

American Peace History since the Vietnam War

By Charles F. Howlett

What is peace history? The field itself—defined as the historical study of nonviolent efforts for peace and social justice—became widely recognized, accepted as a subfield of the discipline of history, and as part of a larger multidisciplinary approach known as peace studies education. In a much broader context, many peace historians see themselves as engaged scholars, who are not only involved in the study of peace and war, but also in efforts to eliminate or, at least, restrict armaments, conscription, nuclear proliferation, colonialism, racism, sexism, and war. Peace history, as part of peace studies, “seeks to inform publics concerning the causes of war while highlighting the efforts of those whose attempts have been directed at peaceful coexistence in an interdependent global setting.”¹ Specifically, the discipline’s basic focus has been “historical analysis of peace and antiwar movements and individuals, international relations, and the causes of war and peace.”²

Peace history came into its own after 1965, largely inspired by peace consciousness on campuses and newer scholars receiving their doctorates in history began legitimizing the field as a professional endeavor. Opposition to an ever-expanding American military presence in Southeast Asia provided an opportunity for scholars anxious to examine the role of peace and antiwar activism in America’s past. Peace history proliferated rapidly from the Vietnam War era to the 1980s. A considerable portion of the literature written during this period of rapid social and political change focused on issues of peace and justice and the emergence of activist-oriented peace organizations and leaders after World War I.

In particular, these specialized studies were most effective in their examination of the composition of each antiwar coalition that developed. The new research showed that membership in each group was given coherence by a distinct viewpoint (such as pacifism or international government), together with social characteristics (such as

Christianity, socialism, feminism, and environmentalism), or functional programs (lobbying and educating, for example). An antiwar constituency, therefore, attracted groups with inconsistent interests, much as opposition to World War II had aligned socialists with some moderate liberals and as condemnation of the Vietnam War joined New Left radicals, conservative business leaders, and even some cold war political warriors. Complementing these new studies, moreover, was a growing interest in historic feminist peace activism.

Basically, the peace history literature of this period can be classified into five primary categories: (1) specialized works on the story of the United States peace movement; (2) peace biographies; (3) works on the Vietnam War; (4) women and peace; and (5) antinuclear activism.

Specialized Studies

With respect to specialized studies, their achievement is a thorough use of primary sources. Adding both texture and context to the narrative, these studies have given new meaning and understanding to the peace crusade as well as important criticisms regarding its successes and failures. Some of the more notable works in this venue, although there are many more, are Peter Brock’s *Pacifism in the United States from the Colonial Era to the first World War* (1968), Lawrence S. Wittner’s *Rebels Against War: The American Peace Movement, 1933–1983* (1969, rev. 1983), Charles Chatfield’s *For Peace and Justice: Pacifism in America, 1914–1941* (1971), C. Roland Marchand’s *The American Peace Movement and Social Reform, 1898–1918* (1972), David S. Patterson’s *Toward a Warless World: The Travail of the American Peace Movement, 1887–1914*, and Charles DeBenedetti’s *Origins of the Modern American Peace Movement, 1915–1929* (1978). Inspired by Merle Curti’s pathbreaking work, *Peace or War: The American Struggle, 1636–1936* (1936), this cadre of younger historians (which included his former student, Arthur A. Ekirch, who

published his *The Civilian and the Military* in 1956), insisted that their research was essential to “advance peace as a process in human social relations” and that “for peace to advance in the world, reform must advance at home through the nonviolent extension of justice under order.”³

Subsequently, in the last two decades of the 20th century and in the current decade of the new millennium, scholars have continued examining various aspect of American peace history. Some of these works include Barbara Epstein’s *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (1991), Valerie Ziegler’s, *The Advocates of Peace in Antebellum America* (1992), Robbie Lieberman’s *The Strangest Dream: Communism, Anticommunism, and the U.S. Peace Movement, 1945–1953* (2000); Thomas F. Curran’s, *Soldiers of Peace:*

ASU SCHOOL OF
Historical, Philosophical
& Religious Studies
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

public history and
scholarly publishing
graduate programs
celebrating 30 years of excellence

Apply by January 1 for Fall Admission

The ASU public history program is one of the oldest, largest and most diversified in the country. Since 1980, the program has enabled students to specialize in local and community history, historic preservation and cultural resources management, historical administration, museum studies, public policy history and scholarly publishing.

The public history and scholarly publishing programs at ASU prepare students for the professional practice of history outside the classroom.

shprs.clas.asu.edu/publichistory

American Peace History since the Vietnam War

By Charles F. Howlett

What is peace history? The field itself—defined as the historical study of nonviolent efforts for peace and social justice—became widely recognized, accepted as a subfield of the discipline of history, and as part of a larger multidisciplinary approach known as peace studies education. In a much broader context, many peace historians see themselves as engaged scholars, who are not only involved in the study of peace and war, but also in efforts to eliminate or, at least, restrict armaments, conscription, nuclear proliferation, colonialism, racism, sexism, and war. Peace history, as part of peace studies, “seeks to inform publics concerning the causes of war while highlighting the efforts of those whose attempts have been directed at peaceful coexistence in an interdependent global setting.”²¹ Specifically, the discipline’s basic focus has been “historical analysis of peace and antiwar movements and individuals, international relations, and the causes of war and peace.”²²

Peace history came into its own after 1965, largely inspired by peace consciousness on campuses and newer scholars receiving their doctorates in history began legitimizing the field as a professional endeavor. Opposition to an ever-expanding American military presence in Southeast Asia provided an opportunity for scholars anxious to examine the role of peace and antiwar activism in America’s past. Peace history proliferated rapidly from the Vietnam War era to the 1980s. A considerable portion of the literature written during this period of rapid social and political change focused on issues of peace and justice and the emergence of activist-oriented peace organizations and leaders after World War I.

In particular, these specialized studies were most effective in their examination of the composition of each antiwar coalition that developed. The new research showed that membership in each group was given coherence by a distinct viewpoint (such as pacifism or international government), together with social characteristics (such as

Christianity, socialism, feminism, and environmentalism), or functional programs (lobbying and educating, for example). An antiwar constituency, therefore, attracted groups with inconsistent interests, much as opposition to World War II had aligned socialists with some moderate liberals and as condemnation of the Vietnam War joined New Left radicals, conservative business leaders, and even some cold war political warriors. Complementing these new studies, moreover, was a growing interest in historic feminist peace activism.

Basically, the peace history literature of this period can be classified into five primary categories: (1) specialized works on the story of the United States peace movement; (2) peace biographies; (3) works on the Vietnam War; (4) women and peace; and (5) antinuclear activism.

Specialized Studies

With respect to specialized studies, their achievement is a thorough use of primary sources. Adding both texture and context to the narrative, these studies have given new meaning and understanding to the peace crusade as well as important criticisms regarding its successes and failures. Some of the more notable works in this venue, although there are many more, are Peter Brock’s *Pacifism in the United States from the Colonial Era to the first World War* (1968), Lawrence S. Wittner’s *Rebels Against War: The American Peace Movement, 1933–1983* (1969, rev. 1983), Charles Chatfield’s *For Peace and Justice: Pacifism in America, 1914–1941* (1971), C. Roland Marchand’s *The American Peace Movement and Social Reform, 1898–1918* (1972), David S. Patterson’s *Toward a Warless World: The Travail of the American Peace Movement, 1887–1914*, and Charles DeBenedetti’s *Origins of the Modern American Peace Movement, 1915–1929* (1978). Inspired by Merle Curti’s pathbreaking work, *Peace or War: The American Struggle, 1636–1936* (1936), this cadre of younger historians (which included his former student, Arthur A. Ekirch, who

published his *The Civilian and the Military* in 1956), insisted that their research was essential to “advance peace as a process in human social relations” and that “for peace to advance in the world, reform must advance at home through the nonviolent extension of justice under order.”²³

Subsequently, in the last two decades of the 20th century and in the current decade of the new millennium, scholars have continued examining various aspect of American peace history. Some of these works include Barbara Epstein’s *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (1991), Valerie Ziegler’s, *The Advocates of Peace in Antebellum America* (1992), Robbie Lieberman’s *The Strangest Dream: Communism, Anticommunism, and the U.S. Peace Movement, 1945–1953* (2000); Thomas F. Curran’s, *Soldiers of Peace:*

ASU SCHOOL OF
Historical, Philosophical
& Religious Studies
ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

**public history and
scholarly publishing
graduate programs**
celebrating 30 years of excellence

Apply by January 1 for Fall Admission

The ASU public history program is one of the oldest, largest and most diversified in the country. Since 1980, the program has enabled students to specialize in local and community history, historic preservation and cultural resources management, historical administration, museum studies, public policy history and scholarly publishing.

The public history and scholarly publishing programs at ASU prepare students for the professional practice of history outside the classroom.

shprs.clas.asu.edu/publichistory

Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s (1993) Linda K. Schott's *Reconstructing Women's Thoughts: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Before World War II* (1997), Marian Mollin's *Radical Pacifism in Modern America: Egalitarianism and Protest* (2006), Kathleen Kennedy's *Disloyal Mothers and Scurrilous Citizens: Women and Subversion during World War I* (1999), Frances Early's *A World Without War: How U.S. Feminists and Pacifists Resisted World War I* (1997), and Joyce Blackwell's pioneering effort incorporating the role of African American women in the struggle against war, *No Peace without Freedom: Race and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1975* (2004).

Antinuclear Activism

The final area of interest to peace historians is antinuclear activism, which became an important aspect of peace history literature from the 1980s to the present. In this regard, Milton Katz's *Ban the Bomb: A History of SANE, the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy* (1986), Robert D. Holsworth's, *Let Your Life Speak: A Study of Politics, Religion and Anti-nuclear Weapons Activism* (1989), Paul Boyer's *By the Bomb's Early Light: Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (1994), James Tracy's *Direct Action: Radical Pacifism From the Union Eight to the Chicago Seven* (1996), Robert Kleidman's *Organizing for Peace: Neutrality, the Test Ban and the Freeze* (1993), Michael Bess's *Realism, Utopia, and the Mushroom Cloud: Four Activist Intellectuals and the Strategies for Peace, 1945-1989* (2003), and the impressive transnational trilogy by Larry Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb* (1993-2003), have taken great pains to point out that the goal of these activists was not simply one of avoiding nuclear annihilation, but also the transformation of society.

Challenges and Future Prospects

The various works listed above represent the many strands of peace history literature. They indicate the extensive expansion of peace history research in the past 40 years or so. Just recently, Oxford University Press published the four-volume *Oxford International Encyclopedia of Peace* (2010), edited by Nigel Young. It reflects the most ambitious effort to date to chronicle and chart the in-

terdisciplinary field of Peace Studies. The work represents the efforts of numerous scholars from throughout the world who have presented a full range of views related to the historical, political, philosophical, and theoretical issues related to peace and conflict.

Still, there are challenges historians must face. Students of American history have been exposed to surveys and monographs dominated by discourses on war. Whether describing preparations for war, battles, military leaders, or postwar plans, these books do so in terms of the glory and necessity of war. Consider the vocabulary itself: "antebellum period", "interwar period", "Cold War", "War on Terrorism", "prewar economy", "postwar planning", and so on. It is by no means a coincidence that one of the most frequently mentioned nouns in the English language is "war." According to the "Concise Oxford Dictionary," the word "war" ranked as the 49th most commonly used noun, while "peace" did not even make the top one hundred.⁵ Certainly, the brutality and consequences of war have received

their fair attention in history books. When peace movements or pacifists have been included in textbooks, diplomatic studies, or histories of domestic America, it has often been to criticize peacemakers as obstructionists or traitors. The justification for omitting peace activism has been that without war, or at least the threat of war, pacifism is merely a reactive ideology, with little to offer on its own. Whether in the classroom or writing books to offer alternative perspectives, the discipline of American peace history is thus fraught with tension.

Nevertheless, the prospects are encouraging. The Peace History Society, an affiliate of the AHA, has made remarkable strides in terms of membership and scholarship since its establishment in 1964. While the bulk of its members are Americanists, there is a large contingent of Europeanists as well as practicing scholars from other parts of the world.⁶ Its goal of utilizing scholarly research in an effort to secure lasting global harmony is easily referenced by some of the works mentioned above. The organization regularly sponsors panels at both the AHA and

New from
AHA
Publications

New Essays on
American Constitutional History

***Race and the Constitution:
From the Philadelphia Convention to the
Age of Segregation*** by Paul Finkelman

Now available: log onto the AHA's Publications Shop at
www.historians.org/pubshop for ordering information.

OAH meetings as well as its own bi-annual conference held at various universities in the United States. It even has its own scholarly journal *Peace & Change*.⁷

Scholars are responding to the challenges the discipline throws at them in a myriad ways, whether it be through gender studies, social movements, or transnational analysis. Significantly, all are bound by one common goal: concern for the future through an examination of the past. As the historian Larry Wittner recently commented, "War, after all, is a genuine problem. In the past century, it led to the deaths of over a hundred million people, and today, in a world armed with

some 24,000 nuclear weapons a good case can be made that it is perfectly appropriate for scholars to seek solutions to this problem and that, in their search for solutions, they will not necessarily lack objectivity....[S]hould the phenomenon of mass violence not be studied by historians in an effort to help end it?"⁸

Charles Howlett teaches at Molloy College in New York. His most recent book, co-authored with Ian Harris, is Books, Not Bombs: Teaching Peace since the Dawn of the Republic (2010).

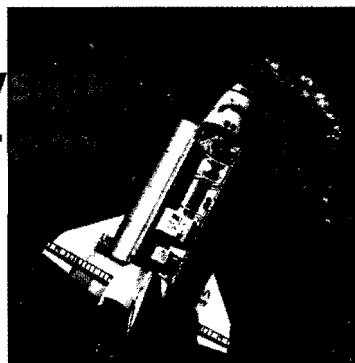
Notes

1. Jeffrey Kimball, "Alternatives to War in History," *OAH Magazine of History* 8 (spring 1994), 5–9. For a thorough historiographical listing of the many works in American peace history consult the bibliographical essay in Charles F. Howlett and Robbie Lieberman, *A History of the American Peace Movement from Colonial Times to the Present* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 519–550.
2. Charles Chatfield, "Peace as a Reform Movement," *OAH Magazine of History* 8 (spring 1994) 10–14.
3. Charles DeBenedetti, *Origins of the Modern American Peace Movement, 1915–1929* (Millwood, N.Y.: KTO Press, 1978), 105–107.
4. Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 1–3, 387–408.
5. Howlett and Lieberman, 2.
6. For a sampling of works on European peace history see the following: Peter Brock, *Pacifism in Europe to 1914* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972); Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914–1945: The Defining of a Faith* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980); Don Birn, *The League of Nations Union, 1915–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981); Thomas C. Kennedy, *"The Hound of Conscience": A History of the No-Conscription Fellowship* (Fayetteville, AK: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1981); Sandi E. Cooper, *Patriotic Pacifism: Waging War on War in Europe, 1815–1914* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991); Richard Taylor and Nigel Young, eds., *Campaigns for Peace: British Peace Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester Univ. Press, 1987); Caroline Moorhead, *Troublesome People: Enemies of War: 1916–1986* (London: Hamilton; Bethesda, Md.: Adler & Adler, 1987); and Norman Ingram, *The Politics of Dissent: Pacifism in France, 1919–1939* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991). See also, Gerloff Homan, "Peace History" A Bibliographic Overview," *Choice* (May 1995): 1408-1419.
7. The Peace History Society's web site is at www.peacehistorysociety.org.
8. Lawrence S. Wittner, "The Background and Activities of the Peace History Society," *Passport*, 40 (January 2010), 32. See also Virginia Williams, "The Peace History Society," *Perspectives on History* 47:8 (November 2009), 42–43.

American Historical Association

2011–2012 FELLOW IN AEROSPACE HIST

Supported by the National Aeronautics
& Space Administration (NASA)



The American Historical Association will annually fund at least one Fellow, for one academic year, to undertake a research project related to aerospace history. It will provide a Fellow with an opportunity to engage in significant and sustained advanced research in all aspects of the history of aerospace from the earliest human interest in flight to the present, including cultural and intellectual history, economic history, history of law and public policy, and the history of science, engineering, and management.

Applications, and letters of recommendation must be postmarked by **March 5, 2011**. Names of the winner and alternate will be announced in **May 2011**.

To learn more about the fellowship, application information, and a list of past fellowship research, please visit the AHA's web site at www.historians.org/prizes/NASA.htm.