MMIGRATION

Immigration policies are based on force, punishment, and racism. They don't take into account the real social and economic needs of people who enter, live, and work in the US. People are punished and locked up just for trying to live in the same country as their family members, to find a better-paying job, or to escape from political, race, gender, or heterosexist discrimination in another country. Military and police make it more dangerous than ever for people to move across national borders.

People without US citizenship face everyday surveillance and harassment by police. Undocumented immigrants are also harassed by agencies that should provide services.

- In Fresno, California in 2003, police set up roadblocks to check citizenship documents of suspected undocumented immigrants.
- Under the 1996 federal immigration law, employees of local governments and social service agencies are permitted to give the federal government information about people's immigration status.

PEOPLE WITHOUT US CITIZENSHIP CAN BE DEPORTED IF THEY ARE CONVICTED OF MOST KINDS OF CRIMES, including drug crimes, property crimes, or offenses related to "national security" or "moral turpitude" (immorality). Non-citizens usually are sent to US prisons, and then the federal government seeks to deport them.

- •The "moral turpitude" rule was used against undocumented workers in 2002. Airport screeners who were accused of forging ID in order to keep their jobs were deported.
- •Undocumented US residents who were convicted of breaking immigration law spent an average of 3.6 months in prison in 1985. By 2000, the average had gone up to 20.6 months.
- •The Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (BICE) (formerly the INS) decides whom to deport based on a long list of rules. The longer the prison sentence, the more likely a person will be deported. Because prison sentences in the US are getting longer and longer, more and more people are being deported.
- Noncitizens can be prevented from entering the US, based on suspicion of being, or ever having been, a drug trafficker. Immigration agents don't need any proof to keep someone out of the US through this rule. This means that immigration agents can target immigrants through stereotypes based on national origin, race, and physical appearance.
- •Under the 2001 "USA PATRIOT Act", immigrants and non-citizens can be detained indefinitely, for "national security" reasons. The government does not have to hold any kind of hearing or trial, ever.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

NATIONAL IMMIGRATION PROJECT OF THE NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD, http://www.nationalimmigrationproject.org Bureau of Justice Statistics, http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs

BUREAU OF IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT, http://www.bice.immigration.gov/graphics/index.htm "How the anti-terrorism bill permits indefinite detention of immigrants who are not terrorists" flyer, available from Critical Resistance.

POLICING

THE POLICE INCLUDE CITY POLICE, SHERIFFS, HIGHWAY PATROLS, BORDER AGENTS, DEA AGENTS, AND FEDERAL MARSHALLS. While some instances of police brutality are well known (think Rodney King, Amadou Diallo), policing itself is brutality. Police pay attention to the interests of certain people (wealthy/white people and their property) but endanger and ignore the needs of people of color and poor and working people.

Police use force—arrest or threat of arrest and physical harm—to make people act in certain ways and be in certain places. They enforce the laws that shape what we think crime is. Police also create and reinforce social norms that aren't laws, like where people of different races and genders should be, or how they should behave.

Police inflict harm and remove people from their communities to deal with social problems. These tactics mark abuse and create new problems. To abolish the PIC, we need to stop allowing people with badges to force other people into cages. To be safe, we need to replace arrest with more lasting problem-solving techniques. (For more on this, see the FAQs section, which deals with ways we can build safety without the PIC).

THE STRATEGIES AND WEAPONS THAT POLICE USE ARE ABUSIVE (also see the militarization information sheet):

- Police conduct "no-knock raids," where they draw their guns, storm people's homes, and explode flash-bang grenades. There have been hundreds of cases where police exploded these grenades in homes of people they weren't even looking for. Philadelphia police, for example, break into the wrong house about once a week.
- Police "stop and frisk" people on the street, based on who they think looks to be carrying a gun. Frisking is a way of intimidating people and making communities feel like they're totally controlled by the police. New York City police don't arrest 80% of the people that they frisk. (also see *racial profiling* below)
- Police use pepper sprays, 50,000 volt stun guns, rubber bullets aimed at the chest or abdomen, and "blunt trauma" weapons such as batons. These are meant to be "less-than-lethal alternatives" to guns. But the result is even larger numbers of deadly weapons. In 2003, an asthmatic man in Fort Lauderdale became the 90th person since 1990 whose death was partly caused by being pepper sprayed by police. More than 3000 police departments in the US use pepper spray.
- •Police often use stun guns to temporarily paralyze and arrest homeless people and people with mental illness. Police can strike people with stun guns from 21 feet away.

NATIVE PEOPLE IN THE US HAVE ALWAYS BEEN TARGETED BY MILITARY AND POLICE FORCES. There are numerous reports of police harassing native people with beatings and mass arrests, sometimes during nonviolent protests.

CONTINUED

RACIAL PROFILING IS WHEN POLICE TARGET PEOPLE FOR SEARCH OR ARREST BASED ON THEIR RACIAL APPEARANCE. Sometimes police are officially told to use racial profiling, and sometimes they choose to use it. Either way, racial profiling is a white supremacist harm: police violence focused against people of color. Because of profiling, people of color are the ones who most often get searched and arrested. This remakes the stereotype that people of color are criminals:

- •In 1995, 76% of drivers stopped on I-95 by Maryland police were black. Only 20% of Marylanders with drivers licenses are black.
- •A New Jersey State Police training manual instructs troopers to look out for "Colombian males, Hispanic males, Hispanic and a black male together, Hispanic male and female posing as a couple" to find so-called drug traffickers.
- •The Justice Department allows profiling of men who look "Middle Eastern" or "Muslim," for "national security" reasons in the "War on Terror."

CIVILIAN REVIEW BOARDS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE PLACES WHERE PEOPLE CAN MAKE COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE POLICE. A review board can make a judgment against a particular cop for a particular abuse. But review boards don't have power to say that the police shouldn't exist or aren't effective in the first place. While these boards might be used to fight certain police abuses, there are major limitations to the way they currently function:

- Police intimidate the survivors of brutality not to file complaints. Police have charged people with "disorderly conduct" and "assault," just to make them drop complaints. In Seattle in 1994, police sued people who had filed complaints. The next year, 75% fewer complaints were filed.
- •Review Boards are part of the government. Their members are usually chosen by the city government and police department. Boards have narrow definitions of what counts as abuse or brutality. If we only rely on boards the way they exist now, we are only able to address isolated cases of state harm, instead of focusing on all the ways the PIC creates harm.
- •Review boards are for punishment. Boards can't change the procedures and rules that police follow. It's hard to think that cops who do terrible harm shouldn't be punished or imprisoned. But to build a world beyond the PIC, we need to find ways to deal with individuals (like police officers and guards) who commit state harm that don't rely on punishment and cages.

INFORMATION COMPILED FROM / FOR MORE INFORMATION:

http://www.rightsforall-usa.org/info/report/index.htm

http://web.amnesty.org/report2003/Usa-summary-eng

http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0325/little.php

http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/9913/hentoff.php

Reason Magazine, August-September 2001

"Errant raids by police bring terror home," Philadelphia Inquirer, October 18, 1992.

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WHY DO WE DO THIS? HOW DO WE DO THIS?

Not all abolitionists have the same political goals. We disagree about what exactly we are abolishing, why that is necessary, how to do it, and what abolition will look like. Alliances across these differences are a critical part of creating a movement, so we need to address those differences to make them strengths instead of weaknesses in our work. Here are some ideas to help organize a discussion about why you are coming together to work for abolition and about how that shapes what you think abolition is and how to fight for it.

THERE ARE LOTS OF DIFFERENT WAYS TO APPROACH ABOLITION. YOU MIGHT COME TO ABOLITION BECAUSE YOU THINK:

PUTTING PEOPLE IN CAGES IS IMMORAL
ABOLITION CAN BE A STRATEGY TO DISRUPT AND EVENTUALLY UNDO THE STATE
ABOLITION IS CENTRAL TO CHALLENGING WHITE SUPREMACY
ABOLITION IS A CHALLENGE TO THE ECONOMIC HARM OF THE PIC

No matter what your approach or political leanings, one thing should stand out: if we're imagining that a world without prisons is going to look like the world we live in now, we aren't really imagining abolition.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- •Why are you doing/wanting to do abolitionist work? Or why aren't you? What are your hesitations (whether you are or aren't)?
- •What types of work does an abolitionist perspective make easier/harder?
- •How does being or not being an abolitionist connect to your political identity?
- •Is abolition an end to itself?
- •A strategy for or part of a larger political view?
- •A tool to shape your political worldview?

|WHAT DO YOU SEE?|

It's easy to see how fighting the PIC is fighting to tear down cages. And if abolition is about getting rid of all the cages, part of the problem is figuring out where they all are. Different approaches to abolition make different cages easier and/or harder to see. A cage isn't only four concrete walls; cages are all the things that restrict self-control and make someone exposed to harm. Cages work physically, emotionally, and structurally (meaning they have to do with patterns of how we live,

not someone's personal politics or feelings). We believe that if you can't get rid of all the cages, you haven't abolished the PIC. We also believe that if you don't get rid of all the cages, the ones left standing will create new ones. If we only tear down

the concrete cages but not the structural cages like white supremacy, heterosexism and imperialism, the PIC will reappear in new forms.

There isn't a set of rules for what politics people must share to be allies in abolition. But starting from certain sets of interests places certain limits to the ways you fight for abolition, and shapes how broad you think that fight is. The more we understand the different places we're coming from, the faster we can find ways to get to where we want to be. Here are some thoughts about different approaches to abolition:

MORAL APPROACH

A MORAL FRAMEWORK ABOUT WHAT IS "RIGHT" AND "WRONG" is a powerful starting place for organizing—and one that we're all using in some way or another. Moral frameworks can be used in positive and negative ways.

For example, queer people are often told they are not moral; colonization is often justified as bringing morality to the colonized, and so on. These moral frameworks, in positioning themselves as objective and absolute, become tools of discipline and harm themselves. This makes organizing abolition only around morality a problem--but not irrelevant--to many of the overlapping communities most harmed by the PIC. Faith communities, for example, have often been able to organize huge numbers of people using moral arguments.

A moral framework can offer a clear answer for why we need to do away with all the types of cages: they are absolutely wrong, so we can't use them at all. But we need more reasons and tools for fighting the PIC, which do not come just from a breakdown in morals. Sometimes when we only talk about the immorality of putting a human being in a cage, it makes it harder to understand the violent connections in these systems. The challenge is to use moral language in a way that makes the connections between the PIC, systems of state violence, and clear ways to challenge that violence, rather than flattening the PIC into simple rights and wrongs.

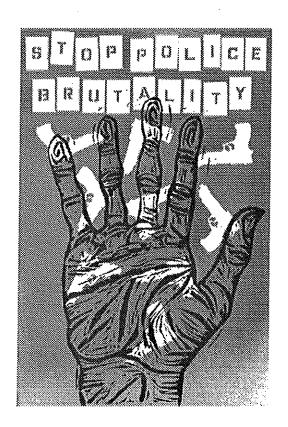
POLITICAL APPROACH

To do this, we need a political approach to the PIC that responds to all the ways power works in this system. This means thinking about how power is distributed between people and institutions (violently, democratically, through consensus) and about how those people and institutions were defined in the first place. How did we come to believe in race and gender as real things? How did prisons get defined as places of punishment and schools as places of education? How come most people think that capitalism means freedom to choose?

Thinking politically also means thinking about harm. It means asking: how are the life chances and health of certain individuals, communities, groups, and regions affected by the PIC? This is a view of abolition grounded in understanding how power is shared (or not), what the effects of power systems are, and analyzing how those systems came to be. This means looking at who is hurt by the PIC and who (in the short-term) gains. It's complicated because both lists are going to be long and overlapping, especially because while in the short-term some people definitely gain from the PIC, in the long run we are all on the "hurt" side. This work requires and produces historical questions and connections like the following three:

1. What other power systems does the PIC remind you of?

This can be general or specific. Some ideas are: slavery, the New Deal, the Middle Passage, warfare, the health care system, or "homeland security." How do these connections help you to explain the problem better, or help people to see why they should care about abolition? How is the PIC today related to these other power systems?



EXAMPLE What are the connections between the PIC and the New Deal? The New Deal was a package of laws created to get the United States out of the Great Depression. It included many public works programs, Social Security, and one of the first national welfare programs. Both are ways of maintaining inequality. The PIC obviously maintains inequality by putting particular groups of people either directly in cages or generally subjecting them to intense repression. And even though it is more commonly remembered for providing relief, the New Deal also maintained inequality. Its purpose was to prevent the collapse of capitalism in the United States. It did provide jobs and protections for some people who needed it, but did so to prevent more radical social change—the thinking was that it's easier to guarantee people's minimum welfare than to risk them rebelling. Also, the New Deal kept up racial and gendered inequality by saving almost all its relief for unemployed white men—it did not undo, and in fact reinforced, the exclusion of white women, men of color, and particularly women of color from secure, well-paying positions in the workforce.

2. What power systems PRODUCED THE PIC?

These are often more nuts-nbolts questions:

- ·What organization, politician, or interest group set off a prison-building boom in your state?
- •How did those groups get so powerful?
- When was it that being "tough on crime" became so important?
- •Was there ever even a crime boom?
- ·How are these particular events connected to larger systems like white supremacy?
- •Why did they happen when they did, and not some other way?

SENTENCE EXERCISE

Choose one (or more) institutions to compare to the PIC. Decide on a set number of points of comparison. They might be:

- historical era and geographic location
- economic, gender, and racial systems in place
- environmental effects
- •political justifications that keep these systems alive
- ways the state maintains these systems

For each point of comparison, try to come up with one sentence along the lines of:

"Just like _____, the PIC..."

EXAMPLE: "Just like Homeland Security, the PIC claims to be about safety and order even though it really makes the lives of most people-especially people of color--less safe and more disordered."

Don't worry about making your sentences including EVERY point of comparison. Make as many as you want, and try to emphasize the connections that will be most motivating or illuminating. You can also run this exercise the opposite way: what are the dissimilarities?

These answers will also tell you about who shaped the particulars of the PIC, which may or may not be the same as who you think is benefiting from it.

3. What have some of the effects of PIC REFORM AND/OR PIC ABOLITION CAMPAIGNS BEEN?

Many times, prison reform has made the PIC stronger. Whether on purpose or not, what are some examples of reforms related to your work? How can this type of reform be exposed and avoided in the future? This not only gives you direct comparison for the work you're doing now, but can give a sense of how the PIC responds to challenges (see Abolitionist Steps for more on this).

This viewpoint focuses less on individuals and their actions or intentions and more on how power works through established paths, areas, and systems. This perspective lends itself toward putting white supremacy, heterosexism, and class prejudice in the center of your work, rather than focusing on the actions of individuals. This shift can be as straightforward

as targeting a department of corrections instead than a particular administrator or politician. It can also be long-range, like doing broad political education about white supremacy instead of a campaign against a particular prison or policy.

Only by organizing for abolition can we fill out our vision of what it's going to look like. Abolition is about undoing our dependence on punishment and violence to watch over and judge individual behavior and social structures to create a new society. Figuring out

EXAMPLE In the 1970s, many prisoner activists and their supporters fought for the end to indeterminate sentencing. Sentences like "1 year to life" gave prison administrators and parole boards almost total control over when to release people. Court-ordered determinate sentencing plans were a major reform at the time, especially for sidestepping the racism that kept prisoners of color from ever being released—no matter their conviction or behavior while inside. However, determinate sentencing paved the way for mandatory sentencing and the kinds of zero tolerance and Three Strikes laws that now have much the same effect as indeterminate sentencing: people never get to go home.

new systems to organize our lives is part of abolition what about. To do that, we have to embrace the fact that abolition is going to mean some changes we can't imagine yet, ones that affect nearly every part of our lives. Again, when we imagine what abolition will make our world look like, it shouldn't seem like the world we live in now.

VISIONARY APPROACH

Working through these political connections helps us to imagine the United States (or the world) without prisons, police, surveillance, or even punishment. When we do that, chances are there are more changes than simply sending people home. Some changes to think about are:

- •What will happen to the politicians, bureaucrats, workers, and corporations who make their living off the PIC in one way or another?
- •Will political activists be free from state repression?
- •What will borders look like?
- •What will happen to institutions (and the resources that currently go into them) like the military and police?
- •What will happen to social service programs?
- •How will we recognize ourselves (and others) in racial, sexual, and gendered terms if we don't have ways to punishing those who don't fit in?
- •How will we meet the needs of people suffering harm?

|Questions for Discussion|

THE WORK OF ABOLITION IS FIGURING OUT how to fight cages right now without settling for any short-term "victory" that might make the system any stronger in the long run.

Which of these models and their combinations helps you find the most cages?

What cages are most important to your work? What connections with other cages do you see? What are the ones that don't get talked about enough?

EXERCISE

Analyze a campaign. One person or group might describe a campaign that they're working on or have completed. Briefly share an outline of what happened or is happening, then ask questions like:

•What cages were seen as the major problem in this campaign?

What understandings of the political system did this campaign try to use and spread?
What we some of the shortcomings?
Who/What got excluded or downplayed?
How could it be done better? What are ways to more clearly tie this particular effort to a broad-based abolitionist movement?

PICTURE EXERCISE

On a large piece of butcher paper, draw the cages of the PIC.

What connects them?

For this exercise, fewer instructions might help produce the broadest range of representations.

I THINK THAT HISTORY SHOWS US that it's important to carry out work along abolitionist lines. I think that history shows us that reforms have temporarily made things better at some points, and some reforms have been incredibly important in improving conditions inside prisons or giving basic rights to prisoners...but if we don't approach that work with a critical eye to what it is that we're creating in its place, and if we're not doing the work in a way that actually undermines the power structure, then that's where we have a problem, because if we're not questioning the underlying—not just causes and reasons for why people become incarcerated but the underlying causes and reasons that give others a vested interest in seeing more and more people being locked up, then we're not addressing the problem. We're simply putting band-aids on some underlying issues of inequality and power in our society... If we don't attack the systemic structures and institutions and power structures that lead to the problem in the first place, then rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, as people say, isn't ultimately going to get us where we all say we want to be.

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CONFRONTING "CRIME," CONFRONTING HARM

TALK OF "CRIME"

TALK OF CRIME USUALLY PLAYS A KEY ROLE IN GIVING AN EXPLANATION for the current punishment system. In addition, whether it is in the corporate media, the state government, or everyday discussions, talk of crime is often full of race and class prejudice. Often, it focuses just on poor urban neighborhoods of color. By contrast, government rules and actions are rarely described as crime.

Discussions of crime often take place without discussion about system-wide forms of oppression such as racism, capitalism, ableism, heterosexism, and sexism. As a result, talk of crime happens without the critical thinking needed to properly understand the conditions in which many acts of harm do take place in our society. How can we understand murder, theft, sexual abuse, police brutality, or any crime without understanding the social forces and economic conditions surrounding them?

Despite the controlling and warped ways that crime is often discussed, we can't just stop talking about crime. Few people will take us seriously if we avoid or sell-short a discussion of crime. In order to have successful discussions of crime, we need to deal with some questions.

- •How can we undo the harmful myths and ideas that often surround talk of crime?
- •How is crime defined and what are other ways we could define it?
- •How should we critically understand the harm that does take place in our society?

In the end, we want to participate in discussions of crime in a way that draws out the people's abilities to reason effectively and not fall into oppressive ideas or mind-numbing fears caused by hysteria over crime.

EXERCISE: DISCUSSING CRIME

One way to undo harmful myths and ideas is to critically assess media portrayals of crime.

Consider the following study:

Many years ago sociologist Mark Fishman did a study that is still meaningful to today. Fishman looked at how the media created fictional "crime waves" with racially coded images. In a time when there was no evidence of an increase in violence against elderly New Yorkers, Fishman found that the three main newspapers of the city along with five local TV stations reported an upswing of violence targeting the elderly. The elderly were usually reported as being mugged, raped, and murdered by black or Latino youth with long criminal records. These youth generally came from inner city areas located near the residential areas of elderly whites that had fled those same areas. Because of the media made hysteria over the alleged "crime wave," new laws were created for more harsh and punishing policies such as longer prison sentences.1

Discuss the following questions:

- 1. How is crime portrayed in your local media? What crimes receive attention? What is the race and class of those who are portrayed as responsible?
- 2. Does the media assist you in understanding crime? If yes, how? If no, why not?

THE QUESTION OF CRIME

IN THE U.S. THE WORD "CRIME" USED IN WAYS THAT CHANGE depending on time and place. The state only uses the word to name those acts that are considered violations of the law. As a result, the very people potentially harmed

by a crime get left out of the picture. What would happen if we instead defined crime as harm?

Too often the word crime is used not to point out acts between people. Defining crime as harm would both broaden and narrow the list of things normally considered crimes. The definition might expand the list in two ways. First, the definition might cover system-wide forms of oppression such as racist institutional policies.

Second, it might also cover what might seem like mild forms of harm such as verbal abuse between family members. At the same time, the definition of crime as harm might narrow the list of crimes by decriminalizing acts not considered harmful. Acts such as drug possession and sex work (prostitution, for example) might then no longer be considered crimes.

We may or may not agree with the definition of crime as harm. Furthermore, we might want to put limits on what harm counts as when we define crime. Should verbal abuse be considered a crime? No matter how we feel, defining crime as harm causes us to ask questions that force us to rethink what proper response to crime might be.

For instance, should everyone who harms get punished? But isn't punishment a form of harm, especially punishment in the form of prisons? Are such forms of additional harm the price we have to pay in order to address harm? Do prisons do anything to repair the harm done? Do prisons even address harm in a way that reduces the chances of an individual harming others again?

THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND HARM

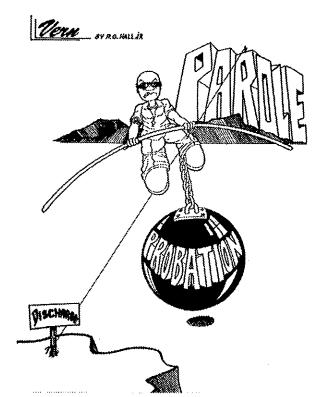
ALONG WITH QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGING HOW CRIME IS USUALLY DEFINED, abolitionist activists would do well to prepare themselves with an approach to understanding the crimes that often set off deep fears and concerns. Mistrust about abolitionism can come from strong reactions to crimes such as murder and forms of sexual violence.

As we mentioned in the discussion of crime and the media above, responding to such strong reactions first requires an understanding of the sources of the reaction. Is it personal experience? Is it media panic? Along with

> this we need to provide alternative ways of understanding harm itself. Alternative ways of understanding harm can prepare us for considering alternative responses to harm.

To understand harm we need informed observations of the conditions that accompany it. One way of looking at homicide rates, for

example, is to look at them historically. Looking historically, the sharpest increases in homicide rates in the U.S. happened at the time of Prohibition when the manufacturing, sale, and transportation of alcohol became



illegal. While violence from alcohol abuse dropped during this period, violence on the whole increased.

We can compare that situation to contemporary homicide rates. While turf wars over the drug market are often listed as a factor, other factors include economic hardship, involvement in wars, and availability of health care. The influence of these factors changes over time. Trends within the larger society can shift the impact of particular factors.

As abolitionists, it is important to make people realize that when we understand the foundations of specific forms of harm such as homicide, we better understand the need for broad social change. Greatly reducing rates of particular kinds of harm depends upon our ability to change the social and economic conditions in which they take place.

RESPONDING TO HARM HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO HARM?

OPENING GROUP EXERCISE

- 1. On one half of a large sheet of paper, list the general values you believe should guide responses to harm.
- 2. On the other half, brainstorm what you see as the main values and rules the government uses to deal with crime.
- Compare and contrast each side of the paper. Discuss why the two sides differ.

Often one of the defining characteristics of the government is punishment. While there are those who benefit politically and economically from punishment, a key question is why people who do not benefit in these ways support punishment. The combination of fear, racism, heterosexism, sexism, and/or class prejudice feed into the impulse many have in wanting to

punish. People often demand punishment as a kind of release for their fear and anger. At the same time, stereotypes that paint people as evil or take away their humanity make it easier to support their punishment. The more we identify with the person being punished, the less we want to see them punished.

ENDNOTE

1. This is an adaptation of a summary found in Jerome Miller's Search and Destroy: African-American Males in the Criminal Justice System, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

I believe we must make the system more victim-friendly, especially for those victims who are seeking healing. The system seems to encourage victims who are seeking retribution, since this becomes useful to the prosecution. However, the system is not equipped to handle those victims who want to heal.

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