped and burnt alive. Twenty two policemen were killed. Gandhi was devastated at the violent turn the campaign had taken. While all the Congress leaders shared his dismay, many felt that the campaign that had reached such momentum should continue. Gandhi decided...

*What do you think Gandhi decided to do? Choose between the options below.*

- A) Continued the campaign*
- B) Called off the campaign.*

*Explain your choice. Use the quotes and background information to support your prediction.*

## Handout C: King and Gandhi Quotes

*"It is a million times better to appear untrue before the world than to be untrue to ourselves."*  
- Gandhi, 16 February 1922

*"It is no longer a choice, my friends, between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence. And the alternative... may well be a civilization plunged into the abyss of annihilation."*  
- King, 31 March 1968

*"When millions become untruthful and violent, it will mean self-destruction."*  
- Gandhi, 28 May 1931

*"We must all learn to live together as brothers or we will all perish together as fools. We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."*  
- King, 31 March 1968

*"Slavery consists in submitting to an unjust order, not in suffering ourselves to be kicked. Real courage and humanity consist in not returning a kick for a kick."*  
- Gandhi, 18 November 1909

*"And it is true that man throughout history has sought to achieve justice through violence. And we all know the danger of this method. It seems to create many more social problems than it solves. And it seems to me that in the struggle for justice that this method is ultimately futile."*  
- King, Justice Without Violence- 3 April 1957

*"In its negative form, [ahimsa/nonviolence] means not injuring any living being, whether by body or mind. I may not therefore hurt the person of any wrong-doer, or bear any ill will to him and so cause him mental suffering... In its positive form, ahimsa means the largest love, the greatest charity. If I am a follower of ahimsa, I must love my enemy. I must apply the same rule to the wrong-doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong-doing father or son. A man cannot then practice ahimsa and be a coward at the same time. The practice of ahimsa calls for the greatest courage."*  
- Gandhi, October 1916

*"More recently I have come to see the need for the method of nonviolence in international relations. Although I was not yet convinced of its efficacy in conflicts between nations, I felt that while war could never be a positive good, it could serve as a negative good by preventing the spread and growth of an evil force. War, horrible as it is, might be preferable to surrender to a totalitarian system. But now I believe that the potential destructiveness of modern weapons totally rules out the possibility of war ever again achieving a negative good."*  
- King, 1958

*"Nonviolence is therefore, in its active form, goodwill towards all life. It is pure Love. I read it in the Hindu scriptures, in the Bible, in the Koran."*  
- Gandhi, 9 March 1922

*"World peace through nonviolent means is neither absurd nor unattainable. All other methods have failed. Thus we must begin anew. Nonviolence is a good starting point."*  
- King, March 1965

*"I am an uncompromising opponent of violent methods even to serve the noblest of causes. There is, therefore, really no meeting ground between the school of violence and myself."*  
- Gandhi, 11 December 1924

*"One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal we seek, but that it is a means by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means... ultimately destructive means cannot bring about constructive ends."*  
- King, 24 December 1967

*"For experience convinces me that permanent good can never be the outcome of untruth and violence."*  
- Gandhi, 11 December 1924

*"Nonviolence is absolute commitment to the way of love. Love is not emotional bash; it is not empty sentimentalism. It is the active outpouring of one's whole being into the being of another."*  
- King, 1957

*"I do not say that the possibility of nonviolence excludes the possibility of revenge when the policy is abandoned. But it does most emphatically exclude the possibility of future revenge after a successful termination of the struggle."*  
- Gandhi, 9 March 1922

*"I am convinced that love is the most durable power in the world. It is not an expression of impractical idealism, but of practical realism...love is an absolute necessity for the survival of our civilization. To return hate for hate does nothing but intensify the existence of evil in the universe. Someone must have sense enough and religion enough to cut off the chain of hate and evil, and this can only be done through love."*  
- King, 1957

*"For no power on earth can stop the onward march of a peaceful, determined and godly people."*  
- Gandhi, 8 December 1921

*"There are two types of laws: there are just laws and there are unjust laws... What is the difference between the two? An unjust law is a man-made code that is out of harmony with the moral law."*  
- King, 1963

*"I believe in the power of suffering to melt the stoniest heart."*  
- Gandhi, 8 December 1921

*"The reason I can't follow the old eye-for-an-eye philosophy is that it ends up leaving everyone blind."*  
- King, 3 May 1963

# Handout D: How Nonviolence Entered the African-American Freedom Struggle

## ORGANIZATIONS INFLUENCED BY GANDHIAN NONVIOLENCE

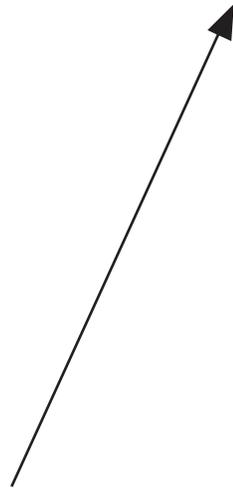
### Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR)

- Started by Pacifist Christians in Europe; U.S. chapter founded in 1915
- During WW1, FOR supported conscientious objectors; after the war, FOR focused on labor rights and racism
- Parent organization for CORE; the two organizations shared many members
- FOR staffers, like Glenn Smiley, helped King understand nonviolence.



### Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)

- Founded 1942; influenced by Gandhi
- Pioneered use of nonviolent direct action in the American civil rights struggle by organizing integration sit-ins in Chicago in the 1940s
- CORE activists provided advice and support to King on nonviolent direct action in the Montgomery Bus Boycott



## PEOPLE WHO VISITED INDIA (YEAR)

### Howard Thurman (1935)

- Met King when he was a doctoral student
- King read his work *Jesus and the Disinherited* which advocates nonviolent responses to oppression

### Benjamin Mays (1936)

- Met King when he was at Morehouse
- King's "spiritual mentor" until his death

### William Stuart Nelson (1946)

- Several trips; marched with Gandhi
- Internationally acclaimed expert on nonviolence
- Corresponded regularly with King

### Bayard Rustin (1948)

- 7 weeks studying Gandhian philosophy of nonviolence
- Advised King on nonviolent direct action during Montgomery bus boycott
- Member of FOR and Co-founder of CORE

### Mordecai Johnson (1949-50)

- First Afr-Am president of Howard University
- In 1950, King was so inspired by Johnson's talk on his trip and on Gandhi that he bought several books on Gandhi

### James Lawson (1952 – 56)

- Missionary in India; studied Gandhian nonviolence
- King, who he met in early '57, urged him to teach nonviolence
- FOR veteran; advisor to SNCC and SCLC; led nonviolent tactics and philosophy workshops

### Martin Luther King, Jr. (1959)

- One of the major leaders of the movement
- Deeply influenced by Gandhi; advocated and practiced nonviolence in all campaigns of the movement