

INSIDE / OUTSIDE THEIR

**MASS INCARCERATION
IN THE UNITED STATES**



WHO WE ARE

Woven Teaching is the **human rights education** practice of Woven Foundation. Through a combination of original programming and grantmaking, Woven Teaching advances the foundation's focus on long term change towards a widespread acceptance of basic human rights for all.

Our programmatic work is dedicated to supporting classroom teachers with practical help for ethical and effective instruction. We believe that by weaving human rights education into the curriculum, educators can create socially responsible global citizens.

Woven Teaching envisions a world in which every student's education includes:

- A sense of historical perspective;
- The development of critical thinking skills;
- A feeling of global citizenship;
- The ability to identify bigotry – understanding its negative effects on both individuals and society – and the analytical tools to combat it.

CONTACT



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Do you have feedback on this lesson or want to share how you implemented it in your classroom? We'd love to hear from you!

Please take our short evaluation at surveymonkey.com/r/wt-eval or scan the QR code to the left.

INTRODUCTION

The United States incarcerates more people per capita than any other country in the world.

Inside/Outside/Other: Mass Incarceration in the United States asks students to examine how the dehumanization of incarcerated people, both inside and outside the four walls of prison, allows this system to keep growing.

Students will read the United Nations' **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (UDHR) and discuss the question of who is deserving of these rights. Students will also learn about the roles that bias, discrimination, and dehumanization play in our understanding and treatment of incarcerated people.

By examining statistics and reading transcripts and interviews of incarcerated people, students will learn about the many ways incarcerated people refuse to be dehumanized by this system; how they affirm their own humanity and often affirm the humanity of others. Finally, the students will imagine a more just system.

FOCUS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Woven Teaching believes that education about human rights is essential to students asserting their own rights and the rights of others. As a result, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights lies at the core of Woven Teaching's materials. The document's thirty articles outline fundamental human rights – basic rights and freedoms which every single human being is entitled to, regardless of the person's race, religion, birthplace, gender, sexual orientation, or other characteristic. Although its articles are not legally binding, the UDHR serves as the moral compass for the international community.

The activities in *Inside/Outside/Other* connect directly to several UDHR articles, including:

- **Article 2:** These rights belong to everyone. You should never be discriminated against.
- **Article 5:** No one can torture you or treat you in a cruel or degrading way.
- **Article 25:** You have the right to an adequate standard of living, including housing, food, and medical care.

CONTENT LEVEL

Grades 11-12

TIME

3.5 hours

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What are human rights?
- What are some reasons why a society might strip a person of their rights?
- What role does dehumanization play in the U.S. system of mass incarceration?
- How does a person affirm their own humanity?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand international human rights standards as laid out in the UDHR
- Define the terms bias, discrimination, and dehumanization
- Recognize the scale of mass incarceration in the United States
- Identify ways in which the U.S. justice system dehumanizes incarcerated individuals

MATERIALS

- Computer, speakers, & TV/screen
- Video: “[American Prisons Are Designed to Dehumanize](#)” (Chicago Ideas)
- Student handouts:
 - » Key Terms
 - » Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Student Version)
 - » Bias/Discrimination/Dehumanization
 - » Infographic: Mass Incarceration in the U.S.
 - » Voices from the Inside Narratives (6)

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

Anchor Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4

Speaking & Listening

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.4

Reading Informational Text

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1

CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHING ETHICALLY AND EFFECTIVELY

- Review practices of **Trauma Informed Education**, which recognizes the role that trauma plays for both teachers and students. By understanding and addressing the effects of trauma, teachers can create spaces where students can learn and thrive.
- The topic of mass incarceration is difficult and will likely raise other sensitive issues. Students may have personal experience with the justice system and that will likely inform their thinking.
- Students may have very different responses to the lesson and the class discussions. Acknowledge that each of us has biases that inform our beliefs and actions; these biases may be implicit or explicit. When differences arise, address them openly and respectfully with your students.
- Remind students of the ground rules for discussion, including:
 - » Using “I” statements and speaking from their own experience
 - » Listening actively and respectfully
- Discussions about race can make students feel vulnerable and uncomfortable. Allow time to process the strong emotions that this subject may elicit from your students. Additionally, tell students that they can expect to feel some discomfort. Sitting with and working through discomfort is critical to dismantling racism and other systems of oppression.
- Caution students against making assumptions about anyone based on their race, gender, or any other characteristic. No community is a monolith and members of the same group may have wildly different opinions about the issues raised in this lesson.
- Approach sources with care; preview all materials before sharing with students.

ACTIVITY 1: WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS?

We often speak about “human rights,” but what are they? In this brainstorming activity, students will consider the meaning of the term.



PROCEDURE (10 MINUTES):

1. Write the following questions on the board. Instruct students to write brief responses as they settle into class. This can also be assigned as homework during the previous class.
 - A. What are human rights?
 - B. What are three things that all humans need?
 - C. What two examples of human rights?
2. After 5 minutes, facilitate a discussion drawing on the student responses. What patterns arise between student responses? Is there a connection between what humans need and examples of specific human rights? Keep track of the responses by writing them on the board (or by having a student write them on the board).
3. Tell students that they will spend the next few class periods discussing connections between human rights, dehumanization, and mass incarceration. Provide each student with a copy of the Key Terms ([Handout A](#)). If time permits, ask students to review the terms and ask clarifying questions for words they do not understand.

ACTIVITY 2: WHO DO HUMAN RIGHTS APPLY TO?

Human rights are universal and inalienable: everyone has them and they cannot be taken away under any circumstances. But if this is truly the case, why do human rights abuses occur and why do those abuses go largely unchallenged? In this activity, students will analyze the UDHR's 30 articles and begin to answer the question: *Do these rights really belong to everyone? Who might be excluded and why?*

PROCEDURE (30 MINUTES):

1. Post the questions below on the board. Students review the questions, then read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (**Handout B**) independently. Ask them to highlight ideas that they think are important and ideas they do not understand. When they finish reading, have students write down their answers for each of the questions.
 - A. What rights of the UDHR stood out to you? Are there any rights that you think are missing that should be included?
 - B. Do you think the world needs a document like the UDHR? Why or why not?
 - C. Are there situations in which people should be denied these rights? Explain.
Answers may include: People who do not respect the rights of others, people who have broken the law, people who are accused of making "bad" choices (e.g. poor or unemployed people, unhoused people, people who use drugs), non-citizens, people who have killed someone, etc.
2. After 15 minutes, instruct students to meet in small groups to discuss the questions for 5 minutes. Once the groups have finished their discussions, ask students to share the highlights of these discussion with the entire class.

MAIN IDEAS TO REACH IN THE CLASS DISCUSSION:

- Connect the list from the brainstorm in Activity 1 with the UDHR. Are the students' examples reflected in the UDHR?
- The UDHR may be an imperfect document but is generally considered as a positive step towards achieving universal rights. It is an aspirational document and provides the concepts and language for all people to articulate their rights and to recognize when these rights are violated.
- Although human rights are universal, people and societies rationalize denying rights to people and groups when we believe that they do not "deserve" these rights as a result of their actions. Do the students' responses to question 3 fall into this category?

ACTIVITY 3: DEHUMANIZATION

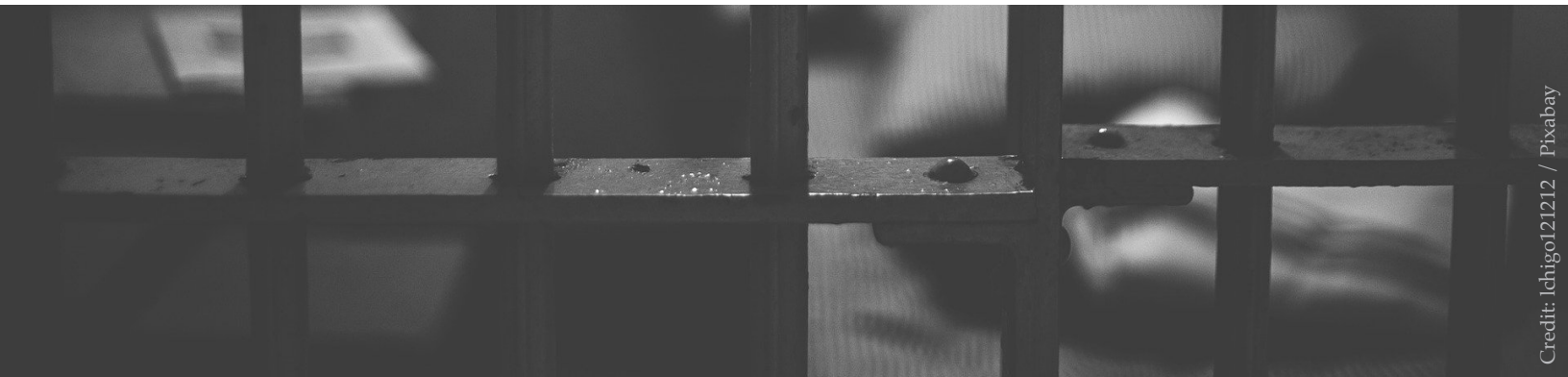
In American society, it is widely believed in that currently or formerly incarcerated people do not deserve all of the rights afforded to others. In this activity, students will learn about the concepts of bias, discrimination, and dehumanization, three means of stripping incarcerated people of their rights and dignity. They will also learn how some resist dehumanization by affirming their humanity in the face of oppression.

PROCEDURE (30 MINUTES):

1. Begin by explaining that bias, discrimination, and dehumanization are features of most societies. They are powerful tools of social control: History has often shown that when a group is perceived to be inferior or “less than,” society will ignore, accept, or even encourage violence against the group. All three are prevalent features of the justice system.
2. Read *Bias/Discrimination/Dehumanization* (Handout C) as a class, asking for volunteers to read each of the sections aloud. When finished reading, check for understanding by asking students to briefly share their own examples of bias, discrimination, or dehumanization with the class. Examples can come from their own lives, contemporary society, or from history.
3. After students share, explain that they will now learn how these concepts apply to the justice system by watching “*American Prisons Are Designed to Dehumanize*” (10:13). This short film places the American prison system in historical context. One of the presenters, Johnny Perez, is a formerly incarcerated person who reflects on the 13 years he spent in prison.
4. After the film, direct students to get into groups of four and discuss the following questions:
 - A. Refer back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights handout. What rights do you think might be violated in jail or prison? Why is it important for these rights to be protected?
 - B. In the film clip, Johnny Perez described some of the ways that the justice system dehumanized him. What were some of these methods? Did any surprise you?
Shackled, stripped of identity (name switched for number, clothes taken away), loss of control (need to ask permission to do things), isolation, lack of human contact
 - C. In the film clip, the presenters describe ways that formerly incarcerated people are discriminated against after being released from prison. What were some of the ways they described?
Losing the right to vote, difficulty finding employment, ineligible to receive financial aid/student loans, difficulty accessing public housing
 - D. Benjamin Rush, an early American civic leader, believed that, “The suffering of the incarcerated should be hidden from view.” How is ignoring the plight of incarcerated people a form of dehumanization?
Denies their existence, allows harm to happen to them, reduces them from a unique individual to a single characteristic (inmate, felon, criminal, etc.)
5. After 10 minutes, debrief group responses as a class.

MAIN IDEAS TO REACH IN THE CLASS DISCUSSION:

- It is important to protect human rights for all people because every individual has value and dignity. Additionally, everyone's rights are connected. When we accept the denial of one person's rights, we create a pathway to deny those same rights to others.
- The justice system in the United States was designed to dehumanize people. Many currently and formerly incarcerated people experience dehumanization at all points of their interaction with the justice system.
- Ignoring the plight of incarcerated people is a form of dehumanization because it acts as a tacit agreement of how they are treated. It creates a distance between "us" and "them" that allows those in power to justify their poor treatment. When this distance is created, society does not feel like it has an obligation to protect incarcerated people from harm. (i.e. "This person did something bad and deserves to be punished harshly").



Credit: Idhigo121212 / Pixabay

ACTIVITY 4: MASS INCARCERATION IN THE U.S.

The United States has the highest number of incarcerated people per capita in the world. Through a quick examination data, students will gain an understanding of the enormous scale of incarceration in the U.S.

PROCEDURE (20 MINUTES):

1. Students briefly look over the information on the Mass Incarceration in the U.S. infographic (**Handout D**).
2. After reviewing the data, lead a quick discussion about the following questions:
 - A. What information surprised or troubled you?
 - B. What questions does the information in this graph raise for you?
 - C. Does the infographic contain any information that you don't think is true?
If yes, advise students to research the data online and report back to the class with the results of their investigation.

ACTIVITY 5: RECLAIMING THEIR HUMANITY: VOICES FROM THE INSIDE

While figures and data are important in helping us to understand a problem, they do not tell the whole story. In this activity, students will learn about the experiences of incarcerated individuals by reading first-person narratives. These stories highlight the problem of dehumanization. They also reveal the many ways in which incarcerated people fight back and affirm their own humanity.

PROCEDURE (60 MINUTES):

1. Divide students into six groups. Distribute Voices from the Inside narratives ([Handout E](#)), providing a different narrative to each group (one copy per student).
2. Students should read their handout independently, circling words or phrases they do not understand and highlighting important details.
3. After reading and annotating, students will work with their groups to explore the narrative's discussion questions. Then groups will determine the most important details of their narrative and create a three minute presentation to give to the class. Presentations should answer the follow questions (write questions on the board):
 - Who is the person in your narrative?
 - How does this narrative describe dehumanization, demonstrate an incarcerated person affirming their humanity, or both?
 - What connections to the UDHR are present in your narrative (does the narrator describe any specific rights violations)?
4. After 40 minutes, each group will present an analysis of their narrative to the class. When all groups have finished, debrief together. What is one thing that students learned from this activity? What is one thing they would like to know more about?

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE: QUESTIONS & POSSIBLE ANSWERS

KALIEF BROWDER

1. How did the justice system dehumanize Kalief Browder? Provide at least one specific example.
Starved, solitary confinement, incarcerated without being convicted
2. How did Kalief affirm his humanity while incarcerated? Provide at least one specific example.
Refusing to plead guilty to a crime he did not commit, spoke with the guard to demand food
3. Kalief said that if he would have taken the plea deal and admitted to a crime he did not commit, “no justice is served.” What do you think justice for Kalief Browder would look like?

CHARLIE MORNINGSTAR

1. How has the justice system dehumanized Charlie Morningstar? Provide at least one specific example.
Guards treating him like an animal in a zoo, staff not acknowledging his pronouns or allowing him to wear underwear consistent with his gender identity
2. How has Charlie affirmed his humanity while incarcerated? Provide at least one specific example.
Making complaints against staff, starting Two Spirits Wellness Group
3. Charlie said that, “as long as you feel inadequate, you will not become all you can be.” How does dehumanization make a person feel inadequate? What is something one can do to counter this feeling?

IRMA RODRIGUEZ

1. How has the justice system dehumanized Irma Rodriguez? Provide at least one specific example.
Her life is controlled – told when to wake up, bathe, brush teeth; male staff watches her in the bathroom; Corrections Officers take her belongings
2. How has Irma affirmed her humanity while incarcerated? Provide at least one specific example.
Reminding herself to have compassion, makes arts and crafts, carrying herself with respect
3. Irma said, “I have to remind myself to have compassion. Just because I’m used to it doesn’t mean someone else is.” What do you think she means?

PERSON INCARCERATED IN OHIO

1. How has the justice system dehumanized the author or those he is incarcerated with? Provide at least one specific example.
Nursing staff does not treat incarcerated people with respect, medical staff ignores person with COVID-19, people put into solitary confinement for voicing concern
2. How has the author affirmed his humanity while incarcerated? Provide at least one specific example.
Caretaking for his friends, exposing prison conditions to the outside world, writing the letter, asking to be retested

3. The author describes caring for his friends inside of prison, including how he and others “frantically scrambled around trying all sorts of remedies.” How does this confirm or challenge society’s perceptions of prison or incarcerated people?
Challenges society’s perceptions of incarcerated people as “hardened criminals” that do not care or have respect for others

ANTWAN WILLIAMS AND ERIC “MASERATI E” ABERCROMBIE

1. Antwan Williams said that “Float Away” is about “being in a space where you have no control over anything.” Do you think that taking away another person’s control over their life is a form of dehumanization? Why or why not?
2. How have Williams and Abercrombie affirmed their humanity while incarcerated? Provide at least one specific example.
Creating music and writing, maintaining their identities
3. What do you think Antwan and Eric mean when they say that “I come from a place where people don’t make it”? What place(s) do you think they are describing?

CURTIS

1. How has the justice system dehumanized Curtis? Provide at least one specific example.
Received a harsh sentence for small crime, has belongings taken by corrections officers, lost connections to his family
2. How has Curtis affirmed his humanity while incarcerated? Provide at least one specific example.
Writing letters to his daughter, maintaining his integrity by refusing to stab someone, wanting to maintain his identity, writing to a pen pal
3. Curtis said that, “I want to show, uh, these cops, society that the sentence that you give a man does not dictate the behavior.” What do you think he means? Why is this important?



Credit: Geoff Livingston / Flickr

ACTIVITY 6: A MORE JUST SYSTEM

What would a more just system look like? In this activity, students create a project to synthesize what they have learned and to offer reforms or alternatives to the system of mass incarceration. Although not a requirement, students may conduct further research to supplement what was covered in class. This project should be assigned as homework; suggested length of time for completion is one week.

Projects should include answers to at least one of the following questions:

1. What are some of the ways that the justice system dehumanizes incarcerated people? Provide specific examples from the readings, the video, and group presentations.
2. What are some of the ways that incarcerated people affirm their humanity in the face of oppression? How do you affirm your humanity? Is this important? Why or why not?
3. What is the purpose of a podcast like *Ear Hustle* or other narratives from the inside? Why is it important for us to pay attention to the voices of people directly impacted by incarceration and other social justice issues?
4. In what ways could the justice system be more humane? What would a more just system look like? Be specific.

Project suggestions include:

- Essay
- Informational poster
- Poem or song lyrics
- Short film
- Social media campaign
- Graphic novel
- Zine
- Podcast

Upon completion, students will present their projects to the class.

RESOURCES

National Prison Project – American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

[aclu.org/issues/prisoners-rights](https://www.aclu.org/issues/prisoners-rights)

The ACLU's National Prison Project is dedicated to ensuring that U.S. prisons, jails, and other places of detention comply with the Constitution, domestic law, and international human rights principles.

The Appeal

theappeal.org

The Appeal produces original journalism about criminal justice.

Black Lives Matter At School

blacklivesmatteratschool.com

Black Lives Matter at School is a national coalition organizing for racial justice in schools. Comprised of students, educators, parents, and others, BLM at School works to end the school-to-prison pipeline.

Ear Hustle

earhustlesq.com

Ear Hustle is a podcast about the daily realities of life inside prison shared by those living it, and stories from the outside, post-incarceration. The podcast is created both in San Quentin State Prison's media lab and from offices on the outside.

The Marshall Project

themarshallproject.org

The Marshall Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization that seeks to create and sustain a sense of national urgency about the U.S. criminal justice system.

National Center for Youth Law (NCYL)

youthlaw.org/focus-areas/youth-justice

National Center for Youth Law advocates for community based services as an alternative to incarceration, and works to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities within the juvenile justice system.

Prison Policy Initiative

prisonpolicy.org

The Prison Policy Initiative is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that uses research to expose the broader harm of mass criminalization.

The Sentencing Project

sentencingproject.org

Founded in 1986, The Sentencing Project works for a fair and effective U.S. criminal justice system by promoting reforms in sentencing policy, addressing unjust racial disparities and practices, and advocating for alternatives to incarceration.

When They See Us Discussion Guide – Woven Teaching

woventeaching.org/download/direct/when-they-see-us-discussion-guide

Ava DuVernay's *When They See Us* explores systemic and institutional racism in the U.S. through the real story of the Central Park Five, five Black and Latinx youth who were falsely accused, tried, and imprisoned for the 1989 attack of a white female jogger.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Ai WeiWei, the contemporary Chinese artist and formerly incarcerated person, created an exhibit to be shown at Alcatraz (the infamous prison that is now a national park). Students can learn more about the artist and his work, reviewing different installations and discuss the multiple meanings of his show. How does Ai WeiWei affirm his humanity through art?
- Incarcerated populations are especially vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic. Have students research the issue of COVID-19 in jails and prisons and brainstorm possible solutions to this growing crisis. Suggested readings:
 - » Priyanka Bhatt and Azadeh Shahshahani, “‘Please Help Us’: Those on the Inside Are in Grave Danger [Op-Ed],” Colorlines.com, May 6, 2020, <https://www.colorlines.com/articles/please-help-us-those-inside-are-grave-danger-op-ed>.
 - » Kate Goldman, “No Masks, Disinfectant or Soap. This Is Detention Amid a Pandemic,” *The New York Times*, April 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/opinion/coronavirus-ice-immigration-detention.html>.
- Instruct students to research alternatives to the existing justice system, namely prison abolition or models of restorative justice. Suggested resources:
 - » Grounded in restorative justice principles, Community Works West’s **Resolve to Stop the Violence Project** is the first jail program in the U.S. that houses and specifically works with male prisoners who have violence documented in their criminal histories.
 - » Kim Kelly, “What the Prison-Abolition Movement Wants,” *Teen Vogue*, December 26, 2019, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/what-is-prison-abolition-movement>.

STUDENT HANDOUTS

KEY TERMS

affirm: to state or demonstrate that something is true or exists. To affirm one's humanity is to reinforce their dignity and worth. This is a method of resistance against dehumanization.

bail: release from jail before a trial

humanity: the fact or quality of being human; the fact or quality of being humane (kindness, mercy, sympathy, etc.)

incarcerated person: anyone currently in jail, prison, or another detention facility. Unlike other terms (prisoner, convict, etc.) this term does not make a claim about guilt and does not reduce a person's identity to a single word.

incarceration: the state of being held in jail or prison; imprisonment

jail: a local incarceration facility, usually for people awaiting trial or those serving short sentences

mass incarceration: refers to the unique way that the United States locks up a large number of people in jails, prisons, and other detention facilities

parole: a procedure by which an incarcerated person is released from prison but remains under supervision for a period of time

plea deal: an agreement in which a person charged with a crime agrees to plead guilty to certain charges in exchange for a concession from the court, such as a shorter sentence

prison: an incarceration facility for people serving longer sentences (more than a year).

probation: period of supervision over a person convicted of a crime, ordered by the court instead of serving time in jail or prison

race: a concept that categorizes individuals based on the color of their skin

solitary confinement: a type of imprisonment in which a person is isolated from the rest of the prison population, usually spending 22 to 24 hours per day alone inside of a small cell. Also known as "the Hole."

"Three Strikes" laws: laws which increase sentences for people convicted of a felony if they have been convicted of two other felonies in the past. These laws also limit a person's ability to receive anything less than a life sentence.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

STUDENT VERSION

1 All human beings are born equal in dignity and in rights.	2 These rights belong to everyone . You should never be discriminated against.	3 You have the right to life, liberty, and safety .
4 No one can hold you in slavery .	5 No one can torture you or treat you in a cruel or degrading way .	6 Everyone has rights , no matter where they are.
7 Laws should be applied the same way for everyone.	8 You have the right to seek legal help if your rights are not respected.	9 You cannot be imprisoned or thrown out of a country without a good reason.
10 You have the right to a public trial .	11 You should be presumed innocent until proven guilty.	12 You have a right to privacy . No one can enter your home, read your mail, or bother you without good reason.
13 You have the right to move and travel within your country and internationally.	14 You have the right to seek protection from another country (asylum) if your country treats you poorly.	15 You have the right to be a citizen of a country (have a nationality).
16 Every adult has the right to get married and have a family .	17 You have the right to own property .	18 You have the right to practice any religion .
19 You have the right to express your opinion .	20 You have the right to gather with others and protest publicly .	21 You have the right to participate in the government of your country (e.g. vote).
22 You have the right to have your basic needs met (e.g. through social security programs).	23 You have the right to work, to receive equal pay for equal work, and to join a union .	24 You have the right to rest from work.
25 You have the right to an adequate standard of living , including housing, food, and medical care.	26 You have the right to an education .	27 No one can stop you from participating in your community's cultural life .
28 Everyone must respect the social order that allows these rights to exist.	29 Everyone must respect the rights of others .	30 No one can take away any of the rights in this declaration from you.

BIAS / DISCRIMINATION / DEHUMANIZATION

BIAS

Humans are hard-wired to categorize things and people. This serves many purposes, but can have a very negative outcomes.

Implicit bias refers to the way that people unconsciously hold attitudes that affect their thoughts and actions; they are not aware of this bias. Explicit bias involves conscious attitudes and beliefs. This shows up in overt displays of racism, sexism, etc. Prejudice – a pre-conceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience – is a kind of explicit bias.

Examples:

- “Us vs. them” mentality
- A person not feeling comfortable with people who do not look like them, talk like them etc.
- Negative beliefs, stereotypes, and generalizations about entire groups of people

DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is the practice of unfairly treating a person or group differently from other people or groups of people.

Examples:

- A company pays men more than women for the same job
- Jim Crow laws in the South; anti-Jewish legislation in Nazi Germany

DEHUMANIZATION

Dehumanization is the process of depriving someone of human qualities and dignity or treating someone in a degrading manner. It is often used against groups of people to justify greed, violence, or abuse.

Dehumanization increases the perceived distance between “us” and “them.” As a result, it allows people to harm others (or witness harm) without feeling empathy or guilt.

Examples:

- Comparing people to animals; using words like “rats,” “vermin,” “infestation” when talking about groups of people
- Reducing an individual’s complexity to a single characteristic (e.g. viewing a person only as a “drug user,” “criminal,” “homeless,” etc.)
- Treating people as though they lack culture or intelligence

RESISTANCE TO DEHUMANIZATION

When a person affirms their humanity, they assert that they are a person worthy of dignity and respect. This is a form of resistance to dehumanization.

Examples:

- Direct resistance: protesting, filing complaints, refusing to perform degrading tasks
- Creative expression: writing, making art, singing, storytelling
- Displaying humane qualities: sympathy, kindness, caretaking, gentleness, strength
- Recognizing the humanity in others: showing empathy, respecting others, speaking out against human rights abuses, protecting others’ rights

After reading *Bias/Discrimination/Dehumanization* and watching “*American Prisons Are Designed to Dehumanize*,” discuss the following questions in groups of four.

1. Refer back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights handout. What rights do you think might be violated in jail or prison? Why is it important for these rights to be protected?
2. In the film clip, Johnny Perez described some of the ways that the justice system dehumanized him. What were some of these methods? Did any surprise you?
3. In the film clip, the presenters describe ways that formerly incarcerated people are discriminated against after being released from prison. What were some of the ways they described?
4. Benjamin Rush, an early American civic leader, believed that, “The suffering of the incarcerated should be hidden from view.” How is ignoring the plight of incarcerated people a form of dehumanization?

MASS INCARCERATION IN THE U.S.

1.9 MILLION

people currently incarcerated in prisons, jails, immigrant detention centers, and other facilities.

441,000

held in pre-trial detention

\$10,000

average bail amount

equal to 8 months income for average person held in pre-trial detention

820,000

on parole

2.9 MILLION

on probation

SOURCES

ACLU
Bureau of Justice Statistics
Prison Policy Initiative
The Sentencing Project

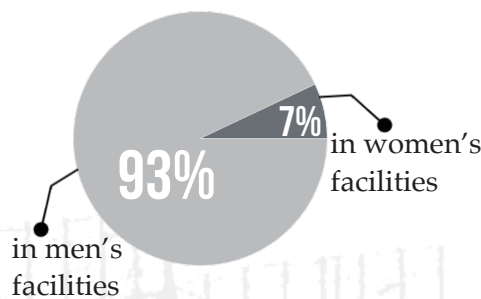
WovenTeaching.org

THE UNITED STATES INCARCERATES MORE PEOPLE THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY ON EARTH.

Handout D

Updated May 2022

The U.S. accounts for



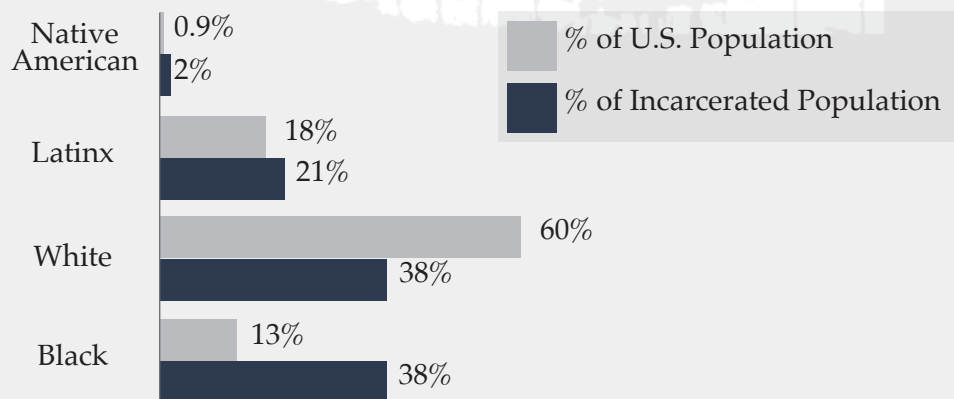
49,000

youth confined

54,000

in immigrant detention

RACISM AND STRUCTURAL INEQUITIES PLAY A LARGE ROLE IN MASS INCARCERATION



Racial disparities result from the unequal treatment of people of color at all stages of the justice system, including stops, searches, and arrests; plea deals; and sentencing.

Sentences to federal prison are **20% LONGER** for Black males than for white males with similar circumstances.

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE: KALIEF BROWDER

The following is an excerpt from a 2013 interview with Kalief Browder; the interviewer is Marc Lamont Hill, an author and political commentator.

Kalief Browder was arrested at age 16 for allegedly stealing a backpack. His family was unable to pay his bail. As a result, Browder spent three years at New York's notorious Rikers Island jail while he awaited trial, including two years in solitary confinement. After 33 months, Browder was offered a plea deal – he would have to admit he committed the crime and in exchange, he would be released. Knowing that he was innocent, Browder did not accept the plea deal, deciding to take his chances on a trial in which he could be sentenced to 15 years in prison.

Incarcerated without having been convicted of a crime, he was released without explanation after more than 1,000 days inside. Two years after his release, Browder took his own life.

Marc Lamont Hill (MLH): So you have to choose between being in prison for up to 15 years and going home right then by admitting you did a crime you didn't do. [...] How did you come to that conclusion?

Kalief Browder (KB): I know deep down inside in my heart that I didn't do it. I didn't feel the least comfortable saying that I did it. I wasn't gonna say that I did a case that I didn't do for the simple fact that I felt like I was done wrong. I felt like something needed to be done about this. I felt like something needs to be said. If I just cop out and say that I did it nothing's gonna be done about it. I didn't do it, no justice is served, nobody hears nothing at all. I felt like I had to fight. [...]

I mean it was real stressful. There was times, there was nights when I couldn't go to sleep 'cause all I thought about was when I go home, what would be the first thing I would do. There was times where I had cried myself to sleep and, it was hard, the whole thing. And being in there with the correction officers and them making my stay even harder. That was one of the main things that had me stressin' [...] I had gotten in a little petty argument with a corrections officer and he had starved me so it's like–

MLH: You said he starved you?

KB: Yes I was starved–

MLH: Explain that. There are a lot of people here who don't understand what happens in prison.

KB: Well at the time I was put in solitary confinement 'cause I was jumped by the correction officers and they said that I had allegedly assaulted them first so they had put me in solitary confinement. And in solitary confinement they control your food and how much food you get and when it's time for feeding – they give you food, so if you say anything that can tick them off for any type of way, some of them (which is a lot of them), what they do is they starve you. They won't feed you. And it's already hard in there because if you get the three trays [of food] that you get every day, you're still hungry 'cause I guess that's part of the punishment, so if they starve you one tray that could really make an impact on you.

MLH: How much were you starved?

KB: Oh I was starved a lot, I can't even count. But the worst time I was starved was when they starved me for four times in a row – they starved me breakfast, lunch, dinner, and breakfast again. And finally it took, 'cause I was trying to tell the captains and their superiors, the rest of their superiors, what they was doing, but nobody wanted to listen to me and nobody wanted to help me and finally, I finally came across the captain that they heard me out and fixed the problem: made sure I ate, I was fed.

SOURCE:

"16 Year Old Falsely Imprisoned For 3 Years in Rikers Island," YouTube interview, 13:03, "HuffPost Live," December 3, 2013, <https://youtu.be/56zlBGdHoZQ>.

QUESTIONS:

1. How did the justice system dehumanize Kalief Browder? Provide at least one specific example.
2. How did Kalief affirm his humanity while incarcerated? Provide at least one specific example.
3. Kalief said that if he would have taken the plea deal and admitted to a crime he did not commit, "no justice is served." What do you think justice for Kalief Browder would look like?

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE: CHARLIE MORNINGSTAR

Charlie Morningstar is transgender. He was assigned female at birth, but has identified as male since childhood. He was convicted of first-degree murder in 1984 and is currently serving a sentence of twenty-seven years to life. Charlie is the founder of the Two Spirits Wellness Group, a group for incarcerated people who may face issues or discrimination as a result of their gender identity. He was 66 years old and incarcerated at a women's prison at the time of the interview.

When I initially came to state prison, the guards took me to the captain of the receiving center [...] What was significant about that was that none of the other people that came in on that bus were taken to the captain. I thought, *I smell prejudice*. The guards had read about my trial and perceived me as a sexual deviant, and considered segregating me from the general population. Also, at the receiving center, a group of staff had turned up to see what I looked like, as if I was some kind of animal at the zoo. [...]

At first, I withdrew within myself. I just didn't talk to anybody. First of all, there was the "she/her" thing that's like scratching on a blackboard – when you've lived all this time being called by masculine pronouns. Since the staff knew about the newspaper article about "the woman who lived as a man," they would talk about putting a dress on me in an attempt to humiliate me.

It hurt – deep-gut pain. [...]

Unlike a lot of the women in prison, I can here and I thought that I had rights. I continued to [submit complaints] about discrimination. At the time it wasn't even a law not to discriminate based on sexual orientation. People here are harassed for having short hair and get in trouble for possession of boxer shorts. The guards claim you're not properly dressed if you don't have a bra and panties on, and this makes you subject to disciplinary action.

Being able to wear certain clothing, like boxer shorts, is important to me, but I am denied this in prison. Other transgenders are denied this too. People can get boxers illegally through contraband by special vendors or when family members send them in. But I choose not to go about it illegally. So I started writing, and pretty soon they stopped saying things to me, because they knew I was going to write them up. That helped, and it gave me fortitude. It heightened my belief in myself and my ability to take care of myself. I thought, Now I know some of the tools to take care of myself in prison. [...]

While in prison, I had noticed over the years the discrimination, and that people didn't have anybody else they could talk to about gender-identity issues. There was no kind of advocacy. So in 2008 I started the Two Spirits Wellness Group. In Native American culture, there aren't just two genders, and the term "two spirits" is recognition that those people who are gay/lesbian/transgender are actually two spirit people, in their psychological self, their spiritual self. [...]

In my Two Spirits meetings, I relate my own experiences to others in the group, and it helps them identify. I started it mostly for people to be able to get a stake in their spiritual identity. We believe that you are what your spirit dictates. In my case, my spirit dictates that I am masculine. We try to help you become strong in your spirit and identity, and to help you be able to function without feeling humiliation, feeling that you are a bad person. As long as you feel inadequate, you will not become all you can be. So you need to be in a better spiritual state.

SOURCE:

Robin Levi and Ayelet Waldman, eds., "Charlie Morningstar," *Inside This Place, Not of It: Narratives from Women's Prisons* (London: Verso, 2011), 195-197.

QUESTIONS:

1. How has the justice system dehumanized Charlie Morningstar? Provide at least one specific example.
2. How has Charlie affirmed his humanity while incarcerated? Provide at least one specific example.
3. Charlie said that, "as long as you feel inadequate, you will not become all you can be." How does dehumanization make a person feel inadequate? What is something one can do to counter this feeling?

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE: IRMA RODRIGUEZ

Irma Rodriguez has been incarcerated for a large part of her life, primarily for drug-related offenses. She has been through many rehab programs and as a result, she had been sober for three years at the time of her interview. While in prison, Irma's medical issues were misdiagnosed and she spent nearly 20 years on prescription drugs that only made her sicker. She was 45 years old at the time of the interview.

The first time I was sent to prison, I was eighteen. I was convicted of possession, transportation, and sale of PCP. I had large quantities, apple juice bottles of that stuff.. My first trip to prison was for six years, and I've pretty much been in and out since then. Now I'm in my mid-forties. In the first institution I was taken under the wing of lifers who knew I was a baby and couldn't take care of myself. A lot of them played mom and a lot of them played sister, and they taught me the morals and principles of how to carry yourself, and the dos and don'ts of surviving in prison. I learned that you have to carry yourself right, carry yourself with respect.

It's hard to explain how degrading prison is to someone who's never experienced it. You are told when to wake up, when you can bathe, when you can brush your teeth. You stand for twenty minutes waiting for a door to open just so you can walk in a line and go eat. You're given three minutes to shovel down your food and then you're right back in that line, waiting for the door to open up again so you can go put your stuff away. Through all this you have constant yelling over the intercom.

There's a lot of heartache, a lot of crime, and a lot of violence and chaos. Crammed into a building with 200 women you've got 200 different kinds of cultural backgrounds, ethics, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions. You've got 200 different ways of processing emotions. There are some women who can't read, some who weren't even taught how to shower. They come in here and they are stripped of their dignity. They can't even go to the bathroom without male staff watching. You can get so accustomed to the loss of dignity that your standards just disappear.

But some women come in who have never even taken off their clothes in front of their husbands. They get so upset and so embarrassed, they cry. What makes me the saddest is that I find myself hardening up, saying things to them like, "What are you crying about?" I have to remind myself to have compassion. Just because I'm used to it doesn't mean someone else is. It's sad to see women coming here who really don't know how to deal with prison. They've never been out of their homes. They're in here for ridiculous stuff: making bad decisions, helping someone out. They were just so naïve and gullible that another person was able to reel them in. And they're incarcerated with people who've committed murder. It's like one pit. Everyone's thrown in one pit. [...]

[Corrections Officers] routinely come into our rooms and take our things. A lot of us have arts and crafts supplies to make cards with, like cardstock and markers. We might also have books or other small things. Routinely the COs will come with their gloves and bags, and they take everything. You're got three blankets? Trust me, they will take them away. You have a homemade pillow sewn up, they'll take that. You're constantly living on edge.

SOURCE:

Robin Levi and Ayelet Waldman, eds., "Irma Rodriguez," *Inside This Place, Not of It: Narratives from Women's Prisons* (London: Verso, 2011), 207-208.

QUESTIONS:

1. How has the justice system dehumanized Irma Rodriguez? Provide at least one specific example.
2. How has Irma affirmed her humanity while incarcerated? Provide at least one specific example.
3. Irma said, "I have to remind myself to have compassion. Just because I'm used to it doesn't mean someone else is." What do you think she means?

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE: PERSON INCARCERATED IN OHIO

The following is an excerpt from a letter written by a man currently incarcerated at Marion Correctional Institute in Marion, Ohio. In this letter he describes the current epidemic of COVID-19 in jails and prisons and recounts a conversation he had with a nurse who works in the prison. It was recently published in *The New York Times*.

I walked to the back of the dorm today to check on my friend. He is confined to his bed by Covid-19. [...]

It has been two weeks now. I have somehow become his nurse. I cook and help with laundry, homework and whatever else he needs.

He was asleep. I was relieved. I finally had a moment of rest. These last two corona-months have been crazy. I have been sick, helping the sick, or both.

Along my way to the day room, I met a nurse who'd just finished passing out daily medications. I asked her if we'd be retested for the virus. After testing positive with over 2,000 other men, and with the symptoms seeming to linger and even reoccur, I am eager to be retested. It has been over 14 days since the tests. We should be negative by now. I am concerned that we are reinfecting each other.

The middle-aged nurse, with the sweetest demeanor, gave me her undivided attention and began to speak comfortingly to me. This is a rarity in prison; nurses are usually curt and distracted. So I tuned in.

She assured me that we would be retested at some point. I should be patient. The nursing staff really cares about us, she said, even those who act a "little snobby." I shouldn't listen to what was being said in the hallways; they're taking good care of us. Everyone who needs serious medical attention is being sent out. [...]

As she spoke, I thought of my friend I was trying to nurse back to health. She knew nothing of this man because, while his case is documented, no one has come to examine him. A cursory glance will show anyone how serious his condition is. Neither he nor I have notified the staff because we know from other friends' experiences that he will be thrown into a cell and left to his own devices. We believe that we — unqualified inmates — can do better.

I also thought of another friend who, only now after two weeks, is beginning to walk on his own again. The virus hit him hard. At one point he had such difficulty breathing that we thought for certain he would die. We frantically scrambled around trying all sorts of remedies, while insisting that the guards alert the medical staff. The nurses refused to come.

For hours, we fought for his life. The only thing that helped was boiling water and Vicks 44 in a crock pot and allowing him to inhale the steam. In the meantime, we contacted his family and told them to contact the administration incessantly. After about 3 ½ hours, the nurse arrived. She took him to the medical area.

Less than an hour later, we watched him be carried back into the building by two officers. He still wasn't walking on his own. His friends — his fellow prisoners — have taken it upon themselves to nurse him back to health ever since. [...]

[The nurse] said the officers were doing their best and that they didn't have to be here. They were working only because they care. She said they were volunteering to do things. She recounted how sad it was that one officer almost "threw in the towel" because of all of the ungratefulness.

I struggled to understand what she meant by "volunteer." The officers are not only paid but paid extra for their efforts. I suspect that if the pay were to stop, they would stop. She waxed passionate when she talked about how some officers had to handle garbage (a job normally reserved for inmates). That sight affected her deeply. She was impressed by people who would willingly handle garbage for a short period of time for \$22 an hour but considered it normal for prisoners to do it every day for \$22 a month.

SOURCE:

Michelle Alexander, "Let Our People Go," *The New York Times*, May 13, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/13/opinion/coronavirus-prison-outbreak.html>.

QUESTIONS:

1. How has the justice system dehumanized the author or those he is incarcerated with? Provide at least one specific example.
2. How has the author affirmed his humanity while incarcerated? Provide at least one specific example.
3. The author describes caring for his friends inside of prison, including how he and others "frantically scrambled around trying all sorts of remedies." How does this confirm or challenge society's perceptions of prison or incarcerated people?

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE: ANTWAN WILLIAMS AND ERIC “MASERATI E” ABERCROMBIE

Ear Hustle is a podcast produced inside San Quentin State Prison, located north of San Francisco in California. The show is produced by Erlonne Woods, Antwan Williams, and Nigel Poor. Woods and Williams began the podcast in 2017 while still incarcerated at San Quentin; both have since been released. Poor is a visual artist who initially got involved at San Quentin as a volunteer.

The following is an excerpt from an episode of *Ear Hustle* featuring music created by Williams and Eric “Maserati E” Abercrombie. The duo wrote “Float Away” while incarcerated at San Quentin.

Antwan: So “Float Away” is a song about being in a place or a space where you have no control over anything and you wanna be somewhere else, you wanna do something better. [...]

Can I float away?
See you living in a day and age
Where the heart and mind, they separate
Love will devastate you
How much can I take?
All I gotta say is can I float away?
Can I float away?

I look at life and all I got from it
Failures with some accomplishments
Growth after being buried
It's nothing short of astonishing
Struggles I gotta buy with 'em
People say we're related
It's probably because I come from a place where
people don't make it

But I got a feeling I might be one in a million
But I think it's groundbreaking
No power tools for the drilling
I'm that crack in your ceiling
I'mma let the light in
Why live like someone else when it's our own
skin we die in?
Never lost my fight, I'm just changing where I'm
fighting
And to get to the arena, it takes being open
minded

Freedom, I'mma find it
And put my name on it I know that I'm the key
but I'mma break the chains on 'em, yeah
So the cycle can end
Then I'mma donate my heart to be recycled
again, yeah
It's crazy, I found life in the pen
Without having life in the pen

See, you gotta know the places I been
To understand the headspace that I'm in
'Cause this cage I'm in is manmade and it's made
for men
With space for every shade of skin
Where does grace begin for those overcame by
sin?
Or lost souls never taken in?
See I can't pretend to be okay with the state we in
Will the pressures ever make amends?
I highly doubt it

'Cause we're living in a day and age
Where the heart and mind will separate
Love will devastate you
How much can I take?
All I gotta say is can I float away?
Can I float away?

SOURCE:

Rahsaan Thomas and Nigel Poor, “Inside Music,” *Ear Hustle*, podcast transcript, August 1, 2019,
<https://www.earhustlesq.com/episodes/2019/8/1/inside-music>.

QUESTIONS:

1. Antwan Williams said that “Float Away” is about “being in a space where you have no control over anything.” Do you think that taking away another person’s control over their life is a form of dehumanization? Why or why not?
2. How have Williams and Abercromie affirmed their humanity while incarcerated? Provide at least one specific example.
3. What do you think Antwan and Eric mean when they say that “I come from a place where people don’t make it”? What place(s) do you think they are describing?

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE: CURTIS

Ear Hustle is a podcast produced inside San Quentin State Prison, located north of San Francisco in California. The show is produced by Erlonne Woods, Antwan Williams, and Nigel Poor. Woods and Williams began the podcast in 2017 while still incarcerated at San Quentin; both have since been released. Poor is a visual artist who initially got involved at San Quentin as a volunteer.

The following is an excerpt from an episode of *Ear Hustle*. It features Curtis, a person incarcerated at San Quentin. Curtis was convicted of robbery and burglary for stealing a small amount of money from a cash register. He had previously been convicted of two other nonviolent felonies. Because of California's "Three Strikes" law, he was sentenced to 50 years to life for stealing \$40.

Erlonne: He got convicted for three robberies. None of them involved a weapon and none of them were violent. But, they were three felonies, three strikes, so the judge had to give him a long sentence. That's just the way it is. [...]

Curtis: Well, you know, when I came to prison the goal I set for myself was not to make it out alive. That wasn't the goal. The goal was that I didn't lose myself in the process. And, um, I remember when I was going through my reception process at the Tehachapi Prison and the whites came to me and they wanted to put a knife in my hand and told me to go stab [another prisoner]. [...] Um, I'm a stupid idiot that stole some money. I'm just not going to pick up a knife and go stab somebody, and I would rather die than lose my integrity. [...]

My mindset with the 50 years to life was: I want to show, uh, these cops, society that the sentence that you give a man does not dictate the behavior.

Erlonne: He was doing real good, but then, in his 13th year, it went all bad. [...]

[In 2008, Curtis experienced violence in prison and became depressed and disengaged.]

Nigel: But something else happened in his life about this time and he calls it the miracle of the diaries. [...]

Curtis: You know, when I, when I first came in in 1995, I, uh, I started writing a diary, and I've never written a diary in my life. [...] it was for my daughter. I would write her letters in there. [...]

I wanted her to know that her father really loved her and this was not a reflection of her at all. This was a reflection of the turmoil within her father and not her. I wanted to be very clear with that. There's a voice inside of me that questions what was it about my own mom and dad that they didn't want me. So, I carry that voice. What was it about me? And I didn't want my daughter Christiana to have that. [...]

[Curtis wrote these diaries for years, despite not having any contact with his daughter or knowing where she lived. Eventually, he sent them to an out-of-state pen pal, J, so that they wouldn't be thrown away by prison staff.]

Erlonne: Yep. Curtis' penpal live in a different state and, after 10 years of corresponding with her, she discovers that his daughter lives right near her.

Nigel: And this leads to the miracle of the diaries.

[The pen pal located Curtis's daughter and eventually met her in person.]

Earlonne: But she didn't give Christiana the diaries right away. Instead, she asked Christiana to write a letter to her father.

Curtis: And she did. She wrote me a letter. "Dad, Curtis, or whatever." Uh. "I hope you know you have a daughter out here." And I can't quote very much of the letter, but I do remember that.

Nigel: Then J gave Christiana a big box with diaries of the first three years.

Curtis: And then, when she's- The diaries. When she has stayed up all night reading these diaries as much as she could, she writes me, which I receive the second letter. Now, it's "Daddy," and she's drawing hearts, and "I love you's", and, um, it was quite different.

Earlonne: After not communicating for 13 years, Curtis and his daughter started exchanging letters.

SOURCE:

Erlonne Woods and Nigel Poor, "Left Behind," *Ear Hustle*, podcast transcript, September 27, 2017, <https://www.earhustlesq.com/episodes/2017/9/27/left-behind>.

QUESTIONS:

1. How has the justice system dehumanized Curtis? Provide at least one specific example.
2. How has Curtis affirmed his humanity while incarcerated? Provide at least one specific example.
3. Curtis said that, "I want to show, uh, these cops, society that the sentence that you give a man does not dictate the behavior." What do you think he means? Why is this important?