"Like Entering an Armed Camp": Christian Peacemaker Teams and the Language of Violent-Toy Protests

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Abstract: Beginning in 1992, a nonviolent social justice organization, Christian Peacemaker Teams, engaged in demonstrations at Toys "R" Us and other stores to publicize concerns about the effects of violent toys and games on children. The organization's periodic protests across the U.S. and Canada served as a training mechanism for its growing corps of volunteers and reservists. In creative engagement with news media and the public, Christian Peacemaker Teams urged consumers to view toy weapons as dangerous and linked the marketing of violent toys to U.S. military recruitment efforts. Building on the legacies of twentieth-century peace groups offering faith-based nonviolent witness in the public sphere, C.P.T.'s campaign provided a grassroots focus for Mennonite, Brethren, Quaker, Catholic, and other activists promoting peace education and antimilitarism.

On New Year's Day, 2008, Chicagoans near the corner of Western and Belmont avenues witnessed a spectacle at the busy Toys "R" Us store: a dramatization of Mary and Joseph shopping with their 10-year-old son Jesus. Camera crews and journalists recorded the theatrics and music that had been well-publicized: carolers singing Christmas and Epiphany tunes with altered words, enjoining consumers not to buy toys and games with violent content. The somber message of the event—that violence in commercial toys and games is harmful to children and to society at large—was tempered with light-hearted images, including Jesus on a skateboard.[1] The sponsor of the event, Christian Peacemaker Teams, a nonprofit organization based in Chicago and focused on social justice, employed the rhetorical question "Would Mary buy Jesus a toy gun?" to prick the conscience of any consumer within earshot.[2]

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1. "Christian Peacemaker Teams Media Alert," Dec. 31, 2008, Toy Action files, C.P.T. office, Chicago.

2. The quotation is from a C.P.T. placard at a Chicago toy action described by Jon Anderson, "Faith in Peace: An Army of Christians has Mobilized to Stop the Violence," *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 7, 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*, Dec. 24, 2009, http://www.gmanews.tv/story/180162/would-you-give-the-child-jesus-a-toy-gun.

While this drama offered an unusual twist on religious imagery, the message was familiar to corporate executives, local retailers, and the media. Exactly one year earlier on New Year's Day, fifteen members of a C.P.T. training group in Chicago had risked arrest by enacting a surreal Nativity scene inside the Toys "R" Us store. Demonstrators dressed as the Magi had appeared to Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus, bearing nonviolent gifts. But soon, actors dressed as military recruiters and video game characters arrived on the scene, presenting violent toys to the infant. Robed choir members stood nearby, singing adapted lyrics to "Angels We Have Heard on High":

> Hear our message from on high,
> Who will pay the consequence?
> Parents, think before you buy:
> Violent toys teach violence.[3]

C.P.T. demonstrators sang other pseudo-carols and distributed leaflets to an audience of shoppers and store employees. The demonstrators quoted video-game packaging that touted "killing without mercy" and linked the games to U.S. military training for the ongoing Iraq war.[4]

[Used with permission from www.CartoonStock.com]

These annual events in Chicago, well-choreographed and savvy in attracting media attention, illustrate the ritualized and highly symbolic but also ephemeral nature of the organization's public witness against

3. "C.P.T. Choir Sings Against Violent Toys," *The Mennonite*, Jan. 16, 2007.
4. Ibid.

violent toys. Beginning in the early 1990s, Christian Peacemaker Teams engaged in a two-decade-long campaign to protest the manufacture, promotion, and sale of toy weapons, toy military figures and vehicles, and video, board, and fantasy games based on violent intent. Participants in this multifaceted campaign—involving an estimated one thousand volunteers, mostly Mennonites, Brethren, Friends, and Catholics—protested at retail stores in more than twenty cities across the U.S. and Canada. Often these actions took place on New Year's, a notoriously slow news day for media outlets, with C.P.T. organizers contacting journalists in advance and promising a story with good visuals.[5] Store managers, employees, and local police officers as well as passersby watched these lively demonstrations, and reporters covered the action. Beyond the store protests, the C.P.T. campaign promoted alternative nonviolent toys and games by distributing peace education materials to church organizations and individuals.

These store protests demonstrate a sustained effort by one small Christian organization to depict violent toys and "first-person shooter" video games (such as *Tomb Raider, Die Hard Trilogy,* and *Mortal Kombat)* as part of a North American consumer culture of violence.[6] Although the toy campaign was never a central feature of C.P.T.'s larger work for nonviolent social justice, the organization planned and engaged in toy demonstrations annually from 1992 to 2008 and distributed resources for people across Canada and the U.S. to challenge the peddling of violent toys to children. C.P.T. charged retailers with bringing violence into local communities and to sought to hold them accountable, publicly challenging them to change their practices.[7]

As the campaign evolved, the organization settled on a two-pronged approach. First, as with the 2008 Chicago demonstration, organizers staged protests at toy stores. C.P.T. found this strategy useful for training incoming volunteers and reservists in the techniques of nonviolent direct action, using symbolic tactics such as vigils and processions, and for shaping C.P.T.'s image with creative, edgy theatrics that sometimes meant risking arrest. Second, through language and drama, C.P.T. framed toy stores as military recruitment centers in disguise, a characterization intended to challenge consumers' notions of toy stores

5. Carol Rose, interview with author, Chicago, April 13, 2011.

6. In this type of game, a player takes on the perspective of a protagonist engaged in combat.

7. Kryss Chupp, interview with author, Chicago, April 13, 2011.

as harmless, safe spaces.[8] By portraying stores in this way, C.P.T. drew on the work of secular and religious peace organizations that, since the 1920s, had created alternative discourses about consumer culture, making violent toys analogous to real weapons and urging disarmament in stores and homes to safeguard children's well-being.

In this historical context, C.P.T.'s campaign contributed to a broad cultural critique of violent toys. By drawing public attention to concerns about the impact of violent toys on children, Christian Peacemaker Teams helped to change North American perceptions about toy stores and their wares, the most violent of which C.P.T. activists connected to street shootings and military training. But after 2008, Christian Peacemaker Teams quietly abandoned the North American toys campaign to concentrate on international peace and justice projects and to engage volunteers in training exercises more directly focused on preparing them for confrontation with authorities and possible arrest.[9]

Faith-Based Activism

Christian Peacemaker Teams, based in Chicago and Toronto, is a small but growing ecumenical organization focused on peacemaking in domestic and international settings. In recent years it has expanded to include some forty full-time workers and 170 reservists on several continents who support local partners in addressing violence.[10] The organization began in 1988, four years after the Christian theologian Ronald Sider, at a gathering of the Mennonite World Conference in Strasbourg, France, delivered an influential address in which he articulated a vision for a nonviolent corps to address social and political injustices with the kind of intensity associated with military organizations. His challenge motivated C.P.T. founders, some of whom had already contemplated such an effort. In 1988, Mennonite and Brethren denominational agencies appointed a Mennonite Central Committee alumnus, Gene Stoltzfus, as the half-time coordinator of the new organization. With his wife, Dorothy Friesen, Stoltzfus had already founded Synapses, a Chicago-based peace and justice organization aimed at connecting Americans with people in developing countries. Turning his attention to Christian Peacemaker Teams, Stoltzfus and

8. Scholars have investigated even more recent strategic responses by U.S. peace movements to counter discourses about patriotism and supporting troops in the Gulf War and Iraq War. Cf. Patrick G. McCoy, Lynne M. Woehrle, and Gregory M. Maney, "Discursive Legacies: The U.S. Peace Movement and 'Support the Troops,'" *Social Problems* 55 (May 2008), 161-189; and Lisa Leitz, "Oppositional Identities: The Military Peace Movement's Challenge to Pro-Iraq War Frames," *Social Problems* 58 (May 2011), 235-256.

9. Chupp interview.

10. Kryss Chupp, email to the author, May 10, 2011.

colleagues began to build a corps of full-time volunteers and part-time reservists committed to nonviolent action.[11]

Rooted in the historic peace witness of Mennonites, the Church of the Brethren, and Quakers, C.P.T., Stoltzfus was fond of saying, was a "natural outgrowth of the Anabaptist tradition."[12] Yet the very public witness of Christian Peacemaker Teams was in tension with the well-established doctrine of nonresistance articulated by mid-twentieth-century church leaders, including the Mennonite theologian Guy F. Hershberger. In the decades preceding C.P.T.'s formation, Hershberger had professed deep skepticism about the claims of religious pacifists that God commanded nonviolent action as a means to social change.[13] During the mid-1980s, as Christian Peacemaker Teams emerged, differing theological perspectives about the value of nonviolent direct action—which many Mennonites perceived as too political—led the Mennonite Brethren denomination and more conservative Anabaptist-related groups to withhold their support from the new organization.[14]

Nevertheless, C.P.T. developed into a faith-oriented partnership of Mennonites, Brethren, Friends, Catholics, and others, seeking social change in the tradition of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). The FOR was a progressive, nonviolent Christian group with origins in the First World War and a penchant for staging media events to promote civil rights and other causes. Like FOR seventy years earlier, C.P.T. would gain visibility as a creative, audacious expression of Christianity, seeking, in the words of the historian Joseph Kosek, to "transform the modern world by going back to the two-thousand-year-old example of Jesus."[15]

In its first decade, C.P.T. experimented with a range of projects. In 1995, it had only a small corps of nine full-time activists, but by then, C.P.T. leaders had already conceived of toy actions as a training mechanism for other arenas of peace and justice work. As the

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11. See Kathleen Kern, *In Harm's Way: A History of Christian Peacemaker Teams* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2009), 1-11, for a discussion of the organization's beginnings.

12. Quotation from Kern, *In Harm's Way*, 11.

13. Joseph Kip Kosek, *Acts of Conscience: Christian Nonviolence and Modern American Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 151. Regarding Hershberger's critiques of the Fellowship of Reconciliation's perspectives on nonviolence, see Theron F. Schlabach, *War, Peace, and Social Conscience: Guy F. Hershberger and Mennonite Ethics* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2009), 454.

14. Kern, *In Harm's Way*, 10.

15. Kosek, *Acts of Conscience*, quotation from 15; see also 245.

organization developed its international focus, Gene Stoltzfus and his colleagues at C.P.T.'s Chicago headquarters became involved locally in violent-toy demonstrations at the invitation of the noted Chicago-based Catholic peace activist Kathy Kelly. During the early 1990s, in the context of the Persian Gulf War, Kelly and others were leading Christmas-time protests against violent toys at area stores, and Stoltzfus joined them. This collaborative experience in Christian witness prompted C.P.T. staff to include toy protests as part of the organization's repertoire for nonviolent activism. Stoltzfus believed that C.P.T. supporters who mobilized around this issue might bring tangible social change to their local communities, and in the process, gain direct experience in community organizing.[16]

The C.P.T. toy campaign, then, represented a training strategy for an advocacy group that emphasized international nonviolent direct action more than targeting North American consumerism and violence. As Christian Peacemaker Teams grew to include more full-time volunteers and reservists, most prepared to engage in peace and justice projects abroad, with the largest numbers working in Hebron, Palestine, as well as in Iraq, Haiti, Mexico, and Colombia.[17] The goal of convincing merchants to remove violent toys from North American store shelves was compatible with C.P.T.'s broader peace initiatives, although the toys campaign remained a minor focus, without the full-time attention of any staff members or volunteers. Even so, the campaign provided a mechanism for C.P.T. to bring faith-based peace values to bear on a secular marketplace in what the C.P.T. training coordinator, Kryss Chupp, called "our own backyard."[18]

Beginning in 1992, Chupp led annual toy actions at Chicago-area retail stores with groups preparing for longer-term assignments, and she also developed educational materials for constituency groups. Earlier, she had served abroad with Mennonite Central Committee, returning to the U.S. in 1992 with a 2-year-old daughter. Chupp remembers:

> I had just come back from a Nicaraguan setting that involved real-life war, to a culture that was promoting violence. This consumer culture of violence was astonishing to me, with fresh eyes from working in Central America. And I had a child; I was a parent for the first time. So that really drew me into the whole issue of the overwhelming imagery of violence in children's play.[19]

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16. Chupp interview.

17. See Tricia Gates Brown, ed., *Getting in the Way: Stories from Christian Peacemaker Teams* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2005).

18. Chupp interview.

19. Ibid.

These cross-cultural experiences, transformative in Chupp's life, found resonance in the Christian Peacemaker Teams organization, where participants often crossed international borders for collaborative nonviolent witness.

Despite the small scale of C.P.T.'s toy actions, public demonstrations like those in Chicago provided useful training, exposing volunteers and full-time members to the techniques of nonviolent witness. From the early 1990s on, scores of C.P.T. staff members and volunteers who participated in the toy campaign—either near the organization's central offices or elsewhere—subsequently took part in nonviolent action projects for justice with local partners at the Mexico/Arizona border, in northern Ontario, and abroad. In those projects, C.P.T. enlisted volunteers in organized efforts to reduce violence, such as removing roadblocks in the West Bank and painting crosses on a wall along the Mexico-U.S. border. Participants willingly risked their safety in nonviolent direct actions intended to confront oppression. Protesting violent toys at local retail stores remained a key element of training nonviolent workers for nearly two decades. At the same time, the campaign drew together church constituents throughout the U.S. and Canada, with C.P.T. activists leading demonstrations in several dozen communities.

"Like Entering an Armed Camp"

Peace campaigns directed against the production and advertising of war-related toys date to the early 1920s, when the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) acquired prominence and women's social activism surged. At the Women's International League's 1921 convention, women from twenty-six countries condemned war toys and appealed to all mothers to "disarm the nursery."[20] They argued that because "children's minds are extraordinarily receptive," parents should carefully monitor their children's access to toys as a way of instilling peace-oriented values.[21] Embarking on a sustained, multiyear letter-writing campaign aimed at convincing American toy manufacturers to make productive playthings instead of toy weapons, the WILPF

20. Quotation from "Disarm the Nursery," *Friends Intelligencer*, Dec. 30, 1922, in "Children and War and Peace, 1894-1929" subject file, Swarthmore College Peace Collection (SCPC), Swarthmore, Pa.

21. Ibid. See also "Mothers, Teachers, Friends of Children!," Women's International League pamphlet, 1921, in "Children and War and Peace, 1894-1929" subject file, SCPC.

members steadfastly opposed militaristic toys. Similarly, in 1929 the New York-based Women's Peace Society began a "Construction versus Destruction" campaign that targeted militarism in the toy industry. Women handed out pledges to store managers proclaiming that they would never buy toy weapons for children.[22] These efforts prefigured C.P.T.'s later activism in Chicago and elsewhere. Like their 1920s-era predecessors, Christian Peacemaker Teams aimed to recast consumers' notions of childhood and toys. Instead of framing childhood as an innocent time of play, C.P.T. understood it to be a transformative period in which children learned to think and act in either peaceful or violent ways.

Despite these continuities, C.P.T.'s toy actions represented a new dimension of protest absent from the campaigns of older peace organizations. C.P.T.'s campaign, launched near the end of the twentieth century, coincided with the rise of technologies marketed for home use. Graphically violent video and computer games packaged as sensory, multimedia children's entertainment called for a stronger language of disarmament and provocative theatrics meant to snap consumers' attention away from the glare of video console store displays.

As early as 1992, when C.P.T. began to direct resources toward its toys campaign, the organization's staff members, including Stoltzfus and Chupp in Chicago as well as Jane Miller in Minneapolis, saw themselves as part of a much larger effort, both nationally and worldwide.[23] Many peace organizations and religious groups were already working on this issue from different angles, including the annual "International Protest Against War Toys" public demonstrations in North America and Europe, letter-writing campaigns to corporate officials, and toy buy-back events and peace fairs. Some consumer groups were lobbying retailers to adhere to a voluntary rating system and refrain from selling "M"-rated ("Mature") video games, with sexually explicit or highly violent content to children under the age of 17. Religious groups like C.P.T., secular peace organizations, and public interest groups as well as political officials all contributed to efforts to minimize the availability and impact of violent toys.

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22. *Newsletter, Women's Peace Society Supplement*, Peb. 1929, in "Children and War and Peace, 1894-1929" subject file, SCPC. For context regarding 1920s-era activities of the Women's International League for Peace and Preedom's U.S. section and the Women's Peace Society, cf. Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 90-97; and Carrie A. Foster, *The Women and the Warriors: The U.S. Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1946* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 44-45.

23. Chupp interview.

In this climate, the New York-based Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility undertook a series of dialogues with officials of Toys "R" Us, Kmart, Wal-Mart, Kay-Bee Toys, and the trade association Toy Manufacturers of America, challenging them to release their guidelines for the marketing of violent and nonviolent toys. Two years later, in 1994—partly in response to several highly-publicized tragedies in which police officers shot children in possession of toys that resembled actual guns—Toys "R" Us, followed by several other retailers, changed their policies and announced that that they would stop selling "look-alikes," or toys that could be mistaken for real guns. As a result, the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility presented Toys "R" Us with an award.[24]

In addition, some interest groups lobbied to increase federal regulations of violence in the children's entertainment industry. While children's television was subject to governmental regulation, manufacturers of toys and video games faced no such accountability, and the effects of video games were becoming a significant public health concern. Physicians' and psychologists' organizations cited mounting evidence linking violent video games with increased aggressive behavior as well as with decreased helping behavior.[25] At the same time that public health experts were mounting a successful campaign about the effects of cigarette smoking on children and teens, C.P.T. activists joined other critics in framing violent toys as similarly toxic. In Edmonton, Alberta, for example, a C.P.T. protester from the Holyrood Mennonite Church who demonstrated at local stores told journalists that "the point of this initiative is to help raise public awareness" with the goal that violent toys would someday be as unacceptable as cigarette smoking.[26]

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24. Rose interview; Jane Godfrey, "War Toys—Not Today" memorandum, Oct. 1992, Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility files, C.P.T. office, Chicago; "Discussion with Chief Executive Officer Toys 'R' Us," memorandum, Dec. 21, 1994, Toy Action files, C.P.T. office, Chicago; Brendan Schurr, "Major Toy Stores Will Stop Selling Real-Looking Guns, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Oct. 15, 1994; Joseph Pereira and Barbara Carton, "Toys 'R' Us to Banish Some 'Realistic' Toy Guns," *The Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 14, 1994, B-1.

25. Doug Pritchard, "Lethbridge, Alberta—Violence is Not Child's Play," news release, July 25, 2000, Toy Action files, C.P.T. office, Chicago; Jeffrey McMurray, "Kmart, Wal-Mart Take Stand on Violent Video Games," Sept. 8, 2000, press release, Toy Action files, C.P.T. office, Chicago; Craig A. Anderson, "Violent Video Games: Myths, Facts, and Unanswered Questions," American Psychological Association Science Directorate, 2007, www.apa.org/science/psa/fb-anderson.html; Darlene Hammell and Joanna Santa Barbara, "War Toys," *The PSR Quarterly* 3 (June 1993), 91-93.

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

Although Christian Peacemaker Teams devoted most of its toy campaign energies toward publicizing the practices of stores in North American communities, C.P.T. leaders also kept pressure on corporate executives through correspondence, usually sent in advance of planned demonstrations. An unusual telephone encounter took place in December 1994, when Gene Stoltzfus, in the C.P.T. Chicago office, spoke with the chief executive of Toys "R" Us, Michael Goldstein, of Paramus, New Jersey. C.P.T. placed the call in anticipation of its plans to stage a "retirement party" media event at a local toy store for G.I. Joe, the military action figure that had first been marketed thirty years earlier.

Recounting his conversation with Goldstein, Stoltzfus noted,

> I told him that we all have a responsibility to provide leadership in these important questions, his corporation in his way and the church in its own way. . . . I told him that entering parts of his stores is like entering an armed camp, that the presence of guns, G.I. Joe and many, many symbols of violence is overwhelming. He cautiously acknowledged that there were elements of Toys "R" Us stores that may be troublesome to selected consumers.[27]

The two men had a wide-ranging conversation for fifteen minutes, and then, Stoltzfus reported, "We closed the conversation in a very polite manner. He said, 'What you advocate is good.' I said that I hoped that this was the beginning of discussions regarding children's toys and that I looked forward to more."[28] Despite the cordial tone, the conversation also revealed obvious dissonance. After the call, Stoltzfus told C.P.T. colleagues:

> [Goldstein] bristled a little when I used the metaphor of 'an armed camp' to describe parts of his stores. I believe that it is part of our responsibility as a church to give moral leadership and that [corporate leaders] should know that if they fail, they will pay a price in their public image and in the marketplace. This is one of the struggles against spiritual darkness.[29]

For nearly a century, peace groups had directly challenged toy industry representatives, claiming moral high ground. This dialogue from 1994 reveals the gulf in perspectives between a corporate leader and a C.P.T. leader who styled his language after that of religious prophets. It was the first and last conversation between the two men.

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27. "Discussion with Chief Executive Officer Toys 'R' Us" memorandum.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.

CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY

In its toys campaign from 1992 to 2008, Christian Peacemaker Teams engaged people of all ages who objected to violent toys. In one of its earliest iterations, a worship vigil and demonstration in late November 1992 outside a Toys "R" Us in Minnesota, nearly half of the C.P.T. participants were children—ranging in age from 3 to 15—from St. Paul Mennonite Fellowship. One 12-year-old, Micah Hirschy, spent the day giving out alternative toy lists to holiday shoppers.[30] From the beginning of the C.P.T. toy actions, the organization included children, although not in acts of civil disobedience. (Along with other nonviolent Christian activist groups, C.P.T. had to consider the implications of having children take risks for social change. At the Minnesota demonstration and in later C.P.T. toy actions, children who participated did so *outside* store premises; unlike some adult activists, they did not enter stores and then violate ordinances by remaining after being asked to leave.) Photographs in Christian Peacemaker Teams online pictorial galleries show children outside stores during planned demonstrations. Occasionally, voices within C.P.T. emphasized the children's contributions. Keith Funk-Froese, coordinator of C.P.T.'s campaign in Edmonton, Alberta, told reporters, "This is a starting point for the next generation. They have a chance to make society something other than it is now."[31] In St. Paul, a C.P.T. organizer noted that "many shoppers were genuinely concerned [about violence in stores] when the message came from so many children."[32] But these were exceptions in the broader C.P.T. movement, where adult activists acted on behalf of children, directing the campaign for nonviolent toys toward the managerial world of manufacturers, store personnel, and media representatives, as well as consumers.[33]

Why did C.P.T. organizers reflect only rarely on whether children should occupy a more central place in the toys campaign? They assumed that adults working on behalf of children's welfare would deliver the most consistent message and they wanted to avoid manipulating

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30. Jane Miller, "Christian Peacemaker Teams Protest Violent Toys," C.P.T. press release, Dec. 3, 1992, Toy Action files, C.P.T. office, Chicago.

31. Wiebe, "Violent Toys Under Fire."

32. Miller, "Christian Peacemaker Teams Protest Violent Toys."

33. "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.

children as agents of change.[34] Their campaign for nonviolent toys represents an unusual instance of an Anabaptist-related organization advocating for social change on behalf of children.

While earlier secular and religious peace groups engaged in systematic campaigns against violent toys, most Mennonites and other Anabaptist groups had remained on the sidelines of nonviolent toy advocacy.[35] There were exceptions, particularly during the Vietnam War when many peace-related organizations voiced disapproval of war-related toys and games. In that context, some Mennonites engaged the issue directly, either as members of local chapters of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, or as professional educators. In 1964 Bernice Esau, a Mennonite pastor's spouse, created displays of nonviolent toys and games in churches across the Twin Cities as part of a broader Women's International League holiday campaign and in conjunction with the Minnesota Council of Churches. Also in 1964, Carl and Carol Rich Andreas, American Mennonites who had recently returned from four years of development work in Pakistan, organized a toy turn-in event in their Detroit neighborhood. The Andreas's young sons invited their friends to bring war-related toys and choose new toys instead, and the family recruited more than a hundred neighbors to participate in a petition drive directed at local store managers, also in conjunction with a broader campaign publicized by the Women's International League. Simultaneously, the Mennonite educator Kathryn Aschliman, in her laboratory kindergarten located at Goshen College in northern Indiana, began a three-decade-long effort to promote nonviolent toys and play among the children in her campus classroom.[36] But apart from such efforts, few Mennonites engaged in sustained nonviolent toy advocacy until the early 1990s when Christian

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34. For more on risks associated with parents' and children's commitments to nonviolent social change, see Fatricia Appelbaum, *Kingdom to Commune: Protestant Pacifist Culture Between World War I and the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 213.

35. Some Mennonite institutions became involved briefly with nonviolent toy advocacy. In the early 1990s the Education Department at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va., offered workshops and promotional materials on nonviolent play. From 1994-1997, Susan Mark Landis of Ohio led a collaborative effort between the two largest Mennonite denominations in the U.S. and Canada to develop a "Peace Factory," a touring exhibit with activities for children promoting peaceful play and lessons in biblically-based conflict resolution.

36. "Minneapolis Churches Witness Against War Toys," *The Canadian Mennonite*, Dec. 15, 1964, p. 1; Joel Andreas, telephone interview with author, July 26, 2011; Carl and Carol Rich Andreas letter to Bernice Esau, 1964, in the author's possession; Susan Dillman, "Teacher Wages Private Battle Against War Toys," *The South Bend Tribune*, Kathryn Aschliman Collection, 1/5, V-04-18-01, "Clippings, Undated," Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, Ind.

Peacemaker Teams launched its campaign, offering leadership, distributing resources, and grooming media contacts.

Christian Peacemaker Teams' largest store demonstration occurred over New Year's weekend in 1994, when some 300 demonstrators converged at a Chicago Toys "R" Us as part of a four-day "Peacemaker Congress" of church representatives from across Canada and the U.S. Before the event, conference-goers attended C.P.T. workshops to consider possible scenarios for the upcoming store demonstration, and C.P.T. organizers advised Canadian participants that, if arrested, they might have to return to Chicago for court hearings.[37] As the action unfolded, a journalist from the *Chicago Tribune* recorded the scene:

> Bodies moved into the Toys "R" Us store—past a flustered manager, two security guards and extra staff waiting for them. . . .
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> "We are people of faith," proclaimed Kryss Chupp, her voice amplified by bullhorn through the store. "We are parents deeply concerned by the violence that surrounds us, in our neighborhoods, on TV, in our children's toy boxes. We've come to help people consider the toys that they buy, to demilitarize."
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> The point of such actions, another [C.P.T.] leader noted, is not to get arrested or cause damage; it is to mount a kind of teach-in for the larger community, to combat wrongs by making them visible.[38]

The proclamation that "we are people of faith" underscored the theological grounds of C.P.T.'s demonstrations, which often opened with prayers and vigils. In its literature as well as protest actions, C.P.T. prepared participants to identify nonviolent direct action as not simply a tactic but as a deeply religious act.[39] In C.P.T. rhetoric, "confronting evil" had spiritual as well as temporal dimensions. Organizers often incorporated the Christ child, the Magi, and other religious iconography in store actions. In the large 1994 Chicago demonstration, participants dressed as biblical characters fanned out in the store and pasted stickers on violent video games, warning shoppers to "Think before you buy." As Cene Stoltzfus shook hands with police officers who were herding C.P.T. protesters out of the building, the store manager told television reporters that Toys "R" Us had no official comment. No one was

37. Jon Anderson, "Faith in Peace," 2.

38. Ibid., 1.

39. "Q and A with Christian Peacemaker Teams," undated, Serve Your World: Volunteer Abroad Guide website, http://www.serveyourworld.com/articles/293 /1/Interview-with-Christian-Peacemaker-Teams.

arrested, and C.P.T. regarded the event as a success in light of the extensive media coverage.[40]

EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES: VIOLENCE IS NOT CHILD'S PLAY

Beyond periodic toy store actions staged in conjunction with conference and training events, beginning in 1994 C.P.T. staff members assembled information packets on nonviolent toys and games and mailed them to anyone expressing interest. During the next seven years, staff members filled requests for these packets weekly, sending out about 200 per year. C.P.T. also began directing more resources to the campaign and stepped up efforts to educate constituent groups about alternative, nonviolent computer software for children.[41] In 1997, C.P.T. joined with Mennonite Central Committee Ontario in cosponsoring "The Games Project," an initiative to promote nonviolent computer and video games for children and teens, with leadership provided by an M.C.C. staff member, Esther Epp-Tiessen of Kitchener.[42] By 1998, C.P.T. had developed a more comprehensive packet, "Sing Out Against Violent Toys," which emphasized grassroots tactics, especially the use of music, costumes, and skits for demonstrating at local stores. From 2002 onward, C.P.T. staff members placed this resource on its website for wider distribution.[43]

In 2000, Christian Peacemaker Teams began a new initiative, Violence is Not Child's Play, encouraging church groups throughout the U.S. and Canada to inspect toy stores in their own communities. In Chicago, a C.P.T. demonstrator, Anita Fast, led a group to the office of Mayor Richard Daley to oppose a $2.2 million economic development grant for Midway Games Inc., the company responsible for manufacturing the video game *Mortal Kombat*.[44] Across the U.S. and Canada, C.P.T. sent press releases and informational packets, announcing hopes that 500 churches would take part in the store-inspection campaign over the decade 2001-2010, which the United Nations General Assembly was promoting as the "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and

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40. Jon Anderson, 1.

41. "C.P.T. Promotes Bytes Without Brawn," C.P.T. news release, Dec. 14, 1994, Toy Action files, C.P.T. office, Chicago.

42. "The TGP Top Ten," newsletter of *The Games Project*, Issue 1, Nov. 1997, Toy Acfion files, C.P.T. office, Chicago.

43. Janice Culp Long letter to C.P.T. constituents, Nov. 1, 1998, Toy Action files, C.P.T. office, Chicago; "Steering Committee Notes From Toy Campaign Caucus," March 16, 2002, Toy Action files, C.P.T. office, Chicago.

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

Nonviolence for the Children of the World." The toy store inspections generated significant support among the Christian Peacemaker Teams' constituency, and marked the high point of the organization's involvement in this issue.

Violence is Not Child's Play drew many participants into theatrics organized by Christian Peacemaker Teams in 2000 and 2001. Whereas earlier training events had often taken place at stores in the Chicago area, in the new campaign demonstrations against violent toys occurred in the Canadian urban centers and suburbs of Edmonton and Lethbridge, Alberta; Abbotsford, British Columbia; Winnipeg, Manitoba; and Waterloo, Ontario. In the United States, the campaign reached Boulder, Colo.; Cleveland; Fort Wayne and South Bend, Ind.; Kansas City; Minneapolis; Nashville; and Wichita, Kan. According to Kryss Chupp, who provided leadership for the binational campaign:

> C.P.T.'s niche in that larger campaign of concern was the public witness aspect: getting out and going to the toy stores, engaging with the retailers' management, and providing a visual invitation for others. With North American audiences, we in C.P.T. recognized that every community has a toy store. Not every community has a big federal building or a military base, or somewhere to direct one's peacemaking energy. But every community has a toy store.
>
> We didn't want to let retailers off the hook. They are the face of the manufacturers in our communities. They're the folks we have access to, in every community, and as much as they want to pass the buck, they can make decisions about what they carry and what they don't. So that was part of our focus, a niche that we felt wasn't being addressed by other groups.[45]

Beginning in 2000, church groups conducted toy inspections by visiting a dozen or more stores within a metropolitan area. Trained participants carrying clipboards (and sometimes wearing white lab coats and hard hats) surveyed merchandise and used rating sheets to assess the stores' level of violent toy and game offerings, as well as their promotion of alternative, nonviolent toys. In Winnipeg, for example, thirty volunteers visited stores, ranked them, and publicized their findings. Ryan Siemens, a theology student at Canadian Mennonite University, recruited fellow students as part of the corps. Together, the volunteers made notes and assigned point allocations for store displays, toys, action figures, table games; electronic, video, and computer games;

45. Chupp interview.

and books, audiotapes, and videotapes. When they had completed their inspections, Siemens and his colleagues presented "certificates of toxicity" to stores that had rated poorly, and "certificates of commendation" to toy sellers whose stores were violence-free or nearly so. "It was interesting," Siemens noted, "that the locally owned stores rated much higher than the chain stores."[46] Throughout the past decade, C.P.T. activists, sensitized to larger concerns about the impact of globalization, had debated how much to emphasize "buying local" in children's entertainment purchases rather than promoting large chain stores that sold few, if any, violent toys.[47] The new Violence is Not Child's Play campaign in dozens of locations provided a partial solution to this dilemma.


Violence is Not Child's Play

Certificate of Encouragement

Delegates to the annual assembly of the Mennonite Church of Canada, held in Abbotsford, British Columbia, in 2001, participated in the toy and video game inspection events and linked their involvement to recent news stories of seven school killings across North America. At one of the Abbotsford stores, a Mennonite "inspector," Ruth Isaac Wiederkehr, of Guelph, Ontario, acknowledged to journalists that she found herself tensing up as she walked into the video game section.[48] Citing the work

46. Carol Thiessen, "Remove Violent Toys, Winnipeg Stores Urged," *Mennonite Weekly Review*, Nov. 23, 2000.

47. "Steering Committee Notes," March 16, 2002.

48. Connie Jackson, "Violent Toys Under Scrutiny," *Abbotsford Times*, 2001 clipping in War Action tiles, C.P.T. office, Chicago; David Grossman, "Trained to Kill: A Military Expert on the Psychology of Killing Explains How Today's Media Condition Kids to Pull the Trigger," *Christianity Today*, Aug. 10, 1998, 1-8; see also David Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1995), 302-305.

of a U.S. military psychologist and writer, David Grossman, C.P.T. volunteers interpreted their presence at Abbotsford stores in light of findings that the gunmen at the Columbine High School shooting in Littleton, Colorado, and at other recent school shootings had shared an immersion in violent pop culture. Student shooters at Columbine had reportedly been obsessed with the graphically violent video games *Doom* and *Quake*.[49] In his influential work, Grossman had shown that the same tactics used to train soldiers were being used in "first-person shooter games, where users learn to kill and like it."[50] C.P.T. toy campaign organizers, linking their work explicitly to Grossman's, noted that military service recruits were learning to "circumvent their natural inhibitions to killing fellow human beings" and that "the same tactics used in training soldiers are at work in our media and entertainment."[51] Grossman articulated, from the perspective of military psychology, the long reach of military training into children's and adolescents' homes and leisure time. His writings and lectures, which touched a sensitive chord with many American parents and educators, gave C.P.T. and other groups organizing against violent toys their strongest confirmation that disarming the toy stores was a cause worth sustaining: Grossman argued that while toy guns and violent video games were facsimiles of the real guns used in military special operations and drive-by shootings, they were also instruments of destruction in their own right. They built a killer mentality in the mind of each child who pulled a trigger.

By 2002, after a spate of store inspections in more than a dozen cities and accompanying media coverage, C.P.T. organizers allowed the goal of engaging 500 churches to slip away. Nevertheless, Christian Peacemaker Teams defended the Violence is Not Children's Play campaign in American and Canadian cities as a valuable form of outreach. Although C.P.T.'s efforts were limited in scope and their specific goals were modest, organizers did achieve some of their goals. For example, they convinced some toy store managers to move violent toys and video games to higher shelves where they would be less accessible to young children. "The [ratings] survey probably wasn't the most rigorous scientific instrument in the world," Kryss Chupp later recalled, "but that wasn't the point. It was to challenge people's complacency about it, and particularly decision-makers who could make

49. "IPGV Releases Violent Video Game Survey," Iowans for the Prevention of Gun Violence press release, May 26, 1999, www.jointogether.org/gv.

50. Jackson, "Violent Toys Under Scrutiny."

51. Grossman, "Trained to Kill," 1.

a difference."[52] Continued media interest in C.P.T.'s staged protests at local stores was a sign of encouragement for organizers, despite overwhelming evidence that violent toy and video game sales were increasing year by year.[53] C.P.T.'s episodic demonstrations could hardly make a dent in the workings of such a highly profitable, multibillion-dollar industry.

Violence, Stereotyping, and Sexism

In its educational materials, Christian Peacemaker Teams borrowed from other peace groups in identifying the characteristics of violence in children's entertainment. Significantly, like the War Resisters League and other pacifist groups, C.P.T. did not limit its focus to militaristic playthings or video games, but targeted the glorification of violence, broadly construed.[54] In dozens of toy actions, C.P.T. volunteers distributed literature and carried placards outside of toy stores, arguing that violent toys teach unnecessarily aggressive competition; require children to use violence in order to win; depict graphic violence; create the need for an enemy; and falsely glamorize military life, combat, and war. In addition to linking children's play with the development of attitudes and actions related to violence, Christian Peacemaker Teams opposed toys and games that depicted minorify groups in negative ways.[55] Although C.P.T. focused its efforts more directly on physical violence than on ethnic or racial stereotyping, a C.P.T. intern, Lisa Pierce, noted that the organization opposed toys that "teach that people who are different are incompetent or evil."[56] During the 1990s, in the wake of the Gulf War, North Americans were increasingly sensitive to broad racial and ethnic stereotyping. The U.S. Arab Association, for example, protested the marketing of "Nomad, the terrorist doll," and the toy's manufacturer, Coleco, responded by taking it off the market.[57] Peace-focused organizations like C.P.T. and the War Resisters League had helped to create public awareness—and disapproval—of toys that

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52. Chupp interview.

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

54. For an overview of responses to violent toys internationally in the second half of the twentieth century, see Sonja Levsen, "War Toys and Noncompetitive Games," *The Oxford International Encyclopedia of Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

55. "Colorado War Toys Action 1997," photo of C.P.T. demonstrators, C.P.T. office, Chicago.

56. "C.P.T. Asks GI JOE to Give Peace a Chance," C.P.T. news release, Aug. 4, 1994, Toy Action files, C.P.T. office, Chicago.

57. Hammell and Santa Barbara, "War Toys," 92. Thanks to David Hostetter, who brought this general point to my attention.

perpetuated stereotypes against minorities, and these concerns held relevance for many consumers. Yet at the same time, many Americans remained ambivalent about the violent form and content of toys, and continued to regard toy guns and military-themed dolls as fun and harmless.[58]

In addition to concerns about toys' violence and negative stereotyping, C.P.T. and other peace organizations drew attention to research regarding sexism associated with some commercial toys. For example, the Norwegian peace theorist Birgit Brock-Utne designed a study in which researchers visited toy stores and requested help in selecting toys for a 5-year-old child. Typically, sales associates asked: "For a boy or girl?" If the answer was "girl," store personnel led the customers not to war-related toys, but instead to dolls, kitchen utensils, small stoves, dishes—all items correlating with the socialization and training of girls for motherhood and homemaking. By contrast, store employees led researchers who said they were shopping for a boy to aisles with toy guns, tanks, and soldier figures.[59] Sexism in the selling of children's toys was not a new problem. But by the end of the twentieth century, peace organizations and consumers alike were increasingly identifying and addressing concerns about sexism, as well as violence, in playthings marketed to children.

Christian Peacemaker Teams and other organizations sought to disrupt the gendered division of children's toys and games by pointing out that many products geared for children appealed to girls and boys alike. Virtually all violent toys were being marketed for boys, and C.P.T. recognized that in some families, boys were presumed to be in training for eventual military service. Significantly, however, in its toys campaign, C.P.T. did not strongly emphasize gender. In 1992, soon after the Gulf War, C.P.T. noted with alarm that Mattel was marketing Barbie Dolls dressed in military clothing for girls.[60] But the organization never explicitly critiqued the toy industry's production of gender binaries. Nor, in its toy store actions and literature, did C.P.T. acknowledge its advocacy on behalf of boys. C.P.T.'s goal was to oppose violent toys

58. Parents who oppose restrictions to children's access to violent games and toys often cite free speech and personal choice. See Rick Marin, "Don't Take Away My Kids' Toy Guns," *Salon*, http://www.salon.com/life/feature/2011/02/08/boys_and_their_guns. Accessed Feb. 8, 2011.

59. Birgit Brock-Utne, "A Gender Perspective on Peace Education and the Work for Peace," *International Review of Education* 55 (May 2009), 207.

60. Miller, "Christian Peacemaker Teams Protest Violent Toys."

directed toward children in general, rather than overturning gender norms either in local toy stores or more broadly throughout the industry.[61] Nonetheless, because manufacturers targeted violent products toward boys, C.P.T.'s actions represented male advocacy by default.

THE METAPHOR OF TOXICITY: CHILDREN IN HARM'S WAY

While scholars have conducted numerous studies of war-related toys and war-play, they are only beginning to explore the counterpoint rhetoric of toy protest movements. Peace researchers acknowledge that psychological studies regarding the effects of violent toys on children yield differing conclusions, and that opposing sides can marshal conflicting evidence.[62] Although peace historians have offered significant analysis of how groups have mobilized to counter powerful symbols of patriotism, few have examined the trajectory, over time, of children's engagement with toy weapons and other violent toys.[63] The work of a sociologist, Wendy Varney, represents an important exception.

Near the end of the twentieth century, Varney surveyed trends in violent toys and linked corporate interests and consumer culture to militarism. She argued that since children, especially boys, are potentially future soldiers, both governments and those who seek to profit from wars have a vested interest "to socialize children into militarism, to make it seem logical, necessary, 'natural' and even fun."[64] Toys, in this reading, take on larger significance than consumers tend to

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61. The emphasis by Christian Peacemaker Teams on violence set the organization apart from performance artists such as the "Barbie Liberation Organization," which galvanized headlines in the early 1990s for stunts calling attention to toys' sexist stereotyping. Members of this group surreptitiously changed the voice boxes of Barbie dolls and G.I. Joe figures for sale in several states. See David Firestone, "While Barbie Talks Tough, G.I. Joe Goes Shopping," *The New York Times*, Dec. 31, 1993, p. A-12.

62. One nonviolent toy advocate working on behalf of the War Resister's League titled an essay, tongue-in-cheek: "I Played with War Toys as a Child and 'I Grew Up to Be OK.'" See Kate Donnelly, *The Nonviolent Activist*, April-May, 1987. For an analysis of violent toys' relation to film and American popular culture, see Patrick M. Regan, "War Toys, War Movies, and the Militarization of the United States, 1900-85," *Journal of Peace Research*, 31 (1994), 45-58. For a survey of psychological studies on violent toys' impact on North American and European children, see Peter K. Smith, "The War Toy Debate," in Jeffrey H. Goldstein, ed., *Toys, Play and Child Development*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1994), 67-84. A chronological survey of trends in the manufacture of war-related and violent toys is Wendy Varney, "Playing with 'War Fare,'" *Peace Review* 12 (Sept. 2000), 385.

63. Charles F. Howlett, ed., *History of the American Peace Movement, 1980-2000: The Emergence of a New Scholarly Discipline* (Lampeter, U.K.: Edwin Mellen, 2005), 12. A significant sociological study of the peace movement's impact on the toy industry during 1960s is Carol Andreas, "War Toys and the Peace Movement," *Journal of Social Issues* 25 (1969), 83-99

64. Varney, "Playing with 'War Fare,'" 385.

assume, and shelf upon shelf of toy weapons in a local store normalizes what Varney called the "delights" of, or conditioning to, violence and power. Christian Peacemaker Teams, by focusing on disarmament, sought to de-normalize violent toys. At a Toys "R" Us demonstration in early 2001, for example, one C.P.T. protester yelled at shoppers, "If you don't want to shop in a toxic, armament-filled store, you have options in the city of Chicago!"[65] By invoking the language of both armaments and choice, C.P.T. activists were prompting consumers to see toy weapons as dangerous and labeling toy stores as toxic places.

C.P.T. also used this metaphor of toxicity in its critiques of economic exploitation and oppression abroad. In recent years, globalization has transformed toy manufacturing and increased profitability for large corporations. Critics of North American toy culture argue that in sweatshops in China, Thailand, and other countries, children are far less likely to be the recipients of controversial toys than to serve as low-wage laborers who produce them. The British journalist Eric Clark notes:

> The dominance of China in toy production is staggering. There are about 8,000 toy factories, employing 3 million workers, spread over six main production areas, of which the Pearl River Delta is the largest by far. Virtually all the American toy names we know, from G. I. Joe to Etch A Sketch, are made there. These workers make 80% of all of America's toys.[66]

While Christian Peacemaker Teams campaigned against the promotion and sales of violent toys, the organization's broader goal of waging nonviolent direct action against oppressive systems in production and distribution of resources provided an important additional philosophical basis for C.P.T.'s protests, although in the organization's literature, linkages between toy violence and exploitation through globalization were largely implicit.[67] C.P.T. noted that violence was "rooted in systemic structures of oppression" and in response offered an anti-capitalist critique of consumer culture. Further, its rhetoric of violent toys as toxic was liable to catch the attention of consumers reading headlines about recall announcements from Mattel and other companies

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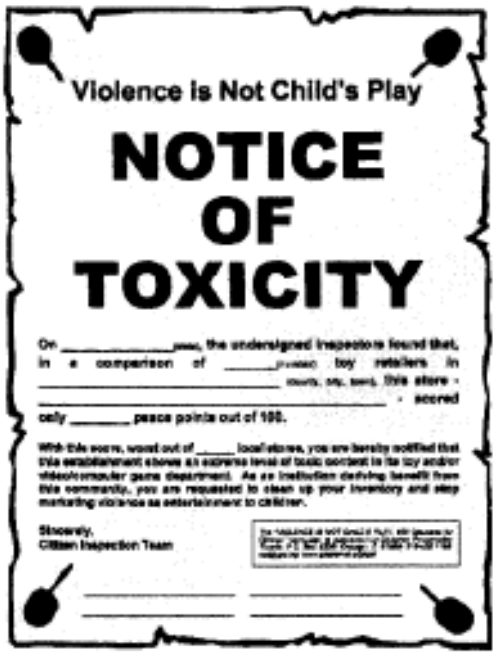
65. Quotation from Evan Osnos, "Protest Over Violent Toys Targets Store in Loop," *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 2, 2001, Section 2, p. 3.

66. Eric Clark, *The Real Toy Story: Inside the Ruthless Battle for America's Youngest Consumers* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 196.

67. "Discussion with Chief Executive Officer Toys 'R' Us" memorandum. Stoltzfus's memo references Bob Herbert, "In America; Terror in Toyland," *The New York Times*, Dec. 21, 1994.

whose Chinese-made toys contained unsafe levels of lead paint and other contaminants.[68]


Violence is Not Child's Play

NOTICE OF TOXICITY

On _____, the undersigned inspectors found that, in a comparison of _____ toy retailers in _____ this store scored only _____ peace points out of 100.

With this score, worst out of _____ local stores, you are hereby notified that this establishment shows an extreme level of toxic content in its toy and/or video/computer game department. As an institution deriving benefit from this community, you are requested to clean up your inventory and stop marketing violence as entertainment to children.

Sincerely,
Citizen Inspection Team

GRADUAL DISENGAGEMENT: ASSESSING C.P.T.'S CAMPAIGN

Although C.P.T. planners could not have foreseen the shifting landscape in violence and international conflict prompted by the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, and the far-reaching "war on terror," developments following 9/11 contributed to C.P.T.'s waning promotion of Violence is Not Child's Play.[69] The toy campaigns had proved useful as a training technique in preparing activists for more high-profile projects. But the periodic trainings at local toy stores were gradually falling out of favor with staff members and C.P.T. volunteers. Some had argued for years that C.P.T. ought to narrow its focus to violent video games. A volunteer from Seattle, Kathy Railsback, for example, who had provided organizational leadership for the Violence is Not Child's Play campaign, believed that C.P.T.'s broad inclusion of many kinds of toys in its demonstrations led to inconsistencies in the

68. Quotation from C.P.T.'s website, www.C.P.T.org/about_C.P.T. On safety concerns about Chinese-made toys, see David Barboza, "Why Lead in Toy Paint? It's Cheaper," *The New York Times*, Sept. 11, 2007.

69. See Anne D'Innocenzio, "Violence is Not a Game to Concerned Parents, Toy-Makers," *The Palm Beach Post*, Sept. 28, 2001.

organization's messages to the media, store officials, and the public.[70] Nevertheless, C.P.T. continued to include in its training events protests against all types of toys and games associated with the purpose of killing or wounding.

A more significant factor in bringing an end to the violent toy campaign after nearly two decades was the organization's shift in priorities toward an international presence. As C.P.T. grew, with increased numbers of reservists heading to Iraq, Colombia, and other locations burdened with ongoing violence, concerns about North American children's consumerism seemed to some within the organization, ironically, like child's play. Prodded by sobering reminders of the risks undertaken by these international delegations—such as the 2005 kidnapping of four C.P.T. workers in Iraq and the subsequent discovery of the body of one, Tom Fox, in Baghdad—the organization refocused its efforts on preparing volunteers and reservists in ways directly connected to C.P.T.'s nonviolent actions around the globe.[71] As a result, training sessions at the Chicago offices and elsewhere no longer systematically included violent-toy actions. But like the tradition of organizing toy store demonstrations, C.P.T. continued to train volunteers for possible engagement in civil disobedience.[72]

For more than a decade, C.P.T. organizers had taken care to prepare toy demonstrators for the possibility of arrest, and advised groups contemplating multilevel action plans, including civil disobedience, to assign specific roles to volunteers, including press and police liaisons and support persons knowledgeable about strategies in case of arrest. (For example, is anyone planning to refuse to give their name or to bail out of jail? Has the group decided that no one will leave until everyone is released? Will anyone need a lawyer?)[73] By all accounts, these preparations had served C.P.T. well as training exercises. But during the two-decade history of C.P.T. protests against violent toys, no demonstration had ever resulted in arrest. Year after year, store

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70. Railsback memo to C.P.T. Steering Committee and Staff, March 13, 2002, Toy Action files, C.P.T. office, Chicago; see also "Review of C.P.T. 'Toys Project,'" C.P.T. memorandum, Oct. 1997, Toy Action files, C.P.T. office, Chicago.

71. Tricia Gates Brown, ed., *118 Days: Christian Peacemaker Teams Held Hostage in Iraq* (Chicago: Christian Peacemaker Teams, 2008).

72. Chupp interview.

73. Kryss Chupp, compiler, "Public Witness Roles," in "Sing out Against Violent Toys: How to Organize a Public Witness at Your Local Toy Store," n.d., www.C.P.T.org/resources/witness/past_actions/violent_toys#public.

managers at Toys "R" Us and other venues, fearing negative publicity, refrained from pressing charges. For their part, C.P.T. organizers made prudent decisions about when to leave contested spaces inside stores. They also developed an acute sense of how to make the most of media coverage. In Chicago, director Gene Stoltzfus, with a trademark white beard as part of his toy-action Santa Claus persona, judged correctly that when television cameras were present, local police would not arrest demonstrators dressed as Santa, elves, and other bringers of good cheer.[74]

After years of casting toy stores as places of toxicity, like "armed camps," Christian Peacemaker Teams moved on to other priorities, citing a lack of personnel to coordinate a sustained campaign and noting that no one on the staff could dedicate full time to promoting the toys campaign and measuring its outcomes. Although C.P.T organizers noted ongoing interest in website resources for toy activism, and they continued to share Internet-based counsel on how to plan and carry out demonstrations at toy stores, the campaign's legacies reveal the limitations of small peace groups' efforts to dismantle what they regarded as miniature arsenals dispensed by North American toy stores.

Organizers have acknowledged that efforts focusing on violent video games could be revitalized—if not by C.P.T., then by others—to protest the normalization of new high-tech forms of military power. In a recent interview, C.P.T. co-director Carol Rose cited parallels between U.S. warfare in the skies above Afghanistan and Pakistan and the video games continuously marketed to North American children and adolescents: "What does it do to train with a game that removes any 'pause' before a person presses a button? There's a similarity now to drone warfare that is removed from human decision-making."[75] C.P.T. ended its annual toy demonstrations to focus more attention on international projects, yet paradoxically, Rose's comments reveal the ongoing blurred distinctions between international militarization, lethal violence, and graphically violent computer and video games.

Measured against the broad scope of Christian Peacemaker Teams' international witness for social justice, the organization's toy campaign represented a small niche within a much larger peace movement. In advocating nonviolent children's play, C.P.T. provided alternative education and addressed violence in the neighborhood. These goals were important to elements of C.P.T.'s constituency that preferred to see the organization address oppression close to home, around domestic

74. Gene Stoltzfus, "In Defence of Santa Claus," Dec. 23, 2009, www.ekklesia.co.uk-/node/10904.

75. Rose interview.

issues—for example, in urban areas or with indigenous peoples—rather than making claims for justice across international borders.[76] C.P.T.'s symbolic gestures called into question North American business practices and consumers' complicity in oppressive labor practices in a globalized economy. The toys campaign contributed to broader cultural critiques of graphic video game protocol, as the organization spread the word that violent toys and games socialize children into potentially violent behavior.

Through all of this, C.P.T. caught a wave of public interest in children's health and well-being. Although C.P.T.'s work to remove violent toys and games from store shelves remained unfinished, their critique of consumer culture is still relevant. Other organizations—some predating Christian Peacemaker Teams and others relatively new to violent-toy protests—have continued to demonstrate at toy stores, exhibitions, and corporate headquarters. In 2010, North American peace organizations engaged in toy actions included Granny Peace Brigade, Code Pink, and smaller, community-based groups such as the Lawrence (Kansas) Coalition for Peace and Justice.[77]

For nearly two decades, C.P.T.'s demonstrations charted a chronological arc of vision and goal-setting, followed by consciousness-raising and action, and, finally, gradual disengagement. C.P.T.'s campaign illuminates both fleeting and substantive elements of faith-based nonviolent witness in the public sphere and, specifically, in the marketplace. From the activists' perspective, corporate and consumer interests collided with Anabaptist emphases on the value of peace education. As a result, C.P.T. attracted the support of volunteers and onlookers seeking what the religious scholar Patricia Appelbaum calls "an experience and a symbolic world . . . . that affirmed pacifists' identity, urged them onward, and tied them to their deepest commitments and beliefs, to their past [and] to the future they hoped for."[78]

Children and adults who committed to nonviolence by participating in C.P.T.'s toy campaigns construed in their own actions a significance that reached beyond the boundaries of local shopping sites. By framing

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76. Chupp interview.

77. Eva-Lee Baird, "Peace Toys Not War Toys," Granny Peace Brigade blog, Dec. 15, 2010, /www.grannypeacebrigade.org/wordpress/category/toys-and-games/; "Say No to War Toys," http://www.codepinkalert.org/sec-tion.php?id=96; Christine Smith et al., interview with author, Lawrence, Kan., March 13, 2011.

78. Appelbaum, *Kingdom to Commune*, 9.

offending toy stores as "armed camps" and prodding consumers to "think before you buy," C.P.T. activists challenged normative notions of violence. Playfully reinterpreting the language of toys and games, they saw themselves as part of a stream of history where alternative readings are always possible.