

THE ESSENCE OF BLACK GIRLHOOD & Ending Girl Incarceration



Justice2Jobs and their project, The Essence of Black Girlhood is shining a big, bright light on ending girl incarceration. The pipeline from unrelenting marginalization to girl incarceration is obvious if we connect the dots between:

- Historic anti-Black racism
- Generational Trauma
- Adaptive Survival Behaviors
- Adultification Bias/Gender Bias
- Removal from the home/Foster Care placement
- School Suspensions
- Girl Incarceration
- Barriers to Ability to Thrive
- Survival Resilience of Black Women

Drivers of Girl Incarceration

Adultification Bias or the erasure of childhood is a mechanism through which adults perceive Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like than their white peers, from ages as young as 5–9 years old. Compared with white girls, Black girls are perceived as needing less nurturing, protection, support and comfort; being more independent; and knowing more about adult topics, including sex.

Black girls are punished at a disproportionate rate compared to their counterparts in schools and the juvenile justice system; this can be directly attributed to adultification bias.

- Black girls experience discriminatory disciplinary policies, and disproportionately high suspension and expulsion rates.
- Black girls are three times more likely to be referred to juvenile court than white girls and 20% more likely to be detained.

Sexual Abuse (including commercial sexual exploitation) is one of the primary drivers of girls' entry into the juvenile justice system. This is another facet of adultification bias where Black girls are perceived as grown and "fast" or promiscuous. Black women are more likely to experience sexual violence, abuse in their relationships, and be killed by a partner. The sexual abuse to prison pipeline for girls is a perverse twist of justice in which girls are blamed and punished for the violence they have experienced.

How we are Ending Girl Incarceration

Vera partnered with the California Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR) to launch the End Girls' (and gender expansive youth) Incarceration initiative. Four counties (Imperial, Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Diego Counties) were selected to be in the first cohort.

Through their year-long participation, these counties are committing to implementing equitable policies and gender-responsive programming to immediately reduce girls' incarceration in their counties and establish multi-year plans to get to zero.

Read More:

The Center on Gender Justice & Opportunity at Georgetown Law
Vera Institute: Ending Girls' Incarceration in California