



On CHARACTER/ Essays by James Q. Wilson (Landmarks of Contemporary Political Thought)

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James Q. Wilson is the former president of the American Political Science Association and adviser to four presidents on issues related to crime, drug abuse, education, and other crises of American culture. In this book, he has produced a provocative series of essays related to character development and character policy that sets this important area in perspective. He brings his argument into clear focus by negating that public discussion of character is a conservative pastime. Rather, the development of character is our collective responsibility. The public interest depends on private virtue.

Wilson argues throughout these essays that to have good character one needs to have at least developed a sense of empathy and self control. In various chapters he writes about crime, families, communities and schooling with those two traits?empathy and self-control?as a basis. He presents the current crises of our community in clear perspective: how much can society tolerate? what is the role of the police? the family? what is a moral virtue? Wilson concludes with an argument that all humans have an inborn "moral sense". We are, after all, social beings, dependent on each other and we have an obligation to each other to develop that moral sense if we care about each other. This is a well written, reasoned book by a wise and experienced expert.

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