

RESOURCE GUIDE

S5 E10: What's the Public's Role in Upholding a Broken Criminal Justice System?



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70 Million is made possible by a grant from the Safety and Justice Challenge at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.



million

ONE JAIL AT A TIME.

story

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SOLUTIONS FOR REFORM

INSHA RAHMAN, VICE PRESIDENT OF ADVOCACY AND PARTNERSHIPS AT THE VERA INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE, STANDS FOR A PORTRAIT AT THE VERA OFFICES IN BROOKLYN. IN THE BACKDROP ARE WINDOWS MADE BY AN ARTIST MEANT TO REPLICATE WINDOWS USED IN JAILS.



"ONE OF OUR BEST CRIME-FIGHTING TACTICS IS TO ACTUALLY ADDRESS SOME OF THE STRUCTURAL AND SYSTEMIC ISSUES THAT DRIVE PEOPLE TOWARDS CRIME IN THE FIRST PLACE." **INSHA RAHMAN, VP OF ADVOCACY AND PARTNERSHIP AT THE VERA INSTITUTE**

Over the course of five seasons of the 70 Million podcast, our reporters have brought the realities of people who have been impacted by the criminal justice system right to your ears. Why? Because there are still more than 70 million Americans who have a criminal record that creates significant barriers to gaining employment, economic stability, maintaining housing, and successfully reentering society.

For the fifth and final season of 70 Million, we examined the inequalities and inadequacies of the justice system from the role of carceral debt and jailhouse informants to the impacts of police schooling by school resource officers and prosecutorial power over grand juries. While the view of the criminal justice system tends to lean towards being controlled by forces greater than us, the people, it's important to remember that it is *our* system. Together we've played a part in allowing it, and together we can shape what it becomes.

Insha Rahman, VP of Advocacy and Partnerships at the Vera Institute and Peter K. Enns, author and professor of government and public policy at Cornell University, join reporter Mark Betancourt to discuss the role the public plays in shaping our criminal legal system. Currently, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, though this wasn't always true. Peter K. Enns argues that this became fact only after the public became more punitive— electing prosecutors, judges, sheriffs, etc. who implemented harsher legislation. Yet, data shows that more incarceration does very little to make us safer. And historically as crime rates lowered, the public became less punitive, though this often gets lost in perception due to news coverage. The media often overreacts to crime, sensationalizing the need for more punitive action and driving political agendas to the ballot box. Fear-mongering results in the need for a more punitive, immediate response to decreasing crime and connecting it with increased safety, rather than decoupling the two and acting on more preventative, long-term actions that address the root of the systemic issue.

Each perspective on the argument of the criminal justice system. So how is that achieved? Increasing the presence of police officers has been shown only to increase the punishment of low-level, nonviolent situations such as homelessness. And a majority of those negatively affected by these actions are racial minorities of lower economic status and police and correctional officers. Black voters are actually the most concerned about crime and safety in their neighborhoods, and corrections officers are more likely to experience depression, PTSD, suicide, and a shorter life expectancy. Insha Rahman shares, "the complete disinvestment in having real public safety is not something that's specific to the criminal legal system or justice issues. It's what we as a country do across the board when it comes to healthcare, when it comes to education, when it comes to housing, to really basic things." The solutions necessary for improving the criminal justice system start with creating programs and legislation through sympathetic, visionary thinking. Housing, rehabilitation, and reentry programs, voting for legislators that seek to improve schooling, housing and jobs, and supporting the funding of crime prevention solutions are steps that each of us can take to create a safer, more humane country to live in.

PEOPLE DOING THE WORK

Vera Institute of Justice

Vera is fighting to end mass incarceration. Founded in 1961 to advocate for alternatives to money bail in New York City, Vera is now a national organization that partners with impacted communities and government leaders for change.

Vera Action

At Vera Action, we fight to end mass incarceration, protect immigrants' rights, and build safe and thriving communities. Alongside organizers and advocates, government leaders, and elected officials across the political aisle, we work to enact transformative policy change for safety and justice at the local, state, and federal levels.

The Sentencing Project

The Sentencing Project advocates for effective and humane responses to crime that minimize imprisonment and criminalization of youth and adults by promoting racial, ethnic, economic, and gender justice.

Pew Research Center

Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world. We conduct public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and other data-driven social science research.



PETER K. ENNS IS A PROFESSOR OF GOVERNMENT AND PROFESSOR OF PUBLIC POLICY AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY. PHOTO CREDIT: NELLIE HARI

CAMBA Housing Ventures

CAMBA Housing Ventures envisions diverse, thriving communities where affordable housing plays a transformative role in the success of low-income individuals and families.

Brennan Center for Justice

The Brennan Center for Justice is a nonpartisan law and policy institute. We strive to uphold the values of democracy. We stand for equal justice and the rule of law. We work to craft and advance reforms that will make American democracy work, for all.

A New Way of Life

We empower and build the leadership skills of formerly incarcerated people; we hire formerly incarcerated people; and we provide cutting-edge organizational leadership that promotes resources for disenfranchised people living in communities that have been marginalized.

Prison Policy Initiative

The non-profit, non-partisan Prison Policy Initiative produces cutting edge research to expose the broader harm of mass criminalization, and then sparks advocacy campaigns to create a more just society.

The Urban Institute

The Urban Institute is a nonprofit research organization that provides data and evidence to help advance upward mobility and equity.

LEARN MORE

"WE'VE TALKED A LOT ABOUT HOW PEOPLE POINT THE FINGER AT PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY. IT WAS A PERSONAL FAILING THAT SOMEBODY BROKE THE LAW. BUT ACTUALLY WE'RE AS A SOCIETY FAILING AND WE NEED TO STEP UP TO OUR ACCOUNTABILITY TO ACTUALLY TELL ACCURATE STORIES ABOUT CRIME AND SAFETY. BECAUSE WHEN WE DON'T, WHEN WE BLAME THE WRONG CAUSE, WE MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO FIND THE RIGHT SOLUTIONS, AND THAT MAKES US LESS SAFE OVERALL." – **INSHA RAHMAN, VP OF ADVOCACY AND PARTNERSHIP AT THE VERA INSTITUTE**

Reading



[15 Discussions That Shaped the Justice Reform Movement](#) by CAP

[Incarceration Nation: How the United States Became the Most Punitive Democracy in the World](#) by Peter K. Enns

[Solutions & Research](#) by Vera Action

Websites



[Get Involved with The Sentencing Project](#)

[Transforming the System](#)

[Incarceration Trends](#) by Vera Action

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