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RESISTANCE TO WHITE SUPREMACY

Nonviolence in the U.S. South and South Africa

During the 1950s and early 1960s, nonviolent protesters challenged legalized racial segregation and discrimination in the only two places on earth where such blatant manifestations of white supremacy could be found—the southern United States and the Union of South Africa. Comparing these movements gives us a better perspective on the recent history of black liberation struggles in the two societies.

The African National Congress's (ANC) "Campaign of Defiance Against Unjust Laws" in 1952 resulted in the arrest of approximately eight thousand blacks (including Indians and Coloreds as well as Africans) and a handful of whites for planned acts of civil disobedience against recently enacted apartheid legislation. The campaign did not make the government alter its course, and it was called off early in 1953 after riots broke out in the wake of nonviolent actions in the Eastern Cape. Repressive legislation classifying deliberate transgression of the law for political purposes a serious crime made the ANC wary of attempting another nationwide campaign of civil disobedience, but it could not prevent the congress and other black or nonracial organizations from protesting nonviolently in other ways. School boycotts, bus boycotts, noncooperation with the program of removing blacks to new townships, and mass marches to protest efforts to force black African women to carry passes* were among the actions of the mid-to-late fifties that the ANC led or supported. In 1960, the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC)—a militant

faction that had recently seceded from the ANC launched a campaign of civil disobedience against the pass laws that ended with the massacre of sixty-nine unarmed protesters at Sharpeville. Chief Albert Lutuli, president-general of the ANC, showed his sympathy for the Sharpeville victims by publicly burning his own pass, and the one-day stay-at-home that the congress called to register its solidarity with the PAC was well supported. But the government quickly suppressed all public protest, and both the ANC and the PAC were banned and driven underground. After Sharpeville, nonviolent direct action no longer seemed a viable option for the liberation movement, and in 1961 some ANC leaders, in cooperation with the South African Communist party, inaugurated the era of armed struggle by establishing a separate organization to carry on acts of sabotage against hard targets.

The nonviolent phase of the American civil rights movement began with the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955–56 and culminated in the great Mississippi and Birmingham and Selma, Alabama, campaigns of 1963–65. Viewed narrowly as an attack on legalized segregation and disfranchisement in the southern states, the movement was remarkably successful. It led to the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, which effectively outlawed separatist "Jim Crow" laws and assured southern blacks access to the ballot box. It becomes immediately apparent therefore that a fundamental difference between the two movements is that one was successful in achieving its immediate objectives while the other was a conspicuous failure.

Fully explaining success or failure obviously

* Black African men were already required to do so.

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requires an assessment of the context—what each movement was up against and what outside help it could expect in its struggle. But before we look at such circumstances, we have to analyze the movements themselves in an effort to compare the resources that each brought to the confrontation with white power. Furthermore, we should not ignore the possibility that the two movements may have influenced each other.

Surprisingly, there is little evidence that the two nonviolent movements influenced each other in a significant way. Before World War II, African-American influence on black South African ideologies and movements had been substantial, but the use of Black America as inspiration appears to have tapered off during the postwar years. Before the triumph of the white Nationalists in 1948, black American interest in South Africa had been limited; the African Methodist Episcopal Church had provided the most important connection when it had established itself in South Africa at the turn of the century. For most African Americans Africa meant West Africa, but awareness of the white-dominated nation at the tip of the continent increased rapidly after the rise of apartheid showed that South Africa was out of step with a world that seemed at last to be moving toward an acceptance of the principle of racial equality.

Nevertheless, the Defiance Campaign does not seem to have made a great impression on African-Americans. The Council on African Affairs, a group of black radicals who sought to influence American opinion on behalf of decolonization, circulated a petition supporting the campaign that garnered 3,800 signatures—many of which came from white radicals—and \$835 in donations; but this appears to be the most significant expression of African-American concern. The campaign was also mentioned in passing in a November 1952 petition to the United Nations on African issues sponsored by twenty-five organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), but the Association's organ, the *Crisis*, which commented frequently in 1952 and 1953 on the rise of apartheid, did not cover the campaign

against it. By 1952 black Americans were beginning to notice African developments, especially the first stirring of independence movements in West Africa, but interest was far less intense than it became a few years later.

Black Americans might have been more aroused by the Defiance Campaign if it had not occurred at a time when interest in direct action as a form of protest in the United States was at a low ebb. Nonviolence had been placed on the agenda of civil rights activity during and immediately after World War II with A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington movement of 1941–45 and the founding and first sit-ins of the Committee on Racial Equality (CORE); but by 1952 McCarthyism and the conservative mood in the country had made established black leaders reluctant to endorse actions that opponents of civil rights could describe as subversive; they feared a backlash that would weaken popular support for a legalistic and gradualist reform strategy that was beginning to bear fruit, especially in court decisions affirming the basic constitutional rights of African Americans. When interest in nonviolence revived after the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955–56, scarcely anyone seems to have thought to invoke the South African precedent.

Montgomery, in turn, does not appear to have inspired the dramatic bus boycott that took place in the Johannesburg township of Alexandria in 1957. Martin Luther King reacted to the Alexandria boycott by expressing his admiration for protesters who had to walk ten or fifteen miles, noting that those in Montgomery had often been driven to work, but he did not claim any connection between the two movements. The Alexandria boycott was a desperate act of resistance to a fare increase, not a protest against segregation or denial of civil rights, and replicated a similar action in the same township during World War II. At the time when Martin Luther King and the American nonviolent movement were first attracting the attention of the world, the faith of black South Africans in passive resistance was wearing thin. When direct action on a broad front commenced in the United States in 1960 and 1961, the ANC was rejecting nonviolence in favor of armed struggle.

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The movements were connected historically in one sense, however. Both were inspired to some extent by the same prototype—Mahatma Gandhi's use of militant nonviolence in the struggle for Indian independence. King, of course, made much of the Gandhian example and tried to apply the spirit and discipline of *Satyagraha* to nonviolent protests in the American South. The statements of purpose issued by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the early 1960s were permeated with Gandhian rhetoric and philosophy. Gandhi was less often invoked by the Defiance Campaigners, but their methods, especially their public announcements of where, when, and by whom laws would be disobeyed and their refusal to make bail in an effort to "fill the jails," could have been learned from a Gandhian textbook.

If both movements drew inspiration from the great Indian apostle of nonviolence, they received the message by different routes. Gandhism came to King and the American movement by way of a radical pacifism that derived mostly from the left wing of the Protestant "social gospel" tradition. King's nonviolent antecedents and mentors were from the Christian pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation and its anti-segregationist offshoot, CORE. Mainly the creation of white Christian radicals such as the Rev. A.J. Muste, this intellectual and spiritual tradition lacked deep roots in the black community, although it did have such notable black adherents as Bayard Rustin and James Farmer. Nevertheless, there was a long history of African-American admiration for Gandhi as a brown man who was fighting for the freedom of his people from white or European oppression. Black newspapers sometimes expressed the hope that a Negro Gandhi might appear to lead a nonviolent movement against racial oppression in the United States.

Gandhi cast an even longer shadow in South Africa, because he had first experimented with *Satyagraha* as the leader of the South African Indian community's struggle for rights as British subjects in the period between 1906 and 1914. The South African Native National

Congress, founded in 1912 and later renamed the African National Congress, had been so impressed with Gandhi's mobilization of Indians for nonviolent resistance that it included "passive action" as one of the methods it proposed to use in its struggle for African citizenship rights. In 1919, the congress actually engaged in "passive action" on the Witwatersrand in an unsuccessful attempt to render the pass laws unenforceable through a mass refusal to obey them. But for the next thirty years this potential weapon lay rusting in the ANC's arsenal as the politics of passing resolutions and petitioning the government prevailed. A politically aroused segment of the Indian minority revived the Gandhian mode of protest in 1946 and 1947 when, with the encouragement of Gandhi and the newly independent Indian government, it engaged in "passive resistance" against new legislation restricting Indian residential and trading rights. With the triumph of the Nationalists in 1948 and the coming of apartheid, the Indian passive resisters gave up their separate struggle and allied themselves with the ANC. The Defiance Campaign itself was in fact jointly sponsored by the ANC and the South African Indian Congress, and several veterans of earlier Indian passive resistance struggles played conspicuous roles teaching Gandhian nonviolent techniques, as well as helping to plan the campaign and participating in its actions.

In neither case, however, does a tracing of the Gandhian legacy provide a full picture of the ideological origins of mass nonviolent action. Mass pressure tactics do not require a specifically Gandhian rationale; they may derive simply from a sense that less militant tactics have proved fruitless. The decision to engage in nonviolent direct action usually constitutes a major escalation of resistance, a shift from legally authorized protest by an elite to initiatives that are more threatening and potentially violence-provoking because they involve bringing masses of aggrieved people into the streets. A philosophical or religious commitment to nonviolence is not necessary to a choice of boycotts and civil disobedience as vehicles of resistance. In fact, groups committed ultimately to a revolutionary overthrow of

the existing order often embrace nonviolent action as a means of raising consciousness and encouraging social polarization. In the United States, the Communist party and its allies had engaged in a variety of nonviolent protests against racial discrimination during the 1930s, including the first mass march on Washington.

Communists were excluded from A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington movement of 1941, but Randolph was clearly influenced by their example in his effort to create an all-black movement for equal rights that would go beyond the customary legalistic methods of the NAACP and use mass action to pressure the government. As a trade unionist, he was also aware of the sit-down strike and other examples of labor militancy that owed nothing to Christianity or pacifism. Neither religious nor a pacifist, he found Gandhi's campaigns attractive because they showed what could be achieved by "nonviolent goodwill direct action." He represented a way of thinking that could endorse everything Martin Luther King, Jr. was doing without accepting his nonviolent theology. For Randolph and those in the movement who shared his views, it was sufficient that nonviolent direct action was a practical means for African Americans to improve their position in society—while violent resistance, however defensible it might be in the abstract, was not in their view a viable option for a racial minority. King himself not only tolerated this viewpoint in his associates but at times came close to embracing it himself, at least to the extent that he came to realize that the effectiveness of nonviolence resulted more from its ability to coerce the oppressor than from any appeal it made to conscience.

In South Africa, non-Gandhian pressures for nonviolent mass action came during the 1940s from the young rebels in the ANC Youth League who had grown impatient with the older generation's willingness to work within the system of black "representation" established by the pre-apartheid white supremacist governments of Prime Ministers J.B.M. Hertzog and Jan Smuts. The Youth Leaguers, among whom were Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and Oliver Tambo, favored a boycott of

segregated political institutions and experimentation with confrontational methods of protest. In 1949, the Youth Leaguers won control of the ANC, and the Program of Action that was subsequently enacted called for "immediate and active boycott, strike, civil disobedience, non-cooperation. . . ." The spirit of the Youth League and of the Defiance Campaign was not based on a belief in the power of love to convert enemies into friends or in the higher morality of nonviolence. Indeed, the very use of the term "defiance" suggests that anger more than *agape* was the emotion being called forth. The campaign, as its chief planner, Walter Sisulu, and its tactical leader, Volunteer-in-Chief Nelson Mandela, conceived it, was designed to enable an unarmed and impoverished majority to carry on its struggle against the tyrannical rule of an armed minority. If nonviolent methods failed, there was no firm ideological barrier to prevent the Young Turks of the ANC from embracing other means of struggle.

But there were still influential older figures in the congress who were nonviolent in principle. Among them was Chief Albert Lutuli, whose fervent Methodist Christianity predisposed him against taking up arms and sustained his hopes that oppressors could be redeemed by the sufferings of the oppressed. "The road to freedom is via the cross" was the memorable last line of the statement he made after the government had dismissed him from his chieftainship because he would not resign from the ANC. The fact that the idealistic Lutuli was elected president-general of the ANC in 1952 showed that the ANC of the 1950s, like the southern civil rights movement of the 1960s, brought together those who regarded nonviolence simply as a tactic and those who viewed it as an ethic.

Besides sharing the ideological ambiguity that seems to be inescapable when nonviolence becomes coercive mass action, the two movements tended to view the relationship of nonviolence to "normal" democratic politics in similar ways. Some forms of nonviolence are difficult to reconcile with democratic theory because they frankly seek to override decisions made by a properly constituted majority. But in

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both of these instances the protesters were denied the right to vote and were therefore able to argue that extraordinary means of exerting pressure were justified by their lack of access to other forms of political expression. One-person-one-vote was a major goal of both movements, and the attainment of it would presumably reduce, if not eliminate entirely, the need for nonviolent mass action, especially in South Africa, where blacks would then constitute a majority of the electorate. As Chief Lutuli put it in 1952, "Non-Violent Passive Resistance" is "a most legitimate and humane political pressure technique for a people denied all effective forms of constitutional striving." Speaking at the Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington in 1957, King made a litany of the phrase "Give us the ballot," and promised that if it were done "we will no longer have to worry the federal government about our basic rights. . . . We will no longer plead—we will write the proper laws on the books."

In addition to such similarities of ideology and ethos, the leadership of the two movements came from a similarly situated social group—what might be described as the educated elite of a subordinate color caste. Studies of the social composition of the ANC through the 1950s have shown that the organization was dominated by members of "an African bourgeoisie" or "petty bourgeoisie" that was characterized mainly by educational and professional achievements. Examinations of the origins of the southern civil rights movement have found the spur for militant action in the rise in southern cities and towns of what Steven Millner calls "a relatively independent black professional class."

It was a special product of legalized racial segregation that such elites were not—as is often the case under less stringent forms of ethnic or colonial domination—subject to alienation from their communities by a system that allows a favored few to move into the lower ranks of the governing institutions established by the dominant group. It might be taken as axiomatic that where race *per se* is the main line of division in a society, as it obviously was in South Africa and the American South, resistance will take the form

of a cross-class movement led by members of the educated middle class. This does not mean, however, that less-educated and working-class blacks made little contribution to these movements. It was, of course, the plain folk who sustained the boycotts, often at great personal sacrifice. The point is that these freedom struggles were, and had to be, movements of peoples or communities rather than of social classes.

These similarities in the ideological and social character of the two movements did not preclude significant differences, to say nothing as yet of the obvious contrast of situations. The most significant structural difference between the Defiance Campaign and the nonviolent civil rights movement was that the latter grew out of a number of local struggles and was sustained by strong organizations at the community level, whereas the former was for the most part a centrally planned, from-the-top-down operation. The one area where the Defiance Campaign achieved something like mass involvement was in the cities of the Eastern Cape, where, as historian Tom Lodge has shown, it was able to build on the firm base provided by a recent history of local mobilization and protest. But nothing like the network of "movement centers" that was the source of the American movement existed to buttress nonviolent campaigns in South Africa. Where such centers existed in South Africa they were usually tied to labor organizations and trade unions; in the United States it was the black churches and black colleges that did the most to sustain local activism. Since every southern city had relatively prosperous black churches and many had some kind of higher educational facility for blacks, such an institutional matrix for community protest was widely available, whereas black unions were well established in only a few places in South Africa. Furthermore, South African black townships of the 1950s were quite different from southern black urban communities. Their populations, which included a large number of transients and illegal residents, were less socially stable and significantly poorer; there were fewer well-established cultural or religious institutions; there was a proportionately much smaller

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middle class and relatively little black entrepreneurship or business activity. Efforts were indeed made to establish community associations, but they had much less success than comparable efforts in Montgomery or Birmingham.

Even if the forces opposing each movement had been identical in strength and determination—which, of course, they were not—there seems little doubt that a centralized movement like the South African one would have been easier to repress. Even before the ANC was outlawed, the government was able to hobble it severely by banning or arresting its top leaders. In the American South in the 1950s, the NAACP was rendered ineffectual by state legal harassment that in some states amounted to an outright ban. It was partly to fill the vacuum created by persecution of the NAACP that independent local movements developed. These grassroots movements were more difficult to suppress by state action, and they flourished in places where the NAACP could no longer show itself. If such strong local communities and institutions had existed in South Africa, the government might have faced a variety of local actions that would have been much more difficult to counter than the centrally directed campaign of the ANC in 1952. (This in fact is what happened in the 1980s with the rise of the United Democratic Front, which was a federation of the community organizations that had sprung up in the 1970s and early 1980s.) When, during the mid-fifties, the congress attempted to assume the leadership of local struggles over housing or transportation, it fell short of effectively adjusting its organizational style to accommodate grass-roots initiatives. The ANC supported the Alexandria Bus Boycott of 1957 and helped it roll back a fare increase, but it failed to turn this spontaneous expression of community grievance into a durable township organization committed to broader objectives. In the later stages of the civil rights movement, SCLC was sometimes accused of coopting local campaigns and undercutting local initiatives. But its great successes in Birmingham and Selma were the product of a skillful coordination of local, regional, and national perspectives.

SCLC's genius was that it could channel community energies to make them serve the cause of national civil rights reform.

Besides differing structurally, the two campaigns also diverged in the less tangible realm of culture and ethos. As the special prominence of ministers and churches in the American movement strongly suggests, religious belief directly inspired the African-American protesters to an extent that could not be paralleled in South Africa. The charisma of King as prophet-saint of the movement was instrumental in making it a moral and religious crusade rather than merely the self-interested action of a social group. The opposition of large numbers of black churches and church leaders to nonviolent direct action belies any notion that African-American Christianity necessarily sanctions militant protest, but King's creative interpretation and application of the gospel showed that it had the capacity to do so. The South African struggle, unlike the American, did not produce a Gandhi-like figure who could inspire the masses by persuading them that nonviolent protest was God's will. There was a reservoir of religious belief that might have been tapped—it surfaced at times in local actions that featured prayer and hymn-singing. But the ANC leadership was composed of highly educated men whose religious beliefs had little connection with those of the masses of Africans, especially those who were members of the independent "Zionist" churches that served a large proportion of urbanized Africans. The rival Pan-Africanist Congress formed in 1959 made a greater effort to draw the independent churches into the struggle, but it did not have time to accomplish much before it was banned in 1960. What King did that no South African leader was able to do was to weave together the black folk Christianity that was his own cultural heritage with the Gandhian conception of nonviolent resistance to empower a cause that both inspired its followers and disarmed the opposition of many whites. Hence the nonviolence of the American movement had a soul-stirring quality, both for its practitioners and for many white observers, that the more obviously conditional and pragmatic civil disobedience of the Defiance Campaign failed to project. Of course this resonance was in part the result of the extensive

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and usually sympathetic way that the national press covered the American movement and, by the sixties, of its exposure on national television. The Defiance Campaign by contrast received relatively little attention from the white South African press and was not widely noticed abroad (which is one reason why it did not serve as a model for African-American passive resisters).

The effects of contrasting media treatment suggest that the differences in the nature of the movements may tell us less about why they ultimately succeeded or failed than we are likely to learn from examining their external circumstances—what they were up against. The American protesters faced a divided and uncertain governmental opposition. The most important division among whites that the movement was able to exploit was between northerners who lacked a regional commitment to legalized segregation and southerners who believed that Jim Crow was central to their way of life. The success of the movement stemmed ultimately from its ability to get the federal government on its side and to utilize the U.S. Constitution against the outmoded states' rights philosophy of the southern segregationists. When King proclaimed that "civil disobedience to local laws is civil obedience to national laws," he exploited a tactical advantage the South African resisters did not possess; for they had no alternative to a direct confrontation with centralized state power. South African black protest leaders had long tried to drive a wedge between British imperial and South African settler regimes, but the withdrawal of British power beginning as early as 1906 and virtually complete by the 1930s had rendered such hopes illusory. For all practical purposes, South African whites in the 1950s were monolithic in their defense of white domination. In the United States it was of course federal intervention to overrule state practices of segregation and disfranchisement in the southern states that brought an end to Jim Crow. In South Africa there was no such power to which protesters could appeal.

The geopolitical context of the cold war and decolonization of Africa and Asia also cut in opposite ways, ultimately helping the Ameri-

can movement and hindering the South African. In the United States, the competition with the Soviet Union for the "hearts and minds" of Asians and Africans, especially by the early sixties, when several African nations achieved independence, made legalized segregation a serious international liability for the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations. As reasons of state were added to other factors working against Jim Crow, the federal government became more susceptible to pressures from the civil rights movement. In South Africa, on the other hand, fears of communist subversion within the country and of Soviet influence in the newly independent African states of southern and central Africa panicked the white political leadership into pressing ahead with more radical schemes for the "separate development" and political repression of the black majority. Underlying these contrary assessments of the dangers of black insurgency was the basic difference between a white majority facing a demand for the inclusion of a minority and a white minority conscious that the extension of democratic rights would empower a black majority.

It would be cynical, however, to see nothing in the positive responses of many white Americans to the civil rights movement except self-interested calculations. White America has not been of one mind historically on the place of blacks in the republic. In the north, at least, there was an alternative or oppositional tradition in white racial thought, originating in the antislavery movement, that advocated the public equality of the races and offered a standing challenge—although one that was only intermittently influential—to the deeply rooted white supremacist tradition that was a legacy of African-American slavery. At times, as during Reconstruction and in the mid-1960s, racial liberals became ideologically dominant and were in a position to respond to black demands for civil and political equality with major reforms. (But, being liberals, they had great difficulty in addressing the problem of economic inequality.) In South Africa, by contrast, there was no white liberal tradition that went beyond a benevolent paternalism and no deep reservoir of theoretically color-blind

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attitudes toward democratic reform that could be appealed to. Nelson Mandela caught this difference when asked by an American journalist in one of his rare prison interviews during the 1980s why he had not followed the example of Martin Luther King and remained nonviolent: "Mr. Mandela said that conditions in South Africa are 'totally different' from conditions in the United States in the 1960s. In the United States, he said, democracy was deeply entrenched, and people struggling then had access to institutions that protected human rights. The white community in the United States was more liberal than whites in South Africa, and public authorities were restrained by law." (*Washington Times*, August 22, 1985)

Was it therefore inevitable that a nonviolent movement for basic civil rights would succeed in the United States and fail in South Africa? As probable as these outcomes might seem to be, one can imagine things turning out differently. It is arguable that without the astute and inspirational leadership provided by King and others, the struggle for black civil and political equality would have taken much longer. Any claim that the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 were inevitable obscures the creative achievements of the liberation movement. For South Africa the argument has been made that the 1961 decision of the ANC to sanction some forms of violence was a mistake; the full potential of nonviolent resistance had not been exhausted, and the sabotage campaign that resulted from the decision was a disastrous failure that devastated the organization. To support this view, one could point, as Tom Lodge has done, to the relative success of the last mass nonviolent action of the 1960s—the three-day stay-at-home of 1961. Lodge has also noted that the one ANC-related organization that was not banned shortly after Sharpeville—the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU)—had a capability for politically motivated strikes that was never fully exploited. Clearly the sabotage campaign that became the center of resistance activity in the 1960s posed little threat to white domination and turned out very badly for the ANC because it exposed its top leadership to arrest and

imprisonment. If nonviolence had its inherent limitations as a resistance strategy under the conditions that prevailed in South Africa, it would be hard to establish from its record of achievement in the 1960s and 1970s that the resort to violence, however justifiable in the abstract, represented a more effective method of struggle. Of course the key historical actors, like Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and Oliver Tambo, did not have the benefit of historical hindsight and can scarcely be condemned for trying something different when nonviolent resistance had obviously failed to move the regime and had become more and more difficult to undertake.

Although Martin Luther King, Jr. had shown some awareness of the South African campaigns of the mid-nineteen fifties, he first indicated a deep interest in South African developments in 1959 when he wrote to Chief Lutuli to express his admiration for him and to send him a copy of *Stride Toward Freedom*. The Sharpeville massacre in 1960 and the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Lutuli in 1961 for his espousal of nonviolent resistance heightened King's interest and prompted him to speak out vigorously against apartheid. In a 1962 address to the NAACP national convention, King said, "If I lived in South Africa today, I would join Chief Lithuli [sic] as he says to his people, 'Break this law. Don't take the unjust pass system where you must have passes. Take them and tear them up and throw them away.'"

King made his fullest statement about South Africa in a speech given in London, England, on December 7, 1964, as he was en route to receive his own Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo.

In our struggle for freedom and justice in the U.S., which has also been so long and arduous, we feel a powerful sense of identification with those in the far more deadly struggle for freedom in South Africa. We know how Africans there, and their friends of other races, strove for half a century to win their freedom by nonviolent methods, and we know how this non-violence was met by increasing violence from the state, increasing repression, culminating in the shootings of Sharpeville and all that has happened since . . . even in Mississippi we can organize to

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register Negro voters, we can speak to the press, we can in short organize people in non-violent action. But in South Africa even the mildest form of non-violent resistance meets with years of punishment, and leaders over many years have been silenced and imprisoned. We can understand how in that situation people felt so desperate that they turned to other methods, such as sabotage.*

Like Mandela two decades later, King was sensitive to differences between the two contexts that would make nonviolence more feasible in the American case. But in the same speech he indicated a way that nonviolence could be brought to bear against apartheid. "Our responsibility presents us with a unique opportunity," he said. "We can join in the one form of non-violent *action* that could bring freedom and justice to South Africa; the action which African leaders have appealed for in a massive movement for economic sanctions." Almost exactly one year after his London speech, on December 10, 1965, King made another strong appeal for sanctions in an address on behalf of the American Committee on Africa. "The international potential of non-violence has never been employed," he said. "Non-violence has been practiced within national borders in India, the U.S. and in regions of Africa with spectacular success. The time has come fully to utilize non-violence through a massive international boycott. . . ."*

King, who gave vigorous support to the sanctions movement for the remaining three years of his life, did not of course live to see the anti-apartheid movement come to the verge of success without unleashing the violent revolution that so many observers had believed would be necessary for the overthrow of white supremacy. It is now possible to argue that the breakthrough that came with the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC was as much, if not more, the result of international non-violence as the fruit of a strategy of violent resistance inaugurated by the congress in the 1960s. The apartheid regime was not in fact decisively defeated on the

battlefield or driven from power by a domestic insurrection. The armed struggle of the ANC served to remind the world that blacks were determined to be liberated from white oppression, but it was the ethical disapproval of much of humanity that destroyed the morale of South Africa's ruling whites, and the increasingly effective economic sanctions that persuaded its business community and those in the government whom they influenced that apartheid had no future. Of course those sanctions would undoubtedly have been lighter and the disapprobation less sharp if the domestic resistance of the 1980s had not provoked the government into a final desperate effort to suppress dissent by force. But that domestic resistance was primarily a matter of withdrawing cooperation from the regime. Not entirely nonviolent, it was predominantly so—a great domestic boycott to parallel the international one. The spirit of Gandhi, long since repudiated by the ANC in exile, was alive and well in the United Democratic Front, the domestic movement that rallied behind the ANC's goal of a nonracial democratic South Africa. In 1989, with the emergence of the Mass Democratic Movement, South Africa once again saw massive nonviolent actions against segregation, led by clergymen like Allen Boesak and Desmond Tutu—both of whom had been greatly influenced by King and the church-based American freedom struggle—and featuring the singing of African-American freedom songs. Nonviolence may not have been sufficient to liberate South Africa, but it is no longer possible to deny that it has played a major role in bringing that nation to the brink of democracy. It would not be beyond the power of historical analogy to describe the successful anti-apartheid movement as Birmingham and Selma on a world scale.

During the negotiations leading to democratic elections in South Africa, nonviolent direct action, or the threat of it, played a significant role in keeping the process headed in the right direction. The ability to mobilize large numbers of Africans for strikes and mass demonstrations was the ANC's main source of leverage whenever it was faced with foot dragging or intransigence from the other side of the bargaining table. But political violence

* Both speeches are to be found in the Library and Archives of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Change in Atlanta, Ga.

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among blacks, instigated in many cases by diehard elements within the police and the government, has bedeviled the transition from apartheid to democracy and is not likely to end with the ANC's coming to power. Mandela has appealed over and over again for an end to the killing, making an effort to conciliate black opponents like Gatsha Buthelezi and his Inkatha movement and to restrain his own militant supporters, some of whom have found it difficult to make the transition from armed struggle to democratic politics. But the persistence of the carnage has led him to rely increasingly on the army to keep order.

There is a rough analogy here to the problem of black-on-black violence that has increasingly drawn the anguished attention of African-American leaders. Missing of course is the overtly political aspect of the South African violence. Sadly similar, however, has been the failure of appeals to conscience in the nonviolent tradition, such as those that have been made so often by the Rev. Jesse Jackson. The long-term solution to the problem of gang

warfare and black-on-black crime has been clear enough—the improvement of ghetto education and opportunities so that poor young blacks can look forward to something better than unemployment, crime, and imprisonment. But in the short run, the need for more and better policing has become evident to many blacks. In both the United States and South Africa, the glorious history of nonviolent resistance to white supremacy seems, on the surface at least, to be sadly irrelevant to the problem of reducing intragroup violence and alleviating the underlying poverty and despair that often cause it. But perhaps some of the spirit, if not the precise methods, of the earlier freedom struggles can inspire greater and more creative efforts to achieve the goal to which they were dedicated—societies that are both nonracist and nonviolent. □

This article was given as a paper at the 1993 Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Conference held in Newcastle, England, and will be included with other papers from that conference in a book to be published in the United States in late 1995 by St. Martin's Press.

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