

*The Tow Youth Justice Institute is a university, state and private partnership established to lead the way in juvenile justice reform through collaborative planning, training, research and advocacy.*

## Upcoming JJPOC Meetings:

JJPOC Meetings are the third Thursday of every month at 2 p.m., at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford.

## Special Edition

### Students Explore Youth Injustice in the Criminal Justice System through Documentary about Kalief Browder

#### Introduction

The University of New Haven launched a new online course, titled "Youth Injustice and the Kalief Browder Story", in the fall 2018 semester, which engaged students at the University from a wide variety of majors. Starting in the spring 2019 semester, this 3-credit hour course will be cross-listed to include Master's students at the University. Additionally, the course will be available to students throughout the country who are exploring injustice through the true story of Kalief Browder. Students from any college or university are welcome to join the online course and transfer their credits back to their home institution.

Individuals interested in this course can enroll for the spring course NOW through March 25 using this link, <http://www.newhaven.edu/kbcourseapp>. If you have questions, feel free to reach out to the course instructor, Dr. Danielle Cooper, at [dcooper@newhaven.edu](mailto:dcooper@newhaven.edu).

This 8-module course addresses the following major questions:

1. How do the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems work?
2. What happens when those systems fail young people?
3. Who is to blame for conditions at Rikers?
4. Do the systems provide liberty and justice for all?
5. How can you engage the community around justice system reform?
6. How sure are you about your own memory?
7. What does the future of criminal justice reform look like?
8. How did Kalief feel the effects of his experience at Rikers after he left the Rikers Island Jail?



**TIME** | **THE KALIEF  
BROWDER STORY**



## Who are the partners?

The Tow Foundation was established in 1988 by Leonard and Claire Tow to provide an opportunity for people to have a high quality life and a voice in their community. The Tow Foundation has many years of investment in juvenile justice reform in Connecticut and other areas and helped establish the Tow Youth Justice Institute in 2014.

The Tow Youth Justice Institute is part of the Henry C. Lee College at the University of New Haven. The Tow Foundation discussed the possibility of designing a class during a conversation with the Center for Children's Law and Policy and decided to utilize the Tow Youth Justice Institute at the University of New Haven to develop and deliver the course.

The Center for Children's Law and Policy is an organization focused on juvenile justice reform and protecting the rights of children in public systems. Staff of the Center for Children's Law and Policy focus on reducing racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system, reducing the incarceration of children and youth, and eradicating inhumane practices for youth who are incarcerated.

The Center for Children's Law and Policy worked with producers of the documentary to publicize the series, and communicated with Kalief's family member about keeping his memory alive. The Center's staff also leads a national campaign to end solitary confinement of young people in custody.

## Why focus on the life and death of Kalief Browder?

Kalief Browder was a 16-year-old who was born and raised in Bronx, New York. On May 15, 2010, Kalief and his friend were walking home from a party when a police officer stopped and detained them. They were accused of stealing a backpack after the victim of the crime identified Kalief and his friend as the two individuals who robbed him – a victim who repeatedly changed his story when questioned by the police.

Police immediately took Kalief to the precinct for questioning by detectives and was told he would get to go home that night. Instead, since Kalief was considered an adult under New York law, he was sent to Rikers Island Jail where he was for over three years. He spent nearly 14 months in solitary confinement. While confined in Rikers, Kalief was attacked by guards as well as other inmates. He attempted suicide four times. During this time, Kalief refused to take a plea deal because he wanted to go to trial to prove his innocence. Every time he requested that the trial move forward, prosecutors requested extensions because they were not ready to proceed.

A judge eventually dismissed all of the charges against Kalief when prosecutors failed to produce any witnesses to the crime. Kalief was finally released on May 29, 2013. Due to the depression and suicidal thoughts brought on by his time at Rikers, Kalief committed suicide on June 6, 2015—just two years after his release back home.

The six-part documentary on Kalief's tragic story aired on Spike TV in spring 2017 and is currently available for streaming on Netflix. This documentary started filming in 2013 while Kalief was alive, so viewers hear directly from Kalief about his experience at Rikers and in the New York criminal justice system. Viewers also see the harmful impact that Kalief's experience had on his family. In 2018, the documentary won a prestigious Peabody Award for excellence.



### What reforms have occurred since the documentary was filmed?

At the time of Kalief's arrest, New York was just one of two states to treat all 16 and 17-year-old youth charged with crimes as adults in the criminal justice system. In other states, the vast majority of young people of that age are handled through a separate juvenile justice system focused on rehabilitation of youth. If youth in those other states are detained, they are placed in facilities designed for youth, with other youth, not placed in adult jails such as Rikers Island.

Two years after Kalief's suicide, New York legislators voted to raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to 18, removing 16-year-olds from the adult criminal justice system on October 1, 2018 and 17-year-olds on October 1, 2019. Had this law been passed a few years earlier, it could have prevented the series of tragedies that led to Kalief's death.

## How was the course developed?

The Center for Children’s Law and Policy and the Tow Youth Justice Institute began a yearlong collaboration in 2017 to develop an online course around the Kalief Browder documentary. During the development, eight modules were created: one for each of the six episodes, as well as modules for the introduction and conclusion of the course. Students review relevant materials including news articles, editorials, and videos throughout the course that expose them to deeper context around the problems identified throughout the documentary. Students’ assignments include quizzes about the episodes, group discussions, reflections, and a final project where they design their own community event to raise awareness of issues in the justice system.

## What are students saying about the course?

*"This course doesn't simply ask us to voice our concern about youth injustice—it requires us to make recommendations that could lead to reform so that Kalief's voice doesn't go unheard."*

~Undergrad Student c/o 2020, Tashaye O'Neale

*"I think it's just important that people are exposed as especially students going into the criminal justice field."*

~Undergrad Student c/o 2018, Schaene Shatto

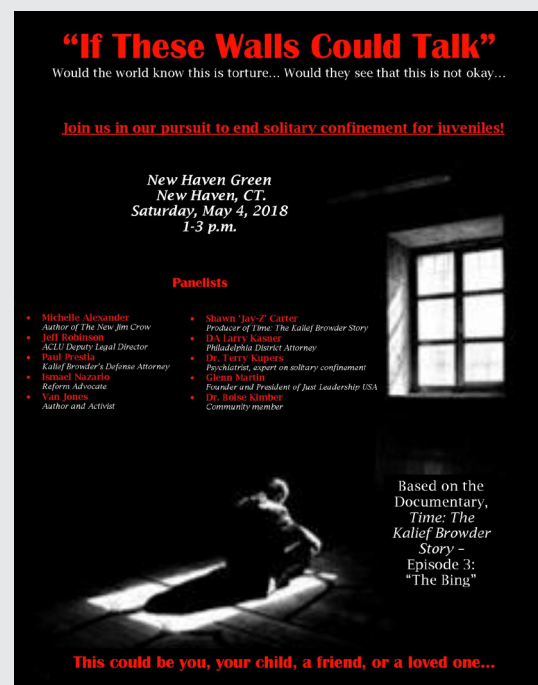
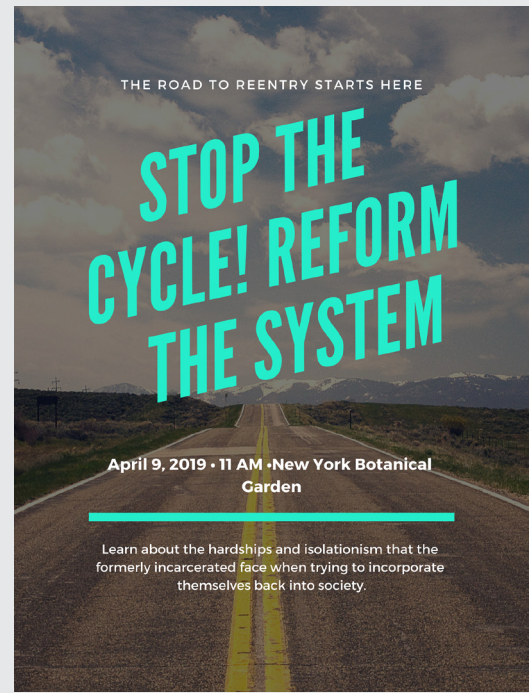
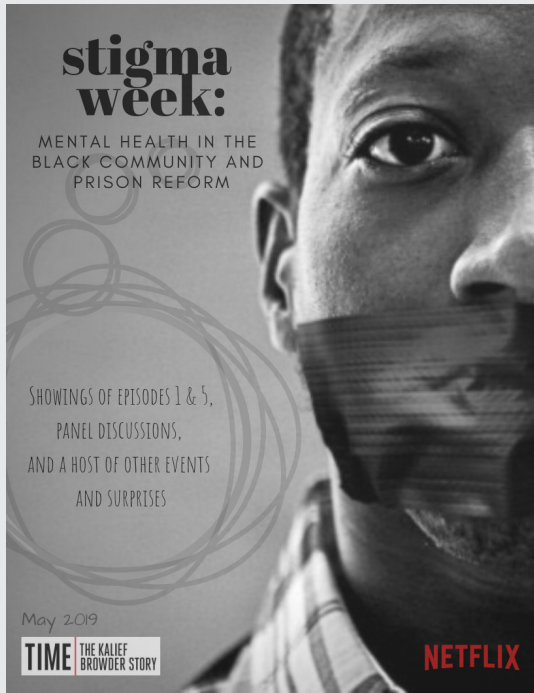


*This word cloud was developed by students using the course description.*



## Final Project:

Students completed a final project in which they designed a proposal for a social justice event in their communities around one or more issues involved in the story of Kalief Browder. These flyers were created by students T O'Neale; S. Shatto; O. Kerr; T. Gay.



Please visit [newhaven.edu/towyouth](http://newhaven.edu/towyouth) for more information about the Tow Youth Justice Institute. Please scan the image to read our other Issue Briefs and Quarterly Newsletters.



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