
**The Center for Justice
Education at Eastern State
Presents:**

EDUCATOR GUIDE:

**JUSTICE 101: WOMEN BEHIND
BARS: WHY IS INCARCERATION OF
WOMEN ON THE RISE?**

**EASTERN STATE
PENITENTIARY**

JUSTICE 101 EDUCATOR GUIDE: WOMEN AND INCARCERATION

This guide supports a classroom viewing and discussion of [“Justice 101: Women Behind Bars: Why is Incarceration of Women on the Rise?”](#)

[Runtime 55 minutes]

This guide fosters critical thinking, empathy, and awareness of systemic issues affecting women in the criminal justice system, while providing key information, discussion topics and recommended classroom extension activities.

Grade Levels:

6th through 12th

Number of Class Periods:

Two periods

Author:

Designed by the Eastern State Education Team.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Michelle Daniel Jones (she/her) is a sixth-year doctoral student in the American studies program at New York University. Her dissertation focuses on creative liberation strategies of incarcerated women and the Alabama Prison Arts and Education Project. As an organizer, collaborator, and subject matter expert she creates opportunities to speak truth to power and serves in the development and operation of task forces and initiatives to reduce harm and end mass incarceration. To learn more about Michelle, visit her [website](#).

Jen Manion (they/them) is a social and cultural historian whose work examines the role of gender and sexuality in American life. Manion is the Winkley Professor of History and Political Economy at Amherst College. They are also author of *Liberty's Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America* and *Female Husbands: A Trans History*. To learn more about Jen, visit their [website](#).

Dr. Kerry Sautner (she/her), is the President and Chief Executive Officer of Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, a museum preserving America's first penitentiary, advancing public understanding of the criminal justice system and its impact on the lives of those affected by it, to inspire a more just future.

KEY STATISTICS

- Women are the fastest-growing population in U.S. prisons, increasing by over 700% between 1980 and 2023.[1]
- 80% of incarcerated women are parents, with the majority being primary caregivers.[2]
- Nearly 60% of women in prison have experienced trauma prior to incarceration.[3]
- Black and Latina women are disproportionately incarcerated, reflecting systemic racial and economic inequities.[4]

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do women's experiences in prison differ from men's, and why might these differences matter?
- What societal issues might lead to women being incarcerated?
- Do you think the current legal system treats women and men equally? Why or why not?
- Should there be special considerations for women in prison, especially if they are pregnant or have children?
- What changes, if any, would you make to the prison system to better support women and their communities?
- What programs or policies could effectively address the root causes of women's incarceration?

[1] <https://www.sentencingproject.org/fact-sheet/incarcerated-women-and-girls/>

[2] <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2024women.html#:~:text=These%20barriers%20to%20authentic%20communication,burdens%20placed%20on%20incarcerated%20women.>

[3] <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/parip.pdf>

[4] <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2023/05/racial-disparities-persist-in-many-us-jails>

TEACHING STRATEGIES

1. **Case Studies and Personal Narratives:** Use real-life stories (e.g., from formerly incarcerated women) to illustrate systemic issues and build empathy.
2. **Media Analysis:** Examine documentaries, podcasts, or articles that highlight women's experiences with incarceration.
3. **Project-Based Learning:** Have students research and propose reforms to address rising incarceration rates for women in the U.S.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Books:

- *Inside This Place, Not of It: Narratives from Women's Prisons* by Ayelet Waldman and Robin Levi.
- *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* by Monique W. Morris.

Reports:

- "The Sentencing Project: Incarcerated Women and Girls"
- Vera Institute of Justice: "Overlooked: Women and Jails in an Era of Reform"

Websites and Organizations:

- [The Sentencing Project](#)
- [National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls](#)
- [Dehanza Rogers: #BlackGirlhood](#), commissioned by Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site.

QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

Contact education@easternstate.org.

Learn more about the Center for Justice Education at Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, and about Justice 101, at

EASTERNSTATE.ORG