

FIRST DEGREE

General Discussion Questions

General questions about mass incarceration

1. What role has the war on drugs played in the current state of mass incarceration in the United States?
2. What are minimum mandatory sentencing laws and multiple offender laws, and how have these policies filled our prisons?
3. Describe the make-up of today's prison population. What role does the legacy of slavery, segregation, Jim Crow, and racism play in our policies of mass incarceration?
4. Prison construction is a big industry, and prisons are major employers. What role do these economic forces play in the incarceration of large segments of the population for long periods of time?
5. What forces have been driving the trend toward privatizing our prisons, and what has been its major impact?
6. What is the cost to society in terms of dollars and lost human potential of our policy of mass incarceration?
7. What is the impact of mass incarceration on poor communities?
8. What specific policies would reduce mass incarceration without reducing public safety?
9. Why do you think the country is finally ready to revisit its sentencing policies at this time?
10. What concrete steps can individuals take to advance criminal justice reforms that will end mass incarceration?

General Questions about Prison Education

1. Why do you think Congress withdrew funding for prison education in 1994?
2. What is the benefit of supporting higher education in prisons, and what role can prison education play in reducing recidivism and mass incarceration?
3. Do you think the Hudson Link model can be broadly replicated across the country?
4. In addition to a college degree, what other strategies, policies, and efforts could help effectively reduce recidivism rates? ,
5. What is the status of current local, state, and national developments to expand prison education?
6. Why does there seem to be growing bipartisan support for expanding prison education, and why now when there is so much political gridlock surrounding other issues?
7. What can individuals do to volunteer in prison education or reentry programs?
8. What can individuals do in the political realm to support efforts to expand prison education and reentry programs?