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ABSTRACT:

This paper reframes the diplomatic history of Indo-American relations in two ways. First, it analyses the Indian National Congress’ (INC) engagement with American public opinion in the inter-war period, highlighting the party’s use of public diplomacy during and after the First World War. While Gandhi, particularly the image of Gandhi in the U.S. media, and Nehru loom large as the figureheads of Indian nationalism in the interwar period, this public diplomacy effort engaged a broad range of leading figures in the nationalist movement, including Lala Lajpat Rai, Rabindranath Tagore, and Syud Hossain. This effort also saw significant involvement from American activists in the African American, liberal Christian, and progressive movements. The examination of the role of these advocates is the second contribution of this paper to the historiography of Indo-American relations. I also argue that the interwar decades are vital for understanding the Cold War estrangement of Indo-American relations, in particular the nuanced and critical account of American power that was articulated by India’s leaders.

Authors note: This paper is part of a chapter in a forthcoming study of U.S. public diplomacy to India during the Second World War and the Cold War.

That India and the United States found relatively few areas of common ground during the Cold War is well known. Less so are the origins of this mistrust in the decades before 1947 and the role of public diplomacy in setting the foundations for the post-independence bilateral relationship. While the decisions taken by each government in the early 1950s were consequential in sustaining the two states’ long estrangement during the twentieth century, these decisions were taken in the context of the inauspicious foundations of the bilateral relationship. These foundations were set before 1947, within the
extensive public diplomacy relationship between India and the United States that began during the First World War. The nature of this exchange of images and ideas shaped the kinds of issues about which the two states disagreed in subsequent decades, in particular India's questioning of America's narrative of itself and its place in the Cold War world. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister and the architect of its Cold War foreign policy, thus entered office with a profound scepticism about the foreign policy objectives of the United States and about the degree to which Washington's often-touted commitment to freedom and democracy actually found expression in practice. The Indian media was similarly determined to question American policy and rhetoric.

America’s military policy, its wartime information, and its commitment to British interests during the Second World War was one of the formative influences on post-war Indo-American relations. The wartime experience was significant for Indian views of America, but also for U.S. officials as they encountered Indian leaders’ willingness to put the cause of their own national independence before Allied war aims.¹ For the Indian public, there was a great hypocrisy in the U.S. propaganda agencies’ touting of the Four Freedoms and the Atlantic Charter in light of the president’s apparent willingness to stand by British imperialism. The longstanding and extensive contacts between the leaders of the Indian independence movement and American activists during the inter-war period were equally significant to these wartime disappointments in shaping the relationship between India and the United States after independence. These ties were the result of the Indian National Congress’ (INC) innovative

approach to cultivating global public opinion as a basis for securing national self-determination during the 1920s and 1930s. Indo-American diplomatic relations thus encompassed far-reaching disagreements during the Cold War in part because political activists in the two nations had been engaged in dialogue on political philosophy and the failings of American politics for more than twenty years.

The United States was not the only focal point for the INC’s efforts to engage global public opinion in the interwar decades. Indian efforts to shape the views of the British public were more extensive given that British domestic public opinion was the most direct lever to influence colonial policy. But in a wider historical context, the INC’s interactions with Americans during the interwar years have arguably been more consequential. The INC sought out liberal Christian, left-wing activists and, most notably, African American activists in the United States in support of their national independence. The exchange of ideas that ensued had a profound impact on Indian leaders’ conceptions of racial and economic forces in global politics, as well as inculcating in the architects of India’s post-independence foreign policy a deep scepticism on racial and economic grounds about the virtues the American government purported to represent. These connections ensured that India’s independence movement was covered extensively in the mainstream American press before the mid 1930s so that, as the apocryphal statement noted, for a while Gandhi’s image was as ubiquitous as Mickey Mouse. Given the paucity of trade, commercial and cultural ties between the two nations before the First World War, as well as the ongoing

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2 India’s Muslim League also embarked on its own public diplomacy effort during the 1930s, much less successfully than the INC. Jinnah nonetheless gained some coverage in the American press and his cause was known, Unterberger and others have noted. Betty Miller Unterberger, “American Views of Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the Pakistan Liberation Movement,” *Diplomatic History* 5:4 (1981).
absence of official diplomatic relations, the INC’s public diplomacy was remarkably effective in cultivating a national awareness of India’s plight.

While Gandhi’s image was the focal point for interwar American understandings of Indian nationalism, and a number of the most influential American journalists and scholars who wrote about India had met Gandhi at various stages of the campaign for swaraj during the 1920s, the INC’s public diplomacy to the United States highlights the contribution of a wider range of figures in the independence movement. Rabindranath Tagore travelled to the United States to give lectures on poetry and political subjects six times before independence. The senior INC figure Lala Lajpat Rai spent five years in the United States during the First World War, working tirelessly in New York for the cause of publicising the concerns of Indian nationalism. The journalist Syud Hossain spoke and wrote extensively on behalf of independence from the mid 1920s and to early 1930s, though not as a representative of the INC. More remarkable, perhaps, is the degree to which American spokespeople for Indian freedom sustained a public debate on nationalism and helped build U.S. public support for Indian independence. These include liberal Christians such as the Unitarian preacher Jabez T. Sunderland, anti-imperialists such as William Jennings Bryan, African American intellectuals W. E. B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Howard Thurman, and civil liberties activities such as John Haynes Holmes.

Indian Nationalism and the First World War.
The exchange of ideas and culture between India and the United States and the emergence of American support for the cause of Indian nationalism dates back to the late 19th century. From the 1880s American Unitarian missionaries and other social reformer Christians joined an earlier generation of American Christian proselytizers on the subcontinent, but differed from their predecessors in approaching their task as one of social modernization, via public works in health, sanitation and education. The prominent New York Unitarian minister Jabez T. Sunderland became the first American to attend a meeting of the INC during his three-month stay in India at the invitation of Bengal's Brahmo Samaj in 1895. Soon after, Sunderland joined the American Anti-Imperialist League to protest the U.S. acquisition of the Philippines, and encouraged the organization to consider British abuses in its earliest publications, the so-called “Liberty Tracts.” William Jennings Bryan and Andrew Carnegie visited India in 1906 and both published pamphlets in favour of an end to British rule, while Sunderland established his short-lived Society for the Advancement of India in 1907. Their activities were picked up by progressive publications such as The Nation and New Republic, with the former running a set of editorials in 1910 to consider whether greater autonomy within the Empire (as the INC favoured) or full independence was preferable in the Indian case.

Joining the social gospel movement in India were the American founders of Theosophy, Helena P. Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott, who travelled to India in 1877, two years after the founding of the INC. Blavatsky and Olcott established

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branches of their organization across India, which would proved popular with many founding members of the INC. Olcott became an outspoken advocate for Indian economic self sufficiency and the revival of Indian religious traditions, which proved sufficiently worrisome that the British authorities forced Olcott to sign a declaration disavowing any intention to join political activities. Undeterred, he spent the rest of his life in India and Sri Lanka as an independence activist. Blavatsky’s protégée, Annie Besant, would serve as president of the INC in 1917.

The First World War solidified two trends in the Indian nationalist struggle: it transformed Indian nationalism into a genuinely mass movement involving all sectors of Indian society, and the INC platform shifted from advocating reforms to imperial administration to a call for greater autonomy within the British Empire. In adopting this more radical set of aims, the INC pointed to India’s substantial contribution to the war effort. A million Indians had fought for Britain in Europe and the Middle East, and their participation had been mostly enthusiastic and voluntary. The INC, and Gandhi most of all, had endorsed India’s involvement in the war as a means to earn global prestige and to reinvigorate India’s national spirit. The global media, and American journals

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5 The important role of Theosophy, as well as Vivekenanda’s visit to the United States, in establishing a basic notion of Indian independence for Americans was later noted by Lajpat Rai. Lala Lajpat Rai, Letter to the Indian Leaders, 25 July, 1919; in Joginder Singh Dhanki, Perspectives on Indian National Movement: Selected Correspondence of Lala Lajpat Rai, (New Delhi: National Book Organization, 1998), p. 138.
6 Lubelsky, Celestial India, p. 101.
7 Mahatma Gandhi quoted in G. B. Singh, Gandhi: Behind the Mask of Divinity, (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), p. 206. Indian soldiers wanted to be part of the conflict on an equal basis with English and other imperial troops, and their enthusiasm was reportedly so great that two divisions had departed for Europe within weeks of the war’s outbreak. A. Yusuf Ali, “India’s Services in the War,” The Contemporary Review 108, (July 1, 1915), p. 448. It was also clear that Indian nationalists sought to
in particular, lauded the contribution. Gandhi also saw participation in an international military campaign as a basis for India to recover its “self-respect,” a somewhat contrary position for a renowned pacifist. Yet shortly after the Paris Peace Conference, to which representatives of India and several other delegations from conquered nations had been denied entry, British authorities announced a serious of law and order measures, known as the Rowlatt Acts, which imposed restrictions on political activism, allowed detention without trial and circumscribed the freedom of the press. It was at a protest against the Acts in the Punjabi city of Amritsar against the measures that the English Brigadier-General E. H. Dyer ordered his soldiers to open fire on an unarmed crowd, killing more than one thousand people. The ensuing public outcry brought Gandhi to the forefront of the INC and undermined its moderate “liberal” wing, solidifying the party’s position in favour of home rule. As Nehru recalled, the massacre brought Indians en masse to the INC, and “instead of being terrorized as she had been after the Mutiny [of 1857], the very horror of the Punjab gave fresh courage and made [Indians] resolve to put an end to conditions which could permit such happenings.” Gandhi consolidate his power within the INC by vocally opposing the British partition of Turkey and the abolition of the Turkish Sultanate in 1920,
which attracted significant numbers of Muslims to the party. Protests against the decision rocked India between 1920 and 1922.

The end of the First World War had also raised the question of whether the American government might offer a measure of political support to Indian aspirations. Woodrow Wilson had constantly emphasized that he had taken the United States into the war to support “the rights and liberties of small nations.” His Fourteen Points for the post-war accord specified that there should be impartial settlements of clashing colonial interests, and he had acknowledged the rights of “autonomous development” of the nations of the Austro Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. This by no means implied that the U.S. was concerned with non-European national claims, but Wilson’s rhetoric sparked a debate in India and elsewhere around the world about whether his principles portended far-reaching reforms imperial administration. The Indian nationalist publishing house Ganesh collected Wilson’s speeches as President Wilson: The Modern Apostle of Freedom, and the collection garnered favourable reviews. Propaganda materials produced by Wilson’s Committee on Public Information, particularly the text of Wilson’s Fourteen Points for a peace settlement, were distributed directly to India. British authorities evidently did not expect these

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statements of American war aims to threaten the stability of the Empire. But the
finer details of Wilson’s plans, particularly Wilson’s own racial prejudices and his
firmly-held view that self-determination should not apply to backward races,
was lost in translation in much of the Indian commentary on Wilsonian
principles in the period.

One Indian leader who responded cautiously to the Wilsonian moment
was the Punjabi writer, Swadeshi radical, and future president of the Indian
National Congress Lala Lajpat Rai, who spent most of the duration of the war in
the United States engaged in publicity on behalf of Indian nationalism. Rai cited
the Fourteen Points in reflecting on the injustice of India’s situation, and he had
telegraphed Wilson to offer his endorsement of the “lofty” goals of the Fourteen
Points soon after the president announced them in January 1918. They implied
that “every people must be free to determine their own form of government,”
and could be used to exert public opinion pressures on the U.S. government, even
if Wilson himself might have had no intention of disrupting British imperial rule.
It was “impossible that the noble truths uttered by President Wilson...could be
limited in their application...his words are going to be the war cry of all small and
subject and oppressed nationalities in the world.”15 A path-breaking academic
article in the American Political Science Review in 1918 outlined India’s claim to
share in the liberal principles celebrated by Wilson. In it the University of
Calcutta’s Benoy Kumar Sarkar argued that grounds for “Young Asia’s”
entitlement to independence derived from its authentic democratic and civic
traditions—traditions that it had established outside the tradition of Western

90. See also: Manoranjan Jha, Civil Disobedience and After: The American Reaction to Political
political thought, but which were explicitly linked to American political thought.\(^\text{16}\)

Rai spent five years in the United States engaged in nationalist publicity for the INC, visiting Japan briefly during this time. This long period of residence in the U.S. had been entirely accidental. Rai had planned to visit England for six months in 1914 and found himself stranded there by the outbreak of the war. Having once visited the United States in 1905 to give lectures on the nationalist cause in New York, Philadelphia and Boston, Rai left London for New York in 1914. He would spend the rest of the war establishing and leading the Friends of Freedom for India and the India Home Rule League of America, organizations devoted to cultivating American support for Indian nationalism. The India Home Rule League of America also had two sub-organizations, the Hindustan Students Association, and the Hindu Workers Union of America, with branches in cities including Ann Arbor, Berkeley, Cleveland, Minneapolis, Louisville and Philadelphia.\(^{17}\) Rai’s organizations attracted members from the ranks of America's progressive intellectuals and journalists, and Rai was also careful to ensure the organizations engaged members of the still quite small South Asian diaspora in the United States.

Soon after his arrival Rai had made contact with New York City’s most prominent progressives, including Jabez T. Sunderland. Since the collapse of his

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Society for the Advancement of India, Sunderland had continued to write in favour of Indian home rule and he had frequently characterised Gandhi as a Christian saint. Rai also met with John Haynes Holmes, feminists Henrietta Rodman and Agnes Smedley, and numerous members of the Irish nationalist movement, including Éamon De Valera.\(^{18}\) In 1916 Rai undertook a speaking tour of Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles. During his visit to the West Coast Rai met, and disagreed, with leaders of the Sikh \textit{Ghadr} party, which was supporting Germany and advocated the rebellion of Indian troops on the Western Front. In New York Rai also met with the future head of the Communist Party of India and protégée of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, M. N. Roy, whom he greatly respected.\(^{19}\) The \textit{New Republic} editor Walter Lippmann advised Rai on how to cultivate a favorable image in the American media and wrote several pieces himself in support of the cause. Rai worked tirelessly to keep the American press informed of India’s suffering, and with Gandhi’s support even established a short-lived official Indian Information Bureau to distribute statements from the INC for the American press. Shortly before his departure from New York he reflected in satisfaction on this work: “the weekly and the monthly press...is full of references to India.”\(^{20}\)

With the help of journalists working at the \textit{New Republic} and \textit{The Nation}, in 1919 Rai established a monthly journal devoted to the cause of Indian independence with the same title as Gandhi’s, \textit{Young India}. The journal was


intended to be a counterpart to the INC’s successful British mouthpiece, *India*. The magazine’s inaugural edition disavowed any intention to bring about a political mobilization in the United States, and was at pains to point out it had no affiliation with German militarism. *Young India’s* stated goal was to support Rai’s organization, the India Home Rule League of America, in its quest to secure home rule by educating Americans about India’s suffering. The inaugural edition also contained an open letter to Woodrow Wilson from the INC stressing Indians’ contribution to the First World War and seeking to appraise him of the “full measure of misrule and oppression in India.” The journal lasted two years before a lack of funds and Rai’s departure forced its closure. It featured articles that went beyond political subjects into cultural diplomacy, devoting several issues in 1920 to Tagore’s poetry, Indian painting and Indian music.

*Young India* frequently compared India’s campaign for freedom to the American Revolution, and articles by Sunderland and Rai appeared in almost every edition. Rai also published a book on Indian self-government that was also called *Young India* in 1915, one of four books written during his sojourn in the United States. *Young India* became the most well-known and accessible overview of the independence struggle for American audiences, and his supporters sent a copy to every member of the British House of Commons. It joined a number of other important works by Indian nationalists that were published and sold well in the United States during the war, including Gandhi’s collected speeches and

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21 “Ourselves,” *Young India* 1:1, (January 1918), p 4.
his manifesto *Hind Swaraj*. Taraknath Das’ *India in World Politics* was also widely read after its publication in 1923—Das had been another prominent believer in the view that American public opinion was vital to the nationalist struggle. Rai thought scholarly books were “absolutely necessary” for correcting the inaccurate impressions of India that many foreigners carried with them and for engaging American supporters in a reasoned, temperate debate. In 1919 he advised the INC to sponsor a translation program so that the most important scholarly works on India could be read in a variety of European languages, and also proposed in a comprehensive public diplomacy strategy that included establishing overseas information bureaus, an Indian global news agency, book distribution and academic exchanges. Reflecting American public concerns about propaganda in the wake of British deceptions during the war, Rai advised that all news and press activities should show “judgment, tact, and experience,” to ensure that India’s point of view would be represented in a manner that was “free from exaggeration and distortion.” He also advised that India’s representations abroad should seek correcting the general ignorance about Islam in the United States, though this was a distinct task from that of advancing the INC’s international profile.25

Rai had also been deliberate in his American writings and speeches to assert a connection between the moral outrages of segregation in the American South and the system of colonialism in India. He visited the American South

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several times, and corresponded with W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington upon his return to India, ultimately becoming firm friends with Du Bois. The pair’s affinity stemmed in part from the fact that Du Bois had been educated in the “Indian-tinctured” intellectual milieu of New England, where the writings of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman loomed large. He solicited Rai’s comments on a draft of his 1928 novel exploring the cultural power of African Americans, Dark Princess.26 Rai helped to spark Du Bois’ interest in Soviet Communism as a positive force for Afro-Asian liberation.27 Rai wrote to Du Bois after the publication of Katherine Mayo’s controversial travelogue Mother India, seeking the African American leader’s reflections on the conditions of racial discrimination in the United States in order to write his rejoinder.28 Rai’s investigations of African American activism even attracted the notice of the War Department in 1917 as a possible threat to American security when he appeared with Du Bois at a public event.29 Despite his lengthy discussions with Du Bois on race, Rai adopted a rather contradictory attitude toward American imperialism during his time in the United States, devoting a chapter of his 1916 book, The United States: A Hindu’s Impressions, to the benefits of American stewardship in

29 War Department quoted in Nico Slate, Colored Cosmopolitanism, p. 38.
the Philippines.\textsuperscript{30} All the same, Du Bois praised the book for its detailed discussion of African American concerns.\textsuperscript{31}

Rai had returned to India, by way of England and after a farewell dinner presided over by the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Dudley Field Malone, in 1920. Without his leadership both of Rai’s American organizations had folded by 1922 despite ongoing funding from the INC. The Pacific Coast Hindustani Association in San Francisco founded a new nationalist publication for Indians and Indian nationalist sympathizers in the United States, called \textit{The United States of India}. That organization had only a tenuous link to the INC—it was in fact the successor to \textit{Ghadr}—and no links to Rai’s influential New York coterie. Ahead of Rai’s departure, the journalist, former \textit{Bombay Chronicle} and \textit{Independent} editor, and INC member Syud Hossain had moved to New York and had intended to take on some of Rai’s advocacy work. But Hossain was forced to support himself with a gruelling circuit of speaking engagements to a wide array of groups and associations, as well as universities, across the United States. He could devote little time to pro-Indian advocacy among the New York media and the cause floundered without coverage in the press. One publicity pamphlet on Hossain indicated that he had travelled to all 48 American states, as well as Alaska, and cited positive press comment on his lectures from papers in fifteen of them. Hossain also established his own publication addressing Indian political issues


and other current events called *The New Orient*.\textsuperscript{32} Other, smaller Indian nationalist groups in the United States sprang up in the interwar period, and the British INC mouthpiece *India* was read by sympathetic Americans in the wake of *Young India*'s folding, before it also folded in 1925. An association of Indian students, with their own publication called *The Hindustanee Student*, was founded in New York after Rai’s departure, and then also quickly folded.\textsuperscript{33} Rai, for his part, took the norms of American higher education back with him to India. In 1920 Rai founded the Tilak School of Politics, named after his mentor, the Swaraj activist Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, along the lines of the New York Rand School of Social Science.

Rai died in Lahore as the result of a police beating sustained during a protest against the visit of British Commissioners in 1928. His years in the United States had coincided with significant changes in the nationalist movement, including Gandhi’s return from South Africa in 1915 and the first national satyagraha campaign in 1920-2. Gandhi had organised smaller satyagraha actions in 1918-9, but his national protests in 1920-2 brought hundreds of thousands of Indians out to demonstrate and shut down the nation’s schools and courts. Gandhi himself called an end to the campaign after a violent attack on police by his supporters in Uttar Pradesh.\textsuperscript{34} Gandhi and much of the Congress leadership were then sent to prison, and political agitation stalled, prompting


several nationalist leaders to form the more radical Swaraj Party, which folded in 1935.\textsuperscript{35} The first satyagraha nevertheless had a significant psychological impact on Indians. For Nehru, it had dissipated the sense of “oppression and frustration” that Indians shared, and had restored their sense of “moral superiority...in regard to our goals and our methods.”\textsuperscript{36} Gandhi's mass movement also generated sustained interest in India’s situation within the mainstream American media, where his unique political methods proved a compelling topic of discussion.

American coverage of the 1921-2 satyagraha campaign singled out the commitment to non-violence as Gandhi's most enduring legacy, and many American writers argued that this stance brought his cause unassailable moral legitimacy. The first book to appear in the United States on the techniques of Gandhian civil disobedience was Non-Violent Coercion by the academic Clarence Marsh in 1923, and numerous others would follow throughout the next decade.\textsuperscript{37}

The most influential was the scholar, labor activist and Quaker Richard Gregg's 1935 Power of Nonviolence. Gregg had met Gandhi during the 1920s, and he established a Committee for Non-Violent Revolution in 1946, which helped to transmit Gandhi’s ideas on political action to a wide range of pacifist and civil rights organizations in the United States during the 1950s.\textsuperscript{38} Gandhi's assertion


\textsuperscript{37} There was also extensive discussion of Gandhi’s political ideas in the United Kingdom and Western Europe, and Hardiman makes the interesting observation that Gandhi struck a strong chord with the British working class in the period, see, eg: Hardiman, Gandhi in His Time and Ours, p. 245. On his reception in France, see: Ruth Harris, “Rolland, Gandhi and Madeline Slade: Spiritual Politics, France and the Wider World,” French History 24:4 (2013), pp. 579-599.

that satyagraha should emanate from love had a particular appeal for African American Christian activists, who were Gandhi's staunchest supporters in the civil rights movement.\(^{39}\) One of Martin Luther King Jr.'s most influential mentors at Boston University was Howard Thurman, who later worked at Howard University. Like Gregg, Thurman undertook a long correspondence with Gandhi on satyagraha and a wide range of other subjects.\(^{40}\) Thurman visited Gandhi in Bardoli, Gujarat, in 1936 during his “Pilgrimage of Friendship” to India, Ceylon and Burma under the auspices of the YMCA and YWCA.\(^{41}\) The pilgrimage included a number of other prominent figures in the civil rights movement such as Howard University President Mordecai Johnson and the Dean of its School of Religion Benjamin Mays. When Mays returned from India he published a series of six articles on satyagraha in the Norfolk Journal and Guide. Gregg, Thurman and Mays stressed that satyagraha's essence was the combination of non-violent resistance and the exposure of the moral inconsistencies of oppression and discrimination. To Thurman, Gandhi had stressed that satyagraha was not passive, but was instead an “intensely active force” that operated “invisibly” and internally.\(^ {42}\) Thurman was especially preoccupied in the years after his meeting with Gandhi in the use of non-violence, moral suasion, and the creation of moral


\(^{40}\) Gordon, “Mahatma Gandhi’s Dialogues,” p. 341. With the rise of Malcolm X and the black power movement towards the end of King’s life, the Gandhian foundations of the civil rights struggle were contested. Hardiman, Gandhi in His Time and Ours, pp. 268-73.

\(^{41}\) An account of the conversation between Gandhi and Thurman as well an overview of the connections between African American activists and Indian nationalists, which includes an interesting discussion of the historiography of this case, see: Sean Chabot, Transnational Roots of the Civil Rights Movement: African American Explorations of the Gandhian Repertoire, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012).

\(^{42}\) Chabot, Transnational Roots, p. 76.
outrage as a specifically Christian mode of political action. As King would write from Birmingham Jail in 1963, in terms that expressed the essence of satyagraha, “injustice must...be exposed, with all of the tension its exposing creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion.”

White Christian pacifists also responded to news of Gandhi’s activism with admiration, lauding Gandhi’s “saint-like” qualities and, after his assassination, his Christ-like self-sacrifice. Gandhi as saint was the subject of several book-length studies of Gandhi during the 1920s such as E. Stanley Jones’ *The Christ of the Indian Road* and the Swiss writer Romain Rolland’s *The Man Who Became One with the Universal Being*. The magazine *Christian Century* editorialised in 1924 that Gandhi was an “outstanding figure...in the spiritual history of our race.” But as ever, advocates for British imperialism sought to discredit Gandhi’s first satyagraha as “mischief-making” that was detrimental to the productivity and education of Indians. The New York journal *Current History* was unusually preoccupied with Indian affairs, and from the early 1920s it

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47 *Christian Century* quoted in Chatfield, “Introduction,” p. 34.
published numerous pieces claiming that most Indians resented Gandhi’s disruptive techniques, that Gandhi’s campaign was based on “erroneous assumptions” about British influence, and that the INC was composed of an exploitative “Western-educated” class of Indians seeking “power and privilege” for their own selfish interests.\(^{48}\) The magazine had the same ownership as the \textit{New York Times}, which also took an ambivalent position on Indian nationalism. In many of these critical accounts of Gandhi and his campaign the very fact of non-violence was held up as a testament to the illegitimacy of the nationalist cause.\(^{49}\)

\textit{Americans and Mother India}

Foremost among the popular, pro-imperial writings that were published in the United States to justifying ongoing British imperial dominance was Pennsylvania journalist Katherine Mayo’s travelogue \textit{Mother India}, published in 1927.\(^{50}\) The book was both enormously popular and highly controversial in the United States, joining the “relatively few works” in history about which “countless numbers of readers and reviewers” have felt the need to record their impressions. This included the publication of 50 books directly addressing


\(^{50}\) Mayo had made her name with muckraking exposés of the Pennsylvania state police and of the corruption in the American colonial administration of the Philippines, and her first book \textit{The Isles of Fear} had argued against U.S. plans to extend greater autonomy to its colony in the Philippines. She was also a vocal opponent of the repeal of the immigration restrictions imposed by the \textit{Asian Exclusion Act}. 
Mayo’s claims, and even a Broadway musical inspired by its contents.\textsuperscript{51} *Mother India* claimed to be an attempt to correct Americans’ widespread “ignorance” of India, and in it Mayo presented a lengthy and lurid account of the dirt, disease, sexual depravity and backwardness that she had encountered during her six-month tour of the subcontinent. Perhaps because of its scandalized tone and its almost titillating retelling of the many intrusive sexual advances that Mayo and her female travelling companion had to endure, *Mother India* became the best-known book on India by an American writer during the first half of the twentieth century.

Mayo drew on long-established popular images of India that had come from Kipling and other pro-imperial writers, and from the American missionaries who had worked in India during the nineteenth century. There was a particular resonance between these longstanding tropes and Mayo’s assertion that Indians had the archaic tendency to forsake material progress, especially in public health and the economy, for the sake of arcane spiritual preoccupations.\textsuperscript{52} *Mother India* sold more than 250,000 copies in twenty years, had gone through 27 editions by the mid 1950s. In his innovative 1958 study of U.S. perceptions of China and India, Harold Isaacs reckoned that *Mother India* was still the best-known non-fiction book about India in the United States—this despite India’s decade of independent statehood. The book was as polarizing as it was scandalizing, and both Indian nationalists and pro-imperialists held up *Mother


\textsuperscript{52} Marouf Hasian, jr. and Anne Bialowas, “Gendered Nationalism, the Colonial Narrative, and the Rhetorical Significance of the Mother India Controversy,” *Communication Quarterly* 57:4 (2009), p. 473.
India to support their respective agendas. For supporters of India, the book symbolized the worst forms of racial prejudices and one-sided views of Indian “backwardness” that were used to justify ongoing imperial rule.

While Mayo denied writing her book at the behest of the British authorities, Mother India served as the capstone of a growing pro-imperial publicity effort to counteract sympathetic portrayals of Indian nationalism in the American media. The book had been intended to shock, with chapters on themes such as: the “slave mentality,” “early to marry and early to die,” and the “wages of sin,” the latter addressing the sorry lot of the Indian widow.53 The intransigence of the Hindu character was a frequent theme: one “essentially Indian” response to the eugenic problems caused by child marriage, according to Mayo, was to see “no connection between the practice of the grandparents and the condition of grandchildren” in weakening girls for motherhood.54 The defense of Indian “womanhood” was a significant rhetorical device in Mayo’s wider pro-imperialist claims, held up as a justification British domination on the grounds that only strong imperial guidance could reform India’s severe patterns of gender discrimination. The treatment of Indian women was thus presented as “inherently endemic to the problems of Indian nationhood” itself, while Indian men's unbounded sexuality was also the cause of its indolence, backwardness and poverty.55 More forgivable to the contemporary reader, perhaps, are Mayo’s criticisms of Indian practices around animal welfare and public health, although Mayo’s discussion of the latter was also posed in such a way as to justify imperial

53 Katherine Mayo, Mother India, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936).
54 Mayo, Mother India, p. 54.
rule. “Mother India” herself was thus a pathological figure, and the conditions of public health and sexual license that prevailed in India were situated as so egregious as to require strenuous containment through the administration of the Raj—a logic that was also reflected in Mayo’s writings opposing Asian immigration to the United States and her preoccupation with modernity, public order, and gender roles.\footnote{Asha Nadkarni, “‘World Menace’: National Reproduction and Public Health in Katherine Mayo’s Mother India,” American Quarterly 60:3 (2008), pp. 805-7.} Though she had met Tagore, Gandhi and other articulate spokespeople for the nationalist cause during her travels, the scant praise Mayo gave to anybody she had met in India was reserved for British officials, the Sikhs and Muslims that embodied vigorous, martial racial qualities, and for the several Indian princes that she had been received by.

Supporters of the imperialist project in both Britain and the United States were quick to endorse Mayo’s impressions. In the Britain, the book earned favorable reviews in major media outlets such as The Nation & Athenaeum, The Spectator and The Observer. Even the more academically-oriented Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society praised Mayo’s thoroughness and its significance as a “salutary” and “helpful” lesson for Indian nationalists on the kinds of social reforms that were needed in their land.\footnote{S. S. D., “Mother India,” The Nation & Athenaeum (August 6, 1927); Meston, “The Truth About India,” The Spectator, (July 16, 1927), pp. 99-100; S. K. Ratcliffe, “Mother India,” The Observer, (July 24, 1927); M. F. O’Dwyer & P. M. Sykes, “Reviews,” Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society 14:4, (1927), p. 389.} The British-run Times of India offered a similar endorsement.\footnote{“Miss Mayo on India,” Times of India, (August 26, 1927).} A number of other book-length of India published in the same period, such as J. E. Woolacott’s Britain’s Record in India, also published in
1927, and Harry H. Field’s *After Mother India*, supported Mayo’s claims. The British government enlisted a number of sympathetic academics and spokespersons to tour the United States and endorse Mayo’s findings. Mayo also received enthusiastic reviews from American commentators. The editor of the *Christian Herald* took to the pages of *Current History* to give an lengthy defense of *Mother India*. A reviewer for the *Nashville Tennessean* reflected that knowing India’s innumerable vices and horrors, the average American reader of *Mother India* will “be glad that India is Britain’s problem and not his own.”

Other reviews were more ambivalent. The *New York Times*’ review queried whether Mayo’s emotional tone was warranted in a study that purported to consider India in broad terms, and *Time Magazine* dismissed the book in a 1935 review as an “anti-Hindu, oversimplified sketch of Indian history” that misrepresented Gandhi. The academic journal *Foreign Affairs* gave a two-line review dismissing the book as “hardly a profound contribution.” But England’s *New Statesman* was in the pro-imperial camp in endorsing Mayo’s argument, and with controversy simmering three years after the book’s publication the *New Statesman* accused the American media of having an obvious and predictable bias toward India. Mayo herself responded to the controversy in 1929 with another book, *Slaves of the Gods*, a defense of her original argument

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60 With typical rhetorical finesse Nehru later derided these “crows” of pro-imperial speakers as “undistinguished and often unknown individuals.” Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961, p. 494.
61 *Nashville Tennessean* quoted in Jha, *Civil Disobedience and After*, p. 31.
in which she professed the hope that she might further agitate the consciences of the Indian nationalists into addressing the egregious cultural practices of Hindu society before seeking political independence.

Mayo’s claims injected a renewed sense of vigor into the effort to shape American views on the India question. Sunderland’s India in Bondage, for example, was conceived as rebuttal to Mayo and Sunderland had received a substantial advance for the book in anticipation of healthy sales. Sunderland’s work and several other critiques of Mother India framed their criticism as an appeal to Americans’ sense of fairness, condemning the book as imperialist propaganda. The charge garnered a sympathetic hearing by Americans who had been shocked to learn of the extensiveness of Britain’s war propaganda in the United States before 1917 and remained wary of propaganda in its various guises well into the 1930s.65 Annie Besant wrote India Bond or Free highlighting the superior spiritual qualities of Indian culture. Another rebuttal that was widely read in the United States was journalist C. S. Iyer’s semi-satirical Father India, which demonstrated Mayo’s biased perspective by concocting an account of American urban lawlessness from a reading of juvenile court documents from the generally sedate city of Denver, Colorado.66 In a similar vein, a 1928 book entitled Uncle Sham catalogued the injustices of Southern segregation, as did Rai’s 1928 reply to Mayo, Unhappy India, which he began while on yet another publicity trip to London. Unhappy India was posthumously published in the U.S.,

66 Edwin Simpson, ‘Review: Father India,’ Religious Education 24:2, (1929), p. 181. For an Anglo-Indian reply to Mayo, which asserted that Hindus had strong social values that were similar in most respects to Christian virtues, see Ernest Wood, An Englishman Defends Mother India: A complete Constructive Reply to ‘Mother India,’ (Madras: Ganes & Co., 1929).
and one of Rai’s most biting objections to Mayo was his assertion that American racial segregation was a larger injustice than India’s caste system. Du Bois gave the book an approving review in his journal, *The Crisis*.

The sitting INC president and distinguished singer Sarojini Naidu also went to the United States on a lecture tour in 1928 to correct Mayo’s impressions, and she often likened India’s great struggle to the founding of the American republic in her speeches. She was criticized on the floor of the U.S. Senate, however, for signing the INC’s official letter of protest to the United States over the Pact of Paris that it signed in 1928. The INC claimed that America’s position in signing the pact amounted to a tacit endorsement of European imperialism. Naidu, whom Mayo had previously criticized as too “English” in her outlook to be able to offer informed comment the real conditions facing India’s masses, was the first of several prominent Indian women who rejected Mayo’s argument about the status of women in India. Naidu herself could draw on a proto-feminist framing of Indian nationalism as a founder of the All India Women’s Conference, an offshoot of the INC, in 1926. The Conference was initially focused solely on Indian nationalism, but in 1931 it took on a stronger internationalist element and convened the All-Asian Women’s Conference in Lahore, taking inspiration in part from the women’s pacifist movement in the United States.

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67 The question of whether slavery and caste discrimination were equivalent became something of a debate between Indian nationalists and the civil rights movement in the period, and *Mother India* generated a substantial discussion on this subject in the U.S. Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, pp. 57-64. The satire in Rai’s *Unhappy India* was criticised by some advocates of Indian freedom for being a too subtle for an uninformed readership, see eg: Florence Wedgwood, Letter to Lala Lajpat Rai, 24 September, 1928, in Joginder Singh Dhanki, *Perspectives on Indian National Movement: Selected Correspondence of Lala Lajpat Rai*, (New Delhi: National Book Organization, 1998), p. 454.


The British missionary, pacifist and close confidant of Gandhi, C. F. Andrews, also known as Deenabandhu, soon followed Naidu with his own lecture tours of the United States undo the damage caused by Mother India. Annie Besant soon followed. Of the various individuals Mayo had met and discussed in Mother India, none had been criticised more than Gandhi, whom she accused of betraying India’s untouchables and of selfishly disrupting British efforts to improve India’s situation. Mayo had also clearly resented Gandhi’s temerity in seeking to directly influence American public opinion over the heads of the British authorities. The Mahatma’s response was a pamphlet entitled The Drain Inspector's Report, another satire intended to demonstrate Mayo’s narrow and incomplete picture of Indian society.

The Salt March and American Public Opinion.

After almost a decade of being rebuffed in its calls for domination status, the Indian National Congress passed a resolution at its party conference in 1929 calling for full independence from Britain. It issued its own declaration of independence, modelled on the American Declaration, on January 26 the following year. In adopting the resolution, the party conference indicated that it would reject any British offers that fell short of independence, criticising the Viceroy Lord Irwin’s delays and obfuscations after Britain had promised greater Indian participation in the colony’s administration after the unrest of 1928. At the same meeting, INC took note of the dwindling effectiveness of its boycotts of

Sidney Strong, “Annie Besant Pleads for India’s Freedom in Seattle Address,” Name and date of newspaper unrecorded; Records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Group 2, Box L 256; Library of Congress Manuscripts Division. Andrews was also active in the South African struggle against racial oppression.
British products, and authorized Gandhi to undertake a new satyagraha. This time Gandhi targeted the British tax on salt, a dietary necessity in India’s hot climate that was paid by rich and poor, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh, alike. In April 1930 Gandhi and a small group of supporters embarked on a 240-mile walk from his ashram in Amhedabad to Dandi on the Gujarat coast, where they would make their own salt from seawater. The crowd swelled to hundreds as Gandhi walked from village to village, travelling in the same humble fashion as the poor peasants he passed.

Ever attentive to the publicity side of his campaigns, Gandhi had invited a cadre of British, American and European journalists to accompany him. Their presence ensured that the campaign was covered extensively in the global media, and newspaper readers across the world took a voracious interest in its daily progress. The American public read gripping dispatches from correspondents Webb Miller, who witnessed the violent attack by police on 1300 unarmed satyagrahas when they reached the coast, and Time’s Negley Farson, who frequently drew on the established notion of Gandhi as saint. Farson embellished his reports with anecdotes of his own daring efforts to circumvent British authorities when transmitting uncensored dispatches from the front lines. Editorialis in papers including the Philadelphia Enquirer, Christian Century, New Republic, the Los Angeles Times and the Boston Globe endorsed the March

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72 On the Salt March as a media event see: Hardiman, Gandhi in His Time and Ours; Scalmer, Gandhi in the West.
and spoke enthusiastically of Gandhi’s “soul force.” But by no means did all American media outlets express sympathy for Gandhi’s demands. The generally pro-imperial *New York Times*, for example, published some sympathetic accounts of Gandhi from its own correspondents in India, but also carried a range of stories via London branding the INC’s tactics disruptive and radical.75

As he had shown from the days of his earliest campaigns in South Africa, Gandhi was an adept media operator with a flair for the dramatic. By 1930 he was also the overwhelmingly dominant figure in the INC. Nehru, his protégée, had become the leader of the party in 1929. Gandhi’s considerable talents as a publicist had been instrumental to Gandhi’s rise to dominance within the party and to the INC’s large national following itself. Newspapers and radio had flourished in India from the turn of the century, instilling a stronger sense of shared nationhood that Gandhi effectively mobilised in support of the INC.76 According to a contemporary account by K. L. Motvani, it was Gandhi’s immense talent in shaping the media that enabled him to arouse hundreds of millions of Indians to the nationalist cause and the discipline of non-violence, whereas other “politicians and patriots, endowed with perhaps greater powers of intellect” had failed to stir the masses.77

The tax on salt had been carefully selected as an issue that could unite all Indians, but Gandhi’s protest was also an exceptionally successful media event that captivated the international media. Following the reports of Miller, Farson

77 K. L. Motvani, ‘Propaganda in Mahatma Gandhi’s Movement,” *Social Forces* 8:4 (June, 1930), p. 574,
and others, American journalists begun to investigate Britain’s strangulation of the Indian economy in more depth, at a time when many influential Americans championed the cause of free trade as a route to international peace.78 A number of prominent American spokespeople, such as Pearl Buck, Eleanor Roosevelt, Cordell Hull and Congressman Emanuel Celler, openly supported the Salt March, and began to note inherent illegitimacy of America’s own colonial domination of the Philippines.79 The emerging Gandhian “personality cult” in the United States was reflected in Time’s decision to make the Mahatma its man of the year for 1930. In awarding this honor to the “little half-naked brown man” whose campaign had become the “Empire’s most staggering problem,” Time noted that Gandhi and about 30,000 of his supporters had been sent to jail during the campaign. The article also detected an echo of the Boston Tea Party’s protest in Gandhi’s gathering of salt from the sea,80 though it is not clear that Gandhi specifically intended to draw this parallel. As the overwhelmingly dominant image of Indian nationalism in the American press, Gandhi presented an exotic image “far removed from American experience.” Thus, while a large number of Americans admired his bravery and non-violence, Gandhi’s foreignness made his image inherently ambiguous. By his very difference the image of Gandhi could easily be situated in the pro-imperial counter-myth of Hindu impracticality, and

thus to undermine the suggestion that the American people might have a decisive role to play in India's quest for freedom.\textsuperscript{81}

Editorials in the \textit{New Republic} and \textit{Harper's} had expressed strong support for Gandhi. The \textit{New York Times} published more than 500 articles mentioning Indian civil disobedience between 1930 and 1931, which increased to more than 700 during the following year as Gandhi attended a Round-Table Conference in London to discuss India's future.\textsuperscript{82} Gandhi was featured even more extensively in progressive newspapers such as the \textit{Christian Science Monitor}, \textit{Christian Century} and the left-wing \textit{New Leader}, and in civil rights papers such as \textit{The Chicago Defender}, Harlem's \textit{Crusader}, \textit{The Crisis} and \textit{Negro World}. Gandhi used his visual image to particularly significant effect, drawing on the relatively new medium of photojournalism. His adoption of a traditional and very brief style of dress was, if not a calculated move, a lucky accident in ensuring his photograph was widely published. Gandhi was “frozen in a remarkable array of acts” in the world’s broadsheets: “cradling an infant, frowning, spinning, walking, reading, dictating, mourning, visiting, recovering from sickness, posing with celebrities, meeting with mill workers, speaking to crowds, raising funds, distributing alms, and disembarking on European soil.”\textsuperscript{83} The explosion of American publishing on India also continued during the Salt March: twenty books were published on Indian nationalist movement in 1930 alone.\textsuperscript{84} Their titles included \textit{Voiceless India}, \textit{The Case for India}, \textit{The Indian Riddle}, \textit{India as I Knew It}, \textit{Truth About India} and \textit{The


\textsuperscript{82} Scalmer, \textit{Gandhi in the West}, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{83} Scalmer, \textit{Gandhi in the West}, p. 28.

\textsuperscript{84} Hess, \textit{America Encounters India}, p. 14.
Power of India. By 1940, one American journalist remarked that Gandhi’s image was as recognizable as Mickey Mouse, though not all in England and America found the Mahatma’s relentless pursuit of exposure for the nationalist cause appealing. One Yorkshire Post writer dismissively observed how “publicity is food and drink to him.” The politically conservative Winston Churchill made no secret of his personal distaste for Gandhi, and described him in 1931 as a “seditious...lawyer,” an “evil force” and a “fakir,” whose temerity in wearing his Indian dress to meet the King-Emperor was a unforgivable spectacle.

The pro-imperial backlash in the United States also continued into the 1930s. Another outspoken female author, Englishwoman Patricia Kendall, published an indictment of the nationalist cause called Come With Me to India! The book sold thousands of copies in the United States in the middle of the great depression. A former Oxford don and professor at Vassar College, Edward Thompson, had been a supporter of dominion status for India during the First World War, but in the 1930s he used his scholarly authority to instead endorse for American audiences the British position ahead of the London Round Table Conference on India’s constitutional status. Thompson and a collection of other unsympathetic Oxford dons met Gandhi during his visit to England in 1931, and deemed his political ideas incoherent and unworkable. To Americans, Thompson attested that imperial reform was a complicated matter that could not be rushed—full independence was an unrealistic goal.

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85 Scalmer, Gandhi in the West, p. 30.
86 Scalmer, Gandhi in the West, p. 26
88 Hardiman, Gandhi in His Time and Ours, p. 239.
89 “America and India,” The New Statesman, August 16 (1930); Edward Thompson, “The Round Table.” See also Jha, Civil Disobedience and After, pp. 136-9.
**African Americans and Indian Nationalism**

The connections that Gandhi and the INC established with African American civil rights activists during the 1920s and 1930s would prove to be one of the most lasting legacies of interwar Indian public diplomacy to the United States. As a consequence of these connections, in the 1920s the Indian nationalist movement had increasingly brought the notion of racial discrimination to the fore as the force in world politics and the basis of colonialism. Nehru condemned the British people’s “singular” inability to appreciate the Indian national perspective because of their deeply held racial prejudices: “India to [the British] is but a part of the mysterious and effete East, which always plots and intrigues most irrationally against the God-ordained might and majesty of England.”

Nehru’s own writings on the United States in *Glimpses of World History* emphasised the role in slavery in shaping the United States’ political and economic development. It was Gandhi and Rai, however, who were most influenced by the racially-centred ideas of the African American movement, and both worked diligently to cultivate connections with African American leaders in support of Indian nationalism.

Du Bois and others African American leaders also actively sought out global connections for their own cause, particularly after the First World War had exposed the global “reality of racism and imperialism.” They sympathized in particularly acute terms with the soldiers from India and other nations within

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the European empires, who had been compelled to fight in the First World War, and yet were accorded no recognition at the Versailles conference. This mirrored the treatment of African American troops returning from the First World War. Gandhi explicitly connected the prejudices that were faced by African Americans to the conceptions of racial inequality that had led to the European colonial conquest, but also frequently extended this critique of inequality to his own society. Racial discrimination had spawned British colonialism, but it was also implicated in the multiple injustices of untouchability that preoccupied Gandhi throughout the campaign for Indian independence.

Gandhi also used the metaphor of caste to engage American support, frequently describing African Americans as America’s untouchables. At the same time, many African Americans hesitated in extending support to the nationalist movement on the grounds of caste injustices.

By the end of the First World War Du Bois, the anti-colonialist Trinidadian scholar C. L. R. James, African American scientist George Washington Carver, and others proponents of racial equality had began to locate their arguments in the context of a global struggle of peoples in conquered nations who had found themselves on the wrong side of the “color line.” Du Bois’ initial assertion that there was a world “color bar” embodied in imperial conquests and racial inequality across Africa and Asia derived from his critique of U.S. imperialism in 1900. He reworked the concept in a 1906 article in Collier’s calling on African Americans to abandon the “parochial” notion that their interests were limited to the American context. He made this argument once again at the London Pan

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91 Slate, Colored Cosmopolitanism, p. 38.
92 On Gandhi’s view of untouchability see, Hardiman, Gandhi in His Time and Ours, Ch. 6; Fisher, Life of Mahatma Gandhi, pp. 142-6.
93 Slate, Colored Cosmopolitanism, p. 65.
African Congress in 1910, and would return to it frequently in the decades to follow. In a statement to the people of India enclosed in a 1925 letter to the author Benarsidas Chaturvedi, Du Bois asserted that African Americans shared the “same terrible battle of the color bar which our brothers in India are fighting” and expressing the sympathies of all African Americans to the peoples of the subcontinent.

In a more detailed piece addressing India in 1936, entitled “The Clash of Color,” Du Bois reflected on the difficulties of establishing mutual understanding between Indians and African Americans in the face of the widespread American sense of Indian exoticism and Americans’ general ignorance of Indian conditions. In it he also reflected on the temptation of both Indians and African Americans to regard themselves as racially distinct, with many Indians long wishing to be seen as “‘Aryan’ rather than ‘colored’ and to think of...[themselves] as much nearer physically and spiritually to Germany and England.” African Americans likewise regarded their own concerns as a distinct issue from European imperialism. Du Bois’ developing views in the 1920s and 1930s on the connection between racial oppression and global capitalism had striking similarities with Jawaharlal Nehru’s. Du Bois later wrote several strong endorsements of Nehru’s leadership.

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of INC and drew heavily on Nehru’s published works in the 1940s. At the same time, Du Bois questioned the utility of satyagraha for the civil rights movement given the different cultural contexts in India and the United States. Gandhi and Du Bois nevertheless enjoyed a close friendship through their long correspondence, and in Gandhi Du Bois found “perhaps the international leader with who...[he] felt the closest kinship.” Each contributed numerous articles and statements of solidarity to the other’s newspapers, and Du Bois continued to hold up Gandhi’s example of non-violence to African Americans long after the Mahatma’s death.

Gandhi also corresponded with Booker T. Washington, expressing his admiration for Washington’s Tuskegee Institute and its emphasis on the dignity of labor. Drawing on both the Bhagavad Gita and his reading of John Ruskin and Leo Tolstoy during his time in South Africa, Gandhi drew on similar principles at his ashram and in his broader conception of Indian national Swaraj, which celebrated the communalism of the village economy and stressed the equal value of all forms of labor. Du Bois also had deep roots in the Indian nationalist movement. In addition to his friendship with Rai, Du Bois met Tagore in 1930 and had written extensively on his poetry in The Crisis and his other publications. He held up Tagore as an inspirational figure in part because his artistic

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98 Chabot, Transnational Roots, p. 77.


contribution could instil in African Americans a sense of internationalism through aesthetic means. Du Bois even exchanged letters with the author of India’s constitution and Dalit leader B. A. Ambedkar in 1946. Ambedkar wrote to enquire about the petition Du Bois presented to the United Nations on behalf of African Americans, as he was considering a similar initiative on behalf of India’s untouchables, though the correspondence developed no further.

The NAACP’s John Haynes Holmes also took an active interest in shaping how Indians understood the American civil rights struggle. During the 1920s and 1930s Holmes often sent materials documenting the practice of lynching, the inequalities of segregation, and African American poverty to Gandhi’s journal and other Indian publications. For American audiences Holmes published eight books on Gandhi between 1922 and 1948, as well as serializing Gandhi’s autobiography in his magazine *Unity* in 1926. Holms was also wont to cast Gandhi as a personification of Jesus’ qualities. Gandhian non-violence also had a great appeal for American Christians, particularly in the Social Gospel tradition, and particularly to African American churches within this tradition. These churches also played an important role in fostering support for Indian nationalism among the American civil rights movement. For example, the African American *Church Review* had editorialized in 1921 that the methods of *satyagraha* presented an “intensely practical” way of achieving a “new birth of freedom” for Indians as well as other communities fighting for their liberty.

103 Barrier, *India and America*, p. 233.
104 Reverdy C. Ransom quoted in Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, p. 44.
There was also a broader transnational dimension to these growing connections between Indians and Americans in resisting racism and imperialism. Jawaharlal Nehru made some of his enduring connections to African Americans through his friendship with the Calcutta-born, mixed-race activist Cedric Dover, who undertook most of his anti-imperial activism in the United Kingdom and spoke out there on behalf of African Americans. C. F. Andrews also served as a conduit between the African American civil rights struggle and Indian nationalism. He visited the United States several times and, notably, toured the Tuskegee Institute in 1929, an institution that Gandhi and Rai both greatly admired and Rai had visited. The connections between the Indian nationalist movement and the African American civil rights struggle would remain deep during the Second World War and beyond it. The NAACP remained supportive of Indian causes well into the Truman administration, and African American activists would draw heavily on the techniques of satyagraha into the 1950s and 1960s.

**Conclusion**

After 1932 Gandhi and India faded from the American headlines. The controversies around the Third Round Table Conference on the Indian constitution in London did not serve the INC’s global reputation well. The Great Depression, global economic turmoil, and troubling political events that appeared to foreshadow a major crisis in Europe pushed Gandhi and India still further from the front pages and the airwaves of America. Editorials on Gandhi, in particular, in conservative American papers such as the *New York Times* turned harsh after Gandhi’s failure in London in 1932, while solidly liberal U.S.
papers grew pessimistic about the prospects of substantial British reforms. The Indian nationalist movement had nonetheless been remarkably effective and nuanced in its approach to public diplomacy in the United States before the 1930s. The INC was especially innovative in engaging spokespeople such as Tagore, Rai, Hossain, and Andrews, and in establishing connections with sympathetic Americans such as Sunderland, Du Bois, Washington and Holmes. The publications that Rai, Hossain and others established within the United States, and the INC’s recognition that Indians and African Americans faced a shared, transnational struggle against racial discrimination, also played a vital role in establishing American support for Indian nationalism. Gandhi was exceptional in his ability to present himself as a compelling figure for the global media. With the possible exception of international Communism before 1917, no other political cause without government backing had managed to capture so much international media attention before the Second World War.

The Indian nationalist movement’s effort to engage American public opinion was also central to the consolidation of the idea of India and the kinds of political values that independent India would claim as its own. India’s public diplomacy to the United States reflected the notion that racial prejudice was the foundation of the unequal world order that had sustained imperial exploitation. It was a point Nehru and other Indian leaders would consistently return to in articulate India’s claims for independence during the Second World War and in justifying India’s Cold War non-alignment after 1947. The connections that Gandhi, Rai and others established with African American activists also foreshadowed one of the most intractable areas of disagreement between India and the United States that often spilled out into declaratory foreign policy:
India's critique of domestic American race relations. These criticisms became a significant an irritant to the Indo-American relationship in their own right, but also caused post-war leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Krishna Menon to charge that American Cold War grand strategy was tacitly informed by a belief in the inferiority of non-white races. Further disagreements between the United States and India would develop around global and regional security, the global projection of American military power and the strategic role of nuclear weapons. The promotion of capitalism and consumerism would also prove to be a source of conflict and misapprehension in Indo-American relations. These cleavages would become a clearer during the Second World War, when the United States government came to regard Indian public opinion as significant to its own military interests, and set about cultivating Indian public support for Allied war aims through the American Office of War Information.