

CRIME VICTIMS

An Introduction to Victimology

ANDREW KARMEN

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Andrew Karmen

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

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*To everyone whose suffering
is needlessly intensified or prolonged
because of ignorance about crime victims
or a lack of commitment to them*

Consulting Editor: Roy Roberg

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CRIME VICTIMS

An Introduction to Victimology

Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice Series

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Crime and Justice: Issues and Ideas (1984)

Philip Jenkins, Pennsylvania State University

Crime Victims: An Introduction to Victimology (1984)

Andrew Karmen, John Jay College of Criminal Justice

The Police in American Society (1985)

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Sense and Nonsense about Crime (1985)

Samuel Walker, University of Nebraska, Omaha

Foreword

The Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice Series introduces important topics which until now have been neglected or inadequately covered, to students and professionals in criminal justice, criminology, law, psychology, and sociology.

The volumes cover philosophical and theoretical issues, and analyze the most recent research findings and their implications for practice. Consequently, each volume will stimulate further thinking and debate on the issues it covers, in addition to providing direction for policy formulation and implementation.

The public is increasingly aware of street crimes and their impact, and the fear of becoming a victim of crime increases accordingly. This fear has produced a renewed interest in crime victims and their plight, both within and outside of the criminal justice system. Strong emotions have been aroused by the media, by politicians, and by special interest groups as they rush to assist these recently "discovered" victims; the result has generally been an impassioned and sensationalized approach to the subject. Thus, Andrew Karmen's scientifically objective study of the myths and realities pertaining to crime victims is both timely and refreshing.

Karmen's work focuses on victims of street crimes—murder, rape, assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft—primarily because such crimes scare the public, preoccupy the police, and capture the attention of politicians. Furthermore, street crimes victimize specific people, usually individuals or families. How do these people become victims? What can the criminal justice system do for them? Should the system be adjusted to serve the victim better? Karmen addresses these and other significant questions from a victimologist's perspective, studying how the police, courts, and related agencies treat victims, and greatly enriching our understanding of what it means to be victimized.

While the subject matter is highly sophisticated, the reader is drawn easily into the discussion by Karmen's fluent and informative style,

excellent use of examples, and sensible organization of complex materials. I have no doubt that *Crime Victims: An Introduction to Victimology* will inspire continued inquiry into the important issues it raises.

Roy Roberg
San Jose State University

Preface

This is the first systematic, comprehensive, and up-to-date introduction to a new and rapidly developing branch of criminology. I trace the emergence of victimology; analyze the public's growing concern for the plight of crime victims; discuss the current exploitation of the victimization experience by business interests; and describe the losses that burden victims of various kinds of street crime. I investigate the bitter controversy surrounding "victim blaming," and examine the many sources of conflict between victims and the criminal justice officials and agencies that are supposed to help them. I review the promises and pitfalls of restitution by offenders, and of state compensation programs. I conclude with analyses of the struggle for victims' rights and services, of the search for an informal alternative to criminal justice processing, and of the recurring impulse toward vigilantism. Throughout the text, I strive for objectivity while examining emotionally gripping subjects, and present both sides of passionately debated issues. I summarize the most significant research and theorizing in the field, and furnish the latest available statistics.

My own experiences as a victim of street crime are as relevant to my research and writing as my professional interests and my credentials as a criminologist. So far, I have been robbed twice by knife-wielding assailants. My home has been burglarized. My car was stolen and only the chassis recovered. Thieves have taken batteries, wheel covers, stereos, and other valuables from my cars on too many occasions to enumerate. But more significant to my becoming a victimologist is my firm conviction that the field is fundamentally humanistic. As an applied social science, victimology is dedicated to the relief of suffering and the prevention of harm and loss. I encourage all who yearn to do something positive about the crime problem, and who share a commitment to social justice, to explore the potential of victimology as an area for research, theorizing, and action.

As I complete this project, I want to acknowledge the assistance of a number of people. At John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York

City, I benefited from insightful comments by my colleagues Edward Sagarin, David Sternberg, Fred Kramer, Sidney Haring, and Donal MacNamara. At Brooks/Cole Publishing Company in Monterey, California, Henry Staat, Cindy Stormer, Bill Waller, and Penelope Sky have my thanks. Various chapters were constructively criticized by Gilbert Geis, University of California at Irvine; Roy Roberg, San Jose State University; Brent Smith, University of Alabama, Birmingham; and by C. Ron Huff, J. L. Barkas, and Herman and Julia Schwendinger. Of course, I take full responsibility for the value judgments, interpretations, and controversial positions in the text, as well as for any errors or omissions.

Andrew Karmen

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