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Crime and Punishment: The Culture of The Illinois Criminal Justice System

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Oral Presentation O7.1

**CRIME AND PUNISHMENT: THE CULTURE OF
THE ILLINOIS CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

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In the United States, criminal justice has been the subject of immense controversy and close examination throughout contemporary history. Several, like Michelle Alexander and James Kilgore have explored the intersections of race, class, and injustice in the legal system. This paper, however, aims to take a step back from federal, identity-focused analyses, and evaluate the criminal justice system with a broader lense on a smaller scale. The concept of a “culture of punishment” describes the legal system as a set of institutions and norms that are systematically excessive and arbitrary. Through the theoretical framework of historical institutionalism, I examine the formal rules, compliance procedures, and standard operating practices that constitute the culture of punishment in Illinois, and how it functions in practice. In conclusion, I further describe some of the literature’s explanations as to why the culture of punishment exists, and how it relates to the ideas illustrated by Alexander, Kilgore, and others.