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[THE PEACE SYMBOL, 1970.]

SYMBOL: Something used for or regarded as representing something else; a material object representing something, often immaterial; emblem, token, or sign. The Random House Dictionary of the English Language

Throughout history symbols have been adopted by groups of people united in a common interest or goal. The twentieth century is no exception. The development of atomic weapons and the fear of a nuclear holocaust convinced many people of the "mutually suicidal character of war."¹ Groups were organized in many countries to promote the ideals of pacifism and nuclear disarmament. Eventually a symbol was created to represent the ideology of the movement.

In 1958 a four-day march from London to Aldermaston (site of the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment) was planned for the Easter week-end to demonstrate support for a policy of nuclear disarmament. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, one of the major British pacifist groups, was headed by Bertrand Russell and advocated "unconditional renunciation of nuclear weapons by Britain and a refusal to allow other powers--that is, the United States--to use them in Britain's defense."²

1. "Pacifism," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1969, XVII, 18.
2. Drew Middleton, "Atomic Arms Foes Gaining in Britain," New York Times, March 6, 1958, p. 8.

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This group and several others planned the Aldermaston March. The following article by Gerald Holtom describes how and why the peace symbol was designed.

The Nuclear Disarmament Symbol was designed on February 21, 1958, and was adopted immediately by Hugh Brock and Pat Arrowsmith on behalf of the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War (London) who initiated and organized the first Aldermaston March at Easter that year.

The Symbol, a composite basic form of the semaphore signal for the letters N and D, was one small contribution to the March. The meaning, in its original design context as an essential unit of the visual witness of the March, was more than "Nuclear Disarmament." The symbol was associated from the outset with the words "Unilateral Nuclear Disarmament."

First thoughts on the need for a symbol flowed from the obvious practical difficulty of making a large number of long banners with the words "Unilateral Disarmament"--words which are too long for the majority of people to read or understand. The first mark on paper was a white circle against a black square. This was followed by various versions of Christian crosses drawn within the white "sphere" on a black background and these in turn gave way to the final ND form.

From the moment the validity of the Symbol as a gesture of human despair became clear; the central motif--a human being in despair; a circle--the world; the background--eternity. This was the meaning of the ND sign carried on the Aldermaston March....

Immediately following the "First March" (there had been previous small scale Aldermaston demonstrations) an ND badge version of the Symbol was devised and made by Eric Austen. Eric's researches into the origins of symbolism confirmed that the "gesture of despair" motif has been associated through ancient history with the "death of man," and the circle with "the unborn child." The significance of the two motifs combined is the predicament in which, by chance, we live.³

3. Gerald Holtom, [article on the peace symbol], Win, October 1, 1969. Win is a publication of the War Resisters League.

It quite often happens that when one group espouses a certain philosophy, other groups arise which seek to present an opposing philosophy. The peace symbol has also been interpreted as a "broken cross," representing part of a Communist plot to destroy the United States by undermining the moral fiber of society. The source cited for this interpretation is Das Zeichenbuch "The Book of Signs" by Rudolf Koch. Upon examining the book, a sign resembling the stylized semaphore symbols is found on page 88, labeled "Der Krähenfusz oder Drudenfusz" (the crow's foot or witch's foot), with no further explanation of its meaning. There is no correlation established between this sign and any anti-religious movement, nor is any mention made of this sign in the chapter in the same book devoted entirely to crosses. The Deutsches Wörterbuch, a highly regarded German dictionary, defines "drudenfusz" as a pentagram, or five-pointed star, which has been foreshortened so that only three of its points are visible. The resulting sign may resemble the semaphore signs used in the peace symbol.

Symbols which are visually the same can represent quite different things. A prime example is the swastika, which to most people symbolizes Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party. However, this same sign has been used for thousands of years by many different cultures, including Indo-European peoples from Scandinavia to India, ancient Mexican and Peruvian peoples, and the early Christians. It would be wrong to assume that the swastika meant the same thing to all people who used it. Similarly, use of a symbol resembling the peace emblem does not imply a congruity of

philosophy between the people utilizing it.

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