



# Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

COURTS AND SENTENCING , MURDER AND MAYHEM

## Seeking justice in the Craigslist Killer case

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Last summer, when suspected Craigslist Killer Phillip Markoff chose suicide over the prospect of life imprisonment, the murder prosecution came to a sudden and unanticipated halt. The family of Julissa Brisman, the erotic masseuse who met her deadly fate when she met up with the Craigslist client in an upscale hotel room, reacted to the news with shock and dismay. Carmen Guzman was denied the closure that she hoped would come from the trial and conviction of her daughter's killer.

At a minimum, a criminal trial would have provided Guzman with some answers in her quest to discover everything about her daughter's last moments alive. And now, the heartbroken [mother is understandably frustrated](#) over the many months it has taken for the case file to be purged of sensitive information pertaining to innocent parties, so that it could be shared.

But there is a secondary reason for Guzman's pursuit of the details, horrific and upsetting though they may be. According to the family attorney, the specifics may also help to build a civil suit against those bearing at least partial responsibility for the crime: the local hotel where Brisman was killed and the New Hampshire gun dealer who is believed to have sold Markoff the murder weapon. It is rather common for grieving families to seek accountability, especially when the true villain is not around to take the heat.

All lodgings -- from upscale hotels to rundown roadhouses-- indeed have a duty to protect their guests by implementing reasonable security measures. One might consider the Copley Marriott negligent were there homeless drunks aimlessly wandering the halls, effortlessly breaking into guestrooms. But Markoff had the appearance of respectability and trustworthiness that would easily have passed the peephole test at Brisman's door. The Copley Marriott was the place where Brisman carried out her trade, but its role stopped there.

Guzman also wonders whether there is evidence of negligence on the part of State Line Gun Shop for selling the crime gun, despite the fact that New Hampshire authorities declined filing criminal charges against the merchant. Whatever may surface when the case file is released, the gun dealer played no part in encouraging Markoff to take aim and fire at Brisman.

Hopefully, Brisman's family will someday see an end to their struggle, even if not to their pain. That day may arrive when a civil claim, should there be one, is resolved one way or the other. Whatever the outcome, it will not equate to justice for Brisman, as her mother has suggested. That kind of justice came last August inside a cell at the Suffolk County Jail.