

Notes on Nonviolent Action

Nonviolent action is a means of bringing about positive social change without hurting others. Though simple, this definition is sometimes difficult to understand since our society generally equates power, strength, and effectiveness with violence, competition, and domination and contends that those who do not seek to destroy their opponents must be either saints or insane. However, retaliation is not necessary for effective social change and you needn't be a saint to practice nonviolent action. Being effective requires only that you carefully plan your actions and consider the impact on everyone you encounter.

Below is an outline of useful facts, ideas, and notes about the history, theory, and practice of nonviolent action and some tips on planning effective nonviolent social actions.

What is Violence and Nonviolence?

“Violence” is often narrowly defined to mean “physically hurting someone.” Then “nonviolence” is seen as merely refraining from physical attack and can easily be confused with passivity, indifference, cowardice, self-restraint, or even righteous hostility. But violence can take many forms, including both active and passive, physical and psychological. Nonviolence is also quite varied. The chart below shows some of the range of violence and nonviolence, and reveals that motivation and attitude primarily distinguish these two concepts.

Type of Behavior (Motivations/Attitudes)	Active / Assertive / Aware (Initiating, responsive)	Passive / Inattentive (Unresponsive, perhaps timid)
Violent (Revenge, malice, hostility, spite, self-righteousness, fear, desire to vanquish another, indifference)	Waging war Directly using force to injure or belittle Beating or molesting a child Destroying the environment Oppressing or thwarting others Threatening bodily harm or economic ruin Raping or sexually abusing someone	Allowing war, starvation, disease, poverty, homelessness, racism, classism, sexism, hatred, child abuse, rape, ecological destruction, etc. to exist Neglecting a child in your care Fatalism — allowing yourself to be a passive victim Using drugs, sex, TV, food, etc. to numb yourself
Neutral (Self-preservation, ignorance)	Eating for nourishment Your body fighting a bacterial infection Working to earn a living Ignoring injustice and destruction Being neighborly Having unemotional sex for procreation	Avoiding dangerous situations Collecting dividends and interest Being unaware of injustice or destruction Restraining yourself when provoked Solitude Test-tube insemination
Nonviolent (Love, compassion, caring, empathy, goodwill, joy, concern, generosity)	Resisting injustice and destruction, working for positive change Working cooperatively with others Being a friend, supporting others Sharing with others Lovingly raising a child Making passionate love with someone	Nurturing a child Admiring someone Quietly boycotting a product Supporting an organization that works for positive social change Cuddling with someone

A Theory of Power

- **Pluralist view of power** — power depends on the obedience and cooperation of the population (in contrast to the monolithic view of power that people at the top have all the power and can dictate to everyone else)
- **Power elite taps various resources of power**
 - Human resources — people who cooperate, assist, or provide services
 - Skills and knowledge — the special skills/knowledge of certain people
 - Material resources — natural resources, financial resources, etc.
 - Psychological and cultural factors — how submissive people are to authority, how much they agree with and defend the elite, how much they accept and perpetuate violence
 - Sanctions — laws, police, jails, the army, vigilantes, etc.
- **Activists can change the power balance**
 - Induce population not to support or submit to the elite
 - Induce those who supply material resources, special skills, or knowledge not to support elite
 - Induce those who fashion or carry out law not to support the elite

Ways to Win a Nonviolent Campaign

- **Conversion** — opponents realize the error of their ways and join us
- **Acquiescence** — opponents are converted enough or worn down enough that they don't stop us
- **Accommodation** — opponents lose support from supporters crucial to them and accede to our demands
- **Incapacitation** — opponents lose support from supporters and are rendered powerless or irrelevant (dethroned, demoted, defeated in an election, etc.)
- **Emotional coercion** — we threaten something that opponents value enough that they concede (this is nonviolent only if we can do it without hurting them or threatening to hurt them) — example: threaten to remove them from office
- **Physical coercion** — we physically force them to concede (this is nonviolent only if we can do it without hurting them or threatening to hurt them) — example: restraining people so they can't hit and are forced to talk

Some Nonviolent Methods of Social Change

Social change means changing how things are done — preferably in a fundamental way so that they become institutionalized and stay changed.

- **Education and persuasion**
 - Talk with people face-to-face — table, leaflet, speak to groups, and convene study groups, rallies, educational events
 - Present information and rational arguments that convince
 - Tell your own experiences or tell anecdotes that can open people's hearts and cut through propaganda
 - Present theater, music, art
 - Illuminate oppression, reveal other possible ways to be, and challenge people to work for change
 - Use humor to make it easier for people to accept your position
 - Sing, dance, have fun
 - Demonstrate alternatives that work
 - Create tangible alternatives that are difficult to refute
 - Show these alternatives publicly
 - Support, nurture, and counsel people
 - Act in a way that makes people trust you
 - Encourage, challenge, and support people to work for change
 - Present your views through the news media — letters to the editor, guest commentary articles, events covered by the news: rallies, vigils, demonstrations
 - Conventional media usually distorts the message
 - Try to convey simple, clear, unambiguous messages
 - Develop alternative media
 - Research
 - Investigate the situation and learn what is really going on
 - Determine the pertinent facts and develop strong arguments by researching your subject thoroughly
- **Lobbying powerholders**
 - Write letters to powerholders asking them to change their positions
 - Visit them and put pressure on them to change
- **Electoral work**
 - Support candidates that support your positions
 - Encourage people who support your positions to run for elective office

- **Legal intervention**
 - Prepare lawsuits and sue
 - Conduct an initiative campaign to place laws on the ballot
- **Building alternatives**
 - Set up and patronize alternative institutions
 - Through your attitude and actions, try to create “the beloved society” of honesty, cooperation, sharing, and mutual support
 - By practicing, learn how to do live with others democratically, responsibly, etc.
- **Nonviolent struggle** (or “nonviolent action” or “nonviolent conflict”)
 - Undermine and/or replace the established order with alternatives
 - Engage in a power struggle: defend yourself or your alternatives from attack, challenge injustice, undermine or bypass powerholders, or mutually negotiate to resolve a conflict
 - Use social, economic, psychological, political, and maybe nonviolent physical power to effect change
 - Work to end oppression without physically hurting or demeaning the opponent (win-win, not win-lose)
 - Work to resolve the conflict in a way in which violence will be ineffective or counter-productive
 - Typical methods of nonviolent struggle
 - Demonstrate opposition — political buttons, bumperstickers, armbands, banners, vigils, petitions, rallies, marches, picketing, fasting, prayers, die-ins, etc.
 - Refuse to participate or consent — boycotts, strikes, embargoes, refusal to serve in military, etc.
 - Directly intervene — sit-ins, blockades, etc.
 - Undermine — ignore powerholders, withdraw, patronize alternatives
 - Cooperate with others — build strong, powerful organizations or coalitions capable of sustained struggle
 - Gene Sharp lists 298 distinct methods in *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*
- **Build support**
 - Spread the word to new people
 - Encourage them to join you
 - Build large, supportive change organizations — support groups, study groups, political parties, alternative institutions, nonviolent conflict groups
 - Physically and emotionally support members of your organization

Some Related Terms

- **Civil disobedience**
 - Henry David Thoreau coined the term — protested war taxes by refusing to pay
 - Historically, refuse to obey immoral laws
- **Civil resistance**
 - Break “neutral” laws (such as trespass laws) as we act to create a better society
 - Civil “obedience” to higher (moral) laws (defense of necessity)
- **Direct action**
 - Historically, doing what is right with your own hands, creating a new situation without relying on the power of the State (authority, police, military)
 - Now often, acting personally rather than relying on a government representative — take personal responsibility for changing things
 - Often used to mean “direct, nonviolent (or maybe not so nonviolent) intervention”
- **Symbolism**
 - Until our change movement is massive in size, everything we do is symbolic because our direct actions cannot really change things directly — the power elite will still determine how things are done
 - Symbolic actions can show, though, how we would like things to be
 - Symbols and ritual are very important to people — think of the symbols of weddings, fireworks, Thanksgiving dinners, etc.
- **A Chart**

	Legal Activity	Civil Disobedience / Resistance
Indirect Action	Hold a protest rally	Block traffic on a bridge to protest government policy on AIDS
Symbolic Action	Hold mock hearings to take evidence when authorities won't	Disenfranchised stand in line at polls waiting to vote
Direct Action	Boycott a company's product	Occupy a construction site to prevent work

Underlying Rationales of Some Types of Nonviolent Social Change

When attending a demonstration or otherwise working for social change, you will likely encounter people who are “nonviolent” for different reasons and in different ways. Below is a list of some of the types of nonviolence you are likely to encounter. Note that for many people, the basis for their nonviolent action spans several of these types.

- **Cowardice** — “I am afraid of being hurt.”
 - Run away from confrontation, avoid conflict
 - Action based on fear, not morality
 - Not really nonviolence, but rather a term used to dismiss or demean proponents of nonviolence — cowards are seldom activists
- **Passive avoidance of violence** — “I should turn away from violence.” “God calls on me to live a righteous life.”
 - Attempt social change only by providing a good model of one’s own sterling behavior
 - Emphasizes purity of one’s self and withdrawal from evil
 - Often a belief that any kind of conflict is morally bad
 - Nonviolence seen as an integral part of one’s life and intrinsically good
 - Actions based on morality
 - Sometimes an assumption of moral superiority
 - Not violent towards anyone, but willing to allow the violence of the status quo to continue
- **Rational persuasion** — “I will try to convince the authorities to change.”
 - Presentation of evidence, rational discourse
 - Goal is to convince authorities of the validity of one’s position
 - Often a belief that conflict should be avoided
 - Sometimes an assumption of intellectual superiority
 - Not violent towards anyone, but willing to allow the violence of the status quo to continue if not able to convince authorities to change
- **Religious/spiritual witness** — “I must keep faith with my conscience.”, “God called me to make a statement against this evil weapon/practice.”
 - Recognizes the violence of the status quo and seeks to change it through witness vigils
 - Emphasizes converting the opposition through goodwill gestures, self-suffering, persuasion, rationality — appealing to the conscience of the community
 - Emphasizes personal transformation or long-term cultural transformation rather than immediate physical change or systemic political change
 - Sometimes a belief that conflict or confrontation is morally bad
 - Nonviolence seen as an integral part of one’s life and intrinsically good
 - Action based deeply on morality
 - Sometimes an assumption of moral superiority and attempts to shame the opposition
- **Self-empowerment** — “I act to make myself more sane.”
 - Recognizes the violence of the status quo and seeks to address it by making a personal statement
 - Emphasizes self-transformation rather than political change or cultural transformation
- **Religious/spiritual direct action** — “God called me to destroy these immoral weapons.” (for example, “Plowshares” actions)
 - Answering the call to engage in acts of conscience
 - No attempt to convert the opposition, but only to act according to God’s will
 - Nonviolence seen as an integral part of one’s life and intrinsically good
 - Action based deeply on morality
 - Sometimes an assumption of moral superiority
- **Direct intervention** — “We will stop business as usual today.”
 - Blockades and sometimes property destruction to prevent the violent status quo from physically continuing
 - Goal is to make it as hard as possible for the authorities
 - Emphasizes immediate physical change rather than personal transformation, long-term cultural transformation, or systemic political change
 - Sometimes an assumption of moral superiority and attempts to shame or demean the opposition
 - Action based primarily on expediency
 - Not necessarily nonviolent; sometimes an aggressive, adversarial tone — “un-violent”
 - Sometimes so goal-oriented and pragmatic that opponents or even supporters are mistreated
 - Forgoing violence often seen as a tactical necessity only (with a belief that violence is necessary for real effectiveness, but not in the current situation)

- **Strategic organizing** — “We will build a large movement of people who will fight for peace and justice.”
 - Conventional tactics of lobbying authorities and defeating them in elections, but sometimes strikes, boycotts, and blockades
 - Emphasizes intermediate-term political change
 - Nonviolence usually seen as a tactic — useful for empowering the dispossessed and challenging the power elite
 - Action based primarily on expediency
- **Strategic mass refusal to consent (non-cooperation)** — “We will build a large enough movement of people that we can refuse to allow evil practices to continue and can force the creation of a good society.”
 - Nonviolent coercion — either directly by physical blockade or, more frequently, indirectly by encouraging the entire community (or a strategic subgroup) to resist (or act) until the status quo must change
 - Emphasizes converting the community by being virtuous and loving while illuminating the immorality of the status quo
 - Nonviolence seen as a strategic necessity, intrinsically good, and a full substitute for violence
 - Emphasizes systemic political change and long-term cultural transformation
- **Satyagraha (Gandhi’s “truth force”)** — “We must struggle toward truth.”
 - Attempt to find a mutual truth with opponents, not to coerce them
 - Love opponents and be willing to shoulder any sacrifice involved — leave a face-saving way out for opponents
 - Nonviolence seen as an integral part of one’s life, a moral necessity, intrinsically good, and a full substitute for violence
 - Action based deeply on morality
 - Emphasizes systemic political change and long-term cultural transformation

Goals of Fundamental Nonviolent Social Change

- **Create a world that is:**
 - Life-affirming — supportive and lifts people up
 - Compassionate/loving — cares about people — empathetically accepts people and understands why they may behave badly — forgives them for their destructive behavior
 - Egalitarian — supportive of every human being and ensures that no person falls behind another
 - Cooperative — encourages sharing among all people
 - Democratic — equally responsive to the needs and desires of everyone
 - Joyful — full of love and laughter
- **Oppose:**
 - Crushing of lives or spirit
 - Hate and indifference
 - Oppression, domination
 - Injustice
 - War, terrorism, assault, rape, battering, jails, poverty, the “-isms” (racism, sexism, classism, authoritarianism, etc.)

Aspects of Strategic Nonviolent Action for Fundamental Transformation

- **Grounded**
 - We are centered and clear in our thinking about the current evil and the envisioned better situation
 - We may engage in “self-purification” activities (meditation; poverty, fasting, or other self-denial, etc.) to develop empathy for opponents and prepare for social change
- **Active** (not passive or submissive)
 - If we allow violence to continue, then we are complicit in that violence — so we must **act** against the violent status quo
 - Work to right wrongs, not just to avoid them
 - Dedicated to working for our truths and to demanding the end of oppression
 - Violence includes war, street crimes, rape, wife and child battering, threats of physical violence, starvation and hunger, poverty, intimidation, racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, imperialism, etc., etc.
 - If we condemn *violent* efforts for social change, then we have the responsibility to work for even more effective *nonviolent* social change — we can’t just condemn efforts we dislike
- **Bold**
 - We engage in serious, powerful, far-reaching action
 - This may require as great a commitment of time, energy, and money and as great an acceptance of risk as that required of a violent revolutionary
- **Consistent**
 - “How can we change the world if we can’t even get along with each other?”
 - Our means of social change are consistent with our progressive goals
 - We practice what we preach and attempt to “live the revolution now” with each other — our social change movement “pre-figures” a good society

- **Responsible**

- Since our opponents are emissaries of the violent status quo, they “get” to be bitter, vicious, obnoxious, childish, and violent
- Since we are emissaries of a nonviolent alternative, we try to be understanding, kind, mature, and trustworthy
- Since we are trying to create a good society, we must boldly challenge our opponents, absorb or channel their violence, offer counseling to mollify their anger, or use whatever other measures that are effective for change
- We show that we can be entrusted with power and won’t abuse it

- **Open**

- Open to multiple truths — just because one perspective is true, does not mean that others on the same topic are false — the world is complex and contradictory and so is truth

Encourage diversity—the more perspectives, the more detailed is our picture of the world — opponents and devil’s advocates force us to consider possibilities we wouldn’t otherwise

- Open to fallibility — we might be wrong
- Open to opponents’ conversion — every person is a potential ally — we must be ready with open arms
- If we are truthful and have nothing to hide, our opponents have less to gain from infiltration

- **Loving**

- We refuse to injure opponents and try to love and support them — we build everyone up, rather than tear our opponents down
- Our goal is *not* to punish opponents, retaliate, wreak vengeance, make them hurt worse than us or in any way demean them, but to create a good society
- We are willing to suffer (or at least accept risk) — “we are so determined to right this injustice that we are willing to suffer to bring about change” rather than “we are so determined to right this injustice that we will force our opponents to suffer for it”
- We try to love the person, hate the destructive role that the person plays and his/her destructive actions, work to transform their role to one that is positive
 - We make a commitment to respect opposition, value them, and love the goodness in them (we make this commitment intellectually even if we find it difficult to feel it completely)
 - We make a commitment to be as thoughtful, aware, and considerate of everyone as we can be
- We search for and implement solutions that satisfy not only us, but also our opponents

- **Strategic**

- Focus on problems and solutions
 - We focus on the underlying sources of problems, not on the people who act them out
 - We focus on positive change — to create a good society — *not* to blame people, express our rage, assuage our guilt, make ourselves feel good, or have a good time
 - We condemn actions, not people
- Our actions are carefully planned in advance to be effective
 - We choose when, where, and how our actions will be carried out
 - Our actions don’t rely on spontaneous uprisings (but we do allow spontaneous activity and flexible responses within guidelines)
 - Our actions are carefully designed to build support for us and undermine support for our opponents
 - We choose battles we can win — our goal is to demonstrate how we can change things, not to demonstrate our powerlessness
 - Our actions are targeted to affect important groups — ones that have the power to make changes or to resist effectively (like Congress, strategic workers, a respected leader, the army, a pivotal judge, etc.)
 - Our actions are bold, exciting, dramatic, and far-reaching, not meek, boring, or repetitive

- **Effective three-prong strategy**

- *Challenge the established order*
 - We refuse to consent to or cooperate with conventional (destructive) ways of doing things
 - Our refusal to consent forces change (nonviolent coercion)
- *Live the way we want people to live*
 - Our actions demonstrate the rightness of our cause and our commitment to truth (satyagraha — “truth force”)
 - Our actions encourage others to dissent and resist
 - We learn and practice how to live alternatives, show others, and encourage others to join us
 - We perform services to the community that show we are responsible and loving
- *Win converts and build sufficient power to triumph*
 - The rightness of our cause and our loving, nonviolent, dedicated stance wins converts of formerly loyal people and troops — their lack of cooperation then forces change
 - We appeal to a larger audience who will force change through their power and connections (news media, government bureaucrats, liberal establishment, etc.) — their dissent forces change
 - We are patient — meaningful change takes time and usually requires a long-term campaign

- **Nonviolent action is not**
 - Not peaceful, polite, cordial acceptance of the status quo — this is appropriate behavior for visits to rest homes, not for bringing about change
 - Not just physically “disrupting business as usual” — after a short-term disruption, the power elite can easily re-establish the status quo so we must challenge the established order more deeply
 - Not just “getting arrested” — we could get arrested for walking nude through town, but what would be the point? Getting arrested is not the same as nonviolent social change — it might be *one consequence* of a social change campaign, but it is not the goal
 - Not just “making a statement” but “being heard” — if no one hears it, then why make a statement?
 - Not just to **feel** powerful, but to **be** powerful
 - “This ain’t no disco, this ain’t no party, this ain’t no foolin’ around”

Some Assumptions Behind Nonviolent Social Change

- People are important — every one of us and every one of them
- People are smart and can run their own lives in a good way if given a chance
- People can decide for themselves what kind of society they want
 - Everyone can make decisions for themselves and no one should force them to do it some other way
 - We can offer alternatives to others, but we can’t force anyone to accept them — if we do, we are acting violently in our own way
- Powerholders have lied, propagandized, manipulated, and threatened people into accepting and supporting the status quo with all its destruction and injustice
- If we counter powerholder lies, demonstrate alternatives, and protect people from powerholder sanctions, then people will change society

A Nonviolent Approach to Social Change

- **Hold tightly onto your truth**, but acknowledge that you are wrong if you hear a new perspective that works better
 - “I know that people are being hurt by the status quo, and I believe my perspective about how things should change is correct. I insist that we act in a way consistent with this perspective until I am convinced otherwise.”
 - “I realize that my perspective is incorrect and yours is better so I have now adopted your perspective. Consequently, I believe that my *new* perspective is correct until I hear an even better one.”
- **Acknowledge other truths** and look for solutions that satisfy *all* these truths — usually a radically new and different solution — insist that this new solution be implemented
 - “I believe my perspective is correct. I think that perhaps your perspective is *also* correct. If both are correct, then what solution can we come up with that takes *both* perspectives into account?”
 - “I insist that you listen to my perspective because I think I have at least part of the truth. I won’t end this blockade until you consider my perspective, we work together to find a mutually agreed upon truth, and we both act according to the dictates of this consensus truth.”
- **Once their behavior has changed, forgive your opponents and forge a new relationship**

Reasons for Nonviolent Struggle (vs. Using Violent Means)

- **Moral**
 - It is wrong to be violent — violence hurts people
 - Violence separates us from other human beings — we are all part of the human family
 - Violence assumes some people are evil and can only be stopped with death, domination, or threats — in truth, we are all human
 - We all act maliciously sometimes, but no one is inherently evil
 - Generally, the more we have been deprived or brutalized (especially as children), the nastier we act — the more we are treated with love and respect and our basic needs are met, the more loving we are
 - Most people can be healed and learn to love again through support and intensive counseling
 - Even the most damaged people can be helped enough that they will not hurt others or they can be gently restrained
 - Keeps our means consistent with the ends we hope to achieve
 - We don’t hurt anyone, so if we’re wrong, then no permanent damage has been done
- **Personal**
 - In order to hurt someone, we must learn to hate or demean others — violence damages our spirit (karma) — we become what we detest
 - Saves us from feeling guilty for the horrible things we would do if we were violent
 - Demands that we get over or put aside our emotional (and not useful) desire for revenge and instead work for positive social change

- Lessens the chance we will be hurt, killed, jailed, or convicted of felonies
- It's enjoyable to act out of love and to do good
- **Practical**
 - The established order has all the firepower — if they choose to use it, we will almost always lose
 - The established order can fix or replace whatever we destroy and tax us more to pay for it — violence usually accomplishes little
 - Violence usually creates or prolongs simmering long-term hatred that is difficult to end (feuds) — long-term it often doesn't work
 - Nonviolent action is safer (but not completely safe) — fewer casualties overall — helps keep violence from escalating (but it **is** a battle, and some may be hurt)
- **Strategic**
 - Exposes existing violence and injustice
 - Crystallizes and dramatizes the extent to which injustice is maintained by violence and force — the established order is violent even when there is no “justification”!
 - Focuses on *real* issues — ending injustice — not tactics in the “game” of politics
 - Keeps our issues in the foreground, instead of the logistics of the demonstration or our behavior
 - Focuses attention on the opposition's policies and actions and our grievances with them
 - Makes clear that the enemy is not a few bad people, but the whole system and focuses attention on that system
 - Creates a better battleground for us
 - Undercuts authorities' rationale for responding to our actions with violence — they have less reason (excuses) to attack us
 - Keeps interaction with authorities on our territory: they're trained to use violence, we're not — but we have learned how to use nonviolent means to effect change
 - Keeps everyone's adrenaline level low — we're less likely to provoke violence and they are less likely to strike at us
 - Brings out the best in the opposition — violence tends to bring out the worst response
 - Brings out the best in us — violence tends to bring out our worst side
 - Effectively uses the energy of our supporters
 - People stay more rational
 - Channels their anger into social change, away from useless flailing
 - Helps keep people's personal problems in check (rather than grandly acted out)
 - Demonstrates the power of resistance, challenge, and alternatives
 - Demonstrates the strength of consent and dissent — when we stop consenting to work for them, the power of the elites evaporates; when we consent to work cooperatively with others, we are powerful
 - Demonstrates that the power of violent sanctions wielded by the elites is limited — if we can continue even in the face of their worst response, then we cannot be stopped
 - We demonstrate loving, alternative ways to interact with others — if we can do it, then everyone could do it
 - We demonstrate you can win without forcing your opponent to lose — there are win/win solutions and supporting others in no way diminishes ourselves
 - Allows more people to move toward our position
 - Attracts more people
 - Gains respect and understanding from neutral observers and news media — doesn't alienate them
 - Leaves a space for the opposition to back down or convert — allows them to overcome their fears and bitterness from their real or imagined past hurts — they are less likely to fear change if we don't threaten them
 - Helps make it safe for opponents and bystanders to begin to resist in their own ways
 - Encourages insiders to leak damaging information, engage in sabotage, etc.
 - Encourages neutral bystanders to support us
 - Encourages our supporters to join our organizations and work with us
 - Allows better long-term solutions
 - Strives for win/win solutions which are more satisfying, more durable, and usually better for us all
 - It's hard to come up with a win/win solution if one side is dead
 - Prevents polarization and extremism — more middle positions possible
 - Effectively forces positive change
 - Undermines the status quo, builds alternatives
 - It works! — shows might *doesn't* make right
 - Actually creates a new, good society
 - We learn to be loving and responsible
 - We come up with workable alternatives to violent oppression
 - We get to live now the way we hoped we would in the future (we “live the revolution now”)
 - Love and altruism tends to inspire more love and altruism
 - Avoids the corrupting influence of violence
 - Violence corrupts — we may become as bad as our opponents — undercutting the rationale for our work

- Violent tactics encourage us to be cold and hateful, making it difficult for us to eventually build a world of love and equality; violent victors usually create a violent new society, not a good society
- Doesn't burn bridges — we need to continue to live with people we opposed before

Preparing for Nonviolent Struggle/Conflict

- **Prepare yourself**
 - Think carefully about your motivations for nonviolent action and how you want to do it — bold and effective, yet loving
 - Meditate, engage in acts of self-suffering, etc. to build empathy for your opponents
 - Carefully plan your action
 - Prepare contingencies — consider what might happen and how you want to respond
 - Role play various situations — practice
 - Build a strong organization that can provide good support for you and your compatriots
 - Respect yourself and your opinions (and others will respect you)
 - Relax, stretch your muscles
 - Get ready to enjoy yourself — it's exciting and fun to make the world better!
- **Prepare your opponents**, the police, authorities, etc. so they won't arrive afraid or angry
 - Talk personally with police, etc. in advance in an informal setting so they understand what we are doing and why we will be confronting them
 - This keeps them from believing myths about us (“Dirty, Communists, hippies”, etc.)
 - It also gives them a chance to question their role — why they will be ordered to oppose our good actions and defend the destructive status quo — why aren't they helping us?

Being Nonviolent and Responding to Threats of Violence Directed at You

Just because you are nonviolent doesn't guarantee that others will be nonviolent towards you — but it should calm things down and minimize the violence

- **Stay centered**
 - Stay calm, cool
 - Be confident and self-assured — fear and uncertainty can invite attack
 - Keep breathing — slowly, deeply
 - Remember why you are there, what you are trying to accomplish — what a great day for making the world a better place!
 - Respect yourself — be proud of your actions
 - Enjoy yourself, this is your action
 - Don't give up or run away in fear
- **Be open and loving**
 - Be honest
 - Maintain a non-aggressive, open stance
 - Be friendly and smile (but don't smirk)
 - Be humorous, keep things light
 - Maintain direct eye contact (but don't stare them down)
 - Be assertive (but not aggressive)
 - Stand up for yourself, don't cower
 - Make an unexpected, loving gesture — give them a gift, give them flowers, offer support
- **Be non-provocative**
 - Don't brandish signs
 - Watch your body language — don't make threatening motions, avoid challenging stances, don't tower over them
 - Sit down and speak from below — don't tower over them
 - Don't run — you may appear cowardly or guilty of something or may encourage them to chase you
 - Don't be wild and freak out the opponents or police
- **Be a person, not a target** — make yourself as human as possible
 - Make human to human contact — hard for them to be violent to another human being, but easy to hurt an “object”
 - Introduce yourself, ask who they are (but don't demand to know)
 - Express yourself clearly
 - Try to engage them on a rational, loving level
 - Wear nice, respectable clothes — show you are a responsible member of society
 - Wear durable clothes you feel comfortable in and you are not afraid of ruining
 - Don't wear helmets, masks, sunglasses or anything that hides your humaness
 - Dance, sing, play children's games like the hokey pokey — show you are just another silly human
 - Show your love for your friends and other nearby beings

- **Talk with your opponents**
 - Ask them questions about themselves, why they are there, how they feel, why they are angry or afraid — listen well
 - Let them blow off steam and express their fears
 - Establish your mutual concern about the issue
 - Acknowledge their position and express empathy — realize they are humans with their own problems and are probably victims too
 - Try to work *with* them — incorporate their concerns into the solution you propose
 - Tell them why you are there, how you feel, who you are — explain yourself like you would to a friend
 - Point out your agreement on other issues
 - Express your concerns for your community and indicate you are acting responsibly to make things better for everyone
 - Be as human as possible with them — talk about your family, your love for others, etc.
 - Don't make snide comments, call them names, guilt-trip them, or act like a snotty punk
 - Tell people when they are hurting you — ask them to stop
- **Get support and comfort from your friends**
 - Hold hands, stay together with your group, hug others
 - Sing
 - Keep TV cameras, journalists, or other witnesses nearby — point out that others are watching
- **If all else fails**
 - Wear “action” clothes that don't hinder your movement
 - Walk away, retreat
 - Run like hell
 - Act insane or disgusting to try to drive them away
 - Curl up into a fetal position on the ground — protect the back of your neck and your face with your arms
 - Accept it

Nonviolent Responses to People Being Violent toward Others

- **Remind fighters what is happening**
 - “You're hurting that person”
 - “Other people see you hurting that person”
- **Try to turn the fight into a discussion**
 - Ask them to tell you why they are angry
 - Ask them to think about good solutions
 - Offer your ideas for mutually satisfying solutions
- **Get fighters to focus on you instead of on their opponents**
 - Ask them questions
 - Tell them how you feel, what you are doing, etc.
 - Do something outrageous that forces everyone to focus on you instead of their anger for each other
- **Physically intervene**
 - Separate fighters — use your body as a shield
 - Link arms with others so that fighters can't get to each other — if necessary, encircle them so they must talk to you
 - Give a group hug to fighters so they are squished together and can't fight anymore — hold until things have calmed down and you are having a discussion

The Role of Anger and Niceness in Nonviolent Struggle

- Don't be cutesy or sweet — it's usually either revolting or insulting
- Let your anger embolden you to demand that things change in a positive way
- “Revolution can't be polite” — be bold!
- Express anger at people's actions, but not at them as people — support them personally while you insist that they change their behavior
- Don't rage at people — it may make you feel better, but it generally is not useful to bring about positive social change
- Notice what makes you “see red” and review the reasons for it later
 - Go somewhere safe and feel and express all your emotions — including grief, fear, rage, anguish, etc. — ask close friends to support you or be alone if that is safer
 - Intense fury often comes from past experiences — don't let your past interfere with or distort your present work

Nonviolent Struggle Compared with War

- Nonviolent struggle compared with war

	War	Nonviolent Struggle
Immediate Goal	• Overwhelm or destroy opponents — make them hurt worse than you	• Find mutually satisfactory solutions with opponents, persuade them to your side, bypass them, or coerce them by undercutting their support
Treatment of Opponents	• Incapacitate, demoralize, punish, humiliate, demean, and/or wreak revenge on opponents	• Respect, support, and value opponents as people, attempt to reconcile with them and work cooperatively with them
Attitude Towards People	• Demonize opponents, extol your own virtue and righteousness	• Humanize everyone, perform acts of compassion and goodwill towards opponents and suppress vindictiveness and ridicule of opponents
Attitude Towards Solution	• Seek to polarize situation, extol your own solution, decry other solutions	• Attempt to find mutually-satisfying solutions
Strategic Goal	• Seize or maintain control of power structures	• Abolish oppressive power structures

- Nonviolent struggle organizations compared with war organizations

	War Organizations	Nonviolent Struggle Organizations
Structure	• Hierarchical , dictatorial	• Egalitarian and cooperative, democratic
Methods	• Order, discipline, and penalties	• Mutual agreements, accountability to others
Important Values	• Obedience and accountability to authority	• Thinking, questioning, and following your own morals and best thinking
Training	• Soldiers taught to dehumanize others and hardened to accept death and suffering	• Participants taught to assume the best about others and sensitized to the suffering of others

Steps in a Nonviolent Campaign (King, FOR)

- **Investigate** — research
- **Negotiate** — meet with opponents and try to reach a settlement
- **Educate** participants, supporters, public, and opponents
- **Demonstrate** — protest oppression, show alternatives
- **Resist** — struggle against oppression and for alternatives

Effective Actions for Social Change

You are initiating social change, so set it up to go the way you want — make sure your actions actually bring about progressive change.

- **Understandable**
 - Disseminate lots of information in advance — have a large number of supporters already on-board
 - Should be visual, simple, and direct
 - Should be timely and close to home
 - Clearly expose the current situation, how it is harmful, and how it violates principles that most people embrace — expose the societal secrets
 - Present an alternative and show why that alternative is superior
 - Best if it can all be summed up in one picture — what message would a single picture convey to people who know nothing of your campaign?
- **Dramatic, but not shocking**
 - Most people should feel comfortable with our actions and behavior
 - Start with fairly moderate tactics and demands, then build as more support grows — exhaust every other means
 - Our actions should be consistent with our ends

- Our actions should be seen as acceptable social behavior
 - Get lots of people (and/or prominent and respected people) involved
 - Explain in-depth why our actions are necessary
- Actions should seriously challenge the established order and force it to respond
 - Make the most reasonable demand that will still undermine the status quo
 - Dramatize the situation, propose an alternative, and boldly demand change
- Part of a larger campaign that seeks to fundamentally change the power structure
 - Avoid useless reforms (co-optation), token responses, committees that will study the issue for years, etc.
 - Push for structural change that allows for more democratic participation, encourages more rational decisions, and lifts up more people
 - After winning some reform, push for more fundamental reform
- Inspiring and encourages people to question authority, think for themselves, trust their own opinions and act according to their own consciences (empowering)
- **Fun**

Building Nonviolent Organizations

- Incorporate into your internal process
 - Independent thinking — questioning, challenging, dissenting, exploring ideas
 - Freedom — protection from unwarranted outside interference
 - Democracy — direct control over things that affect your life
 - Respect for others — including their ideas and history
 - Empathy — concern for those around you
 - Altruism — love and compassion for others
 - Responsibility — ensuring that things go well for everyone
 - Cooperation — working with others
 - Nonviolent resolution of conflicts

A Nonviolence Agreement

Each large action typically has its own nonviolence agreement, but below is one that has been used at many actions with some notes on what they mean. These guidelines for action form an agreement between the participants of the action about what behavior is acceptable. When every affinity group agrees to these guidelines, then everyone in the action knows what they can expect from everyone else. By having a clear set of criteria, it is easier to know who belongs at the action — those individuals or affinity groups who do not adhere to the guidelines can be asked to leave (by the nonviolence monitors or others).

By making it clear in advance to ourselves, the opposition, and others that we will be nonviolent, spelling out exactly what that means, acting that way, and insisting that everyone act that way at our actions, we make it easy to deny accusations of violent behavior and we build a reputation as being nonviolent and trustworthy.

1. Our attitude — as conveyed through words, symbols, and actions — will be one of openness, friendliness, and respect towards everyone we meet.

This includes both people we are working with and our “opposition” before and during the action. You should at least be able to pretend friendliness and lovingness. If you need to rage at authority figures, go do it somewhere else — it is not useful at this action.

2. We will use no violence, verbal or physical, toward any person.

Violence includes insults, snide comments, snottiness, guilt-tripping, obnoxious gestures and facial expressions.

3. We will not damage property.

The issue of property damage tends to shock and appall people.

4. We will not bring or use any drugs or alcohol other than for medicinal purposes.

We want everyone to be as clear-headed as possible and we want the issue of illegal drugs to be moot.

5. We will not run.

This means both that we will not run away and that we will not run from place to place — running tends to get people’s adrenaline flowing and to think that there is something exciting going on that they should run to also — encouraging a mob response.

6. We will carry no weapons.

These are not rigid rules but guidelines for action. There may be situations where it makes sense to run, etc. You and your affinity group must use your own judgement.

History of Nonviolent Action

Almost every social change movement has relied heavily on NV action — but NV tactics are overshadowed by violent battles and insurrections

- Some good examples of NV struggle
 - Boston Tea Party
 - The Underground Railroad before and during the Civil War
 - Women's suffrage movement to get the right to vote
 - Mass marches, demonstrations, vigils, civil disobedience, boycotts, hunger strikes
 - Gandhi's campaign for Indian independence from the 1920's to the 1940's
 - Gandhi used nonviolence deliberately and chose strategic times and places to act
 - Salt Campaign — 100,000 people marched to the sea, made their own salt (illegally), and were arrested — filled the jails
 - Labor movement
 - Strikes and boycotts
 - Major sit-down strike in 1937 at the General Motors plant
 - World War II
 - Norwegian teachers refused to adopt Nazi curriculum in 1942
 - King of Denmark wore a Star of David and encouraged all other Christians to do so also, so that Jews would not be singled out
 - Gentile wives of Jewish men vigiled outside the camp where they were held until the Nazis released them
 - Civil Rights Movement
 - Freedom Rides in which whites and blacks would ride together through the South on Greyhound buses
 - Blacks boycotted Montgomery city buses until allowed to sit in front
 - Blacks sat-in at restaurants and demanded service
 - Blacks stood in line at voting places demanding the right to vote
 - Vietnam War
 - Rallies, vigils, reading the name of the dead on the Capitol steps, blockades at the front of draft induction centers, self-immolation, wearing black armbands
 - Czechoslovakian resistance to Soviet invasion in 1968
 - Polish Solidarity resistance to the Polish government
 - Anti-nuclear movement
 - Sailing ships into nuclear test zones (late 1950s)
 - Blockades and occupations at Diablo Canyon, Seabrook, Trojan, Rocky Flats, the Pentagon, Livermore Labs, Nevada Test Site, etc., etc.
 - Anti-intervention in Central America movement
 - Environmental movement
 - Greenpeace
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