CAN A COLLEGE BEHIND BARS STOP THE REVOLVING PRISON DOOR?

FIRST DECRETE with JOHN FUGELSANG

VIEWER GUIDE

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SYNOPSIS

HE EXPRESSION "SENT UP THE RIVER"

was coined by convicts who were sent up the Hudson River to do their time at the infamous Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining, New York. FIRST DEGREE finds hope in this seemingly hopeless place by investigating an unusual college behind bars that is successfully preventing Sing Sing inmates from being sent back up the river after their release. Nationwide, over half of released inmates return to prison within five years, but for the past 14 years, less than one percent of the inmates who received a college degree at Sing Sing returned to prison.

FIRST DEGREE takes viewers inside this notorious maximum security prison and introduces them to some unforgettable inmates. We first meet Sean Pica, who was 16 years old when he went to prison in 1986. Sean's highschool friend, Cheryl Pierson, told Sean that her father was sexually molesting her, so Sean helped plan and carry out his murder. After receiving a 24-year sentence, Sean thought his life was over until a prison education program called Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison gave Sean an opportunity to earn a bachelor's degree. After serving 16 years, Sean was released, but he couldn't stay away from Sing Sing. Unlike most of the paroled prisoners whom Sean met at Sing Sing who reoffended and quickly returned to prison, Sean came back to Sing Sing to run their college program. He takes us through his early days in prison as a hopeless 120-pound, 16-yearold inmate to his discovery that college could open up an entirely new world of opportunity and possibility.

SYNOPSIS

Next, we meet Jermaine Archer, a former drug dealer who was sentenced to 22 years to life for murder. Jermaine talks about how his

FIRST DEGREE is a dramatic and emotional powerhouse, exactly what an independent documentary film should be. I know a movie is solid when I begin making a mental list of people I'll call, urging them to see it. My list for FIRST DEGREE is long.

> —David Rothenberg, Founder and Executive Director, The Fortune Society

prison reputation changed from being a feared gang leader from the streets of Flatbush, Brooklyn, to being a role model for students attending college at Sing Sing. We attend Jermaine's college graduation ceremony and watch as he, for the first time in his life, brings tears of joy to his mother's eyes.

WINNER, BEST DOCUMENTARY SHORT Sedona International Film Festival February 2016

WINNER, BEST DOCUMENTARY SHORT Ojai Film Festival November 2015

WINNER, GOLDEN REEL AWARD, Best Short Tiburon International Film Festival *April 2015*

WINNER, GOLD REMI AWARD Worldfest-Houston International Film and Video Festival *April 2015* Lastly, we meet Clarence Maclin, who received his college degree along with Jermaine. Shortly after his graduation, we catch up with Clarence, who is on parole and participating in Hudson Link's reentry program. We watch as the staff and volunteers at Hudson Link help Clarence acquire work-appropriate clothing, write a resume, search for jobs, and train for interviews. Ultimately, Clarence is hired by a nearby residential treatment program to work as a counselor with juvenile offenders. He relishes the opportunity to help the young people he mentors avoid some of the costly mistakes he made as a teenager.

FIRST DEGREE is produced and directed by Roger Weisberg, whose 31 previous documentaries have won more than 150 awards including Emmy, DuPont-Columbia, and Peabody awards, as well as two Academy Award nominations. FIRST DEGREE builds on Weisberg's extensive body of work and represents the culmination of almost four decades of documenting the struggles, aspirations, and achievements of disadvantaged Americans.

IN THE FILM



SEAN PICA is currently the Executive Director of Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison, which provides college education, life skills, and reentry support to incarcerated men and women. Sean serves on the board of Career Gear and on the Service Providers Advisory Committee (SPAC), which collaborates on policy issues with the New York State Department of Corrections. He is also a Senior Fellow for Social and Criminal Justice at Mercy College, where he is currently pursuing an M.B.A. degree.

JERMAINE ARCHER earned his B.A. degree at Sing Sing in 2013 and hopes to be released by 2020. He continues to work with Sing Sing's prison education program, tutoring and mentoring other students.

CLARENCE MACLIN, also known as Divine, I-Build, or Caribu, grew up in Mt. Vernon, New York. The eldest son of a single mother. Clarence began getting into trouble in middle school. He ultimately was convicted of first-degree robbery and sentenced in 1996 to 20 years. While serving his time at Sing Sing, Clarence received a bachelor's degree from the Hudson Link program. Shortly after being released in 2012, Clarence got a job at Lincoln Hall Boys' Haven, where he currently works as an Assistant Supervisor.







HEN FUNDING FOR their prison college education program was cut in 1994, the inmates at Sing Sing Correctional Facility were devastated. They reached out to community leaders and college

Through the telling of three inmates' stories, Roger Weisberg's film FIRST DEGREE shows how education can help reform, uplift, and change the lives of America's prisoners. This enlightening film brings much-needed awareness to the issues surrounding incarceration, the U.S. justice system, and prison education programs across the country.

-Tony Marx, President, New York Public Library



educators, and in 1998, Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison was founded with private funding in conjunction with Nyack College. Hudson Link provides college education, life skills, and reentry support to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated men and women to help them make a positive impact on their own lives, their families, and their communities. Their efforts result in lower rates of recidivism, incarceration, and poverty. Hudson Link has expanded to five correctional facilities and cooperates with a number of colleges in New York state. Transition and postrelease programs have been added to give graduates the best foot forward upon release. Professional development workshops through Career Gear's Job Readiness Program offer alumni training on how to enter the workforce. As a result, Hudson Link graduates have a recidivism rate of less than one percent, compared to 43 percent among the general prison population.

FIRST DEGREE

DIRECTORYS States of the second states of the secon

ver since I completed a recent documentary about capital punishment, I wanted to make a film about mass incarceration. America has five percent of the world's population but 25 percent of the world's prisoners. Since launching the war on drugs in the 1970s, there has been a 700 percent increase in our prison population. The land of the free is now the world's biggest jailer with nearly seven million Americans in prison, in jail, on probation, or on parole.

If our prisons were effectively rehabilitating inmates and making our communities safer, it might be possible to justify the over 80 billion dollars a year we spend on mass incarceration, but our prisons do an abysmal job of preparing inmates for productive lives once they return to their communities. Over three quarters of released inmates are re-arrested within five years, and over half return to prison.

I heard rumors that a remarkable prison education program at Sing Sing Correctional Facility in upstate New York was successfully preventing inmates from returning to prison after their

FIRST DEGREE

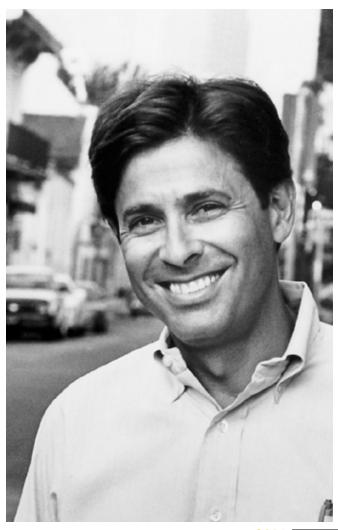
release. I set out to investigate Sing Sing's secret to curbing recidivism and met some unforgettable inmates along the way.

FIRST DEGREE is primarily an intimate portrait of three Sing Sing inmates who discover the transformative power of higher education. Jermaine Archer, serving 22 years for murder, says, "It costs \$60,000 dollars, approximately, to house a person in prison for one year. And I think it costs \$54,000 to go to Harvard for a year ... if I do my time, and you let me go home because I did the 20 years that the state sentenced me to, there's a good chance it becomes a recycling bin. Whereas it shows that if you give me an education, instead of that drug dealer, I can be that accountant. Instead of that pimp, I can be a lawyer."

Shortly after his release from Sing Sing, Clarence Maclin says, "My goals are certainly to maintain employment, but also to be employed in an area where I can give back to some of the places that I damaged." Sean Pica says, "Less than one percent of our graduates that have been through the program and are now home have returned to prison phenomenal statistics that save this country and this community about eight-million dollars a year. So, for a program that is privately funded, saving New York state taxpayers eight-million dollars a year, I'm not sure I see the downside to that."

The three men we profile in FIRST DEGREE make it perfectly clear that higher education in prison can save lives as well as money. Nationwide, every dollar we spend on prison education programs saves five dollars on re-incarceration costs. But when Congress withdrew prison education funding in 1994, the number of prison college programs dropped from 350 to just eight by 2000. By 2015, the prison population grew by 50 percent, leading President Barack Obama to restore some federal funding on a trial basis to test the effectiveness of prison education programs in reducing the prison population.

By profiling a few remarkable inmates at Sing Sing prison, I hope that FIRST DEGREE can make a small contribution to the growing movement to expand prison education and reduce mass incarceration and recidivism.



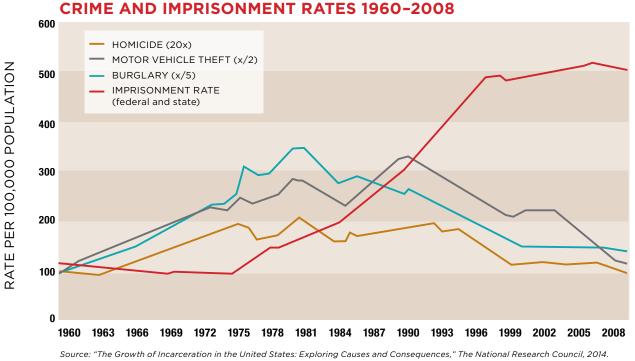
FAST FACTS, Q DISCUSSI NFSTIN

SLOW

HE UNITED STATES HAS THE LARGEST PRISON POPULATION IN THE WORLD, WITH 2.2 MILLION PEOPLE BEHIND BARS.

Mass incarceration is the term used to describe the explosion in the prison population in the U.S. since the early 1970s. Studies show the 700 percent increase in incarceration is not due to an increase in crime rates, which have gone down markedly since the early 1990s¹, but is the result of social policies implemented over the past forty-five years, including the war on drugs, mandatory minimum sentencing requirements, and multiple offender laws.² Millions of non-violent drug offenders, especially people of color, have been imprisoned because of these policies, destroying lives and communities in the process. Mass incarceration also presents a financial burden for local and state governments,³ while fueling an over \$80 billion annual industry from which many corporations profit. The ACLU states in a recent report, "This excessively punitive and racially charged system exacerbates injustice, breeds resentment, and undermines the legitimacy of the justice system itself."⁴ Reforming our criminal justice system appears to have bipartisan support in today's divisive political climate. Greater emphasis on rehabilitating prisoners and reforming harsh mandatory minimum sentencing laws are among the first steps needed to undo the damage caused by mass incarceration.

MASS INCARCERATION



Adapted with permission from the American Psychological Association, Monitor on Psychology,"Incarceration Nation," Adapted with permission from the American Psychological Association, October 2014, Vol. 45, No. 9, p. 56.

FAST FACTS ABOUT Mass incarceration

In response to the increase in recreational drug use and its association with social rebellion and inner-city crime in the 1960s, President Richard Nixon declared a "war on drugs" in 1971. Calling drugs "public enemy number one," Nixon intended to end the manufacture, import, sale, and use of illegal drugs. President Ronald Reagan expanded the war, perhaps most famously with First Lady Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" initiative. By 1989, 64 percent of the general public believed drugs were the nation's number-one problem, compared to less than six percent in 1985.⁵ Racial disparities were prevalent in the prosecution of the war on drugs. For

example, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 mandated stiffer sentences for crack cocaine, which was used more frequently by poor communities of color, compared to powdered cocaine, which was favored by affluent white communities.

Mandatory minimum sentencing laws require binding prison terms of a particular length for certain crimes and prevent judges from matching punishment to fit the individual circumstances of the crime. Most of the crimes under mandatory minimum sentencing laws are drug-related and have led to the soaring increase in the prison population.⁶

Multiple offender laws, otherwise known as habitual offender or "three strikes" laws, refer to the policy of stronger punishment for repeat criminal behavior. As of 2015, 28 states have three-strikes laws, under which a third criminal offense results in harsh punishment, most often life imprisonment.⁷ While the laws generally apply to felony crimes, non-violent felonies and misdemeanors in some states can result in life sentences, adding to the enormous growth in the prison census.⁸

Stop and frisk refers to the practice of police officers stopping individuals on the street based on a "reasonable suspicion of criminal activity." Since people of color are targeted much more often by police than whites, the practice is considered a form of racial profiling.⁹

FIRST DEGREE

MASS INCARCERATION

POPULATION IN JAILS OR PRISON

In 2014, 6.9 million Americans were in the U.S. adult correctional system (in prison, in jail, on probation, or on parole).¹⁰

In 2014, 2.8 percent or one in 36 adults in the U.S. were in the correctional system.¹¹

Black males are six times more likely to be imprisoned than white males.¹² ² Whites use drugs at five times the rate of Blacks, yet Blacks are imprisoned for drug use at ten times the rate of whites.¹³

If current rates continue, one of every three Black males born in 2001 can expect to spend time in prison during his lifetime.¹⁴

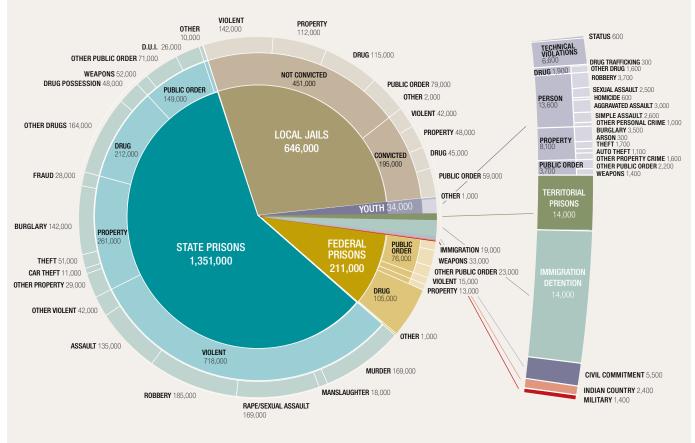
Hispanic males are 2.5 times more likely to be imprisoned than white males.¹⁵

TRENDS IN INCARCERATION SINCE THE WAR ON DRUGS BEGAN IN 1971

- Between 1970 and 2005, there was a 700 percent increase in the U.S. prison population.¹⁶
- ¹ Incarceration peaked in 2009 ^{*} at 2.3 million people in prisons or jails with a rate of 720 prisoners per 100,000 members of the population.¹⁷

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE LOCKED UP IN THE UNITED STATES?

The United States locks up more people, per capita, than any other nation. But grappling with why requires us to first consider the many types of correctional facilities and the reasons that 2.3 million people are confined there.



Sources And Data Notes: Prison Policy Initiative Prisonpolicy.org/Reports/Pie2016.Html



COSTS OF MASS

In 2010, among a survey of 40 states, the Vera Institute of Justice found that the cost to taxpayers of mass incarceration is \$39 billion, \$5.4 billion more than is reflected in the states' corrections budgets. Taxpayers pay an average of \$31,286 per inmate in these states.¹⁸

A \$10 billion increase in the incarceration budget is estimated to lead to a one to four percent decrease in the crime rate, while a raise in the minimum wage to \$12 an hour by 2020 could result in a three to five percent decrease in the crime rate.¹⁹

MASS INCARCERATION

INCARCERATION IN THE U.S. VERSUS OTHER COUNTRIES

Making up only five percent of the world's population, the U.S. has 25 percent of the world's prison population, making it the largest jailer in the world.²⁰

The U.S. holds as many prisoners as China and Russia combined.²¹

INCARCERATION FOR NON-VIOLENT DRUG CRIMES

- At the end of 2014, over 50 percent of those in federal prisons were imprisoned for drug offenses.²²
- At the end of 2013, 15 percent of those in state prisons were imprisoned for drug offenses.²³
- ² Two of the largest catego-⁴ ries of the incarcerated are non-violent drug offenders in state prisons (237,000) and arrestees who are awaiting trial in local jails and have yet to be convicted of any crime (428,312).²⁴

MASS INCARCERATION

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Most Americans believe the U.S. is the epitome of a free society. Is the high incarceration rate a necessary means to maintain a free society or does it undermine our ideals of life and liberty?
- 2. Prison construction is a big industry, and prisons are major employers. What role do these economic forces

play in the incarceration of large segments of the population for long periods of time? What forces have been driving the trend toward privatizing our prisons?

- Describe the make-up of today's prison population.
 What role does the legacy of slavery, segregation, Jim Crow, and racism play in our policies of mass incarceration?
- 4. Why was the war on drugs implemented, and how effective has it been in reducing drug use and drug-related crimes? What are some alternatives to the way we respond to drug use in the U.S.?
- 5. What is the cost to society in terms of dollars and lost human potential of our policy of mass incarceration?
- 6. Jermaine Archer says it is up to him to "break the cycle" of imprisonment that has engulfed all the male members of his family. How does family background affect outcomes for at-risk youth? How does mass incarceration block the path to the American Dream for prisoners, their families, and their communities? To what extent is stopping mass incarceration a personal or societal responsibility?
- 7. What are the arguments for and against minimum mandatory sentencing laws and multiple offender laws? Should life imprisonment be imposed for non-violent drug offenses?
- 8. What specific policies would reduce mass incarceration without harming public safety?





HEN INMATES ARE RELEASED from prison, they face many obstacles reintegrating into society. Studies indicate former convicts have a 12 to 19 percent lower rate of employment²⁵ and earn 10 to 20 percent less as a result of imprisonment.²⁶ Additionally, the **Clinton Administration's Personal** Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, otherwise known as the Welfare Reform Act, included a lifetime ban on receiving federal public assistance for individuals with felony drug convictions.²⁷ While housing discrimination against most categories of former prisoners is illegal, rental discrimination is ubiquitous in many cities. Close to 2,000 cities have "crime-free housing programs" that deny housing to former convicts.²⁸ Convicts who enter the prison system have higher rates of chronic health problems, mental illness, substance abuse, and infectious disease than the general population. Prison overcrowding, violence, and sub-standard health care exacerbate these problems, leaving parolees worse off upon release. These difficulties force parolees into the shadows, increasing the likelihood they will be reincarcerated.

Mass incarceration would not be as severe without high rates of re-imprisonment, which is known as recidivism. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, about two-thirds of released prisoners are arrested for a new crime within three years, and threequarters are arrested within five years.

REENTRY AND RECIDIVISM

FAST FACTS ABOUT REENTRY AND RECIDIVISM

REENTRY CHALLENGES

- An arrest decreases employment opportunities more than any other employment-related stigma, such as long-term unemployment, receipt of public assistance, or having a GED instead of a high school diploma.²⁹
- Close to one-third of released inmates expect to go to homeless shelters upon release.³⁰
- Many public housing facilities where the families of prisoners live have "onestrike" policies, preventing those with a criminal record from moving back. ³¹

- ² Laws that deny the right to ⁴ vote for people with felony convictions have left approximately 5.85 million Americans disenfranchised. The result is that one of every 13 Blacks is unable to vote.³²
- Ex-felons are prevented from serving on juries or receiving financial aid or scholarships.³³

RECIDIVISM RATES

Over 95 percent of the prison population today will be released at some point in the future.³⁴ Since 1990, an average of 590,400 inmates have been released annually from state and federal prisons.³⁵

Within five years of release, 82.1 percent of property offenders were arrested for a new crime, compared to 76.9 percent of drug offenders, 73.6 percent of public order offenders, and 71.3 percent of violent offenders.³⁶

- More than a third (36.8 percent) of all prisoners who were arrested within five years of release were arrested within the first six months after release, with more than half (56.7 percent) arrested by the end of the first year.³⁷
- A sixth (16.1 percent) of released prisoners were responsible for almost half (48.4 percent) of the nearly 1.2 million arrests that occurred in the five-year follow-up period.³⁸
- Within five years of release, 84.1 percent of inmates who were age 24 or younger at release were arrested, compared to 78.6 percent of inmates ages 25 to 39 and 69.2 percent of those age 40 or older.³⁹

MENTAL HEALTH⁴⁰

- 14.5 percent of male inmates and 31 percent of female inmates in the U.S. have serious mental health problems.
- The prevalence of serious mental health problems is two to four times higher in state prisons than in the community.



FIRST DEGREE

REENTRY AND RECIDIVISM

SUBSTANCE ABUSE DISORDERS⁴¹

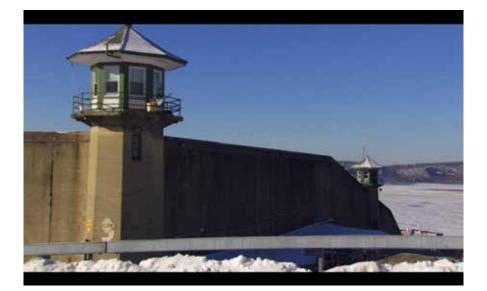
- Sixty-eight percent of all inmates suffer from diagnosable substance abuse disorders, compared to nine percent in the general population.
- Fewer than 15 percent of these prisoners receive the appropriate treatment for substance abuse.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Do most prisons foster an environment that is conducive to rehabilitating prisoners?
- 2. What are the reasons for high recidivism rates? What could be done in prisons to prepare inmates to return successfully to their communities?

- 3. What are the biggest barriers that inmates face upon their release? What can be done to help remove some of these barriers that prevent former convicts from re-integrating into society?
- 4. What are some of the common views toward former inmates? Once an inmate serves his or her time, should they be able to return to society with a clean slate?
- 5. Do you know anyone who has served time in a correctional institution? Can you share some of their experiences and the challenges they faced?
- 6. What are some ways to prevent more people from entering the correctional system? If this approach is more cost-effective and better for our communities, why is the prison population still so large?
- Large numbers of the nation's inmates have mental health and/ or substance abuse problems. Are these public safety issues or public health issues? How else can these issues be addressed?
- 8. Many of the incarcerated come from communities where poverty, unemployment, sub-standard housing, failing schools, and a lack of public services are rampant. What can be done to address some of these root causes of crime?



S CRIME RATES GO DOWN and the destructive socio-economic effects of mass incarceration on American society become more apparent, bipartisan support for criminal justice reform has been growing. Organizations across the country are working to reduce the prison population through a range of approaches, including reducing unnecessary arrests, pre-trial detentions, convictions, and lengthy sentences; eliminating mandatory minimum sentencing policies; addressing aggressive policing tactics and racial profiling; creating alternative "diversion" programs for juvenile offenders to avoid the stigmatization that occurs when they are processed through the adult criminal justice system; incentivizing communities to challenge the economic power of the for-profit prison industry; rehabilitating prisoners through prison education and reentry programs to reduce recidivism rates; ending discrimination in employment and housing against former convicts; providing public education and prison volunteer programs to change public opinion about mass incarceration; promoting restorative justice to empower communities to find alternatives to incarceration; and reinvesting in the communities most harmed by mass incarceration through increasing employment opportunities and improving healthcare and education. Please refer to the Action Steps and Resources section on page 28 for a comprehensive list of programs and initiatives spearheaded by dozens of organizations nationwide to reform the criminal justice system.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

A SAMPLING OF REFORM EFFORTS

FEDERAL

In 2014, the U.S. Sentencing Commission voted unanimously to reduce excessive sentencing for up to 46,000 prisoners who are serving time for federal drug offenses.

In 2010, Congress passed the Fair Sentencing Act, reducing the disparity between certain drug offenses.

CALIFORNIA

Proposition 47, passed in California in 2014, reclassified low-level property and drug crimes from felonies to misdemeanors.

NEW YORK

After decades of advocacy and activism, New York reformed the harsh mandatory minimum sentencing provisions of the Rockefeller drug policy laws in 2009.

MICHIGAN

In 2002, Michigan was spending \$1.6 billion on corrections, nearly a fifth of its general fund. In 2003, the state introduced the Michigan Prisoner Reentry Initiative (MPRI),

shrinking the inmate population by 12 percent, closing more than 20 correctional facilities, and reducing recidivism rates by 33 percent.42

OREGON

By providing inmates with risk and needs assessments at intake, targeted case management during incarceration, and detailed transition plans beginning six months prior to release, Oregon achieved the lowest recidivism rate among any state by 2004, at just 22.8 percent, a decline of 31.9 percent over the state's 1999 rate. 43





RISON EDUCATION PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY EFFECTIVE

In reducing recidivism rates and helping the formerly incarcerated successfully reenter society. Prisoners who take college courses while serving their sentences are 43 percent less likely to return to jail and more likely to maintain employment upon release. In 1994, the Clinton Administration cut funding for prison education programs as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, a continuation of the war on drugs. In 2007, the Second Chance Act was enacted to improve the outcomes for the incarcerated upon their release. In 2015, under the Obama Administration, the Department of Education announced the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program, which will support postsecondary education in prisons on a test basis for three to five years in an attempt to reduce recidivism rates.

FAST FACTS ABOUT PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAMS

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF INMATES

- From 1972 to 2010, the number of people incarcerated increased 700 percent, from 174,379 to 1,403,091. A significant proportion of this increase was concentrated among people with no college education.⁴⁴
- According to the most recent study of educational attainment among prisoners, 37 percent of individuals in state prisons did not have a high school diploma, compared to 19 percent of the general population.⁴⁵
- Half of the general population has at least some postsecondary education, compared to only 14 percent of the adult correctional population.⁴⁶

PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAMS

EFFECTS OF EDUCATION ON RECIDIVISM

- The chances of obtaining post-release employment among inmates who participated in correctional education programs are 13 percent higher than among inmates who did not participate.47
- Dost-secondary education offers a 400 percent return on investment over three years for taxpayers, which translates to a savings of \$5 for every \$1 spent.48
- Facilities with college programs report less violence and conduct problems, improving prison safety for staff as well as the incarcerated.49

OPPORTUNITY FOR COLLEGE EDUCATION IN PRISON

- Less than half of state prison facilities report providing college courses to incarcerated individuals.⁵⁰
- In the academic year 2009 to 2010, fewer than 71,000 prisoners in 43 states participated in postsecondary education programs or six percent of the total state prison population in the U.S.⁵¹



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the benefits of supporting higher education programs in prisons, and what role can prison education play in reducing recidivism and mass incarceration?

2. According to Sean Pica, Hudson Link saves New York state taxpayers \$8 million a year. "I'm not sure I see a downside in that," Pica says. Despite the reductions in recidivism and costs to taxpayers, why are there relatively few resources for college education programs in prison?

3. Why did Congress withdraw funding for prison education in 1994?

4. Do you think the Hudson Link model can be broadly replicated across the country?

5. Why does there seem to be growing bipartisan support for expanding prison education, and why now when there is so much political gridlock surrounding other issues?

6. What can individuals do in the political realm to support efforts to expand prison education and reentry programs? What concrete steps can individuals take to advance criminal justice reforms that will end mass incarceration?

7. Jermaine Archer says, "One of these days, I'm going to be sitting in the Louvre, which is the museum of all museums. and I'm going to be talking to someone in French, and they're going to be surprised when I tell them I learned French in a maximum security prison in America." What does Jermaine's story tell us about the American Dream?

FIRST DEGREE

PLANNING A FIRST DEGREE SCREENING EVENT

PLANNING A SCREENING EVENT

OCUMENTARIES HAVE THE ABILITY NOT ONLY TO EDUCATE, BUT ALSO TO GENERATE engagement that extends beyond the screening. The first thing a viewer will want to do after watching a film is talk about it. Screening events facilitate meaningful debate, reflection, and subsequent action. The following suggestions will provide you with the tools you need to host the most successful event possible.

CREATE GOALS FOR THE EVENT

What do you hope to achieve as a result of your event? Do you want to increase awareness, change attitudes or behavior, or help people network in ways that spark energy and ongoing connection? Being clear about your goals will make it easier to decide how to structure the event, target publicity, and evaluate results.

OUTREACH FOR PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Although FIRST DEGREE is primarily an intimate portrait of three Sing Sing inmates who discover the transformative power of higher education, their stories are emblematic of larger challenges facing the criminal justice system. Consider inviting partner organizations that work in the areas below to co-host your screening in order to reach more diverse audiences, build coalitions, and share possible solutions to the problems addressed in the film:

RECOMMENDED PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Criminal Justice Reform Organizations
- Faith-based Organizations
- Legislators and Staffers
- Reentry Programs
- Juvenile Justice
 Organizations
- Prison Education Groups
- Grassroots Community Organizations
- Diversion Programs

PLANNING A SCREENING EVENT

PLAN AHEAD

Choose a screening date at least several weeks out to secure the best location, find partner organizations, and publicize the event widely.

MAKE SURE THE STRUCTURE OF THE EVENT FITS YOUR GOALS

Do you need an outside facilitator, translator, or sign language interpreter? Who are the local experts on the topic who should be present? Will you have a panel presentation, a structured Q&A session, or just an open discussion? Try to gather a group of people who have different opinions on the subject. If all sides are fairly represented, the discussion will be much stronger and have more impact.

SELECT A VENUE

Does your screening facility allow for an inclusive discussion? Is the building wheelchair accessible and easily reachable by public transportation? Does it have the appropriate screening equipment for the size of your audience? The best locations are those that regularly host film screenings, such as movie theaters, church meeting rooms, public libraries, community centers, and labor halls. Be sure to test audio-visual equipment before the day of your event.

CHOOSE A FACILITATOR

The facilitator plays an important role in creating an environment in which people feel respected, safe, and encouraged to share their opinions about controversial topics. University professors, journalists, and professionals from community organizations can provide background knowledge about the subject matter, maintain a neutral position, and keep the dialogue moving forward.

PUBLICITY

The FIRST DEGREE screening toolkit and electronic press kit on our website at http://www. pppdocs.com/firstdegree.html have materials to help you publicize your event, including digital flyer and press release templates, social media posts, a sample invitation letter to legislators, feedback form, key art, film synopsis, credits, director's filmography, film reviews, and photos. Here are some tips on using these communications tools.

- EMAIL BLASTS. Make your invitation short and personal; ask recipients to spread the word
- **SOCIAL MEDIA**. Set up a Facebook event page; invite viewers to attend the event
- PRESS RELEASES. Contact journalists, bloggers, and local radio hosts who cover these issues
- EVENTS LISTINGS. Promote the event on newsletters, listservs, and online calendars

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POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION

Since audiences will passively absorb a lot of information during the film, you may want to open the floor right away to questions, dialogue, and next steps. Please refer to our Background Information, Fast Facts, and Discussion Questions section on page 10 to help structure your discussion.

REMIND PARTICIPANTS THAT EVERYONE SEES THROUGH THE LENS OF THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES

Everyone in the group may have a different view about the film they have just seen. Geography, age, race, religion, and socioeconomic status can all have an impact on comfort levels, speaking styles, and prior knowledge.

END DISCUSSION WITH A PLAN FOR ACTION

After a thought-provoking discussion, your viewers will hopefully leave the event wanting to take action. Provide a wide range of next steps that

audiences can take in their communities, whether they are new to the subject, have limited time or resources, or are seasoned organizers. Refer to the Action Steps and Resources section on page 27 for suggested activities and organizations that welcome community participation.

COLLECT FEEDBACK AND SIGN-IN SHEETS

Remind viewers to fill out feedback forms and sign-in sheets so you can stay in touch, receive a PBS broadcast notice, find out more about community needs, and learn how to improve future events.

PLEASE SEND A COPY TO: Public Policy Productions PO Box 650, 3 Ludlow Lane Palisades, NY 10964 OR EMAIL US AT: pppinfo@pppdocs.com

For more information about planning a community screening of FIRST DEGREE, please visit <u>http://pppdocs.com/firstdegree.html</u>



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END MASS INCARCERATION/ HARSH SENTENCING

Learn about the American Civil Liberties Union's (ACLU) advocacy of alternatives to mass incarceration, including its involvement in the Justice Reinvestment Initiative. <u>https://</u> www.aclu.org/ending-mass-incarcerationcharting-new-justice-reinvestment

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that promotes peace with justice as a practical expression of faith in action. See the AFSC's five recommendations to reform the criminal justice system at <u>http://www.afsc.org/resource/5-</u> things-your-congregation-can-do-supportcriminal-justice-reform

Join the movement to end mass incarceration at the **Campaign to End the New Jim Crow.** <u>https://actionnetwork.org/forms/join-the-</u> <u>campaign-to-end-the-new-jim-crow</u>

The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) is dedicated to advancing and protecting rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Use their toolkit to educate others about criminal justice reform. <u>https://ccrjustice.org/home/getinvolved/tools-resources</u>



Rather than imprisoning people, **Critical Resistance** believes providing basic necessities and ending inequality are what make us safe. See their toolkit at <u>http://criticalresistance.org/</u> <u>resources/the-abolitionist-toolkit/</u>

Work toward alternatives to incarceration with the **Formerly Incarcerated, Convicted People & Families Movement**. To learn more about the FICPM's involvement with prison reform on the grassroots and national levels, visit their website at <u>https://ficpmovement.wordpress.</u> <u>com/about/</u>



Review the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law's "Publications and Resources" to stay informed about their national initiatives to end mass incarceration through policy change and advocacy. <u>https://</u> <u>lawyerscommittee.org/project/employment-</u> <u>discrimination-project/publications-and-</u> <u>resources/</u>

Find ways to help communities affected by mass incarceration, including advocacy training and supporting the families of the incarcerated, with Legal Services for Prisoners with Children. <u>http://www.prisonerswithchildren.</u> <u>org/our-projects/program-areas/</u>



END MASS INCARCERATION/ HARSH SENTENCING [cont.]

The Marshall Project is a nonprofit news organization that focuses on the American criminal justice system, featuring investigative reports as well as voices from inside the justice system. <u>https://www.</u> themarshallproject.org

The Public Welfare Foundation supports efforts to advance justice and opportunity for people in need, funding projects in the areas of criminal justice, juvenile justice, and workers' rights. http://www.publicwelfare. org/grants-process/

Whether it is writing your local legislator or attending a demonstration, the **Sentencing Project** has a list of current activities that you can participate in to help reform the most damaging practices of the U.S. prison system. <u>http://www.sentenc-</u> ingproject.org/actions

Stand in solidarity with Columbia University's Students Against Mass Incarceration and become part of a network of students who are speaking out against racist practices in the criminal justice system. Consult SAMI's facebook page for more information at https://www.facebook.com/ ColumbiaUniversitySAMI/

CURB THE USE OF Solitary confinement

Join an advocacy group in your state to pressure legislators to ban solitary confinement. Refer to pages 12 to 15 of the **ACLU's Resources for Advocates** guide to find bills, standards, resolutions, organizations, and films against solitary



confinement in your state. https://www.aclu.org/other/ stop-solitary-resourcesadvocates-updatednovember-2015

Launch a **"Stop Solitary"** campaign in conjunction with the ACLU's advocacy efforts to curb solitary confinement. For instructions, go to <u>https://</u> <u>www.aclu.org/stop-solitary-</u> <u>advocacy-campaign-tools</u>

Understand the damaging effects of solitary confinement on prisoners and the communities to which they return. Read a feature by the **Marshall Project** on the effects of solitary confinement at <u>https://</u> <u>www.themarshallproject.</u> org/2015/06/11/from-solitaryto-the-street#.ovUBb4vnM

Watch and share a video about "Mariposa and the Saint," a play based on firsthand accounts of a female victim of solitary confinement. The play is scheduled to be performed for state legislators in New York and Philadelphia in an attempt to reduce the use of solitary confinement in state prisons. https:// www.themarshallproject. org/2016/02/16/watch-avideo-from-mariposa-andthe-saint-a-new-play-aboutsolitary-confinement.html



SUPPORT PRISON EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Get involved with the Education from Inside Out Coalition (EIO), a nonpartisan collaborative of advocates working to remove barriers to higher education facing students while they are in prison and once they come home. <u>http://www.</u> eiocoalition.org

Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison provides college education, life skills, and reentry support to the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated. <u>http://www.</u> hudsonlink.org/

The Petey Greene Program

supplements correctional education systems by providing individualized tutoring for incarcerated people to reduce recidivism rates and build stronger communities. <u>http://www. peteygreene.org/</u>

Download the **Prison Activist Resource Center**'s Prisoner Resource Directory for an extensive list of organizations and information intended to help prisoners receive education and reentry support. <u>https://www.prisonactivist.org/</u> <u>sites/default/files/2015-parc-</u> <u>directory.pdf</u> Find a prison education program in your area and consider volunteering your time and tutoring skills. For information on prison education programs in your state, consult the **Prison Studies Project**'s <u>interactive map</u> at <u>http://</u> <u>prisonstudiesproject.org/</u> <u>directory/</u>

ADVOCATE FOR REENTRY/ REHABILITATION INITIATIVES

Advocate for **"Certificates** of Rehabilitation" to be implemented in your state to help former inmates secure housing and employment. <u>http://lac.org/toolkits/</u> <u>certificates/certificates.htm</u>

Join the Legal Action Center's H.I.R.E. Network for the latest developments in workforce placement for the formerly incarcerated, criminal justice policy, and related reports. http://www.hirenetwork.org/

Understand how hiring practices can be changed to help those with arrest or conviction records. **The National Employment Law Project** outlines fair-chance hiring best practices at <u>http://www.nelp.</u> <u>org/content/uploads/Fair-</u> <u>Chance-Conditional-Offer.pdf</u>

TOOLS FOR THE FORMERLY INCARCERATED

Look up the "collateral consequences" of your prior convictions at the **American Bar Association's National Inventory of Collateral Consequences** map at <u>http://www.</u> <u>abacollateralconsequences.</u> <u>org/map/</u>

Refer to the ACLU's Prisoners' Assistance Directory at <u>https://www.aclu.org/2012-</u> prisoners-assistance-directory

To find reentry services near you, click on your location on this map provided by the **National Reentry Resource Center.** <u>https://</u> <u>csgjusticecenter.org/reentry/</u> <u>reentry-services-directory/</u>

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS WORKING ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PRISON REFORM

All of Us or None Legal Services for Prisoners with Children is a grassroots civil and human rights organization fighting for the rights of formerly- and currentlyincarcerated people and their families. They fight against the discrimination that people face every day because of arrest or conviction history. The goal of All of Us or None



is to strengthen the voices of people most affected by mass incarceration and the growth of the prison-industrial complex. <u>http://www.</u> <u>prisonerswithchildren.org/our-</u> <u>projects/allofus-or-none/</u>

#BlackLivesMatter is a call to action in response to anti-Black racism.<u>http://</u> <u>blacklivesmatter.com/</u> <u>getinvolved/</u>

The Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law

is a nonpartisan law and policy institute that seeks to improve systems of democracy and justice through research and innovative policies, including reducing mass incarceration. <u>https://www.brennancenter.</u> <u>org/issues/ending-massincarceration</u>

The Center for Community Alternatives (CCA) is a leader

in the field of communitybased alternatives to incarceration. Their mission is to promote reintegrative justice and a reduced reliance on incarceration through advocacy, services, and public policy development in pursuit of civil and human rights. <u>http://www.</u> <u>communityalternatives.org/</u>

The Center for Court Innovation uses a system of research, operating programs, and expert assistance to apply qualitative analysis of prisoner reentry data to day-to-day field work in increasingly innovative ways. <u>http://www.</u> <u>courtinnovation.org/what-</u> we-do

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS WORKING ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PRISON REFORM [cont.]

The Center for Justice at Columbia University

is committed to reducing the nation's reliance on incarceration and advancing alternative approaches to safety and justice through education, research, and policy. <u>http://centerforjustice.</u> <u>columbia.edu/</u>

The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice is

a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization whose mission is to reduce society's reliance on incarceration as a solution to social problems. <u>http://www.</u> cjcj.org/about.html

Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants (CURE) is a national network of grassroots organizations

whose mission is to curb harsh sentencing practices and give the incarcerated the resources they need to turn their lives around. <u>http://catholicsmobilizing.</u> org/1308/citizens-united-forrehabilitation-of-errants-cure/

Communities United for Police Reform is a campaign to end discriminatory policing practices in New York, bringing together a movement of community members, lawyers, researchers, and activists to work for change. The partners in this campaign come from all five NYC boroughs, from all walks of life, and represent many of those most unfairly targeted by the NYPD. <u>http://</u> changethenypd.org/

Community and College

Fellowship seeks to eliminate individual and structural barriers to higher education, economic security, longterm stability, and civic participation for women who have criminal convictions, including those currently and formerly incarcerated, and their families. <u>http://</u> <u>collegeandcommunity.org/</u> <u>ccf/</u>

Correctional Association of New York is an independent non-profit organization that advocates for a more humane and effective criminal justice system and a more just and equitable society. <u>http://www.</u> correctionalassociation.org/



OTHER ORGANIZATIONS WORKING ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PRISON REFORM [cont.]

The Drug Policy Alliance

promotes sensible drug policies that are grounded in science, compassion, health, and human rights. The Alliance seeks to roll back the excesses of the war on drugs and its damaging consequences, especially on the young and communities of color. <u>http://</u> <u>www.drugpolicy.org/</u>

Families Against Mandatory

nonpartisan organization that advocates for smart sentencing laws that are fair, reduce incarceration rates, and protect public safety. <u>http://</u> famm.org/

The Ford Foundation uses its \$12 billion endowment to reduce poverty and injustice, strengthen democratic values, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement. The foundation's Just Films program has provided a number of filmmakers with grants to work creatively around social justice issues, including racial justice. <u>https://</u> www.fordfoundation.org/ work/our-grants/justfilms/

Fortune Society supports successful reentry from prison to society with extensive resources, including transportation, employment strategizing, family care, and substance abuse support services. <u>http://</u> <u>fortunesociety.org/</u>

Innocence Project is a national litigation and public policy organization dedicated to exonerating wrongfully convicted individuals through DNA testing and reforming the criminal justice system to prevent future injustice. <u>http://</u> www.innocenceproject.org

Jails Action Coalition is a coalition of activists that includes formerly incarcerated and currently incarcerated people, family members, and other community members who are working to promote human rights, dignity, and safety for people in New York City jails, many of whom are pre-trial detainees who cannot afford bail. <u>http://nycjac.org/</u>

The Justice Policy Institute is a national nonprofit organization whose research identifies programs and policies that promote well-being and justice for all people and communities. <u>http://www.justicepolicy.</u> org/index.html

JustLeadershipUSA is dedicated to cutting the U.S. correctional population in half by 2030, while reducing crime. JLUSA empowers people most affected by incarceration to drive policy reform. <u>https://www.</u> justleadershipusa.org/

Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice is a

growing team of professionals with decades of collective experience in community organizing, policy advocacy, strategy development, training, political campaigns, and communications. The Center collaborates with partners to build powerful, research-based campaigns to dismantle mass incarceration, end the war on drugs, and advance health, equity, and justice. http://www. katalcenter.org

Law Enforcement Against Prohibition (LEAP) is an international nonprofit organization of criminal justice professionals who are speaking out about the failure of the war on drugs and existing drug policies. <u>http://www.leap.cc/</u>

Mothers of Incarcerated Sons is a nonprofit group formed by the mother of an incarcerated son in 2001 to offer support to parents whose children are in the prison system. <u>http://www.</u> mothersofinmates.org/

OTHER ORGANIZATIONS WORKING ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PRISON REFORM [cont.]

The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund is a legal organization fighting for racial justice through litigation, advocacy, and public education to expand democracy and achieve racial justice for all Americans. http://www.naacpldf.org/

Prison Policy Initiative challenges over-incarceration practices around the country, using research, advocacy, and organizing to bring attention to predatory practices in criminal justice. http://www. prisonpolicy.org/

The Prisoner Reentry Institute at John Jay College of

Criminal Justice is primarily involved with developing and evaluating innovative reentry programs, as well as promoting educational opportunities in prison. The Institute hosted a roundtable of experts to speak on the role of education in corrections in 2008 that can be viewed here: <u>http://johnjayresearch.</u> <u>org/pri/2012/07/17/</u> <u>from-the-classroom-to-</u> <u>the-community-exploring-</u> <u>the-role-of-education-during-</u> <u>incarceration-and-reentry/</u>

Safer Foundation is one of the nation's largest not-forprofit providers of services for people with criminal records to help them secure and maintain employment. <u>http://www.</u> <u>saferfoundation.org/</u>

The Stanford Justice Advocacy Project (formerly the Three Strikes Project) represents individuals who are serving unjust prison sentences for minor crimes. The project helps their clients reenter their communities and advocates for a more fair and effective criminal justice system. https://law. stanford.edu/stanford-justiceadvocacy-project/



The Ordinary People's

Society (T.O.P.S.) is a nonprofit, faith-based organization that offers hope, without regard to race, sex, creed, color, or social status, to individuals and their families who suffer the effects of drug addiction, incarceration, homelessness, unemployment, hunger, and illness, through comprehensive faith-based programs that provide a continuum of unconditional acceptance and care. <u>http://</u> <u>www.wearetops.org/</u>

The Vera Institute for

Justice combines expertise in research, demonstration projects, and technical assistance to help leaders in government and civil society improve the systems people rely on for justice and public safety. <u>http://</u> www.vera.org/

VOCAL-NY is a statewide grassroots membership organization building power among low-income people affected by HIV/AIDS, the drug war, and mass incarceration to create healthy and just communities. They accomplish their goals through community organizing, leadership development, public education, participatory research, and direct action. <u>http://www. vocal-ny.org/</u>



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Control. Dirs. Chris Bravo and Lindsey Schneider. 2014. <u>http://www.controldocumentary.com/</u>

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1 Between 1980 and 2014, violent crime rates declined 39 percent and property crime declined 52 percent. https://www.whitehouse. gov/sites/default/files/ page/files/20160423 cea incarceration criminal justice. pdf

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