

Given these conclusions, if our movements are to have any possibility of destroying oppressive systems such as capitalism and white supremacy and building a free and healthy world, we must spread these criticisms and end the stranglehold of nonviolence over discourse while developing more effective forms of struggle.

We might say that the purpose of a conversation is to persuade and be persuaded, while the purpose of a debate is to win, and thus silence your opponent. One of the first steps to success in any debate is to control the terminology to give oneself the advantage and put one's opponents at a disadvantage. This is exactly what pacifists have done in phrasing the disagreement as *nonviolence versus violence*. Critics of nonviolence typically use this dichotomy, with which most of us fundamentally disagree, and push to expand the boundaries of nonviolence so that tactics we support, such as property destruction, may be accepted within a nonviolent framework, indicating how disempowered and delegitimized we are.

I know of no activist, revolutionary, or theorist relevant to the movement today who advocates only the use of violent tactics and opposes any usage of tactics that could not be called violent. We are advocates of a *diversity of tactics*, meaning effective combinations drawn from a full range of tactics that might lead to liberation from all the components of this oppressive system: white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, and the state. We believe that tactics should be chosen to fit the particular situation, not drawn from a preconceived moral code. We also tend to believe that means are reflected in the ends, and would not want to act in a way that invariably would lead to dictatorship or some other form of society that does not respect life and freedom. As such, we can more accurately be described as proponents of revolutionary or militant activism than as proponents of violence.²

I will refer to proponents of nonviolence by their chosen nomenclature, as nonviolent activists or, interchangeably, pacifists. Many practitioners of such prefer one term or the other, and some even make a distinction between the two, but in my experience the distinctions are not consistent from one person to the next. Most importantly, pacifists/nonviolent activists themselves tend to collaborate regardless of their chosen term, so the difference in labels is not important to the considerations of this book. Broadly, by using the term *pacifism* or *nonviolence*, they designate a way of life or a method of social activism that avoids, transforms, or excludes violence while attempting to change society to create a more peaceful and free world.

At this point it might help to clearly define *violence*, but one of the critical arguments of this book is that *violence* cannot be clearly defined. I should also clarify a few other terms that pop up frequently. The word *radical* I use literally, to mean a critique, action, or person that goes to the *roots* of a particular problem rather than focusing on the superficial solutions placed on the table by the prejudices and powers of the day. The word is not a synonym for *extreme* or *extremist*, much as the media would have us believe it is, through ignorance or design. (Similarly, in case anyone is still unclear: an anarchist is not someone who favors chaos but someone who favors the total liberation of the world through the abolition of capitalism, government, and all other forms of oppressive authority, to be replaced by any number of other social arrangements, proven or utopian.) On the other hand, I do not use the word *revolution* literally, to mean the overthrow of current rulers by a new set of rulers (which would make *anti-authoritarian revolution* an oxymoron), but only to mean a social upheaval with widespread transformative effects.

² Because it may be presumptuous to refer to someone who is not engaged in open conflict with the state as a revolutionary, I define a *revolutionary activist* as someone who, at the least, is building toward the point when such a conflict is practical. Some people have qualms with the term *activist*, or associate it with reformist types of activism. To avoid being too particular about words and terminology, I will ask readers simply to receive this term in the best possible way.

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the imperialist states.⁹ In many ways the poverty of its people has deepened and the exploitation has become more efficient. Independence from colonial rule has given India more autonomy in a few areas, and it has certainly allowed a handful of Indians to sit in the seats of power, but the exploitation and commodification of the commons have deepened. Moreover, India lost a clear opportunity for meaningful liberation from an easily recognizable foreign oppressor. Any liberation movement now would have to go up against the confounding dynamics of nationalism and ethnic/religious rivalry in order to abolish a domestic capitalism and government that are far more developed. On balance, the independence movement proves to have failed.

The claim of a pacifist victory in capping the nuclear arms race is somewhat bizarre. Once again, the movement was not exclusively nonviolent; it included groups that carried out a number of bombings and other acts of sabotage or guerrilla warfare.¹⁰ And, again, the victory is a dubious one. The much-ignored nonproliferation treaties only came after the arms race had already been won, with the US as undisputed nuclear hegemon in possession of more nuclear weapons than was even practical or useful. And it seems clear that proliferation continues as needed, currently in the form of tactical nuke development and a new wave of proposed nuclear power facilities. Really, the entire issue seems to have been settled more as a matter of internal policy within the government than as a conflict between a social movement and a government. Chernobyl and several near meltdowns in the US showed that nuclear energy (a necessary component of nuclear arms development) was something of a liability, and it doesn't take a protester to question the usefulness, even to a government bent on conquering the world, of diverting staggering resources toward nuclear proliferation when you already have enough bombs to blow up the entire planet, and every single war and covert action since 1945 has been fought with other technologies.

The US civil rights movement is one of the most important episodes in the pacifist history. Across the world, people see it as an example of nonviolent victory. But, like the other examples discussed here, it was neither a victory nor nonviolent. The movement was successful in ending de jure segregation and expanding the minuscule black petty bourgeoisie, but these were not the only demands of the majority of movement participants.¹¹ They wanted full political and economic equality, and many also wanted black liberation in the form of black nationalism, black inter-communalism, or some other independence from white imperialism. None of these demands were met — not equality, and certainly not liberation.

People of color still have lower average incomes, poorer access to housing and health care, and poorer health than white people. De facto segregation still exists.¹² Political equality is also lacking. Millions of voters, most of them black, are disenfranchised when it is convenient to

⁹ India's neocolonial status is widely documented as part of the expanding body of anti- and alter-globalist literature. See Arundhati Roy, *Power Politics* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2002) and Vandana Shiva, *Stolen Harvest* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000).

¹⁰ The group Direct Action in Canada and the Swiss guerrilla Marco Camenisch are two examples.

¹¹ See Robert Williams, *Negroes with Guns* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1962); Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas, *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party* (New York: Routledge, 2001); and Charles Hamilton and Kwame Ture, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967).

¹² "Historical Context of the Founding of the Party," <http://www.blackpanther.org/legacvnew.htm>. In 1994, Dr. Kenneth Clark, the psychologist whose testimony was instrumental in winning the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision, stated that segregation was worse than it had been 40 years prior. Also see Suzanne Goldberg, "US wealth gap grows for ethnic minorities," *The Guardian* (UK) October 19, 2004, reprinted in Asheville Global Report, no. 302 (2004) <http://www.agrnews.org/issues/302/nationalnews.html>. The Pew Hispanic Center, analyzing US Census data, recently found that the average white family has a net worth 11 times greater than that of the average Latino family, and 14 times greater than that of the average black family, and that the disparity is growing.

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How Nonviolence Protects the State

Introduction and chapter 1

Peter Gelderloos

I use this word only because it has such long-standing favorable connotations, and because the more accurate alternative, liberation, is clumsy in its adjectival forms.

To reemphasize a crucial distinction: the criticisms in this book are not aimed at specific actions that do not exemplify violent behavior, such as a vigil that remains peaceful, nor are they aimed at individual activists who choose to dedicate themselves to non-combative work, such as healing or building strong community relationships. When I talk about pacifists and advocates of nonviolence, I am referring to those who would impose their ideology across the entire movement and dissuade other activists from militancy (including the use of violence), or who would not support other activists solely because of their militancy. Likewise, an ideal revolutionary activist would not be one who obsessively focuses on fighting cops or engaging in clandestine acts of sabotage, but one who embraces and supports these activities, where effective, as one portion of a broad range of actions needed to overthrow the state and build a better world.

Though I focus on debunking pacifism in service of revolutionary goals, in this book I include quotes from pacifists working for limited reforms in addition to quotes from people working for total social transformation. At first, this may seem like I am building a straw-man argument; however, I include the words or actions of reformist pacifists only in reference to campaigns where they worked together closely with revolutionary pacifists and the quoted material has relevance to all involved, or in reference to social struggles cited as examples proving the effectiveness of nonviolence in achieving revolutionary ends. It is difficult to distinguish between revolutionary and non-revolutionary pacifists, because they themselves tend not to make that distinction in the course of their activity—they work together, attend protests together, and frequently use the same tactics at the same actions. Because shared commitment to nonviolence, and not shared commitment to a revolutionary goal, is the chief criterion for nonviolent activists in deciding whom to work with, those are the boundaries I will use in defining these criticisms.

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Introduction

In August 2004, at the North American Anarchist Convergence in Athens, Ohio, I participated in a panel discussing the topic of nonviolence versus violence. Predictably, the discussion turned into an unproductive and competitive debate. I had hoped that each panelist would be given a substantial amount of time to speak in order to present our ideas in depth and to limit the likely alternative of a back-and-forth volley of clichéd arguments. But the facilitator, who was also a conference organizer, and on top of that a panelist, decided against this approach.

Because of the hegemony advocates of nonviolence exert, criticisms of nonviolence are excluded from the major periodicals, alternative media, and other forums accessed by anti-authoritarians.¹ Nonviolence is maintained as an article of faith, and as a key to full inclusion within the movement. Anti-authoritarians and anti-capitalists who suggest or practice militancy suddenly find themselves abandoned by the same pacifists they've just marched with at the latest protest. Once isolated, militants lose access to resources, and they lose protection from being scapegoated by the media or criminalized by the government. Within these dynamics caused by the knee-jerk isolation of those who do not conform to nonviolence, there is no possibility for a healthy or critical discourse to evaluate our chosen strategies.

In my experience, most people who are becoming involved with radical movements have never heard good arguments, or even bad ones, against nonviolence. This is true even when they already know a great deal about other movement issues. Instead, they tend to be acquainted with the aura of taboo that shrouds militants; to have internalized the fear and disdain the corporate media reserve for people willing to actually fight against capitalism and the state; and to have confused the isolation imposed on militants with some self-imposed isolation that must be inherent in militancy. Most proponents of nonviolence with whom I have discussed these issues, and these have been many, approached the conversation like it was a foregone conclusion that the use of violence in social movements was both wrong and self-defeating (at least if it occurred anywhere within 1,000 miles of them). On the contrary, there are a great many solid arguments against nonviolence that pacifists have simply failed to answer in their literature.

This book will show that nonviolence, in its current manifestations, is based on falsified histories of struggle. It has implicit and explicit connections to white people's manipulations of the struggles of people of color. Its methods are wrapped in authoritarian dynamics, and its results are harnessed to meet government objectives over popular objectives. It masks and even encourages patriarchal assumptions and power dynamics. Its strategic options invariably lead to dead ends. And its practitioners delude themselves on a number of key points.

¹ Some periodicals limited to the strictly anarchist milieu, such as *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*, are not at all pacifist. However, their influence, and the influence of their readership, can be clearly seen as marginal in areas where, otherwise, anarchists have a major impact. At mass mobilizations of the anti-war and anti-globalization movements, in which anarchists are key organizers, criticisms of pacifism are not even entertained; at best, some participants can successfully argue that watered-down forms of direct action really do qualify as nonviolent. Media widely available beyond anarchist circles, in the way progressive media are somewhat available to the mainstream, are almost exclusively pacifist, even when many of the volunteers that keep those media alive are anti-authoritarians who support a diversity of tactics.

Nonviolence is Ineffective

I could spend plenty of time talking about the failures of nonviolence. Instead, it may be more useful to talk about the successes of nonviolence. Pacifism would hardly be attractive to its supporters if the ideology had produced no historical victories. Typical examples are the independence of India from British colonial rule, caps on the nuclear arms race, the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and the peace movement during the war against Vietnam.¹ And though they have not yet been hailed as a victory, the massive protests in 2003 against the US invasion of Iraq have been much applauded by nonviolent activists.²

There is a pattern to the historical manipulation and whitewashing evident in every single victory claimed by nonviolent activists. The pacifist position requires that success must be attributable to pacifist tactics and pacifist tactics alone, whereas the rest of us believe that change comes from the whole spectrum of tactics present in any revolutionary situation, provided they are deployed effectively. Because no major social conflict exhibits a uniformity of tactics and ideologies, which is to say that all such conflicts exhibit pacifist tactics and decidedly non-pacifist tactics, pacifists have to erase the history that disagrees with them or, alternately, blame their failures on the contemporary presence of violent struggle.³

In India, the story goes, people under the leadership of Gandhi built up a massive nonviolent movement over decades and engaged in protest, noncooperation, economic boycotts, and exemplary hunger strikes and acts of disobedience to make British imperialism unworkable. They suffered massacres and responded with a couple of riots, but, on the whole, the movement was nonviolent and, after persevering for decades, the Indian people won their independence, providing an undeniable hallmark of pacifist victory. The actual history is more complicated, in that many violent pressures also informed the British decision to withdraw. The British had lost the ability to maintain colonial power after losing millions of troops and a great deal of other resources during two extremely violent world wars, the second of which especially devastated the "mother country." The armed struggles of Arab and Jewish militants in Palestine from 1945 to 1948 further weakened the British Empire, and presented a clear threat that the Indians might give up civil disobedience and take up arms en masse if ignored for long enough; this cannot be excluded as a factor in the decision of the British to relinquish direct colonial administration.

We realize this threat to be even more direct when we understand that the pacifist history of India's independence movement is a selective and incomplete picture—nonviolence was not

¹ This particular list comes from an article written by Spruce Houser (Spruce Houser, "Domestic Anarchist Movement Increasingly Espouses Violence," *Athens News*, August 12, 2004, http://athensnews.com/index.php?action=viewarticle§ion=archive&story_id=17497), a peace activist and self-proclaimed anarchist. I have seen these same putative victories declared by other pacifists time and again.

² Hell NYC, *2/15: The Day the World Said No to War* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2003). This book gives one a feel for the way peace activists celebrate these protests.

³ For example, as soon as a pacifist panelist at the anarchist conference mentioned in the introduction was forced to admit that the civil rights struggle did not end victoriously, he changed directions without blinking an eye and blamed the struggle's failure on militant liberation movements, saying that as the movement *became* violent, it started to lose ground. This argument ignores the fact that resistance against slavery and racial oppression was militant well before the late 1960s, and also disavows any specific analysis that might, say, correspond an increasing militancy with a decreasing base. Such correlations are factually nonexistent.

universal in India. Resistance to British colonialism included enough militancy that the Gandhian method can be viewed most accurately as one of several competing forms of popular resistance. As part of a disturbingly universal pattern, pacifists white out those other forms of resistance and help propagate the false history that Gandhi and his disciples were the lone masthead and rudder of Indian resistance. Ignored are important militant leaders such as Chandrasekhar Azad,⁴ who fought in armed struggle against the British colonizers, and revolutionaries such as Bhagat Singh, who won mass support for bombings and assassinations as part of a struggle to accomplish the "overthrow of both foreign and Indian capitalism."⁵ The pacifist history of India's struggle cannot make any sense of the fact that Subhas Chandra Bose, the militant candidate, was twice elected president of the Indian National Congress, in 1938 and 1939.⁶ While Gandhi was perhaps the most singularly influential and popular figure in India's independence struggle, the leadership position he assumed did not always enjoy the consistent backing of the masses. Gandhi lost so much support from Indians when he "called off the movement" after the 1922 riot that when the British locked him up afterwards, "not a ripple of protest arose in India at his arrest."⁷ Significantly, history remembers Gandhi above all others not because he represented the unanimous voice of India, but because of all the attention he was given by the British press and the prominence he received from being included in important negotiations with the British colonial government. When we remember that history is written by the victors, another layer of the myth of Indian independence comes unraveled.

The sorriest aspect of pacifists' claim that the independence of India is a victory for nonviolence is that this claim plays directly into the historical fabrication carried out in the interests of the white-supremacist, imperialist states that colonized the Global South. The liberation movement in India failed. The British were not forced to quit India. Rather, they chose to transfer the territory from direct colonial rule to neocolonial rule.⁸ What kind of victory allows the losing side to dictate the time and manner of the victors' ascendancy? The British authored the new constitution and turned power over to handpicked successors. They fanned the flames of religious and ethnic separatism so that India would be divided against itself, prevented from gaining peace and prosperity, and dependent on military aid and other support from Euro/American states. India is still exploited by Euro/ American corporations (though several new Indian corporations, mostly subsidiaries, have joined in the pillaging), and still provides resources and markets for

⁴ Chandrasekhar Azad, who was killed in a shootout with the British, is a focal point of a recent movie, *The Last Revolutionary*, by Indian director Priyadarshan.

⁵ Reeta Sharma, "What if Bhagat Singh Had Lived?" *The Tribune of India*, March 21, 2001; <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2001/20010321/edit.htm#6>. It is important to note that people across India beseeched Gandhi to ask for the commutation of Bhagat Singh's death sentence, given for the assassination of a British official, but Gandhi strategically chose not to speak out against the state execution, which many believe he easily could have stopped. Thus was a rival revolutionary removed from the political landscape.

⁶ Bose resigned after a conflict with other Indian political leaders, stemming from Gandhi's opposition to Bose because the latter did not support nonviolence. For more on Indian liberation struggles, read Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885–1947* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

⁷ Professor Gopal K. email to author, September 2004. Gopal also writes, "I have friends in India who still haven't forgiven Gandhi for this."

⁸ Though the conservatism inherent in any political establishment prevented many Euro/American states from seeing this for some time, neocolonial rule is much more efficient at enriching the colonizer than direct colonial administration, and more efficient at maintaining power, once direct colonialism has successfully effected the necessary political and economic reorganization within the colonies. Liberals within the imperialist states, unfairly characterized as disloyal or unpatriotic, were, in fact, right on the money when they advocated independence for the colonies. George Orwell, Ho Chi Minh, and others have written about the fiscal inefficiency of colonialism. See Ho Chi Minh, "The Failure of French Colonization," in *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution*, ed. Bernard Fall (New York: Signet Books, 1967).

spreading from the contemporaneous black liberation movement. The domestic anti-war movement clearly worried US policy-makers,²⁶ but it had certainly not become powerful enough that we can say it "forced" the government to do anything, and, in any case, its most forceful elements used violent protests, bombings, and property destruction.

Perhaps confused by their own false history of the peace movement during the Vietnam War, US pacifist organizers in the 21st century seemed to expect a repeat of the victory that never happened in their plans to stop the invasion of Iraq. On February 15, 2003, as the US government moved toward war with Iraq, "weekend protests worldwide by millions of anti-war activists delivered a stinging rebuke to Washington and its allies...The unprecedented wave of demonstrations...further clouded US war plans," according to an article on the website of the nonviolent anti-war group United for Peace and Justice.²⁷ The article, which exults in the "massive display of pacifist feeling," goes on to project that the "White House...appears to have been rattled by the surge in resistance to its calls for quick military action." The protests were the largest in history; excepting a few minor scuffles, they were entirely nonviolent; and organizers extensively celebrated their massiveness and peacefulness. Some groups, like United for Peace and Justice, even suggested the protests might avert war. Of course, they were totally wrong, and the protests totally ineffective. The invasion occurred as planned, despite the millions of people nominally, peacefully, and powerlessly opposed to it. The anti-war movement did nothing to change the power relationships in the United States. Bush received substantial political capital for invading Iraq, and was not faced with a backlash until the war and occupation effort began to show signs of failure *due to the effective armed resistance of the Iraqi people*. The so-called opposition did not even manifest within the official political landscape. The one anti-war candidate in the Democratic Party,²⁸ Dennis Kucinich, was never for a moment taken seriously as a contender, and he and his supporters eventually fled their moral high ground to defer to the Democratic Party platform's support for the occupation of Iraq.

A good case study regarding the efficacy of nonviolent protest can be seen in Spain's involvement with the US-led occupation. Spain, with 1,300 troops, was one of the larger junior partners in the "Coalition of the Willing." More than *one million* Spaniards protested the invasion, and 80 percent of the Spanish population was opposed to it,²⁹ but their commitment to peace ended there — they did nothing to actually prevent Spanish military support for the invasion and occupation. Because they remained passive and did nothing to disempower the leadership, they remained as powerless as the citizens of any democracy. Not only was Spanish prime minister Aznar able and allowed to go to war, he was expected by all forecasts to win reelection — until the bombings. On March 11, 2004, just days before the voting booths opened, multiple bombs planted by an Al-Qaida-linked cell exploded in Madrid train stations, killing 191 people and injuring thousands more. Directly because of this, Aznar and his party lost in the polls, and the Socialists, the major

²⁶ It is educational to see how the elite themselves perceived the anti-war movement. One rich account comes from Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara in the documentary *Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara*, directed by Errol Morris, 2003. McNamara clearly expressed being troubled by the protests often held outside his workplace, but with the typical arrogance of a bureaucrat assumed the public didn't know enough to make policy suggestions. He believed that he too wanted peace, and as a leading government expert he was thus working in the interests of the anti-war protestors.

²⁷ "Millions Give Dramatic Rebuff to US War Plans," News, United for Peace and Justice, <http://www.unitedforpeace.org/article.php?id=1070> (accessed October 5, 2006). Originally published by Agence France-Presse, February 16, 2003.

²⁸ Excluding Al Sharpton, who was treated (as always) as a pariah.

²⁹ Sinikka Tarvainen, "Spain's Aznar Risks All for a War in Iraq," Deutsche Presse-Agentur, March 11, 2003.

In the Holocaust, and less extreme examples from India to Birmingham, nonviolence failed to sufficiently empower its practitioners, whereas the use of a diversity of tactics got results. Put simply, if a movement is not a threat, it cannot change a system based on centralized coercion and violence,⁴⁴ and if that movement does not realize and exercise the power that makes it a threat, it cannot destroy such a system. In the world today, governments and corporations hold a near-total monopoly on power, a major aspect of which is violence. Unless we change the power relationships (and, preferably, destroy the infrastructure and culture of centralized power to make impossible the subjugation of the many to the few), those who currently benefit from the ubiquitous structural violence, who control the militaries, banks, bureaucracies, and corporations, will continue to call the shots. The elite cannot be persuaded by appeals to their conscience. Individuals who do change their minds and find a better morality will be fired, impeached, replaced, recalled, assassinated.

Time and again, people struggling not for some token reform but for complete liberation — the reclamation of control over our own lives and the power to negotiate our own relationships with the people and world around us — will find that nonviolence does not work, that we face a self-perpetuating power structure that is immune to appeals to conscience and strong enough to plow over the disobedient and uncooperative. We must reclaim histories of resistance to understand why we have failed in the past and how exactly we achieved the limited successes we did. We must also accept that all social struggles, except those carried out by a completely pacified and thus ineffective people, include a diversity of tactics. Realizing that nonviolence has never actually produced historical victories toward revolutionary goals opens the door to considering other serious faults of nonviolence.

⁴⁴ One example of the mere threat of popular violence creating change comes from the American Indian Movement (AIM), in Gordon, Nebraska in 1972. An Oglala man, Raymond Yellow Thunder, had been killed by white people whom police refused to arrest (this was a relatively common occurrence). His relatives, fed up with the apathy of the government, called in AIM. Thirteen hundred angry Indians occupied the town of Gordon for three days, threatening: "We've come here to Gordon today to secure justice for American Indians and to put Gordon on the map...and if justice is not immediately forthcoming, we'll be back to take Gordon off the map." [Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1990), 122.] Promptly, the two murderers were arrested, a cop was suspended, and local authorities made some effort to end discrimination against Indians.

ruling interests, and only four black senators have served since Reconstruction.¹³ Other races have also been missed by the mythical fruits of civil rights. Latino and Asian immigrants are especially vulnerable to abuse, deportation, denial of social services they pay taxes for, and toxic and backbreaking labor in sweatshops or as migrant agricultural laborers. Muslims and Arabs are taking the brunt of the post-September 11 repression, while a society that has anointed itself "color-blind" evinces nary a twinge of hypocrisy. Native peoples are kept so low on the socio-economic ladder as to remain invisible, except for the occasional symbolic manifestation of US multiculturalism — the stereotyped sporting mascot or hula-girl doll that obscures the reality of actual indigenous people.

The common projection (primarily by white progressives, pacifists, educators, historians, and government officials) is that the movement against racial oppression in the United States was primarily nonviolent. On the contrary, though pacifist groups such as Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) had considerable power and influence, popular support within the movement, especially among poor black people, increasingly gravitated toward militant revolutionary groups such as the Black Panther Party.¹⁴ According to a 1970 Harris poll, 66 percent of African Americans said the activities of the Black Panther Party gave them pride, and 43 percent said the party represented their own views.¹⁵ In fact, militant struggle had long been a part of black people's resistance to white supremacy. Mumia Abu-Jamal boldly documents this history in his 2004 book, *We Want Freedom*. He writes, "The roots of armed resistance run deep in African American history. Only those who ignore this fact see the Black Panther Party as somehow foreign to our common historical inheritance."¹⁶ In reality, the nonviolent segments cannot be distilled and separated from the revolutionary parts of the movement (though alienation and bad blood, encouraged by the state, often existed between them). Pacifist, middle-class black activists, including King, got much of their power from the specter of black resistance and the presence of armed black revolutionaries.¹⁷

In the spring of 1963, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birmingham campaign was looking like it would be a repeat of the dismally failed action in Albany, Georgia (where a 9 month civil disobedience campaign in 1961 demonstrated the powerlessness of nonviolent protesters against a government with seemingly bottomless jails, and where, on July 24, 1962, rioting youth took over whole blocks for a night and forced the police to retreat from the ghetto, demonstrating that a year after the nonviolent campaign, black people in Albany still struggled against racism, but they had lost their preference for nonviolence). Then, on May 7 in Birmingham, after continued police

¹³ Mick Dumke, "Running on Race," *ColorLines*, Fall 2004, 17–19. This article was written before Barack Obama's election so I have updated the figure.

¹⁴ "They [the civil rights movement and the black liberation/anti-colonial movement] rapidly evolved toward armed struggle, with self-defense leading to armed organizations. Anti-government violence had mass approval and participation." E. Tani and Kae Sera, *False Nationalism, False Internationalism* (Chicago: A Seeds Beneath the Snow Publication, 1985), 94. Also see Mumia Abu-Jamal, *We Want Freedom* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2004), 32, 65.

¹⁵ Flores Alexander Forbes, "Point Number 7: We Want an Immediate End to Police Brutality and the Murder of Black People; Why I Joined the Black Panther Party," in *Police Brutality: An Anthology*, ed. Jill Nelson (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), 237.

¹⁶ Abu-Jamal, *We Want Freedom*, 31.

¹⁷ "[I]f an oppressed people's pent-up emotions are not nonviolently released, they will be violently released. So let the Negro march...For if his frustrations and despair are allowed to continue piling up, millions of Negroes will seek solace and security in Black nationalist ideologies." Martin Luther King Jr., quoted in Tani and Sera, *False Nationalism*, 107. Martin Luther King Jr. played up the threat of black revolutionary violence as the likely outcome if the state did not meet his reformist demands, and his organizers often capitalized on riots carried out by militant black activists to put the pacifist black leaders in a more favorable light. See especially Ward Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 1998), 43.

party with an anti-war platform, were elected into power.³⁰ The US-led coalition shrunk with the loss of 1,300 Spanish troops, and promptly shrunk again after the Dominican Republic and Honduras also pulled out their troops. Whereas millions of peaceful activists voting in the streets like good sheep have not weakened the brutal occupation in any measurable way, a few dozen terrorists willing to slaughter noncombatants were able to cause the withdrawal of more than a thousand occupation troops.

The actions and statements of cells affiliated with Al Qaida do not suggest that they want a meaningful peace in Iraq, nor do they demonstrate a concern for the well-being of the Iraqi people (a great many of whom they have blown to bits) so much as a concern for a particular vision of how Iraqi society should be organized, a vision that is extremely authoritarian, patriarchal, and fundamentalist. And, no doubt, what was possibly an easy decision to kill and maim hundreds of unarmed people, however strategically necessary such an action may have seemed, is connected to their authoritarianism and brutality, and most of all to the culture of intellectualism from which most terrorists come (although that is another topic entirely).

The morality of the situation becomes more complicated when compared to the massive US bombing campaign that intentionally killed hundreds of thousands of civilians in Germany and Japan during World War II. Whereas this campaign was much more brutal than the Madrid bombings, it is generally considered acceptable. The discrepancy that we may entertain between condemning the Madrid bombers (easy) and condemning the even more bloody-handed American pilots (not so easy, perhaps because among them we may find our own relatives — my grandfather, for example) should make us question whether our condemnation of terrorism really has anything to do with a respect for life. Because we are not fighting for an authoritarian world, or one in which blood is spilled in accordance with calculated rationales, the Madrid bombings do not present an example for action, but, rather, an important paradox. Do people who stick to peaceful tactics that have not proved effective in ending the war against Iraq really care more for human life than the Madrid terrorists? After all, many more than 191 Iraqi civilians have been killed for every 1,300 occupation troops stationed there. If anyone has to die (and the US invasion makes this tragedy inevitable), Spanish citizens bear more blame than Iraqis (just as German and Japanese citizens bore more blame than other victims of World War II). So far, no alternatives to terrorism have been developed within the relatively vulnerable belly of the beast to substantially weaken the occupation. Hence, the only real resistance is occurring in Iraq, where the US and its allies are most prepared to meet it, at great cost to the lives of guerrillas and noncombatants.

So much for the victories of pacifism.

It would also help to understand the extent of the idea's failures. A controversial but necessary example is that of the Holocaust.³¹ For much of "the devouring," militant resistance was all but absent, so we can measure the efficacy of pacifist resistance alone. The Holocaust is also one of the few phenomena where victim blaming is correctly seen as support or sympathy for the oppressor, so the occasional oppositional uprisings cannot be used to justify the repression and genocide, as happens elsewhere when pacifists blame authoritarian violence on the audacity of

³⁰ Not only were commentators nearly unanimous in attributing the shift of power directly to the bombings, the Spanish government itself acknowledged the impact of the bombings by trying to cover up Al-Qaida involvement, instead blaming ETA Basque separatists. Members of the government knew that if the bombings were connected in the public mind to Spanish participation in the Iraq occupation, they would lose in the polls, as they did.

³¹ Ward Churchill, in using the example of the Holocaust to demonstrate the pathology of pacifism in the face of oppression, cites Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961) and Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Macmillan, 1972). Churchill's own contributions to the topic, which informed my own, can be found in Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology*, 31–37. He also recommends Bruno Bettelheim's Foreword to Miklos Nyiszli, *Auschwitz* (New York: Fawcett Books, 1960).

violence, three thousand black people began fighting back, pelting the police with rocks and bottles. Just two days later, Birmingham — up until then an inflexible bastion of segregation — agreed to desegregate downtown stores, and President Kennedy backed the agreement with federal guarantees. The next day, after local white supremacists bombed a black home and a black business, thousands of black people rioted again, seizing a 9 block area, destroying police cars, injuring several cops (including the chief inspector), and burning white businesses. A month and a day later, President Kennedy was calling for Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act, ending several years of a strategy to stall the civil rights movement.¹⁸ Perhaps the largest of the limited, if not hollow, victories of the civil rights movement came when black people demonstrated they would not remain peaceful forever. Faced with the two alternatives, the white power structure chose to negotiate with the pacifists, and we have seen the results.

The claim that the US peace movement ended the war against Vietnam contains the usual set of flaws. The criticism has been well made by Ward Churchill and others,¹⁹ so I'll only summarize it. With unforgivable self-righteousness, peace activists ignore that three to five million Indochinese died in the fight against the US military; tens of thousands of US troops were killed and hundreds of thousands wounded; other troops demoralized by all the bloodshed had become highly ineffective and rebellious;²⁰ and the US was losing political capital (and going fiscally bankrupt) to a point where pro-war politicians began calling for a strategic withdrawal (especially after the Tet Offensive proved the war to be "unwinnable," in the words of many at the time). The US government was not forced to pull out by peaceful protests; it was defeated politically and militarily. As evidence of this, Churchill cites the victory of Republican Richard Nixon, and the lack of even an anti-war nominee within the Democratic Party, in 1968, near the height of the anti-war movement. One could also add Nixon's reelection in 1972, after four years of escalation and genocide, to demonstrate the powerlessness of the peace movement in "speaking truth to power." In fact, the principled peace movement dissolved in tandem with the withdrawal of US troops (completed in 1973). The movement was less responsive to history's largest-ever bombing campaign, targeting civilians, which intensified after troop withdrawal, or the continued occupation of South Vietnam by a US-trained and -financed military dictatorship. In other words, the movement retired (and rewarded Nixon with reelection) once Americans, and not Vietnamese, were out of harm's way. The US peace movement failed to bring peace. US imperialism continued unabated, and though its chosen military strategy was defeated by the Vietnamese, the US still accomplished its overall policy objectives in due time, precisely because of the failure of the peace movement to make any domestic changes.

Some pacifists will point out the huge number of "conscientious objectors" who refused to fight, to salvage some semblance of a nonviolent victory. But it should be obvious that the proliferation of objectors and draft dodgers cannot redeem pacifist tactics. Especially in such a militaristic society, the likelihood of soldiers' refusing to fight is proportional to their expectations of facing a violent opposition that might kill or maim them. Without the violent resistance of the Vietnamese, there would have been no need for a draft; without a draft, the self-serving nonviolent resistance in North America would hardly have existed. Far more significant than passive conscientious objectors were the growing rebellions, especially by black, Latino, and indigenous

¹⁸ Tani and Sera, *False Nationalism*, 96–104. As King himself said, "The sound of the explosion in Birmingham reached all the way to Washington."

¹⁹ Ward Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology*. Also, for an example, Tani and Sera, *False Nationalism*, chapter 6.

²⁰ A pacifist panelist at the North American Anarchist Conference, rejecting the idea that the Vietnamese resistance, and not the peace movement, defeated the US, temporarily confused his moral/tactical position with a racial one by pointing out that it was US troops assassinating their officers that also led to the end of the war.

the oppressed to take militant direct action against that authority. Some pacifists have been so bold as to use examples of resistance to the Nazis, such as civil disobedience carried out by the Danes, to suggest that nonviolent resistance can work even in the worst conditions.³² Is it really necessary to point out that the Danes, as Aryans faced a somewhat different set of consequences for resistance than the Nazis' primary victims? The Holocaust was only ended by the concerted, overwhelming violence of the Allied governments that destroyed the Nazi state (though, to be honest, they cared far more about redrawing the map of Europe than about saving the lives of Roma, Jews, gays, leftists, Soviet prisoners of war, and others; the Soviets tended to "purge" rescued prisoners of war, fearing that even if they were not guilty of desertion for surrendering, their contact with foreigners in the concentration camps had contaminated them ideologically).

The victims of the Holocaust, however, were not entirely passive. A large number of them took action to save lives and sabotage the Nazi death machine. Yehuda Bauer, who deals exclusively with Jewish victims of the Holocaust, emphatically documents this resistance. Up until 1942, "rabbis and other leaders...counseled against taking up arms," but they did not counsel passivity; rather, "resistance was nonviolent."³³ Clearly, it did not slow down the genocide or weaken the Nazis in any measurable way. Beginning in 1942, Jews began to resist violently, though there are still many examples of nonviolent resistance. In 1943, people in Denmark helped most of the country's seven thousand Jews escape to neutral Sweden. Similarly, in the same year, the government, Church, and people of Bulgaria stopped the deportation of Jews from that country.³⁴ In both of these cases, the rescued Jews were ultimately protected by military force and kept safe by the borders of a country not under direct German occupation at a time when the war was starting to look bleak for the Nazis. (Because of the violent onslaught of the Soviets, the Nazis temporarily overlooked the minor thwarting of their plans by Sweden and Bulgaria.) In 1941, the inhabitants of a ghetto in Vilnius, Lithuania, conducted a massive sit-down when the Nazis and local authorities prepared to deport them.³⁵ This act of civil disobedience may have delayed the deportation a short while, but it failed to save any lives.

A number of leaders of the Judenrat, the Jewish Councils established by the Nazis to govern the ghettos in compliance with Nazi orders, accommodated the Nazis in an attempt not to rock the boat, in the hope that as many Jews as possible would still be alive at the end of the war. (This is an apt example because many pacifists in the US today also believe that if you are rocking the boat or causing conflict, you are doing something wrong.³⁶) Bauer writes, "In the end, the strategy failed, and those who had tried to use it discovered with horror that they had become accomplices in the Nazis' murder plan."³⁷ Other Jewish Council members were bolder, and openly refused to cooperate with the Nazis. In Lvov, Poland, the first council chairman refused to cooperate, and he was duly killed and replaced. As Bauer points out, the replacements were much more

³² The example of the Danes during the Holocaust was used by pacifist anarchist Colman McCarthy at his workshop "Pacifism and Anarchism" at the National Conference on Organized Resistance, American University (Washington, DC), February 4, 2006.

³³ Yehuda Bauer, *They Chose Life: Jewish Resistance in the Holocaust* (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1973) 32, 33.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁶ For example, on a listserv of former "prisoners of conscience" with School of the Americas Watch (SOAW), a group that has conducted one of the longest-running campaigns of nonviolent civil disobedience against US foreign policy, one veteran pacifist suggested that if the military was placing more restrictions on protesting outside an Army base that had been targeted by demonstrations, we were doing something wrong, and should take a step back. The same person, representative of a large trend within US pacifism, also objected to calling a protest a "march" instead of a walk (although he claimed to uphold the legacy of King and Gandhi).

³⁷ Bauer, *They Chose Life*, 45.

troops, within the military. The US government's intentional plan, in response to black urban riots, of taking unemployed young black men off the streets and into the military, backfired.²¹

Washington officials visiting Army bases were freaked out at the development of "Black militant" culture...Astonished brass would watch as local settler [white] officers would be forced to return salutes to New Afrikans [black soldiers] giving them the "Power" sign [raised fist]... Nixon had to get the troops out of Vietnam fast or risk losing his army.²²

Fragging, sabotage, refusal to fight, rioting in the stockades, and aiding the enemy, all activities of US soldiers, contributed significantly to the US government's decision to pull out ground troops. As Colonel Robert D. Heinl stated in June 1971,

By every conceivable indicator, our army that remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and non-commissioned officers, drug-ridden and dispirited where not near mutinous. Elsewhere than Vietnam the situation is nearly as serious.²³

The Pentagon estimated that 3 percent of officers and noncoms killed in Vietnam from 1961 to 1972 were killed in fraggings by their own troops. This estimate doesn't even take into account killings by stabbing or shooting. In many instances, soldiers in a unit pooled their money to raise a bounty for the killing of an unpopular officer. Matthew Rinaldi identifies "working class blacks and Latinos" in the military, who did not identify with the "pacifism-at-any-price tactics" of the civil rights movement that had come before them, as major actors in the militant resistance that crippled the US military during the Vietnam War.²⁴

And though they were less politically significant than resistance in the military in general, bombings and other acts of violence in protest of the war on white college campuses, including most of the elite universities, should not be ignored in favor of the pacifist whitewash. In the 1969–1970 school year (September through May), a conservative estimate counts 174 anti-war bombings on campuses and at least 70 off-campus bombings and other violent attacks targeting ROTC buildings, government buildings, and corporate offices. Additionally, 230 campus protests included physical violence, and 410 included damage to property.²⁵

In conclusion, what was a very limited victory — the withdrawal of ground troops after many years of warfare — can be most clearly attributed to two factors: the successful and sustained violent resistance of the Vietnamese, which caused US policy-makers to realize they could not win; and the militant and often lethal resistance of the US ground troops themselves, which was caused by demoralization from the effective violence of their enemy and political militancy

²¹ Tani and Sera, *False Nationalism*, 124–125. "Project 100,000" was begun in 1966 at the suggestion of White House adviser Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who, incidentally, hypothesized that the unemployed men targeted for military service were "maladapted" because of "disorganized and matrifocal family life," while Vietnam represented "a world away from women." (Interestingly, de,onziation of strong black women was eventually insinuated into the Black Power movement itself). Colonel William Cole, commander of an Army recruiting district, said, "President Johnson wanted those guys off the street."

²² Tani and Sera, *False Nationalism*, 127.

²³ Matthew Rinaldi, *Olive-Drab Rebels: Subversion of the US Armed Forces in the Vietnam War*, rev. ed. (London: Antagonism Press, 2003), 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 11–13.

²⁵ Tani and Sera, *False Nationalism*, 117–118.

compliant (though even obedience didn't save them, as they were all bound for the death camps; in the specific example of Lvov, the obedient replacement was killed anyway just on suspicion of resistance). In Borszczow, Poland, the council chairman refused to comply with Nazi orders, and he was shipped off to the Belzec death camp.³⁸

Other council members used a diversity of tactics, and they were clearly more effective. In Kovno, Lithuania, they pretended to comply with Nazi orders, but were secretly a part of the resistance. They successfully hid children about to be deported and smuggled young men and women out of the ghetto so they could fight with the partisans. In France, "both sections [of the council] belonged to the underground and were in constant touch with the resisters...and contributed significantly to the saving of most of the Jews in the country."³⁹ Even where they did not personally take part in violent resistance, they multiplied their effectiveness immensely by supporting those who did.

And then there were the urban guerrillas and partisans who fought violently against the Nazis. In April and May 1943, Jews in the Warsaw ghetto rose up with smuggled, stolen, and homemade weapons. Seven hundred young men and women fought for weeks, to the death, tying up thousands of Nazi troops and other resources needed on the collapsing Eastern Front. They knew they would be killed whether they were peaceful or not. By rebelling violently, they lived the last few weeks of their lives in freedom and resistance, and slowed down the Nazi war machine. Another armed rebellion broke out in the ghetto of Bialystok, Poland, on August 16, 1943, and continued for weeks.

Urban guerrillas such as a group composed of Jewish Zionists and Communists in Krakow, successfully blew up supply trains and railroads, sabotaged war factories, and assassinated government officials.⁴⁰ Jewish and other partisan groups throughout Poland, Czechoslovakia, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Baltic countries also carried out acts of sabotage on German supply lines and fought off SS troops. According to Bauer, "In eastern Poland, Lithuania, and the western Soviet Union, at least 15,000 Jewish partisans fought in the woods, and at least 5,000 unarmed Jews lived there, protected all or some of the time by the fighters."⁴¹ In Poland, a group of partisans led by the Belsky brothers saved more than 1,200 Jewish men, women, and children, in part by carrying out revenge killings against those who captured or turned in fugitives. Similar partisan groups in France and Belgium sabotaged war infrastructure, assassinated Nazi officials, and helped people escape the death camps. A band of Jewish Communists in Belgium derailed a train that was taking people to Auschwitz, and helped several hundred of them to escape. During a rebellion at the Sobibor death camps in October 1943, resisters killed several Nazi officers and allowed four hundred of the six hundred inmates to escape.⁴² Most of these were quickly killed, but about sixty survived to join the partisans. Two days after the revolt, Sobibor was closed down. A rebellion at Treblinka in August 1943 destroyed that death camp, and it was not rebuilt. Participants in another insurrection at Auschwitz in October 1944 destroyed one of the crematoria.⁴³ All of these violent uprisings slowed down the Holocaust. In comparison, nonviolent tactics (and, for that matter, the Allied governments whose bombers could easily have reached Auschwitz and other camps) failed to shut down or destroy a single extermination camp before the end of the war.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 39–40.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 39 (regarding Kovno), 41 (regarding France).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 47–48.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 52–53.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 53–54.

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