



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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

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## **Learning the System to Overcome the System: Juvenile Justice for High School Students**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 19.02.08, published September 2019  
by Krista Baxter Waldron

This unit about juvenile justice addresses five essential questions: Why are prisons our main tool of punishment? What is the role of race in juvenile incarceration? What does effective juvenile justice look like? How do Tulsa County's and Oklahoma's juvenile systems stack up against the rest of the country? What can citizens—especially young people—do to improve our criminal and/or juvenile justice systems? We begin by looking at prisons, the traditional assignment for criminal behavior, to understand how prisons came to be and how they work—or don't work. Next is the topic of juvenile justice nationally and in Oklahoma. These systems have followed hard-on-crime policies over the last forty years and share the persisting problem of racial disparity with adult justice systems. The last sections look at Tulsa County's juvenile history, and then problems and solutions that advocates, especially students, can tackle to bring attention to these problems and to cause change. Strategies include simulations, Socratic seminars, field trips, and exercises in critical reading and writing. We will use greatly varied materials including the graphic novel, political cartoons, journalism, and literary essays. This unit may work best in urban schools.

(Developed for English Language Arts, grades 9-10; recommended for English Language Arts, grades 11-12, and Current Affairs and U. S. History, grades 9-12)

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