

Book Review: Cameron D. Lippard, Pavel Osinsky, and Lon Strauss, *War: Contemporary Perspectives on Armed Conflicts Around the World*. New York: Routledge, 2018. ISBN: 9781138932531 (Paperback). 336 Pages. \$54.95.

Reviewed by James E. Sutton¹

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Cameron Lippard, Pavel Osinsky, and Lon Strauss' new book, *War: Contemporary Perspectives on Armed Conflicts Around the World*, delivers a thorough overview of the literature on war and closely related topics. This book is a dynamic interdisciplinary work that will appeal to scholars in several disciplines, including, but not limited to: history, international relations, philosophy, political science, and sociology. At the same time, it specifically foregrounds sociological thinking on war, evidenced in part by its substantial sections on core sociological themes, such as, cultural representations of war, war and social stratification, and peace and antiwar social movements.

Collectively, the authors have published widely on war, the military, and a range of other sociological topics. They also feature an intriguing blend of educational and professional experiences, with each having taught at multiple institutions. Lippard earned his Ph.D. in Sociology from Georgia State University and is currently a Professor of Sociology at Appalachian State University. Osinsky is also a Professor of Sociology

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at Appalachian State. He initially earned a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Moscow State University in Russia and then later earned a second Ph.D. in Sociology from Northwestern University. Strauss is currently an Assistant Professor of Military History at the U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College. He previously taught at the U.S. Army War College and earned his Ph.D. in U.S. History, Military History, and Modern European History from the University of Kansas.

I do not know any of these authors, nor am I privy to the writing strategy that ultimately produced this book. With this said, it is my strong sense that each of these authors made integral contributions. Their fluency in multiple disciplines, their integration of a wide range of substantive examples from both around the world and throughout history, and their seamless and coherent presentation of this content all stood out and impressed me. The authors thoroughly researched this book, and their distinct yet complementary backgrounds enriched the final product.

War is available in hardcover, paperback, and eBook format. The authors refer to this book as a textbook, and accordingly they include photographs, figures, tables, framing paragraphs at the beginning of each chapter, bolded terms within the text, and discussion questions at the end of each chapter. Most of the discussion questions tend to reinforce the factual content presented in each chapter, as opposed to facilitating application or stoking debate.

The authors additionally provide forty-one “Break Out Boxes” that present case studies, key contributions from the literature, and other thought-provoking segments in more depth. For demonstrative purposes, the titles for a few selected examples include *Leo Tolstoy on War*, *President Dwight D. Eisenhower on the Military-Industrial Complex*, *C. Wright Mills and the Power Elite*, *Cultural Differences in European and Native American War Tactics*, *Eight Stages of Genocide*, and *Quotes on the Processes of Peace*. The authors clearly picked these items very carefully and placed them strategically within the chapters to reinforce core themes. I found these Break Out Boxes to be engaging, and frankly they were my favorite part of the book. I think students in particular will find them to be helpful.

Setting these sorts of standard textbook features aside, I am reluctant to call this book a “textbook.” In my view, this word increasingly has a superficial connotation as a small handful of large corporations continues to flood the market with generic, mass produced books. *War* is not like those and is instead a serious academic work. It does not read like a standard textbook given its breadth and depth, and the Break Out Boxes and other textbook features that I have referenced are subtle. In terms of

target audience, I would recommend this book for graduate students, advanced undergraduates, and researchers who wish to have a solid go-to reference.

The authors organize their content using seven chapters entitled: (1) *The Nature of War*; (2) *Adaptations in War*; (3) *The War Machine: The Political Economy*; (4) *The Cultural Representations of War*; (5) *War and Social Stratification*; (6) *War and Military Participation*; and (7) *Postwar Peace and Anti-War Movements*. On a supplemental page at the beginning of the book that precedes the table of contents, the authors claim “this book provides theoretical views of armed conflict and its impact on people and institutions around the world.” The authors certainly do interlace certain content with theory. However, I found theoretical contexts to be minimal for a lot of the overview material that they provide.

This brings me to *War's* comprehensiveness, which I found to be both its greatest strength and its most pressing limitation. I commend the authors for their broad coverage of substantive themes and examples. I challenged myself to come up with a list of relevant topics that I would hope to see in a book like this, including some more obscure topics that I would not necessarily expect to find. My list was informed in part by two *Annual Review of Sociology* articles (Kestnbaum, 2009; Wimmer, 2014), as well as by current events and my own interests. To my surprise, in some way this book contained every topic that I came up with (Donald Trump's call for a Space Force notwithstanding). I am therefore confident that other readers will similarly find the topics that they are interested in represented in *War*, which no doubt attests to the fact that the authors were extremely well-qualified to write this book.

War's breadth is, indeed, laudable, but in terms of depth, I found that certain sections and topics received less attention than I would have liked. *War* takes on the ambitious task of providing an interdisciplinary overview of multifaceted and complex issues that are often not among the primary emphases of sociologists and other scholars. It is therefore inevitable that the authors would simply be unable to treat every topic with the requisite or desired depth. To be clear, the authors do present several sections very thoroughly, with *The War Machine: The Political Economy* and *The Cultural Representations of War* chapters particularly standing out to me in this respect.

However, other sections are on the briefer side. For instance, in the *Adaptations in War* chapter, the authors devote only two pages of content to cyberspace. Given prospects for the future in this area, as well as current concerns in the U.S. with hacking and interference from other

nations, I think the authors missed an opportunity by not developing this section a little further. One other timely theme that I think warranted some additional attention is the treatment of opposing forces, which could include more on substantive topics, such as, prisoners of war, torture, and enemy combatants. These issues have received considerable coverage in popular culture in recent years, as we have seen in light of the controversies surrounding Guantanamo Bay. For this reason, I think that further discussion of these themes would have nicely balanced out the authors' thorough treatments of noncombatant and civilian deaths, terrorism, and genocide.

Up to this point, I have shared my belief that this is a very dynamic work and have noted some of its strengths. I have also referenced a few spots that were a little more limited in my view. I now turn to the final part of my review, where I will briefly highlight the two substantive sections of *War* that I found most compelling.

The first was early on in the book in the initial chapter when the authors addressed why people fight wars. They draw from multiple disciplines to outline a range of common explanations, including human nature, belligerent leaders, territorial disputes, bully states, anarchy in the international system, and hegemonic transitions, with each explanation becoming more sophisticated in terms of the level of analysis. We currently live in a time marked by increasing globalization, stratification and instability, demographic shifts, and more pronounced turns toward nationalism, coupled with the unprecedented Trump presidency. As we continue to weigh the meaning of these developments and their implications for the future, the intellectual context provided in this section is crucial.

The second of the two sections that I found especially interesting was the chapter on *The War Machine: The Political Economy*. In particular, I think the authors did a very nice job of describing examples of how organizational deviance perpetrated by elites can thrive within the context of war. For instance, the authors recount abuses of power by Haliburton and Dick Cheney during the Iraq war that resulted in opportunistic violations of federal laws and the public trust, all for financial gain. Moreover, they additionally call attention to the exploitation of marginalized people that occurred in conjunction with these schemes, which is something that rarely gets attention.

There are other parts of the book where the authors examine similar abuses of power along these lines. Ultimately, this all gets into the realm of what criminologists refer to as state-corporate crime, which “foregrounds the ways in which horizontal relationships between

economic and political institutions contain powerful potential for the production of socially injurious actions” (Kramer & Michalowski, 2006, p. 21). Though the authors do not use this language or draw directly from the state-corporate crime literature, they nonetheless have sections that nicely parallel published works on deviance and state-corporate offending associated with private military contractors (Rothe & Ross, 2010) and the Iraq war (Kramer & Michalowski, 2005; Rothe, 2006), to name a few examples.

When considering that war has been understudied by sociologists (Wimmer, 2014), Lippard, Osinsky, and Strauss’ *War: Contemporary Perspectives on Armed Conflicts Around the World* is a much-needed contribution to the literature. The authors were ambitious in this undertaking, with the end result being a dynamic and comprehensive book. Unfortunately, there are a myriad of important, well-developed, and interesting sections in *War* that I was simply unable to specifically address in my review. I therefore very strongly recommend that you read this book yourself to learn more about them.

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