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Review of *Fighting Better: Constructive Conflicts in America*, by Louis Kriesberg.

Neil H. Katz

As someone who worked under Dr. Louis Kriesberg's tutelage at Syracuse University for 37 years and has read many of his over 160 publications, I am grateful for his continued activity in research, writing, and publications in his ninth decade of life. His contributions to peace and conflict studies have been informative, and impressive. They have moreover enhanced my understanding of social conflicts. Exciting and pleasing me the most is his recent book on *Fighting Fair*, which cleverly weaves in previously published insights on constructive conflict principles with a cogent analysis of both gains and failures in advancing equity over the past 70 years along three critical dimensions: class, status, and power.

Dr. Kriesberg's contribution is notable for its comprehensive overview of progress and regression in enhancing equity, particularly in its coverage of public policy conflicts and decisions in U.S. administrations starting from the end of World War II in 1945. The narration in the sections on class, status, and power unfolds with the nuance of a novel, highlighting the importance of well-known characters in shaping events along these three critical dimensions. Lurking in the shadows are the millions of Americans affected by the decisions of policymakers, notably marginalized groups such as the poor, women, and African Americans. The book persuasively argues that rising inequality in class has been on the ascent since the early 1980s with the presidency of Ronald Reagan, and it found its zenith in recent years under the Trump administration. The section on recent years is especially illuminating, as the author outlines the intended and sometimes-unintended consequences of policies and the ensuing conflicts shaped by them.

One critical and unexpected insight from Dr. Kriesberg's book was the interplay between power and the divergent paths taken by class and status, as well as how the strategies and tactics pursued by partisans impacted their trajectory. The author's exhaustive research highlights some positive developments in recent decades, such as enhanced status among many groups particularly women on equal rights and African Americans, as well as other collective identities such as LGBTQ and even White identity. Nevertheless, his sharpest analysis and criticism are focused on the "hyper inequality of income and wealth... that distorts the political system to serve the interests of the wealthiest people, neglecting the needs of most others" (p. 69). The erosion of political

power among the American people has further exacerbated this problem, caused in part by policies that promote the trickle-down theory of income distribution despite its obvious flaws.

The subtitle of the book *Fighting Fair* is “Constructive Conflicts in America.” The book discusses the principles that underlie this approach in the first and last chapters and offers many examples making the case that choices on how conflicts are waged influence constructive or destructive results. What is unique though in this work is that Kriesberg illuminates this theme through a seven-decade historical narrative of American society's advances and backlashes along the three critical dimensions of class, status, and power.

The book also explores the shifting allegiances of the working class and certain immigrant groups in today's political climate, as well as the dangerous effects of politicians and social media in obscuring the failures of equity advancement efforts by deflecting the narrative to issues such as anti-woke cultural wars.

Dr. Kriesberg's optimism in the last chapter surprised and impressed me the most, especially given the troublesome trends highlighted in the preceding nine chapters. Understanding Dr. Kriesberg's history helps shed light on the source of this optimism, including his work combating poverty, racism, and sexism in his hometown of Syracuse, NY, and his strong revulsion to the horrors of war he witnessed growing up in the 1940s and 1950s. After obtaining his Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Chicago in 1953, he sought to do something about it by collaborating with like-minded colleagues to initiate early efforts in peace and conflict studies programs and professional associations.

Dr. Kriesberg's optimism is also rooted in his many examples of progress fueled by social movements promoting greater freedom and fairness by exercising nonviolent collective power rather than distributive power. This observation leads him to quote and have faith in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s idea that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice” (p. 3). The book's compelling theme is that fighting better by pursuing constructive social conflicts via non-coercive inducements, persuasion, and positive sanctions, along with a commitment to serving mutual interests and supporting democratic principles, may hasten the bending of this arc.