**Act 33**
Pennsylvania’s Youth in the Adult Justice System

- Act 33 is a 1996 amendment to the Pennsylvania Juvenile Act.
- Youth 15 and older are now automatically tried in the adult criminal justice system if accused of several categories of crimes.
- More than 40% of cases of youth automatically tried as adults in Philadelphia are eventually sent to juvenile court, but…
  - Waiting period can range from a couple months to a year.
  - While waiting, youth are held in adult facilities.
  - Being held in an adult jail or prison is extremely harmful for youth:
    - Increased chances of victimization and death.
    - Little to no educational or rehabilitative opportunities.
  - Youth whose cases end up being tried in adult court:
    - Are given harsher sentences.
    - Have an adult criminal record, which can impede their ability to obtain education, housing, and a job.

**Youth Art and Self-Empowerment Project**

YASP builds a youth-led movement to end the practice of trying youth as adults in Pennsylvania.

- Conducts weekly art, music, poetry, and empowerment workshops for youth incarcerated in Philadelphia’s adult jails.
- Supports youth coming home from adult jails and prisons.
- Screens documentary and facilitates workshops about the school-to-prison pipeline and Act 33 for students in Philadelphia-area schools and colleges.
- Campaigns to repeal Act 33.
  - Collects petition signatures around Pennsylvania.

**What I Did**

- Attended school-to-prison pipeline workshops run by YASP.
- Researched members of PA House and Senate judiciary committees for lobbying efforts.
- Compiled petition data by legislative district.
- Researched and worked on application process for grants.
- Wrote weekly reflections about my experiences.
- Read about art and incarceration, school-to-prison pipeline, and restorative justice.
- Visited art exhibits about incarceration in Philadelphia.

**Evolution of Learning**

- Began course focused on potential of art as individual empowerment and social criticism.
- Throughout internship and readings, ideas about restorative justice became more salient.
  - Forgiveness, can you imagine?
  - Criminal justice system creates and perpetuates harms.
  - Can’t address individual harms without transforming societal institutions that cause harms.
  - Perpetual effects of generational trauma.

**Art**

- Saw art created by youth in YASP’s workshops.
- Art empowers youth to be creative and express themselves.
- Prison system sees art empowerment workshops as rehabilitative.

**Social Criticism**

- Read about and viewed art exhibits critiquing incarceration.
- Art can challenge viewers to consider experience and harm of incarceration.
  - Ex. “God’s eye” (pictured left)—freedom restricted.

**Definition**

“A process to involve those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible.”
- Howard Zehr

**Restorative Justice**

- How can restorative justice processes also be transformative, i.e. work to change harmful social institutions?
- How can art be used to promote healing and transformation?
- How can restorative justice address generational trauma?

**Contrast to Retributive Justice**

- Retributive justice: crime is a violation of the law, and punishment is the goal.
- Restorative justice: crime is a harm to communities, and healing is the goal.

**Individual Empowerment**

- Can art empowerment workshops allowed by the prison system be a space for social criticism? Do they need to be?
- Does individual empowerment need to be combined with a critique of oppressive institutions to be effective?