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## Review of Fighting Better: Constructive Conflicts in America

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***Fighting Better: Constructive Conflicts in America.* Lou Kriesberg. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2023, 344 pages, paper, ISBN 9780197674796**

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There is no time like the tumultuous present to challenge conflict resolution studies with an existential review of twentieth-century America. Certainly, the world saw horrors on a grand scale over the course of the industrial age. These have formed the backdrop for our field, prompting us to ask guiding questions about the structural and cultural bases of conflict; whether, when, and how conflicts can be constructive avenues for realizing social justice; and how social policies and practices can ensure peace, security, and equity for the most marginalized among us. Lou Kriesberg's latest book, *Fighting Better: Constructive Conflicts in America*, takes on the zeitgeist of the Left in the United States today. He confronts deepening social and political polarization, the highly partisan and now deadlocked political system in which intense fighting continues to occur at every level, new dips in inequality, and widespread alienation, disenfranchisement, and fears about the state of our democracy.

Kriesberg's tour de force takes readers through an ambitious systemic analysis of over one hundred years of political power struggles based on class, race, and gender. *Fighting Better* asks us to "reflect backward in order to look forward" into how a longstanding tradition of constructive conflict transformation might carry us into a more peaceful state of affairs. Across ten chapters, Kriesberg examines the evolution of US society. In chapters on class conflict, he takes readers from workers' struggles to organize unions and conduct strikes at the end of the 1800s and early 1900s to the 2009 Tea Party movement in protest of a plan to relieve mortgage foreclosures. His chapters on race in America span from some of the earliest lunch counter desegregation sit-ins in the 1940s (including one in Los Angeles, organized by Glenn Smiley, in which Kriesberg participated) to the emergence of #BlackLivesMatter in the wake of a brutal wave of anti-Black killings by police officers in 2013. Finally, his chapters on gender cover the feminist fight for equal pay and against workplace discrimination to the push for #MeToo to become a formal amendment to the Congressional Accountability Act in 2017.

*Fighting Better* draws on Kriesberg's foundational contributions to conflict resolution studies, providing a 30,000-foot view of the many ongoing layered and intersecting battles over rights, resources, responsibilities, the boundaries of belonging, entitlement, and privilege in the US. To do so, he applies seven core ideas from the constructive conflict approach:

1. That conflicts unfold in institutionalized environments. Those environments hold the legitimacy to allow and govern struggle, even as they suffer from institutional inertia intrinsic to their design.
2. The importance of noncoercive inducements, including a combination of political persuasion and positive sanctions.
3. The recognition of diversity across oppositional lines followed by an effort to leverage common bonds and interconnections to arrive at mutually beneficial solutions.

4. The development of an understanding of the socially constructed nature of conflict, identities and demands, opponents' stances, and the potential for change so that both sides can arrive at common objectives and agreements.
5. The pointed search for mutual gains that should follow from this understanding.
6. A recognition of the intricate ways individual conflicts are embedded in and interconnected with larger conflicts.
7. A broad understanding of the flexible nature of conflicts across time and space.

For scholars and students questioning what has happened in the US to place us in this present state of division, this book is both timely and urgent. As Kriesberg makes clear from the outset, it's just as vital to identify the latent stages of conflict embedded in structural inequalities as it is to analyze the dynamics of active conflict in periods of escalation. All too often, failing to do so can lead to new levels of suffering that may have been avoided with earlier interventions.

Further, Kriesberg asks us to look closely at more than the big events that have come to symbolically denote major paradigmatic shifts in class, race, and gender relations in the US. There is much historical complexity to be gained in reconsidering the countless small-scale, early, and experimental resistance tactics of movements and scrutinizing the dynamics of their evolution into the more visible grand gestures made by lawmakers. In *Fighting Better*, Kriesberg helps us to see both the forest and the trees and to identify and better understand the breakdowns in what could have led to more transformative conflicts at multiple levels.

Finally, this book begs the essential question I think must be asked at this pressing moment in the US in 2023: what can we do now with all of the empirical and theoretical work the field has generated over the last seven decades while standing at what may feel for some like a crossroads and for others like a corner turning into an unknown future?

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