

Positive Peace, Activism, and the Crises of Climate, Health, and Human Rights

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Webinar on Human Rights Challenges

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**Oregon State
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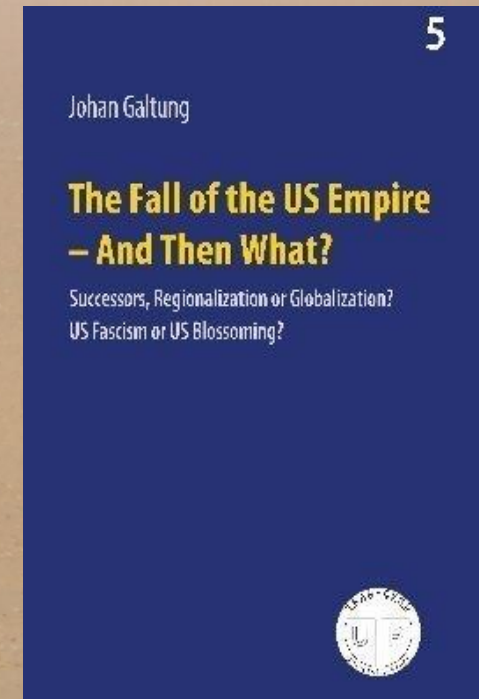
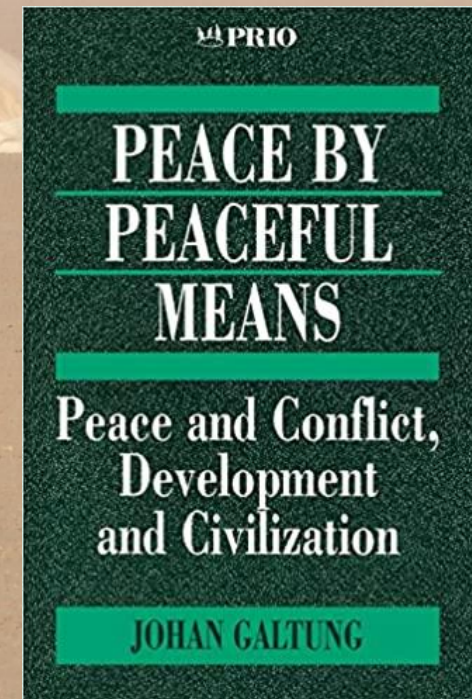
The Topics...

- **Introducing three people**
 - Professor Johan Galtung and his ideas on peace and violence
 - Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez and their work as activists
- **The Crises of Climate, Health, and Human Rights – and connections to peace and activism**



Let's meet Johan Galtung

- Prolific peace researcher – credited with founding “peace studies” as a discipline
- Professor at universities in Norway, Croatia, and the USA
- Founder of Transcend International – A Peace Development Environment Network (www.transcend.org)



A Perspective on Peace: Negative and Positive

- Professor and peace researcher Johan Galtung distinguishes between “negative peace” and “positive peace”
- Negative peace refers to the absence of violence. For example, when a ceasefire is enacted in a violent confrontation a negative peace emerges. It is negative because something undesirable stopped happening (e.g. the violence stopped, the oppression ended).
- Positive peace stems from constructive content and activity such as restoration of relationships, the creation of social systems that serve the needs of the whole society, and the constructive resolution of conflict.

Adapted from irenees.net – “a website of resources for peace”



A Perspective on Peace

- Peace is the confrontation and elimination of violence in all forms.
- Violence is that which denies individuals the opportunity to realize their psychological and physical potential.
- Positive peace and peacebuilding involve creating and improving all types of systems (e.g., institutional, relational) that foster sustainable peace and minimize violence in all forms.
- Positive peace and peacebuilding respect basic human needs – such as survival, physical well-being, liberty, and identity.

(Adapted from the works of Johan Galtung)



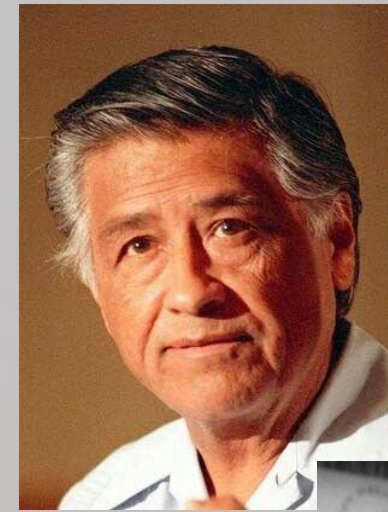
Peace – Overcoming three forms of violence

- **Direct:** One party suffers harm because of the actions another. An agent of violence can be identified.
- **Structural:** One party suffers harm because of actions not attributable to another party. The victim is identifiable but the agent of violence is not clear. Structural violence is often indirect, appearing as exploitation and repression.
- **Cultural:** One party suffers harm because of the self-perceived superiority of another (ethnocentrism). Galtung writes that “aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence -exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) ...can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence.” (*Journal of Peace Research*, 1990, p. 291)



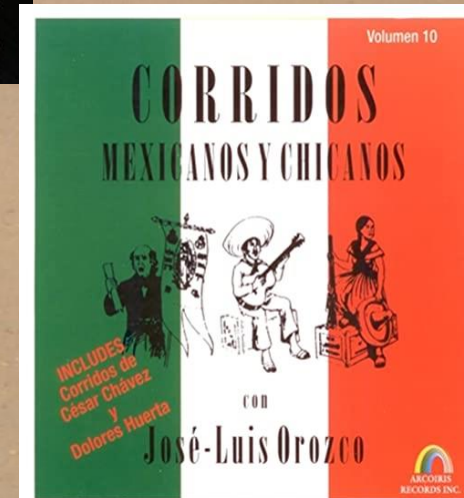
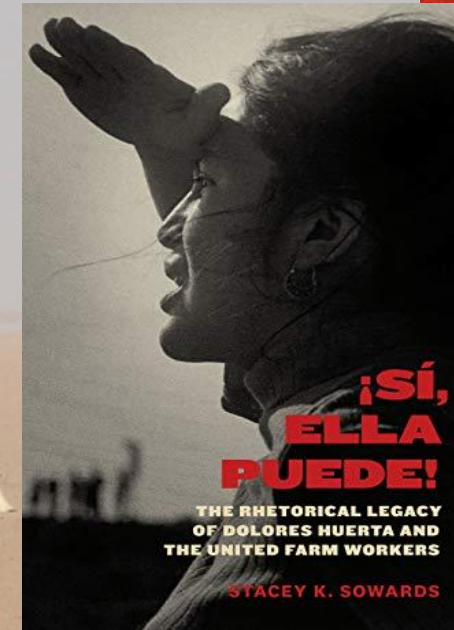
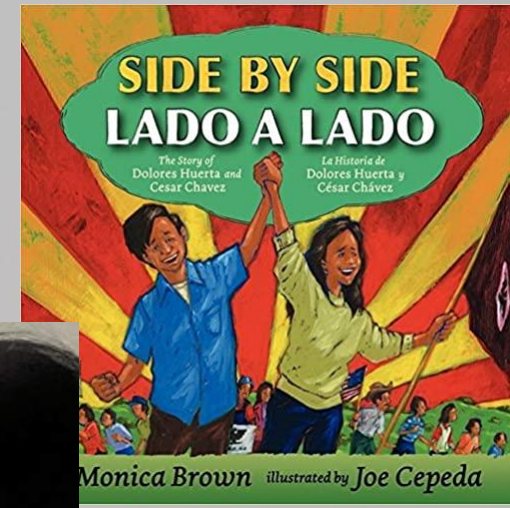
Let's Meet Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez

- For decades in the USA farm workers were exploited, doing difficult work for long hours, in poor working conditions with no benefits and low pay.
- In the 1960s in California (USA) Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez founded the the United Farm Workers (UFW) Union, a labor and civil rights organization. The UFW conducted produce boycotts (e.g., grapes, lettuce) in the 1960s and 1970s that resulted in rights-based labor contracts.



As Activists...Huerta and Chavez

- Were inspirational, displaying leadership and modeling the behavior that others would follow
- Took great risks (and received death threats)
- Confronted direct, structural, and cultural violence
- Believed in – and practiced – nonviolence and civil disobedience
- Sought labor rights (fair pay and good working conditions) and family rights (e.g., housing and schools)



Huerta and Chavez quotes of note

- Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world. (Huerta)
- Leaders come up from the volunteers that do the work, and it's amazing because then they do these incredible things in their community that they never thought they had the power to make that happen. (Huerta)
- Preservation of one's own culture does not require contempt or disrespect for other cultures. (Chavez)
- The burdens of generations of poverty and powerlessness lie heavy in the fields of America. If we fail, there are those who will see violence as the shortcut to change. (Chavez)



Peace and Activism – the Climate Crisis

- A global consensus on climate science has been achieved –and models have underestimated the future
- Climate crisis policies and practices generate controversy – when action is needed.
- What actions? Here are some possibilities.
 - Recognize structural violence in the climate crisis (e.g, marginalizing indigenous people)
 - Organize as activists – to educate, advocate, and influence
 - Support organizations and politicians that support a green climate agenda



Peace and Activism – The Health Crisis

- In terms of peace – The Pandemic's impacts reflect structural violence, with impacts on communities of color and low income (health and well-being)
- In terms of peace – Overcoming the Pandemic relies on civility and civic responsibility – people caring about and for one another
- In terms of activism – Advocating and educating for responsible behaviors from individuals, organizations, and governments. Some examples:
 - Socially responsible behavior (e.g, masks, distancing)
 - Actions to support people in need (e.g., housing, jobs, food, health care)



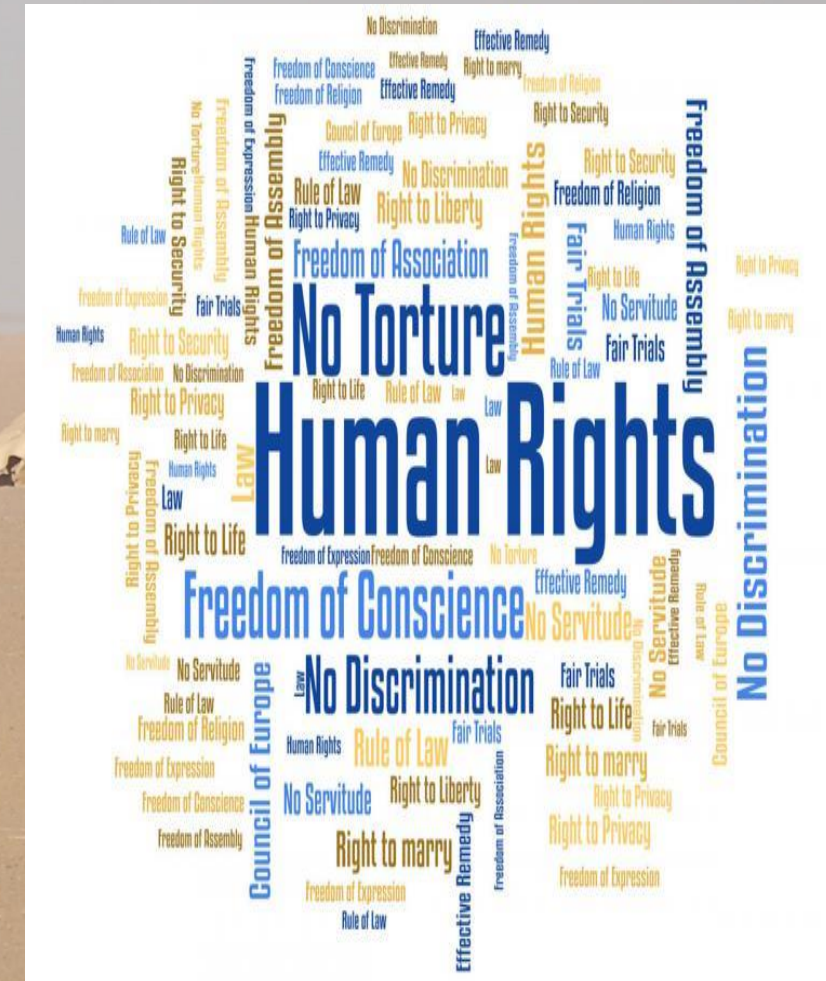
Peace and Activism – Human Rights

Something you know...From the United Nations:

“Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.”

<https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/human-rights/>

What would you add to this?



Human Rights, Peace, and Activism: Questions to Consider

- What forms of violence threaten human rights? In what ways? Is one form of violence the most significant to address (hint, Galtung would say yes...)
- What human rights strategies are important for confronting violence- and providing opportunities for people to realize their potential?
- What is the nature of activism about human rights? What role does activism play in achieving human rights?
- Are human rights best addressed at the grassroots level or by governments and organizations?



The Crises of Climate, Health, and Human Rights...Connections and a Question

Which of these climate crisis issues relate to human rights...and to public health?

- Migration and refugees
- Food security – agriculture and fisheries
- Sea level rise and community displacement
- Species extinction and biodiversity loss
- Deforestation and land degradation
- Just transition and livelihoods



Peace and Activism – See the Connections

- Think holistically, systemically
- The climate crisis is about human rights; human rights embrace health – all are elevated through activism
- Look for opportunities to intervene, to act to change the system and foster positive peace
- Younger generations have much at stake and have the capacity to lead



In closing – some thoughts from Environmental and Peace Activist Wangari Maathai

- *Human rights are not things that are put on the table for people to enjoy. These are things you fight for and then you protect.*
- *In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called to shift to a new level of consciousness, to reach a higher moral ground. A time when we have to shed our fear and give hope to each other. That time is now.*
- *When we plant trees, we plant the seeds of peace and seeds of hope.*
- *(Galtung, Huerta, and Chavez would agree)*



Thank you for listening,
reflecting, and thinking
critically. I look forward
to the Webinar
discussion.

-- Gregg

