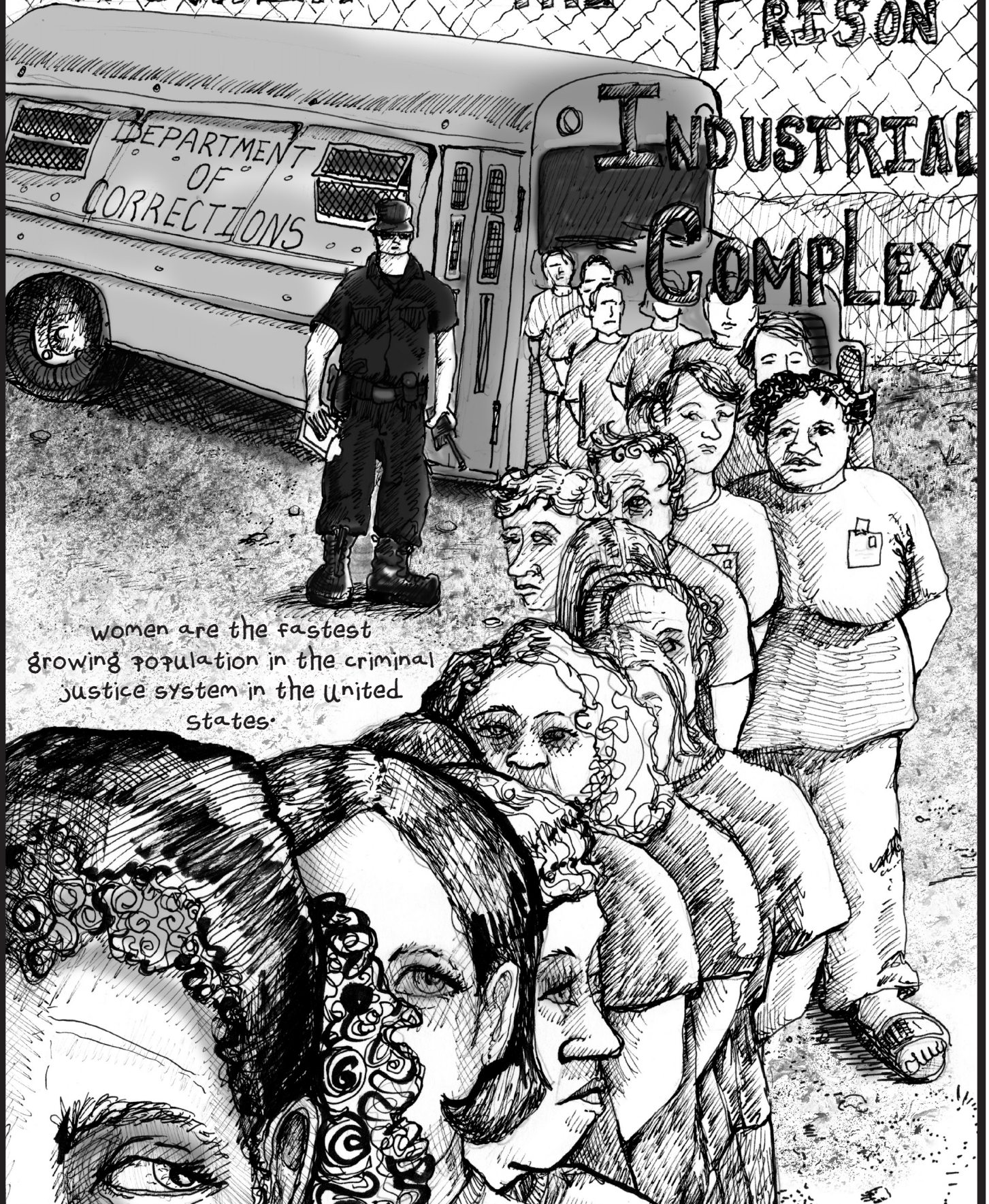
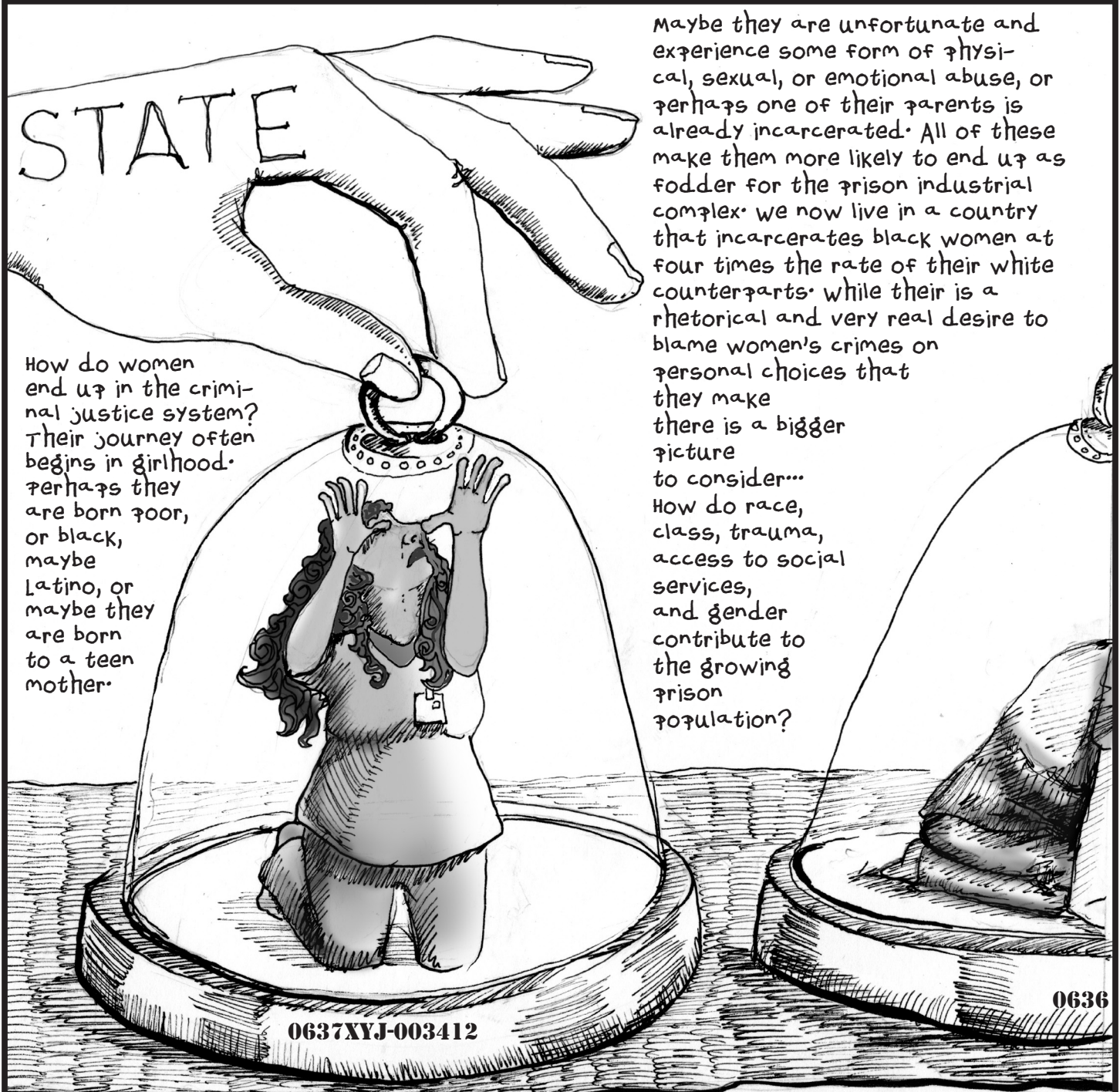


WOMEN AND THE PRISON



women are the fastest growing population in the criminal justice system in the United States.

women who are victims of gender entrapment experience poverty and violence in their private lives;



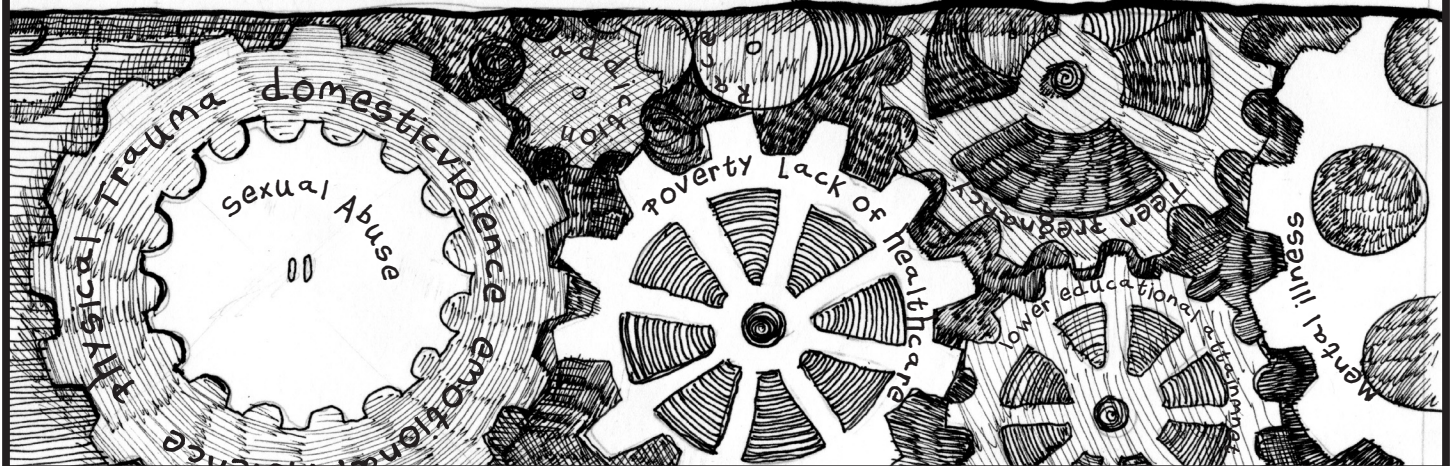
How do women end up in the criminal justice system? Their journey often begins in girlhood. Perhaps they are born poor, or black, maybe Latino, or maybe they are born to a teen mother.

Maybe they are unfortunate and experience some form of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, or perhaps one of their parents is already incarcerated. All of these make them more likely to end up as fodder for the prison industrial complex. We now live in a country that incarcerates black women at four times the rate of their white counterparts. While there is a rhetorical and very real desire to blame women's crimes on personal choices that they make there is a bigger picture to consider... How do race, class, trauma, access to social services, and gender contribute to the growing prison population?

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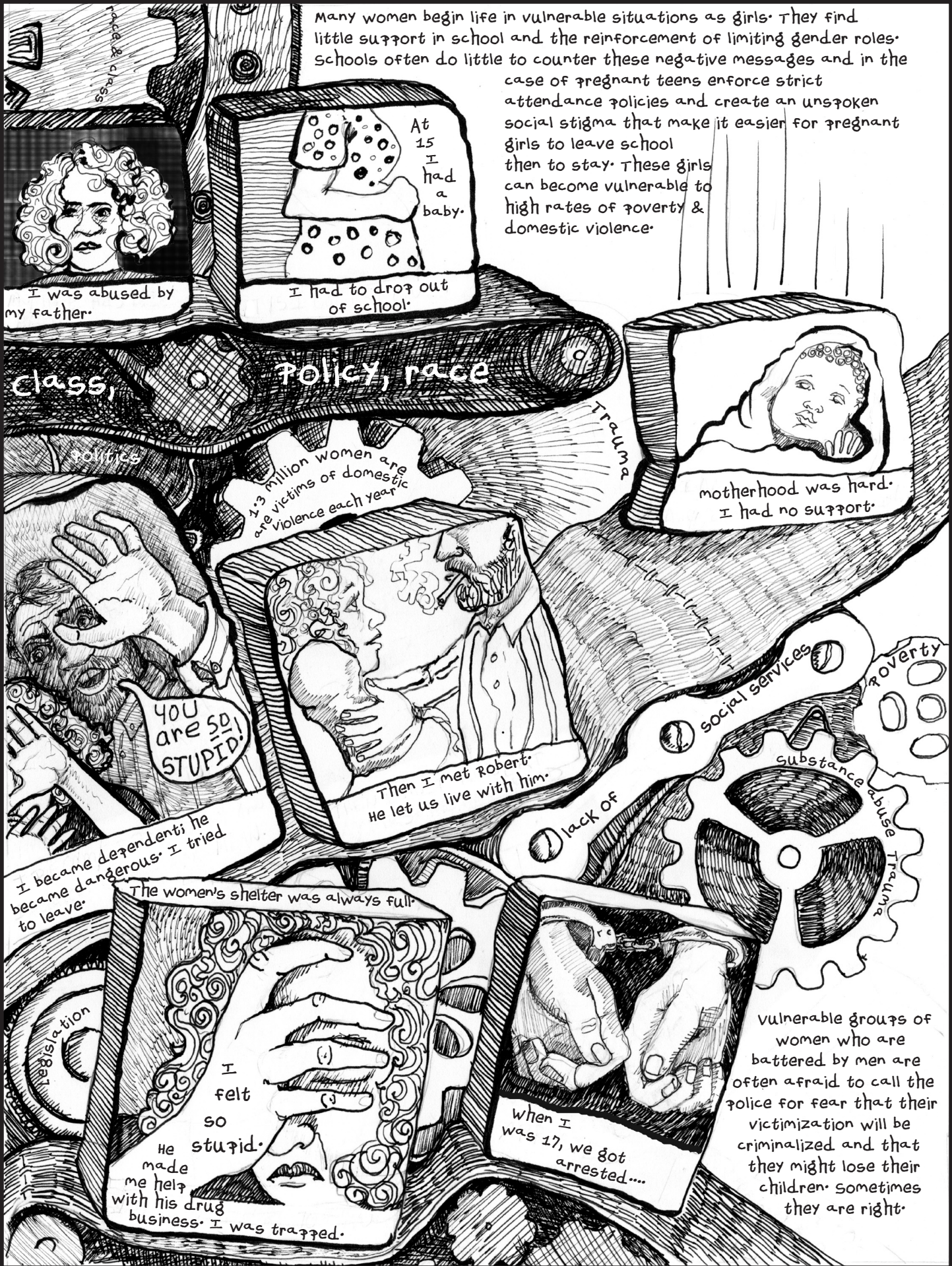
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Jails and prisons are designed to break human beings, to convert the population into specimens in a zoo - obedient to our keepers, but dangerous to each other. A.D.



they are often publicly punished by the state for becoming ensnared in a tangle of social conditions over which they have no control.

Many women begin life in vulnerable situations as girls. They find little support in school and the reinforcement of limiting gender roles. Schools often do little to counter these negative messages and in the case of pregnant teens enforce strict attendance policies and create an unstoken social stigma that make it easier for pregnant girls to leave school than to stay. These girls can become vulnerable to high rates of poverty & domestic violence.



vulnerable groups of women who are battered by men are often afraid to call the police for fear that their victimization will be criminalized and that they might lose their children. sometimes they are right.

once women are arrested their lives are destroyed. while for some women it may be the first chance they have

had to get access to healthcare, mental health services, dental care, and substance abuse treatment, the after affects of prison are devastating & long-lasting.

Almost 2/3 of women in prison are mothers.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act allows the state to terminate parental rights if a child has been in foster care 15 out of the last 22 months.

Spending time in prison and/or receiving a felony conviction makes getting a job much more difficult. If women are convicted felons and under community supervision they often have little or no access to food stamps, public housing, or social services. They also receive little or no job training, or training in fields that are low paying. This means that making a "living wage" is nearly impossible. Women with children are especially penalized. They often prioritize the need for child care and family reunification over employment.

I lost my parental rights while I was in prison.

FELON

patriarchy

After 44 months I was released. I was labeled a felon for life.

Violence



No one would hire me. I had no where to live.

POVERTY

YOU WANT ME TO DO WHAT?!

Eventually I was arrested again and sent back to prison.

I sold my body to survive on the streets. I did drugs to survive the trauma I endured at the hands of countless men and the police. No one would help me.



If we could divert the money our country is pouring into the prison industrial complex to provide more social services to vulnerable populations, legislate laws to end violence against women, support outreach services, shelters, counseling, protection, and education that would be the beginning of turning the tide in favor of a more just and humane solution to crime and punishment.

Most women are incarcerated for non-violent offenses. Community treatment options, access to mental and physical health care, substance abuse counseling, safe and dependable child care, trauma intervention and treatment, and economic support would reduce recidivism by a large margin among women who have been incarcerated.

WE must work to abolish prescribed gender roles, and racism. We need to recognize the resilience and wisdom that women possess when they are safe and feel like productive members of our communities.

Finally we need desperately to understand and examine the role of racism, heteronormativity, and poverty in our current models of punishment and social control. Women of color, sexual minorities, and poor people are doubly punished by our system. If we could work to take down the prison industrial complex it would improve public safety and make our communities more livable for everyone, especially women and children.



[W]omen prisoners are twice marginalized, invisible in the "free" world by virtue of their incarceration, and largely overlooked even by prison activist by virtue of their gender... Challenging the hyperinvisibility of women prisoners is central to effective activist and academic work around issues of imprisonment...

Angela Davis (1999)

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Rachel Marie-Crane Williams, is an artist and teacher currently employed as an Associate Professor at the University of Iowa. She has a joint appointment between the School of Art and Art History (Inter-media) and Gender Women's and Sexuality Studies. She is originally from North Carolina (the Eastern Coastal Plain), but she has lived in Iowa since 1998, and taught at The University of Iowa since 1999. Her work as a researcher and creative scholar has always been focused on women's issues, community, art, and people who are incarcerated. She earned a BFA in Painting and Drawing from East Carolina University and an MFA (Studio Art) and a Ph.D.(Art Education) from Florida State University.