

BOOK REVIEW

Re-Centering Culture and Knowledge in Conflict Resolution Practice

Edited by: Mary Adams Trujillo, S.Y. Bowland, Linda James Myers, Phillip M. Richards, and Beth Roy

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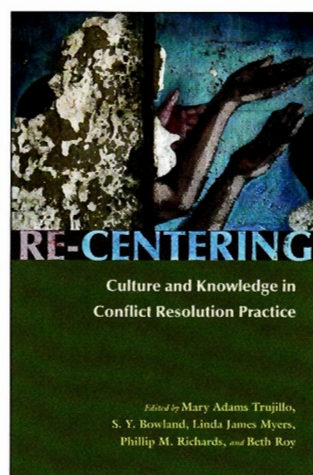
July 2008, 344 pages, \$45

Reviewed by Andrew Thomas

Re-Centering Culture and Knowledge in Conflict Resolution Practice, the first anthology of its kind, is long over due. The authors collectively point out the existence and impact of the Eurocentric underpinnings that have and continue to drive alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes in the United States, as well as the field's lack of sensitivity to other cultures, beliefs, traditions and values. The diverse group of practitioners, researchers and authors does a masterful job of challenging conflict resolution practitioners, theorists and students to examine the premise of their worldview about people, conflict and conflict resolution western culture models into which they have assimilated. The authors artfully, and with respect and dignity, call into question the shortcomings of the traditional conflict resolution models/systems in use when it comes to dealing with people of color. In addition, questions are raised as to why the field is so underrepresented by people of color and whether there is a glass ceiling in the field.

The book is divided into three sections according to theme: Re-Centering Culture, Re-Centering Knowledge, and Re-Centering Practice.

- **Re-Centering Culture:** The authors, in different ways, reflect on their life experiences and how they have shaped their worldviews of human interaction. Linda James Myers in her essay, "Towards Fuller Knowledge in Peace Management and Conflict Resolution," captures the essence of the section in her statement, "Most of my academic career has been spent researching, seeking to understand and writing about the implications of these differences in cultural worldviews for human experience." The essays explore the writers' findings as they relate to the impact of culture, race and tradition in peace management and conflict resolution.
- **Re-Centering Knowledge:** This section's collection of essays includes discussions and explorations such as moving from theory to practice; the different views practitioners and researchers hold regarding the value of research in driving knowledge; what is neutrality, is it important and can mediators really be neutral?; race, injustices and oppression; do conflict resolution processes alleviate or further the injustices and oppression for people



of color?; and why is it the majority of new practitioners of color in the field are serving minorities and marginal populations and are not in the mainstream of the field?

- **Re-Centering Practice:** The authors exemplify how the experience of practitioners of color and others working in the margins are challenging the research and truths that have become the standard for the field. The collection of success stories about the eclectic experiences of mediators, facilitators and trainers practicing from a premise that respects parties' cultures, values, beliefs and traditions are very insightful and informative.

The authors in general present a convincing argument as to why conflict resolution practitioners need to become more aware, at a deeper level of understanding, of the multicultural society in which we live and the rich history of conflict resolution and peacemaking that is inherent in other cultures. The authors suggest it is neces-

sary to re-center culture and knowledge in the conflict resolution field to emphasize the value of ADR processes that respect the existence of other cultures and their historical process.

Andrew Thomas is president of ALT Associates, Conflict Management Consultants. He has more than 30 years of experience in ADR, including serving for 26 years as executive director of the Center for Dispute Settlement in Rochester, NY.

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