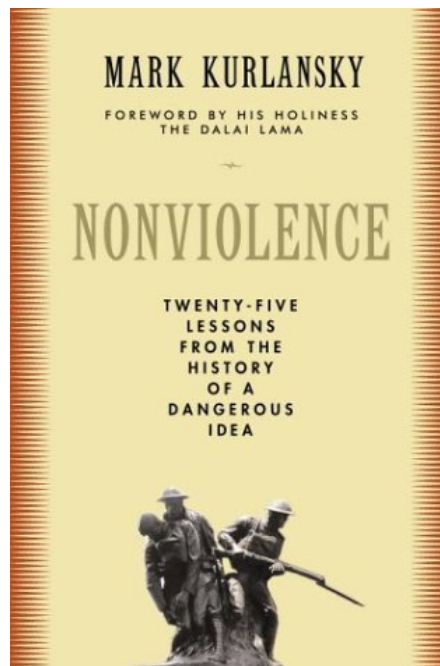




Nonviolence: Twenty-Five Lessons from the History of a Dangerous Idea

Mark Kurlansky , Dalai Lama XIV (Foreword by)

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) ➔

Nonviolence: Twenty-Five Lessons from the History of a Dangerous Idea

Mark Kurlansky , Dalai Lama XIV (Foreword by)

Nonviolence: Twenty-Five Lessons from the History of a Dangerous Idea Mark Kurlansky , Dalai Lama XIV (Foreword by)

In this timely, highly original, and controversial narrative, New York Times bestselling author Mark Kurlansky discusses nonviolence as a distinct entity, a course of action, rather than a mere state of mind.

Nonviolence can and should be a technique for overcoming social injustice and ending wars, he asserts, which is why it is the preferred method of those who speak truth to power.

'Nonviolence' is a sweeping yet concise history that moves from ancient Hindu times to present - day conflicts raging in the Middle East and elsewhere. Kurlansky also brings into focus just why nonviolence is a "dangerous" idea, and asks such provocative questions as: Is there such a thing as a "just war"? Could nonviolence have worked against even the most evil regimes in history?

Kurlansky draws from history twenty-five provocative lessons on the subject that we can use to effect change today. He shows how, time and again, violence is used to suppress nonviolence and its practitioners – Gandhi and Martin Luther King, for example; that the stated deterrence value of standing national armies and huge weapons arsenals is, at best, negligible; and, encouragingly, that much of the hard work necessary to begin a movement to end war is already complete. It simply needs to be embraced and accelerated.

Engaging, scholarly, and brilliantly reasoned, 'Nonviolence' is a work that compels readers to look at history in an entirely new way. This is not just a manifesto for our times but a trailblazing book whose time has come.

Nonviolence: Twenty-Five Lessons from the History of a Dangerous Idea Details

Date : Published September 12th 2006 by Modern Library (first published January 1st 2006)

ISBN : 9780679643357

Author : Mark Kurlansky , Dalai Lama XIV (Foreword by)

Format : Hardcover 203 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Philosophy, Politics, Sociology

 [Download Nonviolence: Twenty-Five Lessons from the History of a ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Nonviolence: Twenty-Five Lessons from the History of ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Nonviolence: Twenty-Five Lessons from the History of a Dangerous Idea Mark Kurlansky , Dalai Lama XIV (Foreword by)

From Reader Review Nonviolence: Twenty-Five Lessons from the History of a Dangerous Idea for online ebook

Bobby says

A 4.5 star effort really but I'm rounding it up to 5 as 1/2 stars are not allowed. In a short book, Mark Kurlansky manages to pack a lot of history, especially as it pertains to the history of nonviolence. The breadth covered is quite large, from ancient Christians to more modern figures like Gandhi and MLK. A key premise is that often religions start out with nonviolence at their core but once the religions are co-opted/adopted by the state/monarchy, violence seems to become part of the religion. Kurlansky details the journey of Christianity and Islam through this process, which I found very enlightening. There are 25 "lessons" about nonviolence that are listed at the end of the book; most of these are great topics for discussion. All in all, a very informative, thought provoking and entertaining book.

James says

This book was absolutely captivating.

The history of non-violence is unrepresented in our educational system. In fact, it is quite the opposite: our educational system presents history almost entirely as a progression of violent acts.

Kurlansky's book is remarkable for several reasons. It is a fascinating, lucid account of the non-violence movement throughout history, most of which we have never before encountered. His writing is excellent - clear and concise, and yet descriptive. And the story is so engaging it draws you in like a fiction novel.

Kurlansky contrasts the non-violence movement from that of the pacifist's. Gandhi was in fact antagonistic to the inaction in pacifism. Kurlansky quotes Ghandi, "Violence is any day preferable to impotence. There is hope for the violent man to become non-violent. There is no such hope for the impotent." As you read this book, you become aware of the incredible bravery of those in the active non-violence movement. As one non-violent leader was quoted as saying, it requires far more bravery to be an active non-violent protestor than a warrior.

Some of the writings from the non-violent movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are amazingly powerful. It makes one wonder how we could still be fighting wars in the twenty-first century. I can only think it is because we have leaders who lack imagination, intelligence, and yes; bravery.

I believe every teenager should have this book as required reading.

I rarely keep books. After I have read them, I put them out in to the world for others to enjoy. This book I will keep and read again many times. I would put it in my top ten of all time. Along with "All Is Quiet On The Western Front", it is a cry to humanity to stop the madness of war.

Harrison says

I went into this book with low expectations. I came out neither impressed nor disappointed. Take that as you will.

Kurlansky ultimately fails to deliver what he promises in his title: a history of non-violence. He tracks conscientious objectors and (a small selection of) nonviolent protestors from antiquity to the modern day. His selections are mostly from the West, though he quotes the Tao Te Ching and spends a few pages talking about Gandhi. Details remain sparse, and he ends up listing most of his examples without going in-depth. Here is Kurlansky's definitive shortcoming: despite an ample collection of nonviolent historical examples to choose from, the author spends most of his time talking about various wars and conflicts themselves. A reader looking for an actual history of nonviolence and its theoreticians might have to double check the title to make sure they're not reading a historical survey of western warfare instead. A better book would spend more time on and speak specifically about different nonviolent actors and their causes.

Kurlansky's tone itself is tendentious and can be grating at times. He derides violence and war for seemingly no other reason than it is violent. While such a tone necessarily objectionable, Kurlansky himself often concedes that nonviolent efforts did not work in a particular situation, leaving the reader wondering what exactly the author would have preferred to happen.

Finally, the book is full of historical simplifications. One that sticks out in my mind is the labelling of the Franco-Prussian war (which on its face was bad, because it was war—don't forget) as something which primarily caused the First World War. While not on its face false, readers deserve a more nuanced historical explanation of conflicts should Kurlansky choose to talk about them. He fails them here. In another historical simplification, Kurlansky speculates how many more Jews would have survived the Holocaust if they had taken up non-violent action—and then moves on. Such banal and thoughtless conjectures offend the historical mind.

The one area in which Kurlansky does succeed is reminding his readers that nonviolence has a long tradition; one that cannot easily be ignored. Should activists question in their day-to-day lives whether a commitment to nonviolence is "worth it" Kurlansky aptly reminds them that it can be.

Amanda says

I never expected this book to be such a disappointment.

I noticed so many inaccuracies that I couldn't trust any of the information about subjects that I knew nothing about yet. Many claims were made without any type of source. (Also, the simplistic definition of zen at its mentioning in the same breath as Zionism felt like a true disaster to me)

Oppressor violence is spoken about as if it just *is*. It is already there. The reaction of the oppressed against this oppressor-violence, that's what could exist in a number of different forms: being passive (will lead to death), effective nonviolence (will lead to peace and stopping of oppressor's violence), or ineffective violence (will lead to death and more violence).

The examples of nonviolence at work and violence failing is what made me quite uncomfortable, I think. Often evidence and stories seemed to be cherry-picked. My first problem with these examples was that the reasoning the author gives could easily be turned around. For example, the author talks about the genocide of

Jews in WW2 and gives us the example of Denmark: the country hid its jews and refused to cooperate, thereby saving almost all of them. This is a fantastic nonviolent point and I wish the author kept it at that. However, he extends this example by mentioning France: armed resistance, 25% of Jews killed. The Netherlands: armed resistance, 75% killed. Poland: armed resistance and armed jews: 90% killed. He makes it sound as if these armed resistances caused or at least were partially responsible for the genocide. Could it not also be said that the worse the violence of the oppressor was, the bigger the resistance became? Is it just the turned around reasoning that is supposed to convince us here?

The second thing that made me uncomfortable in these examples of the author was the retrospective "what if" reasoning, combined with a snarky tone and the condemnation of violence. Black slaves in the US reacted to their horrible circumstances with either being passive or being violent, according to the author. This is a pity, because what if they had responded with more nonviolence? It could have ended all with more gains, but now they ended up with a civil war that caused many deaths. The same sort of examples keeps being mentioned: WW2 and the holocaust, Haiti and the war of 'extermination', etc. Are there no better arguments than to hypothesize that everything could have been better for those who have suffered so much, if only that had responded in a better way?

The third problem I had with many examples was that it was such a flat piece of history. Politics, economics, all sorts of external and internal pressures... These all have their role in conflicts too, but were often barely talked about. I get that rushing through hundreds of years of civilization can't be that in depth, but this felt too simplistic.

Also, I can't stand the glorification of Gandhi. He is called a genius, quirky, someone with a mischievous sense of humor. Is it nonviolent too to overlook someone's sexism, racism, homophobia, classism and to not make a mention of it?

tl;dr I think the nonviolence movement deserves way better than this book

Ted says

A lovely little book with a nice organizational conceit: a list of lessons. The author makes arguments that will be impossible to disagree with, even if they are hard to put into practice. Others are less obvious and might make some readers question the assertions made. But that's good. I found myself questioning some assumptions I had labored under for some time (e.g., was WWII really a good or even necessary war?).

The folks who will find this book most useful are those of us who are drawn to the idea of nonviolence and have a strong conviction about its rightness, but who still need some intellectual convincing themselves (and the means with which to convince others) to support this conviction.

Those who are highly skeptical of nonviolence may not be persuaded by such a thin tome (although it will at least raise some interesting questions). Of course, such people are not likely the actual or even intended readership.

Larry Bassett says

The subtitle of this book lets you know what to expect if you pick it up intending to read it: Nonviolence:

Twenty Five Lessons from the History of a Dangerous Idea.

For me, nonviolence is a part of an ideal world. I am drawn to it but do not know where in my being it originated. I do not want to make the concept a weak rationale that explains how I try to travel on my life's path. How do people fall under the spell of nonviolence?

I am a member and supporter of the War Resisters League. I joined many years ago by agreeing to this statement:

The War Resisters League affirms that all war is a crime against humanity. We are determined not to support any kind of war, international or civil, and to strive nonviolently for the removal of the causes of war, including sexism, racism and all forms of human exploitation.

The United States' oldest secular pacifist organization, the War Resisters League has been resisting war at home and war abroad since 1923.

Nonviolence is the absence of violence. There is no positive word that conveys that state of being. "Advocates of nonviolence – dangerous people – have been there throughout history..." Kurlansky asserts on the first page. Some have seen nonviolence as an unattainable ideal. We have the example of Jesus as a person who placed nonviolence at the top of the Jewish tenants. "You shall not kill," is the most concise commandment of the Jewish and Christian religions. Whoops.

Active practitioners of nonviolence are always seen as a threat, a direct menace, to the state. The state maintains the right to kill as its exclusive and jealously guarded privilege.

...

One of history's greatest lessons is that once the state embraces a religion, the nature of that religion changes radically. It loses its nonviolent component and becomes a force for war rather than peace.

...

And so a religion that is in the service of a state is a religion that not only accepts war but prays for victory.

Here is a GR review that includes the 25 lessons: <http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/...>

The first third of the book revolves too much around religion for my liking. History tells us that nonviolence will not come through the religious bodies of the world. Religions justify violent warfare more often than they proscribe it. The answer to the question, "What would Jesus do?" is a nonstarter for most Christians. Jesus is the aberration. Only one of the twenty-five lessons makes a reference to religion and that is to say "Once a state takes over a religion, the religion loses its nonviolent teachings." The Historic Peace Churches, Quaker, Mennonite, and Brethren, hardly qualify any more for their peace designation.

The Revolutionary War and the Civil War are visited in turn with only a very little attention paid to any nonviolent aspects. Opposing the American Revolution does not mean seeking a nonviolent way to separate from the British. Some did call for a negotiated settlement and there were numerous demonstrations and boycotts and we all know about dumping the tea in the harbor. What if Nat Turner had lead a nonviolent uprising? What indeed. There are the standard revelations that Lincoln's goal was to preserve the union far

more than to end slavery and that the Emancipation Proclamation only freed the southern slaves where Lincoln had no authority. The history of the U.S. is by and large a history of wars and conflicts.

There were peace and antiwar movements in the U.S. until the time the U.S. entered World War I. Then it was equated with espionage. Calls for peace die with the firing of the first bullet. And the peace movement, at its best, never really espoused nonviolence but simply non war.

Nonviolence eventually becomes an antiwar book more than a book about nonviolence. You could contend that being antiwar necessarily means that you are nonviolent. The story of the Danish reaction to occupation by Nazi Germany shows how Danes took direct action to accomplish nonviolence rather than simple passivity. In this example, often referred to, nonviolence is at the forefront and is successful.

Later there are some fascinating pages about World War II and the Holocaust. The point is made that people and governments did know the Holocaust was happening and, for a variety of reasons, chose to do nothing. But the connection of this information with nonviolence is not clear to me. It may be that the connection is that a common objection to nonviolence is that it would not have been effective in saving the Jews. (The Danish experience notwithstanding.)

The American and English firebombing of cities killing thousands of civilians and the atomic bombing of Japan are also brought into the conversation about war. Again, I wonder about the relevance in a book about nonviolence. Maybe we are to see the worst results of violence in these cases to encourage us to try nonviolence. But that does not seem to have worked.

Gandhi comes up, of course, but strangely very little of King. A.J. Muste, a twentieth century pacifist, gets more than a brief mention. And then come the antinuclear movement, the civil rights movement, and the antiwar movement, all with their bits of nonviolent tactics and strategy. But only a commitment of a few who believed in the philosophy of nonviolence.

Major changes of government in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary occurred without bloodshed. The Mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina are another example of nonviolence. And there are more experiences of nonviolent change included in the concluding pages of the book.

The first half of *Nonviolence* gets two stars from me: too much emphasis on religion which has a bad history in regard to nonviolence. But the second half gets four stars as it gets into real examples of the success of nonviolence in the world. So, as a whole, I give the book three stars.

Ellen says

If we want peace, we will have to be willing to suffer for it, and maybe even die for it, but isn't that what we say about "freedom," and that the cost is worth it? Why are we willing to kill others in war, even if that means we have a good chance of getting hurt or killed ourselves, but we are unwilling to refuse to kill, if that means we might be hurt or killed? The human mind is a strange thing. Kurlansky does a terrific job of pointing out not just the suffering of war, but the absurdity of it, and the deception behind it. Not that you didn't already know that. But the value here is that he backs up his assertions with myriad examples from history, and shows that the ideas of nonviolence have been around a lot longer than Gandhi. He exposes the state -- any state -- for what it is, by explaining why those who are committed to nonviolence are and have always been its greatest enemies. He even questions conventional wisdom about the American Revolution, the necessity of World War II, and the arms race that supposedly brought down the Berlin Wall. A terrific

tonic for the constant war glorification in our culture today. Other authors might take a more religious approach to the questions, whereas Kurlansky makes an argument from the practical perspective: It works. It is the only thing that works. From whatever angle you see it, only light can drive out the darkness.

Jason Evans says

As I waited for our '03 Honda Civic to get serviced today, I finished reading, *Nonviolence: The History of A Dangerous Idea* by Mark Kurlansky. And, I must say that this is a great read! I love reading history, so maybe it's just me, but I really enjoyed this book. Kurlansky is accessible and does a good job of representing the history of nonviolence throughout history. The book is fairly short, so he does not go into too much detail but enough to entice the imagination of those that dream of a way of life without violence. I would recommend this to just about anyone simply because the side of history of told here is often not heard. This book is actually a history of violence rather than nonviolence. Kurlansky tells the other side of that history; of those that were opposed to and withstood violence throughout recorded time. But the violence seems ever present unfortunately. But those I would recommend this to the most would be my fellow Christians. A decent amount of ink is used on telling another side of the history of the Church. It is inspiring and frustrating. But it ultimately gave me hope that those of us that follow Jesus today yet don't agree with the Christendom machine are not alone. Pick it up.

Steven says

"One of history's greatest lessons is that once the state embraces a religion, the nature of that religion changes radically. It loses its nonviolent component and becomes a force for war rather than peace. The state must make war, because without war it would have to drop its power politics and renege on its mission to seek advantage over other nations, enhancing itself at the expense of others. And so a religion that is in the service of a state is a religion that not only accepts war but prays for victory. (25-26)

That was a passage which particularly stood out to me; it sets the tone for the entire book. Kurlansky seeks to delineate the history of nonviolence (through examples from religious teachings to individual dissenters – from the sayings of Chinese sages through those of Jesus, to the actions of MLK and resisters of Soviet rule in Czechoslovakia) in order to show that it *can* work and that violence should not be uncritically accepted as inevitable. Look, it isn't a flawless work; Kurlansky blows through millennia worth of history in fewer than 200 pages – of course it suffers from lack of depth and development in the areas that it examines. The upside of this approach, however, is that you receive a clear and highly focused overview – more so, perhaps, than you would get had Kurlansky spent the arguably required 800 pages on the topic. Even if in places the discussion isn't as elaborate as one might like, the book has power through its concentrated effort. It also, I have to admit, exposed some areas of history about which I either possessed little knowledge, or which I had never realized *went quite like that*. History is never objective – I think this lesson can be added to the 25 that Kurlansky draws from his survey of the history of nonviolence. I've included them, here, if you're interested (to be honest: I mostly added them for myself, to come back to later). The 'lessons' are less powerful on their own; they are more convincing after you have read the book. I think that speaks to the value of *Nonviolence* in and of itself.

The Twenty-Five Lessons:

- 1) There is no proactive word for nonviolence.
- 2) Nations that build military forces as deterrents will eventually use them.

- 3) Practitioners of nonviolence are seen as enemies of the state.
 - 4) Once a state takes over religion, the religion loses its nonviolent teachings.
 - 5) A rebel can be defanged and co-opted by making him a saint after he is dead.
 - 6) Somewhere behind every war there are always a few founding lies.
 - 7) A propaganda machine promoting hatred always has a war waiting in the wings.
 - 8) People who go to war start to resemble their enemy.
 - 9) A conflict between a violent and nonviolent force is a moral argument. If the violent side can provoke the nonviolent side into violence, then the violent side has won.
 - 10) The problem lies not in the nature of man but in the nature of power.
 - 11) The longer the war lasts, the less popular it becomes.
 - 12) The state imagines it is impotent without a military because it cannot conceive of power without force.
 - 13) It is often not the largest but the best organized and most articulate group that prevails.
 - 14) All debate momentarily ends with an "enforced silence" once the first shots are fired.
 - 15) A shooting war is not necessary to overthrow an established power but is used to consolidate the revolution itself.
 - 16) Violence does not resolve. It always leads to more violence.
 - 17) Warfare produces peace activists. A group of veterans is a likely place to find peace activists.
 - 18) People motivated by fear do not act well.
 - 19) While it is perfectly feasible to convince a people faced with brutal repression to rise up in a suicidal attack on their oppressor, it is almost impossible to convince them to meet deadly violence with nonviolent resistance.
 - 20) Wars do not have to be sold to the general public if they can be carried out by an all volunteer professional military.
 - 21) Once you start the business of killing, you just get "deeper and deeper," without limits.
 - 22) Violence always comes with a supposedly rational explanation – which is only dismissed as irrational if the violence fails.
 - 23) Violence is a virus that infects and takes over.
 - 24) The miracle is that despite all of society's promotion of warfare, most soldiers find warfare to be a wrenching departure from their own moral values.
 - 25) The hard work of beginning a movement to end war had already been done.
-

Wu Shih says

Il pacifismo è passivo, la non violenza è attiva. Essa deve prevenire non dalla debolezza ma dalla forza, e solo le persone più determinate e disciplinate possono sperare di raggiungerla.

Il saggio cinese Mozi identificava nell'amore reciproco (chien ai) la chiave per sanare i mali del mondo.

Il rabbino Hillel rispose a un suo discepolo che lo interrogava sulla Torah: "Ciò che risulta sgradevole a te stesso, non farlo al tuo prossimo. Il resto non è altro che un commento a questo principio".

Coloro che praticano la non violenza vengono da sempre percepiti come una minaccia, un affronto diretto allo stato che intende invece mantenere il diritto di uccidere come privilegio esclusivo.

Lo scontro fra violenza e non violenza è sempre una controversia di natura morale e se la fazione non violenta si converte alla violenza, perde il vantaggio e diventa solo una questione di forza bruta.

La storia passa dai movimenti religiosi istituzionali (quando correotti dal potere temporale divengono guerrafondai) e di ribellione. Passa quindi attraverso la disamina di concetti quali Pax dei, jihad, chanukah, e analizza vari movimenti cristiani più o meno monacali (anabattisti, valdesi, catari, quaccheri...).

Descrive anche l'operato di vari personaggi di spicco nel mondo non violento come Te Whiti, David Low Dodge, William Garrison, Ghandi ("la forza non deriva dalla capacità fisica. Essa deriva da un'indomita volontà"), MLK, Badshah Khan, Richard Gregg.

Interessante anche se la storia raccontata è sbilanciata enormemente dalla parte occidentale, soprattutto

americana.

Irene says

This book made me profoundly sad about humankind. Although it was supposed to be about non-violence, it was more so a history of violence, war, and injustice with a few examples of brave men who practiced non-violent resistance. Are we ever capable of learning and ending the violence?

Nick says

I didn't particularly enjoy Kurlansky's book on nonviolence--although his facts are accurate, they are often incomplete and his tone is snarky throughout. Someone whose introduction to nonviolence is this book is likely to reject the whole business.

Evelyn says

Nonviolence: The History of a Dangerous Idea is a book that I've seen many human rights activists who I admire recommend, and it's really opened my eyes to seeing things from a different point of view. In *Nonviolence*, Kurlansky provides an insightful overview of this powerful mindset and movement, citing its early origins in the foundations of religions such as Christianity and Hinduism, and carries it through to describing its use in relation to the fall of the Soviet Empire. He illustrates the differences between nonviolence and pacifism, draws upon how States around the world have manipulated religion to promote wars and ultimately promotes nonviolence as the only way to achieve sustainable peace. The chapters are short and accessible, yet packed full of information, and he rounds it off with a 25 lessons summary at the end to recap what you've just read.

Nonviolence is a fascinating book which will help you to think about the futility of war and violence, and hopefully it'll encourage more people to question and proactively change (through nonviolent means) the power-mad agendas of their governments. One of my favourite quotes that's stuck in my mind is one by Hannah Arendt - "*The practice of violence changes the world, but the most probable change is a more violent world.*".

Steve says

Mark Kurlansky is an excellent writer, He makes a very strong case for nonviolence. He sees nonviolence as a political tactic, and openly questions those cases in history that have been routinely touted as examples of regimes which would be impervious to a Ghandi-like resistance.

He singles out the Nazi's and the slave-owning southern states of America as deserving special consideration, because it is the accepted wisdom that nonviolence would have been ineffective in these two cases. There are of course limits to what counter-factual histories can tell us, if indeed they can tell us anything, but despite Kurlansky's arguments, I find myself doubting the idea of countering Nazi atrocities with nonviolence.

Nonviolence can be an effective tactic, but two conditions need to be met: The world has to be watching, and someone somewhere has to care about your plight. In the case of the European Jews or the African slaves, that simply wasn't the case. Either people were not watching, or people did not care, and so no amount of nonviolence on the part of the oppressed was likely to change behaviors.

Many of the examples given in the book of nonviolent resistance resulted in death and ruined lives for those engaged in the practice. Certainly violence would have fared them so better in most cases, but are we expected not to fight when our freedoms and our lives are about to be taken? What about the lives and freedoms of our children, friends and others?

Nonviolence is a tactic. When it can be effective, it should be used. But when you take violence off the table, and forever forswear its use, nonviolence might be seen as a weakness to be exploited. All tactics have to be on the table.

Still, I'm attracted to nonviolence as a practice, and in all cases that I can envision myself involved in seem amenable to this tactic. I'd have to be pretty desperate to give up peace. But that's easy for me to say, living as I do in my nice house in my nice city nestled here in New England. I won't be so quick to judge those in more dire circumstances.

Marcus Wolfe says

As a "history of" nonviolence it was OK but a bit brief in sections that I thought should or could be covered in more detail. I found his exegesis of certain Biblical passages when dealing with Christian nonviolence marginal at best. He "cherry picked" those passages that he felt supported his view but failed to address quite a few passages that did not. And even those he chose to use, there are other possible and more likely translations from the original languages that would lead one to a different conclusion. Later in the book his discussion of the fall of Communism and of apartheid in South Africa were also rather simplistic. He failed to address the economic pressures on both systems, from outside in South Africa's case and internal in the communist East.
