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A Case for Nonviolence

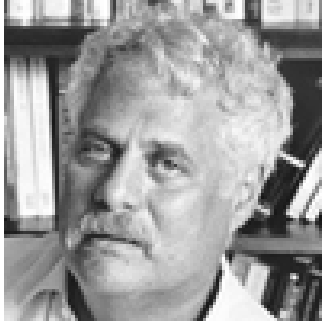
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A Case for Nonviolence

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Violence begets violence, but sometimes a humanitarian crisis like the Rwandan genocide requires a military response, according to Mark Kurlansky, author of *Nonviolence: Twenty-five Lessons from the History of a Dangerous Idea*.

"If troops could have prevented that massacre, I think we should have sent them in," Kurlansky told a gathering of the first-year class in the Frericks Convocation Center Sept. 25. "If you have an instance where you can save half a million lives, then you have to do it. The military is rarely used in defense of human rights. States use warfare for power, not for the good of humanity."

Nearly 2,000 first-year students read Kurlansky's book over the summer as part of the first-year read, UD's version of the National Endowment for the Arts' Big Read.

"This is what the University of Dayton is for: to raise big questions about how we ought to live, and to confront and explore those questions together, as a community," Paul Benson, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, told the largely student audience before Kurlansky's talk.

A journalist and author of primarily nonfiction books, Kurlansky pointed to the U.S. civil rights movement, Mohandas Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence and the Eastern Europeans' resistance to the Soviet Union as examples of where peaceful tactics have been effective. In Zimbabwe, a country torn by political violence and a currency crisis, two rivals recently signed a power-sharing agreement, though it's too early to judge whether it will bring stability.

"The notion of war that most people have is that it's inevitable, that it has to happen from time to time," he said. "There have been nonviolent movements throughout history, and they've succeeded. They have a better track record of success, yet nonviolence almost always goes unnoticed."

Kurlansky's argument against violence is not a moral one. It's pragmatic.

"Violence doesn't work," he said. "Nonviolence worked in the civil rights movement. It worked against the military dictatorship in Argentina. It worked in South Africa. One of the reasons why people are so much more open to warfare than nonviolent activism is that warfare and violence are easy. We know how to do that.

"A good nonviolent campaign requires imagination and creativity."

In a world fractured by terrorism and war, it's hard for some to imagine a life without violence.

"Every generation bears this incredible sorrow," Kurlansky said. "Let's have the next generation without that sorrow. You've inherited this mess. It's yours. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't change it."