Victimization Philosophy. It has become apparent since the early 1990s that there are growing numbers of individuals and groups who see themselves as having been victimized by society. New York magazine featured a cover story on “The New Culture of Victimization,” with the title “Don’t Blame Me!” Esquire probed what it called “A Confederacy of Complainers.” Charles Sykes published A Nation of Victims: The Decay of the American Character. Sykes’ thesis, with which these other observers would agree, is that the United States is fast becoming a “society of victims.”

What is particularly interesting about the novel philosophy of victimization is the widespread extent to which it is dispersing in the population. According to these writers, the victim mentality is just as likely to be seen among all groups in society—regardless of race, gender, age, or any other classification. Sykes observed that previous movements may have been seen as a “revolution of rising expectations,” whereas the current movement might be called a “revolution of rising sensitivities” in which grievance begets grievance.

In such a society of victims, feelings rather than reason prevail, and people start perceiving that they are being unfairly “hurt” by society’s institutions—government, business, and education. One example is worthy of note. In Chicago, a man complained to
the Minority Rights Division of the U.S. Attorney’s office that McDonald’s was violating equal-protection laws because its restaurants’ seats were not wide enough for his unusually large backside. As Sykes observes, “The new culture reflects a readiness not merely to feel sorry for oneself but to wield one’s resentments as weapons of social advantage and to regard deficiencies as entitlements to society’s deference.”

As the previous example illustrates, the philosophy of victimization is intimately related to and sometimes inseparable from the rights movement and the entitlement mentality. Taken together, these new ways of viewing one’s plight—as someone else’s unfairness—may pose special challenges for business managers in the future.

In summary, affluence and education, awareness through television, the revolution of rising expectations, an entitlement mentality, the rights movement, and the victimization philosophy have formed a backdrop against which criticism of business has grown and flourished. This does help to explain why we have an environment that is so conducive to criticism of business. In the next two subsections, we will see what some of the criticisms of business have been, and we will discuss some of the general results of such criticisms.