mass resistance or revolutionary nationalism—proved capable of dealing with the damaging social consequences of long-standing historical injustices.

[See also Civil Rights Movement in the United States, subentry on Methods of Nonviolent Action, and Gandhian Theory of Nonviolence.]

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Methods of Nonviolent Action

The U.S. civil rights movement (1955–1965) of the mid-twentieth century owes its success in part to its implementation of the technique of nonviolent struggle, using scores of nonviolent methods, or action steps. The hundreds of documented nonviolent sanctions, or methods, fall generally into one of three fundamental categories, identified by the scholar Gene Sharp as protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention. Protest or persuasion methods send a message and include demonstrations, marches, petitions, and vigils. Noncooperation methods suspend cooperation and assistance and include economic noncooperation, such as consumer boycotts and strikes, and political noncooperation, such as civil disobedience—the deliberate violation of decrees, laws, military or police orders, ordinances, or regulations regarded by those ruled as illegitimate, immoral, or unethical. Nonviolent intervention methods intentionally disrupt and include
alternative or parallel social and political systems, hunger strikes, and sit-ins.

The civil rights movement used methods from all three classes, but those most commonly included were “nonviolent direct action”—a synonym for nonviolent struggle or nonviolent resistance, which generally referred to protest and persuasion methods to gain blacks access to segregated public facilities—and voter registration, which was sometimes considered among alternative or parallel institutions or valued for its potential power. The civil disobedience employed in the movement cut across classes, with context determining whether a method epitomizes political noncooperation or political intervention.

Nearly three hundred years of enslavement of Africans forcibly brought to the New World shaped the social and political struggle for equal rights in twentieth-century America. Some of the nonviolent methods employed in this struggle derived from a tradition of resistance begun on slave ships centuries earlier. In addition to revolts and uprisings, slaves indicated their refusal to cooperate with bondage through petitions and other documents, escapes, work slowdowns, sorrow songs, spirituals conveying hidden meanings, and rejection of slave names. Disparate challenges and protests would cumulatively build until slightly less than a century after emancipation, when the civil rights movement coalesced into a massive nonviolent social mobilization across the southern United States in the decade between the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott and the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Transmission of Knowledge: From India to Montgomery

In 1942, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) emerged to fight racial segregation through nonviolent direct action. CORE conducted sit-ins that same year, and in 1947 organized the Journey of Reconciliation, or “freedom ride,” to challenge segregated interstate travel.

Within eight years of India gaining independence in 1947, civil disobedience, fasting, vigils, and alternative institutions—methods used in the Indian independence struggles by Gandhi—had become more evident than previously in the southern United States. As early as the 1920s, sectors of the black community had been astutely aware of the subcontinent’s nonviolent freedom struggles and perceived Indian strategies of resistance to colonialism as applicable to societal conditions in the United States. Prominent black leaders who traveled to India conveyed news of that struggle, providing regular accounts through black-owned newspapers and making speeches about it upon their return. In 1950, the newly independent Indian government declared untouchability unconstitutional, after decades of work by the system’s opponents, raising the hopes of African Americans, emboldened by the idea of something similar occurring in their country.

Five years later, in Montgomery, Alabama, citizens launched a boycott, the first well-known nonviolent method to be collectively employed in the burgeoning civil rights movement. When Rosa Parks, a seamstress active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was arrested on 1 December 1955 for refusing to yield her seat on a bus to a white man, the Women’s Political Council, having previously contemplated a boycott as a means of resistance, worked overnight to organize this act of economic noncooperation. Martin Luther King Jr., newly having taken up his ministry in Montgomery, was elected unanimously to head the boycott organization. The city’s black population learned how to use boycotts and other sanctions through regular “mass meetings,” training sessions usually held in churches. Such assemblies were themselves a method of protest and persuasion and often involved role playing, preparing the nonviolent protagonists with the theoretical bases for action and teaching them how to maintain nonviolent discipline if violently attacked. Implementation of the Montgomery boycott was distinguished by the unity of the city’s black population during 381 days of rigorous civil resistance.

The target in Montgomery was only one city’s bus system, but the boycott’s success—acknowledged when the Supreme Court ruled on 13 November 1956 that local laws requiring segregation on buses were unconstitutional—raised hopes for similar eradication of other heinous practices. The boycott established the parameters of strategic nonviolent action for the civil rights movement as a whole. The resulting regional mass mobilization would within one decade destroy the legal supports for the racial caste system in the United States.

Organizations and Methods

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) formed in 1957 to translate Montgomery’s success into a South-wide strategy. It would be the first of two southern-born organizations guiding the civil rights movement. After the end of the Montgomery boycott, King and fellow ministers C. K. Steele and Fred Shuttlesworth called on sixty clergy to meet at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, on 10–11 January. In attendance were Bayard
Rustin, a practitioner of nonviolent action, Ella J. Baker, a former field secretary with the NAACP, and Stanley Levison, a white supporter from New York. The gathering elected King president of the newly christened SCLC. He set about encouraging clergy at the helm of local movements to become part of a network of SCLC affiliates across the South.

During the Montgomery boycott, King had begun learning the theories and methods of nonviolent resistance from Rustin and the Reverend James M. Lawson Jr., professional trainers who had become knowledgeable about nonviolent action while in India. Nightly tutorials with Rustin, and later Glenn Smiley, gave King a deep grounding in strategy, theory, and practice and included the study of works from the Indian independence struggles. SCLC as an organization incorporated the theories and methods of nonviolent struggle as imparted by Lawson in workshops. Local SCLC affiliates tended to emphasize demonstrations, marches, and rallies—methods of protest and persuasion—although it also held voter registration drives.

Opportunities for individual engagement in pursuit of civil rights had been rare in the period prior to Montgomery, but this situation would change with the first sit-in. On 1 February 1960, Ezell Blair, Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond—four black students attending North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro, North Carolina—decided to seek service at a “whites only” lunch counter. They agreed that if refused or asked to leave, they would stay. News of their “sit-in,” a term with which they were unfamiliar, circled a world in which movements for self-determination were shaking off colonialism and its inherent inequities.

Unnoticed until the Greensboro sit-ins, students elsewhere had also used similar methods. The Nashville Christian Leadership Conference, SCLC’s first affiliate, had, in 1958 and 1959, undertaken nonviolent direct action against racial discrimination in downtown stores and restaurants. Throughout autumn 1959, James Lawson had led a weekly meeting to help students from several academic institutions analyze the theories of the technique that he had studied during three years in India. The Nashville students, including John Lewis and Diane Nash, participated in several small sit-ins for practice. After hearing of the Greensboro sit-ins, seventy-five Nashville students began the largest and most disciplined of the 1960 campaigns.

Sit-ins swept the Southern states, as students adopted this method from the most disruptive category, nonviolent intervention. As thousands took action, it appeared to be harmonized. Participants had burning cigarettes ground into their limbs; ketchup and mustard dumped on their heads; chewing gum stuck to their hair; spittle and insults hurled at them; some were punched or pulled off stools. When asked to leave, they remained. As 1960 ended, 70,000 students, mostly black, but joined by increasing numbers of whites, had sat in. Some 3,600 were arrested, most going limp in noncooperation as police rounded them up. Within a year, hundreds of lunch counters had been desegregated in the mid-Atlantic southern states. The Deep South continued to resist.

The sit-ins provided the civil rights movement its regional base and character as a mass phenomenon. This soon led to the creation of a second southern organization, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced snick). Ella Baker, having helped create SCLC, had an important hand in establishing SNCC at a meeting of student sit-in leaders at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, 15–17 April 1960. The Nashville students and James Lawson participated in this organizational meeting, influencing the nonviolent emphasis reflected in the new organization’s name. SNCC generally emphasized community organizing and endeavored to identify and nurture new leadership. Baker, Lawson, and history professor Howard Zinn acted as senior advisors for the group.

SNCC adopted a more militant stance than did SCLC, in part pursuant to a request for help after black college students from a local CORE chapter were arrested at a sit-in in Rock Hill, South Carolina, in February 1961. SNCC responded to a plea from Rock Hill and joined the CORE activists. In jail, the combined group refused bail, on grounds that being bailed out after arrest was insufficiently Gandhian. This evolved into a “jail-in,” a nonviolent method viewed as a double dose of noncooperation. The sanction of “jail, no bail” became a key difference between SNCC and SCLC.

A new round of “freedom rides” began on 4 May 1961. CORE initiated them as a recapitulation of its 1947 journey, when participants traversed Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and West Virginia following the 1946 Supreme Court ruling that desegregated seating on interstate transport. In 1961, James L. Farmer, CORE’s national director, proposed challenging the failure of the U.S. government to implement the 1946 judicial decision while bringing attention to a 1960 Supreme Court judgment against segregated public transportation terminals. Farmer recruited an interracial group of thirteen men
and women to undergo training in Washington, D.C. The riders planned their civil disobedience to defy the continuing segregated practices of the Greyhound and Trailways bus companies.

Vowing to accept prison without bail, the freedom riders’ crossed Virginia and North Carolina, South Carolina, heading for New Orleans, Louisiana. On 14 May in Anniston, Alabama, a white mob burned the first of two buses. As the blazing vehicle exploded, flying glass injured the freedom riders trapped aboard it. Physicians and nurses refused to treat them after they were hospitalized. Although the freedom riders were largely CORE volunteers, SNCC participants, led by Diane Nash, insisted that the rides continue. When another bus reached Birmingham, Alabama, white men with baseball bats and chains beat the riders for fifteen minutes before police arrived. Jim Peck, who had participated in the 1947 freedom ride as a new CORE volunteer, was severely beaten. Such brutality only intensified SNCC’s combative spirit.

In 1963, major demonstrations and boycotts were aimed at desegregating the restaurants in downtown department stores in Birmingham, a city that had failed to prosecute dozens of bombings meant to intimidate black citizens. During a small march in April, authorities arrested King. Incarcerated, King penned his “Letter from Birmingham City Jail,” a response to eight Alabama religious leaders who argued that the movement’s goals should be litigation and negotiations. In his missive, King explains that nonviolent action can produce negotiations:

You may well ask, ‘Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches, etc.? Isn’t negotiation a better path?’ You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue.

The letter, a justification for civil disobedience, is the most important document composed during the civil rights movement.

SCLC organizers, aware of Gandhi’s 1930 Salt March and the sixty thousand Indians imprisoned after the procession to the sea, rallied Birmingham’s schoolchildren, crying, “Gandhi said to fill the jails! We’re going to fill the jails!” On 2 May 1963, thousands of black pupils left their classrooms and headed for the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Emerging from the sanctuary in groups of fifty with the intent to demonstrate, they sang freedom songs as they proceeded into police paddy wagons waiting to intercept them. Of 1,000 would-be demonstrators arrested that day, 319 were children, some incongruously transported to detention in school buses. The next day, city officials turned police dogs and high-pressure water hoses against the children’s crusade, a sight broadcast globally.

Little resulted from the Birmingham confrontations, however, and as fears rose of increased bombings and assassinations, Bayard Rustin revived the concept of a march on Washington, proposed in the 1940s by the black labor leader A. Philip Randolph. SCLC and SNCC were both involved in the resulting 28 August 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. King’s “I have a dream” oration on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial climaxed the event. At least a quarter of a million persons from all backgrounds gathered on the National Mall in Washington.

In addition to methods of protest and persuasion, SCLC and SNCC emphasized voter registration. In 1961, SNCC had decided to concentrate on securing the ballot for blacks in a twenty-two-county project in southwest Georgia and across Mississippi. Demonstrations in support of voting rights during 1961–1962 in Georgia resulted in more than one thousand arrests. In 1963, SNCC almost split over whether it should accentuate direct action, aimed largely at desegregating public facilities, or voter registration, which could affect the constellations of power. Ella Baker decisively said that SNCC could do both. SCLC encouraged its local affiliates to organize voter drives, often with booster marches to advertise the impediments of racially discriminatory restrictive literacy tests and poll taxes. Registering voters would normally be a benign form of civic engagement, yet for disenfranchised Mississippians, attempting to register in Amite, Pike, and Walthall Counties became a form of civil disobedience. The Reverend Herbert Lee, a leader of the SNCC-supported drive in Amite County, was killed in September 1961 by E. H. Hurst, a state legislator, in retaliation.

Louis Allen, a witness willing to testify to Lee’s murder, was gunned down in January 1964. The second death confirmed the need for Robert Moses, SNCC’s Mississippi director, in his determination to organize a statewide confrontation with the country’s most degenerate stronghold of racism and violence toward blacks, to focus national attention on the need for federal intervention. The resulting Mississippi Freedom Summer
of 1964 employed one of the most advanced methods from the class of nonviolent intervention methods: organizing alternative, or parallel, institutions.

As early as the Montgomery boycott, King had adopted Gandhi’s concept of the constructive program—creating a set of decentralized institutions to serve as the infrastructure for a just society—and had included in it voter registration. Alternative institutions would eliminate dependency on the adversary, making it possible to proceed toward a new social reality in the midst of the old. A statewide mock election in November 1963 was one such application and had verified the desire among Mississippi’s black community for the franchise. SNCC recruited from across the country nearly one thousand young, mostly white students, religious leaders, and lawyers to serve as volunteers in voter registration drives, “freedom schools,” and community centers. For this encounter with state-condoned vigilante terrorism, Moses of SNCC and David Dennis of CORE utilized the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), an umbrella organization with local black leadership to present a united, cooperative front for all organizations active in Mississippi.

COFO organized credit unions, cooperatives, and a parallel political party. These alternative institutions would allow black Mississippians to circumvent the control of white oligarchies in pursuit of social justice while also withdrawing cooperation from racist structures. Hundreds of volunteer teachers staffed thirty-eight Freedom Schools and taught more than three thousand students. Midway through the summer, the stress on voter registration shifted to “Freedom Registration,” the enlistment of registrants for the alternative nascent Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, chaired by Lawrence Guyot. In August, millions of Americans watched televised accounts of this parallel party meticulously mounting a formal challenge to the seating of the all-white Mississippi delegation at the Democratic Party’s national convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Peaceful implementation of the newly-passed 1964 Civil Rights Act—outlawing discrimination in education, employment, and public accommodations—was one result of the summer’s “constructive program.”

Another outcome was the enervation and interruption of state-sanctioned vigilante violence, as international attention focused on Mississippi. On 21 June, at the start of the Freedom Summer, officials in Neshoba County had murdered three civil rights workers: James Chaney, a local black youth, and Mickey Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, two young white men from New York. In 1965, the deputy sheriff and six other defendants were convicted. Rather than being charged with murder—a crime normally adjudicated at the state level but unlikely to return justice in a system permeated by racism—they were prosecuted for denying the volunteers’ civil rights under federal statutes.

A fifty-four-mile march from Selma, Alabama, to Montgomery in 1965 stands as the movement’s last surge of direct action involving methods of nonviolent protest and persuasion. The civil rights legislation of 1964 had not authorized federal registrars to assist blacks subjected to blatant threats when trying to register to vote or provided procedures to prevent discriminatory changes in voting procedures. SNCC and SCLC joined to dramatize these issues. As protesters attempted unsuccessfully to cross the Selma bridge on 7 March, police hit SNCC chairman John Lewis with a crushing blow to his skull. As with the freedom rides, SNCC pressed to continue the march. From across the country, demonstrators headed toward Selma. King led the second attempt to cross the bridge on 9 March. Solidarity demonstrations in other cities demanded action. Watched by 70 million television viewers on 15 March 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson asked Congress to approve a voting rights bill. Some 25,000 persons eventually reached the state capital of Montgomery for a mass rally on 25 March. Prodded by the pressures exerted by the Mississippi Freedom Summer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Johnson and Congress soon thereafter enacted the 1965 Voting Rights Act. It established enforcement mechanisms to guarantee the right to vote and made illegal the literacy tests and poll taxes that had been used to hinder African Americans from registering and voting.

[See also Civil Disobedience; Civil Resistance as a Peace Policy; Gandhian Influence on Peace Movement; India, Peace Movements in; and King, Martin Luther, Jr.]

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**CIVIL SOCIETY, THEORY AND PRACTICE OF.**

The role of "civil society," social organizations independent of the nation-state or governing parties, is now accepted by many (especially Western) governments and by international governmental organizations (IGOs) as central to democratization and development. Social movements campaigning for human rights, social justice, environmental protection, and peace have also embraced belief in the value of civil society and can indeed be seen as one facet of it. Moreover, campaigns of popular resistance have often generated new social organizations or institutions, such as trade or labor unions or cooperative societies arising from the nineteenth century workers movements, or women’s refuges created by second-wave feminism, that help create or strengthen civil societies.

But the concept of civil society has a complex history within western political thought, and the definition of civil society itself is debated. The idea of civil society is therefore interpreted within competing ideological perspectives. Moreover, although the connotations of civil society are generally positive—suggesting initiative from below, social cooperation and a sense of social responsibility—government pressure on civil society bodies may undermine their autonomy. Governments seeking to create “civil society” inside other states can moreover, be seen as acting in an imperialistic, paternalistic, or aggressive manner.

Civil society, however, exists not only within states but also at a transnational level, although the possibility of a “global civil society” is also still sometimes contested. The role of transnational civil society in representing nonviolent values, in transcending national frontiers and ideological divides, and in creating conditions for a more peaceful world can be seen as even more crucial at a global level. On the other hand, there are strong grounds for criticism of some aspects of global civil society, which are examined here.

**Civil Society in Political Thought**

When western political thought began to elaborate on the evolution of the “nation-state,” one issue was how far “society” existed independently of governing political institutions. “Civil society” was sometimes used in seventeenth and eighteenth century English and Scottish thought to encompass all social institutions including government and sometimes, as in Locke, to indicate social relations existing independently of government or outside the control of the state. Adam Smith used the term primarily to denote both cooperative and competitive relations within the economy. Hegel, drawing on Smith, defined civil society (bürgerliche Gesellschaft) to incorporate the realm of the market, in which individuals rationally pursue their interests, and the role of sectional interest-based associations. Hegel’s philosophy proposed that civil society should be constrained and complemented by the ethical communities of the family and the state. Marx drew on Hegel, but he stressed further the economic and conflictual nature of civil society, and he argued that the state itself was determined by the class relations within civil society and derived from it.

The nineteenth century theorist now often cited as a forerunner of contemporary understandings of civil society is Alexis de Tocqueville, who stressed in *Democracy in America* (two volumes, 1835 and 1840) the role of voluntary associations in promoting a sense of the citizen’s responsibility and in meeting important social needs. De Tocqueville also argued that the initiative and social cooperation entailed in creating autonomous social and cultural bodies encouraged a healthy form of democracy and helped to limit the scope of state intervention. This view was not dissimilar from the advice of Proudhon,