

National Peace Essay Contest 2006-2007



Youth and Violent Conflict Scholarship Competition for High School Students

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Introduction

The international system has witnessed dramatic changes in the recent past. Developments around the globe and at home challenge us to rethink the role of the United States in the international community. What is our nation's place in this increasingly complex global picture? How do we best promote respect for human rights and the growth of freedom and justice? What can we do to nurture and preserve international security and world peace?

The United States depends on knowledgeable and thoughtful students—the next generation of leaders—to build peace with freedom and justice among nations and peoples. In the belief that questions about peace, justice, freedom, and security are vital to civic education, the United States Institute of Peace established the National Peace Essay Contest to expand educational opportunities for young Americans. The National Peace Essay Contest:

- ☐ promotes serious discussion among high school students, teachers, and national leaders about international peace and conflict resolution today and in the future;
- ☐ complements existing curricula and other scholastic activities;
- ☐ strengthens students' research, writing; and reasoning skills.
- ☐ meets National Content Standards.

Eligibility

Students are eligible to participate if they are in grades nine through twelve in any of the fifty states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. territories, or if they are U.S. citizens attending high school overseas. Students may be attending a public, private, or parochial school or participating in a high school correspondence program. Entries from home-schooled students are also accepted.

The United States Institute of Peace encourages students of all backgrounds and ability to participate in the National Peace Essay contest.

Previous first-place state winners and immediate relatives of directors or staff of the Institute are not eligible to participate. Previous honorable mentions are eligible to enter.

Students may take part in the contest with the sponsorship of any school, school club, youth group, community group, or religious organization. There must be a contest coordinator—someone in the school or community who can review essays and act as the key contact between participants and the Institute. If there is no designated coordinator at your school or organization, you may ask a teacher, youth group leader, club sponsor, parent, or other adult to be your coordinator. It is to your advantage to have someone review your essay before you submit it to make sure it is complete, has all the necessary forms, is free from typographical and grammatical errors, and addresses the topic. There is no formal process to become a coordinator. (See "Information about the Contest Coordinator" on page 7.)

Students, Teachers, and Coordinators

To obtain a study guide on this year's topic, e-mail essaycontest@usip.org, call (202) 429-3854, or download the guide at www.usip.org/npec. The guide provides useful information for teachers on integrating the topic into the classroom curriculum. The study guide also helps prepare students working independently for writing their essay.

What Do Essay Contest Winners Receive?

Contest winners earn money for their college or university studies. For the 2006–2007 contest, first-place state winners will receive college scholarships of \$1,000. First-place state winners will also compete for national awards of \$10,000, \$5,000, and \$2,500 for first, second, and third place respectively (national awards include state award amounts). All first-place state winners are invited to attend an all-expenses-paid awards program in Washington, D.C. in June 2007.



2006–2007 National Peace Essay Contest Topic

Youth And Violent Conflict

Over the past 20 years, children—both boys and girls—as young as six years old have become involved in many violent conflicts around the world. The reasons why they become involved are complex. Sometimes, despair and a lack of hope for the future—because of limited opportunities for jobs, education, housing, or health care—cause some young people to join groups that use violence, such as gangs, criminal groups, or militant organizations. At times, youths are persuaded that violence—sometimes going as far as suicide bombing—is their only chance for political, social, and economic change. Many young people are involuntarily recruited into or forced to join armed groups. There are more than 300,000 child soldiers (soldiers under the age of 18 according to the UN Protocol on Child Soldiers) participating in current conflicts.

Many governments, international organizations, and private groups work to provide young people with alternatives to joining militias or other groups prone to violence. The focus of some of these programs is to prevent young people from engaging in violence. For instance, the organization Search for Common Ground holds soccer camps and peace camps for children from different ethnic groups in Burundi. These camps help build solidarity across ethnic divides and offer alternatives to violence by providing leadership training and education. Other programs integrate those who have fought in violent conflicts back into civil society. As an example, the organization Save the Children is working in Sri Lanka to reintegrate child soldiers into their communities by giving them job skills and hope for the future. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is doing the same with child soldiers in Uganda.

In this exercise, you are the leader of a United Nations task force on youth and conflict. The secretary-general of the United Nations has asked you to develop programs that (1) prevent young people from turning to violence, or (2) help them to rejoin their community after a conflict. Base your program on an analysis of two foreign conflicts—at least one case should be post-Cold War—in which young people were involved in the fighting. At least one case should include efforts to prevent young people from fighting or help them rejoin society after conflict comes to an end. In 1500 words, your essay should:

- Briefly describe and analyze the conflicts by examining causes and the parties involved. How did the nature of the conflict affect the role youth played in the conflict? What kind of impact did the conflict have on those young people? Describe programs to prevent youth from participating in violence or reintegrate them when the conflict has come to an end. If there were no such programs, what were the consequences?
- Drawing on lessons learned from your analysis, design one or more options for preventing youth from becoming involved in violent groups or for reintegrating them into their communities after a conflict. Explain the key components of your program, including target audience, and how you would determine its success.
- In conclusion, explain how your proposal will help to prevent, reduce, or resolve violent conflict.





2004-05 State Level Winners gather after the awards ceremony and banquet dinner at the Embassy of Turkey

Essay Contest Guidelines

Your contest coordinator is responsible for reviewing your essay for grammatical and typographical errors. In addition, although the research and analysis must be your own work, your contest coordinator may review the essay to see that it reflects the essay description above. The text of the 2004–2005 winning essay is included in this booklet for your reference.

What Are the Essay Requirements?

For the purposes of the National Peace Essay Contest, an essay is a three-part paper that lays out and develops a position in response to the essay contest question. Although researching the topic to find examples that support your points is crucial to writing your essay, it should be more than a research paper, a narrative description of an event, or a statement of opinion.

Your essay should contain the following:

- ⊃ An **introduction**, which introduces the subject and contains an explanation of your position. The objective is to demonstrate that you understand the essay contest question and have formed a response to it.
- ⊃ A **body**, which develops your argument using research and analysis. The process of analysis may include comparing and contrasting, differentiating among several ideas or events, critiquing a variety of perspectives, interpreting results, or drawing inferences. **Be sure to identify the sources of your information or ideas.**
- ⊃ A **conclusion**, which summarizes the research and analysis presented in the essay and sets forth your conclusions. Drawing on ideas already presented, you should demonstrate that your conclusions support the

What Do Students Do In Washington?

First-place state winners in the National Peace Essay Contest are invited to Washington for the awards program. This unique five-day program promotes an understanding of the nature and process of international peacemaking by focusing on a region and/or theme related to the current essay topic.

Over a period of three days, students take part in a simulation exercise in which they assume roles of national and international leaders, examine issues, address crises, and then formulate and propose solutions. In addition to such academically oriented events, program activities have included:

- ⊃ meeting with such leaders as: Senators Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Trent Lott (R-MS), Charles Hagel (R-NE), and Patrick Leahy (D-VT); Representatives Ralph Regula (R-OH) and Nita Lowey (D-NY); and officials from the White House, State Department, and Department of Defense.
- ⊃ participating in briefings by officials at the embassies of Ireland, Israel, Sri Lanka, Korea, the United Kingdom, Kenya, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Colombia, and Sierra Leone.
- ⊃ visiting historical and cultural sites, including the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Holocaust Museum, Korean War Memorial, FDR Memorial, Capitol, Supreme Court, and Smithsonian museums.
- ⊃ attending musicals or plays and sampling international cuisines from some of Washington's most interesting ethnic restaurants.

position you put forward in the opening paragraphs. Your aim is to convince the reader that your position is reasonable and valid.

Your essay should also include notes and a bibliography:

- U **Reference notes** (footnotes or endnotes) give the sources of your information or ideas. Footnotes are placed at the bottom of the page where the information appears. Alternatively, you may gather all the notes at the end of the text as endnotes.
- U A **bibliography** is a list of the works that you have referred to in your essay or have consulted in order to write it.

Essays that use a variety of sources—academic journals, news magazines, newspapers, books, government documents, publications from research organizations—fare better in the contest.

Citations in the reference notes or bibliography should follow rules given in a handbook such as the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* or the *Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. Typically an entry will have *at least* the name of the author or editor, title of the work, and date and place of publication. The bibliography should be arranged alphabetically by the last names of the authors.

Encyclopedias are not acceptable as sources. Essays citing encyclopedias in notes or bibliography may be disqualified.

The Internet or World Wide Web should not be the only source for your essay. Be aware that you may encounter “republished” or “third generation” information on the Internet that is inaccurate or improperly attributed. When citing Internet sources, you must include the following information: author(s), title of work, Internet address, and date information was accessed. Detailed instructions can be obtained from the manuals listed above. For the purposes of this essay, Internet sources should be listed separately from non-electronic sources, such as books, magazines, and newspapers.

You must:

- U Type your essay, double-spaced, on one side of white 8 1/2 by 11 inch paper with left and right margins set at 1 1/4 inches each. **Do not write your name or school name anywhere on the essay.**
- U Answer the essay contest question in a well-organized, well-reasoned essay of no more than 1,500 words. Points will be deducted from essays exceeding the 1,500-word limit. The word count includes articles (the, and, a) and quotations.
- U Include standardized citations and a bibliography. (These are not included in the 1,500-word count.) Essays without these elements will be disqualified.
- U Write the essay in English and address all parts of the 2006–2007 contest topic. Essays on other topics will be disqualified.
- U Number the pages of your essay.
- U Include a completed and signed copy of your student registration form.
- U Submit four stapled, legible, collated copies of your essay, along with the completed registration form, to your contest coordinator well in advance of the February 1, 2007 postmark deadline. Attach the registration form (one copy only) to the top of your essay copies. Your coordinator will submit the essays to the Institute.

Your essay will be disqualified if:

- U It is not on the topic.
- U Registration forms are not complete.
- U It does not analyze two cases.
- U It does not have reference notes and a bibliography.
- U It uses encyclopedia citations in the bibliography or relies solely on Internet research.
- U It is postmarked after the deadline of February 1, 2007.
- U It plagiarizes—that is, uses someone else’s statements or ideas as your own.



How Will Your Essay Be Judged?

Essays submitted to the National Peace Essay Contest in Washington, D.C., are sent to state-level judges—qualified experts selected by the Institute. Using the criteria described below, state judges select winning essays. National winners are selected from among the first-place state essays by the Institute’s board of directors. The decisions of the judges are final. The Institute reserves the right to present no awards at the state and national levels, or to reduce the number of awards if an insufficient number of deserving entries is received. Participants are notified in May of their essay’s status. Please do not call the Institute for information about the status of your essay.

Your essay will be judged based on the seven criteria outlined below.

1. Focus: The criteria of focus examines how well your essay responds to the questions and/or tasks presented. Does the essay provide specific and thorough responses to all of the questions and/or tasks presented?

An excellent essay provides **specific and thorough** responses to **all** of the questions and/or tasks presented.

2. Organization: This criteria looks at the structure of your essay and the strength of your thesis statement. Does the essay have an organized structure?

An excellent essay has an introduction, a body and a conclusion. The organization includes an **excellent** thesis and moves the reader through the text.

3. Analysis: The analysis criteria considers how well your arguments are supported. Are the discussion points argued coherently and supported with research?

In an excellent essay **all** of the arguments are **strong, well detailed** and **extremely well supported** by convincing and accurate evidence.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations: The criteria that examines conclusions and recommendations examines how well these thoughts are expressed and how closely they follow from the analysis. Conclusions and recommendations should not present new information that is not a part of the analysis: Does the essay provide sound conclusions and recommendations that follow from the analysis?

An excellent essay provides a **coherent and comprehensive** summary based on the analysis. **All** of the solutions to the problems presented are **specific and well thought out**.

5. Originality: This criteria looks for creativity in writing. Does the writer use and develop ideas creatively?

In an excellent essay, the writer proposes and develops creative ideas, through the selection of cases and/or examples, to present novel analysis and alternatives throughout the **entire** essay.

6. Voice: The voice criteria considers how well your writing engages the reader. Is the essay compelling and/or engaging?

An excellent essay **fully captures** the reader’s attention. The flow of the essay keeps the reader engaged throughout the **entire** text.

7. Style and Mechanics: This criteria examines how well the essay is written in terms of grammar, spelling, and punctuation, as well as word choice and sentence construction. Is the essay well written?

An excellent essay uses standard writing conventions correctly, e.g. grammar, spelling, and punctuation, with **no** errors. There are **no** errors in word choice and **all** sentences are well constructed.



Information about the Contest Coordinator

The contest coordinator is the key contact between students and the United States Institute of Peace. **The coordinator may be selected by the student and can be any adult—teacher, parent, youth leader, etc.** Coordinators can obtain a study guide for teachers and students on this year’s topic that will provide useful information on integrating the topic into the classroom curriculum or in working independently. **Coordinators do not need to contact the Institute prior to submitting essays.**

The coordinator:

- U chooses how the contest will be conducted;
- U oversees the selection process for essays submitted to the contest;
- U ensures that essays are conceived and written by students and represent the students’ own thoughts;
- U reviews the essays to ensure that they follow the guidelines on pages 4–5, and to check for grammatical and typographical errors;
- U signs each student registration form to certify compliance with the rules;
- U registers online as a coordinator (see page 8) and submit four collated copies of each student's essay along with a completed and signed copy of the coordinator registration and student registration form for each essay entry.

If you would like more guidebooks or have questions regarding the contest, call the National Peace Essay Contest at (202) 429-3854, fax (202) 429-6063, or e-mail: essaycontest@usip.org.

Mailing the Submissions

All essays must be postmarked no later than February 1, 2007. All essay packages must contain the registration forms and essays. In order to help us with the processing, please put one copy of the coordinator form on top, and place one copy of each student’s signed registration form in front of the four copies of his or her essay. Four stapled copies of each essay must be submitted with the registration forms or the essay will not be forwarded for judging. Disqualified essays will not be returned for correction or forwarded to judges. Essays may be disqualified if they are not on the essay topic, are incomplete, do not have standardized citations and a bibliography, or use encyclopedias as sources in the bibliography.

Students and Coordinators

You can obtain a study guide on this year’s topic, “Youth and Violent Conflict.” The guide will provide useful information on integrating the topic into the classroom curriculum (see page 2) or in working independently.

Teachers

The United States Institute of Peace also runs an annual summer institute for high school teachers on international peace, security, and conflict management. Applications are due February 15, 2007, and the program runs in early August. Please contact the Institute for further information about this program and about Institute publications on these and other issues.

Directions for Entering the Contest:

! To expedite the winner selection process, we ask that you complete your registration form online.

Student:

- Let your coordinator (see page 7) know about your intention to enter the contest. If your coordinator is not from your school and does not belong to an organization or a club, give to your coordinator your school name and address.
- Follow the essay guidelines carefully to write your essay. When the final draft is ready, ask your coordinator to review it to make sure you have followed all the guidelines and directions.
- Go over the list at the bottom of this page to make sure you have all the information you will need to register your entry through our Web site. Online registration is mandatory for students and coordinators. (See below: Note About Internet Access)
- Get your coordinator's ID number. (If your coordinator has not registered, show your coordinator the coordinator section of this page.)
- Go to www.usip.org/npec/register. Follow directions to fill out the student registration form.
- After submitting your information, print out two copies of the registration form. Send one copy to us, and keep one for your records.
- Include at the top right corner of the first page of your essays the essay ID number found on your registration form. If you have already printed out your essay and made copies, write it by hand.
- Look over the Checklist on page 8.
- When your essay is ready, give one signed copy of your student registration form and four stapled copies of your essay to your coordinator.
- Be sure to keep a copy of the essay and registration form.

! You will need to have the following information on hand when you go online to register:

If you're a STUDENT

- Essay Title
- Exact Word Count
- Student Name, Address, Home phone, Email
- Grade in School, Anticipated Graduation Date, Gender
- Coordinator Registration ID and Name
- School Name and Address

Note About Internet Access:

If the coordinator and the student(s) do not have easy access to the Internet, the registration forms on page 9 and 11 of this guidebook may be used. You may ignore the instructions regarding the contest coordinator ID number and/or essay ID number if this is the case. We will process the registration forms and essays without any penalty or prejudice.

Coordinator: (see page 7)

- Before students begin to write their essays, and after students have their essays ready, review the Essay Submission Checklist (on page 10) with students.
- Go over the list at the bottom of this page to make sure you have all the information needed to register online. Online registration is mandatory for coordinators and students unless Internet access is not possible (See Note About Internet Access below).
- Go to www.usip.org/npec/register to register as a coordinator.
- Follow directions online to fill out the coordinator registration form. Print out a copy of the registration form to include with the student entries. If you find errors or would like to update the information after printing the form, make the change by hand and put your initials next to each change. Keep a copy of the form for your records.
- Give to your students your coordinator ID number from the coordinator registration form. The students need this information to fill out their student registration form online.
- Collect the student registration forms along with the essays. Sign each student's registration form to certify that the essay is the student's work.

! You will need to have the following information on hand when you go online to register:

If you're a COORDINATOR

- Coordinator Name, Address, Phone, E-mail
- Student's school address if different from the coordinator's affiliation
- Information on how you heard about the contest, how you received contest guidebook and or study guide, and whether you used the study guide
- Number of students who participated in writing an essay
- Number of essays submitted this year
- If a teacher: subjects taught, grade levels taught



Please register online. Use this form only if the Internet is not easily available.

| | | |
|---------------|-----|-----|
| USIP USE ONLY | | |
| CF | CT | DL |
| SF | ENC | WC |
| TOP | INT | INC |

2006–2007 Student Registration Form

(Type or print in black ink.)

Student Information

Essay Title _____

Name _____
First M.I. Last Suffix

Home Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____ Country _____

Grade in School _____ Anticipated Graduation Date _____

Gender M F

Home Telephone Number (_____) _____

E-mail Address _____ Citizenship _____

(Students living outside the United States must be U.S. citizens to be eligible for the National Peace Essay Contest.)

How many words (counting articles and quotations) are in your essay? _____

Did you share your essay with others? _____ If so, how? _____

(Was it published in a school newspaper, posted on a bulletin board, discussed in your youth group?)

Note: Publication or sharing of essays is not required.

How did you hear about the contest? _____

School Information

Name of School _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____ Country _____

Coordination Information

Coordinator Name _____

Coordinator ID number (if coordinator registered online): _____

Mailing Address (if different from school information) _____

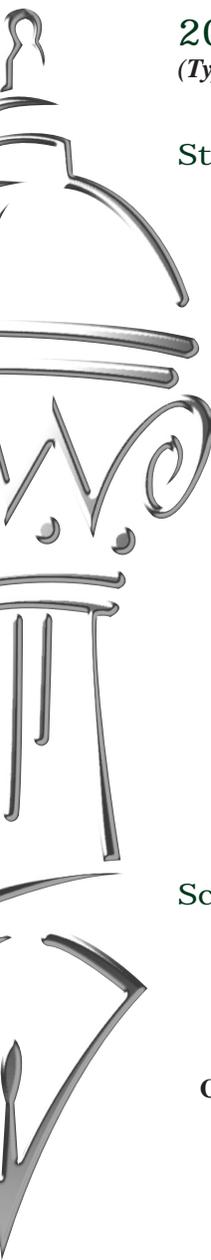
Certification Information

I pledge that this essay is my own work. I agree to abide by all guidelines and requirements of the National Peace Essay Contest. I understand that my essay will not be returned and will become the property of the United States Institute of Peace to use at its discretion.

Signature of Student _____ Date _____

I have reviewed this essay and found that it meets the requirements of the National Peace Essay Contest. To the best of my knowledge, this essay is this student's own work.

Signature of Contest Coordinator _____ Date _____



Essay Submission Checklist

- Have you made sure that your name, school, or city do not appear anywhere on the essay manuscript?
- Is your essay no more than 1,500 words long?
- Have you filled in the word-count section on the application form?
- Is your essay written in English?
- Does your essay address all parts of the contest topic?
- Have you given your essay a title?
- Have you scrupulously followed accepted standards regarding attribution of quotations, arguments, and ideas of others?
- Does your essay have standardized citations and a bibliography?
- Are your Internet sources listed separately from your other sources?
- Is your essay typed, double-spaced, with left and right margins set at 1 1/4 inches, on one side of white 8 1/2 by 11 inch paper? (Please do not put essays in binders.)
- Have you numbered the pages of your essay?
- Has your contest coordinator completed the Coordinator Registration Form?
- Have you filled out, printed out, and signed the Student Registration Form? (Read the pledge carefully. In signing it, you certify that the essay is your own work.)
- Has your contest coordinator signed your student registration form?
- Have you made four legible, collated copies of your essay, including the bibliography?
- Have you stapled each copy of your essay?
- Have you attached your student registration form to the top copy of your four essays?
- Have you made a copy of your essay and the student registration form to keep for your own records?

Mail the essays and registration forms to:

United States Institute of Peace
National Peace Essay contest
1200 17th Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036-301

Four copies of each essay must be submitted with the student registration form or the essay will not be forwarded for judging. Disqualified essays will not be returned for correction.

Essay submissions must be postmarked no later than February 1, 2007.

For more information:

Phone: (202)429-3854
Fax: (202)429-6063
E-mail: essaycontest@usip.org
Web: www.usip.org/npec

Useful Web links:

Fill out Registration Forms at: www.usip.org/npec/register
Download a copy of this guidebook at: www.usip.org/npec/07gb.pdf
Download a copy of a study guide at: www.usip.org/npec/07sg.pdf

Please register online. Use this form only if the Internet is not easily available.

2006-2007 Coordinator Registration Form

(Type or print in black ink.)

Coordinator Name (Please circle) Dr. Ms. Mr. _____
First M.I. Last Suffix

Relationship to student: Teacher Parent Club Sponsor Other: _____

Name of School or Organization _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____ Country _____

Telephone (_____) _____ Best time of day to reach you _____

E-mail: _____

Subjects Taught: _____

Grade Levels Taught: _____

How many times have you participated in the contest, including this year? _____

How did you learn about the National Peace Essay Contest? _____

How did you obtain the contest guidebook? downloaded PDF Mail Other: _____

Did you use the NPEC Study Guide? Yes No

Comments: _____

Would you like to receive materials for next year's contest? Yes No

Check one demographic description that best fits the student's school:

Urban Urban-suburban (suburb of large metropolitan area)

Rural-suburban (suburb of medium to small city) Rural

Participation Information

Total number of your students participating in writing an essay this year _____

Total number of essays submitted this year _____

If the essays were prepared for a class or extra-credit assignment, please provide the name of the class in which the assignment was given. If the essays were for a club activity, provide the name of the club and its purpose.

General Class Assignment _____

Extra-Credit Assignment _____

Club Activity _____

Please use the space below to provide the Institute with any additional information about how you used the essay topic with your students, club, or group.



Sample Essay: 2004–05 National Winner

The 2004–05 Question

Transitions to Democracy

Democracy embraces political conflict – the conflict of ideas, competition for power, the struggle for influence. Open, stable democracies like the United States are able to manage such conflict non-violently because of strong institutions, separation of powers, rule of law, civil society, a free press, accountability through regular elections, and multiple opportunities for citizen engagement with the government. For nations in transition to democracy from authoritarian systems or dictatorships, it is a daunting challenge to democratize peacefully. Institutionalizing democratic principles within societies lacking strong institutions can exacerbate conflict and political competition that can rip a country apart.

The process of democratization is particularly difficult when a country is emerging from a conflict. The transition to democracy, in combination with other factors, can often contribute to violent conflict, especially in societies that do not have the capacity to cope with conflict through non-violent means. In some cases, premature elections have promoted politicians who exclusively represent the narrow interests of their own ethnic group or class, thus exacerbating ethnic cleavages and economic polarization. In Bosnia, Rwanda, and Angola, for example, premature elections contributed to the collapse of a fragile peace and heightened internal divisions.

Inclusiveness, equality and reliance upon laws and institutions—rather than on individual leaders—are critical components of democratic societies. Creating the institutions and political culture that support democratic politics requires time and confidence in governing authorities. A slow transition that allows time for developing confidence in new institutions and policies is often necessary for stability. In South Africa and in some Latin American countries, a slow transition led eventually to a new constitution or to new power-sharing political arrangements among the different groups. The experience of some countries is that moving too fast toward democracy is a very destabilizing process. New governments often face expectations of quick results, immediate expansion of political participation, and instant prosperity. Responding to these expectations—or failing to respond to them—may destroy the weak consensus to stop fighting as groups fear they will be excluded from the post-war gains.

In a 1500-word essay:

Select two countries—outside of the United States—that have sought a transition to democracy. In one of the cases, a democratic regime emerged; in the other no democratic regime was created. At least one of the cases should be post-Cold War.

- For each case, describe the process of democratization. What factors led to democratization? How important were external elements or actors?
- In each case, analyze whether democratization contributed to a sustained peace or to conflict. What other factors, in concert with democratization, contributed to the resulting peace or conflict?
- Based on your analysis of the two cases, what advice do you have for the international community as to the proper sequence of actions that would provide for a smooth transition to democracy? What other elements should accompany democratization efforts to ensure a successful political transition that can sustain peace?



Finding Peace: Japan and Cambodia

Jessica Perrigan

DUCHESNE ACADEMY

OMAHA, NEBRASKA

COORDINATOR: MS. VIRGIE OATMAN

Fukuzawa Yukichi, the foremost proponent of modern education in Japan, expressed an essential truth of civilization when he said “schools, industries, armies and navies are the mere external forms of civilization. They are not difficult to produce. All that is needed is the money to pay for them. Yet there remains something immaterial, something that cannot be seen or heard, bought or sold, lent or borrowed. It pervades the whole nation and its influence is so strong that without it none of the schools or the other external forms would be of the slightest use. This supremely important thing we must call the spirit of civilization.”¹ That spirit of civilization must be cultivated through an effective educational system. Education provided the framework for a successful Japanese democracy, and its absence in Cambodia precipitated its demise in the 1970s.

The 1870s ushered an era of *bunmei kaika*, or “Civilization and Enlightenment,” into Japan.² During this decade the works of great philosophers such as the de Tocqueville and Rousseau found their way into Japanese translation to the profound interest of the Japanese population, especially the youth.³ Students in Japan learned of the theories regarding civil liberties and natural rights, and began to claim that such rights were not only fundamental to Western societies, but to Japan as well. No book was more influential than Nakamura Masanao’s translation and occasional alteration of Samuel Smiles’ *Self-Help*. An entire generation grew up on Smiles and Masanao’s key theme: every person has the duty to work hard to cultivate his or her talents for the benefit of Japan and the world.⁴ By the 1880s, a so-called “People’s Rights Movement” enthusiastically challenged the divinity of the emperor and invoked natural rights, theories learned from the translated works of European philosophers. This direct challenge foreshadowed the official end of the emperor’s divinity sixty years later and began to pave the path for democracy.⁵

Only two decades earlier, such translations of Western works would not have been allowed into Japan. The Tokugawa Shogun—corrupt, decrepit, and highly traditional—forbade Western influence and only opened the ports of Japan to Western trade after “gun-boat diplomacy.” After the Shogunate’s fall in 1868, Japan turned eagerly toward Western ideas. Emperor Meiji soon realized that, to combat the stinging embarrassment of Western patronization, Japan would have to quickly institute political, social, and military reforms. Nowhere was the combination of the three more apparent than in Japan’s educational system.

Emperor Meiji did not face an uphill battle for educational reform: a high respect for learning was embedded in Japanese culture. The preamble of the Fundamental Code of Education, passed in 1872, embodies the optimistic spirit felt by the Japanese about educational modernization: “Learning is the key of success to life, and no man can afford to neglect it...Hereafter...every man shall, of his own accord, subordinate all other matters to the education of his children.”⁶ The Fundamental Code of Education made education not a matter for parental decision, but a child’s right. Among the reforms initiated by the Fundamental Code of Education was a mandate that required every boy and girl to attend school for at least four years, starting at age four.⁷ Perhaps even more important than compulsory education was the de-emphasis on Confucian morality in favor of more “Western” subjects such as practical sciences and the “development of the individual.”⁸

Fifty years later, Japan’s World War II experience proved disastrous, and, as McNamara and Blight argue, “The unconditional surrender of ...Japan made it possible for the United States and the West to force quick integration”⁹ of features of Western society, including the reorganization of Japan’s schools. One of America’s most pressing post-conflict tasks lay in the formation of a modern educational system in Japan.

In 1946, shortly after the beginning of the American occupation of Japan, a group of American educators arrived in Japan to modernize the education system. They immediately realized that the ultra-nationalistic curriculum favored before the war needed to be replaced with one that encouraged “individual dignity” and endeavored to “bring up people who love truth and peace.” In 1947, the newest “Fundamental” educational code took authority over the schools from a centralized ministry to local communities, and the Education of Ministry, the branch of the government that promulgated the nationalistic prewar and interwar curriculums, was stripped of all but oversight powers.¹⁰ Until new textbooks could be introduced, students and teachers took brush and ink to any pictures or words deemed militaristic in an effort to “democratize” school curriculums.¹¹



In addition, “the elitism of the imperial universities [gave] way to a more egalitarian organization.”¹² All of these reforms paved the way for Japan’s smooth transition to a world power. A literate society is a thinking society, and a thinking society institutes social change. Today, Japan’s schools are well-known for their intensity and for producing some of the brightest students in the world.¹³

In stark contrast to Japan’s cultural proclivity and respect toward education, the roots of education were never well-planted in Cambodia. For over one hundred years, until the end of World War II, Cambodia remained a French colony. The French did implement a rudimentary state education system, but only for the well-off. However, the French were much more involved in their more lucrative and well-known colony of Vietnam, and did not spread an educational system to the majority of the Cambodian population. Buddhist monks ran most other schools in their monasteries, called wats.¹⁴

During the 1960s, Cambodia enjoyed a brief golden age of prosperity. Under the guidance of Norodom Sihanouk, the head of the country during the decade, the number of public schools nearly doubled.¹⁵ Sihanouk also established compulsory education for children and universities for native Cambodians. However, though Sihanouk was fond of the trappings of educational reforms, he did not really support social change. He forbade schools from addressing social equity or human rights, and essentially deprived schools of one of their fundamental purposes: to think about social problems and to encourage students to institute needed reforms.¹⁶

After the betrayal of Norodom Sihanouk by Lon Nol, his right-hand general, Cambodia’s already shaky political infrastructure swayed even closer to collapse. Lon Nol, worried about maintaining power, did not continue educational reforms.¹⁷ As unrest grew in Cambodia, a small communist group known as the Khmer Rouge fed on people’s fears and rapidly gained power until the Cambodian civil war broke out. With the victory by the Khmer Rouge, a former electrical student originally named Saloth Sar but known to the world as Pol Pot, would have complete control over Cambodia’s educational system. During the Khmer Rouge’s spectacularly brutal reign, a time in which the “blood of Vietnam” spilled over Cambodia’s borders to inspire frenzied revolutionary terror, formal education ended.¹⁸ “My,” a survivor of the Cambodia genocide, described the end of schooling in Cambodia: “The Khmer Rouge divided the kids up into age categories. The older ones were sent off to another camp. The pre-teen kids were weeders and rice planters. My sons had a green thumb, so the Khmer Rouge told them to plant rice,” instead of attend school.¹⁹ Chanrinthy Him, a survivor of the Khmer Rouge, wrote after the genocide that “it [had] been six years since I attended formal school. Now, at fifteen, I enroll in the seventh grade, two grades higher than when I lived in Phnom Penh”²⁰ [before the Khmer revolution].

Schools were transformed into prisons where political opponents were tortured. The Khmer Rouge “aimed to create a society based on ignorance and obedience.”²¹ During the Khmer Rouge’s rule, the wearing of glasses, the “mark of a civilized person,” was outlawed and the use of any language beside Khmer meant death for the speaker, because knowledge of a foreign language was a mark of education and therefore a threat to national unity.²² In addition to the destruction of schools, the Khmer Rouge effectively destroyed Buddhism in Cambodia, thereby ending the most accessible form of education for most Cambodians. Pol Pot believed that the “totally indoctrinated,” or totally uneducated, would be able to construct a completely equal country without feudalistic overtones introduced by education.²³

If education was not the key to democracy, why would dictators such as Pol Pot go to such lengths to deny it to the population? Democracy is a government for the thinking, and for a country to have a sustained cultural movement toward democracy, its population must be taught to reason and to search for knowledge. The process of education provides the means by which a population may institute social change and the basis of individual development, without which democracy will not succeed. The responsibility of nations like the United States and organizations like the United Nations is to implement and fund successful systems of education in Third World countries. Teachers and textbooks must be supplied and a curriculum based on a country’s culture must be planned and executed if countries without a democratic system of government now can ever become democratic.



Endnotes

1. James L. McClain, *Japan: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002), 178.
2. *Ibid.*, 169.
3. *Ibid.*, 175.
4. *Ibid.*, 176.
5. Ian Buruma, *Inventing Japan: 1863-1964* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 42.
6. Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 403.
7. McClain, *op. cit.*, 179.
8. *Ibid.*, 181.
9. Robert S. McNamara and James G. Blight, *Wilson's Ghost: Reducing the Risk of Conflict, Killing, and Catastrophe in the 21st Century* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001), 64.
10. Patrick Smith, *Japan: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 98.
11. John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999), 247.
12. Jansen, *op. cit.*, 680.
13. The Japanese Foundation, "Japanese Studies and Intellectual Exchange"; available at <http://www.jpfi.go.jp/e/intel/index.html>; Internet; accessed 19 January 2005.
14. Robert Green, *Modern Nations of the World: Cambodia* (San Diego: Lucent Books, 2003), 78.
15. Green, *op. cit.*, 79.
16. David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 204.
17. Bruce Sharp, "The Banyan Tree: Untangling Cambodian History"; available at <http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/banyan1.htm>; Internet; accessed 20 January 2005.
18. Francois Bizot, *The Gate* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 5.
19. Three Women: Oral Histories, "My"; available at <http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/3women2.htm>. Internet, accessed 20 January 2005.
20. Chanrithy Him, *When Broken Glass Floats: Growing Up under the Khmer Rouge* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000).
21. Green, *op. cit.*, 70.
22. Ian Mabbett and David Chandler, *The Khmers* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 240-245.
23. *Ibid.*, 248.

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