

# Message from the President

## Marketing Peace?



Linda Woolf

ONE OF THE GREATEST PLEASURES OF SERVING within the leadership of the Society is the opportunity to meet so many truly amazing colleagues. I have gotten to know peace psychologists who work around the globe in very disparate contexts such as schools, government, organizations, and NGOs. These individuals are engaged in myriad activities, such as research, activism, practice, teaching, and consulting. The work being done involves such seemingly disparate topics as domestic violence, school shootings, workplace violence, structural forms of violence (e.g., institutionalized forms of bias and the systematic violation of human rights), torture, and mass violence (including ethno-political conflict, genocide, and war). Yet, despite this incredible variability, there are common threads tying together the work of these psychologists. All possess an abiding concern for others, reflect a deep commitment to their work, struggle to maintain hope during these challenging times, and endeavor tirelessly to build more peaceful communities at home and around the globe.

Those of us involved in efforts toward peace are fundamentally aware of the breadth and depth of the field, as noted above, as well as the commitment of all peace practitioners. However, it is clear that many individuals in the United States and around the world have numerous misconceptions about what it means to work for peace. Moreover, these misconceptions are being used to attack the fundamental construct of peace and the work of peace practitioners.

David Horowitz has recently published a book entitled *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*. The book description states:

David Horowitz reveals a shocking and perverse culture of academics who are poisoning the minds of today's college students. *The Professors*

is a wake-up call to all those who assume that a college education is sans hatred of America and the American military and support for America's terrorist enemies.

The list of academics included in this text can be found online at a number of sites. What is most notable when one examines the list, however, is the number of peace studies professors who have made the list. It appears that the sole rationale for their inclusion in the book is their work related to studying and teaching peace.

Although *The Professors* has many methodological flaws, (for example, Horowitz does not appear to have attended classes or interviewed most of the professors that he profiles), it appears to be selling. Yesterday, *The Professors* had a sales ranking of 953 on amazon.com. In less than 12 hours, as I finish this column, the ranking has moved to 598. Moreover, this book is being discussed by political pundits as fact and as an argument for elimination of the tenure system. Similarly, Students for Academic Freedom is advocating for the passage and adoption of the Academic Bill of Rights (ABR) legislatively by state as well as by individual institutions. The ABR purportedly is aimed at providing protection for political "conservatives" in the hiring process and also as protection for "conservative" students. This ABR is designed to counter what Horowitz describes as "the colonization of significant parts of the liberal arts academy by tenured radicals who are political activists rather than scholars, and the resulting intellectual corruption." It should be noted, that the organization's web site also provides an online mechanism for students to register and permanently log complaints about professors deemed as "liberal" through their "Forum on Abuses." Again, many peace studies professors are being targeted via this forum.

Another web site, *Discover the Networks: A Guide to the Political Left*, lists not only individuals but also groups and expands beyond academia to include media, arts and culture, politics, and fund raisers. Again many organizations involved in work towards peace are included on these lists. Unfortunately, the descriptions of many of these groups distort their work. For example, in describing the work of one highly respected peace organization, the web site states, "While no one denies that peace is preferable to war, such groups use peace (an entirely honorable if sometimes impractical and unachievable goal) to mask their real agenda: the fomenting of hatred against the West, the destabilization of liberal democracies, and the abolition of capitalism."

These web sites often provide a link to FrontpageMag.com where one can find a link to a t-shirt for purchase embossed with a picture of Senator Joseph McCarthy that reads, "McCarthy was right!" This appears to be a message that has truly been taken to heart.

Research defines propaganda as a vital tool used by an ingroup elite. It is designed to stigmatize and dehumanize the outgroup, as well as to present the outgroup as an imminent threat to the well-being or existence of the ingroup. Moreover, research argues that it is most effective when the propaganda relates to emotional issues, is used during times of war, targets those whose opinions are not well formed, and finally, when there is a vacuum of counter-information.

What all of this means is that those of us involved in work toward peace need to engage in an educational process informing those we know, our communities, and the media about the true nature of work towards peace. We need to present counter-information and work to alleviate fear. The following are some key points,

(continued on p. 4)

## Message from the President

(continued from page 3)

but by no means a definitive list of points, that need to be made as part of this educational process.

**1** It should be stressed that work in peace studies is not foundationally based on ideological perspectives or opinions. Rather, it is important for individuals to know that decades of research from a range of disciplines such as psychology and international relations on topics such as terrorism, war, effective conflict resolution, peacebuilding, reconciliation, etc. form the basis of the field. In other words, the work of peace practitioners and the pedagogy of peace are based on a foundation of scholarship, research, and study. It is important to present examples of such research and scholarship to highlight one's points when teaching or discussing one's work.

For it isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it.

*Eleanor Roosevelt*

**2** Some seem to believe that peace is the equivalent of passivity or inaction. Rather, it is important to note that work towards peace involves a significant amount of work. If peace were easy, everyone would be doing it! It takes work to learn the strategies of effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding and then put these into practice. It is important to provide examples of the effective use of these strategies, particularly in relation to long-term goals. Moreover, one can point to a plethora of examples where knowledge and research from psychology, sociology, international relations, peace studies, etc. has been ignored with tragic results. Additionally, it may be useful to

draw on examples from history, as these may be less emotionally charged than current examples.

Non-violence means positive action. You have to work for whatever you want. You just don't sit there doing nothing and hope to get what you want.

*Daw Aung San Suu Kyi*

**3** It is important to point out that peace is not just an end product but also the process by which one achieves that goal. Violence and disregard for human rights have very real consequences not only for the victims but also for everyone involved—from bystanders to those defined as perpetrators. Moreover, traumas transcend the immediate victims and can have an impact on a culture in the form of unhealed group trauma and future generations. Again, there are research literatures examining the impact of violence on individuals and groups, including succeeding generations.

Peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal.

*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

**4** In addition, it is important to recognize that peace is not simply an issue for liberals or conservatives, Republicans or Democrats, Right-wing or Left-wing, or any other group categorization that one would care to employ. Rather, it is a universal concern. Therefore, it behooves us not to begin a similar pattern of demonization of the "other" simply on the basis of group status. While there may be ideologues with which dialogue is less possible, it is important for us to endeavor to dialogue and work constructively together to find common ground

in our search for peace. What this means, of course, is that we should model our own beliefs and knowledge through our interactions with others.

We must all have a care about humanity.

*Honorable Gabrielle Kirk McDonald*

Finally, I would add that in the face of dissent, we must not keep our work and knowledge silent. As most of you know, in addition to my research, I teach. I love teaching, and I work very hard to be respectful of my students and to model the kind of critical thinking that I require of my students. Regardless, I'm convinced that no matter what one teaches, does, or states, he or she may still be accused of bias. For example, I had a complaint on a course evaluation in my Holocaust class stating that I was biased against the Nazis and that it was unfair that I painted them in such a negative light. It appears that in these current political times, dissent and attempts to silence those working for peace may be inevitable.

It is therefore important to have networks for social support and collaboration with one's professional activities. The Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence can provide a home for such networking. Additionally, we can continue to grow and learn through the sharing of our work in such forums as the *Peace Psychology* newsletter, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, and the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association. I look forward to seeing everyone in New Orleans!