



Pacifism as Pathology: Reflections on the Role of Armed Struggle in North America

Ward Churchill , Derrick Jensen (Introduction) , Mike Ryan (Contributor)

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"This extraordinarily important book cuts to the heart of one of the central reasons movements to bring about social and environmental justice always fail. The fundamental question here is: is violence ever an acceptable tool to help bring about social change? This is probably the most important question of our time, yet so often discussions around it fall into clichés and magical thinking: that somehow if we are merely good and nice enough people, the state will stop using its violence to exploit us all. Would that this were true."—Derrick Jensen, author of *Endgame*, from the introduction.

Pacifism, the ideology of nonviolent political resistance, has been the norm among mainstream North American progressive groups for decades. But to what end? Ward Churchill challenges the pacifist movement's heralded victories—Gandhi in India, 1960s antiwar activists, even Martin Luther King's civil rights movement—suggesting that their success was in spite of, rather than because of, their nonviolent tactics. *Pacifism as Pathology* was written as a response not only to Churchill's frustration with his own activist experience, but also to a debate raging in the activist and academic communities. He argues that pacifism is in many ways counterrevolutionary; that it defends the status quo, and doesn't lead to social change. In these times of upheaval and global protest, this is a vital and extremely relevant book.

Ward Churchill is a prolific writer and lecturer, having authored, co-authored, or edited over twenty books. He is a member of the leadership council of Colorado AIM (American Indian Movement).

In Oakland, California on March 24, 2015 a fire destroyed the AK Press warehouse along with several other businesses. Please consider visiting the AK Press website to learn more about the fundraiser to help them and their neighbors.

Pacifism as Pathology: Reflections on the Role of Armed Struggle in North America Details

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Jeff says

What a book. It's sad how one of the most important conversations that the left needs to be having right now is relegated to like 2 or 3 books published by PM or AK Press... If you want the gist of this book I highly recommend reading Jensen's intro: <http://www.derrickjensen.org/2007/01/...>

Don says

Reminds me a bit of the Unabomber's tiresome tome.

Blackpanther01 says

The book speaks truth to power, although many would like to believe that non-violence and cooperation with the state is the only way, it is historically inaccurate. I liked this one particular paragraph, They tell us that by wanting to fight back, we are being dualistic, separating the world into us and them. "Pacifists tell us the ends never justify the means. This is a statement of values disguised as a statement of morals. A person who says ends don't justify means is simply saying: I value process more than outcome. Someone who says ends do justify means is merely saying: I value outcome more than process. Look at it this way, it becomes absurd to make absolute statements about it. There are some ends that justify the some means, and there are some ends that do not." Pacifism only serves to protect the state, and protect the oppressor, and endanger the oppressed. I recommend this book, highly.

Ed says

interesting take on non-violence as white entitlement

Tyler Anderson says

Ward Churchill has the nerve to point out that if Jews, Queers, Communists and Freemasons had capped one Nazi Gestapo officer each, when they roundups began, Hitler's Germany would have run out of Gestapo long, long before the Holocaust got underway. Could'a Should'a Would'a, I know, but the point is taken.

For violating the dogma that states "It is best to just let the government kill you and your children, because violence is bad," (and for pointing out that White America needs to stop acting surprised when the rest of the world flips out and does something awful to us, instead of just surrendering absolutely everything to us gladly) Churchill has been completely excoriated, denigrated, and persecuted.

Even if you totally disagree, before, after, or both, Churchill is worth a read, and this is a very perky and readable intro to his writings.

(Later note: I was enthused to find the same argument in the positions of Frederick Douglass, who posited that it was better for the world for one to blow away the guy trying to kidnap you and your family and sell them into slavery, than to remain passive and prayerful in the face of boundless malice. I couldn't agree more.)

Arielle88 says

Churchill makes a very powerful argument against certain types of Western pacifism. It's certainly easy to be a pacifist you're not the target of the system's violence. The biggest "wow" moment for me was when Churchill took on academic pacifist-types who support violent anti-imperial struggles abroad. Churchill brilliantly argues how their positioning of their role as the discursive attackers of the system allied with subaltern populations fighting imperialism abroad reproduces the dynamics of imperialism. Colonizers located and educated in the West are positioned in a role of intellectual leadership over the left, and as such more valuable than the masses of non-white people fighting for their land-base and survival, whose deaths are tolerated.

I take issue with Churchill's take on Gandhi and other non-violent resisters who won their struggle. Churchill points out that India's independence was only won as a result of Britain being severely weakened after WW2, and that in normal circumstances, Britain could have contained the resistance. Okay, but what are "normal circumstances" for a violent imperial empire? I would argue that intermittent catastrophes, violent wars and economic collapses, all moments of vulnerability, are inevitable in the course of running empires that sustains themselves on violently dispossessing outsiders (and certain classes of insiders). It's during those moments of weakness that empires are most vulnerable to upheaval.

I guess my point is that I agree that violent resistance is sometimes the only option, often the best option, but I don't think it's always necessarily the most effective tactical option. I agree that the embrace of Pacifism by Western activists is overwhelmingly hypocritical and self-righteous, but I wouldn't dismiss pacifism as a basis of resistance altogether. Nor does Churchill, really, he affirms his respect for non-violent resisters whose tactics directly attack the system and who are willing to take a hit and suffer violent reprisals. By and large I agree with him, I think we just draw the line a little differently.

I was kinda taken aback by Churchill's characterization of feminism as being a frivolous movement concerned with "fanny-pinching". Seriously, you felt the need to make that point? Violence against women is a huge problem, kills a lot of people... I get that he was writing in 1986, and that back then feminism did not paint gender as intersectional with race and class, which it totally is. Since then, there's been a ton written on how colonization and imperial wars target women and utilize Western sex and gender roles to subjugate and divide colonized populations. A great book on this topic is *Conquest* by Andrea Smith.

Jordan says

Jensen's introduction was strange and used odd metaphors, although I generally agreed with the points he

was making by the time he meandered around to laying them out.

Churchill's main text was excellent and raised a lot of good points about the privilege and ineffectiveness of pacifist activism.

Alex says

Love the critique of the "violence begets violence" attitude of the bourgeois-liberal American "left". His argument of it as a pathological condition leaves something to be desired, but his therapeutic solution is downright hilarious.

Marius Jaan says

Potent. In today's reactionary and peace police-dominated environment, Churchill's 30 year old book is needed. Fueling its value are the Preface, Foreword, Introduction, and the two additional brief commentaries/engagements by Michael Ryan. Not window dressing these; engaged, vibrant they help connect Churchill's discussion within larger questions. They also magnetize Churchill's modest and common sensical proposals.

Militants, wannabe militants, Black Blocers, Antifa, and the millions of middle class white people mindlessly committed to pacifism and non-violence would do well to read this book. Churchill offers an armed Interzone with working concepts, frameworks, and vocabularies. Armed or not, pacifist or not, engaging with this short piece work may do many movements a favor: it can build their tactical, strategic, and philosophical vocabularies. It can create common ground for short and long-term alliances. Whether we accept or reject Churchill's militarized common ground is less relevant than the fact that progressive and militants might actually have an honest and detailed discussion. We could expand our shared language.

Writing is raucous, enraged, righteous, and a roller coaster. Loved it. I can't offer just one quote to justify this claim. One quote cannot suffice.

Politically, especially for self-described liberals, this book is essential. If you align with peace movements but actually read and engage with Churchill's work honestly and do not require non-violence as a premise, if you don't accept the deceptions that Gandhi's non-violence alone ended colonial rule, that it was not MLK, Jr.'s non-violence alone that improved Civil Rights in America, you may come to the conclusion that a robust movement, one that has a holistic strategy that employs multiple tactics and methods, includes unarmed and armed struggle. If you want to actually change social structures and not just obtain superficial classist reforms, then robust movements, diverse movements, are necessary.

Militant resistance groups like the UFF (United Freedom Front), BLA (Black Liberation Army) or WUO (Weather Underground Organization) can't simply be imitated and pasted in today's culture. That won't work. Current surveillance technologies and police tactics, not to mention the privatized infiltration and provocation by groups like the Oath Keepers, means adaption is key to survival and encouraging serious change.

Flowers in gun barrels is an old strategy. It worked in certain times and places. Then not now. Check your

stats: oligarchs are richer, climate is hotter, and more people of color around the world are murdered and slaughtered. Here in the USA, our prisons bloat. As a single source solution, pacifism has failed.

Unlike pacifists who claim their solution is the only solution, Churchill does not claim or argue that the way of the gun is the only way. Far from it. Instead, if readers actually attend to and think through his assertions and challenges, they will likely better understand their own positions on direct action, what type of actions they personally find acceptable or not, and—hopefully—a willingness to allow for others to make up their own mind instead of dictating a universalist approach to activism. Or at least they won't snitch on militants.

Churchill's argumentation is solid, his voice compelling, and the evidence thorough and consistent.

There is no chance that any self-satisfied white liberal could intellectually or politically enter an honest, engaged encounter with Pacifism as Pathology and not emerge changed. White activists who feel confused about how they can be an ally or support movements should drop everything and read this book. Churchill can help you sort out your thinking.

A powerful book. An incredible piece of propaganda. Calcified classist cowardice dies under its lens.

Greg says

This is a hard book for me to rate. Churchill's broad argument, that sometimes armed struggle is necessary depending on the context is something that I agree with. However, the problem I have with this book, is that he can and did make that argument quickly and clearly. He points out that it is perfectly morally defensible for a woman to violently defend herself from a would be rapist, even to the potential death of her assailant. I agree 100%. I think any reasonable person would agree with that.

But, he constantly refers to the most extreme examples, calling up the holocaust on multiple occasions. And, again, I would agree that the victims of the Final Solution had every moral right to fight back. The problem there is he makes the case that the ones who did not fight back, were wrong. It's easy to sit in the future and judge with the benefit of hindsight what a person should or should not have done. It's like watching a sporting event from the stands and snidely commenting on how one of the teams is making all kinds of mistakes. It's easy to do from the outside. When you're in the thick of it, it's not so clear. In any case, his point is easily made using extreme examples.

Yet, the essay drones on for almost 80 pages where he uses examples of revolutionary activity to justify armed resistance. And, I can't help but notice that every example he uses is a leftist/socialist example. Mao Tsetung, Che Guevarra, Fidel Castro, the Bolsheviks. There is an obvious case to be made for the justification of armed struggle with the American Revolution. It's absent, and I think I know why.

The whole time reading this book, I was resisting the urge to consider this just radical leftist propaganda. However, I have to be completely honest... if it quacks like a duck, and walks like a duck... you know where I'm going.

I particularly took issue with multiple statements he made on psychology that I know to be false. He was writing with such an air of surety, as if he were a psychologist, that I looked him up. He's not a psychologist. He went on to suggest that people who insist on maintaining a non-violent attitude be given 'therapy' to 'cure' them of it. I only have an undergraduate degree in psychology, but the methods he suggest would be roundly

rejected by an ethics board of board certified psychologists. He isn't talking about therapy, he's talking about indoctrination. The methods he suggest draw a strong image in my mind of what "gay conversion therapy" must look like.

I read this book because a friend at work read it and she recommended it. I only saw it's title and the immediate thought intrigued me. Because, I would not consider myself a pacifist. I'm not a violent person, and I'd go a long, long way to avoid a fight. My initial thought was it had to do with why in interpersonal violence some people won't defend themselves. But, that's not what I got. I stuck with it because I think it's important to expose yourself to ideas with which you strongly disagree. If this conversation is one you're interested in, then it might be worth the read. However, from my point of view, the conclusions that are drawn are something that I would consider pathological in their own right.

I will say this for Churchill: His writing style is easy to follow. He doesn't fall into that trap that a lot of career academics or 'intellectuals' fall into where they feel like they have to write in a way that is so confusing, just so they can lord it over you that you weren't intelligent enough to follow them. For the most part, he writes directly, and his logical threads are easy to follow. And, I don't say that condescendingly. It's one of my biggest pet peeves when reading academic works. So, he has that going for him.

Bricoleur (David) Soul says

We can simply watch our systems collapse.

We can try to design successor systems before the collapse.

Or we can try to hasten the collapse with no idea of what might replace that which we have.

This book maintains the 3rd is right and that protest that delays the "right timing", are wrong while itself failing to attempt reflection on if the proposed solution is in itself a very special pathology prohibiting the building of better systems to replace what was.

Liz says

This most recent edition of Ward Churchill's essay "Pacifism as Pathology" includes not only the original text, but three additional essays/reflections on Churchill's work, by other authors.

I can't explain how valuable, necessary and timely this collection is. Churchill's essay is a poignant and scathing description of how major pacifist movements have not only failed to fulfill any meaningful political agenda, but have only served to protect those in power while undermining those who they claim to act in solidarity with.

Churchill gives several in-depth reviews of the pacifist movements most western activists are familiar with, including Ghandi's pacifism toward British invasion, Martin Luther King Junior's pacifism toward segregation, American pacifism toward the Vietnam War, and even Jewish pacifism to the Nazi regime.

With each analysis, he carefully provides an airtight account of how the behavior of pacifism has damaged the struggle of the oppressed, and uplifted the oppressors. Furthermore, he debunks major pacifist claims of victory as either false, or really belonging to those working in underground cells practicing violent uprising (The Black Panthers for example)

Also debunked are many popular pacifist theories like "violence begets more violence" and "if you just explain everything the right way, people will understand their error and stop doing X Y or Z because you have proven them morally indefensible."

Churchill provides strong and provocative evidence that pacifism is a tool used only to maintain the status quo, while providing a dangerous and counter-revolutionary blanket of righteousness for those who practice it, further undermining those facing real peril.

I would recommend this book for every single person alive today, especially those in comfortable bubbles within developed nations who still believe that a healthy debate or public symposium is the best way to attack a problem.

E says

I'm not quite sure what to make of this book. On the one hand, it's the most compelling and concise criticism of Euroamerican pacifist/nonviolence movements I've read to date, and I agree with many of the points made by Churchill (as well as Ed Mead and Mike Ryan). I think Churchill is absolutely right that symbolic rather than material resistance has come to dominate nonviolent oppositional tactics, that there is a tremendous amount of hypocrisy among those who support armed resistance in the Global South but not North America (a sure case of NIMBY if ever there was one), and that pacifism as practiced today seems to constantly ask, "what sort of politics might I engage in which will both allow me to posture as a progressive and allow me to avoid incurring harm to myself?" Absolutely, yes.

On the other hand, I take issue with some of Churchill's generalizations, and in particular his absolute dismissal of anyone who disagrees with him. He simply does not allow for the possibility that a person can arrive at a principled, nuanced pacifist position; instead he characterizes all pacifists as deluded and living in a fantasy world where moral superiority alone is supposed to triumph over a repressive state. Pacifists are, in essence, mentally ill: "it is easy enough to discern that pacifism – far from being a praxis adequate to impel revolutionary change – assumes the configuration of a pathological illness when advanced as a political methodology." His solution? Radical therapy. I have no idea what the meat and bones of radical therapy is and consequently I don't feel like I can make any judgments about it, but I'm immediately wary of a situation wherein "the role of the therapist is to draw each participant out into a full and noncontradictory elaboration, as well as to facilitate the emergence of a potential for future, ongoing reevaluation and development of revolutionary consciousness." I don't think it should be a therapist's job to deliberately inculcate patients with a particular political ideology, be it one of revolutionary violence or neoconservative economic predation.

A few other things: Churchill argues that leftists in favour of gun control policies hold such positions because they're afraid of firearms or ignorant of how they work, again as if it's simply impossible or inconsistent that someone can have a nuanced view of firearms distribution, one where the state does not hold a monopoly of force but where another Marc Lepine would be unable to access a semi-automatic rifle, for example. Also, my instinct is to rear back a bit when Churchill writes about Jewish pacifism (which he does not distinguish from passivity), and of the Sonderkommando. I suppose this is my beef with the entire argument: I have a hard time issuing blanket approvals of armed liberation when there are no clear parameters outside of which violence becomes forbidden, when it is no longer necessary, when liberation has indeed been achieved. I am not a pacifist but I'm not a utopianist either, because history teaches me that guerilla/liberation movements (not to mention socialist states!) are just as capable of committing unnecessary and immoral acts of violence. When, for example, did Shining Path cross the line from being a 'legitimate' liberation army to being a murderous gang roving across the countryside of Peru? Churchill seems to rely on

the very same moral righteousness he so despises in pacifists, rather than providing any actual guidance about such situations.

So... *Pacifism as Pathology* is a great, succinct book for what it is, and I agree with many – perhaps most – of Churchill's positions on the necessity of violence in effecting substantive political change. My issues are more or less with his polemics, and some of the larger philosophical questions he fails to address. I'm reminded of how Ian McKay describes the literature on the history of the Canadian Left: "They often stir up a potent brew of sectarianism and sentimentality. Sectarianism: *our tradition* has the goods, and every other approach to the left is mired in error and illusion. *Here* we have the truth. *There* you find the erroneous others. Sentimentality: *our heroes* were never complicated, cowardly or inconsistent." Churchill falls into that trap, and while that doesn't take away from the strength of his argument, it makes the book a somewhat less convincing read.

Graybird says

Really not a Ward Churchill fan, especially after reading this book. The point that he makes throughout the book is legitimate; however, his tone is moralistic and very self-righteous and reeks of privilege, which I found extremely off-putting. His definition of resistance as armed revolt and armed revolt only is excessively narrow, and it invisibilizes countless profound liberation movements and tactics that were not pacifistic but under his definition would have been labeled so. I appreciate the ethos of rejecting a hierarchy of violence; however, I feel like a much more comprehensive, realistic, and less privileged enumeration of this idea can be found in *How Nonviolence Protects the State* by Peter Gelderloos.

Keegan says

To read this book with an open mind, one must begin by acknowledging the fact that the luxuries and lifestyles enjoyed in the first world are dependent upon violence and destruction propagated in the third world. As Churchill says "Pacifists, no less than their unpacifist counterparts, are quite aware that violence already exists as an integral component in the execution of state policies and requires no provocation" (70). A horrible example of this is occurring in Peru as I write this. A "fair trade" agreement was made between the Peruvian government and the United States government that allows Exxon Mobile and other multinational companies to explore the relatively untouched Peruvian rainforests, as they pay monetary compensation for the lands they deface. However, indigenous people still live in these forests, and money matters little to them. They are being kicked off their land because the government says they have no "right" to it – they don't hold titles, just like Native Americans did not hold titles when Columbus arrived at the New World. Now that these indigenous people have banded together and peacefully protested this injustice, they are being killed. At least 90 have been murdered so far, all because of an agreement between Peru and America, which was made so that Exxon can continue to provide us American's with oil for our cars, planes, laptops, and packaging.

Churchill's most contentious point is that the only way to directly divert the violence propagated against other for our benefit is to violently fight that system ourselves. Peaceful protests, he argues, even if they log-jam the system, do not divert troops and ammunition.

Churchill's final point, is that if you admit these two facts, it is morally unconscionable to refuse to engage in violence against the state when the state is violent against others for your benefit.

This argument lends itself to his use of the term pathology. "The psychopathic individual is characterized by

the absence of the guilt feelings and anxiety that normally accompany an antisocial act” (10).

Basically, we should constantly feel terrible about what is happening in places like Peru, simply to maintain our way of life, so terrible that we are willing to assume some of that violence against ourselves.

The point is well taken. There would obviously be more outcry if 90 peaceful American protests had been killed than those recently killed in Peru. As we saw in the Vietnam War, effective outcry occurred not because of peaceful protests, but because American children had to stand on the front lines to defend America's neocolonialism (74).

But because of the complexity of neocolonialism, engaging the national guard would not directly divert troops from killing protesters in Peru, because the Peruvian government is using its troops against its own people, while the U.S. Government stands back and waits to reap the outcome. However, this is not always the case. As the Killer Coke campaign highlights, the U.S. Military has violently defended international corporations whose “progress” has been slowed by non-violent protests in the third world.

Churchill argues that throughout history, peaceful protests that have log-jammed the system have been effective, but only when supplemented with activity that weakens the violent powers of the state. He discusses the Holocaust, the Indian independent movement, the civil rights movement, and Vietnam.

Holocaust (47): many Jews could have been saved with more violent uprising. Their pacifists tactics did not save them, the intense violence of the allied forces did – 54 “Left to a pacifist prescription for the altering of offensive state policies, and the effecting of positive social change, 'World Jewry' – at least in its Eurasian variants – would have suffered total extermination.”

Indian Independence (55): Their success came in that their form of pacifism clogged the system – did not work with it in the extreme peaceful protests of contemporary America. And this pacifist tactic was only successful because British forces were spread too thin with the violent world wars 55: “While the Mahatma and his followers were able to remain 'pure,' their victory was contingent upon others physically gutting their opponents for them.”

Civil Rights(56), basically says that the state made King look good to encourage that sort of protest, a sort they could manage, control, acquiesce to without changing much. And this turns into his larger point, that non-violent protest has become a sort of internalized form of rebellion that the state is totally prepared to deal with, and allow to happen because it only reinforces the myth that we live in a free and just society.

Vietnam: “The perceived ineffectiveness with which (Lyndon Johnson) prosecuted the war, (was) brought about not by pacifist parades in American streets, but by Vietnamese armed resistance” (74).

The essential contradiction (57): “The essential contradiction inherent to pacifist praxis is that, for survival itself, any nonviolent confrontation of state power must ultimately depend either on the state refraining from unleashing some real measure of its potential violence, or the active presence of some counterbalancing violence of precisely the sort pacifism professes to reject as a political option.”

His most scathing points come toward the end of the book, when he argues that if the mostly affluent white pacifists in America condemn violence while it is necessary in third world struggles, a new hierarchy could emerge after the violence of the state is repealed, where white pacifists claim moral superiority over violent revolutionary, and espouse to hold the theoretical superiority in a new society: “social relations which could serve to largely replicate the present privileged social position of whites” (85).

His most important point is that contemporary American protesters and protests are becoming ineffectively passive. People are not willing to stand up for even the most important causes if it may harm them or their long-term standing in society. “What sort of politics might I engage in which will both allow me to posture as a progressive and allow me to avoid incurring harm to myself?” (61). In concur with this criticism. When I try to rally people to events and actions, I always find myself assuring them that they won't be hurt and their actions will be entirely unarrestable, which makes me think their pacifist stances are far more about personal safety and freedom than ideology. For example, when Students for Free Tibet were organizing actions surrounding the Beijing olympics, I heard many people say they were not willing to take part in this struggle for abused and murdered monks, because they might lose their own freedom to travel to China in the future. Churchill then discusses the type of contemporary American protests that evolve from this mentality, where

protesters obtain the necessary permits, let police know ahead of time what illegal actions they may engage in so that they can be prepared to arrest that amount of people, etc. “Both sides of the 'contestation' concur that the smooth functioning of the state's processes may not be physically disturbed, at least not in any significant way” (63). “Clearly the state allows us to engage in these actions because they are harmless or, worse, because they reinforce the popular myth of...democracy” (122).

This is what has really angered Churchill about pacifism – it's passive complicity in the violence of the state. “Rather than pursuing Gandhi's (or to a much lesser extent, King's) method of using passive bodies to literally clog the functioning of the state apparatus – regardless of the cost to those doing the clogging – the American nonviolent movement has increasingly opted for 'symbolic actions’” (63).

Throughout the book, it was odd to me that he never mentioned the incident at Wounded Knee in 1973, a great example of how violent protests can and did divert military intelligence, personnel, and resources from neocolonial wars abroad to the homeland. During the occupation, the two people who died on a reservation in the United States drew more attention to the unjust policies of the U.S. Government than the thousands dying in Vietnam, and the event informed the nation of the ills dealt Native American to this day, far more than other non-violent demonstrations such as the siege of Alcatraz and the BIA building. Perhaps most importantly, it became a lightning rod for groups and individuals who are willing to engage with violence for the state. Many people who are organize and participate in non-violent demonstrations are willing to engage in violent demonstrations if they believe the purpose is important enough, and it if will succeed to any measure, but opportunities like these are few and far between. Revolutionaries cannot merely pick up a gun and go to war with the state. Without the circumstances surrounding Wounded Knee – the issues facing Native America, the U.S., and the state of the media – those revolutionaries would quickly be brought down, and deemed terrorism by the system and general public.

Derrick Jensen's introduction adds a lot to this edition of the book, because many of his strengths are Churchill's weaknesses. He does a great job of deconstructing many of the platitudes of pacifism, particularly on pg 19 with his deconstruction of an aversion to use the “master's tools.” He proves we need to use our tools at our disposal, and only by giving the most effective ones up do we create the master/servant dichotomy. We cannot give up media or language even though the state misuses the, so why draw other lines.

Of escaping from violence with violence does lowering you to your oppressors “level” he says: 53 “May it rightly be suggested that those who took up arms against their executioners crossed the same symbolic line demarcating good and evil, becoming 'the same' as the SS?” This is a particularly important distinction because of most pacifists willingness to except violent revolutions in third world countries. If one argues that their violence is justified, surely less violence in the U.S. that could help their cause even more because of the media presence here, is also justified.

Other nice quotes from introduction:

17: Love does not imply pacifism, and I think a mother grizzly will back me up on this one.

12: But I'll tell you something important: the Jews who participated in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, including those who went on what they thought were suicide missions, had a higher rate of survival than those who went along.

15: That's the good thing about everything being so fucked up: no matter where you look there is great work to be done.

24: I can change myself all I want. If damns still stand, salmon still die.

25: To say that violence never accomplishes anything not only degrades the suffering of those harmed by violence but it also devalues the triumphs of those who have fought their way out of abusive or exploitative situations.

Degrading the suffering of those harmed by violence is very important. Violence obviously accomplishes a lot of oppression and demoralization.

The afterward by Mike Ryan also helps Churchill's case.

“Another deformation, one which serves as a cushion against breaking with comfort zone politics, is the concept that there is no enemy, that we are all victims (oppressed and oppressors alike), victims of a state gone out of control. This concept is undoubtedly the result of the fact that nonviolence is often a white movement response to forms of repression which do not directly affect them” (133).

I think that with any honesty, relatively privileged, free Americans must admit that their struggles with the state pale in comparison to people in the third world who are living with violent oppression from our state and others that work in conjunction against them, for our benefit.

We “leave Third and Fourth World peoples in the front line of the very real and very violent struggle between imperialism and liberation while we continue to reap the benefits of a comfort zone created by their oppression” (133).

To remain pacifist while this struggle continues, yet desire to create a new, just society is “The wish to build up a luxury socialism on the fruits of imperialist robbery,” -Marcel Peju.

“It may well be that our self-imposed inability to act decisively, far from having anything at all to do with reduction of violence, is instead perpetuating the greatest process of violence in history...These strategies are nothing but a complex, psychological self-deception that allows us to pose as revolutionaries from within our comfort zones” (149).

Even if someone dies in a nonviolent protest, their action can be brushed aside as misguided actions of confused individuals standing in the way of progress, the largess of which they enjoy in their freedom to protest. On the other hand, it is hard to argue that one enjoys the system if they seek to physically destroy it. And no one can shrug you off if you take over.
