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Review of *Murder, the Media, and the Politics of Public Feelings: Remembering Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr.* by Jennifer Petersen

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The 1998 murders of Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. prompted strong emotions in the national debate over hate crimes. Yet while legal, literary, and critical readings of these murders have emerged, little attention has been devoted to these emotions and their role in the politics that followed. Jennifer Petersen remedies this deficiency, offering broader insights about politics, media, and the public sphere.

Drawing upon close readings of local and national media, Petersen tirelessly traces the complex affective webs that surround each case. In the first half of her book, Petersen describes the national media's characterization of Shepard as an empathetic, modern figure identifiable with the American public. In contrast, the media berates Shepard's hometown of Laramie, Wyoming, for failing to share that identification, publicly shaming the residents to distance them from the national imaginary. The book's second half turns to the Byrd case, highlighting how the little-known man is both pitied and minimized in the press to focus instead upon his killers, prosecutors, and other victims of bias. In each case, Petersen emphasizes the media's part in ascribing "the right feelings" publics should have toward each crime and how local publics relied upon performances of "proper" feelings to direct their responses to the incidents.

Petersen's strongest contribution is her exemplifying the function of public feelings in motivating civic action. This is clear in her discussion in chapter 2 of the debate over how Laramie's bias crimes ordinance became an exercise for locals to demonstrate "care" for others, processing their shame and rebutting mischaracterizations of the town as a backward, western community. Chapter 3's account of Byrd's murder as an opportunity for Southern whites to convict his racially motivated killers and restore faith in liberal institutions by "getting it right this time" is similarly insightful. Petersen concludes with a call to rethink the place of affect in the public sphere and offers a discussion of "a political economy of feeling" as an initial solution to current shortcomings.

Though successful overall, the book suffers some missteps. At times, supposed distinctions between public feelings and public arguments are not always clear or productive. Also, Petersen's portrayal of an emotionless...
public-sphere theory sometimes feels more like a caricature than reality. Nonetheless, Petersen offers an impressive reading of media discourses illustrating the value of public feelings and how they can become animating forces in the production of civic action.

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