The Criminal Injustice System: The New Enslavement of People of Color

Guide for Curriculum Unit 96.01.11
by Pamela Monk Kelley

This unit addresses how the media exposes and deals with racism in the Criminal Justice System. Some sociologists would argue that negative media exposure contributes to delinquency. One aspect of the social learning theory is that youths are particularly susceptible to imagery. Many youth are not able to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Systematic exposure to violence on TV, in music, and through other means of the media, may influence aggressiveness, and antisocial behavior patterns. This unit will help students recognize the distortions and risks of imitation produced by the media's frequent portrayals of violence.

This unit exposes the students to some existing laws and their impact on the criminal justice system. The legal system appears to many people to be inherently racist. The lack of representation in the court system leads people of color to perceive that they don't get fair treatment in the court and that looking to the courts for solutions to civil or criminal complaints is a waste of time. The reciprocity concept of returning something of value to society can be crucial to rehabilitate the typical young offender, who's not yet into a criminal pattern and has no set lifestyle. The students will choose a trade, keep journals and critique newspaper articles (ones that often call for value judgement).

This unit provides the opportunity to raise sensitivity, and talk about the taboo: discrimination and prejudice in all forms, from racism to homophobia to anti-Semitism.

(Recommended for Social Development and Life Skills, grades 7-12)