

THE GENEALOGY OF NONVIOLENCE

The patriarchs of the nonviolence movement in 20th-century America were two ministers, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Reverend James Lawson. Both men studied the writings of Mohandas Gandhi, and both made pilgrimages to Gandhi's ashram in India.

Lawson applauded the peaceful bus boycott that King led in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955-56. After he returned to America, Lawson taught workshops in nonviolence for King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, as well as at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.

Among his students at Fisk were Bernard Lafayette, Dorothy Cotton, Diane Nash, and James Bevel. Their disciples, in turn, included Andrew Young, James Orange, Hosea Williams, Andrew Marrisett, and Tommy Wrenn—all of whom trained black youth, like Arnetta and the Peace Ponies, in the values and tactics of nonviolent protest.

A key lesson about nonviolence that Lawson and King taught generations of peaceful activists was: “Your idea is not small, and because your idea is not small, your numbers will not be small either.” (Quotation source: David Halberstam, *The Children*)