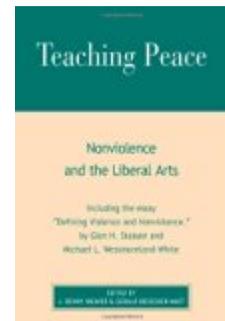


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

J. Denny Weaver, Gerald Biesecker-Mast. *Teaching Peace: Nonviolence and the Liberal Arts*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003. xiii + 287 pp. \$96.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-1456-0; \$30.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7425-1457-7.

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## Imagine: Nonviolence in Teaching and Learning

The book is a collection of essays written primarily by faculty of Bluffton College, a church-related college of the Mennonite Church USA. The ideas were first presented at an all day workshop at the college in October 2000 aimed at strengthening the college mission's commitment to nonviolence through a revised general education curriculum. Some essays were further developed before publication to take into account the impact of the events of September 11, 2001 and the Bush administration's assertion of the right to preemptive violence as a principle of U.S. foreign policy. The timeliness of these essays, however, rests more on the critical analysis of normative assumptions about the inevitability of violence and the redemptive quality of violence as the necessary foundation of American freedom than on their use of recent events. A remarkable range of disciplines are explored, including theology, history, politics, communication, literature, art, theater, music, marketing, criminal justice, psychology, economics, biology, mathematics, education, and management. Readers will appreciate the clarity of ideas on nonviolence and the practicality of suggestions for presenting these ideas in teaching.

In the introduction, Gerald Biesecker-Mast, one of the editors, sets the challenge to which each of the contributors will respond. "While not denying the fruitful contributions to human well-being associated with the Enlightenment, the chapters assume that 'pure reason' is not a sufficient ground for peaceful and ethical engagement with the world" (p. 12). Peace and nonviolence are presented as a non-conformist position in modern cul-

ture. The Christian roots of nonviolent practice in the Mennonite tradition are given in an overview. Though the contributors share a Christian approach to nonviolence, the issues they address are the same as those identified by advocates of nonviolence from other religious or secular traditions. Two guest contributors, Glenn H. Stassen and Michael L. Westmoreland-White, from Fuller Theological Seminary, develop a chapter defining violence and nonviolence, and provide a survey of contemporary uses of nonviolent direct action. The chapter concludes with a summary of the ten parts of the Just Peace Making Theory explained by Glen Stassen in *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War* (1998). The ten practices spell out how to use nonviolent direct action; promote human rights and accountability; and cooperate through international systems, arms reduction, and sustainable economic development in peace making.

In subsequent chapters, each author reflects on how the challenge of nonviolence may be framed in the discipline and then offers examples of how the principles they have identified are used in teaching. Historians address the myth of redemptive violence, the nonviolent movement in Kosovo in the 1990s, and George W. Bush's national security strategy of preemption. Chapters on communication and literature raise theoretical perspectives on the construction of difference as a problem rather than an expectation as well as the normative portrayal of violence in literature. The chapter on art deftly explores the move from the tradition of anti-war paintings that show the horror of violence to paintings of those human expe-

riences associated with peace. Examples from art clarify the peace studies conceptions of negative peace (absence of violence) and positive peace (enhancing life to the full). The chapter on theater analyzes the violent foundation of traditions of actor training and proposes an alternative non-violent pedagogy. The chapter on choral music aptly addresses not only the choice of music for performance, but the very process of building a just community among chorus members.

Chapters on social science compare the difficult relationship of democratic politics and market economics; retributive and restorative approaches to criminal justice; and the disparate emphasis in psychology on aggression and altruism. The chapter on economics provides a detailed approach to calculating the cost of war as the basis for challenging the myths of war as an essential economic stimulus.

One biologist provides a personal story on the process of analyzing and challenging the disciplinary preference for metaphors of war to describe biological events. A second biologist considers examples of conflict resolution among primates, indicating the success of nonviolent as compared to violent intervention strategies in maintaining group order.

The mathematicians connect their discipline to nonviolence in two different ways. First the logic of mathematics that accepts irreconcilable number systems as equally valid points to a problem-solving perspective that does not try to enforce reconciliation or choice but looks for a third framework that appreciates both. A second consideration suggests mathematics problems in textbooks could have real life subject matter analyzing social inequities such as the racial disparity in the use of the death penalty or the distribution of wealth using the Gini index. The final chapters deal with preparing teachers to teach about nonviolence with nonviolent methods and training managers in nonviolent ethics.

Some analysis of the chapters on teaching history and social science may indicate the combination of theoretical and practical insights that characterize the essays. For instance, Perry Bush challenges the “myth of redemptive violence” that is particularly deep in U.S. culture by examining the claim, with examples from the Civil War, that war “delivers ultimately beneficial ends for people who harness such means,” and by presenting examples of nonviolence used to achieve freedom without war (p. 79). The Civil War in the United States did end slavery, but civil rights, real participation in freedom, for freed slaves was achieved not by war but by a long, nonviolent

social movement. In the nineteenth century, Russia and Brazil abolished slavery without war. Perry agrees with those who emphasize the importance of human agency in history, but calls for a critical and comparative approach to the choices people have made in history.

James Satterwhite examines recent events in Kosovo to challenge the idea of the historical inevitability of violence. Using the work of participants and historians on the nonviolent resistance movement in Kosovo in the 1990s, he identifies a series of missed opportunities for supporting local grassroots initiatives for a nonviolent solution to the Serb/Kosovar conflict. In addition to giving a more complete picture of the recent history of Kosovo, he provides a specific repudiation of the claims of the United States and NATO that violence was necessary to stop human rights abuses. Satterwhite concludes rather than justifying violence as inevitable the Kosovo case illustrates the refusal of leaders to recognize and to employ nonviolent strategies.

David Wiesner proposes a pacifist pedagogy that teaches students to critically evaluate the Bush Doctrine of “the right to exercise military force globally, regardless of long-honored principles of international law ..., state necessity..., or humanitarianism” (p. 105). Wiesner contrasts the Bush Doctrine with the principles stated in the UN Charter and the requirements of the Just War and Just Peace theories. He also sets the principles of the Bush Doctrine in defense of U.S. security and freedom in historical context, since the United States has carried out overt or covert military actions in at least twenty countries since 1945 and has established a military presence in seventeen more. Wiesner teaches students, through pedagogy he calls “critically embodied studies,” to evaluate U.S. policies by having them examine the history of those policies and actions with regards to Vietnam and the Vietnamese people.

Two economists provide both theoretical and practical insights on the economics of war and peace. James M. Harder asserts economic relationships like military conflicts can be ways in which “a more powerful group can inflict inhuman conditions on a weaker group” (p. 179). Harder explains why few economists are willing or able to address the moral dimension of power and conflict in economic systems and then makes a case for why economists and citizens must ask questions about how the much-touted benefits of the global market for human welfare measure up on the scales of social justice. The essay is a useful overview of the debate on globalization. Ronald L. Friesen explains the difficult challenge

faced by economists who want “to bring a peace perspective to bear on standard data of economic analysis” (p. 210). Having identified the normative assumptions of inevitable violence and value-free economics, he analyzes a textbook definition of economics as “the efficient use of scarce resources,” to open up a space for evaluating the cost of war and peace in relation to scarce resources. He then explains the meaning of opportunity cost and comparative advantage as used in economic analysis, and uses these terms to challenge four “myths” about war, namely that it brings prosperity, increases employment, is necessary for security, and develops beneficial technology. Friesen concludes that a critical application of economic analysis would reveal the economic “futility of war” (p. 218).

The variety of disciplinary approaches offered here gives the reader an inspiring array of examples on teaching peace, but inevitably provides only an introduction to

each. Although Bluffton College has developed a general education curriculum on nonviolence that few colleges may emulate, faculty in peace studies programs will find good ideas for their own teaching. They may also find this a useful model for developing greater coherence in their multi-disciplinary curricular offerings. Taken together the essays demonstrate that challenging normative assumptions about violence is an excellent strategy for teaching critical thinking.

The Christian witness of the contributors offers a refreshing example of Christian faith expressed in humility as a basis for peacemaking and provides some antidote to the media emphasis on religion as the basis for violent conflict. One of the major themes of the collection is the failure of political imagination that allows people to uncritically accept normative assertions on the inevitability and necessity of violence. Everyone who reads the book will be better able to imagine peace.

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