



**Virginia Iris Holmes. *Einstein's Pacifism and World War I.*
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Albert Einstein's pacifism seems inextricably linked with nuclear fission and the onset of the atomic age. How a true pacifist could ever urge US president Franklin D. Roosevelt to develop a nuclear weapon is suspicious for Einstein's skeptics. Virginia Iris Holmes takes the long view, suggesting that Einstein's "pacifist worldview" emerged much earlier in life than is usually acknowledged. Holmes focuses on Einstein's correspondence with other scientists, using full-length quotations from the archives to

highlight and explore the personal thoughts and political leanings of the eminent theoretical physicist during and after the First World War. The author suggests Einstein experienced a pacifist awakening in the period 1914 through 1921, embracing political activism out of necessity and moral obligation. Examining Einstein's personal interactions in response to the first major conflict of the twentieth century, Holmes offers a valuable study on the personal thoughts and political decisions that spurred Einstein's pacifist identity and actions.

In Holmes' view, investigating the early development of Einstein's pacifist and internationalist thought is essential for understanding the maturation of his insights that came to the fore later in his life. "Although there is evidence of incipient pacifism from Einstein's childhood and youth," Holmes explains in the introduction, "World War I was the period when he first articulated an explicit commitment to pacifism, took public stands on behalf of peace and international organization and reconciliation, and used his growing stature and influence to promote political objectives for which he cared" (xvi). Einstein lived and worked in Berlin during the war years, a city that was both the apex of science in German-speaking Europe and the capital of one of the principle belligerent nations. The wartime circumstances Einstein encountered are thus critical for examining the emergence and progression of his conscious political philosophies, convictions, choices, and resulting pacifist activism.

Holmes spent six years working as a senior research editor with the Einstein Papers Project at the California Institute of Technology, a collaborative initiative aimed at making Einstein's vast documented record available in English. The project draws upon the Albert Einstein Archives at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to publish *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein* (CPAE), a series of English-language translations currently consisting of fifteen large volumes published through Princeton University Press. Between 2002 and 2008, Holmes diligently selected documents excluded from the CPAE volumes; *Einstein's Pacifism and World War I* came to fruition partly because the author wanted to publish some documents not presented in the CPAE numbers 4 through 12, the volumes covering the years 1914 to 1921. Holmes translated Einstein's letters, correspondence, and related documents from German to English, carefully preserving the integrity of his written word while highlighting passages that illuminate his pacifist inclinations and political beliefs.

As an annotated chronicle of the war years, the book provides a fascinating view of the progression of Einstein's pacifism in relation to major historical events and issues. Concerned that a large-scale war was ruinous for Europe, Einstein saw the international scientific community as a venue to promote peace and reconciliation. He considered war evil and thought international organization was essential to eradicate conflict and promote world peace. When the war lasted longer than he had anticipated, Einstein joined the German pacifist New Fatherland League in June 1915 and voiced his opposition for the conflict publicly. He attributed the outbreak of war to male aggression and patriotism, and advocated for internationalism to prevent future conflicts. In this vein, Einstein called for the establishment of a new intergovernmental body. He envisioned a postwar order of states to ensure future peace in Europe and around the world, an idea he documented in writing to other scientists.

The immediate postwar years saw Einstein refine his newly-developed pacifist worldview. In January 1918, cautiously optimistic, Einstein embraced Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points as a possible foundation for successful peace negotiations. He also expressed optimism for the new Weimar Republic, openly seeking positives in the wartime military defeat and economic suffering endured by the German people. A sense of pessimism emerged in Einstein the following year as he reacted to the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Although he participated in a 1919 commission of private citizens investigating war atrocities committed by the German army in Belgium and France, Einstein's scientific contributions came under attack when he publicly expressed his disapproval of the Versailles peace settlement. Harassment against Einstein continued as his fame grew in 1920 and 1921, but he remained committed to pacifist causes and declined endorsement requests for initiatives that failed to address the dire social and economic issues he witnessed in postwar Europe.

Curiously, the book's epilogue examines Einstein's pacifism from 1921 until his death in 1955. Earlier in the book, we learn that Einstein embraced a flexible pacifism that was palatable to Jews. He cultivated for himself a distinct Jewish identity, declaring his support for Zionism and advocating social justice issues for the Jewish community in Eastern Europe. He did so as a vocal internationalist and open critic of German nationalism, motivated by compassion for the oppressed and a desire to alleviate suffering. Although Einstein's philosophies and political activism during and after the

Second World War resonate with his early pacifist outlook, the epilogue glosses over far too much history for a single chapter. “Einstein defined pacifism in his own terms, not according to the standards of others,” Holmes contends, “and this self-defined pacifism included the flexibility to designate the Nazis as a special case that had to be opposed through the use of military violence, in his view” (188). The author also connects Einstein’s incipient pacifist awakening with such issues as atomic weapons and the Holocaust, both important topics that require deeper attention and interrogation. Perhaps a concluding discussion of the significance of the period 1914 to 1921 would have better served the aims of the book.

Readers seeking an empirical research study of Einstein’s pacifist philosophy and political activism during the First World War should approach Holmes’ work as a complimentary historical resource. The book is an excellent curated collection of primary documents, but it lacks the deep contextual base of the standard academic monograph. Holmes sacrifices historical context and analysis to foreground Einstein’s writings, allowing the reader a rare and insightful glimpse into the pacifist worldview of an esteemed and celebrated intellectual. Do not mistake a lack of context for low quality, however. Despite a heavy reliance on Einstein’s letters and correspondence, Holmes’ command of the archival record is clear and the author demonstrates an equally impressive engagement with the existing literature on Einstein and pacifism in the period under examination. *Einstein’s Pacifism and World War I* is a valuable contribution to the field of pacifist studies, easily accessible for junior and senior scholars alike. Holmes’ work will inform future research about Einstein’s life, politics, and commitment to international peace and world order.

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