
REVIEWS

Parallel Justice for Victims of Crime, Susan Herman,¹ 2010. Washington, DC: National Center for Victims of Crime.

Victims of Crime *and* of the Criminal Justice System

Janine M. Zweig
Justice Policy Center
Urban Institute, Washington, DC

In *Parallel Justice for Victims of Crime*, the author, Susan Herman, systematically and succinctly documents the United States's current response to victims of crimes, including recent advancements and conspicuous limitations. Herman argues that when society addresses crime, we primarily focus on those who violate the law, with most of the resources and energy directed at identifying and punishing offenders. Although this process is important, focusing primarily on offenders does a disservice to society, in general; to local communities; and, most detrimentally, to victims of crime. In short order, Herman lays out a conceptual framework and plan by which a system separate and

¹Susan Herman is Associate Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Human Services at Pace University.

Correspondence should be addressed to Janine M. Zweig, Justice Policy Center, Urban Institute, 2100 M St. NW, Washington, DC 20037. E-mail: jzweig@urban.org

parallel to that of the criminal justice system can be created in which victims are the focus of public and private efforts to restore their humanity, wholeness, and safety.

Herman correctly describes the current criminal justice system as that of a communal response focusing almost exclusively on offenders, whereby society works to identify those who violate the law, adjudicate cases, and impose sanctions, including imprisonment and death. Yet, such a communal response to victims is absent. Herman posits that parallel justice requires a paradigm shift in society to recognize the breach in our social contract when a crime has been committed and, more important, the harm caused to victims by that breach. Meaningful justice requires that we attend to those harmed by the crime, in addition to those who committed it, such that victims can be safe, heal from trauma that has occurred, and fully reengage in the community.

To set the stage for such a concept, Herman describes the impact of crime in chapter 1, paying specific attention to its emotional impact on victims. She documents that many crime victims are left devastated by such experiences, with high rates of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and substance abuse existing among victim populations. Victims are left to deal with the fact that the harm they have suffered and the trauma they have experienced was a product of an intentional and cruel act of another human being. Further, Herman describes how the phenomenon of this reaction is qualitatively different from the response to other types of trauma, such as the illness of family members or loss of loved ones. Also of particular interest is Herman's argument that addressing the needs of victims is indeed a crime-prevention strategy. Victims of crime are more likely to become offenders—and more likely to become violent offenders—than non-victims (e.g., Shaffer & Ruback, 2002).

In chapter 2, Herman rigorously assesses the current response to victims of crime in the United States. Even in the face of tremendous progress in the past 3 decades, in terms of the criminal justice system response to victims, victim compensation, victims' rights legislation, and victim advocacy, Herman acutely identifies where such advancements have fallen short of stated goals, been implemented inconsistently or without regard for all types of crime victims, and relied on practices where victims' needs remain unmet. For example, the victim assistance grant funds allocated by the Victim of Crime Act (1984) cannot support services to incarcerated persons, even if those persons have been victimized (*Final Program Guidelines*, n.d.). This is particularly distressing when one notes that violent victimization, left unaddressed,

may lead to violent offending (Zweig, Yahner, Visher, & Lattimore, 2010).²

Parallel justice for victims of crime “decouples the pursuit of justice for victims from the administration of justice for offenders. As a result, justice for victims becomes a distinct goal rather than an occasional byproduct of a system focused elsewhere” (p. 56). In chapter 3, Herman describes the parallel justice framework, which is guided by ten principles. For those of us who have studied victim service programs, the guiding principles seem practical and ones perhaps noted before in various places. However, Herman brings these ideas into one philosophical rubric and makes them fundamental to any appropriate response to victims. They entail truly listening to victims, meaningfully engaging them, and providing comprehensive and coordinated services to address their safety, emotional, financial, and practical needs. Herman also lays out the role of the government and the community in such a process.

Finally, in chapters 4 and 5, Herman describes specifically how to make parallel justice happen in communities. Using concrete examples, the practical application of the framework is laid out in reassuring detail. The complex conceptualizations presented previously become a reality, with real-world examples of policies and practices operating today. Herman provides specific steps that several entities can take to implement parallel justice, including the police; prosecutors; the courts; probation, parole, and corrections; victim advocates; health care; social services; employers; businesses; neighbors, friends, and family; and legislators. She describes the information provided as a roadmap for “getting started.”

Susan Herman’s longstanding commitment to victims of crime is evident throughout this book, and readers can sense her sincere passion to this mission of providing true and comprehensive justice to victims of crime. This book offers to society a practical alternative response to crime victims than what we currently have. It forces readers to hear the voice of victims, to focus on the harm caused to them, to understand the importance of addressing this trauma, and to regard victims as much more than a means to criminal conviction in court. It should be required reading for anyone responding

²For example, my colleagues and I have just completed a study where we found that for a sample of former prisoners, in-prison victimization experiences—that is, the threat and actual experience of physical assault—led to greater likelihood of perpetrating criminal behaviors and violent criminal behaviors once individuals returned to communities, and this increased likelihood was partially mediated through feelings of hostility. A similar pattern was shown for substance-use behaviors—that is, in-prison victimization led to greater likelihood of illegal drug use upon release from prison, and this relation was partially mediated by feelings of anxiety.

to victims of crime—those in the mental health and substance-use treatment fields, in public health and health care, in advocacy roles, and in social services. It should also be required reading for every scholar and student of, and every worker within, the current criminal justice system.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Janine M. Zweig is a senior research associate in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute in Washington, DC. Her research interests focus on the experiences of victims of interpersonal violence, including victimization while incarcerated, intimate partner violence, and sexual violence. Recent publications can be found in *Criminology and Public Policy* (in press), *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, and *Corrections Compendium*. Dr. Zweig holds a PhD in Human Development and Family Studies from Pennsylvania State University.

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