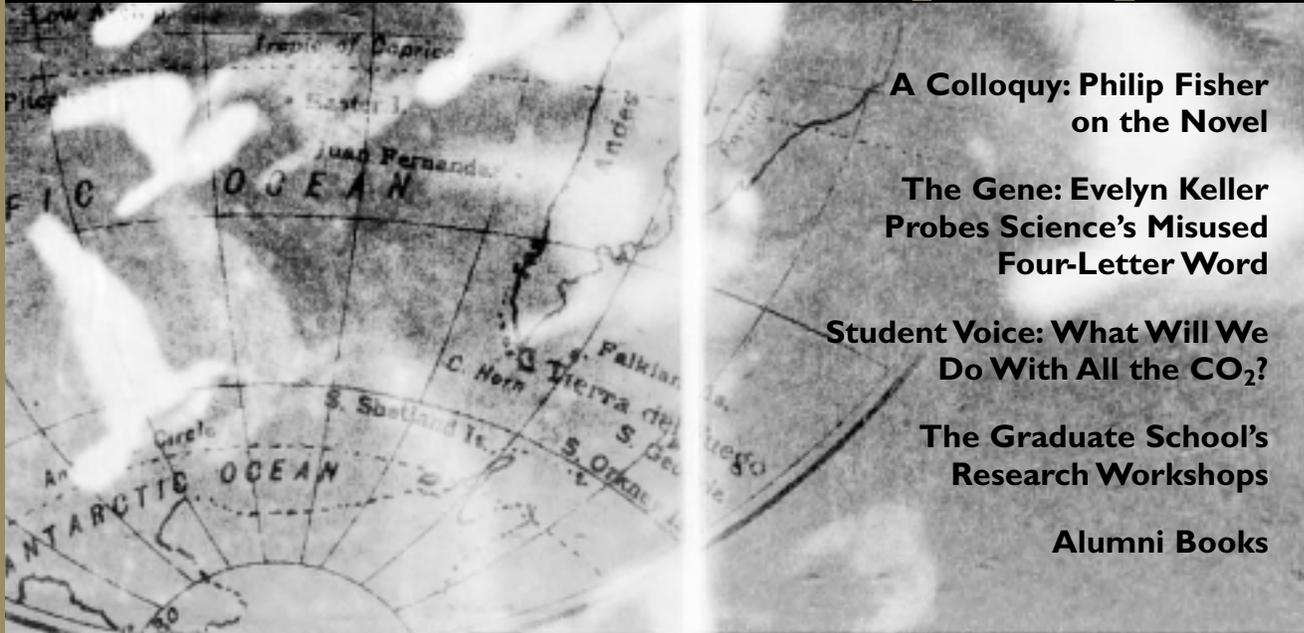


SPRING 2001

Colloquy

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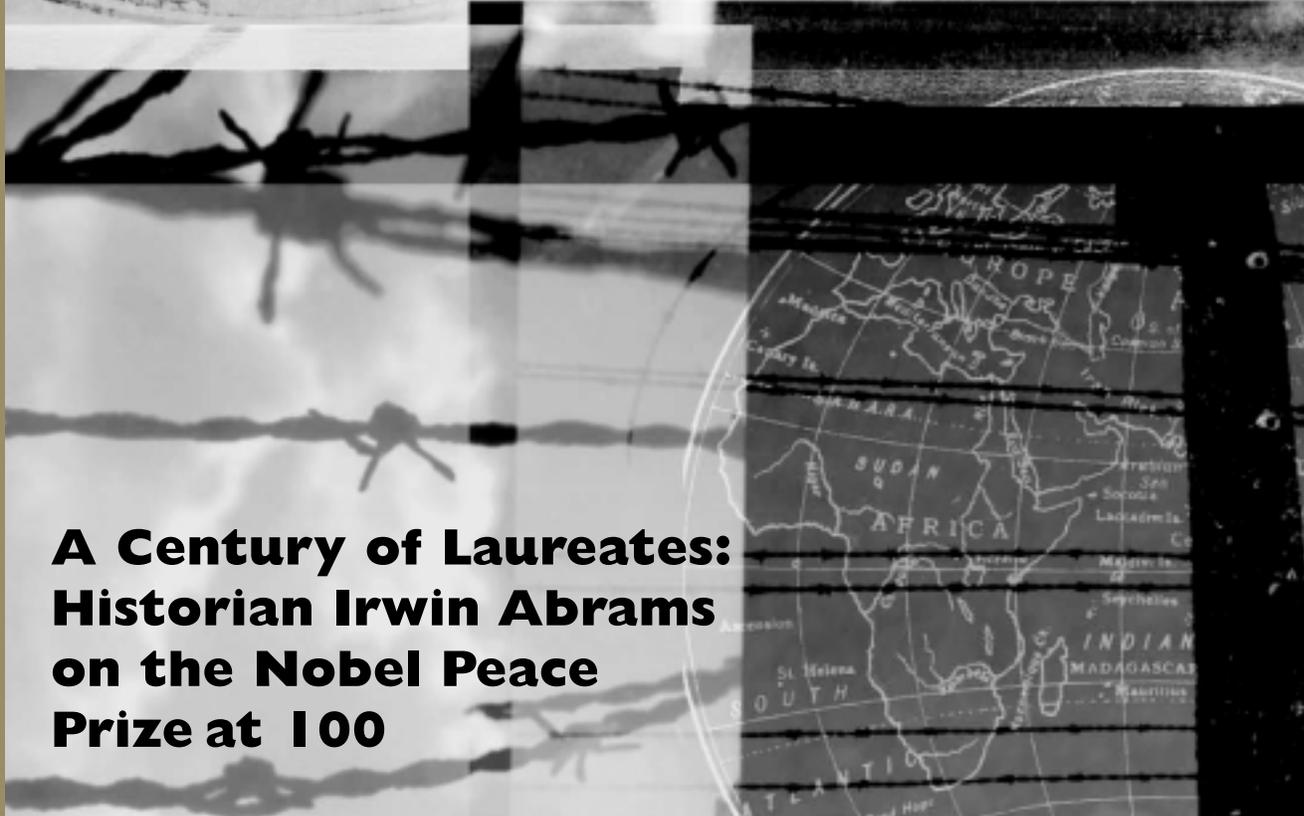
**A Colloquy: Philip Fisher
on the Novel**

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**A Century of Laureates:
Historian Irwin Abrams
on the Nobel Peace
Prize at 100**

A Century of Laureates:

THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE AT 100

Alfred Nobel

BY SUSAN LUMENELLO

Historian Irwin Abrams, PhD '38, reflects on the Nobel Peace Prize at the centennial mark.

Sitting in a Paris hotel in November 1895, a lonely but successful Swedish engineer puts the finishing touches on his will. Never married, Alfred Nobel had no children and few heirs. But he was rich, and he left the bulk of his fortune, nine million dollars, to endow prizes in physics, chemistry, medicine, literature, and peace¹. These were to represent a legacy that was, Nobel hoped, greater than the sum of his 350 patents, including those for dynamite and smokeless gunpowder. A year after completing his will, Nobel died in Italy of a stroke. Five years later, on December 10, the anniversary of his death, the first Nobel Prizes were awarded.



© Per Anders Rosenkist/Sonifoto

Irwin Abrams

In his famous will, Nobel set out only the most minimal guidelines for his prizes. The peace prize, he wrote, must be given to “the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies, and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses.”

Originally, Nobel wanted the peace prize to be given every five years and only for a period of 30 years, reasoning that if the world hadn't become more peaceful in that span, it surely would have reverted to barbarism. In the 100 years since it was first given to anti-war activist Frederic Passy and Henry Dunant, founder of the International Red Cross, the Nobel Peace Prize has failed to stop wars and quiet arms. But more often than not, it

has spotlighted the promise if not the imminence of world peace.

The prize has also been at the center of one historian's scholarship for nearly 40 years. Irwin Abrams, PhD '38, is perhaps the foremost biographer of the Nobel Peace Prize. A retired professor of history at Antioch University, Abrams is currently updating his 1988 biographical history, *The Nobel Peace Prize and the Laureates*, to be published later this year. A fifth edition of *The Words of Peace*, Abrams's collection of inspirational excerpts from peace laureates' lectures, was published last year. Abrams also is a contributor to the Nobel Channel Web site and a consultant to the Nobel Museum, opening this year in Oslo.

Conventional wisdom has long held that Nobel created the peace prize to

¹The Nobel Prize in economics was first awarded in 1968.

relieve his guilt over his most prominent invention, dynamite, used as much for war and destruction as it was for the road-building and construction projects he had intended.

Alfred Nobel was hardly guilt-ridden over his inventions, says Abrams. Instead, the 87-year-old historian says that Nobel was influenced to create a peace prize by a young Austrian woman.

Baroness Bertha von Suttner and Nobel maintained a correspondence based largely on debates about the most effective route to peace, a subject von Suttner had embraced in the face of increasing European militarism.



Bertha von Suttner

Abrams picks up the story: “In 1889, Bertha writes what was the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of the peace movement, an anti-war book called *Lay Down Your Arms*. She sends a copy to Nobel who [cynically] writes back to her, ‘Lay down your arms? What am I going to do with the powder I just developed?’”

But through von Suttner, Nobel became aware of the growing number of individuals and organizations working for peace. He sent money to the Austrian Peace Society, the group von Suttner and her husband had founded, and promised her “he would do something great for peace,” but had no firm plan. As von Suttner wrote in her memoirs, Nobel asked her to convince him that peacemakers were as worthy of financial support as scientists and poets were.

During an 1892 visit to Switzerland, Nobel met up with von Suttner, who was there attending a World Peace Congress. Von Suttner described the goings-on with enthusiasm, but Nobel

remained skeptical. “He said to Bertha, ‘My factories may make peace before your congresses,’” says Abrams. “He thought technological developments would make war so horrible, [that] when one army could completely obliterate the enemy, nations would shrink from warfare.”

But soon after his visit in Switzerland Nobel wrote to von Suttner with the news that he had decided to fund a prize for peace.

A few years later in 1905, von Suttner won the peace prize named for her friend in recognition of her work as an author and as president of the International Peace Bureau in Switzerland.

MISTAKES AND SUCCESSES

“There are over a hundred or more peace prizes, but there’s nothing like this one for humanitarian work,” Abrams says. “Clearly, it’s the most publicized. The winners get what Marion Erster Rose (the wife of 1986 peace laureate Elie Wiesel) calls the big microphone—whenever they speak, they’re listened to. The people who have been given this over all the years, by and large, are worthy people. I would think Nobel would have to be happy.”

Abrams acknowledges that the committee has made some poor selections over the years, often defying the intent of Nobel’s will, which was, as Abrams says, to “reward dreamers.” Too often, Abrams and other critics agree, the committee has given the prize too late in a person’s career to make a difference, or it has made safe picks of institutions and statesmen. Nobel, says Abrams, intended the prize as a sort of MacArthur “genius” grant to reward risk-takers immersed in the struggle to end war and aggression.

Abrams notes that despite its occasional blunders, the prize has directly aided various struggles for peace. “The prize for 1991 went to Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma (Myanmar), and certainly it helped her cause, even though she was in and out of detention. The United States has adopted sanctions on Burma, and just the other day the [*New York Times*] had an article about how the military are finally talking with her,” he



Aung San Suu Kyi

says. The daughter of a diplomat, Suu Kyi (pronounced Sue Chee) led the National League for Democracy Party even though her life had been threatened during the campaign. Before the elections she was put under house arrest. Her party won the election, but Suu Kyi remains detained despite the efforts of many governments and a delegation of Nobel peace laureates.

“When you get to ‘96,” Abrams continues, “the prize definitely helped the people of East Timor.” The prize went to Bishop Carlos Belo and José Ramos-Horta, activists for East Timorese independence. “It played an important part in focusing world attention on that little island, supporting the cause of independence and the transition to the new government,” Abrams says. These recent awards point to a broadening worldview from a committee that, as many critics have pointed out, has tended to ignore the struggles of non-Western nations.

“By and large, the committee has a good record,” says Abrams, “but there are always political controversies.” Rigoberta Menchú, the laureate for 1992, is a Mayan Indian who founded Revolutionary Christians in her country of Guatemala. “She was accused of consorting with an armed guerrilla faction in her country and for spreading falsehoods in her autobiography about her family’s victimization at the hands of her government,” Abrams says. “I would explain these not as falsehoods, but as part of her effort to give the testimony of her people, adding to her own story the atrocities her people lived through.”

The *Washington Post* published an exposé of dissension within the

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NOMINATORS AND NOMINEES

Many academics may be unaware that they have the privilege of making nominations for the peace prize, says Irwin Abrams. Professors of political science, history, law, and philosophy have been eligible to nominate for the peace prize since 1950. "This was decided by the Norwegian legislature," Abrams says, adding that members of legislatures can also nominate people. "Anybody can ask his or her congressman to nominate a person," he says. "That's the way to go."

As both a history professor and a member of a peace prize-winning organization, Abrams is qualified to nominate. He has used this privilege to nominate former US president Jimmy Carter 11 times for his "post-presidential peacemaking" efforts in Haiti, Bosnia, and North Korea. In 1994, Abrams took a break from Carter to nominate Maha Ghosana, a Buddhist monk who campaigned for peace during Cambodia's civil war.

For the 2001 award, there are 132 nominees, 29 of them organizations. There were 150 different nominations last year, which is the record.

The committee's policy is to keep the names of nominees secret to prevent campaigning; leaks, however, are rife. According to various wire reports, nominees for the 2001 peace prize include Mordechai Vanunu, jailed since 1986 for revealing secrets of Israel's nuclear program; Li Hongzhi, founder of China's banned Falun Gong spiritual movement; and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the world's governing body for soccer, was nominated by a Swedish politician for the sport's role in uniting nations. The year's most controversial peace prize nominee is death row inmate Stanley "Tookie" Williams, cofounder of the notorious Crips gang in Los Angeles and the convicted murderer of four people. Williams's name was submitted by a member of the Swiss Parliament on the basis of a series of children's books written by the inmate urging young people to avoid gang life. Others said to be on the list are Estonian President Lennart Meri, former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, and perennial nominees Bill Clinton, Pope John Paul II, and the Salvation Army. According to Agence France Presse, the International Red Cross is also being considered for the award. That organization was the prize's first recipient in 1901.

The winner of the Nobel Peace Prize will be announced in October. Last year's winner received approximately \$883,000.

Members of the present peace prize committee are Gunnar Berge, director general of the Norwegian Petroleum Directorate; Bishop Gunnar Johan Stalsett; Hanna Kristine Kvanmo; Sissel Marie Ronbeck, deputy director, Directorate for Cultural Heritage; and Inger-Marie Ytterhorn, senior political adviser to the Progress Party's parliamentary group. Except for Stalsett, all members previously served in the Norwegian Storting (legislature). Committee members serve a six-year term.

International Committee to Ban Landmines, which won the prize in 1997. But the award that year "helped bring along the Ottawa Treaty in record time, especially when you think of how long it takes to put together an international treaty," Abrams says. "I think the prize did help the cause [of banning landmines]."

History can also betray the intentions of the selection committee, Abrams says. The 1994 award went to Yasser Arafat, Shimon Peres, and Yitzhak Rabin for the Oslo Accords. "Rabin gave his life for that and can be well

celebrated," he says, "but the prize itself was given for a peace accord that really wasn't much of an accord in the long run." Abrams adds that Arafat's work with terrorists should have disqualified him from the start. At least one member of the prize committee agreed with Abrams; committee member Kare Kristiansen resigned his seat in 1994 in protest of Arafat's selection.

The most controversial prize in modern times was awarded in 1973 when then-US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, AB '50, PhD '54, government, and Le Duc Tho of North

Vietnam were named joint winners for the Paris Peace Talks. The Communist leader declined the prize, the only time the honor for peace has been rejected by a would-be laureate. Le Duc Tho died in 1990.

"Kissinger should not have won the prize," says Abrams. The award was given for an armistice that was broken by the time the award ceremony happened, he says. "That's why Le Duc Tho declined it. He said the United States was violating [the treaty] and Kissinger said the North Vietnamese were," Abrams says.



Henry Kissinger

"People don't realize that Kissinger tried to give the prize back," Abrams continues. "He said that he was returning the symbols of the prize, that is the medal and the diploma, but they never reached Oslo. I don't think that was his fault. I think he gave them to some subordinate. Kissinger did keep the money, but he used it to set up a scholarship fund for orphans of the GIs [from the Vietnam War], which I think was a good use of it.

"Looking at public opinion at all the prizes, there was more criticism about that than any other in recent times. Prizes like that can make people cynics," Abrams acknowledges. "Mrs. Lionaes (chairwoman of the Nobel committee Aase Lionaes) said the committee gave the prize for the effort Kissinger and Le Duc Tho were making to bring that war to an end. They have always said that they were not giving the prize just for the achievement but for furthering the process."

Kissinger did not go to Oslo to accept the prize or to deliver a Nobel lecture. In a letter written shortly after the

announcement was made, he told the Nobel Committee: "The people of the United States, and indeed of the whole world, share the hope expressed by the Nobel Peace Prize Committee that all parties to this conflict will feel morally responsible for turning the cease-fire in Vietnam into a lasting peace for the suffering peoples of Indochina. Certainly my Government, for its part, intends to continue to conduct its policies in such a way as to turn this hope into reality." Kissinger did not reply to inquiries from *Colloquy*.

Others nominated that controversial year were President Richard Nixon and President Josip Tito of Yugoslavia. Abrams says two members of the prize committee wanted Bishop Camara of Brazil to win for 1973. "One of them wrote an article some years later, which he shouldn't have done. They practically take an oath on the committee that they'll never talk about their decision-making. But he felt that the other three people [on the committee] had already made up their minds and that there wasn't really room for any discussion. The Norwegian people, who were also very opposed to this prize, collected money and gave a 'people's prize' to Bishop Camara," says Abrams.

During this period, Abrams says, the selection committee began focusing less on disarmament, which was Nobel's intent, and more on rewarding peacemakers in global hotspots. "The committee is being a peacemaker itself in these ways," Abrams says. This is not without precedent.

Abrams has considerably more affection for fellow Harvard alumnus, the 1950 peace laureate Ralph Bunche, PhD '34, government. "I think people probably don't remember anything about Ralph Bunche," Abrams says ruefully. "Here's somebody who's the grandson of slaves, his parents die early, his grandmother raises him and insists that he stay in school when a lot of young Afro-Americans of his age were just not finishing high school."

Bunche, the first black person to win the peace prize, was a professor of political science at Howard University when he left academe in the early 1940s to join the war effort. With his



Ralph Bunche

depth of knowledge on race relations and colonial matters, Bunche quickly rose through the ranks of the State Department. From there he joined the UN Secretariat, presiding over the Trusteeship Division at a time when one developing nation after another was declaring its independence. But Bunche focused on the problem over partitioning in Palestine, and when fighting broke out between Israel and Palestine in 1948, he was called in to mediate.

"Bunche had the Israelis and the Arab statesmen on the Isle of Rhodes and kept going back and forth between groups—they wouldn't even sit in the same room with each other. He kept going religiously until he got that peace. The peace didn't stay forever, but it stayed for a number of years. It was a marvel of mediation and arbitration, which he was able to accomplish against great difficulties."

Bunche initially declined the prize and told the Nobel committee that he was being honored simply for doing his job. But the committee insisted that the prize would benefit the work of the UN, and Bunche accepted. "He's one of the greats," says Abrams, who got to know Bunche when he visited Antioch University. Ralph Bunche died in 1971.

The committee's greatest failure, Abrams says, was an award not given. In 1947, Mohandas Gandhi used the principles of nonviolence to lead his country to independence. That same year, Pakistan partitioned itself from India leading to violent conflict between Hindus and Muslims.

"Gandhi was said to have supported the Indian army, but that was wrong,"

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ALUMNINOTES

APPLIED SCIENCES

Judson C. French, SM '49, reports his retirement after an enjoyable career. He continues as guest researcher and director *emeritus* of the Electronics and Electrical Engineering Laboratory at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). In November 2000, NIST honored him by awarding the first Judson C. French Award for "pioneering development of excimer laser measurement services in response to urgent requests from the semiconductor industry."

Gabe Spalding, PhD '90, reports that he has received both tenure and a promotion from Illinois Wesleyan University, where he is associate professor of physics.

BIOCHEMISTRY AND MOLECULAR BIOLOGY

Rosalind Shorenstein, PhD '73, has been elected a fellow of the American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine, the nation's largest medical specialty organization. Shorenstein currently serves as president of the Santa Cruz County Medical Society and as president of Branch 59 of the American Medical Women's Association.

CHEMISTRY

Paul Scheuer, PhD '50, was honored last December by the International Chemical Congress of Pacific Basin Societies in Honolulu for his ocean research. The award commemorated the 50th anniversary of Scheuer's academic career at the University of Hawaii as well as the start of clinical trials of Kahalalide F, a potential cancer treatment Scheuer discovered in a Hawaiian marine mollusk.

GEOLOGY

George B. Vockroth, AM '51, retired in May 2000 as owner of Vantage Oil Company. He continues to represent the Mississippi Geological Society as a member of the Mississippi Water Resources Advisory Council.

PHILOSOPHY

Barry Wellman, PhD '69, has received the Outstanding Contribution Award from the Canadian Sociological and Anthropological Association for his work in the study of social, computer, and community networks.

REGIONAL STUDIES—USSR

Andrew Sorokowski, AM '75, writes that he has begun work as a historian for the US Department of Justice.



Mohandas Gandhi

says Abrams. Gandhi admitted that he had supported his country's fight "against injustice," but asserted that he found no place for himself in what he saw as a new militaristic India. "All the same the committee decided to wait [to honor Gandhi] 'until the dust settled,'" Abrams says. "The next year, Gandhi was assassinated."

There was talk among committee members of giving the award to Gandhi posthumously, but that idea was rejected as contradictory to Nobel's intentions of recognizing actively engaged peacemakers. Oyvind Tønnesson, writing for the Nobel Foundation, posits that the committee had no sense of how prize money would be dispersed—Gandhi had no heirs or inheriting foundation. No prize was given in 1948. "The Nobel committee issued a statement explaining that there was no living person worthy of the prize that year," Abrams says.

The historian's greatest overall complaint with the committee's selections is that they honor statesmen. In some cases, elected politicians may have been chosen merely to improve or ease relations between Norway and powerful countries. Abrams believes this was the case in 1906, when Theodore Roosevelt, AB 1880, was awarded the prize. "Statesmen do something by dint of their office, and it's something that they're paid to do anyway—to keep the peace," Abrams says. A Quaker pacifist, Abrams objects more specifically to statesmen recognized for a single act of reconciliation rather than for efforts in an ongoing struggle. "Roosevelt really deserves credit for helping end the war between Russia and Japan," Abrams says, but in his

THE HARVARD CONNECTION

Graduate School alumni have figured prominently in Nobel Peace Prize history: Henry Cadbury (see page 16), Ralph Bunche, and Henry Kissinger. Certainly, the most renowned peace laureate with a Harvard connection is Theodore Roosevelt, AB 1880, who won in 1906 for his efforts in ending the Russian-Japanese war. The peace work of two Harvard faculty members has also been recognized by the Nobel committee.

In 1985, two cardiologists, American Bernard Lown of the School of Public Health and Russian Evgeny Chazov of the USSR Cardiological Institute, shared the prize on behalf of their antinuclear group, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW).

The prize had an immediate impact on the once-marginalized group. Says Lown, a professor emeritus of cardiology, "When Chazov and I launched the IPPNW in 1981, we expected a far warmer reception than we encountered. After an initial burst of publicity at the time of the first IPPNW Congress in Virginia, there was a uniform silence in the West and paradoxically we continued to receive a good deal of favorable publicity in the Soviet Union and among its satellites. This reinforced a stereotypic image that the doctors were naive dupes of the KGB or worse. We faced a constant barrage of criticism for not addressing human rights issues in the USSR, but we were exclusively a global antinuclear organization. In this hostile climate, the Nobel Prize came at a most auspicious moment for our movement. Our message was widely communicated as a result. Though negative publicity also multiplied, nevertheless, the sincerity, passion, and commitment of physicians in IPPNW was reinforced. We had no mission other than assuring human survival, threatened as it was by the worst conceivable catastrophe. As a (1981) *New York Times* editorial phrased it, 'The doctor's warning that it can never be war like other wars is a grim reminder of the price of failure.' Another element is that we went from starting line, so to speak, to a Nobel recognition in four and a half years—from no membership to a worldwide constituency of 200,000 physicians."

John Holdren, a professor in Harvard's Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences and at the Kennedy School of Government, was executive director of the Pugwash Conferences when the arms control group shared the 1995 Nobel Peace Prize with scientist Joseph Rotblat, founder of the conferences.



Henry Cadbury



Bernard Lown



John Holdren

Nobel lecture, "Roosevelt said that any country that is going to be worth anything has to fight and be warlike. It was a most unpeaceful speech.

"The statesmen laureates I approve of most are the ones like [German Prime Minister] Willy Brandt and [former president of Costa Rica] Oscar Arias, who went on peacemaking after they left office, showing their commitment

to peace," Abrams continues. "Or [French minister Léon] Bourgeois and [British foreign secretary Arthur] Henderson, who made lifetime efforts for years before receiving the prize.

"Take the last prize to Kim Dae-jung," says Abrams of the South Korean president, the 2000 peace laureate. "His meeting at the summit with the other Kim (Kim Jong-il) of North Korea was

a great achievement in moving toward reconciliation between the two Koreas.” But, Abrams goes on, if the peace prize had been given to Dae-jung “only for that one act of the reconciliation that would be a questionable one for me. But this is a man who has worked for peace his whole life. He’s been beaten, put in jail, given a death sentence. When he was in Japan in exile, he was kidnapped and almost killed. He’s gone through all that for years out of his deep faith as a Catholic. So, I think that whatever happens in Korea, even if the North stays a Stalinist, authoritarian state, if there is no reconciliation, still I think that somebody like Kim Dae-jung can stand next to somebody like Mother Teresa and the others in the pantheon of peace. That’s a good prize.”

FINDING HEROES

Abrams began his work as a historian of the Nobel Peace Prize to bring the heroic lives and work of so many remarkable individuals to the attention of young people. A man of deep religious faith, Abrams’s personal heroes among the peace laureates are those who maintained their own faith, “religious or humanitarian,” against great obstacles. He points to Jane Addams, who was branded a traitor by the United States for protesting World War I, and Carl von Ossietzky, a German journalist who spoke out against Nazism even as he was shunted from one concentration camp to another. Addams won the peace prize in 1931, Ossietzky in 1935. “The laureates I most prize are ones who have gone on working for peace after winning the prize, like [Albert] Schweitzer and Pauling,” he says.

Abrams has met and interviewed a number of peace laureates, including Brandt, Arias, nuclear disarmament advocate Linus Pauling (the only person to receive two Nobel prizes—for peace in 1962, for chemistry in 1954), civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., Argentine human rights activist Adolfo Perez Esquivel, Swedish diplomat Alva Myrdal, author Elie Wiesel, and anti-landmines campaigner Jody Williams. Even Abrams’s Sumner

Prize-winning dissertation was on the peace movement (“A History of European Peace Societies, 1867–1899”). But he has a personal connection to the prize beyond scholarship.

Before joining the faculty at Antioch, Abrams worked during and after World War II with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), the Quaker organization known for its global humanitarian work. In 1947, the Friends, as the Quakers call themselves, along with their British counterparts, won the Nobel Peace Prize for aiding war refugees in Eastern Europe, Germany, and Austria, and for helping to rebuild war-torn nations. Accepting the award for the American contingent was a GSAS alumnus, AFSC Chairman Henry Cadbury, PhD ’14, the classics, a professor of divinity and director of the Andover-Harvard Theological Library.

Of course, a hundred years of peace prizes have not prevented a hundred years of wars, large and small. “Intellectually, I guess I shouldn’t be optimistic at all,” Abrams says. “I don’t think we’re going to achieve peace in this poor world of ours, but I think that conflicts can be resolved.” If Nobel were alive today, Abrams suspects that he would have a bittersweet take on his peace legacy, gratified that the prize has perhaps abated aggression and conflict over the years, but pained to see there is still reason to give it. ♡

CO₂

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When my optimism in mankind’s abilities to address looming global warming falters, I can always look to the lessons I have learned from my own research into the most dramatic climate changes in Earth’s history. During the Neoproterozoic era, some 1,000–550 million years ago, the climate bounced back and forth between extreme greenhouse conditions, incomparable to any in recent history, and ice ages so frigid that the entire surface of the Earth might have frozen over. In comparison, the present climate change is so small we would not even detect it in the ancient geological record. Adding time to the equation further lightens the picture; the Earth will most certainly recover, and the vicissitudes of long-term climate change will obscure the present man-made blip in global warming. ♡

their development. All of us like that aspect of it.”

LAUNCHING PAD

Christina Davis, a government student from Washington, will graduate this June. She has received five offers to teach and has accepted a position at Princeton as an assistant professor of international relations. Davis credits research workshops with helping her to develop her dissertation and to prepare for the academic job market.

“In my third year, the International Political Economy Workshop provided a forum for presenting early ideas as I developed my dissertation prospectus and, in my fifth year, I presented draft chapters to the Positive Political Economy Workshop,” she says. “I learned to take criticism and use it in a constructive way to improve my work.” Davis’s dissertation is “Beyond Food Fights: How International Institutions Promote Agricultural Trade Liberalization.”

Practicing before one’s peers and advisors is more nerve-wracking than the real job talk, Davis notes. “I found that in the seven job talks I presented during interviews, many of the same questions that arose in the practice talk came up again,” she says. “Even while I could not solve all of the problems in my research, it helped that I could confidently discuss the problems and wasn’t taken by surprise when questions arose.”

An estimated one thousand students have “graduated” from the research workshops over the years. The pilot program is now a tradition, part of the graduate school experience, and the place where scholarship meets community. ♡