



# Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent

*Ronald E. Santoni*

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## **Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent** Ronald E. Santoni

"In this well-documented, provocative work, Professor Santoni uncovers and examines the ambivalences of Sartre's treatments of violence throughout his writings. In the process he interestingly resurrects the intellectual atmosphere of mid-twentieth-century France, paying special attention to one of the most famous polemics of the time, the Sartre-Camus clash over the latter's *The Rebel*. The timeliness of Santoni's contribution, at a moment when the word 'terrorism' has captured everyone's attention but the idea of it often appears murky and unclear, hardly needs to be underscored." -William L. McBride, Purdue University "I do not know of anyone who has undertaken as thorough a study of both the early and later Sartre's 'curiously ambivalent' views on violence. One of the book's special strengths is that it makes significant use of Sartre's unpublished 1964 Rome Lecture as well as interviews he gave shortly before his death."-Thomas C. Anderson, Marquette University *From Materialism and Revolution* (1946) through *Hope Now* (1980), Jean-Paul Sartre was deeply engaged with questions about the meaning and justifiability of violence. In the first comprehensive treatment of Sartre's views on the subject, Ronald Santoni begins by tracing the full trajectory of Sartre's evolving thought on violence and shows how the "curious ambiguity" of freedom affirming itself against freedom in his earliest writings about violence developed into his "curiously ambivalent" position through his later writings. In the second part of the book, Santoni provides a detailed analysis of Sartre's debate with Camus in 1952 and his Rome Lecture in 1964. Santoni criticizes Sartre for scoffing at Camus's "limits" on violence while failing to articulate his own. And in the Rome Lecture, Santoni argues, Sartre still held a two-sided position: while acknowledging conditions for any legitimate use of terror, Sartre failed to show persuasively how revolutionary killing could be a vehicle for overcoming mass alienation or effecting the "new" humanity he sought.

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