

The Journal of Social Encounters

Volume 5
Issue 2 *Women and Peacebuilding*

Article 14

2021

Review of Building Peace in America

Chris Hausmann
Northwestern College

Ron Pagnucco
College of St. Benedict/St. John's University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), and the [Social Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hausmann, Chris and Pagnucco, Ron (2021) "Review of Building Peace in America," *The Journal of Social Encounters*: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, 131-134.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters/vol5/iss2/14

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Social Encounters by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csbsju.edu.

***Building Peace in America.* E. Sample and D. Ivin-Erickson (Eds.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020. Paper, 251 pp. ISBN 978-1-5381-4380-3.**

Chris Hausmann
Northwestern College, Iowa

Ron Pagnucco
College of St. Benedict/St. John's University

This book is the result of a two-day workshop in May of 2018 on “Building an Architecture of Peacebuilding in the United States” at the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict resolution at George Mason University. The workshop brought together academics and practitioners. Some of the participants worked for NGOs such as Peace Direct and Alliance of Peacebuilding that have been doing peacebuilding in countries in the developing world and that only recently began to apply their peacebuilding analysis and experiences to their home counties of the United States and the United Kingdom.

The workshop used the concepts negative peace – the absence of conflict – and positive peace – the presence of justice – articulated in Martin Luther King, Jr.’s famous Letter from a Birmingham Jail, and introduced to the academic field of peace studies by Johan Galtung. -- peacebuilding includes resisting repression. One criticism of the book is that perhaps it underestimates the value of negative peace and the methods to achieve it. For example, helping to bring two gangs to a truce to stop the violence is a major negative peace challenge, as is reducing intergroup violence in general. How to build a sustainable intergroup peace is broader challenge.

The book is organized into five parts: Part 1: Framing our conversation of Peacebuilding in the United States; Part 2: Doing Goo (?): Dialogue, Difference, and Ethical Practice; Part 3: Social Spaces and Social Practices of Peacebuilding; Part 4: Confronting Direct and Structural Racial Violence: The Paths Forward; and Part 5: In the Spirit of Self-Reflection: Discussions on Gender and Nation. Due to the limitations of space, we will discuss selected essays from these sections.

The chapter by Bridget Moix, “Peacebuilding Begins at Home: A Call to U.S. Peacebuilders,” makes the noteworthy point that US and European peacebuilders have separated peacebuilding in the global South from peacebuilding in their own countries and have not adequately discussed how their countries contribute to conflicts elsewhere. A key point Moix makes is that “there are likely vital lessons we can learn from peacebuilding in the global South that might be applied to the needs we now face in the global North, and the views of outsiders may be just as valuable as we believe they are when we ourselves offer them to others” (p. 15). These are good points and worth stating, but such learning from the global South has been taking place in the U.S. for a while, notably, for example, in the consultations with and study of Gandhi by African American leaders struggling for civil rights in the U.S. Also, some of us academic have been trying to apply to the U.S. what we have learned from peacebuilding cases in the global South (see for example Autesserre, 2021). Indeed, the Journal of Social Encounters was established to help facilitate such leaning and exchange. Moix closes her chapter with a look at four local peacebuilding organizations in the U.S., including the Maine-Wabanaki Reconciliation-Engagement-Advocacy-Change-Healing (REACH) organization. REACH has worked with the Maine-Wabanaki State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the first government-sponsored TRC in the U.S.,

*Book Review:
Building Peace in America*

and an important model to study along with the TRCs of other countries to explore possible ways for helping to bring about reconciliation in the U.S.

The chapter by Beverly Janet Goines, “Social Justice as Peacebuilding in Black Churches: Where do We Go from Here?” is one of the best short overviews of the subject that one can find. As she notes, the Black church has persistently worked for positive peace since the days of slavery. Goines highlights some key aspects of that history, including the relationship of the Black churches to the Social Gospel movement, and also discusses the involvement of blacks in the international peace movement in U.S. history. Goines discusses some of the aspects of the Black church that present challenges for its work for justice and peace, such as the influence of conservative Evangelical theology and the preaching of the Prosperity Gospel, and she concludes with five honest and frank suggestions for the Black church “to help reinvigorate a social justice peacebuilding consciousness” (p. 12), including a recommendation to embrace secular movements like Black Lives Matter. Reading this chapter will be a valuable aid to a realistic understanding of the Black Church’s work for social justice and peace past and present.

In “Peacebuilding Programs in the United States: First Do No Harm,” by Elizabeth Hume we find an important discussion of community peacebuilding programs in the U.S. Hume, who works with Alliance for Peace (AfP) notes that after the mapping program of local peacebuilding groups conducted by AfP and Peace Direct, they found that some groups were doing an excellent job of peacebuilding, but also that some of the leaders of local peacebuilding organizations “have very little background in peacebuilding and conflict resolution” (p. 80) and cautioned that “without understanding basic principles of peacebuilding , including conflict sensitivity” their efforts could be counter-productive. The AfP has produced “Guiding Steps for Peacebuilding Design, Monitoring and Evaluation” – available for free online—that includes seven steps: 1. Conduct a conflict assessment; 2. Design the peacebuilding program; 3. Develop a monitoring and development plan; 4. Conduct a baseline study; 5. Monitor and make adaptations to the program as needed; 6. Conduct an endline study and final evaluation; and 7. Disseminate and share results and key learnings. Readers in the U.S. will recognize a version of these steps as requirements in a project grant proposal to a foundation and in a good theory of change, which we contend, all projects, no matter how simple, can and should have. As Hume notes, Conflict Sensitivity and the principle of Do No Harm should be integrated into the entire project, and “Do No Harm is as simple as remembering to analyze how the different activities in the program will impact a community both positively and negatively and ensure the program adapts and is modified” (p. 79; see also p. 75).

Hume provides two case studies: of an unsuccessful and a successful local peacebuilding program. A key reason for the failure of the one peacebuilding program was that the organization, which came from outside the community, “didn’t conduct a conflict assessment and build the long-term community relationships that would have allowed them to develop a program with the community members in a participatory manner that was needed and owned by the community”; rather the organization’s program was “a too-simple ready-made model” (p. 85). This is a very important insight to remember in doing local peacebuilding work. We would add that it is also very important to have a clear theory of change for your program, which will help you to decide if it is worth trying in the first place and to think about how program activities might affect broader, interrelated factors (Lederach, et al, 2007). But relationship building and talking with the community are key.

Several of the authors mention intergroup contact theory – the contact hypothesis – but do not discuss it and its application to peacebuilding projects in much detail. In her chapter, Hume, commenting on the

need for more knowledge about peacebuilding by many local organizations wrote that some programs “rely on simple and naïve assumptions based on contact theory and dialogue” (p. 88). However, in the successful peacebuilding case she described, Hume wrote that “[t]hey followed the best practices of contact theory... which demonstrate specific structures that help maximize the development of empathy, such as enough time together, meaningful rather than causal interactions, common goals, some form of cooperation, self-disclosure, and equal treatment” (p. 86). A fuller discussion of contact theory and how it can be used effectively in local peacebuilding programs, especially in light of the claim that some programs have a simplistic understanding of contact theory, would have been helpful.

In *Service for Peace: Working with Students and Youth to Plant the Future*,” Eddah Mutua, a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Social Encounters*, discusses a program with which one of the authors of this review (Pagnucco) is familiar. Communicating Common Ground (CCG), which was started in 2007 and for which Mutua is the lead coordinator, is a project in which every spring semester members of the Central Minnesota community, four school districts, diverse students from five local high schools and from Mutua’s upper-level intercultural communication course at St. Cloud State University collaborate in a service-learning project intended to facilitate understanding and connection in this increasingly diverse area of Minnesota. Bringing together 70-80 students for a range of activities for the last 10 years, though Mutua does not mention it in the chapter, the CCG program has won several awards. The university students help to develop material for dialogue sessions with the high school students, and the high school students apply what they are learning by doing such things as teaching fifth graders about peace talking circles. Students learn about important issues from guest speakers; learn about peacemakers, who provide inspiration and role models; go on “diversity tours”; and learn meditation, self-care and self-love. Mutua discusses the roles of various actors in the collaborative CCG program: administrators in the local school districts and the university; parents; high school teachers, and of course the high school and college students. The program includes listening to the participants and making modifications as needed. One author of this review (Pagnucco) has heard ethnically and racially diverse students speak about the program experience very favorably and was very impressed with what they had to say. It is a program very much worth studying for peace education/peacebuilding ideas.

Danielle Christmas’s “From Heritage Politics to Hate” provides a cultural context for the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, South Carolina. One question that emerged from that rally is how many whites have come to see the removal of Confederate monuments as an existential threat to white identity. To answer this question, Christmas draws upon the iconography of a neo-confederate novel, *The Last Confederate*, which relies upon a “greater than average suspension of belief” to dramatize a white masculine hero, acting to defend his communities against militant archetypes of the Nation of Islam (p. 141). Christmas argues that “the novel’s archival value circles back to its heritage politics, because... the entire plot and the four pillars [of neo-Confederate rhetoric] that provide its foundation are all contingent on the life-sacrificing rescue of a large rectangular cloth printed with a design crafted in the 1860s... (p. 144). Like perhaps many analyses of political literature, the chapter offers an intriguing introduction into this literary form, but leaves lingering questions about whether and how white nationalists consume, interpret, and deploy its tropes.

In “The Legacy of Slavery,” Sarah Federman argues colleges and universities as a locus of reparations. Grounded in the logic of transitional justice, Federman effectively balances questions about the substance of reparations (such as apologies, reckoning, and compensation) with the question of where reparations can or should occur. She describes efforts Georgetown University, Brown, and other educational

*Book Review:
Building Peace in America*

institutions to account for their ties to slavery and to respond justly. And, without losing sight of national-level reparations, she demonstrates the advantages of pursuing reparations through institutions may be more committed to reflexivity, contesting colonization, and empowerment.

Gaskew's chapter, entitled "Stop Trying to Fix Policing," calls Black Americans to end their ambivalent relationship to the police as part of a larger dialogue to decolonize their minds and communities. He grounds that dialogue in five rituals of Pan African healing: learning to speak the language of police abolition; unfriending policing; decolonizing the state narrative, community-controlled justice, and the natural right of self-defense" (pp. 200-201).. Three aspects of this chapter are distinct: First, whereas Moix's chapter narrates the bifurcation of peace-building efforts abroad from U.S. justice movements, Gaskew demonstrates how transnational Black identity has long enriched the Black struggle for liberation. That is, the Pan African movement approaches transnational collaboration differently from professional peace networks (involves a fundamentally different relationship to the state). Second, the narrative arc of peace-builders, who seek to transform negative peace into positive peace, hangs in tension with Gaskew assertion, grounded in critical race theory, that racism is a "permanent" feature of all Americans institutions (p. 189). Finally, Gaskew observes that Americans have always been uneasy about the necessity Black armament and rights to self-defense (p. 200). For perhaps different reasons from the general public, the peace movement may approach that necessity with its own misgivings.

The penultimate chapter, "Empowered Women Empower Women," is perhaps the most riveting of the edited volume. Written by Shelly Clay-Robison, Melinda Burrell, Elizabeth Hume, Deena R. Hurwitz, Emily Sample, and Kate E. Temoney, the chapter begins by recounting the sexist behaviors of a man, referred to only as "The Guy" during a breakout session at the May 2018 Peace Conference. It is an innovation in form: Whereas the targets of micro-aggressions have often found their stories pushed aside and silenced, this chapter inscribes the experiences of four women into the public record of the conference. The chapter proceeds to wrestle meaningfully with the nuances of this incident: the shock the women experienced at the inappropriateness of The Guys' comments, alongside its familiarity in their previous experiences; how patriarchy might manifest itself in peace organizations in ways that are similar to, but distinct from its presence in other professional and activist settings. Thus, whereas the volume reflects upon what it means to do peace-building work in a U.S. context, this chapter asks that same question in the context of colleagues.

The final chapter, written by Patricia A Mulden, promises to offer a big picture, but that picture does not fully come into view. The chapter opens up too many lines of inquiry to wrap back up. And too frequently, Mulden trades the metaphors of chaos theory for historical and institutional specificity. Still, the chapter offers an evocative framing of the contingent, open-ended, and sometimes surprising nature of peace-building in the U.S. That framing seems fitting for a series of essays that makes notable, if uneven progress toward its goal.

References

- Autesserre, S. (2021). *The frontlines of peace: An insider's guide to changing the world*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lederach, J.P., Neufeldt, R., Culbertson, H. (2007) *Reflective peacebuilding: a planning, monitoring, and learning toolkit*. Joan B. Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. https://pulte.nd.edu/assets/172927/reflective_peacebuilding_a_planning_monitoring_and_learning_toolkit.pdf