

Carrie A. Rentschler, **Second Wounds: Victims' Rights and the Media in the U.S.** Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011, 273 pp., \$68.03 (hardcover), \$23.95 (paperback).

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In recent years, popular and political culture in the United States has seen the rise of the victim as a key public figure and powerful speaking position. Scholars from Francis Fukuyama to Wendy Brown have noted and critiqued the role of victims and victim rhetoric in political discourse and media representations. *Second Wounds: Victims' Rights and the Media in the U.S.*, by Carrie A. Rentschler, offers a fresh take on this discussion. The author's intervention into and reevaluation of the politics of victimization is a welcome addition to discussions of victimization that find in the rhetoric of victimization (and the speaking position of victim) only disempowerment, resentment, or the flowering of a repressively punitive political project. Rather than focus on media texts and representations, Rentschler concentrates on the work of the victims' rights movement, excavating the documents and strategies of advocacy that have most influentially shaped public portrayals of victims.

The book brings together a wide array of materials, from training manuals to media texts to interviews, presenting them through a Foucauldian and feminist lens. These materials outline practices and statements that Rentschler puts together to trace a discourse of victims' rights that has taken on shape and publicity over the last 40 years. One of the key outcomes of this, according to the book, has been the production and popularization of the secondary victim as a subject of representation and as a truth- (and rights-) bearing speaking position.

The first two chapters begin the history of how this came to be, tracing the origins and history of the victims' rights movement and noting important fractures between those branches of the movement invested in harsher punishment and fewer rights for the accused and other branches based in feminist and antideath penalty commitments. Chapter 1 locates the origins of the movement in the law-and-order politics that emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s as a backlash against legal decisions that protected and extended the rights of defendants. These law-and-order politics, which sought to increase the punitive powers of the state and often to reduce the rights of the accused, have provided much of the language and structure of the movement. Chapter 2 focuses on the laws, institutions, and funding structures that enabled the law-and-order branch of the movement to become its public face. While the law-and-order framework came to publicly define victims' rights, it has not defined the political commitments of all victims' rights advocacy. To support this point, the chapter notes that anti-death penalty victims' rights advocates found, in this framework, tools to critique punitive policies and practices of criminal justice.



Chapters 3–6 trace the ways that the victims' rights movement has acted to define the representation and meanings of victimhood within the media—how the movement has acted on media and educational institutions. Chapter 3 takes up the training manuals of victims' rights movement groups in the 1990s and 2000s. The manuals provide explicit discussions of how to define and represent victimhood publicly, which expanded the definition of victim to include family members, based in the idea of secondary trauma or victimization. The manuals also offer implicit lessons, or "hidden transcripts" (p. 83), of the stakes and political nature of representation, which is figured as potentially harmful or traumatizing.

Chapter 4 demonstrates that these ways of defining victimization and representation have shaped journalism training within formal educational institutions and have changed the practices of news production toward a more therapeutic model of publicity. Rentschler pulls out points of connection or quotation in which journalism training draws on ideas about the (potentially harmful) nature of representation and more broadly, the concept of secondary victimhood that were first circulated through the victims' rights movement. Within the new, trauma-centric journalistic training and practices, Rentschler finds an implicit but incomplete critique of typical news production practices. Her discussion of the way that the focus on trauma undermines the very referentiality upon which news is based is a must-read for those interested in critical and cultural studies in journalism.

The turn toward the commemorative and the therapeutic in the last few chapters lays out the heritage of victims' rights in depictions of crime and broader journalistic practices. Chapters 5 and 6 investigate examples of therapeutic publicity: Chapter 5 examines news commemorations of the victims of mass violence, and Chapter 6 discusses a set of opposing publicity campaigns that struggled to "put a face on murder (p. 201)." In Chapter 5, Rentschler demonstrates how the conception of victimization forwarded in victims' rights media manuals and journalist trauma training is manifested in the depiction of victims of mass violence and terrorism, one of the more ubiquitous and pressing sites of victim politics in the contemporary public sphere. The chapter analyzes the "profiles of life" (p. 137) for those who died in the Oklahoma City bombing and in 9/11. Rentschler shows these profiles to be discursively circumscribed and deeply gendered practices of bestowing agency on the victims and their families. And Chapter 6 takes up a similar set of cases of politically-inflected portraiture: a Benetton ad campaign featuring portraits of death row inmates and the photographic counter-publicity mounted by families of murdered children. Both campaigns depend on portraiture as a practice of humanizing the dehumanized, whether this dehumanization took place through violence or through incarceration and whether the campaign was propelled by politics or profit. Without endorsing or valorizing either of these campaigns, Rentschler finds a promising point of common ground in them in the ethics of portraiture. The points of connection and contrast between the profiles of life documented in Chapter 5 and the portraiture of inmates and murder victims in Chapter 6 are fascinating, though more evocative than explicitly discussed.

The critical stance and optimism of *Second Wounds* are on display in the discussion of the ethics of portraiture, which extends through to the conclusion. In the practice of providing a face and in doing so, humanizing both victims of crime and those who have committed violence, Rentschler suggests that there is the possibility, though not the guarantee, of an ethical encounter between the families of murder victims and perpetrators, as well as for a politics outside of "moral economies" of guilt and innocence, indeed, even outside the punitive carceral powers of the state. In this, she unearths the possible grounds

for a more human approach to crime and violence in the discourse of victims' rights. While the examples in Chapter 6 do not always point to this outcome, the author's Levinasian description of the different workings of the face in practices of portraiture common to death row documentation and also to commemorative political and news practices is both thoughtful and thought provoking.

Because of the nature of the subject matter and Rentschler's approach, which foregrounds nuance, the materials and practices examined here do not always add up to a tidy assessment or conclusion. For example, while the practices of portraiture may offer the possibility for an ethical encounter, as the conclusion demonstrates, the cases examined in the two previous chapters demonstrate the elision of ethical encounters or exchange as much as their possibility. It is one of the points of what has come before, though, that such outcomes are not inevitable or inherent to the notion or rhetoric of victims' rights itself but rather to the effects of particular, historically contingent practices of its institutionalization.

In addition to the specific history of the discourse of victimhood and politics of representation that are the foci of the book, the study also offers an important chapter in the history of the rise of therapeutic discourse in the public sphere. It will be of interest to a variety of scholars, including those interested in the cross-disciplinary study of trauma and its representation and those in the fields of American studies, media studies, cultural studies, gender studies, and criminology.