

The Evolution of Peace Education in the United States from Independence to the World War I Era

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Many would probably agree that a major effort to make peace history and peace studies a permanent feature of the American education experience began in the 1960s. The anti-Vietnam War Movement demanded that pacifism and nonviolent social justice become as much a part of scholarship and the college curriculum, in particular, as the civil rights movement. The public joined peace activists in working to understand better the roots of pacifism and nonviolence. The result of this dual desire to consider both the philosophical foundations of pacifism and nonviolence and its practical political applications produced an outpouring of scholarly work and curriculum development. Peace studies courses and sometimes-entire departments or majors were created by universities overnight. Faculty also demonstrated that they were not immune to external pressures from their students, nor were they oblivious to the need to bring their scholarship closer into line with their own increasing political activism.

The evolution of peace education as a matter of public awareness actually started much earlier, during the early 1790s, shortly after the United States of America was established. With the adoption of the Constitution, plans to promote peace were given a much wider audience than ever before. One of the most captivating proposals put forth was by Benjamin Rush, the Philadelphia Quaker physician and former Continental Army Surgeon-General. Rush, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, was a fascinating figure who blended evangelical Christianity with a scientific intelligence that placed him in the company of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. After completing his medical training at the University of Edinburgh, he became one of the best-known doctors in America. He was an enthusiastic reformer who championed the causes of public education, women's rights, temperance, abolitionism, and, most especially, world peace. It was Rush who, in 1786, first called for a systematic form of public education in the New Republic when he penned *A Plea for the Establishment of Public Schools and the Diffusion of Knowledge in Pennsylvania in Which Are Added, Thoughts upon the Mode of Education, Proper on a Republic*.

Writing in 1793, Rush embodied Quaker ideals by urging the formulation of a national peace office under the direction of a man who was a "genuine republican and sincere Christian, for the principles of republicanism and Christianity are no less friendly to universal and perpetual peace, than they are to universal liberty" (quoted in D'Elia, 1974, pp. 97-98). It represented the first such proposal in United States history. Aiming to substitute a culture of peace for the glamour of war—a problem perplexing peace advocates even to this day—Rush believed the peace office should establish throughout the country free schools that would promulgate pacific Christian principles, work to eliminate all capital punishment laws, and seek the elimination of military parades, titles, and uniforms. Rush suggested that painted representations of all the military instruments of death be displayed, along with a plethora of art examples depicting human skulls, broken bones, unburied and putrefying dead bodies, hospitals overcrowded with wounded soldiers, villages on fire, rivers dyed with blood, and vast plains without trees or fences in the backdrop of the ruins of deserted farm houses. Above these graphic scenes Rush suggested that the words, "NATIONAL GLORY," be inscribed in red characters to represent human blood.

In the second decade of the nineteenth century, bolstered by the spreading spirit of evangelical Christianity and romantic faith in human perfectibility, the first major peace societies were organized for publicizing the benefits of peace. The early peace societies established periodicals and published tracts designed to convince humankind that war was unchristian, wasteful of life and treasure, and an ineffective method of solving disputes between nations. The peace movement as an organized effort and educational instrument gained considerable momentum

through the initial efforts of Noah Worcester. In 1814, at the conclusion of the War of 1812, he anonymously published his manifesto, *A Solemn Review of the Custom War*, in which he proclaimed, "There is nothing in the nature of mankind, which renders war necessary and unavoidable – nothing which inclines them to it which may not be overcome by the power of education...." Accordingly, he recommended the establishment of peace societies "in every nation of Christendom" whose purpose would be that of "diffusing light, and the spirit of peace in every direction" and of "exciting a just abhorrence of war in breast" (quoted in Brock, 1972, pp. 2-4). These educational efforts were to be carried out through newspapers, tracts and periodical works, through churches and religious observances, and through educational institutions.

Putting his ideas into action, Worcester helped found the Massachusetts Peace Society (MPS) in 1815, began publishing a quarterly journal, *Friend of Peace* (1815-1827), and was soon producing numerous peace tracts, including some designed especially for children. At the same time, David Low Dodge, the well-to-do New York City merchant "who tucked peace tracts into the boxes of goods sent out from his storerooms," created the New York Peace Society (NYPS) in 1815. Dodge implored peace loving parents to caution their children about the trappings of martial spirit because "When they have accidentally caught the sounds of music, and seen the brilliant parade of troops, then explain to them the nature and fruits of war, and that the parades were designed to foster the spirit and teach the art of war...." (quoted in Curti, 1936, pp. 36-37)

If Worcester and Dodge were responsible for establishing societies to further the cause of peace, Elihu Burritt actually made the crusade for peace education an admirable endeavor. Born in New Britain, Connecticut, in 1810, son of an eccentric shoemaker and farmer, Burritt was both brilliant and precocious. Referred to by Merle Curti as the "learned blacksmith," the self-educated, radical pacifist had mastered more than thirty languages—a true commitment to his international sentiments. He anticipated many of the most effective modern propaganda techniques. From temperance circles, he adopted the idea of a pledge of complete abstinence from every possible form of war. Burritt also helped organize women's peace societies such as the Olive Leaf Circles where they raised thousands of dollars for international peace work. Conscious of war's brutalizing effects, he called upon the "workingmen of Christendom" to put an end to "such pretentious valuations upon their earthly possibilities as to believe they are worth more for producing food for man and beast, than for feeding with their own flesh and blood the hungry maws of mortar and *mitrailleuses* on fields of human slaughter" (quoted in Weinberg & Weinberg, 1963, p. 344).

A major reason why these peace activists attempted to educate the public at large about the importance of peace was in response to the nationalistic and patriotic temperament of McGuffey Readers and textbooks, which glorified and reveled in the young nation's respect for hero worship and justification for independence through military victory. George Washington frequently was compared to Moses. Geography and history textbooks like those of Jedidiah Morse and Samuel G. Goodrich were replete with moralizing and claims about the superiority of Americans and American institutions. According to the noted historian Lawrence Cremin: "Given the evangelical effort to identify nondenominational Protestantism with righteous republicanism, the teaching of virtue went hand in hand with the teaching of patriotism, with the result that God, country, and temperance were often inseparably intertwined in the preachments of teachers and textbooks" (Cremin, 1980, p. 395).

Criticism of the Mexican War (1845-1848), moreover, prompted many intellectuals from New England to condemn militarism. Teachers and ministers, many of them connected to the intellectual movement known as Transcendentalism—a philosophy grounded in moral and individual progress—wrote and spoke about the horrors of war. The writings and teachings Ralph Waldo Emerson and the sermons of Theodore Parker were widely distributed among peace societies. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's popular poem, "The Arsenal at Springfield," was recited

by New England schoolchildren in many classrooms. Perhaps the most famous essay condemning war and militarism was that written by a former schoolteacher and America's most famous anarchistic individualist Henry David Thoreau. In an "Essay on Civil Disobedience," Thoreau made an impassioned plea for moral commitment in the face of injustice and a justification for opposing the state when law and conscience conflict. His essay would later have a profound influence on such notable figures as Count Leo Tolstoy and Martin Luther King, Jr.

During the Civil War, a Philadelphia Quaker woolens merchant who refused military service and the payment of war taxes, Alfred Love, founded a pacifist organization, the Universal Peace Union (UPU). At the conclusion of the war, Love and his peace society not only advocated improved industrial labor relations, better treatment of native Americans, and women's suffrage, but also protested against all military parades and ceremonies, the building of monuments dedicated to war heroes, and other aspects of the martial spirit. Central to Love and UPU's peace cause was the demand for the abolishment of military drill as part of the high school curriculum for boys. UPU's primary objective was educating children in peace awareness and it put forth innumerable resolutions against military training of any kind in the nation's schools. The society also took aim at the glorification of war found in school textbooks. In 1870, it demanded that "school books and literature should be purified from the precedence given to scenes of blood, presenting them only as blots and opprobrium of the human race to correct the errors of the past" (quoted in Curran, 2003, p. 146). In 1877, furthermore, the UPU's *Voice of Peace* endorsed the recently published U.S. history text authored by Josiah W. Leeds that gave little attention to wars and battles, while focusing on the social, civil, economic, and political life of the nation.

In addition, the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, whose theological support for nonviolence was firmly planted in Colonial America during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, rebounded from setbacks that the Civil War had made among younger members and became a force for peace education during the era of Reconstruction. In 1867, the Peace Association of Friends in America was established based on the efforts of yearly meetings in Baltimore, Indiana, Ohio, Kansas, New York, North Carolina, and other locations. Seeking to popularize peace through the written word as an educational tool, the Association reprinted many of the classics of the peace movement written during the first half of the nineteenth century. Among the list of publications were Dr. David Bogue's lecture *On Universal Peace*, Thomas Chalmers's *Thoughts on Universal Peace*, Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner's oration on *The True Grandeur of Nations*, and the writings of Elihu Burritt and William Ladd, the first president of the American Peace Society. More importantly, the Association put out peace pamphlets for children extolling the views of non-resistance by New Englander Henry C. Wright as well as various anthologies condemning the horrors of war and praising the virtues of peace. Short biographies of leading pacifists and peace activists were also part of the Association's education package for children. The Association also produced its own journal *Messenger of Peace*, which had a circulation of between three and four thousand. Many of the articles printed were didactic in tone, evangelical in spirit, and emphasized the virtues of Christian pacifism through stories and extracts illustrating this theme as part of its peace education mission.

Directly linking peace education with schools, however, began in earnest after the Civil War. Of immediate concern was the impact of the Franco-Prussian War, which broke out in 1870. Peace advocates became alarmed with American admiration for the Prussian plan of state education—one carried over to her citizen army, which the American press praised as an educated, thinking army. Many Americans believed the Prussian military system, based on compulsory service, was both democratic and non-aggressive. In particular, peace leaders of both genders were concerned about teaching the martial spirit to America's youth. Looking at the post-Civil War records of the National Education Association (NEA), the most prominent national teachers' organization, peace movement leaders were disturbed to find absolutely no discussion of the problem of peace or war at its meetings. They were even more upset by William T. Harris, the

dominant figure in public school education in the 1870s and 1880s, who believed that if war came “it was inevitable and functional to some higher synthesis,” and whose Darwinian views reached into hundreds of classrooms (Leeds, 1896, pp. 93-104). Peace leaders were also distressed because schools in Boston and New York during the 1870s had overwhelming numbers of war pictures on classroom walls, and pupils were called upon to recite the details of war campaigns, the noble characteristics of military heroes, and the national advantages resulting from America’s wars.

Peace advocates, in response to post-Civil War martial displays in the classroom, began making a conscientious effort to influence the curriculum and teaching materials of the public schools. During the Ulysses S. Grant Administration, a pamphlet by Leeds argued *Against the Teaching of War in History Textbooks*, which Columbia University philosopher John Dewey would also urge in the early twentieth century. During the same period, *The American Advocate of Peace and Arbitration* (organ of the American Peace Society) carried a reprint from the *Journal of Education* entitled “Teach the Children—a Woman’s Word.” This article encouraged schoolteachers to promote the cause of international arbitration as one plausible means for establishing world peace. In the same issue, the American Peace Society advertised two of its own peace education publications: (1) *Topics for Essays and Discussions in Schools, Colleges, and Debating Societies*, which presented a list of 200 peace-related topics and a list of relevant reference books, and (2) the *Angel of Peace*, an illustrated monthly magazine for children. Primarily, peace educators in the post-war period launched a direct attack on school textbooks as a source of international misunderstanding. *APS* also recommended “the removal of false ideas about the nature and causes of war, and called for a radical reduction in the amount of textbook space devoted to armies and war” (Howlett & Zeitzer, 1985, pp. 17-21).

Women also emerged as prominent figures in promoting peace education. During the last third of the nineteenth century, women assembled a wide range of independent reform organizations focused on educating the public about peace. Julia Ward Howe, poet, reformer, and author of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” issued “An appeal to Womanhood Through out the World”—September 1870. “Our husbands,” she declared, “shall not come to us reeking with Carnage, for caresses and applause. Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy, and patience” (Richards & Elliott, 1915, pp. 300-304). Quaker feminist Hannah Bailey followed Howe’s lead by creating a peace department within the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Under her capable and efficient direction, the department operated in twenty-eight states—“issuing the *Pacific Banner* and handing out thousands of Children’s Leaflets” in Sunday Schools. Moreover, May Wright Sewall, founder of the Girl’s Classical School in Indianapolis and chair of the executive committee of the National Woman Suffrage Association, helped establish the International Council of Women. During the 1890s Sewall and her Council tirelessly worked to get a peace manual adopted by the schools. The manual showed how the popular idea of arbitration could be easily adapted to family situations, school, economic endeavors, and, above all, relations among nations.

At the same time, the twin goals of peace and arbitration were given wide publicity beginning in 1895 when two Quakers, Albert and Alfred Smiley, welcomed to their scenic Lake Mohonk, New York, resort peace educators and national figures supporting the cause of international understanding. Twenty-two annual conferences were held until World War I finally suspended its efforts. Topics most commonly discussed were peace education in the schools and colleges, the role of government in international arbitration, and arbitration as a matter of politics. Female educators were particularly outspoken at these meetings. M. Carey Thomas, president of Bryn Mawr College, presented a speech entitled “Influence of Educated Women for Arbitration and Peace,” pointing out how the martial spirit negatively affects males’ respect for women. Agnes Irwin, president of Radcliffe College, hoped that some day “the time may come when the young will see instinctively that war is a great calamity....” (Annual Report, 1902, p. 31). Sensitive to the

remarks of Thomas and Irwin, New York State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Charles R. Skinner, noted that five-sixths of all American teachers were women. It is up to them to tell schoolchildren "what has been accomplished through arbitration to secure the peace of the world [not] how many soldiers marched up and down with Caesar" (Annual Report, 1906, p. 141). Finally, Boston schoolteacher and wife of textbook publisher and founder of the World Peace Foundation Edwin D. Mead, Lucia Ames Mead, implored her listeners at the 1897 meeting not to be afraid to let children read about war, "provided they are taught that it is the most savage and most foolish method ever discovered for settling disputes." Constant instruction in the classroom "should be given," she added, "if the next generation is to be taught what it needs to know about attaining peace through world organization or about the ethics of the new internationalism" (Annual Report, 1897, p. 99).

Noted philanthropists also took up the call for peace. Andrew Carnegie contributed \$10 million in United States Steel Corporation bonds in December 1910 toward the formation in New York of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. CEIP had three divisions: The Division of Intercourse and Education, The Division of Economics and History, and The Division of International Law. The Division of Intercourse and Education was created to maintain agencies throughout the world in order to gather information about other nation's international policies and to promote international goodwill. The Division of Economics and History sponsored studies of the conditions—political, social, and economic—that influenced peace and war, and suggested methods of action regarding them. The Division of International Law tried to extend the law of nations to all disputes arising among nations. It also disseminated information on the nations' rights and responsibilities under existing international law and promoted periodic international conferences to amplify and codify that law.

Other efforts to promote peace education were undertaken prior to World War I. In 1905, the Lake Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration appointed a committee on colleges and universities that subsequently induced many institutions to hold regular observances of Peace Day (May 18th, anniversary of the first Hague Conference for World Peace), debates, and oratorical contests, and special lectures on the peace movement. In the same year, President Noah Byers of Goshen College and Professor Elbert Russell of Earlham College founded the Intercollegiate Peace Association (IPA) to promote peace-oriented activities among faculty and students. By 1912, the IPA had conducted "intercollegiate and interstate oratorical contests" involving "at least 300 undergraduates from 80 colleges in some 16 states" (Lochner, pp. 2-4).

More in line with traditional classroom outreach, The American School Peace League held its annual meetings in conjunction with the National Education Association, the largest teaching organization in the United States, beginning in Denver in 1909. Its state branches held meetings in conjunction with state teachers' associations. The League "distributed literature, supplied speakers, gained observance of Peace Day in the schools," developed curriculum materials. It organized "peace study groups for teachers," and held essay contests on peace issues for high school students. Through these and other activities, the American School Peace League became "perhaps the most influential of all the juvenile propagandist bodies in the world" (Zeiger, 2000, pp. 54-58).

Popular educators and reformers also understood the importance of teaching peace. Harvard University philosopher William James, rather than relying on classroom instruction, used his philosophy of pragmatism to address head-on the issue of human nature and aggression. One of the more interesting educational peace proposals ever put forth was James' "Moral Equivalent." When his essay was introduced during a speech at Stanford University in 1906, it was considered one of the most important addresses on one of politics' most classic problems: how to maintain political unity and civic virtue without war or the threat of war. The Civil War had set the militia institution on a downward path because many militiamen were killed, wounded, or demoralized.

In lieu of the militia promoting social unity, James came up with a brilliant idea; he proposed a form of national service that would wage warfare against injustices in nature.

His vision of a means toward a peaceful society was designed around organizing an army of workers to work in the coalfields and industries of America. Rather than being conscripted for military service male youths would serve in an army of economic and reconstruction builders. Reacting to the psychological values of manliness and physical vigor encouraged by war, James developed a counterweight by providing what he called the "moral equivalent of war" encompassing the military virtues of "intrepidity, contempt of softness, surrender of private interest, [and] obedience to command." As a substitute for military conscription, he urged the drafting of all youth to form for several years an "army enlisted against nature," to contend with the "sour and hard foundations of his Higher life." He would draft them "to coal and iron mines, to freight trains, to fishing fleets in December, to dishwashing, and window washing, to road-building and tunnel making, to foundries and stoke-holes, and to the frames of the sky-scraper" (Perry, 1967, pp. 311-328).

By the first decade of the twentieth century, "...aspirations for a peaceful society free of military dominance would be wedded to practical educational plans such as curriculum guides and textbooks" (Stomfay-Stitz, 2008, p. 2). These learning tools were considered essential to teaching children first about the necessity of constructing a peaceful society prior to training for citizenship. Unfortunately, when the United States entered World War I schools quickly became seminaries of patriotism. Classrooms were transformed into laboratories for allegiance to the flag, devotion to Americanism, and avenues for impressionable minds to support the war effort. School texts and learning aids were designed to encourage America's military victory over the "evil Huns," and in many states, teachers were required to take loyalty oaths. Any teacher criticizing President Wilson's war aims was subject to dismissal. Peace education was virtually nonexistent in the nation's schools, save for promoting the Fourteen Points and the League of Nations.

After World War I, however, school textbook revision became a notable byproduct of the peace crusade as educators began to see nationalistic tendencies as an important factor leading to war. Columbia University philosopher John Dewey began arguing for "a curriculum in history, geography, and literature which will make it more difficult for the flames of hatred and suspicion to sweep over this country in the future, which will indeed make this impossible, because when children's minds are in the formative period we shall have fixed in them through the medium of the schools, feelings of respect and friendliness for the other nations and peoples of this world" (Howlett, 1977, pp. 60-63). In line with Dewey's call for "transnational patriotism," the Association for Peace Education published a report in 1924 on the impact of curriculum materials related to war and peace—based on a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of typical school histories in the United States. Based on this report Paul Klapper, Dean of the School of Education at CCNY, published a text in 1926 entitled, *The Teaching of History*. This text was widely used to prepare Social Studies teachers. A section, "History and World Peace," noted, "Instruments thus far devised to answer humanity's prayer for the abolition of war" include international treaty agreements and the reduction of armaments. But the real solution, according to Klapper, is for "Teachers of history and the social sciences" to "picture vividly the human cost of war, and that war persists only because some of the leading nations are not ready to maintain justice in international affairs on as high a plane as in individual matters." To accomplish this requires the elimination of "bigoted nationalism and martial propaganda from history" (Klapper, 1927, pp. 114-116)

The belief that schools had a primary responsibility toward peace was also widely shared by other members of the educational establishment. Dewey's colleague, William H. Kilpatrick, gave an address at a Quaker school in Philadelphia in 1921 on the subject "Our Schools and War" which reasoned that just as "learning to kill" requires "careful teaching," it can be unlearned in the

name of peace. Teachers trained in America's normal colleges must be taught the new bible: that war is not inevitable; that the "social integration" of humankind is inevitable; that competitive armament is folly; and that if war was a form of learned behavior, it could be unlearned, as dueling had been unlearned. These new educators must teach the children committed to their charge that modern war is horrible; that war is unnecessary; that world integration is the shape of the future; and that unlimited national sovereignty is out of date. Teachers, Kilpatrick stressed, should downplay in their lesson plans the German atrocity stories that had been the staple of the Allied press during the war: "We have too many children of German parentage in our midst." He suggested that educators cautiously endorse the League of Nations: "When finally we have settled our partisan disputes...about the League, then the teachers must do their utmost to make it work" (quoted in Carter, 1977, pp. 34-36).

In 1924, moreover, three university professors studied twenty-four standard public school American history texts and twenty-four popular supplementary readers. They concluded that the books glamorized and glorified war—so much so that military exploits rivaled civilian achievements in terms of their descriptions and proportionate space allotted. Based on these findings, *The Nation* magazine quickly called for the replacement of war propaganda with peace propaganda: "The future demands a type of history that will not exaggerate the place of war, which will show its true nature, and which will develop in children the will to peace. Parents should demand such histories..." (quoted in Carter, 1977, pp. 35-36).

The period after World War I, marked by revisionist histories such as Harry Elmer Barnes' *The Genesis of the World War* and Sidney Fay's two-volume *Origins of the World War*, along with public disillusionment regarding the failures at the Treaty of Versailles (1919), caused educators to examine more carefully the deleterious effects of war on society. Although World War II and McCarthyism would slightly impede the growth of peace education and peace studies, the development of weapons of mass destruction in the late 1940s and 1950s would ultimately serve to strengthen the need for peace education. Thus, what began shortly after the American Revolution with the call for an Office of Peace by Benjamin Rush, grew exponentially over the course of the American experience. By the time of the Vietnam War period, therefore, the historical evolution of peace education in the United States had already grown in terms of legitimacy and importance. Peace education had a rich tradition upon which to build. The historical evolution continues to this day.

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