



Global Nonviolent Action Database

Published on *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>)

Christian Peacemaker Team protests war toys, United States and Canada, 1992-2008

Time period notes: The campaign slowed after January 2008.

November

1992

to: January

2008

Country: United States

Country: Canada

Goals:

The goals of the campaign were:

1. A decrease in the purchasing and production of violent toys.
2. Reduce acceptance of war toys by both consumers and key decision makers.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › sent out informational packets regarding violent toys
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 014. Mock awards › Mock G.I. Joe Retirement Party
- 034. Vigils
- 035. Humorous skits and pranks
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 050. Teach-ins

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › Gave out information from "The Games Project"
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › sent out informational packets regarding violent toys

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › Gave out information from "The Games Project"
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › sent out informational packets regarding violent toys
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › "Sing Out Against Violent Toys"
- 015. Group lobbying
- 016. Picketing

- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › "Violence is Not Child's Play" rating program
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › anti-violent toy information handed out at demonstrations
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › sent out informational packets regarding violent toys
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › "Sing Out Against Violent Toys"
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 035. Humorous skits and pranks
- 037. Singing › reworded Christmas carols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 178. Guerrilla theatre

Methods in 5th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › anti-violent toy information handed out at demonstrations
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › sent out informational packets regarding violent toys
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › "Sing Out Against Violent Toys"
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 035. Humorous skits and pranks
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 178. Guerrilla theatre

Methods in 6th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › sent out informational packets regarding violent toys
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books › "Sing Out Against Violent Toys"
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 035. Humorous skits and pranks
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 178. Guerrilla theatre

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Peace

Group characterization:

- Christian Peacemaker Team activists
- church groups

- schoolchildren
- students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Gene Stoltzfus

Partners:

Mennonite Central Committee Ontario

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

Joining order not known

Segment Length: *Approximately 2 years 4 months*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Corporate executives in the toy industry

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

No known campaigner violence

Repressive Violence:

No known repressive violence

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The goal of CPT was to decrease the amount of violent toys purchased and/or produced. However, with the events of September 11, the amount produced and sold increased.

Activism against militarism in the toy industry began in the 1920s with groups such as Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the New York-based Women's Peace Society. These groups aimed to induce the public and leaders of the toy industry to re-conceptualize their ideas of childhood and toys. They believed that childhood is the most malleable time in a child's life where their conceptions of violence and peacemaking are formed. War toys normalize violence for children. Like its predecessors, Christian Peacemaker Team (CPT) believed that childhood is a crucial transformative period where children learn to act in either violent or peaceful ways and, subsequently, began their campaign against war toys in 1992.

Activists formed CPT in 1988. They were inspired by a speech given by Christian theologian Ronald Sider that articulated a vision for nonviolent organizations as a prominent component of the fight against political and social injustices. In 1992, CPT began a campaign against war toys as part of their mission against the oppressive systems in production. Quakers, Methodists, Roman Catholics, and other Christians joined in the two-decade long campaign to protest against the manufacturing, promotion, and sale of toy weapons. "Our goal is violence reduction, whoever it is linked to," says Mervin Stoltzfus, CPT director. "Games that focus on killing raise kids who think it is OK to kill." In addition, they wanted to challenge complacency, especially by key decision makers.

In late November 1992, CPT organized a worship and vigil demonstration outside a Toys 'R' Us in Minnesota. Interestingly, almost half of the participants were three to fifteen year-old children from St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship. In 1994, the group had their largest demonstration at a Chicago Toys 'R' Us over New Year's Weekend. Over three hundred demonstrators converged at the store as a part of a church-based "Peacemaker's Congress" across the U.S. and Canada. The point of the actions was to promote awareness of injustice in the toy industry in the format of a teach-in for the larger community.

In 1994, CPT activists framed violent toys under the banner of toxicity during their demonstrations. They made the statement that the effects of violent toys on children were just as detrimental to their health as cigarette smoke.

In addition to the demonstrations, CPT activists kept pressing corporate executives through correspondence. Often, they would call in advance of a planned demonstration. In December of 1994, one of CPT's leaders, Gene Stoltzfus, placed a call to Toys 'R' Us executive Michael Goldstein of Paramus, New Jersey right before a demonstration that entailed a retirement party for the GI Joe military doll at a local toy store.

CPT began another important piece of their campaign in 1994 by creating and mailing out information packets on nonviolent games and toys by request. On average, they sent out two hundred packets per year for the next seven years. During this time, they also responded to the escalation in computer usage by children by directing more of their resources to educating constituents about alternative, nonviolent computer software. In addition, CPT cosponsored "The Games Project" with Mennonite Central Committee Ontario in 1997. "The Games Project" was an initiative that promoted nonviolent computer and video games for children. It was dedicated to rating video game content for violence and horror. "The Games Project" activists would then recommend games that promoted education, skill, and character.

In 1998, they released an improved packet called "Sing Out Against Violent Toys" that included information about putting together demonstrations at local stores. They emphasized grassroots tactics involving theatrical demonstrations with music, costumes, and skits.

In January 2000, Anita Fast, a CPT activist, led a demonstration to the office of Chicago Mayor Richard Daley in opposition to a \$2.2 million economic development grant for Midway Games Inc. Midway Games Inc. was responsible for violent video games such as Mortal Kombat. Protesters dressed in royal robes and sang Christmas carols with altered lyrics.

That same year, CPT launched a new form of war toy protesting called “Violence is Not Child’s Play” in the U.S. and Canada. This initiative encouraged church groups to inspect their local toy stores and rate them on a scale of violent content. Many students also participated. Their goal was to involve 500 churches across the both countries to inspect their toy stores over the 2001-2010 decade in solidarity with the United Nations General Assembly’s “International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World.” Unfortunately, the landscape shifted in 2001 with the terrorist attacks of September 11. The increase in support for the military in the “war on terror” led to a simultaneous increase in the success of violent games and toys. Subsequently, CPT’s momentum in the Violence is Not Child’s Play initiative dwindled.

During this time, CPT began annual symbolic and ritualized demonstrations in front of Toys ‘R’ Us stores. For example, on New Years Day, CPT dramatized a nativity scene inside the actual department store. Those playing the Magi entered bearing nonviolent gifts. Then, activists playing the opposing military recruiters entered framing the toy stores as military recruitment centers in disguise. Not only did they spread their message through heavy media coverage, but they also handed out leaflets and belted out pseudo carols like this one: “Hear our message from on high, / Who will pay the consequence? / Parents, think before you buy / Violent toys teach violence.”

On January 2008, the activists engaged in a similar action outside a Toys ‘R’ Us in Chicago IL. The demonstration was still a dramatization of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. This time they proclaimed their message using altered Epiphany songs and asking shoppers the rhetorical question: “Would Mary buy Jesus a toy gun?” These Christmas demonstrations focused their attempts directly at “first-person shooter” video games such as Tomb Raider, the Die Hard Trilogy, and Mortal Kombat.

At this point, CPT’s efforts had decidedly become more internationally oriented and they began allotting fewer resources to their war toys campaign. Although CPT was more interested in international projects, their war toys campaign not only served as a training ground for new members to become acquainted with methods of nonviolent direct action, but also, through the avid media attention, was also considered a relevant critique of consumer culture.

Research Notes

Sources:

Anderson, Jon. “Faith in Peace,” 2.

Catherine Bargen quoted in Andrea Wiebe, “Violent Toys Under Fire,” Edmonton Journal, 26 Nov. 2000.

CPT Choir Sings Against Violent Toys, The Mennonite, 16 Jan. 2007.

Christian Peacemaker Team website, www.cpt.org/participate/delegation/faq#9.

Culp, Janice. Long letter to CPT constituents, 1 Nov. 1998, Toy Action files, CPT office, Chicago; “Steering Committee Notes From Toy Campaign Caucus,” 16 March 2002, Toy Action files, CPT office, Chicago.

D’Innocenzio, Anne. “Violence is Not a Game to Concerned Parents, Toy-Makers,” The Palm Beach Post, 28 September 2001.

Goossen, Rachel Waltner. ‘Like Entering an Armed Camp’: Christian Peacemaker Teams and the Language of Violent-Toy Protests. This article is slated to appear in The Mennonite Quarterly Review, January 2012.

How to Plan an Alternative Toy Fair: Notes from the 1993 Toy Fair,” War Toys Campaign 1993-circa 2000 folder, Christian Peacemaker Teams Collection, X-56, Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, Ind.

“Faith in Peace: An Army of Christians has Mobilized to Top the Violence,” Chicago Tribune, 7 Jan. 1994, Tempo section, 1. Other peace advocates used the same rhetorical question, e.g., “Would You Give the Child Jesus a Toy Gun,” GMA News, 24 Dec. 2009, <http://www.gmanews.tv/story/180162/would-you-give-the-child-jesus-a-toy-gun>.

Kern, Kathleen. In *Harm's Way: A History of Christian Peacemaker Teams* (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade Books, 2009), 1-11.

Miller, "Christian Peacemaker Teams Protest Violent Toys."

The TGP Top Ten," newsletter of The Games Project, Issue 1, November 1997, Toy Action files, CPT office, Chicago.

The Video Game Industry: An \$18 Billion Entertainment Juggernaut," *Seeking Alpha*, 5 Aug. 2008,
<http://seekingalpha.com/article/89124-the-video-game-industry-an-18-billion-entertainment-juggernaut>.

Varney, Wendy, "Playing with War Fare," *Peace Review* 12 Sept, 2000, 385.

Veenker, Jody. "Moral Combat," *Christianity Today*, 6 March 2000; "Christians Protest Against Grant to Mortal Kombat Maker," A.P. news photo clipping, 7 January 2000, Toy Action files, CPT office, Chicago.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Hannah Lehmann, 06/11/2011

A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

Copyright Swarthmore College.



Global Nonviolent Action Database is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Original website design and artwork created by [Daniel Hunter](#).

Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>.

Registered users can [login](#) to the website.

Source URL (retrieved on 07/10/2020 - 23:16): <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/christian-peacemaker-team-protests-war-toys-united-states-and-canada-1992-2008>