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If There Is No Justice, There Will Be No Peace

By Adlai J. Amor



When Dat Duthinh arrived as a student at Princeton University in 1969, he sensed that the atmosphere was not normal. It was peaceful. “I had never lived in peace before,” said Dat. He only knew war.

He had already been a refugee in 1954, when his family evacuated from Hanoi to Saigon during the First Indochina War (1946–1954)—when Vietnam won its independence from France. But the war still pursued them when the United States got involved in defending the government of South Vietnam against the communist North.

Growing up in Saigon, now Ho Chi Minh City, the streets were filled with the rumblings of tanks in the streets and planes bombing the countryside. Music from bars catering to U.S. soldiers spilled into his neighborhood.

At that time, participating in anti-war protests was extremely dangerous. “There were only two types of Vietnamese: those who support the government and the communists,” Dat said. “If you don’t support the government, you are a communist and the only good communist is a dead communist.”

When he landed in the United States, Dat was pro-Vietnam War, largely because of government propaganda. But the more he researched to defend his position, he realized how wrong he was.

“What turned me around was how the French colonialists after World War II had turned U.S. opinion around to support French colonial reconquest. They did that by turning it into a fight of the free world against communism,” Dat said.

Soon he joined the anti-Vietnam War protests, not only at Princeton but also in Washington, D.C. “I felt free. If I had done anything like that in Vietnam, I would have been imprisoned. To see that a lot of Americans were against the war and marching against it was very heartening,” he said.

The anti-Vietnam War movement proved very effective, leading to its end in 1973. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War.

When asked what major lesson from the Vietnam War would apply to today’s wars, like the war in Ukraine, he stressed the need for all parties involved in the conflict to be at the same table as they negotiate peace.

In 1954—before the 1973 Paris Accord that ended the second Vietnam War—the Geneva Accord was signed, which ended the war against the French colonizers. “The Vietnamese were doing all the fighting and all the dying, but their role in the peace negotiations was not assured,” Dat said.

“To see that a lot of Americans were against the war and marching against it was very heartening.”

By the time they were invited, the Vietnamese controlled three-fourths of the country, but in the end, they had to settle for much less than what they gained on the battlefield. It caused the second Vietnam War which lasted for another 20 years.

“We should always work towards peace but I’m not in favor of peace at any price. I’m not in favor of telling Ukrainians to turn the other cheek and lay down your arms, or the U.S. to please stop supplying weapons. That would cause the subjugation of the Ukrainians within a week,” Dat said. “If there is no justice, there will be no peace.”

Although he was raised as a Buddhist, Dat was impressed by the Quakers’ unwavering support for peace in Vietnam. In 1965, he learned of the self-immolation of two Quaker peace activists, much like the Buddhist monks who set themselves on fire to protest the Vietnam War—Alice Herz in Dearborn, MI, and Norman Morrison in front of the Pentagon.

While in Vietnam, he learned of the covert voyage of the Phoenix, a ship that helped war victims in North Vietnam. It was sponsored by the American Field Service Committee and the Quaker Action Group (QAG).

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Violence Interrupters: A Key to Making Our Communities Safer

By Kristen Archer



In March, more than 300 young adults converged in Washington, D.C., (and online) to learn a new strategy for making our communities safer from gun violence: violence interrupter programs. After several days of training during Spring Lobby Weekend, March 25-28, they lobbied Congress for federal funding for these community-level conflict mediation programs.

Spring Lobby Weekend took place the same weekend as the Generation Lockdown: Made in America rally on Capitol Hill. The rally demanded more actions, including a federal assault weapons ban, at the federal and state levels to make schools safer.

It is appalling, yet painfully accurate, that this generation of young adults can now be referred to as Generation Lockdown after it has witnessed so much gun violence. As Spring Lobby Weekend participants lobbied Congress on March 27, another heavily armed mass shooter killed six people in a school in Nashville, TN.

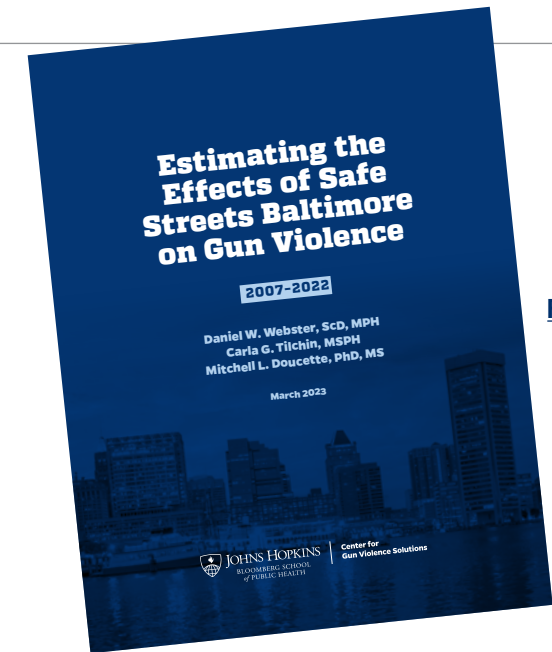
There have been 131 mass shootings (those involving four or more people) so far this year in the United States, where there are 120 guns per 100 people. FCNL and our network of advocates have lobbied Congress to reduce gun violence by limiting gun ownership, possession, and use. Still, Congress has failed to pass common-sense, responsible gun control legislation.

Although the growing number of high-profile mass shootings is alarming, community-level shootings, and suicides comprise most gun violence incidents in this country. These occurrences rarely receive much publicity, both because of their frequency and the communities they impact the most.

For this reason, we are pursuing an alternative approach: violence interrupter programs.

One such program is Safe Streets Baltimore, established in 2007. It operates in 10 Baltimore neighborhoods that have long experienced structural racism, chronic disinvestment, and high rates of gun violence.

A new study by the Center for Gun Violence Solutions of Johns Hopkins University revealed that Safe Streets reduced homicides and nonfatal shootings overall from 2007 to 2022 in Baltimore. It reduced such shootings by as much as 32% in some sites.



The new study by Johns Hopkins University can be downloaded at FCNL.org/GVStudy

Violence interrupters work within their communities to mediate conflict and de-escalate violence before it happens. They step in when they learn of the potential for escalation or retaliation and work to encourage cooler heads to prevail. As some violence interrupters have previously been involved in the justice system themselves, their experiences authenticate their efforts to save lives and offer opportunities for individuals at higher risk of violence.

“It’s powerful that you’re taking something that’s a stigma in our society—a criminal record—and making it an asset,” said José Santos Moreno, FCNL director of justice reform, at the start of Spring Lobby Weekend.

Violence interrupters are not law enforcement personnel, but their work often reduces the need for police intervention. This is a key to their success. Too often, politicians’ default response to increased community violence has been to pump more money into policing.

“These increases in police spending are supposed to make our communities safer, but there is little evidence that this approach meaningfully reduces crime and violence,” FCNL’s Michiya Cooper recently wrote.

Issues rooted in racism and white supremacy—such as underinvestment in education, housing, economic opportunity, community development, and infrastructure—underpin violence in urban communities.

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◀ Participants in the 2023 FCNL Spring Lobby Weekend gather around program staff from Safe Streets Baltimore following a powerful panel discussion on violence interrupter programs in the city. Photo by Wesley Wolfbear Pinkham/FCNL.

(Justice, Peace from page 3)


Although he eventually married a Quaker, Anne Buttenheim, Dat did not realize that he was a Quaker until he was offered his first engineering job—building nuclear silos and structures that could withstand a direct hit by a nuclear bomb. He turned down the job.

“As I reflected on that offer, I guess I became a Quaker then,” Dat said.

Today, he is a member of the Frederick Meeting in Frederick, MD. He is also very active with Peace Action, Prevent Nuclear War, and FCNL.

Although he arrived in the United States as a penniless student, Dat worked hard, eventually earning a doctorate degree in structural engineering from Cornell University.

He recently retired after having worked for 26 years as a scientist at the National Institute of Standards and Technology.


Adlai Amor is FCNL's associate general secretary for communications. 

(Gun Violence from page 5)

Homelessness, mass criminalization, and incarceration are also realities that disproportionately affect Black and brown people in urban settings. The investments that are effective in quelling community-level violence are those that center humanity, address root causes, and minimize additional harm.

“When I am out there, I’m locked in. I know what it feels like to lose a child. I know what it feels like ... I would not give it up for anything in the world. I have a passion for people,” said Nicole Warren, a violence interrupter with Safe Streets Baltimore. It is this passion that makes violence interrupter programs successful.

As more gun violence occurs, there is growing support to end it. President Joe Biden called for support for violence interrupter programs in his State of the Union Address in February. The fact that two groups of young people lobbied Congress at the same time in Spring—one for a federal assault weapons ban and FCNL for investments in violence interrupter programs—speaks to the enormity of the problem and the solutions.

Kristen Archer is FCNL's editorial and social media director. 



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Cover: SLW Delegates lobby Senator Maria Cantwell (WA) on securing funding for violence interrupter programs. Photo by Taylor Monet/FCNL.

Blessed are the Peacemakers
for they will be called children of God.

— Matthew 5:9

 Friends Committee on National Legislation

Lobbying with Quakers at FCNL.org

We hold in the Light the thousands of American and Vietnamese soldiers and civilians who died during the Vietnam War.

We thank the thousands of peace activists who protested, lobbied, and worked to end the Vietnam War 50 years ago.

Bringing the 1969 Anti-War Protests to the Screen

By Alex Frandsen

Robert Levering was uniquely qualified to serve as the executive producer of “The Movement and the ‘Madman,’” a recently released documentary centered on the anti-war protests of 1969.

After all, he was there.

Levering, an FCNL General Committee member based in California, was one of the staff members behind the Nov. 15, 1969, demonstration against the Vietnam War. More than half a million protesters took to the streets of Washington, D.C., calling for an end to the war. It was one of the largest anti-war protests in U.S. history.

In Levering’s eyes, the protest had been neglected in portrayals of Vietnam War-era activism. “There have been films about the anti-war movement within the American military. And there have been some really good films about the Vietnam War itself,” said Levering. “But there just wasn’t a lot of storytelling about the more mainstream anti-war movement that millions of Americans were involved with.”

Now, thanks in part to Levering, that has changed. “The Movement and the ‘Madman’” premiered as a special presentation of the American Experience PBS series on March 28. It explores how the massive protests in late 1969 caused President Richard Nixon to cancel plans for a massive escalation of the U.S. war in Vietnam—including threats to use nuclear weapons.

The impact of the protests has remained largely unknown, even to those who attended them. Levering himself had not understood their influence until he spoke with Daniel Ellsberg, the famous anti-war activist behind the Pentagon Papers. “I heard him say more than once that the demonstrations in ‘69 had a big impact on Nixon,” Levering said. “I thought, ‘Well, that’s interesting, but is it true?’ And after doing more research, I realized it could be a really good story to tell.”

For Levering, it was also a chance to return to his past. He was a full-time organizer against the Vietnam War from 1967 to 1973, working part of that time with the American Friends Service Committee. Levering, a Quaker himself,

played a vital role in planning and preparing for the Nov. 15, 1969, rally. He views Quakerism as a core aspect of both his advocacy then and his storytelling now.


“Quakers were deeply involved in the anti-war movement,” said Levering. “From draft counseling to local vigils to FCNL’s lobbying, they were everywhere. And Quakers are featured in the film.”

In addition to his commitment to peace, Levering also suspects that Quakerism influenced his work process on the documentary. “In telling this story, it was very important to have the Quaker value of integrity. I do not know if it is journalism or Quakerism, but I thought it was important to talk to everyone involved,” he said.



That commitment to exploring every angle of the 1969 protests led to some surprising moments. At one point in the documentary, for instance, Henry Kissinger’s aide, Anthony Lake, revealed that he had wished that he could join the demonstration.

More broadly, Levering hopes that the documentary will resonate with advocates today. “The film is extraordinarily clear on this point. You will not always know the impact of your actions at the time. You may not think you are having an effect, but you are. Much more than you can imagine. It is ultimately a real message of hope.”

“The Movement and the ‘Madman’” is available for online streaming at PBS’s American Experience website. 

Q&A: Telling the Truth

With David Hartsough

*David Hartsough, a former staff member of FCNL, is the author of the book *Waging Peace: Global Adventures of a Lifelong Activist*. This Q&A is excerpted from a 2022 interview for FCNL's oral archives conducted by Kristen Archer.*

What brought you to FCNL?

I went to an American Friends Service Committee seminar in Washington and one of the things we did was to visit FCNL. Frances Neely, who was on the staff, took a dollar bill and cut it into slices. About half of it was for the military and for wars, and then there were tiny little slices for education, healthcare, and Social Security. That stuck with me for years.

Tell us about your meeting with President John F. Kennedy.

Ed Snyder invited me to be a part of the delegation to meet President Kennedy in the White House in May 1962. We sat in a semi-circle at the Oval Office, with Pres. Kennedy on his rocking chair next to the fireplace. We encouraged him to take more leadership and move us away from the nuclear arms race.

We had heard that a nuclear submarine was going to be named the William Penn. We said we don't believe in nuclear submarines, and William Penn would turn over in his grave. After 25 minutes, his secretary came in, told him his next appointment was there, and he said, "Tell them to wait. I'm learning something from these Quakers."

How did you convince members of Congress to read the names of soldiers who died in Vietnam?

It wasn't exactly my job with FCNL, but Quakers began coming to

Washington on Wednesdays to read the names of the war dead on the Capitol steps. They would only get through 50, 60 names and they'd be arrested for demonstrating without a permit. I got arrested. After three weeks of Quakers getting arrested, I asked Congressman George Brown of Southern California for help.

He took a big puff out of a cigar and leaned back on his swivel chair, and he says, "Yeah," he said, "I think I will join you. Furthermore, I'm going to write to every member of Congress telling them what I'm going to do and invite them to join us."

So the next day we had three members of Congress on the Capitol steps who joined us reading the names of the war dead. And when the Quakers were all arrested, the congressmen continued reading 40,000 names of the Americans who had died. They had immunity, they could not be arrested.

What did FCNL and Quakers bring to the anti-war movement?

FCNL was really taking the lead and showing by example. It's not enough just to educate the people back home about what was going on, we needed to go over and rub noses with these people that had the power to make some key life-and-death decisions about war and peace.

We convened a lot of meetings of church groups and other peace groups. We briefed all kinds of people coming to Washington.



Bridget Moix with David Hartsough and his wife, Janet.
Photo by Stephen Donahoe/FCNL.

And people saw by example of what we're doing at William Penn House (now Friends Place) with the regular educating members of Congress about what was going on.

What advice would you offer to people working for peace today?

FCNL must continue to go to the Hill—speaking truth to power and educating and encouraging members of Congress to do the right thing and take the leadership in ending these wars.

The military and those that want to fight these wars have gotten smarter and keep things secret. Now it's just pervasive how false information is getting out. I've gotten to know Daniel Ellsberg very well, who faced 150 years in prison for telling the truth about the Vietnam War. His advice to me is, "Tell the truth because without the truth, how can a democracy work if people don't have accurate information?"

It was a great joy and a great privilege to work closely with both Raymond Wilson and Ed Snyder in the 1960s. I know that FCNL's continuing to do very important work, so thank you. 