# A CRIMINOLOGIST'S QUEST FOR PEACE

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Hal Peninsky

# **Chapter 6: EDUCATING FOR PEACE\***

The title for this chapter comes from Norwegian feminist peace education professor Birgit Brock-Utne's (1985) distinction between "educating for peace" and "educating about peace." Educating for peace means that people learn to make peace by practicing peacemaking in their education. This is not about learning peacemaking techniques but about engaging in peaceful relations. Peaceful relations abandon the barriers of hierarchy and open the gates of harmony. Teachers and students share participatory space. Students assume responsibility for learning what they need to know about communication with others - how to do it, right down to how to use letters and numbers. A personal example is illustrative. My daughter is now in her twenties. In the fourth grade in public school, she had a teacher who sat her students in circles of six around round tables rather than in rows. Her walls were plastered with student products. As a parent volunteer for several field trips, I saw the room roaring with private conversations as the teacher stepped to the head of the class. When she spoke, the class immediately became silent. In that class my daughter wrote what for years were her most beautiful, articulate, meaningful essays and poems. That teacher stands out to me as one who systematically educated for rather than about peace. Her students were able to practice whatever she preached. That gave them faith in the value of what she had to say. They listened. They responded.

In this essay I review how education for peace works for me and my daughter and others at any level. I do so against a background of a competing paradigm - one that supports further institutionalization of educating about peace, which roughly translated, means "do as I say, not as I do." Educating about peace presumes that elders, including teachers, know what obedient students must learn about how to get along, by sitting in rows quietly while the teacher tells them what they must know. I call this competing paradigm "warmaking" (Pepinsky 1991). In criminology warmaking means identifying, isolating and subduing criminals. We can measure our progress by the criminals we put away in prison for instance. In like fashion, we can measure our educational progress by "quality control" in which we identify, isolate and subdue deficient students. In this essay I outline the direction in which the warmaking paradigm leads, as in installing metal detectors, video security cameras and bringing drug-sniffing dogs to school. I describe the historical context in which alarm over youth violence arises, here and now. It is a false alarm. Parents and teachers pose far greater dangers of predation and law violation than their children. And yet the warmaking paradigm proceeds on the premise that making youth sit in their places and do what we adults instruct them to, is the most pressing need we have to control violence and crime in our midst. I concur with Mike Males (1996, 1999) that from drug use and mental lapse to violence against one another, parents and teachers are

"perpetrators" by all manner of indices more than adolescents. And yet in criminology for nearly two centuries as in everyday life, we presume that the modal age of social predation is late adolescence. In this essay I explain why this is not the case for me.

My own study and experience teaches me that educating <u>for</u> peace works better for children and their elders than educating <u>about</u> peace. I even see educating for peace as the best way to teach the three R's. More than that, I see it as the way to create more caring, sharing, cooperative, creative adults. For us humans, education for peace works better than educating about peace, anywhere, in any circumstance, at any age. In its broadest sense the choice of how to educate is a choice of how to live one's next moment in everyday life, anywhere anytime.

I do not presume to give educating about peace equal time in this essay. I will describe that paradigm, and illustrate how it works, and how indeed it leads to greater repression of schoolchildren. But I will concentrate on how I, as an educator, have forsaken faith in educating about peace, for obtaining fruits of educating for peace. I have come to recognize that the kind of education anyone believes in comes from personal experience. Here I will tell my own story of how my faith has grown that we make better progress toward peace and learning insofar as we educate for rather than about peace.<sup>1</sup>

#### PEACE AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

I went to an "experimental" school from eighth grade through high school - University School, closed in 1967, at Ohio State. I received no grades. Instead, I first wrote a letter evaluating how I had done at fulfilling a personal contract for what I would do and learn for the quarter, then the teacher would respond, and those evaluations would go to our school files, our parents and guardians. For much of the day in "core," we studied what students voted to study for the semester, and held class meetings to govern ourselves. Long after graduating, I read the avowedly democratic credo of staff who formally dedicated the school in 1949, long after its creation on the model of John Dewey (1956).

At University School I toyed with teachers for two years, alternating between conning them through doing nothing to promising far more than I could deliver in a contract. Gradually, I learned to learn for myself rather than for my teachers. College, law school, and graduate school in sociology were grade games I easily performed. I also persisted in learning for myself. I began to think that on the whole, my most vocal challengers and laggards in my sophomore class had been victimized as I had, and were simply more damaged because they had not had the chance I had years earlier to take a couple of years to stumble and assume responsibility for my own education, and to acknowledge my own limits without being pounded upon.

I have taught criminology from the sophomore to the doctoral level for well over a quarter century. In 1976, I shifted jobs and abruptly changed from teaching all graduate students to mostly college sophomores. I came to recognize that I was trying to offer

them a University School education five years or so later than the one to which I had been exposed. I find that the same form of education that works for me, works for education at any level. Semester after semester for the past 6 years or so, I have taught a class for 25 or 30 students seeking "intensive writing" credit. This helps meet a liberal arts college requirement, designed to help students to write well at the time they are about to receive a bachelor's degree. My students and I exchange "letters" on stories of child abuse that our guests and our course reader describe. They write beautifully. I remove these students' names from their essays and send copies to the guests about whom they write. Guests who come back to class at their own expense tell us that the writing they receive stimulates them to return. They feel understood and appreciated. Students have a reason for writing. They write as beautifully as my daughter did in her fourth-grade classroom. I "grade" by the number of "satisfactory" words written. My daughter's teacher did likewise, respondingly personally to much of what my daughter wrote.

I find that when I talk with people about alternatives, they quite understandably want to know: So what do I do next? In this story I tell of how I try to educate, I concentrate on how we learn what we need to know to become responsive to one another, to be motivated to learn from one another, to know our three R's, and to become less violent toward one another. Welcome to this account of my own journey to understand how to make peace in our schools.

## IN THE WARMAKING PARADIGM, YOUTH IS OUR ENEMY

"Modern criminology," the study of why some people rather than others become criminals, began in earnest in the nineteenth century in the period of what historian David Rothman (1971) has called "the discovery of the asylum." The first "modern" penitentiaries - what Native North Americans have called "iron houses" - were built in the United States in Auburn, New York, and in Philadelphia during the 1820s. At that moment contained populations of offenders became identifiable, and subject to study. As Rothman describes, those who worked with prisoners were among the earliest "modern" criminological theorists, positing how broken families and moral depravity born of poverty created delinquents, who associated with one another to form criminal subcultures. The image of the prototypic criminal against whom we wage wars on crime continues: He is underclass, in all probability a member of a racial as well as an economic underclass, a lumpenproletarian; and more basically than anything else, he is young, strong or cunning, and dangerous. Behold the criminal, our caged animal. Look at how he misbehaves.

A generation after the establishment of modern prisons, schooling of children began to become compulsory. The primary impetus for this movement was to get idle children off city streets, to teach them the discipline they would need to fit into our workforce. Underclass youth hanging out on street corners were the primary impetus both for making schooling compulsory, and at the same time, for establishing uniformed police forces (Collins 1979). Dealing out discipline was a primary objective:

In most institutions keeping order took precedence over teaching. One observer in 1851 likened the typical American school to "the despotic government of a military camp." . . . In 1917 . . . when New York City introduced a "platoon" system to deal with an influx of pupils, students rebelled - literally. Between 1,000 and 3,000 schoolchildren picketed and stoned P.S. 171 on Madison Avenue and attacked nonstriking classmates. Similar riots erupted across the city, resulting in furious battles between student mobs and the police. (Greenberg, 1999).

Worldwide to this day, the modal age of those arrested and prosecuted is in late teens, and of those incarcerated only slightly older.<sup>2</sup> In legal practice as in media and everyday discourse, when we think of violence and crime we first and foremost imagine "youth."

Virtually from the outset of my criminological career, when I rode hundreds of hours in police squad cars in the so-called high-crime area of Minneapolis, I have been convinced that the association of crime and violence with youth is absolutely wrong. Not that youth are innocent, but that their elders do far more of whatever we fear in youth than youth do. I joined others like Reiman (1997), and Chambliss (1988) in presenting data indicating that even at the level of homicide and illicit drug trafficking, "the rich get richer and the poor get prison," and higher officials get caught doing the very activities for which they send people to prison (Pepinsky and Jesilow 1992). I became involved with those caught in child custody battles and struggles to heal and free themselves from "incest" and even ritual, homicidal torture, and in so doing, have further gained the impression that molestation, rape and even murder of our children by highly respected parents and caretakers is many magnitudes greater than our reports of rape and prosecutions for child molestation indicate. I have been heavily involved in an international movement to abolish prisons (MacLean and Pepinsky 1993), but I now find myself wondering whether for children especially, home and school are not more dangerous than prison life is for the many prisoners whom I have gotten to know. Michael Males (1996, 1999), has taken each kind of threat of violence we fear in youth, from teen pregnancy to homicide to illicit drug use and abuse, and shown that the involvement of men my age is magnitudes greater than that of adolescents. Youth are less offending, more restrained, more responsible, and far more victimized by, than victimizing of, their adult caretakers. The sad part is that left unacknowledged and unvalidated, childhood victimization hardens into our becoming more dangerous adults. From generation to generation, we scapegoat our youth and implicitly give ourselves license to perpetuate the violence we suffered in our own childhoods (Miller (1990 [1983]). I don't think that this fact of violence has changed much since the early nineteenth century. We are just becoming more open to recognizing the obvious - that in hierarchies of power, those who are bigger are likely to do more damage than those who are smaller.

We are born aiming to please, eager to do what it takes to gain love and human connection. We master languages at incredible rates as we honestly try to conform, to fit, to belong, to be loved. And if in those early years we are abused by those we so desperately want to love and trust, we will be all the less likely to resist - to blame anyone but ourselves for our own pain, fear, and betrayal. From the point of view of those who

would prey on those least likely to retaliate, we are born perfect victims. Small wonder if adults manage to do far worse to us than we manage to do in return.

Paradoxically, the fear of youth that translated into nineteenth-century punishment and discipline of children was accompanied by an unprecedented recognition - unprecedented for European-Americans and Europeans at any rate - that children have intrinsic human worth, that it matters a damn whether they live or die, prosper or deteriorate. "Psychohistorian" Lloyd DeMause (1984) has traced this development. By the end of the century we even began to legislate special labor protection for children. On the whole, it is fair to say that our belief in the importance of youth and how children fare has become more acute, and that our ambivalence over whether youth are to be loved or feared has grown accordingly.

I have observed that our organized fear of youth waxes and wanes in intergenerational cycles (Pepinsky 1991, 1997). Early on, I recognized that incarceration rates in the United States since the mid-nineteenth century had leveled off or declined only during periods when large numbers of our young men were under mortal fire at national enemy front lines. The most recent of these was the Vietnam War. Incarceration rates started rising from a 15-year low in 1975, the very year that war ended.<sup>3</sup> Our trauma, our fear, our risk of trauma from personal violence is--it appears to me--as nearly universal as ever. Military political leaders historically preserve hegemony by rallying their constituents to war against identifiable, "pc" (politically convenient), "scapegoats" (Males 1996). Possessed of weapons which can destroy all humanity megatimes, we are forced to look back among ourselves for enemies, encouraged by political and media demagoguery. And so we have unprecedented, so far unrelenting, increases in incarceration in these United States at this moment.

Intergenerational waves of fear of youth need not automatically translate into waves of incarceration. I have found that since World War II, the intergenerational waves seem to have become globalized. Thus, the election of WWII star John Kennedy over WWI veteran officer Dwight Eisenhower set off a worldwide transition in political leadership as between those generations' heroes. Such a transition, obviously, bred uncertainty about what would happen, about what could be trusted. And in the habit of children who have learned to blame themselves for adult betrayal, adults responded to messages that their own children - who hadn't experienced the Depression and didn't know what hardship is - were not to be trusted with our future. The prophecy fulfilled itself. Worldwide, youth rebelled, from the Cultural Revolution to the streets of Paris to U.S. college campuses, to the mass arrest of 3,000 in RFK Stadium in Washington, D.C., in the wake of disclosure of U.S. invasion of Cambodia in 1970, at the close of the decade. But eventually the U.S. president had over half a million young men and women in Vietnam, and we could worship their caskets instead of fearing their rebellion.

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev's ascension to power in the Soviet Union signalled the beginning of the next generational transformation--to children of the WWII generation. Bill Clinton signalled that transition in the U.S. as he became president in 1993. It was

time, once again, to fear ourselves and our future, and hence to become vulnerable to messages that our youth are out of control. I used to get angry at Clinton's grandstanding on crime. I forgave him a little as I recognized that if he had not filled this cultural bill - a demagogue railing against domestic youth or youth in foreign uniform - he would not have been qualified to become our president. He represents the cycle to which we all have become habituated. We are vulnerable to fears that our children are getting out of control, that they will not measure up to the challenges our future poses, that they are dangerous especially when congregating in groups, particularly in defiant groups dressing alike.

The saddest image I have from the past year is television news footage of black elementary schoolers stepping off a bus and being frisked with an electronic wand. How utterly undeserved. In spite of recent high profile school massacres, I have read and believe that the chances of a child being killed in school are lower than the chances of any of us being struck dead by lightning. How unfair. How sad that eager children are taught to believe that all that keeps them from killing one another is being frisked by a police officer as they get off their schoolbus.

On the other hand, we can enjoy many opportunities once we let our children know that we fear them less than we fear ourselves. Personally and socially, we can make peace with our children, and in fact are doing so in what I believe to be historically unprecedented ways.

I am not blind to what even a penal abolitionist calls "the dangerous few" - "serial killers and violent rapists" (Morris 1995:81). In my criminological wanderings, I have met many of the dangerous few. Some have stayed in my house - yes, I believe, even serial rapists and murderers. In retrospect, my most telling encounter was in a motel room where a new parolee was staying. He was tattooed from head to foot, much taller than I, and he readily let on that in his prison time he had killed at least five people. An ex-prisoner friend had invited me to meet his buddy. Here we were. While my friend sat on the side, my new acquaintance invited me to stand in front of him to test whether I knew how to protect myself from fatal personal attack. He was a full head taller than I. I looked up into his eyes. We stood there. He chastised me for looking at his eyes rather than his hands, but the fact was, I knew he wasn't going to hurt me in front of his friend, and so I had no reason to guard against his attack, let alone presume I could win such a confrontation.

My friend sent me pictures of me and this dangerous offender clowning around on the anti-aircraft guns planted at the local college football stadium. He has gone back to prison. I was not prepared to take on spending enough of the new parolee's time with him to guarantee his safety to self and others. I marveled at the mechanical skills he offered, and at his desire to teach children what he knows (in a case devoid of record of child molestation), but I did not know where he could go. The lesson I draw is this: No one I have met is too dangerous to be safe when - /he is with one or two other respectful, trustworthy people. If we cast people off into prison or expel them from schools, I may not blame adults who give up on schoolchildren, but I also know that insofar as we find

time to be engaged with one another, no one I have ever met has been too dangerous to be released from detention or prison, provided we have human time available to be with those whose misbehavior poses a continuing risk.

The friend in that encounter has also returned to prison. He taught classes in my department, in fact guest lectured for me. One of the things he said more than once was that when he had been in a really hardcore maximum security prison, there was one guard on his cellblock who was known to be fair. If a riot or anything like it happened, there was common agreement among prisoners that this guard would be locked away from the action and not hurt. As a teacher I feel safer when I become known as "fair." "Fair" to me entails humility, to want to know what is bugging people around me who act out and respect them, rather than trying to put them in their place. Educating <u>for</u> peace pays off in personal security as well as in broader social security, even with the cliched, so-called "dangerous few" - the grown-up ones let alone disruptive schoolchildren.

Consider how to make peace with the dangerous few and with schoolchildren alike.

### **HOW PEACE IS MADE**

Educating for peace begins from the premise that every member of a group, including children in a classroom, has equally important contributions to make to group dialogue and action. Of course adults have guidance to offer children: a parent ought to pull a child's hand away from a hot stove or away from an oncoming car, but equally, a parent ought to listen to a child. In our childhood, we are more inclined to see absurdity or hypocrisy in adult posturing. We are less likely to lie as children than to lie unconsciously as adults - to ourselves as well as to others. We are less likely wedded to ways things have to be done, to hang onto bad habits. As children we offer honest dialogue to our adult caretakers, and a chance to learn from one another. The size or bureaucratic position of a teacher should neither diminish nor elevate the position of the teacher in dialogue with students. I struggle to achieve this balance in my own classes, no matter how high the formal level of instruction. I begin each class convening a set of strangers. I ask them to become emotionally involved enough in our subject matter to care how well they write or speak. My primary index of how well I have taught is how much I have learned from my students, and my teaching is no more successful than its capacity to engage something that really honestly matters to each class member, myself included.

I think this is no less true of the position of a teacher of younger students than mine. Educating for peace entails bringing them into the process of deciding what to write and •rithmetic for, and of giving them space to raise whatever things they thought they'd like to talk over and learn with others (an approach to education Paolo Freire, 1970, is particularly famous for expounding). One alternative school I know has weekly "family meetings" for primary, middle, and highschoolers, and monthly grand meetings involving them all. Any member can contribute to the agenda, which notably includes how we and school are getting along.

When I taught rape awareness to my sophomore students I wished that, as girls and boys from the outset in school, they (and I too for that matter) could have talked about what they wanted from each other. If only girls could relieve boys of the burden of believing that being tough and in charge was what turned them on, what they sought. If only boys knew that by being vulnerable and soft they could actually attract girls. If only boys and girls just had time to speak openly and safely about boy/girl issues.

When I began college teaching there was a nationwide, vocal demand that what one taught be "relevant" to the lives of students. Why not? Why should a person not be given an important reason to write, other than the promise that if your spelling and grammar are correct, someone may employ you years hence? That is a gift a teacher gave my daughter in the fourth grade - to write about what mattered to her. And why not give people something important to them to calculate? Why not discover why people in a class want to read, write, and calculate as a prelude to having them practice?

The warmaking brand of education presupposes that someone on high knows what students need to know at any level, as by offering standardized tests of educational progress. We all live within that model. The pressure is on, but happily, the human spirit is not constrained to implement a model literally in order to get away with demands for compliance. My daughter's fourth-grade teacher was an award winner. Any of us adults, when with a child, can relate as a master or as a peer. Relating as a peer, acknowledging that one wants to learn from the child as well as hoping to teach, is essentially what it takes in any daily interaction to constitute educating <u>for</u> peace. Parents, teachers, any of us can choose to relate with children as peers and hence educate for peace on any occasion, as against commanding obedience. Any adult-child moment of interaction is an occasion for one form of education or the other - for or about peace.

That is how education for peace works at the personal level. People learn to read, write, and calculate faster. I get amazing writing from students with whom I exchange casual letters. As in my own two-year process of adjustment to an alternative school, we all fumble - the more so the later we are given responsibility for our own education - when we start. The reward is that in the process of educating for peace we demonstrate and nourish respect for one another, acknowledgment of one another's contributions to our learning process. People actually practice respect and empathy, and so become safer among themselves.

There are now many peacemaking and conflict resolution training programs being carried out in schools, and that is great. But peacemaking can go beyond how to keep students from punching each other out on the playground, to the very process by which reading, writing, •rithmetic, and whatever else matters to class members gets shared and developed.

We live in a period I call "ultimate nomadry." Traditionally, a nomadic existence was one in which tribes, clans or families moved around together. Now even "nuclear" families split apart horizontally (divorce, commuting partnerships, etc.) and vertically

(dying alone in a nursing home, moving away or running away from home, confronting one's childhood assailant, being a child of divorce). I think that often even people long-married, and children and parents, hardly know what most intimately matters in one another's lives.

In the midst of ultimate nomadry, reports are unfolding that violence, particularly sexual violence, against children by caretakers is prevalent and severe. Low as the risk is that a child will shoot up a school, each time it happens I can't help but wonder what secret torture that child endured long before the explosion. Schoolchildren spend most of their waking hours in school. It is there that they have the greatest chance, somehow, to share the violence they are suffering and have adult help in gaining safety. I think that in place of abstract good touch/bad touch programs I would offer students real life testimony from adults who have suffered what they themselves might be - incest survivors like those who visit my college seminar on children's rights and safety. As a school staff member who heard a child tell a story of victimization I would talk through with the child what consequences would follow from reporting the "abuse" - that the child would have to retell the story to a child protection worker, that the remedy might be to "remove" the child from the home, and in that case, is there anywhere the child would want to go, or any other remedy the child could imagine (e.g., dad leaving home). In a condition of ultimate nomadry, our struggle is to create safe response to our vulnerability and victimization in place of crumbling patriarchy. My own father may be raping me. I may still want desperately to love him safely. As with school curriculum, the opportunity lying in educating for peace is to recognize that our students have as much to teach us about what scares and helps them in everyday life as experts.

The saddest manifestation to me of the drive to educate about peace is the drug war. The drug war itself is a monumental exercise in enforcing obedience to patriarchal authority. It is simply a lie that the drug war is about getting people off drugs. Rather, it is about having problem people take the drugs doctors prescribe, or that corporations purvey. For instance, Ritalin is, in pharmacological action and effect, indistinguishable from powdered cocaine. How many schoolchildren are forced to take Ritalin so that they will sit in their seats and obey teacher's orders? We don't have time or inclination to get to know people well enough for them to trust us with the stories of how people close to them hurt them, scared them, and threatened them, to keep the relationship secret. We focus on making sure that they are taking the right "meds." And increasingly, for exercising the "privilege" of participating in extracurricular activities, we test youth for whether they are taking unprescribed drugs. Now students are even being tested for traces of having smoked or chewed tobacco. Frankly, I have no pat answers as to which "drugs" students ought to be taking. But I'd prefer real dialogues on the subject, instead of the pretense that drug problems are limited to what is illicit, let alone to what shows up in random urine testing. I don't want students to grow up believing that they have to subject themselves to drug monitoring in order to be safe. I do want students to grow up believing that they can discuss how drugs make them feel, and whether they ought to be taking even what the doctor ordered.

Once when my daughter was in high school she told me that a fellow student had brought

a gun to school and been caught with it in his locker, police attending. I found myself wondering whether if I had received such a report as a principal, I might have accorded the student more dignity and opportunity for assuming responsibility for the threat he posed. When I called him to my office, might I have not asked whether I couldn't check out his locker the next day, have told him I hoped to find no gun, have asked whether he knew how to handle a gun safely, have asked whether he was angry enough to shoot someone or scared of anyone so that I might offer him protection. . . Perhaps such a collaborative approach to a reported troublemaker is mere idle fantasy, but I think giving people - schoolchildren included - a way to assume responsibility pays off in safety more than preemptive force.

Insofar as we educate our children well, they will become better than we are at deciding what they need to know, and at how to learn. Those inclined to warmaking and peacemaking seem to agree that we are better off as students learn "responsibility." To be responsible is the opposite of being violent toward another, or to being victimized by another's violence. "Responsibility" is a three-step process: listening to those your next action may affect, deciding on account of what you hear what you will do next, and accounting openly for your ensuing action. Life is safe from violence where responsibility becomes practiced, supported, and enjoyed. Violence is thereby aborted. That is the only way any of us becomes safer, now that we are shattering the illusion that we can depend on "families," "schools," or "countries" wherein father figures are supposed to solve our problems for us as long as we live by their rules and orders.

Whenever we encounter a child, we face the choice between educating for or about peace. Insofar as we enter these moments listening to what children might teach us is worth attending, we and the child become safer together. Insofar as we enter these moments feeling obliged to teach children what they have to know, believe, and feel, we become more at risk of violence from one another, and to others hereafter. Insofar as educating for peace happens, we who are caught up in ultimate nomadry establish safe, honest, open relations - the kind we would aspire to in a "family of choice." We help our children prepare to face and choose how they relate to a world of uncertainty. Insofar as we give up the pretense of knowing what children must know, we allow children to assume responsibility for learning what they need. Children learn faster, children mature faster. Why not?

This is how I would address the threat of violence in and outside my schools and classes.

## Notes

1. One can do either in any setting, as Henry (1983) showed when he found that legally cooperative enterprises in Britain could be as punitive and hierarchical in personnel actions as formally hierarchical organizations. In other words peacemaking is not about the kind of structure but about the content of social relations.

- 2. Interestingly, the conventional criminological way to measure incarceration is to count adult prisoners. The United States Government, which now publishes annual national prison and jail censuses, only sporadically publishes highly incomplete censuses of juveniles in custody. If one counts juvenile "detention" and "secure placement" as incarceration, the actual median age of incarceration is probably much lower than official figures indicate.
- 3. The last attempt to translate major infusion of troops to a war front failed: George Bush's obviously orchestrated war in 1991, after which he was defeated for re-election. We have progressed to the point at which the world's leading possessor of weapons, the United States, can't find a war to relieve the pressure to war against our own young, and send them to prison. Once again, "progress" is ambivalent.

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<sup>\*</sup> This title originally appeared in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 567, pp. 158-170 (2000).