



TRUE

BRYAN STEVENSON'S FIGHT FOR EQUALITY

JUSTICE

RESOURCE DISCUSSION GUIDE



CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

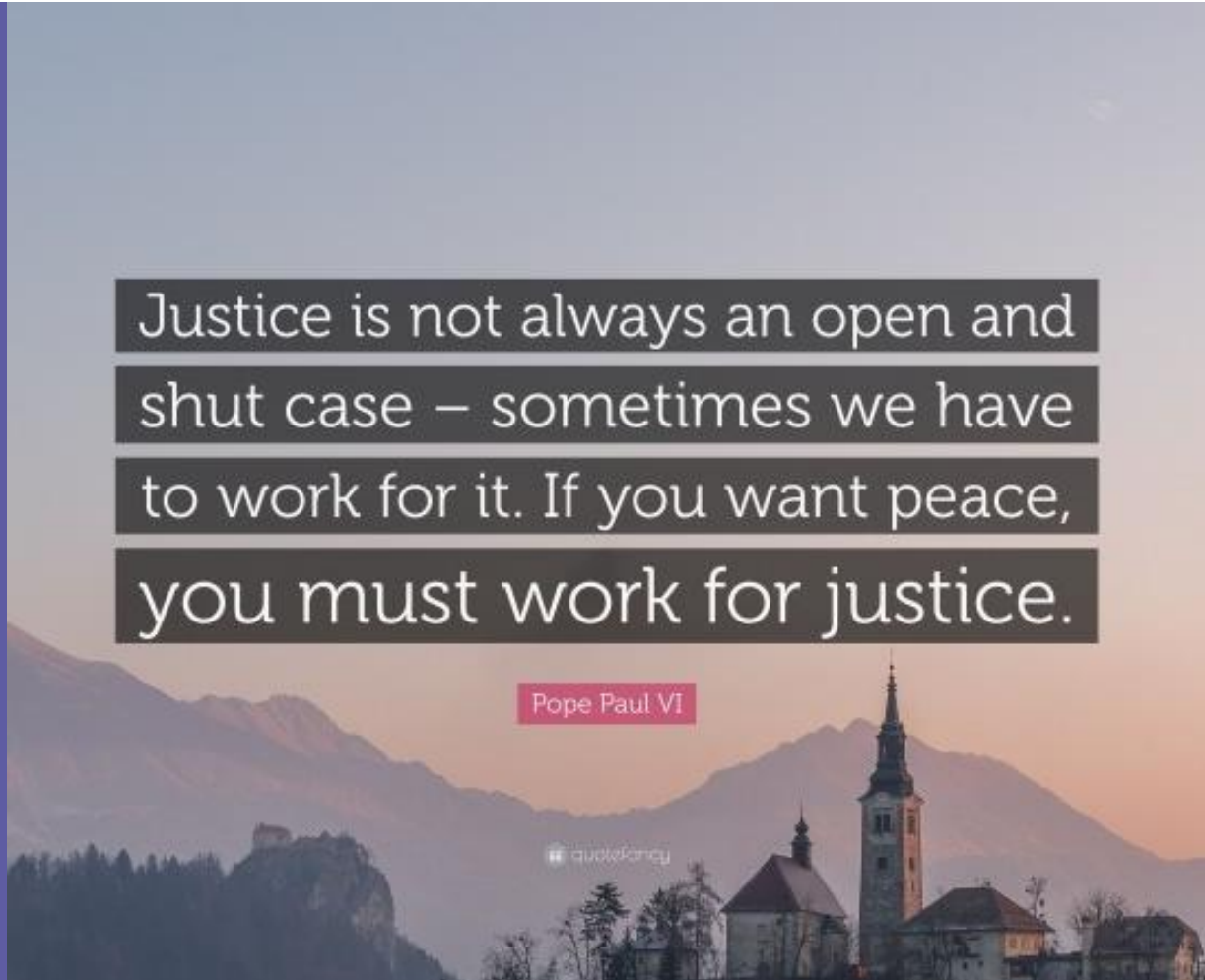
No Justice, No Peace...

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

“Oh you who believe, be upright for God, and be bearers of witness with justice!” [Quran, 5:8]

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than ourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. 1 Corinthians 12:26



Justice is not always an open and shut case – sometimes we have to work for it. If you want peace, you must work for justice.

Pope Paul VI

quotefancy

How to Use Resource Discussion Guide

The *True Justice: Bryan Stevenson's Fight for Equality* Resource Discussion Guide is more than just a tool to spark conversation about the film, it includes a broader context for understanding the evolution and racialized underpinnings of mass incarceration through a historical lens. The guide is presented in slide -format so facilitators and group leaders can choose which parts to reference and/or use in setting the stage for watching the documentary, and as hand-out material post-viewing/discussion.

The guide begins with some personal reflection questions and issues to consider prior to viewing the documentary, followed by more focused questions related to themes depicted in the film, and ends with a call to action along with additional resources for congregations and faith-based organizations to consult for information and further guidance.

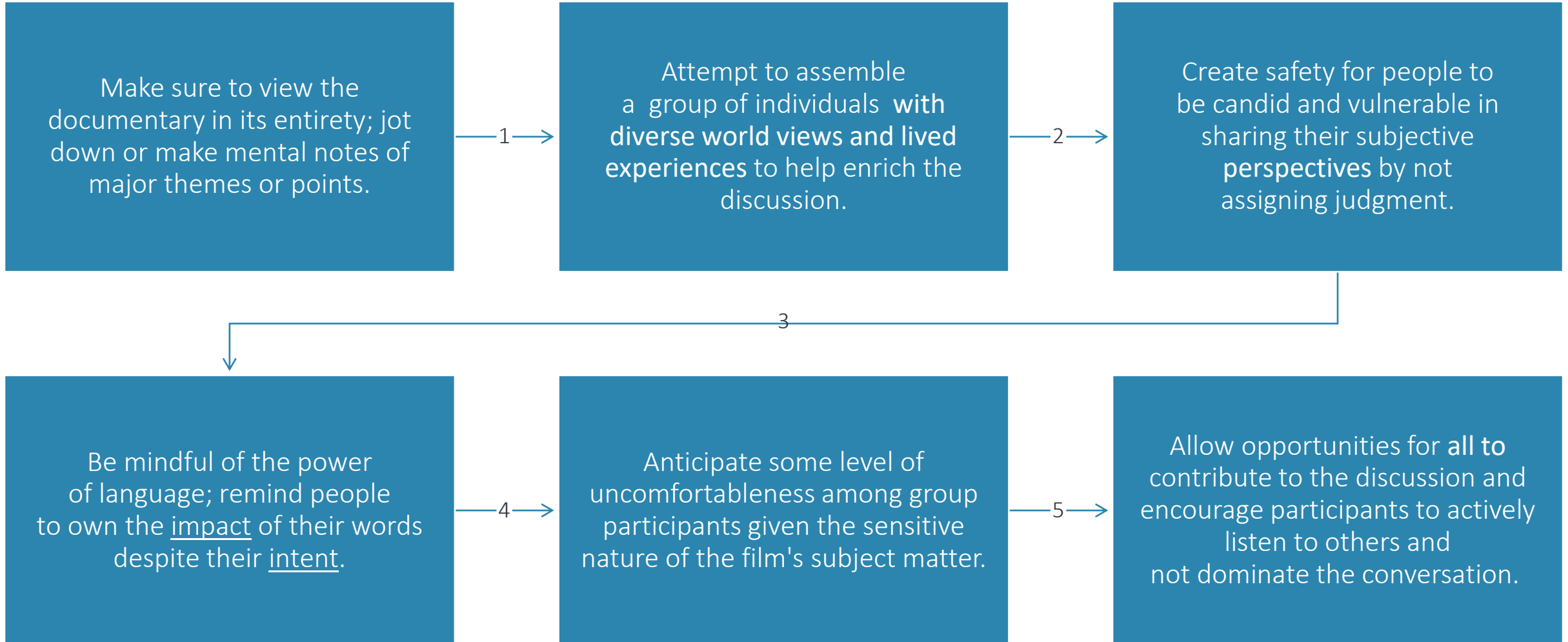
Because the guide encompasses facts and statistics about mass incarceration and the criminal justice system, the information included can be easily adapted for non-faith groups by simply modifying the discussion questions as appropriate.



“We don't like to talk about our history. And because of that, we really haven't understood what it's meant to do the things we've done historically... We have a hard time talking about race, and I believe it's because we are unwilling to commit ourselves to a process of truth and reconciliation.”

Bryan Stevenson

Facilitated Discussion Considerations





CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

Background

eji **Equal Justice
Initiative**

Introduction

The Faith & Action Project at Christian Theological Seminary (CTS) is pleased to provide the *True Justice: Bryan Stevenson's Fight for Equality* Discussion Guide to the Central Indiana community.

The guide was created to be a resource for faith groups to engage in meaningful dialogue about the *True Justice* film and explore ways to help address the issue of mass incarceration and its many detrimental effects on our society, particularly poor people.



About the Faith & Action Project...

Indianapolis is a leader in so many positive ways, except one very negative way: poverty. The city's general poverty rate and child poverty rate both exceed national rates by nearly a third.

Poverty in our community is likely to be even more exacerbated by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the correlated drain on the national and local economy. The high unemployment rate, especially for African-American young men is devastatingly high. Pervasive poverty creates a challenge for any city to thrive, so CTS Faith & Action Project is tackling this issue head on.

Launched in 2016, the Faith & Action Project at Christian Theological Seminary is dedicated to helping to spark a revolution of hope by bringing together faith communities, nonprofit organizations and leaders in business and government in a collaborative effort to turn back the tide of poverty.

The Faith & Action Advisory Board, comprised of a diverse group of community members, provides overall direction and guidance to the project and assists with planning and execution of its programs and activities.

Faith & Action is supported by the generosity of the Mike and Sue Smith Family Fund and Lumina Foundation. This Discussion Guide is made possible through the help of these CTS partners.



CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY Faith & Action Project

Guiding Values

At the Faith & Action Project, we believe:

- It's time for action, not only talk.
- It's time for solution-oriented thinking, not only identifying problems.
- Building on a community's existing assets can be more powerful than focusing on a community's unmet needs.
- The world's great religious traditions – including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, among others – each call on us to attend closely to the well-being of the impoverished and most vulnerable people.
- We need a new social movement in this regard, and communities of faith and conviction can and must play a galvanizing, sustaining role.
- Poverty has personal, social, and structural dimensions, and must be confronted accordingly. This includes candidly addressing how implicit and explicit racial and class-related biases distort our community life.
- Effective solutions will be rooted in evidence-based design and evaluation.
- Organizations who collaborate can increase impact, reduce redundancies, and make better use of finite resources.
- At every turn, our efforts must be as open and inclusive as possible.
- The most wise and effective solutions will intentionally consider the possibility of unintended harm; produce equitable opportunities and benefits; and include accessible avenues of participation, including at the design stage, for the solution's intended beneficiaries.

Faith & Actions Fall Event
Allows the community to hear national experts discuss the big issues. It highlights the challenges we face and inspires big ideas

Fall Event

Spring Conference

Faith & Actions Spring Event gives attendees the chance to share ideas and hear from area organizations that make a difference

Grant Program

Faith & Action's Grant Program makes resources available to initiatives and collaborations with innovative approaches to addressing poverty in Central Indiana

The Equal Justice Initiative was founded in 1989 by Bryan Stevenson, a widely acclaimed public interest lawyer and bestselling author of *Just Mercy*. EJI provides legal representation to people who have been illegally convicted, unfairly sentenced, or abused in state jails and prisons. EJI challenges the death penalty and excessive punishment and provides re-entry assistance to formerly incarcerated people.

EJI works with communities that have been marginalized by poverty and discouraged by unequal treatment. It is strongly committed to changing the narrative about race in America. EJI produces informational reports, award-winning programs, and short films that explore the nation's history of racial injustice. In 2018, EJI opened the Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration and the National Museum for Peace and Justice; as part of a national effort to create new spaces, markers, and memorials addressing the legacy of slavery, lynching, and racial segregation and their present-day effects.

EJI provides research and recommendations to assist advocates, elected officials and policymakers in advancing criminal justice reform. The organization's staff conducts educational tours and presentations for thousands of students, teachers, faith leaders, professional associations, community groups, and international visitors every year.





The Big Picture

Understanding the Historical Context

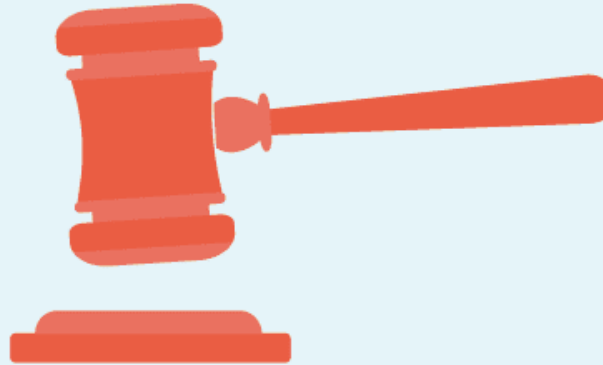


Law Enforcement



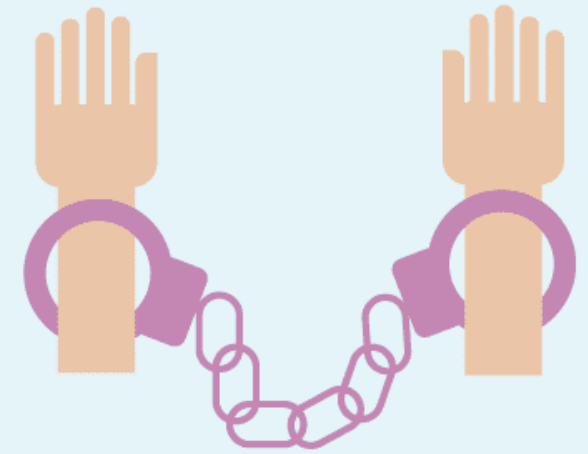
Police patrol communities to help prevent crimes, to investigate incidences of crime, and to arrest people suspected of committing crimes.

Courts System



The court system consists of attorneys, judges, and juries, as well as ancillary staff. The guilt or innocence of a suspect is determined in court.

Corrections System



The corrections system incorporates all forms of sentencing and punishment. It includes incarceration and probation.

U.S. Justice System Overview

Law Enforcement- Police, sheriffs, the FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) and Border Patrol exist to enforce the law. Law enforcement in the U.S. is largely split between federal and local law enforcement. Local law enforcement might consist of local police and state-specific organizations. Each of these organizations only has a mandate or jurisdiction to operate within its own state. Federal law enforcement has jurisdiction that extends across state lines and is made up of agencies with different mandates, such as the Department of Homeland Security, FBI, ATF, Customs and Border Protection, National Park Ranger Service, Veterans Affairs Police and the Postal Service.

Courts- The US court system is split along similar lines as law enforcement. Local state courts handle trials that involve matters such as family law, traffic violations, wills and estates, and most contracts and criminal cases. The federal courts head cases that deal with interpreting the U.S. Constitution bankruptcy, disputes between states and maritime disputes. The federal court system is further split into district courts, who determine most of the judgments; appeals courts, who are there to determine if the law was applied correctly by the district and state courts, and the Supreme Court, which is the highest court in the nation and has the final say on the constitutionality of all laws.

Corrections- Contrary to what many people many think, the correctional system does not just deal with prison and prisoners, in fact, the correctional system includes a variety of correctional facilities, such as jails, which are used to hold suspects awaiting trial; juvenile detention centers, which hold offenders under the age of 18 and prisons with various levels of security, which depends on the types of crimes offenders have committed. The correctional system is also responsible for programs that deal with the probation and rehabilitation of prisoners, allowing them to readjust to life after a prison sentence and reenter society at a functional level.



Historical Precedents to Modern-Day Policing

The origins of our modern-day police mentality can be traced back to the “Slave Patrol”. The earliest formal slave patrol was created in the Carolinas in the early 1700s, with the following mission: to establish a system of terror in response to slave uprisings with the capacity to pursue, apprehend, and return runaway slaves to their owners, including the use of excessive force to control and produce desired slave behavior. Slave Patrols allowed forcible entry into any home solely based on suspicions of protecting runaway slaves. Slave Patrols continued until the end of the Civil War and the passage of the 13th Amendment.

Following the Civil War, during the Reconstruction Period, slave patrols were replaced by militia-style groups who were empowered to control and deny access to equal rights to freed slaves that looked to join the workforce and integrate with society. Their work included the enforcement of Black Codes, strict local and state laws that regulated and restricted access to labor, wages, voting rights, and general freedoms for formerly enslaved people.

In 1868, ratification of the 14th Amendment technically granted equal protections by laws of Constitutional rights to African Americans – essentially meant to abolish Black Codes. Shortly after the abolishment of Black Codes, Jim Crow Laws, and state and local statutes that legalized racial segregation were enacted. Jim Crow laws looked to vanquish all protected rights of African Americans. By the 1900s, local municipalities began to construct police departments to enforce local laws in areas of the East Coast and Mid-West, including Jim Crow Laws. Local municipalities leaned on police to enforce and exert excessive brutality on African Americans who violated any Jim Crow law. Jim Crow Laws continued through the end of the 1960s. (Source: NAACP)

Police-Community Relations



- Law enforcement officials are responsible for the investigation of a crime and to gather evidence to identify and use against the presumed perpetrator. The presumption upon which they are supposed to operate is that individuals are suspects and innocent until proven guilty.
- As of 2018, there are 686,665 full-time employed law enforcement officials across the United States.
- The Fourth Amendment prohibits unreasonable searches and seizures and is the foundation for the protections included in *Miranda Rights*: “*You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be held against you in the court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you.*”
- A Black person is five times more likely to be stopped without just cause than a white person.
- A Black man is twice as likely to be stopped without just cause than a Black woman.
- 65% of Black adults have felt targeted because of their race. Similarly, approximately 35% of Latino and Asian adults have felt targeted because of race.

There is an obvious disparity in how the general public view fatal encounters between police and Black people. 66% said these encounters were isolated incidents.

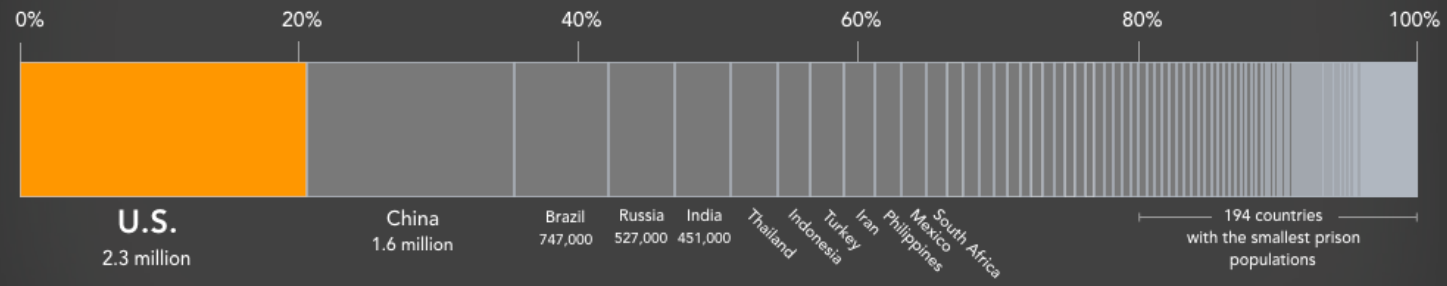
- 84% of Black adults say white people are treated better than black people by police; 63% of white adults agree based on 2019 research on police relations.
- 87% of Black adults say the U.S. criminal justice system is more unjust towards Black people; 61% of white adults agree.
- Despite more white people have been killed by police, Black and Hispanic people are disproportionately impacted. While white people make up a little over 60% of the population, they only make up about 41% of fatal police shootings. Black people make up 13.4% of the population but make up 22% of fatal police shootings. This does not take into consideration other forms of police brutality, including non-lethal shootings.

Facts & Figures

The U.S. constitutes less than 5% of the world's population, while it has nearly 25% of the persons incarcerated, globally.

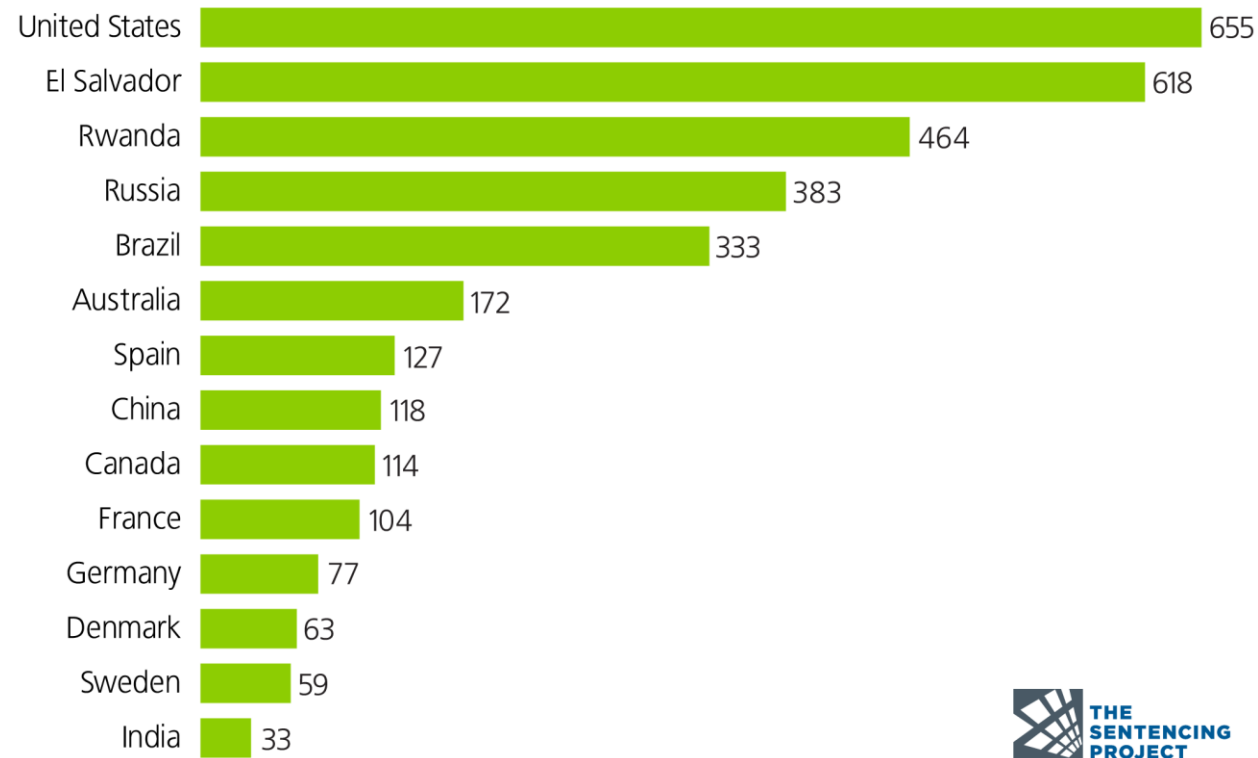
1 OUT OF 5 PRISONERS IN THE WORLD IS INCARCERATED IN THE U.S.

Eleven million people around the world are in prisons and jails. The U.S. locks up a larger share of these people than any other country, with as many prisoners as the 194 countries with the smallest incarcerated populations combined.



Sources: U.S. incarcerated population from Prison Policy Initiative, *Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2019*, and all other data from Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research, *World Prison Brief* downloaded January 2020.

International Rates of Incarceration per 100,000

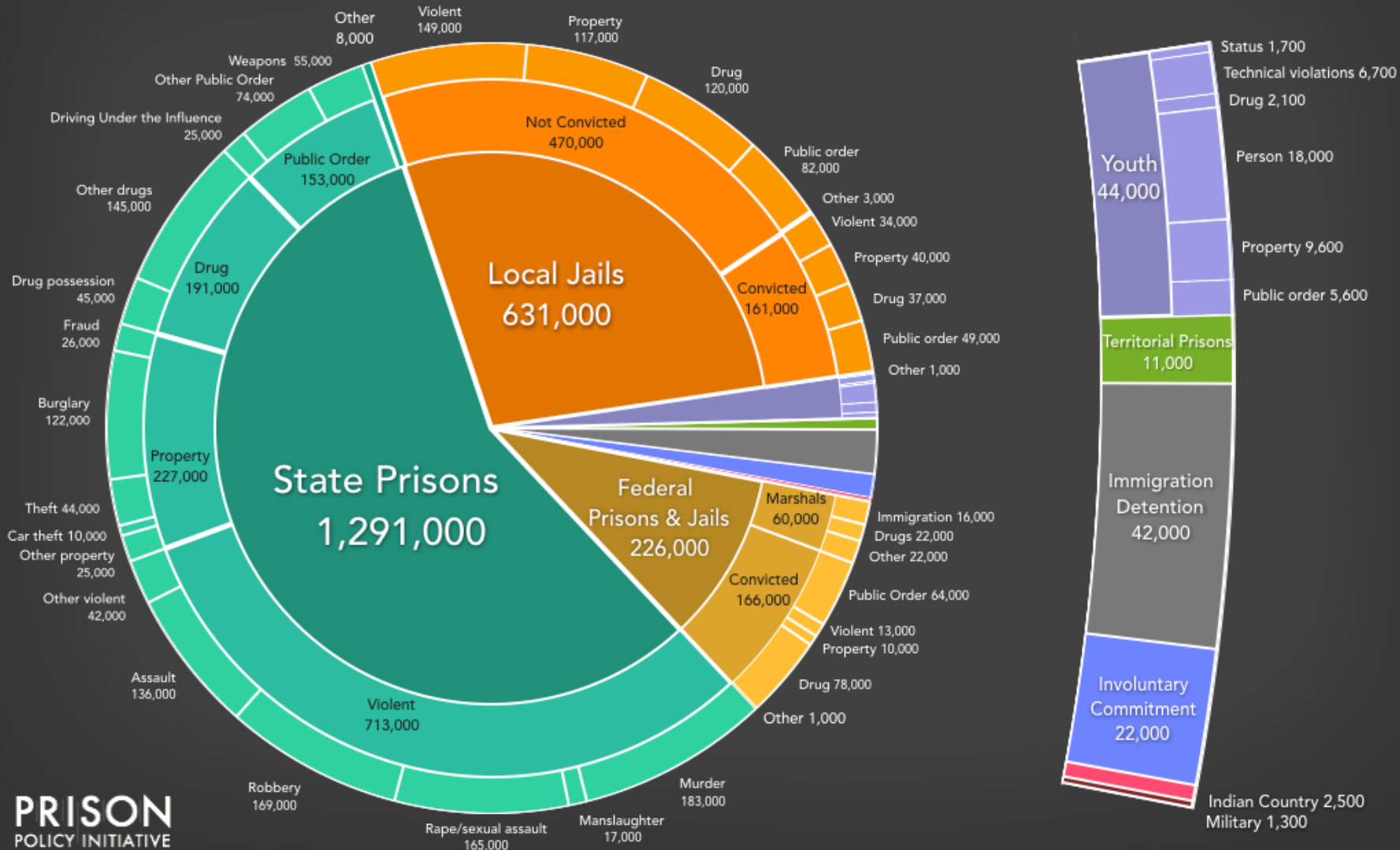


U.S Comparisons

The United States not only incarcerates more people per population internationally, but also far exceeds all other NATO countries.

How many people are locked up in the United States?

The U.S. locks up more people per capita than any other nation, at the staggering rate of 698 per 100,000 residents. But to end mass incarceration, we must first consider *where* and *why* 2.3 million people are confined nationwide.

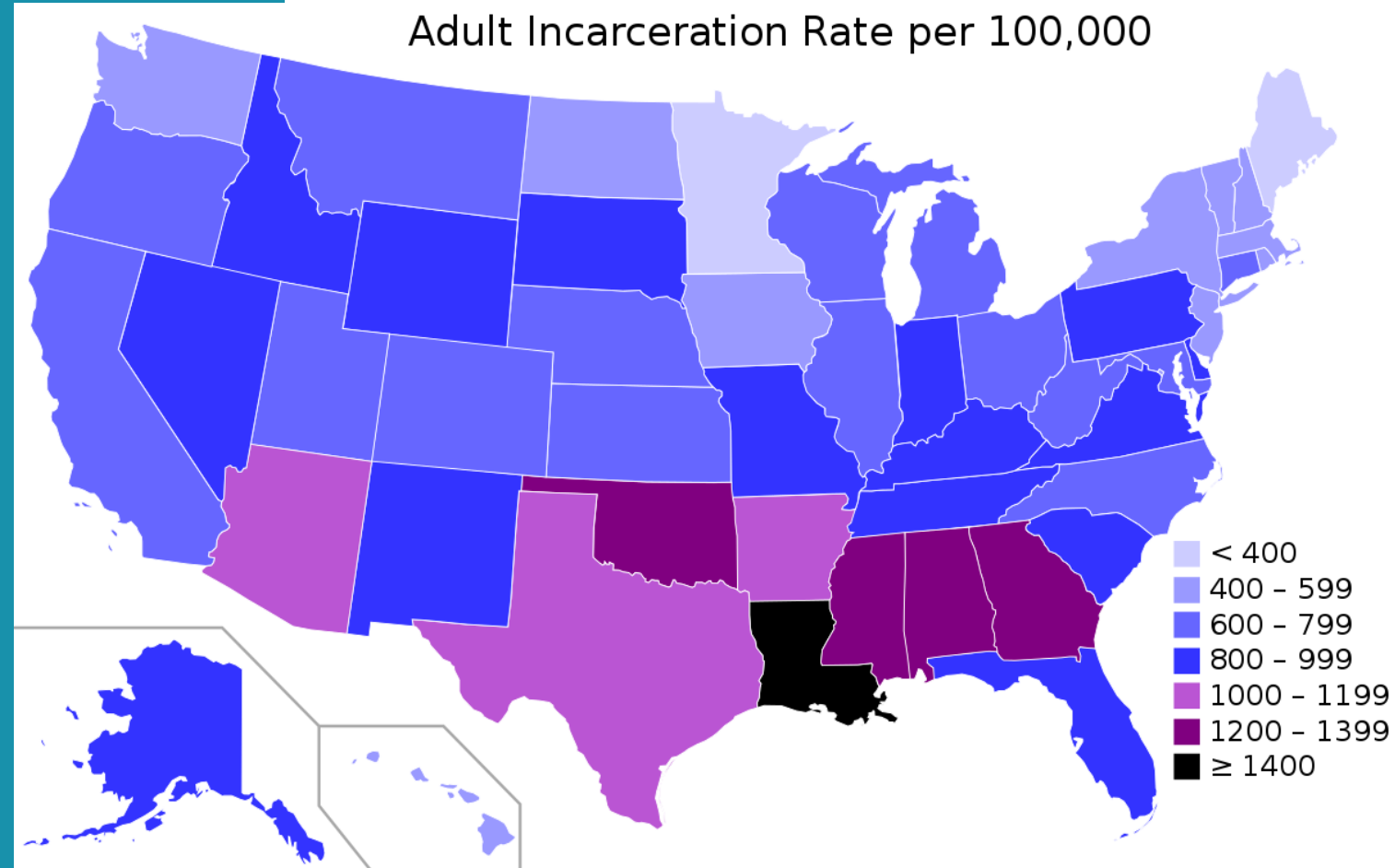


PRISON
POLICY INITIATIVE

Sources and data notes: See <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2020.html>

State Incarceration Rates

Indiana's incarceration rates per population are higher than neighboring states: Ohio, Illinois, and Michigan (the highest rates are in southern regions.)



How did we get here?

- Exorbitant Bail – Nearly 500,000 people sit in prison at any given time, waiting for trial because they cannot afford to pay bail and be released to await trial. Research shows that people awaiting trial who are not in jail are less likely to be convicted and less likely to be imprisoned if they are convicted.
- Mandatory Minimum Sentencing – Laws that dictate minimum sentencing strip judges of the ability to account for individual circumstances.
- Three Strikes Laws – These laws mandate a sentence of 25 years to life after conviction for a third felony.
- “Truth” in Sentencing Laws – These laws mandate that people convicted of crimes must serve most of their sentences before becoming eligible for parole.
- The War on Drugs – It’s been explicitly documented that policymakers understood the war on drugs would disproportionately affect people of color. Today, nearly 50 percent of incarcerated people in the federal system are in prison for drug offenses, and two-thirds of that population are people of color.
- Harsh Punishment for Non-Violent Crimes Resulting in Increased Plea Bargaining – As mandatory minimums became more commonplace, more and more people charged with crimes increasingly opt to plea to lesser charges that still include imprisonment, even when they are innocent, rather than face incredibly harsh punishments if they’re convicted at trial.
- Problematic probation and parole – Strict rules regarding probation and parole cause many people to be sent back to prison for minor violations. Nearly 25 percent of state prison admissions are due to probation violations.
- Lack of Mental Health Services – A huge proportion of incarcerated people face mental health issues, approximately 1.2 million, according to Mental Health America. Prison guards, lacking training in responding to mental health crises, resort to use of force and solitary confinement – both known to aggravate mental health issues.
- Longer sentences and more life sentences – One in nine people currently incarcerated are serving a life sentence, with a third of those serving life without parole.
- Private prisons and profit motive – Private prisons and a vast number of private vendors are financially incentivized to maintain mass incarceration.

Source: Fair Fight Initiative



Bryan Stevenson

Man on a Mission



About the Documentary...

In the last half-century, America has become the nation with the highest rate of incarceration in the world, authorized the execution of hundreds of condemned prisoners and continued to struggle to recover from a long history of racial injustice.

For more than three decades, Alabama public interest attorney Bryan Stevenson, founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, has advocated on behalf of the poor, the incarcerated and the condemned, seeking to eradicate racial discrimination in the criminal justice system. An intimate portrait of this remarkable man, *True Justice: Bryan Stevenson's Fight for Equality* follows his struggle to create greater fairness in the system and shows how racial injustice emerged, evolved and continues to threaten the country, challenging viewers to confront it.

Six-time Emmy-winner Peter Kunhardt (HBO's Emmy-winning *Jim: The James Foley Story*) executive produces and directs; Emmy-winners Teddy Kunhardt and George Kunhardt produce and direct.

Told primarily in his own words, *True Justice* shares Bryan Stevenson's experience with a criminal justice system that, he asserts, "treats you better if you're rich and guilty than if you're poor and innocent." The burden of facing this system is explored in candid interviews with associates, close family members and clients.

This feature documentary focuses on Stevenson's life and career – particularly his indictment of the U.S. criminal justice system for its role in codifying modern systemic racism – and tracks the intertwined histories of slavery, lynching, segregation and mass incarceration. Highlighting watershed moments involving cases and clients, *True Justice* offers a rare glimpse into the human struggle that is required when the poor and people of color are wrongly condemned or unfairly sentenced and explores the personal toll it has taken on Stevenson and his colleagues.

The film chronicles Stevenson's work in Alabama, birthplace of the civil rights movement and home to the Equal Justice Initiative, as well as the early influences that drove him to become an advocate for the poor and the incarcerated. As a young lawyer in the 1980s, he witnessed firsthand how courts unfairly applied the death penalty based on race and how the Supreme Court ultimately declared that racial bias in the administration of the death penalty was "inevitable."

Tracing the trajectory of the Court since the 1857 Dred Scott decision, which ruled that African Americans are not citizens of the U.S., *True Justice* shows how the Court has long sanctioned inequality, oppression and violence. Illuminating the power of memory in cultural change, the film instills hope of a brighter American future through the insights of his journey.





Pre-Screening

Begin with Rhetorical Questions



Glossary of Terms

Classism- The institutional, cultural, and individual set of practices and beliefs that assign differential value to people according to their socioeconomic status. Classism also refers to the systematic oppression of poor and working-class people by those who control resources.

Dominant Group- Not necessarily the majority, but the group within a society with the power, privilege, and social status to control and define societal resources and social, political, and economic systems and norms.

Equity- The effort to provide different levels of support based on an individual's or group's needs in order to achieve fairness in outcomes. Working to achieve equity acknowledges unequal starting places and the need to correct the imbalance.

Implicit Bias- A belief or attitude that affects our understanding, decision, and actions, and that exists without our conscious awareness.

Institutional/Systemic Racism- The practices that perpetuate racial disparities, uphold White supremacy, and serve to the detriment and harm of persons of color and keep them in negative cycles. Institutional/systemic racism also refers to policies that generate different outcomes for persons of different race. These laws, policies, and practices are not necessarily explicit in mentioning any racial group, but work to create advantages for White persons and disadvantages for people of color.

Marginalization- The process that occurs when members of a dominant group relegate a particular group to the edge of society by not allowing them an active voice, identity, or place for the purpose of maintaining power.

Prejudice- A preconceived opinion or assumption about something or someone rooted in stereotypes, rather than reason or fact, leading to unfavorable bias or hostility toward another person or group of people. Literally a "pre-judgement."

Race- A social and political construction—with no inherent genetic or biological basis—used by social institutions to arbitrarily categorize and divide groups of individuals based on physical appearance (particularly skin color), ancestry, cultural history, and ethnic classification. The concept has been, and still is, used to justify the domination, exploitation, and violence against people who are racialized as non-White

Racial Justice- The proactive process of reinforcing and establishing a set of policies, practices, attitudes, and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts, and outcomes for all individuals and groups impacted by racism. The goal, however, is not only the eradication of racism, but also the presence of deliberate social systems and structures that sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures.

White Fragility- A range of defensive (and centering) emotions and behaviors that White people exhibit when confronted with uncomfortable truths about race. This may include outward displays of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate White racial equilibrium.

White Supremacy- An institutionally perpetuated and ever-evolving system of exploitation and domination that consolidates and maintains power and resources among White people. This system promotes the ideology of Whiteness as the standard and the belief that White people are superior to other races.

Secondary Source: Center for the Study of Social Policy

Ask yourself...

- How much do I know about mass incarceration and what it even is?
- What are my personal beliefs about why people are poor?
- What stereotypes and biases do I harbor about people who are or were formerly incarcerated?
- How have I personally, or as a part of my faith group or organization, been complicit in racial injustice?
- What are my feelings about the current state of the criminal justice system?



Discussion Questions

The guide is intended to help groups focus their discussions through these four primary domains related to central themes depicted in the documentary.

1. The creation and evolution of race in America and the pervasive nature of systemic and institutional racism.
2. The economic and social costs of mass incarceration and its effects on poor and marginalized people.
3. The correlations between the criminal justice system and disparities in education and employment outcomes.
4. The opportunity to be a part of the solution by acknowledging the past and demanding a fairer justice system.



Discussion Topics



Race and Systemic Racism

Economics and Poverty

Education and Employment

Truth and Reconciliation

Race and Systemic Racism

It has been often said America's original sin is *racism*. The idea of race is a relatively new phenomenon in the course of human history. Whereas early civilizations made social distinctions, recorded accounts strongly suggest these lines were primarily drawn along **language, religion, geography, and economic status**. Categorizing people according to skin color began soon after Europeans pillaged land inhabited by Indigenous peoples and sought to justify the enslavement of Africans during America's colonial period. Race is socially constructed and has no genetic or scientific basis.

Systemic racism is both a theoretical concept and a reality. As a theory, it is premised on the research-supported claim that the United States was founded as a racist society, that racism is thus embedded in all social institutions, structures, and social relations within our society. Rooted in a racist foundation, systemic racism today is composed of intersecting, overlapping, and codependent racist institutions, policies, practices, ideas, and behaviors that give an unjust portion of resources, rights, and power to white people while denying the same to people of color. This notion has given rise to a pervasive white supremacy culture in America (Golash-Boza, 2017).

White supremacy is a term used to characterize various belief systems central to which are one or more of the following key tenets: 1) whites should have dominance over people of other backgrounds, especially where they may co-exist; 2) whites should live by themselves in a whites-only society; 3) white people have their own "culture" that is superior to other cultures; 4) white people are genetically superior to other people. Most white supremacists today further believe that the white race is in danger of extinction due to a rising "flood" of non-whites, who are controlled and manipulated by Jews, and that imminent action is need to "save" the white race. (Anti-Defamation League)

Blacks make up 13% of the U.S. population, yet comprise 40% of the prison population. If an African American and a white person each commit a crime, the Black person has a better chance of being arrested. It's also true that, once arrested, Black people are convicted more often than white people. And for many years, laws assigned much harsher for using or possessing crack, for example, compared to cocaine. Finally, when Black people are convicted, they are about 20% more likely to be sentenced to jail time, and typically see sentences 20% longer than those for whites who were convicted of similar crimes. Unfortunately, a felony conviction means, in many states, that you lose your right to vote. Currently in America, almost 7.5% of the adult African American population is disenfranchised (compared to 1.8% of the non-African American population). According to EJI, American history begins with the creation of a myth to absolve white settlers of the genocide of Native Americans: the false belief that nonwhite people are less human than white people. This belief in racial hierarchy survived slavery's abolition, fueled racial terror lynching, demanded legally codified segregation, and spawned our mass incarceration crisis.



Race & Systemic Racism

Stevenson refers to what Europeans did to Native/Indigenous Peoples as to why America is still today a "post-genocide" society, what does he mean and what are the social implications?

Some say electing an African American president shows America is in a post-racial era, do you agree, why or why not?

What were the five (5) reasons Mr. Anthony Hinton was told by police that he would most likely be convicted of a crime he did not commit?

Oftentimes lynchings were witnessed by white children, what impact might such an experience have on their psyche and racial identity?

How and why did white supremacy begin and what are present-day manifestations of white supremacy culture in faith and religious institutions?

Economics and Poverty

Prisons are Big Business. The prison privatization boom began in the 1980s, under the governments of Ronald Reagan and Bush Sr., but reached its height in 1990 under William Clinton when Wall Street stocks were soaring. Clinton's program for cutting the federal workforce resulted in the Justice Department's contracting of private prison corporations for the incarceration of undocumented workers and high-security inmates. Private prisons are the biggest business in the prison industry complex. About 18 corporations guard 10,000 prisoners in 27 states. The two largest are Correctional Corporation of America (CCA) and Wackenhut, which together control 75%.

Private prisons receive a guaranteed amount of money for each prisoner, independent of what it costs to maintain each one. The Brookings Institution found that only 49 percent of incarcerated men were employed in the three years prior to incarceration and their median annual earnings were \$6,250; just 13 percent earned more than \$15,000. Further findings in the Brookings study reveal a pattern: These individuals are not just more likely to be poor and unemployed, but they were also more likely to grow up in poverty and in neighborhoods with high unemployment. The likelihood that a boy from a family in the bottom 10 percent of the income distribution will end up in prison in his thirties is 20 times greater than that of a boy from a family in the top 10 percent. Individuals are also nearly twice as likely to be imprisoned if they grow up in single-parent homes, even after accounting for differences in income. Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to have developmental issues, which inhibit impulse control, cause low self-esteem, and reduce educational achievements, each of which may contribute to the likelihood of committing a crime.

Poverty and drug use perpetuate each other and often inhibit escape from the cycles of addiction and poverty; substance abuse may result from poverty as a person uses drugs or alcohol to cope with their financial stresses, and alternatively, poverty can be a result of chronic and expensive drug abuse that leads to overwhelming debt. In 2016, drug and alcohol use cost an estimated \$1.45 trillion, including \$578 billion in economic loss and \$874 billion in societal harm from reduced quality of life. And each year, we lose \$87 billion in GDP due to mass incarceration.

According to data from the National Household Survey of Drug Abuse (NHSDA) and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, drug use is associated with greater poverty because of its effects on education level, human capital investments, and family composition. Drug use, particularly chronic drug use, lowers productivity, reduces earnings, adversely affects educational attainment, and ultimately increases the likelihood of poverty. Ninety-seven percent of 125,000 federal inmates have been convicted of non-violent crimes. It is believed that more than half of the 623,000 inmates in municipal or county jails are innocent of the crimes they are accused of. Of these, the majority are awaiting trial. Two-thirds of the one million state prisoners have committed non-violent offenses. Sixteen percent of the country's 2 million prisoners suffer from mental illness.



Economics & Poverty

What does the film say about why mass incarceration is profitable or financially beneficial to certain people or companies?

How does the federal government benefit from large prison populations, and does this have any burden to taxpayers?

What can faith-based organizations do to provide support for formerly incarcerated people to help prevent them from returning to jail/prison?

By 2045 non-whites will be a numeric majority in America, what implications does this have for the justice system and public policy?

Why do most anti-poverty programs fail, and what can be done differently to get better outcomes?

Education and Employment

There are several reasons that inmates are less likely to have been educated, but a primary factor may be found in the fact that prisoners have a disproportionately high rate of learning disabilities. Among those who had not completed high school or the GED in the national study, 59 percent had a speech disability, and 69 percent had a learning disability. Using prisons to deal with poverty and mental illness makes these problems worse. People leave overcrowded and violent jails and prisons more traumatized, mentally ill, and physically battered than they went in (Equal Justice Institute).

Another huge issue is the social and economic inequality that contributes to fewer quality educational opportunities being available to prisoners, pre-incarceration. According to a Prison Policy study, before they went to prison, incarcerated citizens had a median annual income over 40 percent less than the median income for non-incarcerated people in their age group. Living in a poor area often means access to lower-quality schooling. The U.S. Department of Education reports that over 40 percent of low-income schools don't get a fair share of state and national educational funding, meaning that they get less money to spend on supplies, infrastructure and teachers.

After leaving school, the chances of incarceration increase drastically, and there are many reasons for this. Primarily, it can be challenging to find a steady job after dropping out of school. Due to the lack of job experience and the lack of academic skills, over half of high-school dropouts are unemployed. Since the average yearly earnings of high school dropouts is just over half of the earnings of high school graduates, leaving school can either put people into poverty or perpetuate the poverty in which they were already living. From here, the profiling and criminalization of homelessness and poverty cement the relationship between poverty and imprisonment. The result of these factors is that high school dropouts are 47 times more likely to be incarcerated than similarly aged peers with a four-year college degree (Institute for Policy Studies).

Following the cycle from poverty to lower-quality education to incarceration, people from certain communities of color are disproportionately impacted at every step of the way. First, certain communities of color are significantly more likely to live in poorer areas. Studies have tracked neighborhoods by ethnicity and found that white and Asian neighborhoods have a much higher median income than other races. And the median wealth of white neighborhoods was 13 times the median wealth of Black neighborhoods as recently as 2013. Since Black and Brown people are more likely to live in low-income areas and low-income areas tend to have lower-quality education, this means that access to education is highly racialized. Additionally, students of color are more likely to be held back, drop out or be suspended or expelled, all of which push students out of the school system. (Source: Caitlin Curley, 2016)

Education & Employment

“The land of opportunity--people who work hard and get a good education can live the American dream”, is it that simple?

How is the American education system contributing to the mass incarceration problem and what needs to change in school discipline practices?

Given the inherent racial inequities in convictions and sentencing, particularly affecting young Black men, should capital punishment be abolished?

More than 4.5 million Americans can't vote because of a past conviction, how does this disenfranchisement in the political process threaten democracy?

Stevenson says more grace is granted to the rich and guilty than the poor and innocent in our criminal justice system, how does this get fixed?



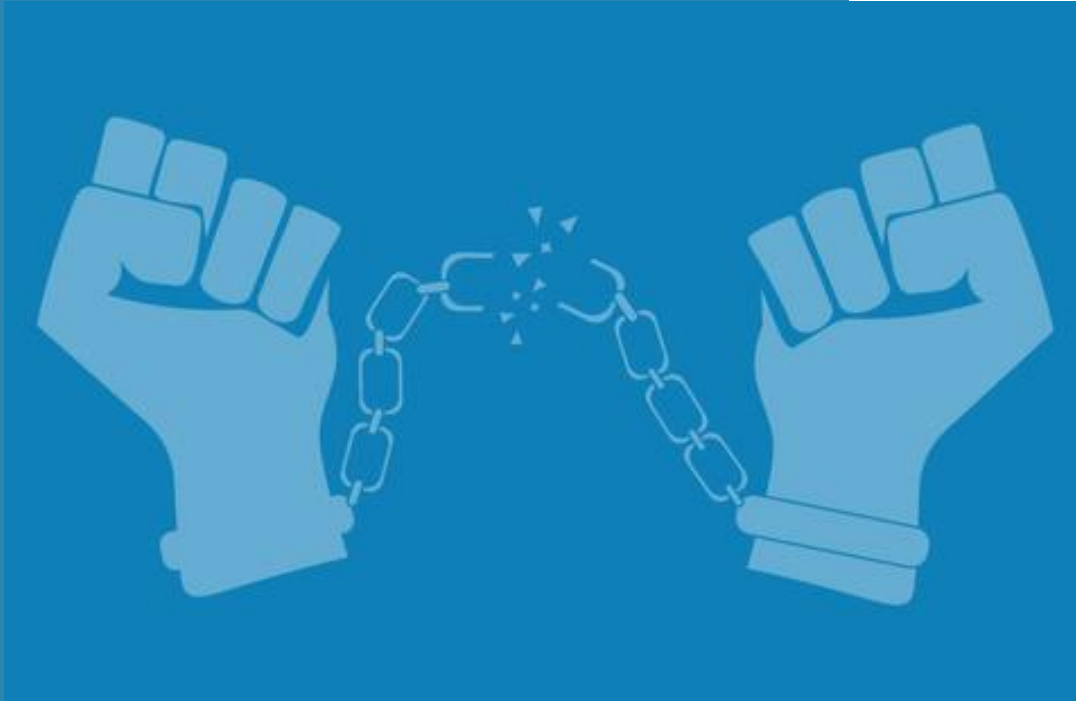
Truth and Reconciliation

When enslaved people became Christian, it challenged the justification for slavery, which was religious difference, i.e., it was considered legal to enslave “heathens” but not to enslave Christians. When enslaved Christians met for worship, White colonists feared they were plotting slave rebellion. A 1709 law clarified that a “white” person could have “no extract” from “a Negro,” thereby establishing the “one-drop rule” as the definition of whiteness and laying a new foundation for slavery and social oppression that made race seem like a natural category—innate. Thus, the codification of whiteness as a legal category was specifically intended to exclude free Black Christians from the full rights of citizenship. It becomes assumed that race is a biological reality when it is really a political category. Slaveholding politicians actively created the category of “whiteness” as a political strategy to protect slave ownership and restrict the voting rights of free Blacks. Whiteness, rather than religious difference, became the new way to justify and enforce slavery.

Protestant supremacy became the forerunner to white supremacy. English slave owners thought of Christianity—and especially Protestantism—as a religion for free people, and they worried that a baptized slave would demand freedom and possibly rebel. As a result, they excluded most enslaved people from Protestant churches. Colonists didn’t call themselves “White”; they called themselves “Christians.” Protestant slave owners constructed a caste system based on Christian status, in which “heathen” slaves were afforded no rights or privileges while Catholics, Jews, and nonconforming Protestants were viewed with suspicion and distrust but granted more protections (Smedley). Founded in 1865, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) extended into almost every southern state by 1870 and became a vehicle for white southern resistance to the Republican Party’s Reconstruction-era policies aimed at establishing political and economic equality for Black Americans. Its members waged an underground campaign of intimidation and violence directed at white and Black Republican leaders. Though Congress passed legislation designed to curb Klan terrorism, the organization saw its primary goal—the reestablishment of white supremacy—fulfilled through Democratic victories in state legislatures across the South in the 1870s.

The 1920s saw a revival of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) nationally, but especially in Indiana where David Curtis “D.C.” Stephenson was Grand Dragon of infamous influence. Stephenson originally settled in Evansville, where he was successful at recruiting thousands of KKK members. He then moved to Indianapolis, living in a mansion in Irvington. Stephenson spread the Klan’s anti-Catholic message through its newspaper and accused Catholics of being behind secret plots to overthrow the government and exterminate Protestants. Jews were also criticized and, to a lesser extent, Blacks. Stephenson was so successful that, between July 1922 and July 1923, almost 2,000 new members were added each week. Membership grew to 250,000, or about one-third of all white males in the state, the largest membership in the country. In 1923, he severed his ties with the national organization, which had supported Democrats, and threw his support to the Republicans who then controlled Indiana’s government. Republican politicians joined the Klan because they learned that Klan endorsement was necessary to win office. By 1925, over half of the members of the Indiana General Assembly, the governor of Indiana, and most other high-ranking officials in local and state government were KKK members (Madison, 2015).

After a period of decline, white Protestant nativist groups revived the Klan in the early 20th century, burning crosses and staging rallies, parades and marches denouncing immigrants, Catholics, Jews, African Americans and organized labor. The civil rights movement of the 1960s also saw a surge of Ku Klux Klan activity, including bombings of Black schools and churches and violence against Black and white activists in the South. Members of white supremacy groups and/or share white supremacy ideology today are overwhelmingly comprised of individuals who also self-identify as Christian and/or Christian-Evangelical.



Truth & Reconciliation

Why can't we agree on America's history and how has the dominant historical narrative glorified certain groups and devalued other ones?

What does the fundamentals of your faith teach about justice and how to respond to marginalized and vulnerable people?

U.S. congregations have become more racially and ethnically diverse than ever, is this a trend, or would you say, by and large, they remain racially segregated?

Stevenson talks about those who have oppressed not ever offering an apology, how can your organization be about racial healing for past societal misdeeds?

What can be learned from South Africa's Truth & Reconciliation Commission and similar efforts occurring in some U.S. communities to help spur a nationwide movement?



Post-Screening

Immediate Reactions to Film



Now you have viewed the film...

What was new learning or opened my eyes to something I had never considered?

What emotions or feelings did the film evoke in me?

What, if anything, made me especially uncomfortable or feel guilty or angry?

How were my preconceived notions about the justice system change or affirmed after viewing the film?

What actions am I willing to take, or behaviors am I committed to changing after watching the documentary?



Taking Action

“If we continue to tell ourselves the popular myths about racial progress or, worse yet, if we say to ourselves that the problem of mass incarceration is just too big, too daunting for us to do anything about and that we should instead direct our energies to battles that might be more easily won, history will judge us harshly. A human rights nightmare is occurring on our watch”.

-Michelle Alexander



Local Programs to Support

- **Faith in Indiana**, <https://faithinindiana.org/> Faith in Indiana is a vehicle for faith communities and people of good will to work together for racial and economic equity. The organization believes treatment and support for those who need it helps prevent incarceration.
- **PACE**, <https://www.paceindy.org/> PACE's mission is to provide a variety of services to incarcerated and previously incarcerated individuals and their families to lead productive and responsible lives in their community. PACE Indy believes everyone deserves a second chance.
- **RecycleForce**, <https://recycleforce.org/> , RecycleForce is committed to reducing crime through employment and job training, while improving the environment through electronics recycling. Since 2006, RecycleForce has safely recycled more than 65 million pounds of electronic waste while providing job training to thousands of returning citizens.
- **Use What You've Got Ministries**, <https://www.usewhatyouvegotministry.org/> By providing transportation, Use What You've Got Prison Ministry affords these families the ability to maintain crucial connections during the incarceration of their loved ones. To propel the fragile family unit from a state of hopelessness to optimism is the ultimate goal.
- **You Yes You**, <https://youyesyouproject.com/> You Yes You's mission is to help build relationships between incarcerated fathers and their children. The goal is to help children reach their full potential by having their fathers deeply involved in their lives.

Criminal Justice Reform Strategies - *Sentencing Project*

1

Eliminating mandatory minimum sentences and cutting back on excessively lengthy sentences; for example, by imposing a 20-year maximum on prison terms.

2

Shifting resources to community-based prevention and treatment for substance abuse and mental illness.

3

Investing in interventions to that promote strong youth development and respond to delinquency in age-appropriate and evidence-based ways.

4

Examining and addressing the policies and practices, conscious or not, **contributing** to racial inequity at every stage of the justice system.

5

Removing barriers that make it harder for individuals with criminal records to turn their lives around.

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