

Educational Unit 3

THE MYTH OF VIGILANTE VIOLENCE



MOVE
nonviolence



Working Group on
Christian Nonviolence
Christianity and Justice Research Center



Centre d'estudis
Cristianisme i Justícia

"Move Nonviolence" is an educational commitment to initiate a process of personal transformation before the conflicts we face in our times, creating nonviolent strategies that free up situations that are at an impasse. This tool consists of a series of videos accompanied by the corresponding educational units so that the teaching guides have the material and direction for their work. The dynamics of this document are classified into sections and their topics in accordance with their appearance in the video. In some sections we suggest suitable options for each end-user profile. This proposal is intended for groups who can be accompanied by someone with a capacity for in-depth reflection on each subject.

Acquire all the material

www.movenonviolence.net

Each unit plan incorporates a series of associated material accessible from the project website: www.movenonviolence.net. The material of this specific unit is found in: <https://movenonviolence.net/U3>.



Vigilante violence

■ CHILDREN

A debate is proposed to the children. The situation is as follows: Mark hits his brothers, sisters and schoolmates over and over again. How can somebody intervene in response to this? What do we do if the person doesn't listen and continues to hurt others? The debate should be guided, to get the group to propose creative alternatives that will generate a change of attitude in the aggressor. If someone suggests hitting Mark, the following questions should be asked:

1. Does hitting Mark ensure that he will understand why he should never hit people?
2. Just because one person is violent, does that justify that the others should also become violent?
3. Doesn't violence always generate more violence?

In the end, the solution to the conflict can be explained with this metaphor: since when can we use fire to put out a fire or since when can we use water to dry a wet place?

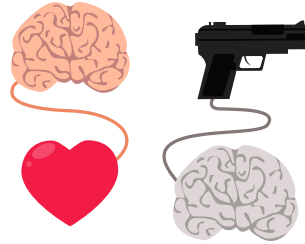
■ YOUTH

The participants stand forming a large circle and one participant stands in the middle. Someone in the circle is given a foam innertube (from a pool). The person in the centre must try not to be trapped by the person who has the innertube, and when trying to escape, he/she must pass beneath the legs of someone in the circle. The person with the innertube has to try to trap him/her, but when the person being chased has gone beneath the legs of someone in the circle, the roles are inverted: the pursuer becomes the pursued, the person with the open legs takes the innertube and takes on the role of the pursuer, and the person initially pursued takes his/her place in the circle. The participants cannot pass beneath the legs of the same person twice. The game ends when everyone has been the pursuer. Afterwards, the participants sit down to share their feelings and experiences: what does it feel like to be the pursuer or the pursued? How can we break this infinite pursuer-pursued dynamic in a real conflict without using vigilante violence (in other words, reciprocal retaliation)?

■ ADULTS

A young person with a political ideology and who is sick of the injustices of the system blows up a bomb that kills 75 people and injures 250 more. In keeping with the laws of the country, the judge and jury decide on the death penalty for a terrorist offence. As to the death penalty...:

- Is it an act of vengeance or an act of justice? Is it justified in any case?
- What will it solve and whom does it benefit?
- In this case, where can vigilante violence be found: in the law, in the decision or in the people who find it normal?
- Is there any solution that might benefit all the parties and where nobody else would die?



The person leading the group discussion will show the group that decisions must be taken from a place of intelligence, rather than from one of emotional impulse: one person's death will never repair another person's loss; rather, it will generate terrible suffering in other innocent people who are close to the person who is sentenced to death.

EVALUATING THE PROCESS OF NONVIOLENCE...

Are you a group leader? We invite you to keep a log of how the group has been evolving since the activities first began:

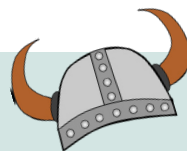
- Is anything changing in the way they understand and transform conflicts? Write it down.
- How does the group behave?
- What areas do you feel still need work?
- ...



1

Myth in our history

Think about the national heroes of your region or choose one from here and find information about him/her.



Greece → Alexander Magnus (356 aC-323 aC)
 Rome → Gaius Julius Caesar (100 aC-44 aC)
 Mongolia → Genghis Khan (1162-1227)
 Egypt and Syria → Salah-ad-Din (Saladin, 1138-1193)
 France → Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821)
 Spain → Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar (El Cid Campeador, 1048-1099)
 Catalonia → Wilfred I of Barcelona (El Pelós, 840 - 897)
 Scotland → William Wallace (1270-1305)
 Venezuela → Simón Bolívar (1783-1830)
 Mexico → Pancho Villa (1878-1923)
 Cuba → Ernesto Guevara (1928-1967)
 USA → George Washington (1732-1799)

Throughout history, heroes have always been presented as a perfect power. Yet we must consider that:

- Their strength leads them to become violent and arrogant.
- Heroes are above all presented as male, and if the hero in question is a woman, she is usually “masculinised”, because femininity is not accepted as a value.
- Heroes need to have an enemy and they are insensitive to the pain of that enemy.
- Heroes do not seek a consensus, let alone dialogue. Instead, they seek to strike and crush their adversaries.
- They become a totem of the group, a symbol that demands unity: any discrepancy will be construed as contradicting the totem and must be destroyed.

Divide the group into two smaller groups: one half learns about the profile of some of the violent heroes and each person presents the information on the chosen hero to the others. The other half of the group searches for and

presents the profiles of peaceful leaders from the same nations who are known for a NON-violent action. After everyone shares his/her information, the entire group then considers the following questions:

- Why do we only study and regard as heroes the individuals who adhere to the myth of vigilante violence?
- Let's make a list of the names of nearby streets and monuments that have to do with military or violent characters. Is it long or short? Why?
- If we value peace and we do not want war, why is it that only those who use military means are the most remembered heroes as figures of cultural and historic reference?
- How many people have been killed by a leader that we consider a hero? How many have been killed by someone we consider a criminal and who is now in prison? What does that lead us to believe?
- Could we invent specific initiatives to change the type of education and role models that we give to children?

Wanting to but can't



■ CHILDREN

Jim has always envied his friend Hazam for his mobile phone. His family can't afford to buy him such a high-end phone, as it is too expensive. But Jim knows that he can't steal it. That would be against the law. What would his parents think if he dared to do that! What would other people think of him! No way. But today Hazam has left his mobile phone on the table. The classroom is empty. Nobody realises it. Nobody sees him. Jim thinks it over a few times. What should he do? What would you do? What will lead him to do whatever he does?

■ YOUTH

Fatuma and Robert have fallen in love. She has decided to hide it from her husband and tries to maintain a double life, and Robert agrees to it. They get together occasionally in the afternoon; they have dinner together a few times ... They have considered spending a weekend away together. Fatuma asks a friend if she can use her as a cover with her husband and say that they will be going out of town together. What should her friend do? What would you do? Would you change your answer depending on whether someone were to find out the truth? Is this an authentic and transparent decision?

■ ADULTS

Helen is happy at the school where she works. She has a good connection with the students and she is happy at work. Her boss is very happy with her work. Yesterday she ran into Sheila's mum; Sheila is a student in the 8th grade, and Helen and her mother have been friends for years. The mother was complaining a lot about the way the school was leading a project. Helen feels the same as Sheila's mother, but she knows that if she reinforces her friend's criticism, she isn't playing in her own favour or in favour of the school where she works. If she tells her that she agrees with her, she'll feel bad. If she defends the school, she feels that she's going against her own convictions. What should she do? What would you do? Would you change your answer depending on whether someone were to find out the truth?

The guide will reinforce the last questions in such way as to make obvious the governing criterion when we opt to step on the other person's toes or not (the moral duty) or what I want "by conviction" (from the heart). Are there ways to honestly integrate what we should do (duty) with what we want to do (heart)? The guide can suggest one: more communication. Would the answer change if it were possible that others might discover the way I have acted? Do we act out of fear of the law or are we moved by our personal convictions? Similarly, we should evaluate whether our nonviolent actions stem from convictions (heart) or social conventions (duty) that we do not believe in deep down. Am I capable of being countercultural?

3

Has he/she saved our world?



Let's take from our culture or environment a fictitious story that speaks of a hero who saves the world. Let's analyse the following characteristics:

- What is his/her main power?
- How does he/she usually act to save the world?
- With what degree of humanity are his/her enemies portrayed? In other words, are they people who decide to act poorly due to specific or perhaps difficult circumstances? Or rather are they more like cold and cruel monsters?

Now, distribute these roles among three participants. Depending on their age, they could act them out in front of the rest of the group in a joint scene:

- **Hero.** This person is strong, smart, fast, and sure of his/her superior power, and feels compelled to destroy the bad guys to save the world.
- **Victims 1 and 2.** They are weak. They suffer, and they hate the tyrant that makes their lives impossible. They would like to do away with him, but they can't. They blindly rely on the hero, who will free them from the enemy.
- **Tyrant.** Evil and apparently almighty, this person does whatever he/she wants, and uses fear to subjugate everyone. The Tyrant enjoys making others suffer.

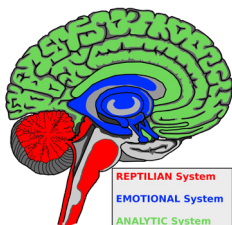
Three more characters enter the scene and they are assigned these new roles. They can be asked to do a public monologue of their thoughts while interacting with the other characters. They are assigned a set amount of time (2-3 min.):

- **The hero's mother.** She intensely loves and is proud of her son/daughter, but at the same time, she worries about him/her. She thinks that her if child risks his/her life so much, one day the hero, her child, will get hurt when helping people.
- **The tyrant's mother.** She sees the bad things the tyrant is doing and it hurts her greatly. She feels guilty for not having taught her child better and out of her motherly love, she would like to get him/her back on track. She scolds the tyrant, but her son/daughter is angry. He /she pays no attention at all to her, and usually sends her away.
- **The tyrant's daughter.** She sees her father/ mother as a model. She has other friends of her age and some of them suffer oppression: this throws her off. Despite it all, she would like to be like her father / mother, have the same power and be able to do whatever she wants, just like the her father / mother does.

Finally, have the entire group imagine the "ideal situation": the hero saves the world, like in the fiction story that we have initially analysed. How would each character feel? (perhaps they themselves could describe this). Would the tyrant's mother and child make do with a savage world like this? What consequences have been imposed on them? Guide the group to discover how simplistic fiction is: the salvation achieved by weapons is no more than a waiting period for rearmament before a new attack.

Myth in our culture

01



The North-American doctor Paul D. MacLean presented¹ a model that provided information on how the human brain works in three interconnected systems:

- The **REPTILIAN system** (base and cerebellum). Dominant in reptiles, ancient and fast, this structure was in charge of the reflex response, unconscious physiology and survival...
- The **EMOTIONAL system** (limbic system, which is regulated by the amygdalae). More present in mammals, this system is responsible for emotions, motivations, memory, social relations...
- The **ANALYTIC system**: governed by the neocortex. Most developed in human beings, this system is responsible for comprehension, abstract thought, motor coordination, language...

Aggression and sexuality, for example, are impulses that we all have and which stem from the reptilian system. These impulses can be externalised in constructive or destructive acts. Yet the analytic system often pressures the emotional and reptilian systems, representing them, to maintain an ideal, rational and socially acceptable image. This relationship

of inhibition affects our conduct: in order to relax, we need to be able to live everything that we have censured for ourselves, yet with no personal risk to us. It can happen that in order to relax, we need to consume extremely violent films or pornography. This seems to suggest the lack of integration among the three systems of the brain, leading to a situation where we do not feel free enough and where we become the slaves of our own impulses.

Activity: In an age-appropriate manner, explain these three systems of the brain to the group. Fill in the blackboard with possible violence-related entertainment options that the group uses to relax: write in film titles, the names of videogames, TV series, books, pinball-type experiences... Describe them. Next, ask the group the following questions:

- Do they have any similarities with the story of the vigilante violence myth?
- Why do we need violence-based experiences to enjoy or relax?
- ¿Consumir este tipo de ocio puede ejercitarnos más el sistema reptiliano y cambiar, por tanto, nuestra forma de reaccionar (imponiendo, siendo poseivos, territoriales...)?
- Can the consumption of this type of entertainment exercise our reptilian system more and therefore change the way we react to things (imposing, being possessive, being territorial, etc.)?
- How can we integrate the reptilian system without feeling the need to spend time on uninhibited consumption to satisfy our instincts? Can we embrace the impulse without acting on it, by symbolising it and deciding on it ourselves?
- How could we integrate a response that is not enslaved by our emotions?

1. MACLEAN, P. D. (1990). *The Triune Brain in Evolution: Role in Paleocerebral Functions*. Berlin: Springer.

Do we survive thanks to violence?



Start the session with this statement in the middle of the blackboard: "What ensures the survival of humankind is violence". Next to it, place a definition, so that everyone has the same point of departure: "Violence is any aggression in the form of an action or words that aims to harm a living being". Next to the first statement, propose three stages of work, adapting them all to the age of the group:

1. Without saying anything, and with soft music playing in the background, invite the participants to express what the first statement suggests to them, yet without speaking. In silence. The participants have access to pieces of paper of different sizes, colours, paints, markers, bits of rubber, bits of fabric, etc., and may use any artistic material that occurs to them. Once they have finished, do not reach any conclusions or engage in any debates. For a few minutes, allow the participants to view what the others have expressed. This is not a rational activity, but rather one of free expression.
2. After the participants have given free rein to their artistic imagination for a while in silence with the first statement, the guide will have them form small groups and suggest that they stage a situation of conflict that they have imagined upon listening to that

statement. This activity should be carried out independently of the previous one. In this activity, the participants should converse and they should do so by sharing a suggested situation, with the aim of acting it out.

3. Next, all together, the group will think about the above expressions, in keeping with the ages of the participants. The guide will find a way to question them:

- Are there situations that can only be resolved with violence?
- What violence is there in the game rules of some of the situations that have been staged? Have violent means been used to reach peaceful solutions? If the solutions are peaceful, does that fact justify the use of the violent means (does the end justify the means)?
- Let's replace the statement above with the opposite statement: "What ensures the survival of humankind is love". Does everyone agree? What examples of this could we come up with?
- If it is true that love ensures survival, could it be that violence is unnecessary or little necessary for our survival?
- Putting things into perspective, what is more helpful for our survival, love or violence?

Violence tricks us: poisons and antidotes



POISON: There are only good guys and bad guys. We are the good guys and the bad guys are inhuman.



ANTIDOTE: Read the following article and discuss it as a group:

02 Pandillero

What moves the members of a gang to become gang members? What do they see in the gang? Bearing in mind their actions, yet also the testimony of the article, do you think the members of the gang are totally “bad”? And are we totally “good”? James Gilligan, a psychiatrist from Harvard University, has been working in prisons for 25 years and this is how he describes violence in the people he has met:



03 James Gilligan

So, could it be that the “bad guys” are in fact human? What motivated their actions?



POISON: We will be safe if we destroy the bad guys, because they are incurable, and it is useless to try anything else.



ANTIDOTE: As a group, discuss the testimony of this Jewish couple:

04 Michael & Julie Weisser

How can we determine whether a person is or is not curable? Now, imagine the emotional ties of the grand dragon with his family, friends and loved ones. How would they feel if they found out about the Weissers’ behaviour? And if he were murdered or sentenced to death? So, in the end, for peace, is it better to cure the aggressor by touching his heart or to project violence and retaliation against him? Which option returns and spreads violence, and which one absorbs it?

POISON: Violence saves people and will resolve conflict: it is the only means with enough power to be useful

ANTIDOTE: Let’s think: A study² run by Chenoweth and Stephan in 2011 analysed 323 international conflicts between 1900 and 2006. Categorised according to the way each conflict was resolved, 26% of the conflicts that were met with violence achieved their goal, whereas 53 % of the conflicts that were met with nonviolent measures achieved their goals. Can it be substantiated that violence is the only option with enough power to be useful in conflicts? Does violence leave behind a healthy and lasting relationship between the parties when it defeats by crushing its opponent?

POISON: We all have the right to express our pain through violence

ANTIDOTE: Let’s look at these three short videos:

05 Crianza sin violencia

06 A trip to the furniture store...

07 Hammers

It isn’t easy to be a parent, and we can’t always come up with the ideal and immediate responses to our children with the same degree of patience. Yet in the face of fatigue, if we systematically respond by yelling or being abrupt, what message do we convey to them? How do you think they will react at school, when faced with conflicts?

2. CHENOWETH, E., STEPHAN, M.J. (2008). Why Civil Resistance Works. The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict, *International Security*, 33(1), pp. 7–44.

How do we decide based on myth?

IN THE FACE OF SOMEONE WHO PRACTICES EVIL. We are often quick to take decisions, and slow reactions are often stigmatised as “having been overthought”. Nevertheless, the impulsiveness that we have analysed in chapter 4 leads to hasty and often catastrophic decisions that perpetuate a blind obedience to the ever-present myth of vigilante violence.

■ CHILDREN (ages 9 and older)

Have them see the film *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2008). Ask them to invent and stage different possible endings to the story. How could the story have ended differently? What leads us to think of these other options? How are emotions expressed in them? The guide should get the group thinking in such a way as to explore the arguments that the children use to justify the use of violence.

■ YOUTH AND ADULTS

Propose a discussion based on the film *Shawshank Redemption* (1994) or *Music Box* (1989). Propose a debate based on themes such as:

- If I were to find myself in the situation of the attorney of the film *Music Box*, when I found out the truth about my father, would I change my opinion of his sentence?
- Do you think that the gravity of the reasons for which the main character of *Shawshank Redemption* is condemned can be lessened at any time?
- In what ways do you think that you too “kill” people around you? (not all death is physical; we can also wipe people out by talking about or ignoring them).

TO ALLEVIATE ANGUISH. Why do people consume violence for enjoyment? Often, when we are over-tired, after too much work, the tension of certain relationships, etc., to disconnect, we look for something to consume compulsively. Imagine yourself walking away from a very stressful situation. What do you do? Do you go shopping, compulsively start up with your mobile phone, watch mindless TV series, colour mandalas, go running, call a friend who can take anything, cry inconsolably, punch a pillow, write everything that occurs to you, submerge yourself in a creative project (painting, drawing, poem, etc.), get together with someone for a beer, find some addictive substance...? The pleasure effect that our brains record after consuming violence replaces the pleasure that we can obtain through other non-violent methods. Aside from providing us with pleasure, and depending on the characteristics of our brains, frequent exposure to violence gradually transmits to us psychopathological tendencies: it helps to consolidate violent behavioural patterns; it spurs the need to call attention to oneself; and it promotes verbal aggression, violent conduct, a lack of self-esteem, anxiety and post-traumatic stress, symptoms of depression, interaction problems and isolation and somatisation. This can be seen in scientific studies such as the [08 DETECTA Research Project](#) and the study [09 Reactions to Media Violence: It's in the Brain of the Beholder](#).³ Why then, don't we disobey our emotional impulse and opt for a non-violent form of pleasure?

3. Complete article: [09 Reactions to Media Violence...](#), informative abstract: [10 Impact of violent media on the brain](#) and in Spanish: [11 El impacto de las imágenes violentas...](#)

What I consider a solution is a problem for the other



THINK ABOUT THE STATEMENT:
«WE WIN JUSTICE QUICKEST BY
RENDERING JUSTICE TO THE OTHER
PARTY» (M. GANDHI).

■ CHILDREN

Have them all lie down on the ground in whatever position they like, yet resting on the ground. Once each child has chosen his/her position, they must remain still, with their eyes closed, with the exception of four people who are not in the room, while the others lie down. The guide will instruct the four people to go into the room in pairs. One person in each pair will tie a handkerchief over his/her own eyes, and the other will take him/her by the hand to guide him/her through the room. The idea is for the person with open eyes to guide the one who can't see, until he/she can pick up a box located somewhere in the room. After the activity, invite the children think about the following: did the blind partner and the guide see "the world" in the same way? Show the group that the path for the seeing partner was in fact a problem for the blind partner. What must the blind partner do if he/she is convinced that the seeing partner is completely mistaken? Can we ever be blind in a given quarrel or conflict? What should we take into account?

■ YOUTH AND ADULTS

They are proposed the challenge of having to handle in public and without "blowing their lid" a close conflict in which they feel they belong to one of the parties. It is important to take all the possible data into consideration, to look closely at nuances. Select four people who think differently about the issue. One by one, they express their solutions, what they believe could ultimately bring about peace. A secretary sums up four proposals with a single sentence for each. Next, the participants are asked to take part in a collective exercise: think about how the group most adversely affected would experience each of those solutions at the family, social, political and personal levels. Would it be a solution for them or a new problem? How could they minimise the damage to the other party, so that they are more satisfied with the solution?



9

Being violent is ineffective

Within a conflict, what would we consider an effective solution? Let's discuss it:

- Whether the solution comes about as quickly as possible.
- Whether the solution reaches the end with the least number of victims.
- Whether it minimises the quantity and quality of the suffering inflicted.
- Whether it minimises the probability that the conflict will break out again
- ...

If we have to measure the efficacy of a given strategy (violent or nonviolent), all of these variables must be taken into account!

■ CHILDREN

Look at the story of Alicia, Martin and Cesar. Why do you think that everyone follows Cesar's proposals against Martin? What makes Alicia change her mind? Are you going through something similar in class, with your friends or in your family...? Analyse what you gain by launching an attack or working together: how does Alicia define her class at the end of the video? (she says there is a good vibe, meaning that it is more "efficient")

Make the children aware that in fact violence brings you more problems, whereas being nice opens doors. Moreover, if we are friends, we join forces, and that will accomplish much more than what a single person can do alone: rescuing Captain Canine

■ YOUTH AND ADULTS

Print on a large poster these three diagrams. Set aside a few minutes to enable everyone to look at them and understand their data:

- [14 Number of deaths in conflicts \(1400 AD-2000 AD\)](#)
- [15 The 100 worst atrocities in history \(400 BC-2000 AD\)](#)
- [16 Deaths from firearms compared with the number of guns in the civil society \(2018\)](#)

Even though the absolute number of deaths in wars has decreased substantially since 1945, it is hair-raising to see what the violent strategy has done throughout history. Could you draw any conclusions? Now listen to this video of Erica Chenoweth:



[12 No Juegos Conmigo](#)



[13 Bully](#)

Watch the story of Lupi and Billy. How many friends did Billy have when he was making other people's lives impossible? How many did he have after he changed his attitude?

[17 Erica Chenoweth](#)



Or watch a passage from the documentary Bowling for Columbine (2002). In 2016, the USA housed 5 % of the world population but accounted for 31 % of the mass shootings in the world. Based on these data and the third graph, would you say carrying a gun is effective? Does the world get better or worse when people use weapons to protect themselves?

10

Is there a more efficient way?



The efficiency criterion of violence is generally always the same: defeating the other means winning the battle. But in fact, the defeated side will simply wait for the chance to rearm itself and fight

back again. The efficiency criterion of nonviolence, however, is a win-win situation where peace can finally be sustained. Though this efficacy requires putting more time and effort into preparing the strategy, in the long run, the result pays off! Discuss these arguments:

- **Building a nonviolence network is more effective than treating the one who does evil with violence.** You may wish to recover the study by Chenoweth and Stephan (discussed in Chapter 6) to assess the data on the effectiveness of nonviolence in international conflicts. In conflicts at schools, the KiVa programme against bullying is founded on a conviction: punishing the bully is not effective, whereas working from the approach of nonviolence in the context of a group is effective. Evaluate the results of this:

well-armed army with no inner conviction will ultimately be defeated. Weapons are the consumables of fear, and they can always be overpowered by more lethal weapons, leading to the perpetuation of destruction. Internal strength, on the other hand, is indestructible. The obstinacy of peaceful resistance is a motor that erodes the purposes of evil. Discuss the poem *Invictus* by William Ernest Henley, placing it in the context of the twenty-seven years of prison suffered by Nelson Mandela. You can also discuss the famous statement by Mohandas K. Gandhi: "You can chain me, you can torture me, you can even destroy this body, but you will never imprison my mind".

- **Nonviolence saves both sides**, unlike only favouring one side, as violence does. For this reason, because it is inclusive, it achieves a far more effective result.
- **Nonviolence changes the game rules**, whereas violence subjugates others by imposing its own game rules. If the game rules are destructive, it is more effective to change them than to use them
- **Nonviolence gets to the root of the conflict**, whereas violence only reacts by crushing the consequences of the problem, and is therefore less effective. Through the 3Rs, nonviolence can actually push through the causes of a blocked conflict: peaceful resistance (includes disarming the aggressor's heart), resilience (includes the management of internal suffering) and finally, reconciliation (includes constantly forgiving the aggressor).



18 Programa KiVa

- **Nonviolence is based on inner strength, which is impossible to break, unlike violence, which is based on weapons.** This leads people to tag nonviolence as weakness, for because it is not tangible, it seems like personal determination is not particularly firm. Despite everything, a

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