peace for the season
This holiday season, USC Dornsife celebrates knowledge as the foundation for peace. Our researchers, scholars, and writers broaden our understanding of the world and build the empathy that enables stronger and more inclusive communities. We are grateful for all of our friends who join us in spreading kindness and compassion.

Wishing you a happy and peaceful new year!

Amber D. Miller
Dean of USC Dornsife
Anna H. Bing Dean’s Chair

We’ve probably all raised our fingers to create a “V” shape to add emphasis to a spirited “Fight On!” Allied nations during World War II used the symbol as a rallying cry for victory — as do Trojans at every football game. But what began as a sign of camaraderie among resistance fighters in German-occupied Europe was eventually adopted by anti-war activists as a symbol of peace.

Alumnus J. Wesley Robb, a beloved professor of religion at USC Dornsife, was instrumental in bringing civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. to speak at the university in the late 1950s. Despite some concerns that the civil rights leader’s visit might spark unrest, the event was peaceful, and King, an advocate of nonviolent resistance, returned many times to USC, from where he called for legislation to address racial oppression.
Ancient tales from Sumer tell us that thousands of years ago — and for thousands of years — people knew well the human capacity to wage war,” says Lynn Dodd, associate professor of the practice of religion and spatial sciences. “However, a recently found ancient clay tablet revealed a new scene about Gilgamesh, an ancient hero who once ruled a great city called Uruk in the land we now call southern Iraq. It relates terrifying destruction without mercy in a distant land. Eventually, having survived these exploits, which are attempts to build a reputation through pillage and battle, our hero Gilgamesh returns home. He discovers that he achieves immortality, a true and enduring legacy, through the security and peace he brings to his people.”

Among the many languages, countries and regions studied at USC Dornsife, “peace” translates as paz (Spanish), 和平 (Mandarin), paix (French), 和平 (Korean), Мир (Russian), pace (Italian), Friede (German), صلح (Arabic), 평화 (Japanese) and פָּאֵס (Hebrew). In 1914, five months into World War I, an unofficial and illicit Christmas truce spontaneously arose along the Western Front. On Christmas Eve, the Germans illuminated their trenches, and both sides began singing carols. Then, at dawn, British troops noticed that German soldiers had placed small Christmas trees along the parapets of their trenches. For a few brief hours, men from both sides laid down their arms and ventured into No Man’s Land, the shell-blasted wasteland between the trenches, to mingle, shake hands, exchange gifts, sing carols, play soccer, and share food and camaraderie. Associate Professor (Teaching) of History Lindsay O’Neill says, “It never happened again during the war, but for one brief moment amid the carnage, the death and the hate, humanity won and peace triumphed over war.”

One of the first presidential candidates to run a successful campaign with a peace-related slogan was a general. Ulysses S. Grant’s campaign promoted two seemingly disparate slogans: “Let Us Have Peace” and “Vote as You Shot.” “Grant as a man of peace? Lincoln thought so,” says Professor of History Richard Fox. “Grant delivered battle victories that brought a peace worth having: an end to the slave regime and the start of a nation with liberty for all.”

The international peace sign originally represented the threat of nuclear annihilation. First used by British anti-nuclear activists, it was widely adopted by the United States anti-war movement in the 1960s, becoming a generic symbol of peace. “Signs and symbols do more than represent values, they also shape them,” says Vanessa Schwartz, professor of art history and history and director of USC Dornsife’s Visual Studies Research Institute.

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At a diameter of 544 miles, its surface strewn with boulders and pockmarked with craters, *Mare Tranquillitatis* (the Sea of Tranquility) appears to some as the Man in the Moon's left eye. Astronomers Francesco Grimaldi and Giovanni Battista Riccioli bestowed its serene-sounding name in 1651, but its renown didn't peak until three centuries later when, on July 20, 1969, astronaut — and USC alumnus — Neil Armstrong would thrill millions by placing the first human footprints on its dusty surface.

“The Apollo program … inspired me to earn a Ph.D. in physics and carry out several decades of research in space science,” wrote Vahe Peroomian, associate professor (teaching) of physics and astronomy, in *The Conversation.*

In our joy, we think we hear a whisper. At first it is too soft. Then only half heard. We listen carefully as it gathers strength. We hear a sweetness. The word is Peace. It is loud now. It is louder. Louder than the explosion of bombs.

We tremble at the sound. We are thrilled by its presence. It is what we have hungered for. Not just the absence of war. But, true Peace. A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies. Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.

(Excerpt from Maya Angelou’s poem “Amazing Peace.”)