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Karmen, A, *Crime Victims — An Introduction to Victimology*, 2nd ed, Pacific Grove, Calif: Brooks/Cole, 1990.

The emotion and passion that normally surrounds any discussion of crime victims in the media marks the study of victimology as one of the growth areas in the continuing debate concerning the fairness of the criminal justice system. In the second edition of his textbook, sociologist Andrew Karmen has used the vast amount of new literature, research and public controversy surrounding crime victims since the publication of the first edition (1982/3) to produce a book which, despite some major limitations, will prove to be very useful for students, professionals, policy makers and academics.

Karmen sets the scope of his inquiry in the First Chapter by establishing his basic definitions of “victimology”, “victim” and “crime victim”; this major limitation would be viewed by those who have a “radical-critical” victimological perspective (Karmen uses this terminology himself, see page 11) as an inherent bias in the book. Karmen admits this bias, but explains leaving out discussion of other types of crime victims for the not altogether convincing reasons of time and space limitations, lack of reliable empirical data for analysis. While he agrees that other types of crimes warrant attention, “they are not the lawless deeds that come to mind when people talk about the crime problem or express fears about being victimized”.<sup>1</sup>

Within the confines of this important limitation, karmen makes it clear that what he is aiming for is “objectivity”, which he hopes to achieve by presenting “as balanced a view as possible by examining all sides of controversial issues”.<sup>2</sup> Although it is easy to be cynical about such a claim, Karmen’s book is impressive in that throughout he consistently presents the arguments from all viewpoints, uses whatever empirical data is available to investigate these arguments, and almost never concludes by taking one side or another. Some may regard this as an inherent weakness; this is not a book that takes a particular perspective or view of the criminal justice system, as do other recent books on victimology, such as *The Politics of Victimization — Victims, Victimology and Human Rights* by Robert Elias, or *Victimology: The Victim in the Criminal Justice Process* by Sandra Walklate. However, the book is invaluable for those wanting to gain an insight into the arguments presented by all sides of the debate in relation to victims of street crimes, given in a well-structured and logical format.

The other main qualities of this book worthy of note are that it is user-friendly, well researched and highly informative.

The frequent use of boxes and tables to illustrate various statistical research, chronologies of events and actual cases facilitates the ease of reading the book. Furthermore, Karmen keeps the reader engaged throughout by providing actual and interesting cases concerning crime victims wherever possible to explain by example the particular point of controversy at hand (indicated by the fact that a significant proportion of the bibliography at the end of each of the seven chapters refer to newspaper or

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1 At 7.

2 Ibid.

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magazine articles). Another feature which adds to its readability is that, despite the complexity of many of the concepts of victimology, Karmen at all times either avoids or clearly explains and defines any complicated terminology. This is particularly the case in the third chapter, "The Victim's Role in Crime", probably the most conceptually difficult in the book, where Karmen provides clear explanations of the concepts of "shared responsibility", "victim facilitation, precipitation and provocation", "victim blaming" and "victim defending".

The book is also well researched, not only because Karmen has obviously kept a strong eye out for interesting articles in the press relating to crime victims, and has used a wide variety of academic and Government material, but also because unlike many other writers in the area, Karmen always tries to make full use of the latest empirical research to help answer some of the relevant questions at hand. In fact, Karmen himself has carried out much of this research, such as the data he collected on the typologies of car theft victims in order to determine their possible role in the crime, ie, did they resist, facilitate, precipitate, initiate or fabricate the crime?<sup>3</sup>

In some instances, Karmen tries too hard to adjust empirical data, obviously not suited to the particular controversy under discussion, in order to shed some light on the question before him. For example, Karmen uses the most convoluted reasoning<sup>4</sup> to derive Table 4.3<sup>5</sup> from the National Crime Survey; the table purports to estimate Stolen Property Recovery Rates by the police, but the unreliability of the data in fact stretches his analysis of this data beyond the bounds of credibility. Karmen's near obsession with statistics is also indicated by the fact that he devotes all of the second chapter to an examination of the types of statistics concerning crime victims that are available, the methodology used, their limitations, and a fairly detailed study of statistics which analyse the interaction between victims and offenders.

Finally, it is worth noting that the book is highly informative. Apart from the chapters already referred to, there are also excellent chapters on the victim and the criminal justice system, including their relationship with police, prosecutors, defence lawyers, judges and parole boards; one on seven special kinds of victims, including the elderly, victims of bias crimes, sexual assault victims and victims of drunk driving; and a chapter on the issue of financial recovery by victims. The last chapter takes an interesting look at future directions in the victims area, such as the moves towards greater legal rights of victims in the criminal justice system, victim-offender mediation and the very worrying American trend of vigilantism.

Despite the breadth of issues and materials covered, Karmen impressively gives justice to each of them in a compact, intelligent and interesting manner. He challenges the various views and assumptions that people from differing perspectives may hold, and in this respect perhaps the book's best use may well be in an educational context.

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3 See Table 3.3 at 118.

4 At 175-6.

5 At 177.

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However, there are a further two major shortcomings which need to be kept in mind. Firstly, comparatively little is said concerning the psychological effects of victimisation, which is surprising given the large amount of research that has been carried out in this area. In fact, the recently officially recognised symptom of “post-traumatic stress disorder”<sup>6</sup> is only mentioned briefly twice in the book, and yet would seem to be crucial to an understanding of crime victims and the way they react following victimisation.

The final major limitation of the book is that it almost exclusively covers the position of crime victims in the United States of America. Little attention is paid to events, trends and research conducted in other jurisdictions. For example, no mention is made of the important “left realist” movement which came out of Great Britain in the 1980s, and the methodology of their local crime victim surveys.<sup>7</sup> This omission is particularly surprising given the strong emphasis on statistics throughout the book. Thus, if this book were to be used as a textbook, it would clearly need to be supplemented with materials from Australia and other jurisdictions.

Keeping these limitations in mind, Karmen’s book is highly recommended and is particularly timely given much of the uninformed rhetoric that predominates in the media concerning victims of street crimes. It is only hoped that those in Government and in other positions of power who subscribe to “law-and-order” ideology will find the time to read it.

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6 Now recognised in the 10th edition (ICD-10) of the International Classification of Diseases.

7 See for example Jones, T, MacLean, B and Young, J, *The Islington Crime Survey: Crime, Victimization and Policing in Inner City London* (1986).

under the legislation, while Wilkie considers how certain provisions of the Act conflict with fundamental principles of juvenile justice established in international conventions. In the final chapter Harding points out the lost opportunity costs of an agenda centred solely around increased punishment. He spells out the causes and preconditions of juvenile crime and the alternative approaches which are available.

As Harding succinctly states;

This research report demonstrates that the Western Australian laws of 1992, particularly the *Crime (Serious and Repeat Offenders) Sentencing Act*, failed according to every criminological criterion by which they can properly be evaluated.<sup>3</sup>

Strong words indeed. The strength of the report is its closely argued demonstration of the failings of the legislation in terms of its legal drafting and its penological theory. The legislation itself stands as a symbol of the folly of formulating public policy around the requirements of talk-back radio announcers and the tabloid press.

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#### **CORRECTION**

On page 229 of Volume 5 Number 2, in a review by Sam Garkawe of A Karmen's book *Crime Victims — An Introduction to Victimology*, an error occurred in the second line of paragraph two. The first sentence in this paragraph should in fact read:

Karmen sets the scope of his inquiry in the First Chapter by establishing his basic definitions of "victimology", "victim" and "crime victim". His focus is almost entirely upon victims of traditional "street crime"; this major limitation would be viewed by those who have a "radical-critical" victimological perspective (Karmen uses this terminology himself, see page 11) as an inherent bias in the book.