



YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2026 Volume I: The Kids are not the Threat

Changemakers in New Haven: Examining the Past, Empowering the Present

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This 8th-grade curriculum unit connects the history of youth activism to the conviction that young people are not a threat to democracy, but among its most vital defenders. Students first survey the national wave of youth organizing from the 1950s through the 1970s: from the roots of the sit-in movement through Black Power, anti-war organizing, and parallel movements including women's liberation, Latino organizing, and gay liberation, learning to analyze how institutions respond to youth-led change through a "Shut It Down" (suppression) versus "Water It Down" (co-optation) framework. The unit then turns to New Haven's own history, tracing a throughline from 1950s urban renewal through the Hill Parents Association, the Hillhouse High School rebellions, the Northern Student Movement, the Black Panthers and May Day 1970, and into more recent organizing around police accountability, institutional accountability, voting rights, and climate justice. Students build a map of New Haven across the unit, layering historical sites of youth organizing and Yale's expansion alongside present-day essential and desirable resources, making visible the connections between historical decisions and present-day disparities. The unit culminates in a civic design project, in which students identify a real disparity in their own city and design an evidence-based proposal for change, applying historical and strategic thinking developed throughout the unit.

(Developed for United States History II, grade 8; recommended for United States History, grade 10)

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