

War and ideology

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Résumé ou extrait : Why do nations go to war ? Is war an institutionalized outlet for our aggressive instincts ? Or is it a cultural invention rather than a biological necessity ? Originally published in 1990, Eric Carlton, looking across a number of societies investigates why men and women go to war, and how they are able to commit atrocities against their enemy. He believes that central to these issues is the perception of the enemy and the ways in which this is 'converted' - consciously or unconsciously - into an ideology of aggression. Military training and ideology are based upon the definition of the enemy as 'the other', and studies in the text reveal the importance of the stereotyped image of the enemy when soldiers carry out atrocities. Dr Carlton explores the underlying problem of how and why societies resort to war, by analysing the motivations, usually religious and ideological, which legitimize warlike policies and activities. Fascinating case studies consider the ways in which the enemy has been seen in various historical and comparative contexts: for instance, to ancient Egyptians the enemy were non-people, to Romans uncouth barbarians, to Maoists class antagonists. These studies underline the fact that perceptions of the adversary determine the nature of warfare more than any other single factor. The book

is unique in its discussion of the idea of the enemy in warfare and military ideology, and in its use of an historical method to comment on situations which are still relevant to the modern world. Its historical and comparative perspective, and its extensive case studies, make it of great value and interest to students of history, sociology, and politics, as well as to those engaged in war studies.

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