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through elaborate public relations campaigns, as with the city’s Progress Pavilion built to promote the redevelopment of Dixwell Avenue in the heart of the ghetto. Throughout the decade, there were scores of open meetings and public hearings. And occasionally, the people won, finally beating back plans to build a ring road and a downtown parking structure projected to sit astride a street of small commercial enterprises.

Jackson makes no pretense of neutrality in this book. It is an elegy to the poor residents of the Dixwell and the Hill neighborhoods. She writes in a consistently scornful tone when discussing the urban planners and developers and city officials (they are “men in suits”—pp. 33, 82, 92). There is never any complexity in their motives in her view: Development is designed to promote corporate interests; repression (p. 223) and pacification (p. 146), freighted terms in the context of the Vietnam era, define important goals of city administration. She speaks of the police “invading” the Hill (p. 110) and the establishment of a “police state” in the ghetto (p. 131). She hints darkly that a collaboration between the city and the IBM company to bring early computerization and data storage to city management was really an ominous surveillance scheme.

None of this is necessary to write a book sympathetic to the people who unfairly bore the burdens of bulldozer redevelopment or critical of urban renewal, as it was practiced in New Haven. But the tone of this book assumes venal or at best naive motives on the part of Richard Lee and his administration, shifting the focus from the organizing accomplishments. The story of ordinary people demanding a role in the future of their city is dramatic enough.

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Federalism is sometimes trumpeted as a system that effectively represents citizens at multiple levels. As Lisa Miller reminds us in The Perils of
Federalism, it is also a system that can deny adequate representation throughout its layers. Miller focuses on crime policy in the latter part of the twentieth century in an effort to explore the variety and limitations of citizen representation in national, state, and local policy arenas. Her conclusions are sobering: criminal justice agencies and single-issue groups dominate the national and state levels while broad-based citizen groups are virtually absent from the policy process. Though the dynamic is nearly reversed in local legislative settings, the rules of federalism—where higher levels trump lower ones—dictate that problem solving will almost always be less effective and less thorough when confined to local government. Fewer resources are available and potential solutions must exist within a legal and conceptual framework established by state and national players. Thus, local groups exist as an archipelago of interests and typically lack the political and financial resources to connect with one another and, in doing so, enhance their political clout.

Miller begins this insightful investigation with a broad look at who participates in various levels of the crime policy process and why some groups may be more successful than others. After situating her investigation within a framework of previous research and laying out a general history of federal crime policy, Miller gets to the heart of the matter with substantive chapters focusing on each level of the federal system. Her data consist of analyses of legislative hearings as well as interviews with state and local legislators and their staff. Though the interviews necessarily focus on the 1990s and early 2000s, the reader interested in institutional development and change will appreciate Miller’s attention to a longer frame of reference for much of the hearings data.

Three elements of Miller’s investigation stand out as particularly useful contributions. First, Miller offers a typology of interest groups that aids the reader in understanding why groups meet with varying degrees of success at different levels of government. She describes groups with a high level of resources and narrowly focused interests (such as pro- or anti-gun groups, criminal justice agencies, or a state district attorneys’ association) as hypermobilized—able to compete successfully for legislative attention in state and national legislative arenas. On the other hand, groups with few resources and diffuse interests (such as a neighborhood improvement association or a group of Black church leaders) present problems without clear policy solutions and lack the resources necessary to coordinate efforts in a way that might help them demonstrate a sizable constituency. These limitations confine meaningful participation to local levels.
A second valuable contribution is Miller’s persuasive discussion of issue frames. Using examples from state and national legislative hearings, Miller demonstrates how the ubiquitous presence of criminal justice agencies and other bureaucratic actors and the relative absence of citizens representing affected communities lead legislators to view crime policy through the lenses of social control and agency agendas rather than through the lens of harm reduction. Miller convincingly argues that the composition of hearing witnesses results in legislative action that increases punishments and allots funding on the basis of agency goals, often with little consideration of whether these actions lead to pragmatic results, such as decreased victimization or improved communities.

Third, Miller offers insight into the trade-offs between race and gender in the public policy process. Though more of an undercurrent than a main theme, Miller’s comparison between the recent successes of groups representing the concerns of women and children and the difficulties groups advocating for minorities and the poor have had in gaining legislative traction is thought provoking. Rather than gloss over this tension, Miller explains that what does not necessarily have to be a zero-sum game has often become one in practice, in which women and children fit the role of “worthy victim” while legislators continue to perceive African-American men (and women and children) as victims “who are themselves involved in criminal enterprises or who are connected to criminal activity by virtue of living in dangerous neighborhoods” (p. 117).

While Miller’s data are extensive and impressive, a few of the stones the author leaves unturned may raise questions in a reader’s mind. For one, though the author is careful to point out that her case studies of the Pennsylvania legislature and Philadelphia and Pittsburgh city governments are not necessarily representative of state and local governments nationwide, one wonders what other insights could be learned from studying state governments that must deal more extensively with multiple ethnic minorities or suburban and rural local governments that might be more ethnically homogeneous or face a wholly different set of crime issues. Issues related to immigration or drug cultivation, for example, may be more relevant in other parts of the country. In addition, the enticing claims about change over time present in the chapters on national and state policy leave the reader wondering if similar shifts may have occurred at the local level. Congressional analysis covers the period from 1947 to 2002, and Miller examines state legislative hearings from 1965 to 2004, but the local hearing coverage is limited to 1997 to 2004. While this provides an excellent comparison of the contemporary era, and while Miller’s difficulties in
obtaining historical data on local hearings are understandable, the gap leaves one wondering whether local governments have always treated crime policy as they do at present.

In sum, this is a moving, powerful text. Miller comes at the issue of federalism from a new angle and, in doing so, produces a thoughtful and readable analysis that will be of great interest to graduate classes and other scholars or practitioners with an interest in race politics, intersectionality, federalism, criminal justice policy, or interest group politics broadly. The Perils of Federalism is an effective warning that the very structure of our political institutions sometimes precludes the outcomes we desire.

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