

Landrum Bolling: Quaker Luminary

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Landrum Bolling was an educator, journalist, philanthropist, author, and activist for Middle East peace. Bolling died on January 17, 2018 at age 104

Bolling worked to bridge divides among ethnic, religious and national groups, and to nonviolently resolve conflicts. The road to peace, Bolling persuaded, could only begin with listening to, and trying to understand, an adversary's story. Bolling told his students and colleagues that all peacemaking begins with listening. "Cultivate the habits of patient, open listening," he said in a 1984 interview. "I think that whatever success I've had in gaining access and being able to talk comes from the judgement people made that I could listen."

Landrum Bolling was born in 1913 to a Baptist family in rural Tennessee, and had been convinced by the Quaker faith by the time he became a young college professor at Beloit University and Brown University.

With the rise of Nazism and the start of World War II, Bolling found himself caught in an ethical battle between his Quaker values and his feeling of humanitarian responsibility.

Bolling resigned his professorship and changed his status from conscientious objector to enlist as a war correspondent to cover the war for a group of Wisconsin newspapers. That job took him to his first encounter with Sarajevo, when he was one of few reporters to witness its liberation from the Nazis.

Bolling was in North Africa when Nazi Germany surrendered. Hearing rumors that French troops had committed a massacre of Algerian Muslims who had protested French rule, Bolling became the first foreign reporter to witness and report the atrocity that the French authorities had tried to cover up. Bolling recounts his war correspondent history in a YouTube video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V_ZWL9J48TA)

<audio 1, Dec 15, 2012>

After the end of World War II, he remained in Europe as chief of the Central European Bureau of the Overseas News Agency. He felt this was the educational opportunity of a lifetime, "Probably nothing I would ever have an opportunity to do would be more

instructive about the great, powerful economic, social, and political forces that were sweeping over the world at that time than to just dig in as a foreign correspondent."

Bolling said, "I became aware in roughly the same period of the problems of the Jewish survivors of the Nazi terror in Europe... and of the Arab nationalist cause in the various colonial areas." He describes visiting concentration camps after the war, and many articles he wrote were about the treatment of Jews in Europe.

On a ship returning to Europe from the United States, Bolling met Elton Trueblood, the Earlham religion professor and author. They would become a lifelong friends. Trueblood, impressed with the young Quaker reporter/academic, convinced Earlham president Tom Jones to offer Bolling a position on the Earlham faculty, which Bolling accepted in 1948.

In the early 1950's, he brought major representatives of Israel and several Arab countries to Earlham for a special three-day seminar at Earlham. Over the next seven years he alternated semesters of teaching and writing until becoming the college's general secretary in 1955. Bolling became president of Earlham College in 1958 and served until 1973. A year after leaving Earlham's presidency, in an unprecedented action for a former president, he became a member of the college's board of trustees, a position he held until his death in 2018. In 2002, Earlham College named its new social sciences building after him.

During his tenure at Earlham, he oversaw the creation of the Earlham School of Religion. While Quakers had been discussing a theological seminary to prepare Friends for ministry for over half a century, the obstacles—lack of money, divisions among American Quakers, and opposition to "preacher factories"-- had appeared insurmountable. "Friends have a special mission still to perform within the Protestant Church and . . . a Quaker School of Religion could give something of real value to those who are going ahead in leadership among Friends," Bolling wrote. After much debate, the board gave approval to launch the Earlham School of Religion in the fall of 1960. It is now the oldest accredited Quaker theological seminary, with alumni in positions of leadership among all persuasions of Friends around the world.

He served as an advisor for the presidential campaigns of John F. Kennedy in 1960 and Richard M. Nixon in 1968 and was himself mentioned as a possible candidate for the United States Senate from Indiana. Nixon appointed him a member of the United States Commission to observe the 25th Anniversary of the United Nations.

Bolling was perhaps best known for his decades of work to find a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He was an informal advisor to several presidents, helping to improve communications between the United States and Palestinians. However, none of Landrum Bolling's full-time jobs has had the Middle East been his sole or central focus.

In 1968, he accepted an assignment from the American Friends Service Committee to examine what Quakers might do to promote peace in the Middle East. The result, after many visits to the region, was the book *Search for Peace in the Middle East*, which Bolling edited. Some saw it as an even-handed but compassionate analysis of the region's difficulties, with its clear sympathies for the plight of Palestinians. Others attacked it as unduly critical of Israel and unrealistic in its call for Israeli withdrawal from occupied lands.

Bolling's book helped open the way to consideration of a two-state solution, the idea that later became, for decades, the framework for all efforts to achieve an Israeli-Palestinian peace. Nearly a half-century later, in 2014, he took up the same conflict in his last book: *Ending the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Arab-Jewish Partnerships*.

During the administration of President Jimmy Carter, Bolling served as a self-described "messenger boy," shuttling between the White House and the Palestine Liberation Organization and its leader, Yasser Arafat. He was an important but unofficial communication channel. Bolling also built close relations with Israeli leaders, and throughout his career kept up communications with leaders from all sides across the Middle East. Few Americans have personally known such a variety of Middle East leaders as has Landrum Bolling. His contacts have ranged from the foreign ministers of virtually all countries in the area to Anwar Sadat, Golda Meir, Menachem Begin, King Hussein, President Assad and Yasser Arafat.

In 1973, he became vice president, and later president, of the Lilly Endowment philanthropic fund, one of the world's largest private grant-making foundations. There, he oversaw the award of a small grant to one of several groups of Americans in the early stages of a campaign to create a national "peace academy." This campaign led, a decade later, to Congress' establishment of the US Institute of Peace (USIP). Bolling established a long engagement with USIP, including membership in the Institute's International Advisory Council. The council includes scholars, former diplomats, business executives and senior conflict resolution experts who advise USIP and support its mission.

After leaving Lilly, in 1978, Bolling moved to Washington, D.C., to become the chairman and chief executive officer of the Council on Foundations, a national research and support group for philanthropies. He spent four years there before theoretically retiring to become a research professor in the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service. In 1985, at the request of Father Theodore Hesburgh, the president of the University of Notre Dame, he moved to Jerusalem to become president and rector of The Ecumenical Institute, a center for advanced study that brings together Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders, scholars and lay people interested in deepening their understanding of all three faiths. He retired from that position in 1988, in his 75th year.

From age 75 to 94, Bolling kept up an impressive pace of international work. He served as a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy, a Washington-based research organization concerned with human rights, democratization and peace issues in areas of regional conflict, and, particularly, with United States policies toward those regions and issues. He also continued the interest in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union that dated back to his days as a war correspondent.

In 1988 he was one of the organizers of the De Burght Conference, an international endeavor based in the Netherlands that works to free prisoners of conscience and religion.

Bolling served as director-at-large and senior adviser for Mercy Corps International, a non-governmental organization that does relief work in parts of the world suffering from war, such as Afghanistan, Sudan and Cambodia. USIP President Nancy Lindborg, who worked with Bolling at Mercy Corp, recalled meeting Bolling when he joined Mercy Corps —at age 82—to run reconciliation programs in the shattered city of Sarajevo toward the end of the

Bosnian war. "He was indefatigable and filled with ideas and curiosity," she said. "He was truly a big soul and had a light that inspired all of us to try harder and do more to build peace in this unruly world."

<audio 2 (2001, post 9/11)>

On the eve of Bolling's centennial birthday, former president Jimmy Carter sent a tribute to the daily newspaper in the Richmond, Indiana, where Earlham College is located, "A longtime friend and colleague, Landrum Bolling is renowned for his many achievements as an educator and journalist, leader in philanthropic, humanitarian, and interfaith efforts, and as a citizen peacemaker. Knowing of his personal acquaintance with Israeli and Arab leaders and his experience in the region, I turned to him for advice and assistance while negotiating the Camp David Accords while I was president. Throughout the years, he has remained a trusted and valued adviser in our work at The Carter Center."

Bolling counseled the cultivation of joy. "I never expected to live to be this old," Bolling said on his 100th birthday in 2013. "I think maybe the real secret is enjoying life, enjoying people, enjoying what you're doing. ... I would gladly have paid for the privilege of doing the jobs that I've had."

Over the years, Dr. Bolling received more than 25 honorary doctorates, but disclaims Middle East academic credentials. "I'm not a Middle East scholar, and I don't speak or read either Hebrew or Arabic," he explains. What he did possess, however, was a genuine and intense interest in global war and peace. Father Theodore Hesburgh, holding the most honorary degrees in history, said of Bolling: "There are few people I've met in life that I've been more inspired by, rehumanized by and, I hope, more liberated by, than Landrum Bolling." In 2010 he received the lifetime achievement award from the National Council on US-Arab Relations

Bolling has written or co-authored several books, including *Search for Peace in the Middle East*, *This is Germany*, *Private Foreign Aid*, *Reporters Under Fire*, and *Conflict Resolution: Track Two Diplomacy*. Bolling also wrote the documentary *Searching for Peace in the Middle East*.

<audio 3, September 11, 2002>

Sources:

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