

THE FAILURE of  
NONVIOLENCE:  
FROM the  
ARAB SPRING  
to OCCUPY

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PETER GELDERLOOS  
*author of How Nonviolence Protects the State*

# **The Failure of Nonviolence: From the Arab Spring to Occupy**

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# The Failure of Nonviolence: From the Arab Spring to Occupy

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## **The Failure of Nonviolence: From the Arab Spring to Occupy** Peter Gelderloos

From the Arab Spring to the plaza occupation movement in Spain, the student movement in the UK and Occupy in the US, many new social movements have started peacefully, only to adopt a diversity of tactics as they grew in strength and collective experiences. The last ten years have revealed more clearly than ever the role of nonviolence. Propped up by the media, funded by the government, and managed by NGOs, nonviolent campaigns around the world have helped oppressive regimes change their masks, and have helped police to limit the growth of rebellious social movements. Increasingly losing the debates within the movements themselves, proponents of nonviolence have increasingly turned to the mainstream media and to government and institutional funding to drown out critical voices.

The Failure of Nonviolence examines most of the major social upheavals since the end of the Cold War to establish what nonviolence can accomplish, and what a diverse, unruly, non-pacified movement can accomplish. Focusing especially on the Arab Spring, Occupy, and the recent social upheavals in Europe, this book discusses how movements for social change can win ground and open the spaces necessary to plant the seeds of a new world.

## **The Failure of Nonviolence: From the Arab Spring to Occupy Details**

Date : Published July 28th 2013 by Left Bank Books (first published January 1st 2013)

ISBN :

Author : Peter Gelderloos

Format : Paperback 306 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Politics, Philosophy



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# From Reader Review The Failure of Nonviolence: From the Arab Spring to Occupy for online ebook

## Jenn says

I think this is a well-argued book with interesting examples. I thought it was better than How Nonviolence Protects the State, partly because it's more timely, partly because the arguments are a bit more mature. I also thought the last section of the book on strategy and creating truly diverse tactics is a totally important read for anyone involved in any kind of activism, regardless of their stance on non-violence.

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## Daniel says

I am sympathetic to Gelderloos' overarching argument and thesis, but I think he shoots himself in the foot with forced, overstated, easy arguments ("it is worth noting that so and so's book does not denounce killing puppies") and peppered meaningless insults (eg: "the authoritarian Muslim Brotherhood" --thanks bro, we don't need your cheap guidance on how to feel about them, especially when you make no effort to explain and the argument is just as forceful without the editorial adjective).

My eventual review of this book (since I am too far behind the reading group to bring up these issues in person to comrades) will basically be a list of dumb shit Gelderloos says. And this despite my total agreement with his overall thesis. Maybe I'll make it into the appendix of the next book, har har har.

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## Jack says

This took me over 6 months to complete it was a very difficult read and I have very mixed feelings about it. Many of my friends were criticized in the book but I think there is a value to having these discussions out in the open instead of shutting them down at the point of entry. Our movement should be strong enough to hold many different ideas even those the seemingly challenge our own views. We have to fight before turning ism in all its forms especially with in our own minds

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## Carl Dick says

Starts and ends really really strong, but has a middle chapter addressing individual proponents of strict nonviolence that really drags and is way too long. This would have easily been 4 or 5 stars without the "Who Are The Pacifists?" chapter.

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## Elliott says

I'm sympathetic to anarchism, though I'm a socialist, and I believe that they nearly always offer valuable critiques for and on leftist politics. I figure after all, we're both anti capitalist, and pro worker where's the

harm? Gelderloos' book proved trying at times though: he saves barbs for socialists such as myself that I don't agree with while a good part of the middle section itself was devoted to "who are the pacifists?" Which reminded me ironically enough of Stalinist propaganda "who are the Trotskyists?" But, he brings to light an important question: who really benefits from nonviolence?

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## **River says**

While I was already familiar with many of the arguments Gelderloos makes against nonviolence and was familiar with his previous book on the topic, I still found some interesting points in this book. He does a good job in arguing for the importance of combative/conflictual approaches to social struggles. It's pretty solid and convincing on that front.

That said, this book was unfortunately somewhat tedious. There seemed to be too many examples and at times there was way too much detail and some of the writing was pretty disjointed.

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## **6655321 says**

When Gelderloos is on he is *\*really really\** on but like, a lot of the time (and i am obviously extremely sympathetic to his project) there is a sort of repetition of the same (ex. his criticisms of various high profile pacifists kinda bleed into each other and to some extent were already covered in previous sections & while i can't help but enjoy anyone laying into Chris Hedges (who is a total shit) it's not like it was a burning necessity). I guess some of my problem with this (and by problem i mean "things i wish were different because ideally in my head authors i like write on the things i want them to rather than what they would like which is probably absurdly selfish") is that *How Non-Violence Protects the State* was *\*really really good\** and a lot of this is sort of a longer addendum to that? Like, i appreciate an impassioned defense of a diversity of tactics as much as the next gal but a lot of this works better cut into different essays than as a cohesive whole but like *\*it's still probably an important book\** but it probably helps if you aren't already pretty sympathetic to Gelderloos' opinions (because you have basically, in that case, heard this argument and position before although Gelderloos' is a pretty solid writer which is definitely worth something).

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## **Ben says**

There's a printable PDF pamphlet of the introduction at <https://archive.org/details/failurepr...>

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## **Evelyn Woagh says**

Has a lot of updated and more detailed information, but gets bogged down by repetition and reiterations. It's important in helping inform about many of the particulars about power relations and law, alternatives, and the success rate of diversity of tactics.

Whenever he talks about people unlike himself, it can be a bit awkward. He'll say something like "women, queers, and trans people", which is a frustrating categorization first because "queers" is the collective

dehumanization of a group, and "trans people" as if trans women aren't women, and suggesting that cis women must come first, which is related to the ironic recuperation of social hierarchy.

At one point he also says "those raised as men" which follows a "male socialization" narrative put forward by TERFs to dehumanize trans women and trans femininity, which enables the transphobic patriarchal and matriarchal violence directed at trans femininity. He makes no criticism to the DGR's TERF ideology, which implies he believes it at least partially, while mainly focusing on criticizing the group's hierarchical structure and opposition to anarchism. He makes little to no mention of how the group puts indigenous people and poor people at the vulnerable front line of the DGR movement, and how that enables the enrichment of colonial profits and the prison profits.

He uses a t-slur at one point to describe trans people, which was pretty disgusting and self-entitled, and brought to the fore the above criticisms.

He also criticizes leftists, "the left", and so on, without giving context to why he's stigmatising the political wing which anarchism has been a part of since the beginning. It worries me because it seems eerily like when pro-capitalists and neo-nazis pretend to be anarchist.

Overall, a lot of beneficial information and important strategy ideas and co-operation suggestions, but at times a repetitious slog, and other times a bit worrying how he defines people different from him and separates anarchism from leftism.

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