

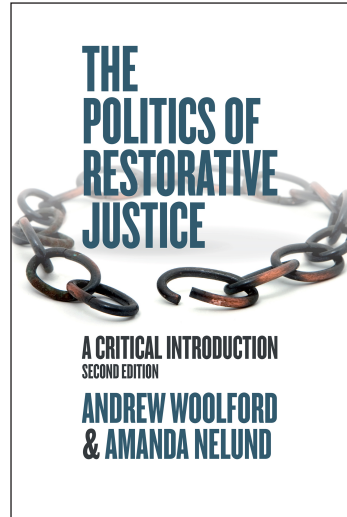
EXCERPTED FROM

The Politics of  
Restorative Justice:  
A Critical Introduction

SECOND EDITION

Andrew Woolford and  
Amanda Nelund

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# PREFACE TO THE US EDITION

**R**estorative justice is an international movement that has made inroads into justice policy in countries around the world, including the United States. In this book, we seek to capture both global and local dimensions of this movement. The scholars and practitioners we draw on for insight originate from all parts of the English-speaking world and beyond. Many of the examples, too, are global, though many others are located in our home country: Canada. The language may, at times, be in a Canadian vernacular: when we discuss the crown, for instance, know that we simply mean the state. More important, the ideas, practices, and politics illustrated in these examples could apply to any jurisdiction. Wherever there is injustice, and wherever people work to imagine alternatives to somewhat rigid and formalized state processes, these visions of justice bump up against and collide with political realities that may either facilitate or thwart such efforts. The politics of restorative justice discussed in these pages is not simply a Canadian phenomenon.

However, there is much that can be learned from the Canadian case. The justice experiences of indigenous peoples, women, the poor, LGBTQ, racialized, and other groups certainly have analogues in other nations, and examples from Canada will likely resonate with those from your home. Moreover, distinctly Canadian projects, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in response to the forced assimilation imposed on indigenous peoples through Canadian residential schools, may lend themselves to considering how similar institutions might operate in the United States. Canada might even be interesting, though it would be un-Canadian of us to say so.

This book has been significantly reworked for its second edition. Transformative justice is an always unfinished project. It must engage with the world, but also retract into the arena of criticism to sharpen ideas and open up blind spots. What better way to challenge and expand thinking on a topic than to bring on board another author? The first edition was based on Andrew Woolford's initial research on, teaching about, and volunteering in the world of restorative justice. However, his views grew and developed through reading the work of and engaging in conversation with Amanda Nelund. She now joins as the second author, providing new insight and experience to the text. While the previous edition was friendly to an intersectional approach to understanding the politics of restorative justice, this approach was too much in the background. Amanda brings to this edition her work in feminist criminology, helping to better accentuate the intersectional politics of restorative justice.

Both of us share a degree of ambivalence about restorative justice. On the one hand, we are trained as critical scholars and deploy insights drawn from critical social theory to interrogate topics in criminology and socio-legal studies. On the other hand, we are committed to improving the experiences of those who, out of necessity, must engage with the criminal justice system. Restorative justice can make a difference for such individuals, however they are involved in the criminal justice system. Our ambivalence is reflected in the makeup of this book. We challenge restorative justice, which emphasizes the involvement of those affected in resolving the harms associated with crime, for all its potential faults, but also leave room for its improvement and advancement—for it to become something more than what it already is.

This book is also the product of our work teaching criminology courses focused on restorative justice at the University of Manitoba and MacEwan University for the past sixteen years. There remains an absence of introductory-level texts that offer a critical sociological investigation of restorative justice concepts. Works by scholars such as George Pavlich provide critical social theoretical insights into the conceptualization and practice of restorative justice, but are written for more advanced students. In contrast, this book aims to bring critical sociological awareness of restorative justice to students in their second or third year of university or college classes, as well as to practitioners and those in the general public interested in matters of restorative justice. This does not mean that the text is always an easy read. We push students at

all levels of learning to expand their vocabularies and to contend with abstract and complicated ideas. While we try to clearly communicate theoretical concepts, we do not boil them down to the point where they become oversimplified and deprived of their full critical force.

We also are motivated to offer a second edition of this book because insufficient thought is still given to “the politics of restorative justice.” This is not to say that politics have not factored into many previous studies of restorative justice. However, many authors tend to work with a narrower conception of politics, locating restorative justice within a political world, but not questioning the ways in which restorative justice is itself complicit in certain forms of politics. In addition, there is a notable divide between the theory and practice of restorative justice whereby the insights of restorative justice theory find less traction within actually existing restorative justice programs (Gavrielides 2007). In our view, the bridge to cross this divide can be forged through a theoretical investigation of the political context and political meanings of restorative justice, which can then contribute to a strategic conceptualization of the way forward for restorative justice.

We offer these thoughts as a preface out of the belief that all projects should begin from a point of reflexivity. As authors presenting a description of what restorative justice is and a vision of what restorative justice could be, it is important that we reflect on our grounding assumptions since these factors certainly inform and influence the interpretations presented in this book. So, let us reveal up front that, intuitively speaking, the values of restorative justice feel right in many respects, in the sense that we have seen the immediate human benefits that can be obtained from a restorative justice approach that is sensitive to the particular needs of individuals and communities. However, we also understand that this desire for collaborative and meaningful conflict resolution is positioned within a socio-political framework that blocks its fullest actualization. This is the first guiding framework for this book. The second is a preference for viewing the world as dynamic rather than static. Whereas some may be drawn to the parsimony and analytical clarity of an airtight typology, our goal is always to leave room in our conceptual models for process and change. Although the world is consistently structured and sufficiently regular in a manner that allows us to navigate our day-to-day lives, it is also constantly in movement, requiring us to adapt and change our actions and thoughts to particular circumstances. We seek to demonstrate that the boundaries of this so-called justice alternative are not firmly set, and

to leave room for the debates and discussions that create and re-create the universe of restorative justice.

\* \* \*

This book owes much to Wayne Antony, who proposed the initial project. As well, we would like to acknowledge the excellent work of the Fernwood production team, especially Jessica Antony (copyediting), Beverley Rach (design and layout), Debbie Mathers (pre-production), and John van der Woude (cover design). We also thank Lynne Rienner Publishers for picking up our little book for US and international distribution.

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—*Andrew Woolford and Amanda Nelund*