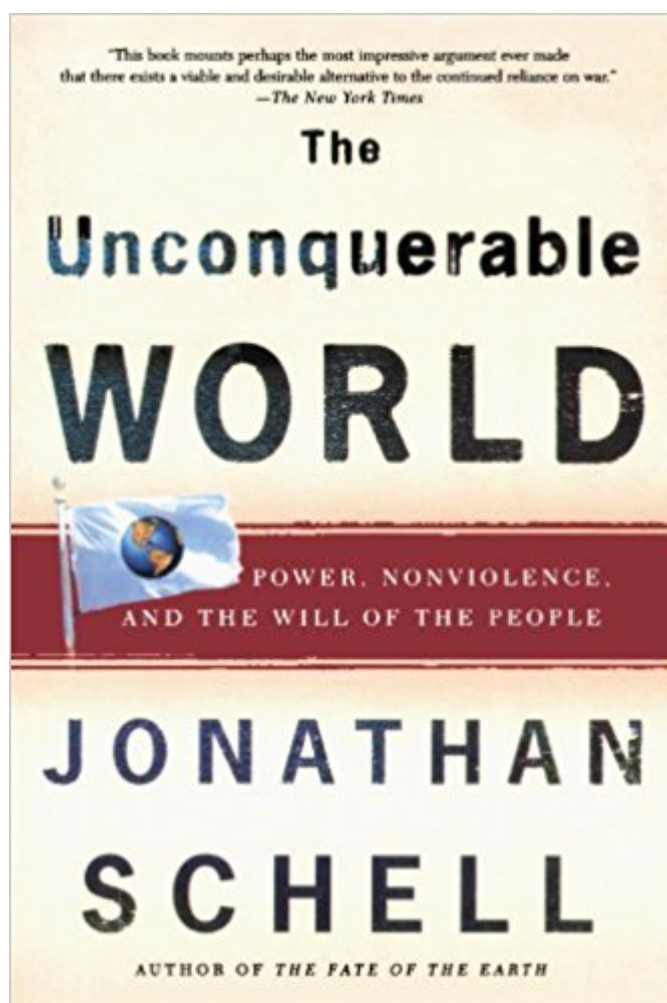


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The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, And The Will Of The People



Synopsis

"This book mounts perhaps the most impressive argument ever made that there exists a viable and desirable alternative to the continued reliance on war." -The New York Times At times of global crisis, Jonathan Schell's writings have offered important alternatives to conventional thinking. Now, as conflict escalates around the world, Schell gives us an impassioned, provocative book that points the way out of the unparalleled devastation of the twentieth century toward another, more peaceful path. Tracing the expansion of violence to its culmination in nuclear stalemate, Schell uncovers a simultaneous but little-noted history of nonviolent action at every level of political life. His investigation ranges from the revolutions of America, France, and Russia, to the people's wars of China and Vietnam, to the great nonviolent events of modern times-including Gandhi's independence movement in India and the explosion of civic activity that brought about the surprising collapse of the Soviet Union. Suggesting foundations of an entirely new kind on which to construct an enduring peace, *The Unconquerable World* is a bold book of sweeping significance.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I picked up this book after hearing the author speak at a book signing in Washington, DC. I was quite impressed by the power of his thought, and this book demonstrates the same qualities of well-supported, insightful and frequently iconoclastic analysis. The central premise, as the above reviews note, is that "political power" - which is based upon the consent of the governed and the agreement by political actors to keep promises and to behave within certain rules - and "violence" -

which relies upon ruling by fear of harm and actually destroys the social bonds from which actual "power" flow - are at odds, and that ultimately political ends may be more effectively achieved by application of "power," a constructive force, than by "violence." Accordingly, the author argues, the political aims of mass movements of people frequently may be more effectively achieved by non-violent means than violent ones. And lest this example be dismissed by "realists," the author analyzes in-depth examples of non-violent or mostly non-violent "revolutions" that include the Indian independence movement, the collapse of the Soviet empire, and the transformation of South Africa from apartheid state to democracy (as well as a host of other, somewhat less-striking examples including the growing democratization of South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Chile, Argentina, Spain, Portugal, Greece, etc.) Although, in my view, the author does not fully answer one of the central questions posed in response to pacifism - how can a non-violent movement gain political traction when confronted by a totalitarian system that utterly denies the worth of human life?

Edit of 21 Dec 07 to add links
This book, together with William Geider's *The Soul of Capitalism: Opening Paths to a Moral Economy*, and Mark Hertsgaard's *The Eagle's Shadow: Why America Fascinates and Infuriates the World*, in one of three that I believe every American needs to read between now and November 2004. Across 13 chapters in four parts, the author provides a balanced overview of historical philosophy and practice at both the national level ("relations among nations" and the local level ("relations among beings"). His bottom line: that the separation of church and state, and the divorce of social responsibility from both state and corporate actions, have so corrupted the political and economic governance architectures as to make them pathologically dangerous. His entire book discusses how people can come together, non-violently, to restore both their power over capital and over circumstances, and the social meaning and values that have been abandoned by "objective" corporations and governments. The book has applicability to Iraq, Afghanistan, and other places where the US is foolishly confusing military power with political power.

Schell's identification of the phenomenon of "people's war," the bottom-up fight for freedom waged by colonized peoples over the last 250 years is nothing short of revolutionary. The basis of the analytical framework he builds to explicate the different varieties of colonial oppression and local resistance, Schell historicizes people's war in its most important incarnations starting with the Spanish resistance to Napoleon's invasion, moving through Gandhi's non-violent formulation which he developed in South Africa and employed against the British in India, discussing how this form of

resistance taken up by Martin Luther King to fight the people's war against the squalid Jim Crow regime in the American South. He notes that over time, "people's war" has been successful more often than it has not, that colonial regimes cannot win against forces which refuse to fight using oppressor's tactics, or use the narrow forms of redress, such as "working through the system," which are offered by those in power under the head of democracy. He begins by examining the great military strategist Von Clausewitz's theory of warfare. In a section that is perhaps somewhat overlong, Schell takes apart Clausewitz in light of the changes in warfare since Clausewitz's time. Clausewitz did witness the first examples of total war in which every citizen was enlisted in the war as either a soldier or as a possible target of war -- the great "democratic" army of Napoleon, and wrote about it in contrast to prior European wars where relatively small forces of men fought limited conflicts for their aristocratic masters.

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