

**Critical Perspectives on Youth Justice**  
Paper proposal for New Directions in Critical Criminology

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In this paper, I will interrogate the new normal of liberal juvenile justice reforms, which call an expansion of treatment interventions in the lives of youth, a greater dependence on risk assessment, and a rhetorical framing of youth as developmentally mature ‘non-criminals.’ I will argue that this new normal must not only be placed in historic context—as it is a direct descendant of the child savers’ paternalistic approach to young people—but also a *new and critically distinct* approach in which diversion becomes a mask for criminalization. In this context, young people are exposed to ‘services’ before being even convicted or adjudicated of a crime; they face an ever-expanding array of risk assessments intended to divert them from the system (but which result in an ever-greater number of youth of color remaining *in* the system), and advocates appeal to their relative under-development compared to the ‘real criminals’ in calling for systemic change. I will look at the case study of the national discourse about raising the age of criminal responsibility for youth as the site in which this dynamic gets set into motion.