



WOMEN

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Dr. Amanda Whitehouse

Don't Feed the Fear

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Welcome

Summer is usually a time for taking a break from our podcasts in order to rejuvenate, reassess, and recenter ourselves and the direction of the show. It's also a time for summer vacations, kids out of school, weddings, and family reunions. So, in some sense, we may be taking a break from podcasting, but the family obligations and responsibilities ramp up. This begs the question - are we really giving ourselves a much needed respite or are we only shifting our energy to other planned events?

For me, being around people I care about, laugh and joke around with, fuels my soul and replenishes the creative energy used for projects like my podcasts and the magazine. So, although I'm going to more social gatherings, my brain and body are resting and getting energized at the same time - without really noticing until I'm by myself again.

When summer comes to an end, the kids go back to school, the last bouquet has been caught, the suitcases are put away, and we settle back into the routine of recording episodes, know that you can always carry that summer feeling with you throughout the year. Making time for ourselves, our loved ones while we are podcasting is possible and essential.

Building relationships with our podcast is one thing many podcasters don't think about when they start their show. And many are surprised when they create meaningful and lasting connections. With these connections, opportunities often appear; opportunities podcasters wouldn't have available otherwise. In this issue, we share insight into how to build these relationships and opportunities using your podcast.

We've all had that guest that doesn't show up for their interview. Don't panic! We shed light on what to do (and not to do) if a guest ghosts you. Another topic in this issue is about quitting the project of YOU. We don't always have to be working on ourselves; fine-tuning, tweaking, reframing, improving, or bettering. Let this be your permission slip or hall pass to give yourself a break and just BE.

The version of you that takes a rest is not a lesser version. It may, in fact, be a truer one.

You are allowed to just be here for a while.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Kathy Barron'.

Kathy Barron
Editor-in-Chief

A portrait of a woman with voluminous, curly brown hair and light-colored eyes. She is smiling and has her arms crossed. She is wearing a dark, long-sleeved V-neck top and a necklace with a rectangular blue pendant. The background is a solid, muted blue-grey color.

JUST

by Nina Rodriguez

Jessica Henry has made it her life's work to challenge the assumptions that hold the American criminal legal system in place. With a career spanning three decades as a former public defender in New York City, a Professor Emerita of Justice Studies at Montclair State University, an award-winning author, and the host of the podcast *Just Justice*, Jessica has built one of the most morally urgent bodies of work in the criminal justice reform space. Now, newly retired and with her latest book due in March 2027, she is entering an expansive chapter and the podcast is at the center of it. "I think it is really kind of important to try to elevate voices that don't typically get heard. And perspectives that are not typically shined a light on," she says.

Just Justice, which releases biweekly, takes a deep dive into second chances in American justice, highlighting who gets one, who deserves one, and who decides. The show brings together the full spectrum of voices ranging from formerly incarcerated people, crime survivors, academics, policy advocates, and national organization leaders. The desire to create it, Jessica explains, grew out of her work on her forthcoming book.

"As I was doing my research and drawing on some of my own networks and contacts, I realized there were so many people's voices who had not been heard. And I also realized that there was no one place to connect all these voices." So she decided to change that. "This podcast was an opportunity to pull all these disparate voices into line, and create a

thread or a flow-through." The path that led Jessica to podcasting runs through almost every corner of the justice world.

She spent ten years as a public defender in Manhattan and the Bronx, doing both trial and appellate work. There, she witnessed a system stacked against defendants unable to make bail, who could not afford childcare for extra court dates, who were effectively coerced into pleading guilty to crimes they didn't commit. This experience shaped everything that followed. "Poverty, not justice, often dictated the outcome of any given case."

She joined the faculty at Montclair State University, where she taught for twenty years and took deep dives into extreme sentencing, the death penalty, and wrongful convictions. She was also appointed in 2024 by Governor Phil Murphy to serve on the New Jersey Clemency Advisory Board, which she describes as "the opportunity of a lifetime," reviewing applications from people seeking pardons or relief from long prison sentences. All of it, she says, feeds the purpose behind the show. "Our very peculiar and unique criminal legal system punishes far more punitively than almost any other country in the world." Central to *Just Justice*, and to Jessica's worldview, is the question of what second chances actually mean, their life-altering ripple effects, and who we believe deserves them. It is a question she has thought about not only professionally, but personally. "I am a product of second chances," she says. Her mother survived the Holocaust as a baby, lived in Hungary, fled

JUSTICE

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as a refugee when the then Soviet Union invaded them in 1956, spent a decade in South Africa, and eventually came to New York. Her father, who had gotten into some legal trouble as a young man, was given a choice by a judge between prison or the military. He chose the military and fought in the Korean War. “Again, that was a second chance provided to him.”

That personal inheritance, she says, is part of what has always resonated for her. It is also what she has seen in her clients and, more recently, in her podcast guests. “Imagine, if you will, the worst thing that you’ve ever done. And then imagine if that was literally the only thing that defined you for the rest of your entire life. It would be so unfair. You’d say, but wait, I’m a writer, but wait, I’m a mother, or I’m a friend. You’re many, many things, and that one incident, even if it’s terrible, isn’t all that you are.”

She pushes back firmly on the idea that incarceration is the only legitimate response to harm. “When we talk to crime survivors, we find that the majority of people who’ve been impacted by the legal system, who’ve been harmed, who’ve been victims of crime or crime survivors, that’s not what they want. They want accountability.” But the conversation, she argues, has to go further. “We need to create opportunities for people to show that they have changed, because people do change. That is the beauty of the human condition. We change.”

The guests on *Just Justice* make this case arguably better than a policy paper can. Jessica recalls a recent episode with Damon “Sharuka” Venable, a man who was recently released after 35 years in prison and is now a Community Affairs and Policy Specialist at

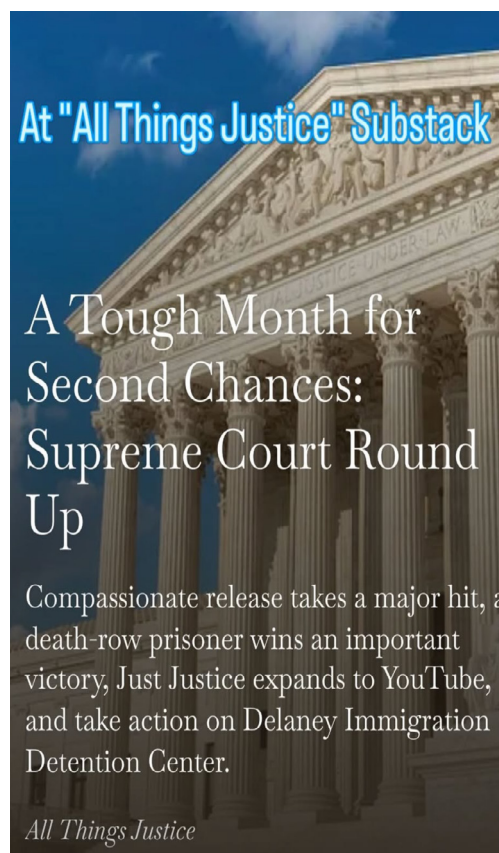
the New Jersey Office of the Public Defender. Today, he is dedicated to policy reform, juvenile justice, and returning citizens’ support, including attending meetings with the governor and attorney general. “Why would we be better with him in prison than with him on the street?” she asks. “And he has changed.”

Then there is Felix Rosado, who was nineteen when he was incarcerated and had no legal pathway out. Inside prison, he created a restorative justice program called *Let’s Circle Up*. The governor of Pennsylvania eventually commuted his sentence. “That never happens,” Jessica says. “Pennsylvania is so stingy with their commutations. And to hear him talk about his life today, and his wife, and their little baby daughter, and the work that he does, and how passionate he is about helping people heal, that was just an amazing episode.” She also points to Dina Windle, a violent crime and sexual assault survivor from season one who speaks about forgiving the person who caused her tremendous harm. Today, she is Chief Investigator at the New Jersey Office of the Public Defender.

The most powerful listener feedback, Jessica says, comes in a specific form.

“When I hear people say, ‘Wow, that episode was really moving, I never thought about that,’ referring, for instance, to the story of a formerly incarcerated person who served thirty years, and seeing them as so thoughtful, or so interesting. It subtly shifts the way people think about who’s in prison, and that, ultimately, has to have a cascading effect.”

Jessica’s first book, *Smoke but No Fire: Convicting the Innocent of Crimes That Never Happened* (University of California Press, 2020), grew out of a discovery that



unsettled her while teaching a wrongful convictions class. While gathering information through the National Registry of Exonerations, she noticed that roughly one-third of all exonerations involved people convicted of crimes that never occurred. “I thought, that can’t be right. I must be running the numbers wrong or something.” She contacted the registry and they confirmed. That figure has since grown closer to forty percent. The book went on to win awards and found a crossover audience beyond academia.

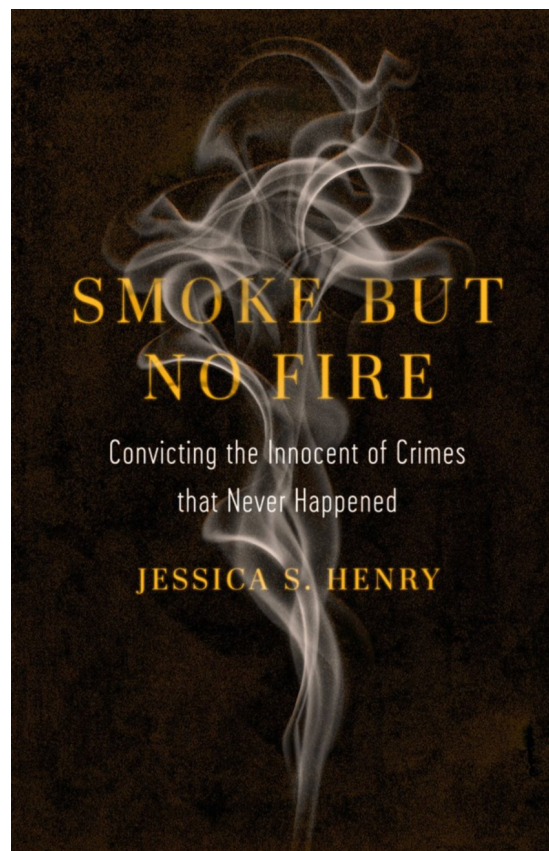
Her forthcoming book, *Bending the Bars: The Case for Second Chances in American Justice*, also from University of California Press, arrives in March 2027, just ahead of Second Chance Month in April. “It tries to make the case about why second chances are important, how they fit into our punishment philosophies, and what mechanisms we have to provide second chances, and what’s working and what’s not.”

She wants readers, particularly those who don’t work in the justice space, to understand the economic reality behind what feels like a distant social issue. “What people don’t know is how much of their money goes to funding these systems that don’t ultimately keep us safer or make our communities better.” She points to the near-zero recidivism rates among people over the age of sixty, and the enormous cost of incarcerating an aging population with complex medical needs. “We’re paying a ton of money. This is happening on our dime. And we don’t need to keep these folks in prison. Folks can be out in their communities, being mentors, healing families, instead of being locked away on our dime.”

When asked about words of wisdom for women thinking about launching a podcast, Jessica’s advice is straightforward: “Just do it. If people have a story to share, they should share it.” What she wishes she had known earlier, and what she plans to do differently going forward, is the importance of deliberately leveraging a guest’s existing networks. “What I have not done well is say to my guests explicitly: here’s a couple of assets from the show, here’s a couple of clips, here’s the link, I’d like you to share it with all of your network.” She is candid about what keeps her going despite the technology frustrations, the time demands, and the challenge of reaching beyond a niche audience. “I think it’s important. It’s just my passion.”

In a moment when her corner of the justice world can feel bleak, she holds on to what she sees happening at the state level, from domestic violence survivor acts, to second-look sentencing bills, and clemency reforms. She also holds on to a phrase she encountered while interviewing a recent guest. “We have to let the hope in, because without hope, we don’t move forward.” That, as much as anything, is what *Just Justice* is about. “That we’re all more than the worst thing we’ve ever

done,” Jessica says, when asked what she most wants listeners to take away. “And that our criminal legal system doesn’t need to be as extreme as it is in terms of punishment.”



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JESSICA HENRY
JUST JUSTICE

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