



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2019 Volume II: The Problem of Mass Incarceration

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## On Criminal Justice Reform: Studying Philadelphia's New, Reform-Minded District Attorney through a Historical Context

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This curriculum unit examines the trends and attitudes that shaped today's criminal justice system. Students read and analyze key texts such as *Charged: The New Movement to Transform American Prosecution and End Mass Incarceration* and articles from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* to inform themselves of the rise of new, reform-minded prosecutors throughout several cities across the United States. Students consider the role of the prosecutor in creating and addressing the problems of mass incarceration by studying the election of District Attorney Larry Krasner in 2017. The origins of "tough on crime" attitudes, the War on Drugs, and the rise in incarceration rates during the 1990s are closely reviewed as they relate to the history of Pennsylvania's and Philadelphia's criminal justice systems. At the end of this unit, students are required to engage in a dialogue that demonstrates their knowledge of the problem of mass incarceration by creating two podcast episodes.

### Key Words:

Mass incarceration, criminal justice, tough on crime, War on Drugs, prosecution, district attorney, Larry Krasner, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, *Charged: The New Movement to Transform American Prosecution and End Mass Incarceration*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, podcast

(Developed for Civics, Government, Politics, and Social Studies, grade 12; recommended for Civics, Government, Politics, Social Studies, Law, and Philosophy, grades 9-12)

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