

Christie, D. J., Wagner, R. V., & Winter, D. A. (Eds.). (2001). ***Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

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## **FOREWORD**

Unlike much trendy writing that has been cashing in on the change of centuries and millennia, this splendid book very appropriately links its treatment of peace psychology to the special date of its issue. The threats and opportunities presented to a psychology of peace, conflict, and violence are so radically different in the twenty-first century than they were until the very last decade of the bloody twentieth century. Responding to the new challenges, the editors and authors present a reconceptualization of peace psychology as a field of research and practical intervention, filled out with contributions that represent the best ongoing work. This book unquestionably becomes the best single resource for psychologists, students, other social scientists, and concerned citizens to turn to for orientation to psychology's present and potential involvement in these important matters. I see it as giving enduring shape to the field.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the top priority for people concerned with war and peace was preventing the catastrophe of nuclear war between the giant nuclear powers around which world politics were polarized. Ralph White, the stalwart elder statesman of peace psychology, edited a fine book, *Psychology and the Prevention of Nuclear War* (New York University Press, 1986), which brought together a representative

selection of the best psychological thought on the topic. Since I wrote the Foreword to that volume, I am keenly aware how greatly the present book contrasts in conception. My thinking was shaped by the intellectual climate of the Cold War era, of which I am a survivor. It may be useful to readers of the present book for me to comment briefly on matters about which its editors and authors have really changed my thinking.

At a time when embarrassingly few psychologists saw fit to give priority to what seemed to them to be a matter of sheer world survival, I regarded it as a distraction to include the agenda of social justice under the same banner as avoidance of nuclear war. I thought that Psychologists for Social Responsibility, in which I was active, ought to concentrate its efforts on mobilizing psychologists to the absolutely critical issue of survival—especially since I had come to think they would use any excuse to avoid attending to the prospect of nuclear annihilation—an avoidance resulting from well-learned helplessness. So I did not warm to Johan Galtung's proposal (which plays a major role in the conceptualization developed here) to refer to the various forms of social injustice that harm people as “structural violence,” thereby pairing structural violence with direct violence as social evils to be combated. I had a strong continuing commitment to the struggle against injustice, but thought the distinction between direct violence and social injustice conceptually and politically important. It even seemed to me that the idea of structural violence was a kind of rhetorical tactic to get people more concerned with injustice—a worthy objective but one that sets the wrong priorities when the likelihood of nuclear catastrophe was so great.

But the Cold War ended more than a decade ago, and although the risks of nuclear war

remain so long as enormously destructive nuclear armament is stockpiled, the avoidance of nuclear war is no longer the preemptive issue. And the violence characterizing our post–Cold War era is not primarily between nation states engaged in the anarchic power plays of Realpolitik; it is increasingly between ethnic or religious groups, often within nation-states. In this new situation, I find the four-fold scheme on which this book is organized very appropriate.

In their brilliant introductory chapter, which also gives a sound review of the history of Peace Psychology in the Cold War era, Christie, Wagner, and Winter pull together much emerging consensus in their four categories. There is direct violence and structural violence, in the sense of Galtung’s distinction. And there are ways of stopping or preventing violence: peace-making including conflict resolution in the case of direct violence, peacebuilding in that of structural violence. Since direct violence at both the individual and group levels gets instigated or augmented by the thwarting of human needs (yes, there is something to the old frustration-aggression hypothesis), the link between peacebuilding and social justice is explicitly argued. The merit of the scheme is especially clear in the authors’ call for a systems orientation in which the reciprocal influence of direct and structural violence is recognized.

The chapters deal with conflict and violence at the interpersonal and intergender as well as intergroup and interstate levels, affording valuable perspectives on such currently active research areas as child and spousal abuse. The editors properly note that whether conflict and violence at different levels follow similar patterns of relationship and respond to similar interventions is a questions for empirical research.

The book's emphasis on peacebuilding and social justice will inherently make it controversial. Research on structural violence and social justice, let alone activism in the promotion of social justice, inherently challenges the status quo, in which injustice is structurally embedded. So be it. If psychologists are to involve themselves in the attempt to reduce the human carnage that follows from urban destitution or poverty in what we used to call the "Third World," they are likely to find themselves in the intellectual company of emancipatory radicals like Paolo Friere or Ignacio Martín-Baró.

The general direction of the book's marshalling of current knowledge and wisdom, as I sense it, does not support Utopian expectations of a final solution for the human problems of conflict and violence, expectations so often shattered in the past. I see the prospect of an empirically grounded Peace Psychology with an activist wing, which can contribute substantially to the never-ending effort to keep the human world livable for human beings. This book makes a large contribution to the identity of such a discipline.

*M. Brewster Smith*

*Santa Cruz, California*