

Bully Nation: How the American Establishment Creates a Bullying Society

By Charles Derber, Yale Magrass

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It's not just the bully in the schoolyard that we should be worried about. The one-on-one bullying that dominates the national conversation, this timely book suggests, is actually part of a larger problem—a natural outcome of the bullying nature of our national institutions. And as long as the United States embraces militarism and aggressive capitalism, systemic bullying and all its impacts—at home and abroad—will persist as a major crisis.

Bullying looks very similar on the personal and institutional levels: it involves an imbalance of power and behavior that consistently undermines its victim, securing compliance and submission and reinforcing the bully's sense of superiority and legitimacy. The similarity, this book tells us, is not a coincidence. Applying the concept of the “sociological imagination,” which links private problems and public issues, authors Charles Derber and Yale Magrass argue that individual bullying is an outgrowth—and a necessary function—of a larger social phenomenon. Bullying is seen here as a structural problem arising from systems organized around steep power hierarchies—from the halls of the Pentagon, Congress, and corporate offices to classrooms and playing fields and the environment. Dominant people and institutions need to create a culture in which violence and aggression are seen as natural and just: one where individuals compete over who will be bully or victim, and each is seen as deserving their fate within this hierarchy. The larger the inequalities of power in society, or among nations, or even across species, the more likely it is that both institutional and personal bullying will become commonplace. The authors see the life-long psychological scars interpersonal bullying can bring, but believe it is almost impossible to reduce such bullying without first challenging the institutions that breed and encourage it.

In the United States a system of intertwined corporations, governments, and military institutions carries out “systemic bullying” to create profits and sustain its own power. While acknowledging the diversity and savagery of many other bully nations, the authors contend that America, as the most powerful nation in the world—and one that aggressively promotes its system as a model—merits special attention. It is only by recognizing the bullying built into this model that

we can address the real problem, and in this, *Bully Nation* makes a hopeful beginning.

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Editorial Review

Review

"A canny and sobering look at bullying behavior and how it permeates our nation's major institutions. When children do it, we abhor it. When our leaders do it, we usually applaud it. The authors remind us."—**Oliver Stone**

"This thoughtful study expertly dissects the 'bullying scourge' that poisons lives and society, exposing its roots in the institutional structure of a 'militaristic capitalist culture' that it reflects and nurtures, while also revealing the encouraging reactions that may offer cures for the malady and the factors that engender it."—**Noam Chomsky**

"*Bully Nation* is the most comprehensive analysis of bullying yet published. It is a brilliant book that refuses to define bullying as merely a psychological concept. Instead, it addresses in great detail the interplay of bullying as having its roots in a range of historical, economic, political, and social conditions. In this instance, bullying functions as a metaphor to connect the private the public, specific acts of violence to larger forms of systemic violence. Rather than treat bullying as part of a rite of passage confined to the often difficult process of growing up, Derber and Magrass treat it as a systemic force that produces values, social relations, structures, and collective identities steeped in violence and aggression. This is a powerful and compelling book that addresses one of the most important social problems of our time. It should be read by all educators, parents, and anyone else interested in a world free of aggression and violence. *Bully Nation* deserves widespread attention."—**Henry Giroux**, author of *Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism*

"A welcome departure from the popular habit of reducing distasteful behavior to family pathologies or genetic dispositions, *Bully Nation* is an important example of how intelligent social science can help heal the world. If bullying is rooted in history and structured by institutions, then citizen action can do something about it." —**John Ehrenberg**, author of *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea*

"*Bully Nation* is absolutely terrific, an important, powerful and timely book that should be read by academic and public audiences alike. The authors have done a remarkable job of taking the topical social problem of bullying, which has received a great deal of attention over the past decade, and extrapolating it to economic, political, corporate and militaristic bullying. We come to understand that bullying isn't just for the schoolyard, it's a socio-pathology woven throughout our culture and guiding much of the way that the political economy is run. Their illuminating analysis illustrates how corporations and governments bully not only citizens—the 99%—but also the planet, and with reckless abandon. The consequences are potentially dire—for our culture, for the middle class, for the nation's and world's poor, and for the survival of the planet. Without question, this is a book that will have wide appeal to academics, students, and public audiences. I imagine using this book in my own courses and am already anticipating with great excitement the important discussion that will be opened with my students as they grapple with the bully nation, and with the most important issues facing their generation."—**Jonathan White**, author of *Sociologists in Action: Sociology, Social Change, and Social Justice*

"Clear and compelling. Its case for shifting our focus from individual schoolyard bullies to power imbalances in American society is badly needed in current discussions of bullying. A brilliant example of the sociological imagination at work."—**Daniel Geary**, author of *Beyond Civil Rights: The Moynihan Report*

and Its Legacy

About the Author

Charles Derber is professor in the Department of Sociology at Boston College.

Yale R. Magrass is Chancellor professor in the Department of Sociology/Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth.

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Paul Norris:

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