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**Joyce Apsel on Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas. By David Cortright. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 376pp.**

Joyce Apsel  
New York University

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**Abstract**

A review of:

Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas. By David Cortright. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 376pp.

**Keywords**

Peace, Pacifism, Disarmament, Peacemaking, History, Activism

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**Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas**. By David Cortright. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 376pp.

*Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas*, by David Cortright, builds upon and expands themes in his earlier works, such as *Gandhi and Beyond: Nonviolence for an Age of Terrorism* (2006). This broad historic overview introduces the reader to the theory, history, people and social movements that have played significant roles in the ideology and praxis of peace and social justice worldwide. The text is clearly written, well-organized, and provides an excellent, one-volume introduction to the history of peace.

Cortright, a long-time peace activist and scholar of peace, is a Research Fellow at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, and President of the Fourth Freedom Forum. From the outset, he emphasizes his commitment as an anti-war activist. Cortright writes that the book is an attempt to set the record straight and to counter popular charges against pacifism. However, he refrains from a rhetorical, propagandistic tone. Instead, he emphasizes the positive accomplishments of peace theories and movements while critiquing elements of peace advocacy—particularly absolute pacifism—and concludes the work with chapters on realizing disarmament and realistic pacifism. Acknowledging that much of history is filled with conflict, Cortright traces the complicated, rich histories of peace and its possibilities, from nuclear disarmament to the potential for reconciliation and social justice.

The author relies on the literature of earlier peace historians, including Charles De Benedetti, Sandi E. Cooper, Charles Chatfield, Roger Chickering, Peter Brock, and others. However, he puts his own imprint on peace history through a thematic framework; deconstruction of terms, including pacifism and democracy; and synthesis that emphasizes the role of nonviolence and disarmament in the history of peacemaking traditions. The volume opens with a chapter entitled “What is peace?” in which the author defines the term and provides an overview, including mention of Latin American and African traditions and peacemaking ideas. Part I, entitled “Movements,” includes the following chapters: “The first peace societies”; “Toward internationalism”; “Facing fascism”; “Debating disarmament”; “Confronting the cold war”; “Banning the bomb”; and “Refusing war.”

Cortright writes back into history, people and movements largely unknown outside peace history circles. This includes, for example, Elihu Burritt, the “learned blacksmith” who was a leader of American pacifism in the mid-19th century; Bertha von Suttner, winner of the Nobel Prize, peace activist, and best-selling author of *Lay Down Your Arms*; and numerous diverse societies and international movements working toward cooperation and peace that emerged during the 19th and 20th centuries.

In Chapter Four, “Facing fascism,” Cortright disputes the widely-held view that the disastrous appeasement policy prior to World War II was largely due to the influence of internationalists and pacifists. He cites the work of Cecelia Lynch, Martin Caedel and others in discussing how international peace advocates during the interwar years held a range of opinions on how best to move peace and cooperation forward. Peace activists wrestled with the terrible dilemmas of how to continue earlier initiatives promoting cooperation and peace in the face of growing fascism.

This chapter is a very important one in examining the range of responses to fascism, including focus on Spain and debates on neutrality, the emergency peace campaign, and the impact of losing Spain to Franco and his supporters. Cortright emphasizes that there was only a minority committed to absolute pacifism, and that even they cannot be held responsible for the outbreak of World War II.

Debates and movements for disarmament and anti-war advocacy are featured throughout this work. Cortright provides important information that reflects his own involvement in and familiarity with the anti-nuclear movement and anti-war movements against the Vietnam and Iraq wars. He revises the popular historic record while pointing out serious strategic and political mistakes within various segments of the anti-nuclear movement itself. While critical of US and other states' foreign policy, the book focuses on presenting the reader with a series of alternatives that, if pursued, could have resulted in less conflict and fewer arms. For example, early on in the Cold War arms race, President Truman faced a number of policy plans by advisors on nuclear weapons disarmament issues. Truman rejected the Acheson-Lilienthal Plan which aimed to control atomic energy and try to prevent a nuclear arms race. Instead, he chose the Baruch Plan, which took what Cortright describes as a hard-line position allowing the US to keep its monopoly of nuclear weapons until the last stages of any disarmament process. This policy decision reflects what became the US double standard throughout the Cold War, i.e., that the United States keeps its nuclear weapons while other countries give up theirs.

Part II is organized around major peace themes, such as religion, democracy, social justice, and the "responsibility to protect." He includes discussions on nonviolent warriors such as Gandhi and M.L. King's "patriotic pacifism," but sometimes fails to put their accomplishments within a larger historical context. For example, Gandhi's leadership and the success of non-violence in gaining Indian independence from Britain cannot be evaluated without consideration of the larger historical context of riots and subsequent mass violence and mass population transfers. The volume concludes with chapters on the possibilities of "Realizing disarmament" and "Realistic pacifism."

I assigned the book last semester in an undergraduate seminar on Peace and Social Justice. Students found the volume informative and engaging, filled with surprises about people and movements they had not heard about before, as well as with new information that prompted reappraisals of popular representations, such as the meaning of Jihad in Islam and how the Cold War ended (no, it was not, after all, primarily by former President Ronald Reagan saying, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall"). From the analysis of religion and peace (what Scott Appelby terms, "the ambivalence of the sacred"), to non-violence and terrorism, Cortright presents a much-needed introductory volume on the history of ideas and movements for peace.

*Joyce Apsel*  
*Liberal Studies Program*  
*New York University*