

Theory Talks

Presents

THEORY TALK #55

MARY ELIZABETH KING ON CIVIL ACTION FOR
SOCIAL CHANGE, THE TRANSNATIONAL
WOMEN'S MOVEMENT, AND THE ARAB
AWAKENING

Theory Talks

is an interactive forum for discussion of debates in International Relations with an emphasis of the underlying theoretical issues. By frequently inviting cutting-edge specialists in the field to elucidate their work and to explain current developments both in IR theory and real-world politics, *Theory Talks* aims to offer both scholars and students a comprehensive view of the field and its most important protagonists.

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MARY ELIZABETH KING ON CIVIL ACTION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE, THE TRANSNATIONAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT, AND THE ARAB AWAKENING



Nonviolent resistance remains by and large a marginal topic to IR. Yet it constitutes an influential idea among idealist social movements and non-Western populations alike, one that has moved to the center stage in recent events in the Middle East. In this *Talk*, Mary King—who has spent over 40 years promoting nonviolence—elaborates on, amongst others, the women's movement, nonviolence, and civil action more broadly.

What is, according to you, the central challenge or principal debate in International Relations? And what is your position regarding this challenge/in this debate?

The field of International Relations is different from Peace and Conflict Studies; it has essentially to do with relationships between states and developed after World War I. In the 1920s, the big debates concerned whether international cooperation was possible, and the diplomatic elite were very different from diplomats today. The roots of Peace and Conflict Studies go back much further. By the late 1800s peace studies already existed in the Scandinavian countries. Studies of industrial strikes in the United States were added by the 1930s, and the field had spread to Europe by the 1940s. Peace and Conflict Studies had firmly cohered by the 1980s, and soon encircled the globe. Broad in spectrum and inherently multi-disciplinary, it is not possible to walk through one portal to enter the field.

To me it is also important that Peace and Conflict studies is not wary of asking the bigger hypothetical questions such as 'Can we built a better world?' 'How do we do a better job at resolving conflicts before they become destructive?' 'How do we create more peaceable societies?' If we do not pose these questions, we are unlikely to find the answers. Some political scientists say that they do not wish to privilege either violence or nonviolent action. I am not in that category, trying *not* to privilege violence or nonviolent action. The field of peace and conflict studies is value-laden in its pursuit of more peaceable societies. We need more knowledge and study of how conflicts can be addressed *without* violence, including to the eventual benefit of all the parties and the larger society. When in 1964 Martin Luther King Jr received the Nobel Peace Prize, his remarks in Oslo that December tied the nonviolent struggle in the United States to the whole planet's need for disarmament. He said that the most exceptional characteristic of the civil rights movement was the direct participation of masses of people in it. King's remarks in Oslo were also his toughest call for the use of nonviolent resistance on issues other than racial injustice. International nonviolent action, he said, could be utilized to let global leaders know that beyond racial and economic justice, individuals across the world were concerned about world peace:

I venture to suggest [above all] . . . that . . . nonviolence become immediately a subject for study and for serious experimentation in every field of human conflict, by no means excluding relations between nations . . . which [ultimately] make war. . . .

In the half century since King made his address in Oslo, nonviolent civil resistance has not been allocated even a tiny fraction of the resources for study that have been dedicated to the fields of democratization, development, the environment, human rights, and aspects of national security. Many, many questions beg for research, including intensive interrogation of failures. Among the new global developments with which to be reckoned is the enlarging role of non-state, non-governmental organizations as intermediaries, leading dialogue groups comprised of adversaries discussing disputatious issues and working ‘hands-on’ to intervene directly in local disputes. The role of the churches and laity in ending Mozambique’s civil war comes to mind. One challenge within IR is how to become more flexible in viewing the world, in which the nation state cannot control social change, and with the widening of civil space.

How did you arrive at where you currently are in your thinking about IR?

I came from a family that was deeply engaged with social issues. My father was the eighth Methodist minister in six generations from North Carolina and Virginia. The Methodist church in both Britain and the United States has a history of concern for social responsibility — a topic of constant discussion in my home as a child and young adult. When four African American students began the southern student sit-in movement in Greensboro, North Carolina, on February 1, 1960, by sitting-in at a Woolworth’s lunch counter, I was still in college. Although I am white, I began to think about how to join the young black people who were intentionally violating the laws of racial segregation by conducting sit-ins at lunch counters across the South. Soon more white people, very like me, were joining them, and the sweep of student sit-ins had become truly inter-racial. The sit-in movement is what provided the regional base for what would become a mass U.S. civil rights movement, with tens of thousands of participants, defined by the necessity for fierce nonviolent discipline. So, coming from a home where social issues were regularly discussed it was almost natural for me to become engaged in the civil rights movement. And I have remained engaged with such issues for the rest of my life, while widening my aperture. Today I work on a host of questions related to conflict, building peace, gender, the combined field of gender and peace-building, and nonviolent or civil resistance. At a very young age, I had started thinking as a citizen of the world and watching what was happening worldwide, rather than merely in the United States.

Martin Luther King (to whom I am not related) would become one of history’s most influential agents for propagating knowledge of the potential for constructive social change without resorting to violence. He was the most significant exemplar for what we simply called The Movement. Yet the movement had two southern organizations: in 1957 after the success of the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-56, he created, along with others, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The other organization was the one for which I worked for four years: the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee ([SNCC](#), pron. *snick*), which initially came into being literally to coordinate among the leaders of the student sit-in campaigns. As the sit-ins spread across the South, 70,000 black, and, increasingly, white, students participated. By the end of 1960, 3,600 would have been jailed.

SCLC and SNCC worked together but had different emphases: one of our emphases in SNCC was on eliciting leadership representing the voices of those who had been ignored in the past. We identified many women with remarkable leadership skills and sought to strengthen them. We wanted to build institutions that would make it easier for poor black southern communities to

become independent and move out of the 'serfdom' in which they lived. Thus we put less prominence on large demonstrations, which SCLC often emphasized. Rather, we stressed the building of alternative (or parallel) institutions, including voter registration, alternative political parties, cooperatives, and credit unions.

What would a student need (dispositions, skills) to become a specialist in IR or understand the world in a global way?

One requirement is a subject that has virtually disappeared from the schools in the United States: the field of geography. It used to be taught on every level starting in kindergarten, but has now been melded into a *mélange* called 'social sciences'. You would be surprised at how much ignorance exists and how it affects effectiveness. I served for years on the board of directors of an esteemed international non-profit private voluntary organization and recall a secretary who thought that Africa was a country. This is not simplistic — if you don't know the names of continents, countries, regions, and the basic political and economic history, it's much harder to think critically about the world. Secondly, students need to possess an attitude of reciprocity and mutuality. No perfect country exists; there is no nirvana without intractable problems in our world. No society, for example, has solved the serious problems of gender inequity that impede all spheres of life. Every society has predicaments and problems that need to be addressed, necessitating a constant process. So we each need to stand on a platform in which every nation can improve the preservation of the natural environment, the way it monitors and protects human rights, transitions to democratic systems, the priority it places on the empowerment of women, and so on. On this platform, concepts of inferior and superior are of little value.

You also co-authored [an article](#) in 1965 about the role of women and how working in a political movement for equality (the civil rights movement) has affected your perceptions of the relationship between men and women. Do you believe that the involvement of women in the Civil Rights Movement brought more gender equality in the USA and do you think involvement in Nonviolent Resistance movements in other places in the world could start such a process?

From within the heart of the civil rights movement I wrote an article with Casey Hayden, with whom I worked in Atlanta in the main office of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee ([SNCC](#)) and in the Mississippi [Freedom Summer](#) of 1964. Casey (Sandra Cason) and I were deeply engaged in a series of conversations involving other women in SNCC about what we had been learning, the lessons from our work aiding poor black people to organize, and asking ourselves whether our insights from being part of SNCC could be applied to other forms of injustice, such as inequality for women. The document reflected our growth and enlarging understanding of how to mobilize communities, how to strategize, how to achieve lasting change, and was a manifestation of this expanding awareness. The title was [Sex and Caste – A Kind of Memo](#). Caste is an ancient Hindu demarcation that not only determines an individual's social standing on the basis of the group into which one is born, but also differentiates and assigns occupational and economic roles. It cannot be changed. Casey and I thought of caste as comparable to the sex of one's birth. Women endure many forms of prejudice, bias, discrimination, and cruelty merely because they are female. For these reasons we chose the term caste. We sent our memorandum to forty women working in local peace and civil rights movements of the United States. The anecdotal evidence is strong that it inspired other women, who started coming together collectively to work on their own self-emancipation in ['consciousness raising groups.'](#) It had appeared in *Liberation* magazine of the War Resisters

League in April 1966 and was a catalyst in spurring the U.S. women's movement; indeed, the consciousness-raising groups fuelled the women's movement in the United States during the 1970s. Historians reflect that the article provided tinder for what is now called 'second-wave feminism', and the 1965 original is anthologized as one of the generative documents of twentieth-century gender studies.

We have to remember that women's organizations are nothing new, but have been poorly documented in history and that much information has been lost. Women have been prime actors for nonviolent social change in many parts of the world for a long time. New Zealand was the first country to grant women the vote, in 1893, after decades of organizing. Other countries followed: China, Iran, later the United States and the United Kingdom. Women in Japan would not vote until 1946. IR expert Fred Halliday contends that one of the most remarkable transnational movements of the modern age was the women's suffrage movement. The movement to enfranchise women may have been the biggest transnational nonviolent movement of human history. It was a significant historical phenomenon that throws light on how it is sometimes easier to bring about social and political change now than in the past.

Nonviolent movements seem to be growing around the world, and not only in dictatorships but also in democracies in Europe and the USA. How do you explain this?

I think that the sharing of knowledge is the answer to this question. Study in the field of nonviolent action has accelerated since the 1970s, often done by people who are both practitioners and scholars, as am I. Organizing nonviolently for social justice is not new, but the knowledge that has consolidated during the last 40 years has been major. The works of [Gene Sharp](#) have been significant, widely translated, and are accessible through the [Albert Einstein Institution](#). His first major work, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, in three volumes, came out in 1973 (Boston: Porter Sargent Publishers). It marked the development of a new understanding of how this form of cooperative action works, the conditions under which it can be optimized, and the ways in which one can improve effectiveness. Sharp's works have since been translated into more than 40 languages. Also valuable are the works and translations of dozens of other scholars, who often stand on his shoulders. Today there may be 200 scholar-activists in this field worldwide, with a great deal of work now underway in related fields. Knowledge is being shared not only through translated works, but also through organizations and their training programs, such as the War Resisters League International and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, each of which came into existence in Britain around World War I. Both are still running seminars, training programs, and distributing books. [George Lakey's Training for Change](#) and a new [database](#) at Swarthmore College that he has developed are sharing knowledge. So is the [International Sex and Center for Nonviolent Conflict](#), which has built a dramatic record in a short time, having run more than 400 seminars and workshops in more than 139 countries. The three major films that ICNC has produced (for example, '[Bringing Down a Dictator](#)'), have been translated into 20 languages and been publicly broadcast to more than 20 million viewers.

After its success, leaders from the Serbian youth movement Otpor! (Resistance) that in 2000 disintegrated the Slobodan Milošević dictatorship formed a network of activists, including experienced veterans from civil-resistance struggles in South Africa, the Philippines, Lebanon, Georgia, and Ukraine to share their experiences with other movements. People can now more easily find knowledge on the World Wide Web, often in their original language or a second language, and they can find networks that share information about their experiences, including their successes and failures.

I reject the Twitter explanation for the increased use of nonviolent action or civil resistance, because all nonviolent movements appropriate the most advanced technologies available. This pattern is related to the importance of communications for their basic success. Nonviolent mobilizations must be very shrewd in putting across their purpose, their goals and objectives, preparing slogans, and conveying information on how people can become involved. In order for people to join—bearing in mind that numbers are important for success—it is critically important to make clear what goal(s) you are seeking and why you have elected to work with civil resistance. This decision is sometimes hard to understand for people who have suffered great cruelty from their opponent, and who maintain 'but we are the victims', making the sharing of the logic of the technique of civil resistance vital.

What would you say is the importance of Nonviolent Resistance Studies in the field of International Relations and Political Science? And how do you counter those who argue that some forms of structural domination are only ended through violence?

In this case we can look at the evidence and stay away from arguing beliefs or ideology. Thanks to political scientists Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, who have produced a discerning work, [Why Civil Resistance Works](#) (2011), we now have empirical evidence that removes this question from mystery. They studied 323 violent and nonviolent movements that occurred between 1900 and 2006 and found that the nonviolent campaigns were twice as effective as violent struggles in achieving their goals, while incurring fewer costly fatalities and producing much greater prospects for democratic outcomes after the end of the campaign. They found only one area in which violent movements have been more successful, and that is in secessions. So, we don't need to dwell in the realm of opinion, but can read their findings. Other scholars have written about the same issues using qualitative data — by doing interviews, developing case studies, and analytical descriptions — but the work of Chenoweth and Stephan is quantitative, putting it in a different category due to its research methods.

Reading 'Why Civil Resistance Works' it caught my eye that nonviolent campaigns seem less successful in the Middle East and Asia than in other regions. Did you see that also in your own work? And if so, do you have an explanation for it? In addition, do you believe that the 'Arab Awakening' is a significant turn in history, or did the name arise too quickly and will it remain a temporary popular phrase?

What I encountered in working in the Middle East was an expectation, notion, or hope among people that a great leader would save them and bring them out of darkness. This belief seems often to have kept the populace in a state of passivity. Sometimes such pervasive theories of leadership are deeply elitist: one must be well educated to be a leader, one must be born into that role, one must be male, or the first son, etc. Such concepts of leadership discourage the taking of independent civil action.

I think that the Arab Awakening has been significant for a number of reasons. As one example, there had been a widespread (and patronizing) assumption in the United States and the West that the Arabs were not interested in democracy. We have heard from various sources including Israel for decades that Arabs are not attracted to democracy. As a matter of fact, I think that *all* people want a voice. All human beings wish to be listened to and to be able to express their hopes and aspirations. This is a fundamental basis of democracy and widely applicable, although democracy

may take different forms. The Arab Awakening rebutted this arrogant assumption. This does not mean that the course will be easy. One of my Egyptian colleagues said to me, ‘We have had dictatorship since 1952, but after Tahir Square you expect us to build a perfect democracy in 52 weeks! It cannot happen!’

Among the first concessions sought by the 2011 Arab revolts was rejection of the right of a dictator’s sons to succeed him. The passing of power from father to son has been a characteristic of patriarchal societies, in the Arab world and elsewhere. [Anthropologist John Borneman](#) notes, ‘The public renunciation of the son’s claim to inherit the father’s power definitively ends the specific Arab model of succession that has been incorporated into state dictatorships among tribal authorities’. In Tunisia to Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen (not all of which are successes), such movements have sought to end the presumption of father-son inheritance of rule.

I believe that we are seeing the *start* of a broad democratization process in the Middle East, not its end. The learning and preparation that had been occurring in Egypt prior to Tahrir Square was extensive. Workshops had been underway for 10 to 15 years before people filled Tahrir Square. Women bloggers had for years been monitoring torture and sharing news from outside. One woman blogger translated a comic book into Arabic about the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, from the 1960s, and had it distributed all over Cairo. Labor unions had been very active. According to historian Joel Beinin, from 1998 to 2010 some 3 million laborers took part in 3,500 to 4,000 strikes, sit-ins, demonstrations, and other actions, realizing more than 600 collective labor actions per year in 2007 and 2008. In the years immediately before the revolution, these actions became more coherent. Wael Ghonim, a 30-year-old Google executive, set up a Facebook page and used Google technologies to share ideas and knowledge about what ordinary people can do. The [April 6 Youth Movement](#), set up in 2008, three years before Tahrir, sent one of its members to Belgrade in 2009, to learn how Otpor! had galvanized the bringing down of Milošević. He returned to Cairo with materials and films, lessons from other nonviolent movements, and workshop materials. This all goes back to the sharing of knowledge. Yet the Egyptians have now come to the point where they must assume responsibility and accountability for the whole and make difficult decisions for their society. It will be a long and difficult process. And it raises the question of what kind of help from outside is essential.

Why do you raise this point; do you think outside help is essential?

I know from having studied a large number of nonviolent movements in different parts of the globe that the sharing of lessons laterally among mobilizations and nonviolent struggles is highly effective. African American leaders were traveling by steamer ship from 1919 until the outbreak of World War II to the Indian subcontinent, to learn from Gandhi and the Indian independence struggles. This great interchange between black leaders in the United States and the Gandhian activists, as the historian Sudarshan Kapur shows in *Raising Up A Prophet* (1992), was critically significant in the solidification of consensus in the U.S. black community on nonviolent means. I have written about how the knowledge moved from East to West in my book [Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King](#). Scholarly exchanges and interchanges among activists from other struggles are both potentiating and illuminating. Most observers fail to see that nonviolent mobilizations often have very deep roots involving the lateral sharing of experience and know-how.

You have written a book about the first uprising, or 'intifada', in the Occupied Palestinian Territories between 1987 and 1993. The second Palestinian uprising did not contain much nonviolent tactics though. Do you foresee another uprising soon? If not, why? If yes, do you think that Nonviolent Actions will play again an important role in that uprising, or is it more likely to turn violent?

Intifada is linguistically a nonviolent word: It means shaking off and has no violent implication whatsoever. (This word is utterly inappropriate for what happened in the so-called Second Intifada, although it started out as a nonviolent endeavor.) In the 1987 intifada, virtually the entire Palestinian society living under Israel's military occupation unified itself with remarkable cohesion on the use of nonviolent tools. The first intifada (1987-1993, especially 1987-1990) benefited from several forces at work in the 1970s and 1980s, about which I write in [A Quiet Revolution](#) (2007), one of which came from Palestinian activist intellectuals working with Israeli groups, who wanted to end occupation for their own reasons. These Israeli peace activists thought the occupation degraded *them*, made them less than human, in addition to oppressing Palestinians. The second so-called intifada was not a 'shaking off'. For the first time, it bade attacks against the Israeli settlements, which had not occurred before.

Let me put it this way: in virtually every situation, there is some potential for human beings to take upon themselves their own liberation through nonviolent action. We may expect that such potential is dormant and waiting for enactment. Disciplined nonviolent action is underway in a number of village-based struggles against the separation barrier in the West Bank right now, in which Israeli allies are among the action takers. As another example, the [Freedom Theatre in Jenin](#) is using Freedom Rides, a concept adopted from the U.S. southern Civil Rights Movement, riding buses to the South Hebron Hills villages and along the way using drama, music, and giant puppets as a way of stimulating debate about Israeli occupation. Bloggers and writers share their experiences (see e.g. [this post by Nathan Schneider](#)). For the first time, as we speak, the Freedom Bus will travel from the West Bank to make two performances in historic pre-1948 Palestine (Israel), in Haifa and the Golan, in June 2013. A Palestinian 'Empty Stomach' campaign, led by Palestinian political prisoners in Israel, has had some success in using hunger strikes to press Israeli officials for certain demands. With the purpose of prevailing upon Israel to conform to international resolutions pertaining to the Palestinians and to end its military occupation, Palestinian civic organizations in 2005 launched a [Boycott, Divestment Sanctions \(BDS\) campaign](#), drawing upon the notable example of third-party sanctions applied in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. The Palestinian Authority has called for non-state observer status at the United Nations and supports the boycotting of products from Israeli settlements resistance.

More and more Palestinians are now saying, 'We must fight for our rights with nonviolent resistance'. Many Israelis are also deeply concerned about the future of their country. I recently got an email from an Israeli who was deeply affected by reading *Quiet Revolution* and has started to reach out to Palestinians and take actions to bring to light the injustices that he perceives. Tremendous debate is underway about new techniques, novel processes, and how to shift gears to more effective mutual action. The United States government and its people continue to pay for Israel's occupation and militarization, which has abetted the continuation of conflict, although it is often done in the name of peace! The United States has not incentivized the building of peace. It has done almost nothing to help the construction of institutions that could assist coexistence.

Also, it is very important for the entire world, including Israelis, to recognize intentional nonviolent action when they see it. The Israeli government persisted in denying that the 1987 Intifada was nonviolent, when the Palestinian populace had been maintaining extraordinary

nonviolent discipline for nearly three years, despite harsh reprisals. Israeli officials continued to call it 'unending war' and 'the seventh war'. Indeed, it was not perfect nonviolent discipline, but enough that was indicative of a change in political thinking among the people in the Palestinian areas that could have been built upon. Although some Israeli social scientists accurately perceived the sea change in Palestinian political thought about what methods to use in seeking statehood and the lifting of the military occupation, the government of Israel generally did not seize upon such popularly enacted nonviolent discipline to push for progress. My sources for *Quiet Revolution* include interviews with Israelis, such as the former Chief Psychologist of the Israel Defense Force and IDF spokesperson.

Your latest book is about the transitions of the Eastern European countries from being under Soviet rule to independent democracies. You chose to illustrate these transitions with New York Times articles. Why did you chose this approach; do you think the NY Times was important as a media agency in any way or is there another reason?

There is another reason: *The New York Times* and CQ Press approached me and asked if I would write a reference book on the nonviolent revolutions of the Eastern bloc, using articles from the *Times* that I would choose upon which to hang the garments of the story. The point of the work is to help particularly young people learn that they can study history by studying newspapers. [The book](#) gives life to the old adage that newspaper reporters write the first draft of history. In the book's treatment of these nonviolent revolutions, I chose ten *Times* articles for each of the major ten struggles that are addressed, adding my historical analysis to complete the saga for each country. It had been difficult for *Times* reporters to get into Poland, for example, in the late 1970s and the crucial year of 1980; they sometimes risked their lives. Yet it's in the nature of journalism that their on-the-spot reportage needed additional analysis; furthermore newspaper accounts often stress description.

After the 1968 Prague Spring, when the Soviet Union sent 750,000 troops and tanks from five Warsaw Pact countries into Czechoslovakia, crushing that revolt, across Eastern Europe a tremendous amount of fervent work got underway by small non-official committees, often below the radar of the communist party states. This included *samizdat* (Russian for 'self published'), works not published by the state publishing machinery, underground publications that were promoting new ways of thinking about how to address their dilemma. Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Lithuania were the most active in the Eastern bloc with their major but covert samizdat. As it was illegal in Czechoslovakia for a citizen to own a photocopy machine, 'books' were published by using ten pieces of onion-skin paper interspersed with carbon sheets, 'publishing' each page by typing it and its copies on a manual typewriter.

The entire phenomenon of micro-committees, flying universities, samizdat boutiques, seminars, drama with hidden meanings, underground journals, and rock groups transmitting messages eluded outside observers, who were not thinking about what the people could do for themselves. The economists and Kremlinologists who were observing the Eastern bloc did not discern what the playwrights, small committees of activist intellectuals, local movements, labor unions, academicians, and church groups were undertaking. They did not imagine the scope or scale of what the people were doing for themselves with utmost self-reliance. In essence, no one saw these nonviolent revolutions coming, with the exception of the rare onlooker, such as the historian [Timothy Garton Ash](#). Even today the peaceful transitions to democracy of the Eastern bloc are sometimes explained by saying 'Gorby did it', when Gorbachev did not come to power until 1985. Or by attributing the alterations to Reagan's going to Berlin and telling Gorbachov to tear down the Wall.

By December 1981, Poland was under martial law, which unleashed a high degree of underground organizing, countless organizations of self-help, reimagining of the society, and the publishing of samizdat. Still, even so, some people believe that this sweeping political change was top-down. It is indisputably true that nonviolent action usually interacts with other forces and forms of power, but I would say that we need this book for its accessible substantiation of historically significant independent nonviolent citizen action as a critical element in the collapse of the Soviet Union.

You also mention Al Jazeera as an important media agency in your most recent blog post at 'Waging Nonviolence'. You wrote that Al Jazeera has an important role in influencing global affairs. Could you explain why? And more generally, how important is diversification of media for international politics?

Al Jazeera generally has not been taking the point of view of the official organs of governments of Arab countries and has usually not reported news from ministries of information. Additionally, it often carries reports from local correspondents in the country at issue. If you are following a report from Gaza, it is likely to be a Gazan journalist who is transmitting to Al Jazeera. If it is a report from Egypt, it may well be an Egyptian correspondent. Al Jazeera also has made a point of reporting news from Israel, and utilizing reporters in Tel Aviv, which may be a significant development. Certainly in the 2010-2011 Arab Awakening, it made a huge difference that reports were coming directly from the action takers rather than the official news outlets of Arab governments.

President George W. Bush did not want Al Jazeera to come to the United States, because he considered it too anti-American. I remember reading at the time that the first thing that Gen. Colin Powell said to Al Jazeera was 'can you tone it down a little?' when asking why Al Jazeera couldn't be less anti-American in its news. To me, either you support free speech or you do not; it's free or it's not: You can't have a little bit of control and a little bit of freedom.

Until recently, Al Jazeera was not easily available in the United States, except in Brattleboro, Vermont; Washington, DC; and a few other places. It was difficult to get it straight in the United States. I mounted a special satellite so that I could get Al Jazeera more freely. This does not speak well for freedom of the press in the United States. This may change with the advent of Al Jazeera America, although we still do not know to what degree it will represent an editorially free press.

News agencies are important for civil-resistance movements for major reasons. Popular mobilizations need good communications internally and externally! People need to understand clearly what is the purpose and strategy and to be part of the making of decisions. Learning also crucially needs to take place inside the movement: activist intellectuals often act as interpreters, framing issues anew, suggesting that an old grievance is now actionable. No one expects the butcher, the baker, or the candlestick maker, and everyone else in the movement to read history and theory.

When news media are interested and following a popular movement of civil resistance, they can enhance the spread of knowledge. In the U.S. civil rights movement, the Southern white-owned newspapers considered the deaths of black persons or atrocities against African Americans as not being newsworthy. There was basically a 'black-out', if you want to call it that, with no pun. Yet dreadful things were happening while we were trying to mobilize, organize, and get out the word. So SNCC created its own media, and [Julian Bond](#) and others and I set up nationwide alternative outlets. Eventually we had 12 photographers across the South. This is very much like what the

people of the Eastern bloc did with samizdat — sharing and disseminating papers, articles, chapters, even whole books. The media can offer a tremendous boost, but sometimes you have to create your own.

Last question. You combine scholarship with activism. How do you reconcile the academic claim for ‘neutrality’ with the emancipatory goals of activism?

To be frank, I am not searching for neutrality in my research. Rather, I strive for accuracy, careful transcription, and scrupulous gathering of evidence. I believe that this is how we can become more effective in working for justice, environmental protection, sustainable development, pursuing human rights, or seeking gender equity as critical tools to build more peaceable societies. Where possible I search for empirical data. So much has been ignored, for example, with regards to the effects of gendered injustice. I do not seek neutrality on this matter, but strong evidence. For example, since the 1970s, experts have known that the education of women has profoundly beneficial and measurable effects across entire societies, benefiting men, children, and women. Data from Kerala, India; Sri Lanka; and elsewhere has shown that when you educate women the entire society is uplifted and that all indicators shift positively. The problem is that the data have for decades been ignored or trivialized. We need much more than neutrality. We need to interpret evidence and data clearly to make them compelling and harder to ignore. I think that we can do this with methodologies that are uncompromisingly scrupulous.

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Related links

- [King's personal page](#)
- Read the book edited by King on *Peace Research for Africa* (UNU, 2007) [here](#) (pdf)
- Read the book by King *Teaching Model: Nonviolent Transformation of Conflict* (UNU, 2006) [here](#) (pdf)