

The earliest trainings in the U.S. took place in 1941 to prepare black and white youth to challenge racial segregation, which was often met with violence. Four youth groups aimed to integrate a swimming pool in Cleveland, and prepared by role playing. They used what they learned to develop a stronger action. This became a model of training for interracial actions.

In 1942, radical pacifists formed the 'Nonviolent Action Committee of the Fellowship of Reconciliation', which trained teams to provide leadership in anti-racist and antimilitarist work. From this group grew the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) which, in 1945 became the first organisation to develop nonviolence trainings in preparation for involvement in nonviolent actions to desegregate. CORE's first major protest in 1947 was the Journey of Reconciliation, when an integrated group of 16 men rode buses together through the segregated South for two weeks. Nonviolence training, co-facilitated by Bayard Rustin and George House, prepared them for the violence and jail sentences they encountered.

Beginning in 1947, CORE ran month-long training workshops in Washington, DC. For 10 years, participants learned theories and skills in nonviolence and organising, with the goal of ending segregation in the Capital region.

In 1959 in Nashville, Tennessee, James Lawson began weekly workshops on nonviolent methods which became participatory training sessions with stories of nonviolence, role plays, and discussions. Lawson facilitated a process of empowerment for the young black students living in a segregated society, where they developed a sense of their own value. They learned how to focus on the issue of racist segregation and choose a target. Not believing in hierarchical leadership, Lawson organised a central committee which was open to those taking the trainings. As the students developed a strategy to desegregate stores, they learned to organise, conduct a demonstration, negotiate, and deal with the media. They role played the physical and verbal abuse they would receive when they sat at a segregated lunch counter, learning how to nonviolently resist the impulse to run or fight back. Their three month campaign - which was preceded by six months of trainings - was a success, and the restaurants and stores of Nashville were desegregated. Nashville became a model for campaigns and trainings.

Eight of the young black students went on to be key organisers of major campaigns in the civil rights movement and beyond. One of them, Bernard Lafayette, trained the trainer of the first two occupations of the nuclear power plant at Seabrook starting in 1976 (see 'Seabrook-Wyhl-Marckolsheim: transnational links in a chain of campaigns' pX). Rev. James Lawson continues to provide nonviolence trainings.

Nonviolence training is part of a decades-old tradition that has empowered people to take action on the issues that matter to them. Throughout the world nonviolence trainings continue to be used to build stronger movements.

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