



# Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

## Newtown victim #27 and the Boston Marathon

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The Boston Athletic Association (BAA) announced on Thursday that it will honor the victims of the Newtown, Conn. shooting spree in this year's running of the Boston Marathon. Apparently, this isn't just another one of the countless sporting events that have respectfully remembered the innocent lives lost in that dreadful massacre. According to the BAA president, the marathon carries special significance in that the 26 miles of the race course will serve as a tribute to each of the 26 victims (ignoring the final one-fifth mile leg of the 26.2 mile race).

Although well-intentioned, those at the BAA and countless other Americans are wrong every time they say that 26 were murdered by Adam Lanza. Sure, 26 were killed at the Sandy Hook Elementary School. But the Newtown shooting spree included 27 homicide victims, if you include, as you should, Nancy Lanza who was fatally shot by her son prior to his assault on the nearby school.

Not only do many people choose to disregard her victimization, but, worse, choose to hold her responsible. We are a nation of finger-pointers, and the parents of mass murderers, regardless of their actions or intentions, are typically convicted in the court of public opinion. We are quick to assume that if they didn't create a madman, then at least they should have seen the warning signs and have taken steps to intervene.

In Nancy Lanza's case, of course, she is not around to answer the many questions that folks have raised about her parenting decisions. She couldn't defend her life from gunshots back in December, and she can't now defend her honor and memory from the slings and arrows of public hostility.

Knowing what we know now about the tragic outcome, it is very easy to second guess Nancy Lanza for having encouraged her troubled son to focus his attention on guns and marksmanship. She was even criticized in the PBS program, *Raising Adam Lanza*, for having withdrawn Adam from the high school where he was so miserable.

Even those who may have been genuinely concerned about Adam Lanza's mental health would, in all likelihood, never have anticipated the bloodshed that he perpetrated at home and at Sandy Hook Elementary. We should assume that Nancy Lanza had the best of intentions in raising her Adam, unless and until we have definitive evidence otherwise. In the meantime, perhaps the BAA could compromise by at least dedicating the remaining fraction of a mile to her memory.