This course will examine juvenile delinquency and juvenile justice in historical, sociological, legal, policy, and cultural contexts during the past two centuries. It will focus mainly on the United States. The course will begin with the creation of the first juvenile reform schools in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston in the 1820s, and end with HBO’s “The Wire” (especially Season 4) to explore popular understandings and cultural representations of juvenile delinquency in recent years.

The course will examine delinquency and juvenile justice through four main analytic lenses:

1) shifts in policy initiatives to define, punish, and rehabilitate delinquents (both boys and girls);

2) sociological, psychological, legal, religious, and journalistic attempts, in different eras, to shape popular understanding of the causes, contours, and societal impact of delinquency;

3) the creation, design, and operations of several key institutions (we will focus particularly on the juvenile court) to prevent, correct, and punish delinquent behaviors; and

4) the cultural representation of delinquents, delinquency, and correctional institutions in different eras, especially as portrayed in film, television, and fiction between the 1920s and the present.

The course will be run as a colloquium, with students playing key leadership roles in launching, guiding, and sustaining class discussions. Evaluation will be based on:

a) several brief written assignments based on each week’s readings and films;

b) a 10-12 page research paper grounded (to greater or lesser degree, reflecting your disciplinary interests) in primary historical documents; and

c) your regular, analytically effective participation and leadership in class discussions.