


Book Review: Rights as Weapons: Instruments of Conflict, Tools of Power by Clifford Bob

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Bob, Clifford, *Rights as Weapons: Instruments of Conflict, Tools of Power*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2019. 220 pages. \$29.95

Clifford Bob, professor and chair of political science at Duquesne University, takes readers on a fascinating journey to understand rights as political rhetoric in his book, *Rights as Weapons: Instruments of Conflict, Tools of Power*. Rights, as defined by Bob, are a “demand for such a right made by a proponent against an opponent through a rhetorical, legal, political or military campaign” (p.8-9). Bob continues to explain that “rights claims are expansive” and includes notions such as rights being moral and universal—but, more importantly, are societal constructs that are often used for persuading the masses (p.9). Bob breaks down the notion of rights into philosophical discussions touching on how this can resonate with a populous while arguing that they are often used as leverage in a number of political issues. According to Bob, “Rights are sometimes thought to transcend politics, furnishing a moral bedrock for societies and activists. For many, rights are progressive goals whose achievement brings peaceful reform. In some visions, rights embody humanity’s best hope for achieving its highest aspirations”(p. 2).

In *Rights as Weapons: Instruments of Conflict, Tools of Power*, Bob’s discussion highlights how rights are often emotionally charged and become worded weapons used in an environment of a variety of different political campaigns. Bob explains the strategy regarding the use of rights in political discussions arguing, “when political leaders issue righteous rallying cries, they engage in a strategic move aimed at bolstering their own side. Activists combine them with vociferous advertising of the foes violations, abuses that are often real but sometimes embellished to advance the cause,” (p. 50). Bob dissects specifically how this takes place through the use of numerous examples in the global political arena highlighting how rights can

be a dangerous platform for political change, and conversely, a positive change for a variety of political agendas.

Rights as Weapons: Instruments of Conflict, Tools of Power is divided into three main parts that highlight the essence of Bob's argument. The first part focuses on rights as "preparing for conflict," highlighting the notion that using rights can both "mobilize support and counter threats." The second section deals with contending with foes, highlighting "overturning laws, masking motives and destroying culture." The last section deals with "thwarting third parties," using rights as a means to "suppress subordinates and to break coalitions." Bob uses numerous illustrative examples to explain his arguments that rights are used as tools of political power in these various instances. Each section is a major piece of Bob's argument, and each chapter breaks down the argument into intriguing pieces that illustrate rights as philosophical weapons.

Rights as Weapons: Instruments of Conflict, Tools of Power is a particularly interesting read for someone studying organizational theory, international security, homeland security, political science, or emergency management. As the book discusses specific aspects of political rhetoric, readers will come away from the book with an intriguing perspective of how rhetoric can influence communities. The book would be an excellent addition to any number of political courses and certainly, can be an important lesson into the phrasing of political campaigns.

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