

ROTARY DISTRICT 5440 PEACEBUILDER NEWSLETTER

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**PREEMPTIVE WAR, ALTERNATIVES AND BLAME:
THEIR IMPACT ON PEACEBUILDING**

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In these newsletters of the Rotary District Peacebuilders, we want to invite readers for contributions and ideas, suggestions and possibilities for our efforts to promote the foundational skills for promoting peace, i.e., nonviolent conflict resolution, improved communication and cooperation, successful negotiation and mediation as well as the critical and creative thinking that can help communities move through obstacles and difficulties. See the end of this newsletter for more details about this project and the authors.

**PREEMPTIVE WARS ARE ALMOST COUNTER PRODUCTIVE:
THE SEDUCTIONS AND FAILURES OF PREEMPTIVE WAR**

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In 1844 President James K. Polk was anxious to distract the public from the loss of Vancouver and the northern part of the Oregon Territory to the British, and there was a significant likelihood of war with Britain if the issue was allowed to continue.¹ Polk preferred a vision of American “Manifest Destiny” incorporating California, New Mexico and Texas into the United States which would give slavery an area into which it could expand. Lincoln wrote to his law partner William Herndon in 1848 about Polk’s decision to use preemptive war against Mexico. Lincoln was very opposed to Polk's expansionist program and made three points:²

1. The president should not start a war because his reasons may end up being wrong.
2. The president should not start a war because his initiative may start a bigger war.
3. The Constitution gave congress not the president the power to declare war. Lincoln noted this was specifically in reaction to the fact that *"Kings had always been impoverishing their people in wars, pretending...that the good of the people was the object. This our Convention understood to be the most oppressive of all Kingly oppressions, and they resolved to so frame the Constitution that NO ONE MAN should hold the power of bringing this oppression on us."* (Emphases shown are Lincoln's not mine).

Nonetheless, in 1846 Polk had ordered General Zachary Taylor to move troops into the disputed Nueces Strip near the Rio Grande to confront Mexican troops. The Mexican troops claimed the Americans were on Mexican land and drove off the Americans. Polk went to Congress demanding they declare war since “Mexican troops had...shed American blood upon the American soil.”

¹ The conflict over Vancouver eventually led to the “Pig War” a bloodless but tense confrontation between the United States and Britain that lasted from 1859 to 1872. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pig_War_\(1859\)#Resolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pig_War_(1859)#Resolution)

² Fehrenbacher, D.E., Ed., *Abraham Lincoln: A Documentary Portrait through his Speeches and Writings*, The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., New York, 1964, pp. 59-60.

When asked who would pay for the war Polk argued Mexico would pay the costs by ceding California and the New Mexico territories. Although the U.S. got major territorial expansion as a result of the Mexican American war, we have embittered relations with Mexico now for over a century. Mexicans even today consider the war an illegal occupation.³

It wasn't much of a "war" really, more like a mugging or a punch in the face. As Ulysses S. Grant himself finally put it:

"I was bitterly opposed to the measure, and to this day regard the war, which resulted, as one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation. It was an instance of a republic following the bad example of European monarchies, in not considering justice in their desire to acquire additional territory".⁴

Did you know that one of the major reasons for the cry for Texan independence that preceded this war was that Mexico had abolished slavery in 1829, and the Texans did not want to give up their slaves?⁵

When you know the back story, all the patriotic guff about the Texas Alamo and the brave American fighters isn't so impressive. For example, the so-called hero James Bowie who died in the Alamo was a black birder⁶ (slave trader), land swindler and a thief. Even worse, Bowie was baptized Roman Catholic so he could emigrate to Mexico, he renounced American citizenship and took out Mexican citizenship, married the daughter of the Mexican vice governor of the province, and swore an oath of allegiance to Mexico ...so he was essentially a traitor to Mexico when he fought at the Alamo.⁷

So how is preemptive war rationalized? One definition suggests:

A preemptive war is a war that is commenced in an attempt to repel or defeat a perceived imminent offensive or invasion, or to gain a strategic advantage in an impending (allegedly unavoidable) war shortly before that attack materializes. It is a war that preemptively 'breaks the peace'.⁸

Preemptive war or preventive war⁹ has been embraced by many nations at different times. Justification has been highly debated. Most recently for the United States the so-called Bush doctrine was argued to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2002. In summary, arguments for preemptive response by Bush's administration were:

- The nature and magnitude of the threat involved,
- The likelihood that the threat will be realized unless preemptive action is taken,
- The availability and exhaustion of alternatives to using force and,

³ For the Mexican viewpoint see: <https://www.guora.com/What-does-Mexico-call-the-Mexican-American-war>

⁴ Quote by Ulysses S. Grant about Mexican American War in 1879
https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Mexican%E2%80%93American_War

⁵ Texas Revolution background of slavery and racial bias: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Texas_Revolution#Background

⁶ A black birder was a slave trader who kidnaped free blacks and sold them to Plantation owners as being former slaves.

⁷ James Bowie: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Bowie#Legacy

⁸ Chronology of preemptive war to today: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preemptive_war

⁹ A preventive war as opposed to a preemptive war is one initiated to prevent a belligerent party from acquiring a capability of attacking.

- Whether using preemptive force is consistent with the terms and purposes of the U.N. Charter and other applicable international agreements.

Article 2, Section 4 of the U.N. Charter prohibits all UN members from even exercising the “threat of use of force against the territorial integrity of political independence of any state.” In Article 51 the UN Charter draws the line between legitimate and illegitimate military force. If no attack has occurred, then there is no justification for preemptive “self-defense.” To be an action of self-defense the preemptive actor must believe the threat is real as opposed to perceived, and self-defensive force must be proportional to the harm threatened. Even then nonviolent options are preferred such as negotiation, retreat, or calling on neutral authorities like the UN.⁸ (The United States ratified the UN Charter as of October 24, 1945.)

Sadly, when a nation possesses a first strike advantage and believes it will win a preemptive engagement, there is very little incentive to bargain for any peaceful settlement. “If the probability of winning minus the probable costs of war is high enough, then no self-enforcing peaceful outcome exists.”¹⁰

CONCLUSION: Although patience and time always seems to be a better solution to seemingly terrible danger than war, peace building is not possible if the first reaction is to use a big military hammer because you have it. With a big hammer everything looks like a nail.

EXPLORE PACIFISM

William M. Timpson, Ph.D. *has been on the faculty at Colorado State University in its School of Education for many years. What follows is adapted from Timpson’s 2009 book, 147 Tips for Teaching Peace and Reconciliation, co-authored with an international group of peace scholars that included Ed Brantmeier, Nat Kees, Tom Cavanagh, Claire McGlynn and Elavie Ndura (Madison, WI: Atwood).*

After the attacks of September 11th in the U.S. and the drumbeat for revenge from the White House, in particular, sounded ever louder, there was an emotional push to do something, for throwing the full force of American military might against the “evil doers” wherever they hid. Eventually George W. Bush would build a case for the preemptive invasion of Iraq, a sovereign nation, as the best way to keep Americans and American interests safe.

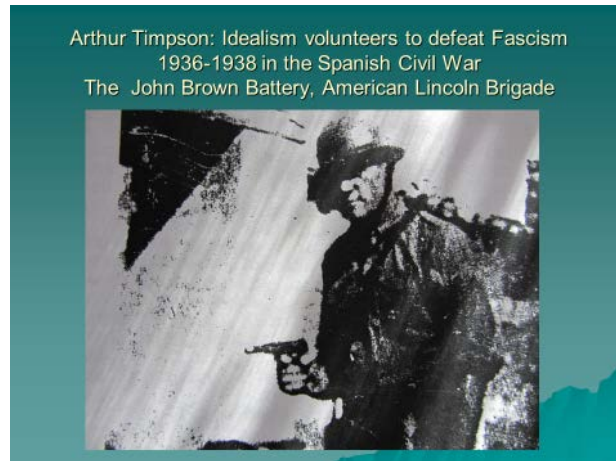
During all this, I remained deeply troubled by all this and began to join with Quakers/Friends for their Sunday meetings. I also joined in the many protests that were organized locally.

As I tried to sort out what I would teach in my classes—just what does an educator say—I found myself drawn to these Quakers and other faith communities who were committed pacifists—they were crystal clear that violence of any sort was not an option. While I tried the services offered by Mennonites in town, I was really drawn to the essential silence of the Quakers/Friends meetings where I could find the space to meditate on the meaning of peace in the midst of outrage and the build up to war.

When I later worked on writing a book on all this, *Teaching and Learning Peace* (2002), I found myself repeatedly returning to the question of nonviolence in Europe during the 1930’s, the rise

¹⁰ Fearon, James (1995). "Rationalist Explanations for War". *International Organization*. 49: 379–414.

of Hitler and the brutality of the Nazi ascension to power. I asked myself: Could I be a pacifist in the face of that kind of threat? My dad had volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War in 1936 and 1938 and then later with Patton's U.S. Third Army as his contribution to rid the world of fascism. The Nazi military along with their Italian and Japanese allies committed numerous preemptive attacks that took a heavy toll on civilian populations, in particular. The German military use of the "blitzkrieg" (lightning war) is a prime example.



Yet, while preemptive attacks got the Germans and their allies early victories, they also created their own defeat. The brutality of their aggression and ambitions, motivations and actions quickly turned the entire world against them. Certainly World War Two fit my notion of a 'just war.' In the summer of 2002 I even took myself on a trail of the Holocaust, exploring the Nazi occupations of Lithuania and Poland including the death camp at Auschwitz and the slaughter of Jews in Budapest. Picasso's Guernica memorializes the tragedy of fascist carpet bombing in Spain.



Revisiting all the arguments for the U.S. involvement in World War Two, I listened to the responses I then got from my Quaker colleagues and these really pushed my thinking. I had to ask myself: What would have happened, if the allies had committed to whole range of nonviolent interventions long before the U.S. entry in the war after the attacks on Pearl Harbour. Could an economic embargo on Germany and its Fascist leaders made a difference? Cutting off their international credit? Divesting? We conducted war crimes trials at the end of World War Two, should we do the same now and rethink the Iraq War? Should we try to determine where the mistakes were made and by whom so that we can respond differently in the future?

Years after World War Two we saw the results when the world united to isolate the South African government and its brutally racist policies of apartheid. No one advocated a military

style invasion. Several international businesses pulled their operations out. College campuses in the U.S. rang with student voices calling for divestiture of funds from companies doing business with South Africa. Sporting teams from South Africa were barred from participating in international events. No armed invasion was needed; in fact, just the opposite happened. In the face of international pressures, South Africa moved toward the inclusion of the Black majority in democratic elections and the ending of apartheid.

I ask you to think this through on your own. Find a pacifist faith community where you live and attend one of their services or meetings. Read the arguments for nonviolence in the writings and speeches of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Join with others to examine the role of pacifism today and consider what they can teach us.

PSYCHOLOGICAL RATIONALES FOR PREEMPTIVE WAR BLAMING, ACCOUNTABILITY & RESPONSIBILITY

Lloyd Thomas, Ph.D. is a longstanding member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club, a licensed psychologist and a life coach with a long history of writing regular columns. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, many in the U.S. wanted to ascribe blame and get revenge.

A "preventive war" is different than a "preemptive war." Both however, are preceded by either fear, revenge or perceived "self-defense." A preventive war is launched in an effort to destroy a perceived potential threat by the targeted party, even when such an attack is "not imminent or known to be planned." It is usually justified by anger or a desire for revenge. The most recent example of one is the war in Afghanistan.

A preemptive war is launched in *anticipation* of immediate aggression by another party, and is initiated even without a clear incentive for either party to attack the other. It is simply based upon the fear-born and irrational belief that one party is about to engage, or has engaged in an aggressive action against the initiator of the war. Such a belief usually "justifies" the preemptive action because the initiating party's fear is diminished and therefore termed to be "defensive." The war in Iraq is an example of a preemptive war.

Both fear-based "defensive" aggression and anger-based vengeful (spiteful) aggression have proven to be quite effective at reducing the perpetrator's fear or anger, but always increases the fear and anger in the victims of a "successful" war.

In his book, *Justifying Preventive War*, Alan Buchanan concluded: "I wish to end however, on a note of caution. Nothing I have said suggests that any preventive war that has been waged in the past, including the...US invasion of Iraq, has been morally justified." Both preventive and preemptive wars are based upon a single dynamic belief: *If I believe that you believe something that I find offensive or frightening, that gives me the right to aggress against you.* For thousands of years, such a belief has been the justification for waging war.

We seem to be living in a time when governments, nations and individuals are always blaming others for their mistakes, beliefs and weaknesses. It appears that

blaming others has become a national habit. When we cannot identify a single person to blame, we spread the blame around to others, to fate, to Mother Nature, to God, to other nations or to anybody who isn't us.

The dynamic of blaming others is a consequence of our personal fear of our genuine inability to control or even influence events or others. It probably begins when we were children and asked to control our own behavior (like bowel and bladder control) and couldn't...leading to parental disapproval or punishment. When we are afraid of being "out of control," we usually are fearful most of the time.

There is a psychological downside to blaming. It inadvertently gives the "blamee" unwarranted power over the blamer. After all, if it is always somebody else's fault, then the blamer has no power to modify that for which he is blaming somebody else. Blaming is always assigned to events or actions that have occurred in the past. And we are all helpless to change anything that is already history. So, blaming always increases the blamer's sense of powerlessness and helplessness. A sense of helplessness is one element in psychological depression. It is no wonder that blamers are often depressed. They also blame anybody or anything for their depression.

An alternative to blaming is "accountability." When we are genuinely seeking accountability, we want to discover the specific cause(s) of events or actions. We ask ourselves the question: "What accounts for this event?" When we become genuinely curious about what causes events or actions, we are open to new learning. When we actually discover and understand the causes of things like disease, violence, disasters, war, and tragedies, we position ourselves to take preventative measures. If we would hold ourselves able to account for (account-able) such occurrences, we empower ourselves to do something about them now and in the future. Genuine accountability does not result in feelings of guilt. Rather, it frees us to become responsible.

Do you hold yourself accountable for the nature and quality of your life? Are you able to account for those things for which you would like to blame others? If you answered "yes" to either of these questions, you will feel much more powerful and able to respond appropriately to anything that "happens" in your life. You become response-able.

When you feel accountable for the quality of your life, and for everything that happens to you, you then become responsible for everything that impacts it. When you take on the responsibility for your mistakes, and even the mistakes of others, you learn from them. If you feel accountable and responsible for an explosion that occurred in someone else's house, you will seek to discover the causes of the explosion (e.g. your neighbor was building rockets or creating methamphetamine), and you may learn what not to do to avoid explosions in your own house. If you observe and learn the responses to the explosion of others (e.g. firemen), you empower yourself to address any explosion you experience now and in the future. You become response-able for prevention and extinguishing future explosions.

Instead of blaming others or circumstance(s) for our life; instead of feeling helpless to do anything about it; instead of feeling guilty about the negative things that "just happen;" instead of blaming yourself or others (or fate); become accountable and responsible for everything that

you experience in your life. When you stop blaming and start being accountable and responsible, you become more powerful, more aware, more capable, more confident, more knowledgeable and hopefully, more wise. Is there anyone who wouldn't like to develop these qualities? Stop blaming, and you increase your chances of creating a life of your dreams.

PREEMPTIVE SEVERE PUNISHMENT: THE COST OF INCARCERATING YOUNG PEOPLE AND THOSE WHO HAVE COMMITTED NONVIOLENT CRIMES

Lindsey Pointer is a PhD Candidate in Restorative Justice at Victoria University of Wellington and is a past recipient of the Rotary Global Grant Scholarship. She works as a restorative justice facilitator, trainer and researcher.

The rationale used for incarceration is often that by putting someone behind bars, we will keep that person from committing further offences and therefore ensure the safety of the wider community. Sometimes this is done as a response to violent offenses, but many people are incarcerated for nonviolent offences, especially drug-related charges. Additionally, many young people are locked up for many years, even far into their adult lives, despite studies that have shown that most people age out of crime. This is similar in some respects to the idea of preemptive war. The community fears that committing one crime (even if it was not a violent crime or a crime committed by a teenager) may indicate that a person is likely to cause additional harm to others in the future, so we lock them up to avoid that chance.

However, this preemptive severe punishment comes with a cost.

Looking specifically at the case of incarcerated youth, most states spend more than \$100,000 per year on a single young person's confinement (Justice Policy Institute). On top of those direct costs of incarceration, there is a loss of future earnings for confined youth, which translates into a loss of future government tax revenue. Additionally, incarcerated youth are more likely to later rely on Medicaid and other social services. Once incarcerated young people also have a very high rate of recidivism, meaning that taxpayers will likely continue to pay for their confinement for a large portion of the rest of their lives.

So what are the offenses pushing us to confine these youth at great public cost? Over 60 percent of youth are confined for nonviolent offenses (Coalition of Juvenile Justice). The majority of youth being put behind bars are not being put there because they pose a violent threat to community safety. More often, these are nonviolent offenses, often tied to needs arising from poverty, substance abuse, or untreated mental illness. 60-70% of youth in confinement have a mental disorder and 25-50 percent have a significant substance abuse disorder often co-occurring with mental disorders (Coalition of Juvenile Justice). Choosing to incarcerate these young people impacts their ability to live at home, build a positive social support network, attend and succeed in school, and work productively in the community.

Instead, needlessly confining young people results in harm to youth, fails to protect public safety and wastes taxpayer money.

So if incarceration isn't the answer, what does work to improve youth outcomes?

According to the Council of State Governments, the most effective programs are ones that identify and address the key needs that drive youth's delinquent

behaviors. This involves getting to know the individual and identifying the specific needs that he or she is attempting to meet through crime, including assessing mental health and substance use treatment needs. Additionally, the most effective programs match youth to services based on their strengths. An emphasis on assets and strengths promotes resiliency and encourages pro-social behavior. Along with this emphasis on strengths, is an integration of individual support networks into the process. Outcomes are improved when the family is engaged.

Programs and practices such as Restorative Justice are arising to fill this gap, responding to the needs of the individual and emphasizing strengths and support networks. These program are both more effective in terms of reducing recidivism, responding to victim needs, and increasing community safety, and also place far less of a burden of cost on the community.

We are faced with the choice to transition to a system that is more effective and less costly, a system that has already been tried and proved at large scales by countries such as New Zealand.

PEACE LITERACY PLANNED FOR FORT COLLINS

Paul K. Chappell is an international peace educator and serves as the Peace Literacy Director of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. He graduated from West Point, was deployed to Iraq, and left active duty as a Captain. He is the author of the seven-book Road to Peace series about ending war, waging peace, the art of living, and our shared humanity. Chappell grew up in Alabama, the son of a half-black and half-white father who fought in the Korean and Vietnam wars, and a Korean mother. Having grown up in a violent household, Chappell has forged a new understanding of war and peace, rage and trauma, and vision, purpose, and hope. He returned to Fort Collins from June 11-13 to lead a series of workshops for school counselors, teachers, parents and community. Emerging from a century of almost continuous warfare combined with the Rotary Foundation's commitment to promoting peace and this current year's focus on literacy, this topic of peace literacy is especially compelling for U.S. citizens, in particular. His website is www.peacefulrevolution.com.

QUESTION: How can we build on the notion of Peace Literacy at every level of education and in every subject area?

PRIORITIES OF THE ROTARY FOUNDATION

In these newsletters of the Rotary District Peacebuilders, we want to invite readers for contributions and ideas, suggestions and possibilities for our efforts to promote the foundational skills for promoting peace, i.e., nonviolent conflict resolution, improved communication and cooperation, successful negotiation and mediation as well as the critical and creative thinking that can help communities move through obstacles and difficulties. The Rotary Foundation has six priority areas: (1) Promoting peace; (2) Fighting disease; (3) Providing clean water; (4) Saving mothers and children; (5) Supporting education; and (6) Growing local economies. It has been argued by staff at Rotary International (RI) that long with promoting peace, "sustainability" is another cross-cutting priority that connects with all the others. RI has directed efforts in these six areas to enhance local and global impact and staff indicate that their most successful and sustainable projects and activities tend to fall within these areas: See the RI website: <https://my.rotary.org/en/learning-reference/about-rotary/our-priorities>

If you would you like to respond to one of the pieces in this newsletter, check out our blog www.rotarypeacebuilder.com and join the conversation! If you would like to contribute to a future newsletter, visit www.rotarypeacebuilder.com/submit/. The topic for next month's newsletter is on "Unarmed Peacemakers." Future issues are looking at the following: September—Empathy an Ingredient for Peace, Caring Civilizations and Utopias; October—Lost Alternatives in Lives, Families, Wealth and the Environment due to War Conflicts; November—Educating for Peace at Every Level: Cooperation, Communication, Critical and Creative Thinking.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

William M. Timpson, Ph.D. *has been on the faculty at Colorado State University in its School of Education for many years and a member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club where his focus on sustainable peacebuilding in Burundi, East Africa, has been supported by two Global Grants. Over the past four decades his work has focused on complex and difficult topics, in particular, issues that include peace and reconciliation, sustainability and diversity. If you have questions or ideas, email Bill: william.timpson@colostate.edu*

Robert N. Meroney, Ph.D. *has been an active member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club and regularly researches a range of topics on modern life, issues and politics that serve to spark deeper conversations among friends and colleagues. If you have questions or ideas, you can contact Bob: Robert.Meroney@ColoState.EDU.*

Del Benson, Ph.D. *is Professor and Extension Wildlife Specialist in the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology at Colorado State University since 1975 working to connect persons with nature and with other humans. Education, research and outreach about nature, outdoor activities, and wildlife conservation on private lands are part of his offerings. His approach to education is to encourage stewardship of nature by multiplying his efforts through community action, workshops, courses, presentations, publications, conservation organization development, and via the Internet: <http://www.LandHelp.info>. To contact Del, email: Delwin.Benson@ColoState.EDU.*

Lloyd Thomas, Ph.D. *is a longstanding member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club, a licensed psychologist and a life coach. In the essay that follows, he extends the example of "Tom" from Northern Ireland and the issues of "blame, accountability and responsibility." Contact him if you would like to receive his newsletters. He can be reached through email: DrLloyd@CreatingLeaders.com*

Lindsey Pointer *has been working on the use of restorative principles in the criminal justice system. She is a restorative practices facilitator, trainer and researcher and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Restorative Justice at Victoria University in New Zealand with support from a Rotary Global Grant Scholarship and the Fulbright Program from the U.S. State Department. If you have questions or ideas, contact Lindsey: lindseypointer@gmail.com*