

# FILM DISCUSSION GUIDE

FROM SLAVE TO CRIMINAL WITH ONE AMENDMENT



# 13<sup>TH</sup>

Created for Youth Specialties  
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\*Modified from Discussion guide created by Amy Williams for Youth Specialties:

[https://scho.schd.ws/hosted\\_files/nywcmemphis2017/7e/13th%20Film%20Discussion%20Guide\\_By%20Amy%20Williams.pdf](https://scho.schd.ws/hosted_files/nywcmemphis2017/7e/13th%20Film%20Discussion%20Guide_By%20Amy%20Williams.pdf)

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude,



except as a punishment for crime  
whereof the party shall have been duly convicted



shall exist within the United States,  
or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the US Constitution

# ABOUT THE 13TH



## FILM DETAILS

**DIRECTOR:** Ava DuVernay  
**RELEASED:** Oct 7, 2016  
**LENGTH:** 1 hour 40 minutes  
**FEATURED:** Michelle Alexander, Angela Davis, Bryan Stevenson, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Jelani Cobb, Van Jones, Malkia Cyril, James Kilgore



### FILM SUMMARY:

Chronicle the history of racial inequality in the United States, the *13th* examines how our country has produced the highest rate of incarceration in the world, with the majority of those imprisoned being African-American. The title of DuVernay's extraordinary and galvanizing film refers to the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. The progression from that second qualifying clause to the horrors of mass incarceration and the prison industry in the U.S. is laid out by DuVernay with bracing lucidity. DuVernay argues that a prison-industrial complex which statistically imprisons black men disproportionately and allows for their disciplinary servitude, has taken advantage of America's black population and brings into question if this system ultimately acts as a form of modern day slavery.

"This film was made as an answer to my own questions about how and why we have become the most incarcerated nation in the world, how and why we regard some of our citizens as innately criminal, and how and why good people allow this injustice to happen generation after generation," said DuVernay at her premier at the 54th New York Film Festival.

## FILM THEMES (written by influencefilmclub.com)

### AFRICAN AMERICANS PORTRAYED AS CRIMINALS

Dating back to D.W. Griffith's 1915 *BIRTH OF A NATION*, African Americans have continually been portrayed as criminals in many forms of American media. Through this lens, the public at large has come to unconsciously believe that black people are more likely to become rapists, drug addicts, murderers or thieves purely because of the color of their skin. The more one sees images and hears stories of African Americans committing crimes, whether it is true or not, the more likely one is to believe that African Americans are indeed criminals.

### MASS INCARCERATION AS REPLACEMENT FOR SLAVERY

As Amendment XIII states, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." Yet, countless corporations have prisoners who have been put to work without pay as part of their sentencing. Since the abolishment of slavery, politicians have implemented policies that feed off of the media-generated fear of black criminals, disproportionately putting African Americans behind bars where they can be used as free labor.

### CORPORATE INTERESTS SHAPE PRISON POPULATION

The American Legislative Exchange Council, better known as ALEC, a coalition of corporate interests like Walmart and Verizon, introduces federal policies which arguably result in putting African Americans and immigrants behind bars in the interest of profiteering from the success of private prisons, surveillance, and prison labor. One in four US legislators have ties to ALEC, some of whom have introduced bills and policies without even bothering to remove ALEC's branding from them before dispersing them to colleagues.

### THE DEHUMANIZATION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

By portraying black people as criminals, depriving their communities of financial resources that put them on a level playing field to their white compatriots, developing public policies that are more likely to see people of color placed behind bars, and creating prison systems that are meant to punish and break people rather than help them rehabilitate and reenter society, America has consciously, or unconsciously, dehumanized its black population.

## BEFORE WE START



### Objective of our movie night:

1. To start conversation about race, racism, and our role as professionals in addressing these issues.
2. To identify personal biases, how they were shaped, and how we can develop strategies to dismantle these biases
3. To understand how institutionalized racism impacts social determinants of health and health disparities, and our role as professionals in addressing the root causes of these disparities.

### Ground rules:

1. Respect each other
2. Remain open minded
3. Lean in to new ideas, discomfort, be open to new ideas
4. Assume ignorance, not ill intent
5. Give constructive feedback
6. Be open to feedback

### Definitions:

#### Social Determinants of Health

“The social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels. The social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities - the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries.”

#### Racism (Ijeoma Oluo, *So You Want to Talk About Race*):

1. “The most common definitions of racism... are as follows:
  - a. Racism is any prejudice against someone because of their race.
  - b. Racism is any prejudice against someone because of their race, when those views are reinforced by systems of power.” (p. 26)

- “When we use only the first definition of racism... we inaccurately reduce issues of race in American to a battle for the hearts and minds of individual racists—instead of seeing racist, racist behaviors, and racial oppression as part of a larger system” (p. 27)
- “The truth is, you don’t even have to ‘be racist’ to be a part of the racist system... It’s the system, and our complacency in that system, that gives racism its power, not individual intent” (p. 28)
  - **“Systematic racism is a machine that runs whether we pull the levers or not, and by just letting it be, we are responsible for what it produces”** (p. 30)
- “Getting my neighbor to love people of color might make it easier to hang around him, but **it won’t do anything to combat police brutality, racial income inequality, food deserts, or the prison industrial complex.** Further, this puts the onus on me, the person being discriminated against, to prove my humanity and worthiness of equality to those who think I’m less than” (p. 29)



## Checking your Pulse

1. Why are you interested in viewing this documentary?

2. This film addresses the injustice of mass incarceration and race—the disproportionate incarceration of poor people of color, particularly black and brown men. Take a second to examine where you are concerning race. Write down a couple of words describing your state (ex: sensitive, struggling with seeing racism, angry, etc.). *\*This will help you understand and pay attention to the filter you will be watching the film through*



**NOTES (1)**

Use this page to write down things that challenge you, points to remember, thoughts you want to discuss, etc.

<b>Checking your Pulse:</b>	<b>Just WOW!</b>
<p>Notice your emotions. Write words or phrases to describe what you are feeling right now.</p>	<p>List one WOW moment or fact from the last segment.</p>

## DISCUSSION 1

MOVIE TIME: 0:00 – 27:23 minutes



1. President Lyndon B. Johnson ushered in the War on Crime, Nixon began a figurative War on Drugs that became a literal War on Drugs in the Reagan era. Were you surprised to learn about the racial underpinning of these legislative policies, and the active role of the state in criminalizing and targeting communities of color? Discuss using the quotation below.

*The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did. – John Ehrlichman, Nixon Administration Advisor*





## NOTES (2)

Use this page to write down things that challenge you, points to remember, thoughts you want to discuss, etc.

<b>Checking your Pulse:</b>	<b>Just WOW!</b>
Notice your emotions. Write words or phrases to describe what you are feeling right now.	List one WOW moment or fact from the last segment.

## DISCUSSION 2

MOVIE TIME: 27:23 – 1:09:20

1. Super predator. Criminal. Think about the power of media and the power of words and images. Discuss media and how words impact the perception and criminalization of people of color, both in the past and the present (animalistic, violent, to be feared, threat to white people, criminals, etc.).
  - a. Give modern-day examples.
  - b. How has the media influenced us as providers that can impact how we treat and care for patients and clients (both knowingly and unknowingly)?



**NOTES (3)**

Use this page to write down things that challenge you, points to remember, thoughts you want to discuss, etc.

<b>Checking your Pulse:</b>	<b>Just WOW!</b>
<p>Notice your emotions. Write words or phrases to describe what you are feeling right now.</p>	<p>List one WOW moment or fact from the last segment.</p>

## DISCUSSION 3

MOVIE TIME: 1:09:21 – 1:40:21



1. *“You immediately become numb. That’s what jail does to humans, that immediate dehumanization, and sensory deprivation that nobody can really understand unless they live through it.”* Discuss the impact this has on those currently incarcerated and what this could look like upon release. How does this relate to health and social disparities experienced by individuals, families, and communities that have experienced incarceration? How does this impact our perceptions, as providers, of former prisoners?

## SUMMARY DISCUSSION



1. After watching the full documentary, how would you sum up your current emotional/spiritual state (helpless, inspired, challenged, angry, stirred to action, a combination of feelings?)
2. Did you learn concepts that were contrary to what you initially thought or believed? How did this film shape your understanding of the prison system? What challenged your thinking?
3. How should health and social service providers be responding to mass incarceration? How can we apply our codes of ethics and other guiding professional values to address systematic injustices associated with mass incarceration?
4. Go back to the section Before We Begin: Checking Your Pulse. Reread what you wrote, and see if you feel any different. Were your questions answered?
  - a. Who do you wish would have been here to see this documentary? Who do you think could benefit from watching this? How can you engage them and invite them to join the conversation?

# BEFORE I FORGET



## MY TAKEAWAYS

List three ways this documentary has impacted you. What did you learn? What insights did it provide? What questions do you still have?

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"PEOPLE SAY ALL THE TIME, 'WELL, I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW PEOPLE COULD HAVE TOLERATED SLAVERY. HOW COULD THEY HAVE MADE PEACE WITH THAT? HOW COULD PEOPLE HAVE GONE TO A LYNCHING AND PARTICIPATED IN THAT? THAT'S SO CRAZY. IF I WAS LIVING AT THAT TIME I WOULD NEVER HAVE TOLERATED ANYTHING LIKE THAT.' AND THE TRUTH IS WE ARE LIVING IN THIS TIME, AND WE ARE TOLERATING IT."

-BRYAN STEVENSON



## ACTION STEPS

### KEEP LEARNING

- Continue gaining information and knowledge around mass incarceration, school-to-prison pipeline, privatization of prison, prison industrial complex, juvenile justice, women in prison, and mental illness/incarceration.
- Watch other documentaries, including series on prison life.
- Subscribe to email lists to stay up to date with issues around mass incarceration and juvenile justice. (Example: Campaign for Youth Justice, Equal Justice Initiative, Just Leadership USA, Juvenile Justice Information Exchange, the Sentencing Project, #cut50, the Marshall Project, the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, etc.).

### AWARENESS

- Host a documentary viewing at your church or in your home.
- Hold a book club to read and discuss *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander.
- Host an event at your church. Invite formerly incarcerated individuals, family members of currently incarcerated individuals, advocates, attorneys, etc., to share their voices and experiences.

### POLICY ADVOCACY

- Organize, track legislation, and write letters/make phone calls to your congressman around local and state laws that perpetuate mass incarceration. (Example: <http://lac.org/toolkits/Introduction.htm>)
- Meet with your representative or their staff in person.
- Start a media campaign, blog, etc. to organize and educate others on policies and legislation around prison reform.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



### DOCUMENTARIES

- *The House I Live In*—[www.TheHouseILiveIn.org](http://www.TheHouseILiveIn.org)
- *Broken on All Sides: Race, Mass Incarceration and New Visions for Criminal Justice*—[www.brokenonallsides.com](http://www.brokenonallsides.com)
- *Rikers: An American Jail*—[rikersfilm.org](http://rikersfilm.org)

#### YOUTH FOCUS:

- *TIME: The Kalief Browder Story*—series on Netflix
- *Young Kids, Hard Time* (45 min.)—[www.msnbc.com](http://www.msnbc.com)
- *Children Behind Bars: American Youth Violence* (46 min.)—[www.msnbc.com](http://www.msnbc.com)
- *Children in Prison: Locked Up for Life* (55 min.)—[www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLrlajvhUaQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLrlajvhUaQ)
- *Alone: Teens in Solitary Confinement* (22 min.)—[www.csgjuscecenter.org/youth/publications/alone-teens-in-solitary-confinement](http://www.csgjuscecenter.org/youth/publications/alone-teens-in-solitary-confinement)

#### WOMEN FOCUS:

- “A Nation of Women Behind Bars” 20/20 (30 min.)—<http://abc.go.com/shows/2020/listing/2015-02/27-2020-022715-a-nation-of-women-behind-bars-a-dianesawyer-hidden-america-special>
- *Women Behind Bars* (30 min.)—[www.aljazeera.com/programmes/faultlines/2013/09/women-behind-bars-201393010326721994.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/faultlines/2013/09/women-behind-bars-201393010326721994.html)

### BOOKS

- *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*—Alexander, Michelle. 2012.
- *Just Mercy*—Stevenson, Bryan. 2014
- *Are Prisons Obsolete?*—Davis, Angela Y. New York: Seven Stories, 2003.
- *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States*—Committee on Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration, et al. National Academic Press, 2014.
- *The Collapse of American Criminal Justice*—Stuntz, William J. 2013.
- *Arrested Justice Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation*—Richie, Beth. 2012.
- *The Justice Imperative: How Hyper-incarceration Has Hijacked the American Dream: A Collaborative Examination of Connecticut's Criminal Justice and Corrections System*—Moran, Brian E, 2014.
- *Building a Movement to End the New Jim Crow: An Organizing Guide*—Hunter, Daniel, and Michelle Alexander, Veterans of Hope Project, 2015.
- *Monster*—Myers, Walter Dean. 1999. (Juvenile Fiction novel)

### WEBSITES

- Campaign for Youth Justice: [www.campaignforyouthjustice.org](http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org)
- The Sentencing Project: [www.sentencingproject.org](http://www.sentencingproject.org)
- Juvenile Justice Information Exchange: [www.jjje.org](http://www.jjje.org)
- Free America (John Legend's Org): [www.letsfreeamerica.org](http://www.letsfreeamerica.org)
- Just Leadership USA: [www.justleadershipusa.org](http://www.justleadershipusa.org)
- Justice Fellowship: [www.justicefellowship.org](http://www.justicefellowship.org)
- Justice Policy Institute: [www.justicepolicy.org](http://www.justicepolicy.org)
- Prison Policy Initiative: [www.prisonpolicy.org](http://www.prisonpolicy.org)
- Equal Justice Initiative: [www.eji.org](http://www.eji.org)
- Vera Institute of Justice: [www.vera.org](http://www.vera.org)
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention [www.ojjdp.gov](http://www.ojjdp.gov)





## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



### Resources at The University of Texas at Austin

- **UT Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC)**
  - Phone: 512-471-3515 (Mon-Fri, 8 am – 5 pm)
  - 24/7 Crisis Line: 512-471-2255
- **Counselors in Academic Residence Program (CARE) (part of CMHC)**
  - General Website: <https://cmhc.utexas.edu/CARE.html>
  - School of Nursing/Dell Medical School contact:
    - Nathan Langfitt, LPC
    - Phone: (512) 232-4701
    - Office: NUR 2.408
  - Steve Hicks School of Social Work Contact:
    - Laura Dannenmaier, LCSW
    - Phone: SSW 3.116B
    - Office: (512) 471-8148
- **CMHC Diversity Coordinators**
  - Diversity Coordinators includes clinicians who have specialized interests, training, knowledge, etc. for serving different populations.
  - Website: <https://cmhc.utexas.edu/diversitycoordinators.html>
  - Phone: 512-471-3515
  - Office hours for drop in consultation/support in the Multicultural Engagement Center (in the Student Activity Center):
  - Identity-based support and discussion groups
- **Campus Climate Response Team**

The University of Texas at Austin is committed to addressing incidents that impact our campus climate, especially those that are bias-related. Your assistance in bringing these incidents to our attention will enhance our ability to systematically identify and respond to such events.

  - Campus climate incidents should be reported as soon as possible after their occurrence via the online report form, by phone or in person.
  - Website: <http://diversity.utexas.edu/ccrt/>
    - Click on the following to report online:



- Phone Number: 512-471-5017