

Peace Studies Department
College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University

May 2nd, 2011

Dear Skeptic,

I'm writing this letter to help you understand why the nonviolent method is one that is proven to work and should be considered at least as powerful as violent methods. Untrained citizens on every continent have used nonviolence successfully against those oppressing them, and I believe that this is proof that this method can be used against anyone who's oppressing a population by that very population. I can't just say that so let me give you a few examples of specific nonviolent revolutions to illustrate this point.

My first example is what is known as the Orange Revolution, a nonviolent revolution following fraudulent elections in Ukraine in 2004. The choice to use nonviolence was the result of a "learning effect" from previous revolutions in Georgia in 2003 and Serbia in 2000 as well as from past events in Ukraine. The primary nonviolent method used during this revolution was street protests. Beyond that they drew on the list of 198 methods of nonviolent action that Gene Sharp, the world's leading nonviolence scholar, developed. This revolution had multiple leading groups and ultimately succeeded in its goal of getting the properly elected candidate in office. The next two examples I'll briefly discuss are the two I expect you to be most familiar with. Those are the work of Gandhi and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. When you think of nonviolence you'll first think of these two movements and their leaders. There is evidence all around the United States, in the

form of black equality, which shows that the Civil Rights Movement worked.

Likewise the complete independence of India from England is evidence of Gandhi's salt march succeeding. These are the two best-known examples of nonviolent revolutions since their leaders became icons of nonviolence.

Using examples of three separate areas of our planet where nonviolence has been used successfully is helpful, but it's only half the picture to back up my statement above. The second half is taking some time to discuss some of the scholars of nonviolence. I introduced Gene Sharp above so I'll start with talking more about his theories. He says that power is not monolithic, but rather comes from the consent of the people of the state. Violence plays right into the strong suits of your opponent, so nonviolence is the way to go to have the best chances of success. You need to take away the sources of political power through political defiance. Nonviolence isn't the weapon of the weak, but actually a method that can only be achieved by those capable of violence. Barbara Deming adds that when practicing nonviolence one both pushes back on their opponent and accepts his or her humanity.

Michael Nagler is the final nonviolence scholar I'll briefly mention. Lots of what he describes is practical ways of using nonviolence to create a peaceful society. One of the things that has stuck with me is what he said regarding when nonviolence (and violence) works. In his words: "Nonviolence sometimes 'works' *and always works* while violence sometimes 'works' but never works." This illustrates how nonviolence has positive long-term effects where violence has no long-term effects, either positive or negative. Nonviolence is a means with which you may be endangering your health, but are progressing the society towards a positive future.

To understand the natural world peace is a prerequisite. Lastly, Nagler states that violence is dehumanizing where nonviolence is rehumanizing.

Between the few examples of nonviolent revolutions and discussing some nonviolence theories I feel that I've sufficiently supported my original claim that untrained citizens on every continent have used nonviolence successfully against those oppressing them, and I believe that this is proof that this method can be used against anyone who's oppressing a population by that very population. In reality this topic has way too much depth to dig deeply into in a short letter, but I hope that this has shown you that nonviolence is not a method of action that should be laughed at as insignificant. I strongly suggest that if you're truly interested in the nonviolent method to explore it yourself.

Sincerely,

Alexander Celeste

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