

SPECIAL  
POINTS OF  
INTEREST:

- Nonviolence takes courage
- Nonviolence requires discipline
- Nonviolence is an idea whose time has come
- Nonviolence is vital to human survival

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# PeacePoints

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## What do we mean by “nonviolence”?

At the Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice, we are frequently asked what we mean by “nonviolence”. Often confused with passivity, there is absolutely nothing passive about nonviolence. In fact, it takes a high level of self-control and inner strength – in contrast to outer strength – to practice nonviolence. When people are threatened or actively violated in some way, it is very natural for us to retaliate against whoever we perceive is hurting us. And then, in a potentially endless cycle of violence, revenge begets more revenge. In this way, violence is inevitably contagious. Nonviolence

means actively renouncing violence, even when threatened or harmed, and even when one has the power to retaliate. It means breaking the cycle of revenge and refusing to participate in vengeance. People who practice nonviolence do so based on principle, setting an example of someone with the integrity



to live their principles. Non-violent resistance is one of the most powerful forces on earth and is responsible for most of the advances in the struggle for human rights of the last century. The Civil Rights Movement in America, the overthrow of the Soviet Empire and the end of the Cold War, the independence of India from the British Empire, the overthrow of dictators, the freeing of political prisoners, and the end of wars have all been rightfully attributed to the success of nonviolent resistance.

## Aims of Nonviolence

The aims of nonviolence are to prohibit physical, psychological and sexual violence. But stopping the violence although necessary is not sufficient. It is entirely possible to temporarily refuse to respond to provocation only to

retaliate later. An aim of non-violent practice must also be paired with active caring toward one’s opponent accompanied by an intention to convert others to nonviolent practice. A significant challenge for those who practice non-

violence is that the commitment must be unconditional, based on both fundamental moral principles and humanitarian and practical concerns.

## What can violent communities teach us?



Artwork by Students:  
Steven Brown and  
Erik Kalstrom, 9th  
Grade, Harbor City  
International High  
School, Duluth, MN.

Researchers have studied the characteristics of violent communities and this research has much to tell us about how to create and maintain nonviolent communities. Communities that become progressively more violent fail to use knowledge to avoid painful and frustrating experiences and those who seek education are unfavorably compared to those who are the most violent. Solutions that involve working together break down. Decisions are made autocratically under

conditions of stress. Community members stop working together to avoid violence. People stop trusting each other. The rules that hold communities together become meaningless, bullying leadership substitutes for real leadership. Members of the community emphasize short-term, immediate, often violent solutions to problems and the idea that nonviolence can be effective is seen as ridiculous. Power revolves around domination and coercion. People who enforce

laws are not taught nonviolent methods. The community loses a sense of purpose, feels increasingly helpless and loses faith that peace and nonviolence could characterize their neighborhoods. Substance abuse increases, bullying increases, violence increases and the pool of victims and perpetrators becomes universal. Meanwhile, the community denies that things are actually as bad as they are and fails to organize themselves to stop the violence.

*"...it is when  
people decide  
they want to be  
free. Once they  
have made up  
their minds to  
that, there is  
nothing that will  
stop them"*

*Rev. Desmond Tutu*

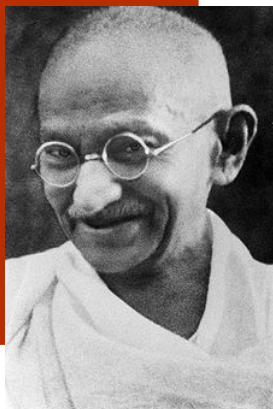
## Nonviolence in South Africa

Nelson Mandela had made it clear as far back as 1964 at his trial that he opposed both white domination and black domination. His final words at that trial were "I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It

is an ideal which I hope to love for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die." On February 11, 1990, Mandela, with TV cameras sending pictures around the world of his every step, walked out of prison a free man. Four years later he was elected president of

South Africa. According to many nonviolent sanctions were an indispensable link in the chain of events that ended apartheid in South Africa.

## Mahatma Gandhi—the World Soul



Mohandas  
Gandhi,  
1930's

During the first part of the twentieth century, Mohandas K. Gandhi was a leader of the nonviolent resistance movement that ended British colonial rule in India. He is often called "Mahatma" Gandhi as a term of

honor because the word "Mahatma" means "world soul" He was probably the first person to apply nonviolence to the political field on a very large scale. Gandhi believed that there were three possible responses to oppression and injustice. The coward's way

was to accept the wrong or run away from it. The second way was to fight by force of arms. The third way – the way he thought was best of all and required the most courage – was to stand and fight solely by nonviolent means.

# City of Brotherly Love



**William Penn as a young man**

William Penn grew up a child of privilege and comfort in England in the 1600's. Like many adolescents, he argued with his parents, had significant conflict with his father. His parents sent him away to school and while

still in his early adulthood, he became a soldier and quelled a rebellion. But under the surface, he was being profoundly moved by the suffering and tragedy he saw around him as a result of poverty, disease, and warfare. He declared himself a Quaker – a Protestant religious sect that opposed violence of any sort – and in doing so adopted the radical nonviolence of the Society of Friends. Because of his beliefs, Penn suffered many experiences of imprisonment. Homeless, he continued to push

for protection of the Quakers until finally, the King of England granted Penn a huge tract of land that became Pennsylvania and Philadelphia became the capital city, “the city of brotherly love”. For seventy years, Quakers dominated the government of Philadelphia, creating a tolerant, educated, and progressive community, a melting pot that influenced the Founders of the United States.

*“A basic fact about the method of non-violent resistance is that it is based on the conviction that the universe is on the side of justice”*

**Rev. Martin Luther King**

## Religious Roots of Nonviolence

The thinking on nonviolence spans thousands of years and many different cultures. Nonviolence has roots in Judaism going back at least to Palestinian Talmudic sources of the middle third century. Truth, justice, and peace are the three tools, according to Jewish thought, for the preservation of

the world. “Christianity was understood by the earlier followers of Jesus as a definitively nonviolent practice. In the United States, the nonviolence preached by Jesus has been most consistently displayed by groups like the Amish, the Mennonites, and the Quakers. Islamic scholars have an active

discourse around nonviolence and Buddhism is fundamentally nonviolent. In Hinduism, the The Bhagavad-Gita had a major influence on nonviolent activists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

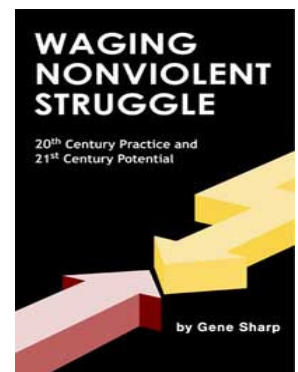
## The Invisible History of Nonviolence

Gene Sharp has spent a good part of his life studying nonviolence. He has proposed some reasons for why the history of nonviolent struggle remains invisible to most people, while we are all acquainted with acts of violence. Rarely have people who pursue nonviolent action been romanticized as heroes. Instead, those who use violence

– the warriors and terrorists – are mythologized for future generations. Violence has usually been considered the only form of legitimate combat and this dominant view conspires to keep people ignorant about the power they can have by using nonviolent methods. In this way, Western civilization is biased toward violence and a

commitment to nonviolence requires a new way of viewing the world.

To see articles by Gene Sharp see: [www.aeinstein.org/](http://www.aeinstein.org/)





**Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice**  
**School of Public Health**  
**Drexel University**  
**New College Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> Fl**  
**245 N. 15<sup>th</sup> St., Mail Stop 1011**  
**Philadelphia, PA 19102-1192**  
**Phone: 215-762-2372**  
**E-mail: [ann.s.wilson@drexel.edu](mailto:ann.s.wilson@drexel.edu)**

We believe that a human society can evolve to be non-violent and socially just. By creating sanctuary in our society, the personal, social, economic and multigenerational wounds caused by sustained exposure to violence can be healed for the public health & welfare. We are committed to a journey of discovery through policy, practice, training, research and dialogue to create a roadmap for social growth and change and to build a shared movement that is inclusive, multidisciplinary, participatory and respectful of differences.

*toward a nonviolent and socially just society*



## Sanctuary as a Safety Culture

The concept of “sanctuary” refers to the important emphasis we place on the active and conscious development of a sense of safety within any school, workplace or community. To adequately describe safety in the community context, we have to understand four levels of safety simultaneously and dynamically: physical safety, psychological safety, social safety, and moral safety. Feeling physically safe requires an environment that is free of threats to our physical wellbeing. Psychological safety means being safe with oneself and respected for one’s own identity. Social safety means being safe with other people. A morally safe com-

munity is one where people live by beliefs that support the safety, growth, and well-being of all of us. By making a commitment to nonviolence we commit to eliminating all threats to safety including physical, aggression, disrespect, demeaning language,

threatening glares, apathy, avoidance and any other behavior that permits people to impose their will on each other and abuse power.

[www.sanctuaryweb.com](http://www.sanctuaryweb.com)

