



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
1995 Volume III: The Constitution and Criminal Justice

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## **The Mirror of Justice: Is it Blind?**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 95.03.04  
by Henry A. Rhodes

My unit is intended for an 8th grade Social Studies class. It also may be used in a high school American history course. The unit will take 4-6 weeks to teach. I must be honest with anyone who decides to read or use my curriculum unit: I developed this unit with the belief that minorities, especially African Americans, are not treated fairly by the U.S. justice system. The research evidence that I have found seems to support my belief strongly. It was not my intent to provide my students, many of whom are minorities, with information that will foster hatred within them against the U.S. judicial system. I hope to give my students a better understanding of how the judicial system deals with minorities, in the hope that if one day they find themselves, their relatives or their friends entwined in the U.S. court system, they will have knowledge they can use to their advantage against a judicial system which has been historically biased against them. Also, one day my students might find themselves in positions of responsibility in which they may effect change in our judicial system that will be to the benefit of all Americans.

In my unit I will examine several aspects of the judicial system (e.g. police, bail system, jury selection system, juries and the death penalty, plea bargaining) and discuss how minorities are treated by these segments of our justice system. In these discussions I will briefly examine how the O.J. Simpson, Claus von Bulow, and William James (a 67-year-old African American from New Haven accused of murdering his live-in girlfriend) cases fared with each segment of the U.S. judicial system I discussed in my unit.

(Recommended for Social Studies, grade 8; or American History, grades 9- 12)

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