



In the Wake of Violence: Image & Social Reform (Rhetoric & Public Affairs)

Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp

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How acts of violence are rhetorically "managed" by social movements: *In the Wake of Violence* explores the immediate and longer term aftermath of violence committed by independent radicals involved in single-issue movements. Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp explores several specific incidents in recent history—the arson of a Vail ski resort by environmentalists, the murder of Dr. John Britton by an antiabortion activist, and the torching of a University of California research laboratory by animal rights activists among them—to discover how the perpetrators of the violence and the majority of reformers involved in their movements rhetorically framed the violent act for a potentially outraged public.

In the Wake of Violence, claims Jorgensen-Earp, the perpetrators are often forthcoming with both explanations for and a defense of their actions, casting themselves as righteous actors or martyrs for a cause. However, ardent reformers within the same cause might look with genuine revulsion at the actions of their own radical wing. This study claims that the nonviolent majority in single-issue reform movements employs a predictable constellation of rhetorical strategies to manage the impact of radical fringe violence. The primary goal of this rhetoric is to avoid a backlash against the larger movement by a public alienated by violent acts.

In examining specific rhetorical responses by the nonviolent majority in antiabortion, animal welfare, environmental reform, abolition, and women's suffrage movements, Jorgensen-Earp considers a wide range of discourse types—from newspaper articles, interviews, and editorials to private letters; from editorial cartoons to the homemade signs of movement activists; and from speeches to modern Internet sites. She discovers that the image restoration techniques brought to bear for a reform cause are similar to those employed by a corporation accused of wrongdoing. Ultimately, she finds that the majority of proponents of the causes she examines believe that the violence can or will be condoned and that it must be rhetorically mitigated.

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