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

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## **Rethinking Policing: Origins of Brutality, the Impact and Reform**

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by Laura Gillihan

Police officers are expected to protect members of the community, but different realities are often lived by many Americans, including my students. Through examining the origins of policing and the rise of police militarization and police brutality, we can begin to understand how this reality came to be. We can then offer insight into how we can improve relationships amongst police and members of our community by acknowledging the trauma it has caused and working to restore relationships that have been damaged.

This integrated unit incorporates social studies goals as well as social emotional learning goals. It was designed to ignite local community student-led activism through the use of restorative practices as a means to mend and forge positive relationships with police officers and the community. Essential questions like, “what is the role of the police,” “what role did laws play in the militarization of police,” “what is police brutality,” and “how can citizens rebuild communities after trauma,” are explored through activities such as hypothetical situations and debates, independent journaling, and the use of restorative practices like talking and peace circles. This unit explores themes such as racial disparities, police militarization, police brutality, restorative practices, empathy and healing from trauma.

### Key Words

- Police brutality
- Policing
- Police militarization
- War on drug
- Trauma
- Healing
- Restorative practices
- Building relationships
- Racial disparities

(Developed for Social Studies and Social Emotional Learning, grades 4-5; recommended for Social Studies, Language Arts, History, and Social Emotional Learning, grades 4-12)

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