



Is this Justice or “Just Us”

Effects of Incarceration on Communities

Background

Imprisonment and incarceration are interconnected with who a person is in terms of race, class and gender. Racial disparities within the criminal justice system exist at every level, from arrest rates, to bail amounts, sentence lengths, and probation hearings and outcomes.

Focus: Students will move beyond just “passing the GED test” and explore how literacy encourages self-expression, self-development, self-resilience, and self-sufficiency. Focusing on self (the individual), the group, the community and society as a whole can promote change

Discussion Questions

- **Why is literacy important?**
- **How has racial disparities in mass incarceration influenced communities? You personally?**
- **What role does school play in imprisonment amongst youth? (School to prison pipeline)**
- **What are some ways we can combat mass incarceration?**

Objectives

- Students will begin to evaluate mass incarceration as a pressing social issue and examine structural, societal and institutional barriers that contribute to the problem.
- Students will identify ways that education and literacy can disrupt unequitable hierarchies of power and privilege.
- Students will reflect on the connection between mass incarceration, the community and their own lives.

Required Materials

- **["A System of Racial and Social Control"](#)**
- **My Daddy's In Jail Too!!**

Activities:

10 minutes: Warm-up

- Prompt students to guess what the title of today's lesson will be about.
- As a class, discuss what students already know about the topic. Ask what questions the students have about the topic. Write the questions on the board. Allow students to write the questions in their notebooks to answer later.



Before Reading

10 minutes: Vocabulary

- Have students define key terms using the handout. Allow students time to independently complete the word list and to define these terms using their own words and complete sentences.
- Explain and/or model word meanings in pairs or in a whole class setting.

During Reading

25 minutes

1. First Read "**A System of Racial and Social Control**". Have students read independently and silently, marking the text with **Thinking Notes**. Thinking notes are annotations (highlights, underlines or symbols) that students make to document their thinking during reading.
2. Second Read **My Daddy's In Jail Too!!** Have students do a guided reading from the article using a Venn diagram model. Students can work alone, in partners or small groups. As they read, students briefly discuss and jot down similarities and differences in articles.

After Reading

20-25minutes

1. Facilitate a class discussion that centers on the two articles that were read and discussion questions.
2. Have students write a small reflection on today's activity including what steps can they (individually and collectively) take to create a more just and equal society.

Background Knowledge and Knowledge Areas

[How the Tough on Crime Movement Enabled a New Regime](#)

[The Education of Prisoners: A Holistic Perspective](#)

Additional Resources and Lesson Plans

[http://drc.centerfornewsliteracy.org/resource/chicago-defender-news-literacy-curriculum-lesson-7-
parallels-between-mass-incarceration-and](http://drc.centerfornewsliteracy.org/resource/chicago-defender-news-literacy-curriculum-lesson-7-parallels-between-mass-incarceration-and)

[https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/parallels-between-mass-
incarceration-and-jim-crow](https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/parallels-between-mass-incarceration-and-jim-crow)

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/lessons-plans/paying-for-crime/>

<https://readwriteact.org>



Vocabulary Word List

African American Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968)

Bias

Class

Discrimination

Jim Crow

Mass Incarnation

Power

Privilege

Stereotype

Racism

Recidivism

Jim Crow

My Daddy's In Jail Too!!

Effects of Incarceration on Communities

For centuries, imprisonment has been one form of punishment used for those who have been deemed criminals by their society. Recently criminals are supposed to be treated more humanely and rehabilitation is supposed to be as important as punishment. However, as a society we seem to have forgotten the devastating effect on the ex-offender, their family, and the community if ex-offenders are not properly prepared to re-enter our communities. Incarceration can perpetuate a cycle of poverty and trap families in a manner that they cannot improve, as well as destroying/decimating communities.

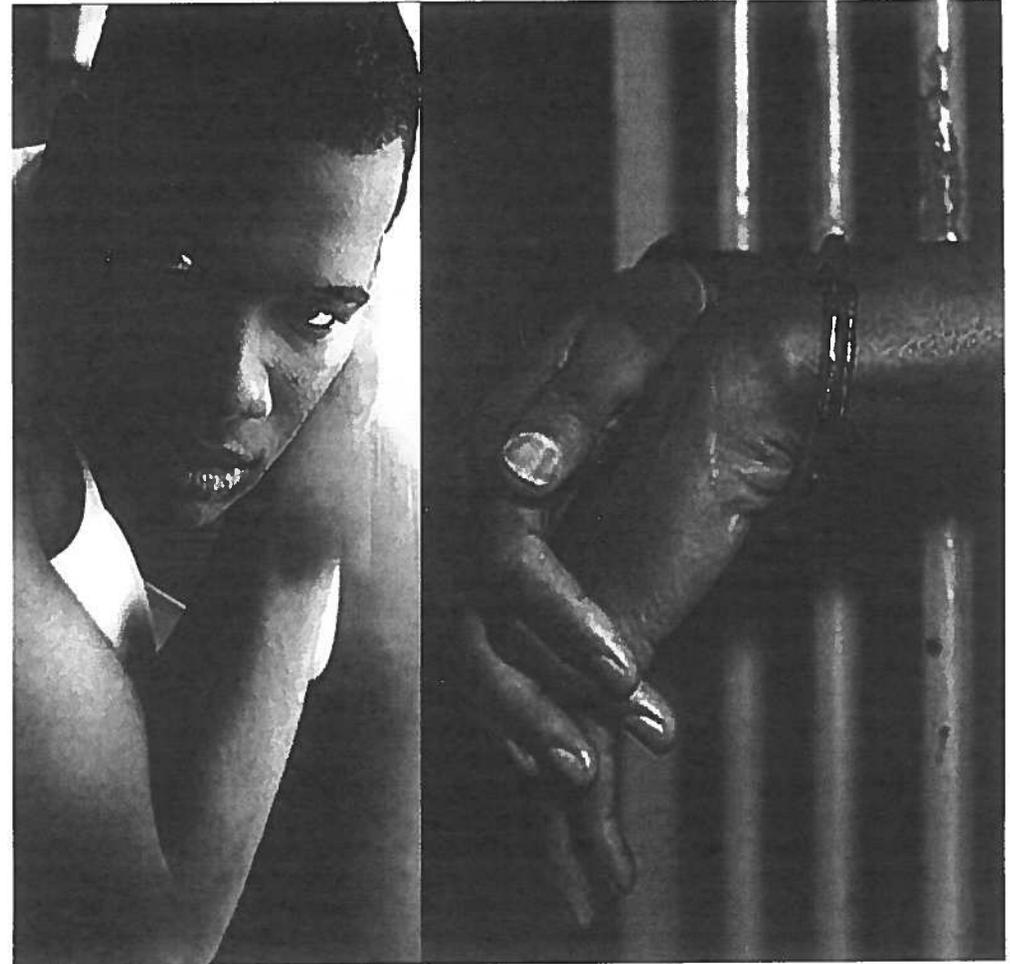
Historically, Black offenders have been treated more cruelly than whites at arrest, trial, and sentencing. Bail hearings often result in keeping the poor locked up because of their inability to pay the money bail. On any given night, 1/2 million people sleep in jail in this country because they cannot afford the money bail. While incarcerated before trial, they will often lose employment and the vicious cycle begins.

During slavery many states made slaves into "criminals" by prohibiting them from engaging in a wide range of activities that whites were free to pursue: learning to read, defending oneself from attacks, leaving "master's" property without a pass, gathering to worship without supervision of a white person, to name a few. Additionally, the punishment for slaves was harsher than for whites. For example, Virginia had 73 crimes that could result in death for slaves and only one crime for whites.

After slavery ended an open labor market was created with Blacks competing with whites for jobs. Many states addressed this "problem" by manufacturing criminals. For instance, Blacks who weren't working were labeled vagrants and jailed, while whites were not. After slavery, the prison population in this country increased rapidly with the percentage of Blacks entering prison skyrocketing. Blacks are clearly targeted for arrests and incarcerated at higher rates than whites. As a result, the number of prisons increased and they became major moneymakers.

While incarceration is warranted in some instances for certain crimes, we must carefully look at the impact this has on spouses, parents, children, and therefore the entire community. Often the families are pushed closer to economic hardship because of loss of income, stress within the family increases, and emotional and psychological breakdowns of the family become more difficult to rebuild. The absence of a family member becomes a daily reality. This unstable family environment, in which the children and parent are not able to bond, often occurs during the most critical time in a child's life.

Once released, (about 700,000 per year), the ex-offender re-enters their community to face numerous obstacles. It's proven that unless they receive the proper support and assistance they are much more likely to return to prison. Upon one's release, life changes again for the whole family. Often deaths have occurred, partners have left, grandchildren are seen for the first time, etc. Employment opportunities are limited. Employers want "experienced" workers and the ex-offender has a gap in their experience. If one doesn't acquire employment quickly, a return to prison is likely. As ex-offenders, housing and education assistance they



might otherwise qualify for are limited.

What do we do? Those arrested should be treated as innocent until proven guilty. Bail should be based on whether the offender is a danger to the community or a flight risk, not on wealth. Maintaining family bonding should be a priority, and limiting mail, phone calls, visitation privileges, and sending offenders hundreds, thousands of miles away should not be used as further punishment. Non-violent drug offenders should receive treatment instead of prison, and be allowed the same credit to reduced sentences as other non-violent offenders. Effective mental health treatment and job training should be provided where needed. Mandatory minimum sentencing should be eliminated so judges can use discretion case-by-case.

More organizations need to be established to help ex-offenders transition back into the community by providing assistance in many areas. Until we stop warehousing human beings and implement effective rehab measures that adequately prepare ex-offenders to re-enter our communities, recidivism rates (currently 43% nationally) will remain high and our communities will continue to suffer.