

# FIRSTHAND

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# Life After Prison



## Discussion Guide

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# About the Series

The purpose of the *FIRSTHAND* project is to put a human face on issues facing Chicago and bring to life important stories from personal, firsthand perspectives. In *FIRSTHAND: Life After Prison*, we follow the stories of five people who share their journeys and experiences of building a life after being incarcerated. These individuals' experiences illuminate the challenges many people face when they reenter society and seek to have their full humanity restored. This series will help viewers better understand how our nation can assist formerly incarcerated individuals become fully reintegrated when they return home. It also explores the transformative processes returning residents are engaging in for themselves and their communities.

*FIRSTHAND: Life After Prison* is not a series of “those criminals.” It is about the problem of mass incarceration, which touches many lives across the nation. It is also about the people living in the long shadow of a criminal record who are fighting to overcome barriers and stereotypes so they will have a promising future. *FIRSTHAND: Life After Prison* allows viewers to walk in the shoes of individuals and families who are confronting significant issues that result from mass incarceration. Life after prison is compounded by a multiplicity of legal, economic, psychological, social, personal, and other factors. These complex situations are challenging for anyone on a journey to restore their humanity and build a life post-imprisonment. By learning from the stories shown in *FIRSTHAND: Life After Prison*, viewers will be more informed, engaged, and understanding of those who have been incarcerated.

These stories demonstrate the resilience and strength of five formerly incarcerated people living with shame, stigmatization, and legal constraints. We see their endurance, tenacity, and commitment to make a better life for themselves, their families, and their communities. In this series, we will provide an opportunity to discuss the

issues affecting formerly incarcerated individuals, paying special attention to the resources that are needed to heal, repair, rebuild, and change the conditions that facilitate mass incarceration and help system-impacted people overcome their past to fully reintegrate into society.

## Purpose of This Discussion Guide

This discussion guide provides questions and resources to help viewers and community facilitators connect with the WTTW *FIRSTHAND: Life After Prison* series through a personalized reflective learning process. The series puts a human face on the issue of incarceration and reentry in Chicago and brings to life important stories from personal, firsthand perspectives to overcome stereotypes and shorthand. This discussion guide provides tools to understand the complex issues system-impacted groups face post-incarceration, the structural and individual conditions that reinforce their marginalized status as people with criminal records, and the processes and supports that may enable them to overcome their past to build a better life for themselves and others. By helping connect viewers with the five featured participants, the guide will spark conversations about the reality of living with a criminal record and a stigmatized status.

This discussion guide is meant to support community members and organizations, educators, faith community leaders, and policymakers to facilitate important conversations on issues raised by the series. Your screening can spark dialogue that can be used to create restorative and healing conversations or develop strategic

and reform policies. You can use the series in the following ways:

- To engage in conversation concerning life after prison and the many individuals impacted by the criminal legal system
- To highlight ways that individuals and communities struggle through the barriers of reintegration yet find ways to move forward
- To explore the intersection of criminal legal involvement with other societal and economic conditions and personal challenges, including trauma, mental health, and substance use
- To brainstorm points of multifaceted prevention and intervention methods at the individual, community, and policy level for those living with criminal records and stigmatized statuses

- To encourage community members from all walks of life to reflect on personal views, decisions, and actions concerning incarceration and reentry

We encourage you to use this guide as a tool to organize screening events utilizing the stories in the series. Each story includes overarching themes related to reentry; however, many of the themes overlap. This guide includes the backgrounds of the subjects, discussion questions, background reading and links, and resources that can help you build successful events to engage viewers about the challenges of mass incarceration and reentry and enhance their awareness of how formerly incarcerated people strive to create a life post-incarceration.

# Background Information

## The Scale of Mass Incarceration

Mass incarceration breeds difficulties that stretch far beyond legal court proceedings, conviction rates and sentences, and prison walls. Yet the prison system in the United States has been bloated since the 1970s. From 1972 to 2009, the prison population increased sevenfold, rising from 174,379 state inmates to approximately 1.4 million at the end of 2009, with a total federal and state inmate population of 2.3 million.<sup>1,2</sup> Since this peak in incarceration rates, the incarcerated population has declined slightly but still remains extremely high. As of midyear 2021, there were approximately 1.8 million people incarcerated in America's jails and prisons, down from 2.1 million in 2019 after local and state criminal legal systems sought to reduce people held in confinement because of the dangers of the COVID-19 global pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, a deeper analysis of these incarceration rates disaggregated by race and gender reveals an alarming situation. With respect to gender, the incarceration rate of men is 13 times the incarceration rate of women as of 2017. Yet women, especially Black women, have experienced exponential growth in imprisonment at the state level since the 1980s, outpacing that of men by nearly double the number.<sup>4</sup> For instance, the Sentencing Project notes that “between 1980 and 2020, the number of incarcerated women increased by more than 475%, rising from a total of 26,326 in 1980 to 152,854 in 2020.”<sup>5</sup> Although the incarceration rate of Black women has been declining, their imprisonment rate is still 1.7 times the rate of White women, while the incarceration rate of Latinx women is 1.3 times that of White women. In general, racial disparity associated with incarceration is starkly evident, with

African Americans incarcerated six times as often as Whites and almost twice as often as Hispanics.<sup>6</sup>

The causes of these incarceration rates and the racial disparities seen in state and federal prison systems are complex and debatable. There are different causal explanations, but they tend to fall into two broad camps. Some researchers and criminal legal experts suggest that the racial disproportionality witnessed in mass incarceration is due primarily to poverty and high crime rates within Black and Latinx communities, while others point to the race- and class-based nature of the entire criminal legal system that works in tandem with a larger structure of racism and inequality impacting Black and Latinx communities.<sup>7,8</sup> In the former argument, high crime and poverty creates high incarceration and racial disparities. In the latter, racial patterns of segregation, systemic racism, and structures of both historic and current inequality marginalize Black and Latinx communities, while the criminal legal system, including law enforcement, target these vulnerable groups at a higher rate. But regardless of the explanations, research reveals that there is a disproportionate effect that disadvantages poor Black and Latinx individuals at every stage of the criminal legal system, from policing to arrests to pretrial detention to convictions and sentencing.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, many states replicate similar patterns of incarceration, although some states have fewer overall numbers of Black or Latinx groups in general. By midyear 2022, nearly 29,000 individuals, of whom 54.1% were Black, 32.4% were White, 12.7% were Latinx, and .8% were Asian, Native American, or biracial, were incarcerated in the Illinois Department of Corrections.<sup>10</sup> Approximately half of these individuals come from Cook County, and the bulk of these individuals come from and return to seven community areas in Chicago — Austin, Humboldt Park, North Lawndale, West Englewood, East Garfield Park, Roseland, and Auburn Gresham.<sup>11</sup> These communities have some of the most intractable social problems concentrated in one area, including high rates of poverty, violence, health disparities, and unemployment, and they represent broader

patterns of segregation and disinvestment in Black and Latinx neighborhoods in Chicago.<sup>12</sup>

With the exception of 2021, Illinois's figures represent the lowest number of people held in state prison in nearly three decades.<sup>13</sup> Yet the decline in Illinois and across the country has not been significant enough to warrant celebration. Even with much criminal legal reform taking place, the Sentencing Project notes that "at the current rate of decline, it will take nearly six decades to cut the nation's prison population in half."<sup>14</sup>

## General Characteristics of System-Impacted Groups

Admittedly, the scale and impact of mass incarceration are overwhelming. Although many citizens support the criminal legal system as it currently operates and while some push for even harsher laws and punishments, a substantial portion of U.S. citizens across the political spectrum understand that the status quo is untenable. In fact, ever since the 2008 economic recession and housing crisis, government officials at the state and federal levels have turned their sights to the nation's swollen prison budgets and raised concern about the deleterious effects of previous tough-on-crime policies that led to high incarceration rates.<sup>15</sup>

At the time, policymakers and criminal legal experts agreed that the War on Drugs had created a context in which a large number of racial and ethnic minorities were swept up into the broad criminal justice net and that reform efforts should seek to address drug use and the overincarceration of people convicted of drug-related crimes. In retrospect, this was a narrow conception of the scale of the country's imprisonment problem because no reforms centrally focused on drug use and drug crimes could adequately address or rethink the punitive approach to violence and people who commit harm.

Nonetheless, one thing that advocates of reform who targeted drug offenders and people incarcerated for drug-related crimes correctly noted was the large number of system-involved people who have a history of drug use or a crime related to drugs. For instance, the rate of substance use for persons on probation or parole is four times that of the general population.<sup>16</sup> According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, an estimated 65% of U.S. state and federal prisoners potentially meet *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) criteria for substance abuse or dependence, while more than 85% of the prison population has a history of substance use or has been incarcerated for a crime involving drugs or drug use.<sup>17</sup>

But drug use and drug-related offenses are only one part of the picture. People who experience incarceration have to face a plethora of challenges that are complex and often difficult to resolve. These challenges reflect not only the problems they face in their communities but also those they face personally, psychologically, and economically.

Research on system-impacted groups indicates that people experiencing psychological distress are vulnerable to incarceration. In fact, people diagnosed with a serious mental illness (i.e., major depression, schizophrenia, or bipolar spectrum disorders) make up an estimated 14% of those involved in the criminal legal system.<sup>18</sup> As researchers Emily Gottfried and Sheresa Christopher state, "Psychiatric disorders are more common among criminal offenders than the population at large."<sup>19</sup>

Today, many advocates believe that some jails and prisons have become new mental institutions. Despite the criticisms by disability justice activists and scholars that critique this metaphor for wrongly defining the problem as one resulting from deinstitutionalization, the rate of incarcerated people in need of mental health support is large enough to warrant outcry.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, system-involved individuals experience higher rates of childhood traumatic events and traumatic experiences during their childhood, although these experiences vary by gender, with women reporting higher rates of domestic abuse and sexual victimization.<sup>21</sup> As Beth Richie, a criminologist and Black feminist scholar, notes in her book *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation*, Black women are particularly vulnerable to these traumatic experiences and are often both criminalized and victimized without protection from the legal system.<sup>22</sup>

To be sure, system-involved individuals experience higher rates of both childhood trauma and traumatic experiences during their life than the general population, with some studies showing that more than 90% of men and women impacted by incarceration have experienced childhood trauma.<sup>23</sup> System-impacted women are especially vulnerable to disproportionate rates of trauma related to sexual and interpersonal violence and abuse.<sup>24</sup> Many of these experiences are complex and overlapping, with many system-involved individuals experiencing multiple forms of trauma, histories of substance use, psychological distress or an official psychiatric condition, and additional circumstantial challenges such as low educational attainment, unemployment, and persistent poverty. Likewise, these experiences impact families and intimate relationships in extremely harmful ways; incarceration compounds these social problems and inequities and can cause additional trauma to those who are held in custody, their children, and their families.<sup>25</sup>

One or both parents of more than 1.5 million children are incarcerated in the United States. These children face short- and long-term challenges that can lead to increased vulnerability to trauma and juvenile justice and child welfare involvement.<sup>26</sup> As a result, mass incarceration is often described as a state-sanctioned form of violence because it frequently causes additional harm rather than repairs or alleviates it. Many incarcerated people return to society with a strong need for trauma-centered therapy and wrap-around services.

## Life After Incarceration

With the dramatic increase in incarceration rates since the 1970s, an equally large number of people return home every year. Each year more than half a million Americans join a population of more than 20 million formerly incarcerated individuals living in society. Specifically, more than 600,000 incarcerated individuals leave prison annually, and many of them face challenges in remaining crime-free and reintegrating into society.<sup>27</sup> In Illinois, an estimated 23,662 former inmates exited state prisons in 2019, with the majority of them returning to Cook County and Chicago.<sup>28</sup> A large portion of releasees return to impoverished communities, face employment barriers and discrimination, and have a hard time reestablishing familial and other social bonds and fulfilling expected roles with their loved ones.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, while often not a part of the public dialogue, jails across the country process more than 8 million people every year, and people leaving jails are not accounted for regarding those reentering society after a period of detainment.<sup>30</sup> With more than 70 million people having some kind of arrest or criminal record, the United States faces an enormous challenge in ensuring that formerly incarcerated people have a sense of belonging, are fully reintegrated into society, and do not return to jail or prison.

Unfortunately, each year nearly a third of the people released from prisons in the United States return within a year, and approximately 62% return within three years and 71% return within five years.<sup>31</sup> Comparatively, in the state of Illinois the recidivism rate within a year for those leaving prisons was 38.5% in 2018; that rate increased to nearly 50% for those under the age of 25.<sup>32</sup> A report on recidivism by the Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council reveals that it costs the state \$151,662 on average for one recidivism event, which would amount to more than \$13 billion over five years if the recidivism rate remained the same at the time of publication (i.e., from 2018 to 2023).<sup>33</sup> Undoubtedly, a large portion of the people leaving prisons return within three years, and it is likely that the recidivism rate remained roughly

the same. But why does this happen? What are some of the reasons for the cycling that occurs in and out of prisons?

Despite successfully completing the terms of their legal sentence, many formerly incarcerated people receive a lifetime of punishment. Christopher Mele and Teresa Miller refer to this lifetime of punishment as the “collateral consequences” or “civil penalties” for having a criminal background.<sup>34</sup> Others, such as Reuben Miller, refer to it as a form of “carceral citizenship” — an alternative legal reality that includes a set of perverse rights, responsibilities, and formal and informal exclusions which impact a person’s ability to feel a sense of belonging in the nation, in their communities, and with their families and relationships.<sup>35</sup> This means that there are social, economic, and political barriers erected through legislation and popular discourse which restrict, exclude, and marginalize the vast majority of people leaving prisons and those who have a criminal record. In many cases, this post-incarceration punishment devastates their ability to reintegrate into society after completing their formal sentence.

Formally, this punishment manifests as being restricted or excluded from voting, receiving public assistance, working in certain occupational fields, receiving occupational licenses, attaining student financial aid for education, participating in jury selection, living in public housing, obtaining driver’s licenses in some states, and becoming adoptive or foster parents in some places.<sup>36</sup> These are just a few examples, but there are many more. Informally, this extended form of punishment grants public access to criminal records for free or for a fee, fosters ongoing shame and stigmatization, and condones discrimination in employment, housing, and education.<sup>37</sup>

According to Reuben Miller, sociologist and author of the book *Halfway Home: Race, Punishment, and the Afterlife of Mass Incarceration*, there are more than “forty-eight thousand laws, policies, and administrative sanctions that target formerly incarcerated people” that restrict their movement, hamper their ability to seek gainful employment in many different occupations, exclude their

participation in various activities, and essentially make it difficult for them to fully “reintegrate” into society. While these vary by state, Miller says that in Illinois, there are “over 1,400, including more than 1,000 employment regulations, 186 policies that limit political participation, 54 laws restricting family rights, and 21 housing statutes.”<sup>38</sup> Although employment discrimination is illegal, formal policies state that people with certain felony records cannot work in health care, cannot obtain a barber’s license, cannot obtain a real estate license, cannot receive food stamps; there are many more such restrictions.

Moreover, these restrictions are amplified for people with certain kinds of felonies, such as a violent or sexual offense. With the rise of sex offender registration and community notification policies nationwide and increasing use of “violent offender registries,” many formerly incarcerated people with sexual offenses are locked out of employment opportunities; are prohibited from living in communities near schools, parks, daycares, or other sites; face direct stigma and threats from community neighbors; and are often explicitly excluded from the housing market.<sup>39</sup>

Research by criminologists Lorine Hughes and Keri Burchfield on residential mapping and sex offender residency in Chicago demonstrates that, because of differences in neighborhood size and the unequal distribution of legally restricted sites (i.e., schools, daycares, parks, etc.), Chicago’s residency restrictions disproportionately limit the housing options for child sex offenders to disadvantaged neighborhoods — neighborhoods that are predominantly low-income Black and Latinx communities.<sup>40</sup>

Also, public perceptions about people who are convicted of sexual offenses are often skewed, resulting in an overestimation of stranger predation that does not match how sexual offenses most often occur. In fact, research shows that more than 90% of incidents involving sexual victimization occur by people known to the victim, including close family and friends, and a large number of people with sex offenses were victimized themselves or experienced early childhood trauma.<sup>41</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the severe nature of sexual crimes and the enduring impact they have on victims, their families, and the public make it difficult for people with sex offenses to escape the pervasive stigma, shame, and punitive attitudes regarding people who commit sexual offenses, although research demonstrates that they frequently have far lower recidivism rates than other offenders.<sup>42</sup> The time on a registry is exceptionally long — well beyond the releasee’s parole time — and registrants live with the knowledge that their lives are open to public judgment and scrutiny the moment they return home.

The State of Illinois has both the Sex Offender Registry and the Illinois Murderer and Violent Offender Against Youth Registry, as well as a registry for those convicted of methamphetamine drug offenses. Failure to register can result in rearrest and return to prison. These registries and community notification practices are mere representations of the fear that is a part of the public’s perceptions regarding people who commit sexual and violent offenses.

While concerns for potential harm may be warranted and understandable, broad exclusions and restrictions are not always helpful. Collectively, the policies and practices affecting formerly incarcerated people engender a legalized system of exclusion and disenfranchisement that provides fertile soil for intensifying poverty and increasing the likelihood of reincarceration by creating challenges for people to support their families and loved ones. More importantly, the racial nature of the impact of these legalized barriers is animated by the stark disproportion of poor men and women of color who have criminal records and who are consequently subjected to collateral consequences. While these policies differ in their application and administration by state jurisdiction, collectively they create a web of roadblocks that systematically punish people far beyond incarceration.

Indeed, the marginalization that people with criminal records face does not simply stop at these legal policies. They also encounter informal consequences that are driven by society’s

stereotypes, fears, stigmas, preconceived notions of dangerousness, and assumptions that formerly incarcerated people will commit harm or a crime. These “negative credentials” reduce the opportunities available for individuals with felony convictions and create a sense of distrust, even among family members. In addition, public access to background checks and background disclosures by the criminal legal system is commonplace.<sup>43</sup> Thus, a criminal background is frequently used to disqualify a potential tenant of rental housing or deny a job applicant employment despite the qualifications presented. Because the criminal record signals a liability, a risk, or dangerousness, discriminatory practices against the formerly incarcerated remain prevalent.

Having a criminal record also affects how formerly incarcerated people negotiate their day-to-day relationships. The shame and stigma associated with their criminal records have a bearing on their conduct and interactions with people from whom they seek support. Again, Reuben Miller’s work is insightful. He shows that one consequence of being a “carceral citizen” is that it creates a situation where people with criminal records are subjected to an “economy of favors,” where they must constantly consider the stakes at play with people from whom they need resources and support. They are compelled to carefully craft their actions and words to minimize perceptions of danger and make others feel comfortable with who they are, regardless of how much they have changed or how much they do not represent their past crimes.

This “economy of favors” is an informal set of rules of conduct that put people at the mercy of others. But at the bottom of it is a stigmatized identity that is always at play: with landlords, with employers, with different human service representatives, and even with family, friends, and potential romantic partners. In short, the weight of a criminal record is tremendous, and its impact is not simply captured in formal statistics. It pervades the social and emotional life of the person living with it.<sup>44</sup>

# Quick Facts

## The Scale of Mass Incarceration

- As of midyear 2021, approximately 1.8 million people were incarcerated in America's jails and prisons, down from 2.1 million in 2019; while this is a notable decrease from the 2.3 million individuals incarcerated a decade earlier, if the current rate of reduction persists, it would take more than six decades to cut the incarcerated population to half its current size.
- Jails process more than 8 million people across the United States every year, and people released from jail are not accounted for regarding those reentering society after a period of detainment. More than 20 million people in the United States have a felony conviction, and more than 70 million have a criminal record.
- Mass incarceration has disproportionately impacted Black and Latinx communities, with Blacks being incarcerated six times as often as Whites and nearly twice as often as Latinx. Latinx individuals are incarcerated twice the rate of Whites. Moreover, system-involved individuals are more likely to be from a low-income or poor background.
- By midyear 2022 in Illinois, nearly 29,000 individuals, of whom 54.1% were Black, 32.4% were White, 12.7% were Latinx, and were Asian, Native American, or biracial, were incarcerated in the Illinois Department of Corrections. Approximately half of these individuals come from Cook County. An estimated 23,662 former inmates exited Illinois state prisons in 2019; the majority returned to seven community areas in Chicago – Austin, Humboldt Park, North Lawndale, West Englewood, East Garfield Park, Roseland, and Auburn Gresham.

## General Characteristics of System-Impacted Groups

- According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, an estimated 65% of U.S. state and federal prisoners potentially meet Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) criteria for substance abuse or dependence, while more than 85% of the prison population has a history of substance use or has been incarcerated for a crime involving drugs or drug use.
- System-involved individuals experience higher rates of both childhood trauma and traumatic experiences after childhood than the general population, with some studies showing that more than 90% of men and women impacted by incarceration have experienced childhood trauma. System-impacted women are especially vulnerable to disproportionate rates of trauma related to sexual and interpersonal violence and abuse.
- One or both parents of more than 1.5 million children in the United States are incarcerated. These children face short- and long-term challenges that can lead to increased vulnerability to trauma, juvenile justice, and child welfare involvement.

## Life After Incarceration

- Nationally, more than 600,000 incarcerated individuals leave prison annually, and many of them face challenges of remaining crime-free and reintegrating into society. Releasees experience disproportionate rates of housing insecurity and unemployment.
- Seven of the Chicago neighborhoods with the highest rates of formerly incarcerated people returning home also have some of the highest rates of poverty, unemployment, crime, and violence in the city.

- Each year nearly a third of the people released from prisons in the United States return within a year, and approximately 62% return within three years and 71% return within five years. The recidivism rate within a year for those leaving prisons was 38.5% in 2018, and that rate increased to nearly 50% for those under the age of 25.
- Research shows more than 90% of incidents involving sexual victimization occur by people known to the victim, including close family and friends, and a large number of sex offenders were victimized themselves or experienced early childhood trauma.
- Research by criminologists Lorine Hughes and Keri Burchfield on residential mapping and sex offender residency in Chicago demonstrates that, because of differences in neighborhood size and the unequal distribution of legally restricted sites (i.e., schools, daycares, parks, etc.), Chicago's residency restrictions disproportionately limit the housing options for child sex offenders to disadvantaged neighborhoods – neighborhoods that are predominantly low-income Black and Latinx communities.
- Employers are more reluctant to hire people with criminal records than any other group of disadvantaged workers, and many states statutorily bar individuals with felony convictions from a long list of professional jobs and occupations and from receiving certifications and professional licenses. Despite “ban the box” legislation in Illinois, that removed the question of prior felony convictions from job applications, people with criminal records face more than 1,000 employment regulations and 21 housing statutes that limit their access to employment and housing. Even after overcoming these legal employment barriers, formerly incarcerated individuals leaving prison obtain low-skilled, low-wage jobs on average.
- The availability of criminal records on the internet and non-restrictive policies that allow access to those records make it easier for employers, rental property management companies, and others to conduct criminal background checks on people with criminal records. This leads to increased rates of housing and employment exclusion.

# Tips for Planning the Discussion

## Laying the Groundwork for Dialogue

Pay attention to the details of the series – the relationships between the key subjects, the references that the subjects make, and the environment that they are in. Pay attention to your own physiological responses. Often, our deepest insights can come when we pay attention to our own emotional and visceral reactions. Choose to not turn away, as your own reactions are opportunities that can lead to meaningful discussions. Stay open to your own reactions to the feelings, thoughts, and ideas shared, as they touch your own fears, anxieties, anger, grief, and joy. As much as possible, make notes of your responses as you watch the, as they can be meaningful during later discussions.

### Creating a Safe Space

*FIRSTHAND: Life After Prison* deals with a subject matter that is personal to many people and is filled with issues that are complex, are nuanced and can be difficult to discuss. To create the most productive outcome and maximize discussion, you will want to ensure that everyone feels welcome and safe.

To this end, facilitators might consider sharing these reminders (excerpted and adapted from PBS's *POV* discussion guide) with their attendees:

“A Note about Facilitation. This series raises issues that may provoke difficult conversations. Some people may deflect their own discomfort with those issues by focusing on the decisions and behaviors of the individuals and institutions featured in the series. To avoid getting bogged down in unproductive personal attacks, you might remind participants that:

- The purpose of this discussion isn't to approve or disapprove of the actions of the people in the stories, but to learn from their experiences so we can make our own families and communities better.
- Issues that come up for one family or community are not more important than other issues. This event is going to focus on what we can learn about incarceration's impact from all of the experiences shared in these stories.
- Joking can be a fun way to interact with friends, but since we don't have that relationship with everyone in the room, and since insults, even in jest, can be easily misunderstood, that type of joking is best reserved for other occasions.”

### Consider Timing

The entire docuseries is approximately 171 minutes long. The expert talks are 61 minutes long. You may prefer to watch portions of the series or focus on a few of the shorter segments. You may also want to allow at least an hour after viewing for discussion.

### Consider Your Audience

Although unrated, the series is best viewed by mature audiences and teens. There is little to no visual content that may be considered objectionable; however, the subject matter deals directly with violence, substance abuse, incarceration, and family losses and strengthening. Do not hesitate to ask an expert (social worker, mental health worker, community practitioner, scholar, etc.) to help guide your discussion or be present for the screening and discussion.

### Follow Up

The series will raise many concerns that will not be resolved after the screening. Find time to follow up with viewers and offer opportunities for resource sharing with others working on these issues. See the appendices for a list of local and national organizations and resources related to addressing mass incarceration and post-incarceration release.

# A Timeline to Prepare

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## 2-4 Weeks Prior

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- Develop your invitation list.

## For an In-Person Event

- Select a location that allows for good screening and ensure that proper seating and audiovisual equipment will be available and set up.
- Be mindful of any security needs. Many venues require security based on the number of attendees.
- Be sure that your location is accessible to all. Consider your viewers' visual, auditory, language, and physical needs.
- Design and send an email that describes the series' name and purpose, the discussion's purpose, and the post-screening discussion's format (panel discussion, moderated Q&A, small-group discussions, open-discussion format, peace circles, snacks or dinner, etc.). If you are planning a potluck or other special aspects, include this information in your invitation.
- If your setting does not allow for a minimum of two hours to both watch and discuss the series afterward (such as during school hours or at an after-school or outreach program), you may want to show shorter clips from the series, highlighting one or two of the participants' stories or smaller sections of their stories. Allow enough time for setup.

## For a Virtual Event

- Follow the same recommended planning procedure for an in-person event.
- Create the virtual conference event with the link that can be shared with the invited guests. It is important to check for the maximum

capacity allowed at the event before sending out the invitation. If restricted to a certain number of participants, include this information in the invitation.

- Check for video- and audio-sharing settings on the virtual platform so that, with the system sound on, your invited viewers can hear the sound from your computer. Turn off all other apps in the background that might make noise (e.g., email alerts, notifications, etc.).

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## 2 Weeks Prior

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- If you are having an in-person event, make reservations for any food or beverages you plan to have for the discussion and decide whether to offer this before, during, or after participants watch the series or during the discussion.
- Prepare an agenda, either formal or informal. Consider who will introduce the series, the start time of the series and the subsequent start time of the discussion, who will facilitate the discussion, and the wrap-up and evaluation procedures. The discussion guide can serve as a tool to provide discussion questions, prompts, and resource sharing related to the series so the discussion will be robust and meaningful.

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## 1 Week Prior

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- Send a reminder email to those who have RSVP'd and those who have not.
- Consider sending RSVP'd guests links to the series' website and social media pages to engage them with information about the series and get them excited about the event. Consider sending a link to one of the articles listed in the resources to prepare them for the screening and discussion.

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### **3 Days Prior**

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- Reconfirm your location and any food or beverages for an in-person event.
- You may want to send a final email to RSVP'd guests as a reminder and send any links to the late RSVPs.
- Ensure that all participants know their roles and have prepared in advance.

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### **Day of the Event**

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- Arrive early to set up and check all audiovisual equipment (sound, lighting, etc.).
- If holding an in-person event and your venue is large, place signs throughout the venue to direct guests to the screening area.
- Have the agenda on hand.
- Welcome everyone and introduce the series!

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### **Day After the Event**

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- Send a thank-you note to all guests who attended and include any follow-up activities.
- Open up opportunities to stay connected and share ideas for taking future actions after viewing the series.

# Theme One: Common Circumstances and Effects of Incarceration

## Kyle Hilbert

**Subthemes: Substance Use, Recovery and Family Strain**

Kyle Hilbert is on a path to recovery. He has been sent to Cook County jail 17 times, has been in prison on three occasions, and has experienced homelessness many times. Kyle has had a long-term drug dependency that developed in high school, but after successfully completing a recovery program, he is on his way to remaining drug-free and crime-free. What does his future look like?



Kyle Hilbert

Photo: Liz Farina Markel © WTTW

## Discussion Questions

### Reflect

- How would you describe Kyle Hilbert's hopes, fears, dreams, and concerns?
- What are some short- and long-term effects of Kyle's involvement in illegal activity and his subsequent incarceration experiences?
- Kyle poignantly states that jail is "meant to be a deterrent, but it becomes more of ... this is what I'm worth. The self-esteem level, and what it does to you mentally, it gives you a feeling of hopelessness that just perpetuates the cycle of the revolving door going in and coming out." In light of his statement, how do you make sense of his cycling in and out of jail and prison since the age of 19?
- As Kyle searches for a better life, what are some key factors that influence the way he feels about his life and his future? Why are these factors significant?

### Engage

- Kyle is an example of someone striving to maintain sobriety, build a better life post-incarceration, and recover from drug dependency. What would be helpful for him as he endeavors to create the life that he truly wants to live?
- As Kyle's story reveals, recovery homes, halfway houses and other facilities often provide short-term support to people leaving jail or prison. Yet there never seems to be enough services that guarantee long-term stability. What can be done to help bolster support for people like Kyle as they work diligently to heal, recover, reconnect with family and become full members of their community? What additional supports or resources would you propose? What kind of resources or supports would be most helpful?

# Tawana Pope

**Subthemes: Trauma, Recovery, Family Separation and Reconnection, Treatment Support**

Tawana Pope has overcome insurmountable challenges during her life. Having been incarcerated on several occasions for drug-related offenses, she is now a pillar of hope and support for system-impacted people, especially Black women with children. Having achieved a high level of education and success, what does the next stage of her life look like?



Tawana Pope

Photo: Liz Fainna Maikael © WTTW

- Tawana tells us about her family history and connects her own experiences later in life to those that she experienced as a child. What are some unique experiences that she had as a Black woman growing up in the community where she was raised?
- As Tawana continues work in the field of substance-use counseling, she is having a positive impact on others who are battling drug dependency and striving for recovery. How does this work help her as someone who has experienced a similar trajectory?

## Engage

- Family separation and family disconnection are significant challenges that system-impacted individuals face. Tawana's story highlights how parental ties become frayed because of incarceration. What can be done to better support system-impacted individuals such as Tawana and their families before, during and/or after incarceration?
- Given Tawana's impressive educational achievements, what can be done to ensure that she is not just an exception to accessing higher education? In other words, what are some key factors in her life and experiences that may facilitate educational attainment for other system-impacted individuals? What ideas or plans would help ensure formerly incarcerated people have access to education?

## Discussion Questions

### Reflect

- How would you describe Tawana Pope's hopes, fears, dreams, and concerns?
- In many cases, the development of drug dependency is the result of traumatic experiences for people who have criminal legal involvement. It is considered one of many "pathways" to incarceration for a lot of individuals, especially women. How does Tawana's story highlight how these issues relate to incarceration experiences?

## Expert Talk 1:

The Humanity We Deserve

### Dr. Nneka Jones Tapia

**Managing Director, Justice Initiatives, Chicago Beyond**

Dr. Nneka Jones Tapia describes the universal experience and impact of trauma for people incarcerated and correctional staff inside and outside of the correctional institution in *The Humanity We Deserve*. She explores the shift we need to begin to heal and achieve real safety.



Photo: Ken Carl © WTTW

Dr. Nneka Jones Tapia

- In what ways does Dr. Nneka Jones Tapia’s talk highlight what system-involved and system-impacted individuals experience before, during and after incarceration?
- How do her experiences in jails and prisons demonstrate what needs to change in the criminal legal system?
- What are the implications of Dr. Tapia’s experiences in prisons for system-impacted individuals? How can they benefit from the ideas in her talk?
- How can families of people with criminal records and communities affected by mass incarceration benefit from the ideas in her talk?

taking part in the trauma-informed Community Anti-Violence Education (C.A.V.E.) group supported him in learning about trauma, finding his healing journey, and rediscovering his humanity.

- In what ways does Orlando Mayorga’s talk highlight what system-involved and system-impacted individuals experience before, during, and after incarceration?
- How do his experiences in jails and prisons demonstrate what needs to change in the criminal legal system?
- What are the implications of Orlando’s experiences in prison for system-impacted individuals? How can they benefit from the ideas in his talk?
- How can families of people with criminal records and communities affected by mass incarceration benefit from the ideas in his talk?



Photo: Ken Carl © WTTW

Orlando Mayorga

## Expert Talk 2:

### The Hurt, the Harm, and the Healing

## Orlando Mayorga

**McCormick Re-entry Policy Coordinator,  
Community Anti-Violence Education  
(C.A.V.E.)**

Navigating life after incarceration without addressing trauma often leads many people right back into the prison system. In *The Hurt, the Harm and the Healing*, Orlando Mayorga describes how

# Theme Two: Challenges of Reentry and Reintegration

## Marcelo de Jesus Velazquez

**Subthemes: Criminal Records, Legal Exclusions, Permanent Punishment, Family Reunification, Reentry Services**

Marcelo de Jesus Velazquez spent more than two decades incarcerated in the Illinois Department of Corrections. Growing up in Chicago's Humboldt Park community, he witnessed violence and abuse as a child and got involved in gangs and drugs. However, having obtained an education while incarcerated and having turned his life around during imprisonment, he is now on a path to rebuilding ties with his family and striving to create a life free from the constraints of his criminal record. Given Marcelo's long history of incarceration and the way people with criminal records are viewed



Marcelo de Jesus Velazquez

Photo: Liz Farina Markel. © WTTW

and treated, what challenges will he face along the way?

## Discussion Questions

### Reflect

- How would you describe Marcelo de Jesus Velazquez's hopes, fears, dreams, and concerns?
- For anyone who has spent time in jail or prison, the process of moving back home and reintegrating into society is difficult. This process is especially challenging for people who spend a long time incarcerated and for people with serious felony convictions. When thinking about Marcelo's story, what are some key factors that may help or hinder him along the way to reestablishing himself in his family, within his community, and in society?
- Marcelo says that "anxiety is my best friend ... and my worst enemy" and talks about living in fear after being released. He also mentions that he preferred to go to Precious Blood's housing program instead of back home to live with his family. What are some possible circumstances, community factors, or personal issues that may concern him and that are causing him anxiety? How are these influencing his decisions and actions?
- One of Marcelo's major concerns is balancing time with his mother, reconnecting with his son and working and going to school. Why are family reunification and family bonding important to his life? How does having a strong family relationship and support help him? Generally, why is family important for people reentering society after incarceration?

### Engage

- Having landed a job at Restore Justice as an apprentice doing legal advocacy work for people with criminal records, Marcelo is excited about his future and all the possibilities ahead. However, he discusses the "box" question regarding felony convictions on college admissions applications and says that

he is trying to get his record expunged. What are other examples that relate to the law and criminal records that may affect Marcelo's plans in the future? What role can Marcelo play at Restore Justice to make changes to these laws?

- Given the many laws and policies that exclude people with criminal records from participating in certain jobs or from obtaining certain resources and licenses, what needs to happen to make formerly incarcerated people truly feel that they belong in this country as equals? What steps can you take to help change how things currently function?



Photo: Liz Fairina Market © WTTW

Paul S.

## Paul S.

**Subthemes: Criminal Records, Legal Exclusions, Sex Offender Registry, Family Support, Intimate Relationships**

Paul spent just over 15 years in prison and is doing his best to create a life free from the shame and stigma of his past. Having been convicted of a sexual offense, he is now required to stay on the Illinois Sex Offender Registry forever. He knows all too well how restrictive and damaging being on this registry is to his life post-incarceration and how it affects the opportunities available to him. However, with a strong spiritual faith, family support, a great mentor, and a loving wife, he is progressing on his goals and feels hopeful about his future. How can he overcome his challenges going forward?

## Discussion Questions

### Reflect

- How would you describe Paul's hopes, fears, dreams, and concerns?
- As with many people who end up in jail or prison, Paul experienced a number of adverse childhood events and mental health challenges that impacted his life as he got older. Because sexual offenses are often considered by the public to be "heinous" or "egregious," how

does Paul's story help you better understand the causes and consequences of crimes like the one he and his ex-wife committed? What is the public perception about this kind of offense? Why?

- Paul says, "There are a lot of difficulties to being released from prison and having to reintegrate back into society ... like, having a place to live, because all of the guidelines, all the restrictions, where you can only be within an X amount of feet of a church, or a school or park or a playground." He also talks about the Sex Offender Registry as being a "scarlet letter." How do you make sense of his past offense and his current life? What does it mean to live with this sense of confinement after having served more than 15 years in prison and having changed his life? What would you do if you were a family member of Paul?
- At the end of Paul's story, he says, "My crime does not define me. Not at all. Absolutely not. What I would want people to know about me is to just give me a chance, to not judge me on a first thought, or because of what my charges are. I could be a good friend. I could be a good neighbor. I just want to help people now instead of hurt people." What do you think about this? What changes in Paul's life are helpful for his future success? What factors may help him succeed? Why are these important for him and others who face similar circumstances?

## Engage

- When you think about all of the restrictions that Paul faces, and more generally the restrictions that formerly incarcerated people face, why do you think these restrictions exist? How do you feel about them?
- If you had the power to change the requirements of the Sex Offender Registry, what changes would you make? Why would you make these changes? What kind of legal reforms are possible? What services are needed? What is fair and just for Paul?



Photo: Ken Carl © WTTW

Regina Hernandez

## Expert Talk 1:

### Prison After Prison

## Marlon Chamberlain

### Manager, Fully Free campaign

In *Prison After Prison*, Marlon Chamberlain reveals the invisible bars called “permanent punishments” that follow people long after their sentences have been served.

- In what ways does Marlon Chamberlain’s talk demonstrate how difficult it is for people with criminal records to remain crime-free after incarceration?



Marlon Chamberlain

Photo: Ken Carl © WTTW

- What challenges to reentry and reintegration does Marlon’s talk highlight?
- How does his talk challenge you to think differently about people with criminal records and their life post-incarceration?
- Based on Marlon’s knowledge and insights, what can you do to help create change for people with criminal records?

## Expert Talk 2:

### Untangling the Path to Erasing Criminal Records

## Regina Hernandez

### Supervising Attorney, Legal Aid Chicago

In *Untangling the Path to Erasing Criminal Records*, Regina Hernandez explores the real-life hurdles of one woman’s life with a criminal record and reveals the challenges of trying to expunge or seal a criminal record in Cook County.

- In what ways does Regina Hernandez’s talk demonstrate how difficult it is for people with criminal records to remain crime-free after incarceration?
- What challenges to reentry and reintegration does Regina’s talk highlight?

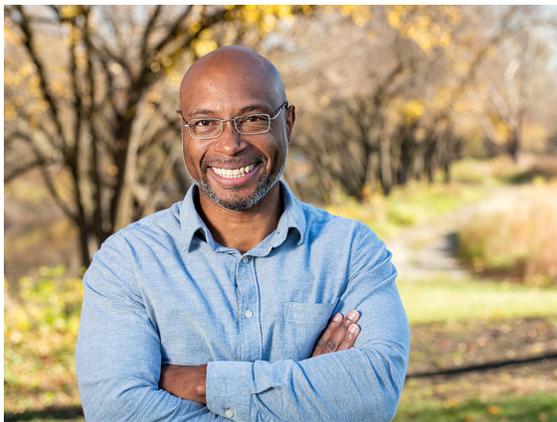
- How does her talk challenge you to think differently about people with criminal records and their life post-incarceration?
- Based on Regina's knowledge and insights, what can you do to help create change for people with criminal records?

# Theme Three: Building a Life After Prison

## Nick Crayton

### Subthemes: Housing, Family Support, Prison Reentry Programs, Employment

Nick Crayton was recently released from prison after serving 24 years in the Illinois Department of Corrections. Before leaving prison, he spent time at the Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center preparing for his release. It is a program designed for a select group of incarcerated individuals who are expected to be released within a few years. Nick's progress post-release is noteworthy, and he is motivated to build a successful, financially stable, and productive life. He has family in his corner, entrepreneurial ideas and skills, and a strong commitment to living with high morals and ethics in honor of his victim. What will allow Nick to continue growing and making the life for himself that he so desperately wants?



Nick Crayton

Photo: Liz Farina Markel © WTTW

## Discussion Questions

### Reflect

- How would you describe Nick Crayton's hopes, fears, dreams, and concerns?
- Although Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center is limited in what it can offer most people incarcerated in the Illinois Department of Corrections, Nick seems to appreciate his time there and what he was able to accomplish. What role did the program play in his transition to society? How did it help him? What did he gain? What would happen if all inmates got the chance to be at a facility such as Kewanee?
- Nick seems to be quite aware of his feelings and his present state. At different moments in his journey, he remarks about how he feels – whether it's "alarms going off" when out past 9:30 pm or feeling the rush of emotions after visiting his old neighborhood. Why is he able to express his feelings so clearly and be so self-reflective? What impact does this have on his life? Does it hurt or help him to express himself in these moments?
- Unlike many newly released returning residents, Nick appears to be making substantial progress quickly. Within a couple of months, he obtained his driver's license, an apartment, a car and is looking to get a job and become an entrepreneur. What key attributes and factors in his life appear to aid his adjustment to society? What supports are facilitating his progress? Why are these supports important for formerly incarcerated individuals? What kind of life in the future do you imagine for Nick if these attributes and factors continue?

### Engage

- Knowing that programs such as Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center are limited in the state of Illinois and that most inmates do not have access to such programs, what would you propose to policymakers and legal reform advocates to help people prepare for their release? What skills should they acquire? What resources would be helpful? Why?

- We see how Nick quickly contacted Defy Ventures Illinois to get support on his business plan and idea. This organization is unique in what it offers formerly incarcerated individuals. Did you know about this organization? What do you think about the program and support services? If you worked at an organization like Defy Ventures, what kind of supports and resources would you want someone released from prison to have available to them?

## Expert Talk 1:

### No Place to Call Home

## Ahmadou Dramé

### Program Director, Illinois Justice Project

Returning residents face barriers to housing in the private market, public housing, and the homeless system. In *No Place to Call Home*, Ahmadou Dramé reveals the contradictions and punishments embedded in housing policies and practices – and the work being done to break through these restrictions.

- After listening to Ahmadou Dramé’s talk, how does his commentary about reentry services and supports provided to returning residents affect your understanding of what it takes to build a stable life after prison?



Photo: Ken Carl © WTTW

Ahmadou Dramé

- What key resources may be more readily accessible or obtainable to people leaving prison? Why? How do these resources show up in Nick Crayton’s life?
- What is one big idea or crucial issue that connects Ahmadou’s talk with Nick’s post-release journey? Why?
- How does Ahmadou’s talk challenge you to think differently about housing programs and resources in Chicago?

# Synthesizing Content and Getting Involved

## Thinking Across Experiences and Significant Themes

### Discussion Questions

Consider the stories and life experiences of each individual in the series and reflect on their circumstances and challenges and the victories they collectively achieved.

- What did you learn that you did not know before watching the series?
- What experiences stand out the most? How do these experiences make you feel?
- How do the experiences of Kyle, Tawana, Marcelo, Paul, and Nick connect? Is there a larger pattern or set of themes across their stories? If so, what are they?
- What do the stories tell you about the reintegration process for people leaving prison in Illinois? What role does returning to the city of Chicago play in their lives and experiences? How do their journeys inform your understanding of what the process involves in a city such as Chicago?
- Think about the changes that each of the five featured formerly incarcerated people made in their lives. What gives each of them inspiration and hope? Can this source of inspiration and hope be replicated? Why or why not?

Reflect on the expert talks and consider what each expert discussed.

- What stands out about the expert talks? What seems to be most challenging to grasp or understand? Is there anything that you strongly agree or disagree with? Why?
- How do their talks connect with each other? What are some important factors that connect them?
- What insights about reentry do the expert talks touch on that intersect with the stories of Kyle, Tawana, Marcelo, Paul, and Nick? What common issues or concerns discussed by the experts show up in the stories of these individuals?
- How do the expert talks impact your understanding of the law? Specifically, what are the strengths and weaknesses of our legal system and the laws that influence the reentry and reintegration process? What can be done about the legal system and laws?
- After watching this series, is there something important that you would like people to know? If so, what?

## Enhancing Your Knowledge and Taking Steps for Change

Take time to think about how larger structural, institutional, and ideological arrangements impact incarceration, reentry, and reintegration. These broader arrangements may include politics, economics, law, class, culture, race or gender social processes. In reflecting on the *FIRSTHAND: Life After Prison* series, what structural, legal, and institutional changes may be necessary to reduce incarceration rates and ensure that people leaving jails and prisons are not reincarcerated and are able to regain a full sense of humanity? What steps can you take to start creating change?

While these are big questions, many people are fighting to tackle these challenges head-on. You can join them by taking any number of these steps:

- Start with your own community and the people you know. How do the issues discussed in the series affect your community? How do they affect people you know? What do you know about the experience of people with criminal records that can help you better understand the challenges they face?
- Start by researching and contacting a local nonprofit that focuses on public safety, incarceration and/or reentry. What organizations in your neighborhood or in nearby communities work on these issues? What do you know about these organizations? What is a good strategy for learning about them and contacting them?

A good source guide can be found at Illinois Reentry Resources, which publishes a guide on reentry resources to help formerly incarcerated individuals navigate the process of reintegration after leaving prison. The guide is called *Mapping Your Future: A Guide to Successful Reentry* and there is a national edition that may be helpful for people outside the state. This guide can also be given to someone before leaving prison.

- Start building your knowledge. What additional articles or books have you read that inform your knowledge and understanding? Can you consult with someone to learn more about the topics discussed in this series? What additional films, podcasts or talks can you seek out to build your knowledge? Learning more about this topic and the issues faced by people who end up in prison is critical for developing a better sense of what can be done to help create change.

At the end of this discussion guide, there is a list of resources that you can read, listen to, and/or watch to help broaden your knowledge. For now, you can bookmark these three online resources in your web browser to periodically read up on the state of the nation's criminal legal system and reform efforts: (1) [The Sentencing Project](#), (2) [Vera Institute of Justice](#), and (3) [The Marshall Project](#).

These resources are excellent repositories for accessible and digestible knowledge on incarceration, reentry, and reform.

- Start by showing up for community events and organizing efforts that push for reform. Have you ever participated in a community event that focuses on changing the current legal system and laws? How does that idea make you feel? What are the pros and cons of participating in a community event or organizing campaign that pushes the public, politicians, and criminal legal stakeholders to change their policies and practices? For many people, this last action step can seem daunting. It seems to require a lot of time, energy, effort, and emotion. In truth, it typically does. Yet most people often overestimate the extent to which they can or need to be involved in an advocacy project or social action endeavor. This means that you can choose how often and to what degree you want to be involved in any effort – with the knowledge that advocacy work is inherently difficult but also requires some degree of commitment later on. The important thing to know is that your first step is just to show up: it is just one step toward a collective effort so you can see for yourself whether you want to be involved. And the truth is that sometimes showing up is all that is needed.

## About the Filmmaker

Dan Protes is the executive producer of *FIRSTHAND: Life After Prison*. He brings more than 25 years of experience as an executive producer, director, and writer, creating content for media outlets including WTTW, PBS *NewsHour*, *Nightline*, WPWR, and CSPAN. Dan's recent work includes the Emmy-winning weekly history series *Chicago Stories*, which he oversaw as executive producer through two seasons, and the national primetime series *10 that Changed America*, which was seen by millions of Americans through its three-season run on PBS. As the founding producer/director of *FIRSTHAND*, he created the series in 2020 to spotlight Chicago's gun violence epidemic and has continued to oversee the project over four subsequent seasons as executive producer. In 2022, Dan founded Protes Communications, which produces original documentaries, in addition to a wide range of communications for corporate, nonprofit, and financial services clients.

## About the Discussion Guide Writer

Dr. Julian G. Thompson is an assistant professor in the Department of Criminology, Law, and Justice at the University of Illinois Chicago. He holds a PhD in social work from the Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice at the University of Chicago, a Master of Arts in Sociology from DePaul University, and a Bachelor of Social Work from Loyola University Chicago.

As a formerly incarcerated individual with more than a decade of experience working with system-impacted groups, Julian served as a victim's rights council member for the Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council from 2016 to 2019, has organized with Chicago institutions for the formerly incarcerated, and is the former director of the Formerly Incarcerated College Graduate Network, a mutual aid group designed to bridge and facilitate postsecondary education for people leaving prison. He is also an active member of the Prison and Neighborhood Arts/Education Project, where he has taught political education courses to individuals sentenced to life in prison at Stateville Correctional Center.

As a researcher, Julian primarily focuses on the impact of criminalization and punishment on system-impacted individuals and communities, the conditions and consequences of violence and violence governance, and efforts geared toward decarceration and public safety that do not involve the criminal legal system. His current research projects are funded by the Joyce Foundation, the Michael Reese Health Trust, and the Polk Bros. Foundation.

# Resources

## Community Resources

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### Chicago and the State of Illinois

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#### Chicago Coalition for the Homeless - The Reentry Project

<https://www.chicagohomeless.org/programs-campaigns/advocacy-public-policy/the-reentry-project>

The Reentry Project advocates for policies that address barriers to housing and access to jobs, especially for formerly incarcerated individuals who experience homelessness.

#### Chicago Community Bond Fund

<https://chicagobond.org>

The Chicago Community Bond Fund pays bond for people charged with crimes in Cook County.

#### City of Chicago

[https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/fss/supp\\_info/ex-offender\\_and\\_transitionaljobsprogram.html](https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/fss/supp_info/ex-offender_and_transitionaljobsprogram.html)

The Chicago Department of Family and Support Services' Community Reentry Support Centers assists releasees with workforce training, housing, health services, food, and other basic needs. These are offered through Westside Health Authority and Teamwork Englewood.

#### Education Justice Project

<https://educationjustice.net/reentry>

A comprehensive college-in-prison program based at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

#### Envisioning Justice RE:ACTION

<https://envisioningjustice.org>

Produced by Illinois Humanities, Envisioning Justice RE:ACTION is an online exhibition and activation kit using the arts and humanities to imagine a future without mass incarceration.

#### Illinois Coalition for Higher Education in Prison

<https://ilchep.org/research-and-resources>

A coalition of prison education programs across Illinois that advocates for progress in higher education in prisons.

#### Illinois Humanities Envisioning Justice

<https://www.ilhumanities.org/program/envisioning-justice/>

Envisioning Justice leverages the arts and humanities to envision alternatives to the enduring injustice of mass incarceration.

#### Illinois Reentry Resources

<https://reentryillinois.net/reentry>

Illinois Reentry Resources provides reentry guides and support for people leaving prison. It has two important guides: (1) "Mapping Your Future: A Guide to Successful Reentry" and (2) "A New Path: A Guide to the Challenges and Opportunities After Deportation."

#### Illinois Sentencing Policy Advisory Council

<https://spac.illinois.gov>

This government entity collects and analyzes criminal justice data to determine the consequences, costs, and impact of sentencing policies in the state. It is a resource hub for state-level reports.

#### John Howard Association

<https://www.thejha.org/who-we-are>

This prison watchdog assesses the conditions and practices of the Illinois Department of Corrections.

#### Legal Aid Chicago

<https://www.legalaidchicago.org>

This Chicago organization helps people get their criminal records expunged or sealed.

#### READI Chicago Heartland Alliance Program

<https://www.heartlandalliance.org/readi>

This program targets high-risk individuals and communities with criminal legal involvement and gun violence exposure and experience.

#### ReEntry CoLab

<https://www.reentrycolab.org>

This collaborative effort among community-based organizations works to create accessible and impactful reentry services for formerly incarcerated individuals.

#### Restore Justice Illinois

<https://restorejusticeillinois.org>

Restore Justice Illinois is a civic organization that focuses on changing sentencing laws and advocating for legislation that impacts incarcerated people.

#### Safer Foundation

<https://saferfoundation.org>

Safer Foundation is one of the largest reentry organizations in Illinois and Chicago tasked with helping formerly incarcerated individuals successfully transition back into society. It provides several services, including job readiness and employment and training and education.

#### Saint Leonard's Ministries

<https://slministries.org>

Saint Leonard's Ministries is a reentry organization in Chicago that provides formerly incarcerated individuals with transitional housing, substance-use treatment, employment services, education and vocational training, and related services to help them reintegrate into society.

#### Transforming Reentry Services

<https://transformingreentry.org>

This reentry organization provides Black women who have been in jail and prison with a plethora of supports and services, including harm reduction, advocacy, health and wellness, and economic recovery.

#### Westside Justice Center

<https://www.westsidejustice.org>

This legal services organization provides advocacy and legal support to alleviate, criminalization, legal involvement, and barriers to justice.

#### Woodlawn Community Reentry Project

<https://www.woodlawncommunityreentryprojectchicago.com>

The Woodlawn Community Reentry Project is a reentry organization located in the Woodlawn community on the South Side of Chicago that focuses on workforce development, education and training, and case management for formerly incarcerated individuals in the Woodlawn community.

## Community Resources, continued

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### National

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**Education Justice Project**

<https://educationjustice.net/reentry>

**Justice Policy Center of the Urban Institute**

<https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/justice-policy-center>

**Pew Research Center**

<https://www.pewresearch.org/topic/politics-policy/political-issues/criminal-justice>

**Prison Policy Initiative**

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org>

**The Marshall Project**

<https://www.themarshallproject.org>

**The National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens**

<https://thenationalreentrynetwork.org>

**The National Reentry Resource Center**

<https://nationalreentryresourcecenter.org>

**The Sentencing Project**

<https://www.sentencingproject.org>

**Vera Institute of Justice**

<https://www.vera.org>

## Articles, Videos, and Podcasts

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### Articles and Reports

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**Chicago's Mayor's Office**

"A Roadmap for a Second Chance City: Chicago's Working Group on Returning Residents Recommendations"

<https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/mayor/PDFs/ReentryReport.pdf>

**Illinois Policy**

"Report: Recidivism to Cost Illinois More than \$13B Over Next 5 Years" (2018) by Vincent Caruso

<https://www.illinoispolicy.org/report-recidivism-to-cost-illinois-more-than-13b-over-next-5-years>

**Prison Journalism Project**

Women in prison writing about their experiences

<https://prisonjournalismproject.org/tag/women-prison>

**The Appeal**

"In Chicago, Rethinking the Link Between Crime and Incarceration" (2019) by Kira Lerner

<https://theappeal.org/in-chicago-rethinking-the-link-between-crime-and-incarceration>

**The Nation**

"How to End the Criminalization of America's Mothers" (2014) by Sarah Jaffe, Mariame Kaba, Randy Albelda, and Kathleen Geier

<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/how-end-criminalization-americas-mothers>

**The Women's Justice Institute**

"Redefining the Narrative" (2021) by Deanna Benos and Alyssa Benedict

<https://redefine.womensjusticeinstitute.org>

**Time**

"'You Have One Minute Remaining': Why I'll Always Drop Everything to Answer My Brother's Calls from Prison" (2021) by Reuben J. Miller

<https://time.com/5938898/reuben-miller-prison-family-life>

**Truthout**

"A Jailbreak of the Imagination: Seeing Prisons for What They Are and Demanding Transformation" (2018) by Mariame Kaba and Kelly Hayes

<https://truthout.org/articles/a-jailbreak-of-the-imagination-seeing-prisons-for-what-they-are-and-demanding-transformation>

**UIC Great Cities Institute**

"The Chicago Reentry Report" (2020) by Timothy O. Imeokparia

<https://greatcities.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The-Chicago-Reentry-Report-Final.pdf>

**Vera Institute of Justice**

"Reimagining Prison Web Report" (2018) by Ruth Delaney, Ram Subramanian, Alison Shames, and Nicholas Turner

<https://www.vera.org/reimagining-prison-web-report>

**Vera Institute of Justice**

"The Challenges of Reentry" (2016)

<https://www.vera.org/the-human-toll-of-jail/a-helping-had-on-the-way-home/the-challenges-of-reentry>

**Volunteers of America**

"Homelessness and Prisoner Re Entry: Examining Barriers to Housing" (2017) by Patricia McKernan

<https://www.voa.org/homelessness-and-prisoner-reentry>

# Articles, Videos, and Podcasts, continued

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## Videos

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### **Incarceration Nations Network**

Incarcerations Nations: A Global Docuseries

<https://incarcerationnationsnetwork.org/a-global-docuseries>

### **TED Talks**

"Community-Powered Criminal Justice Reform" by Raj Jayadev

[https://www.ted.com/talks/raj\\_jayadev\\_community\\_powered\\_criminal\\_justice\\_reform](https://www.ted.com/talks/raj_jayadev_community_powered_criminal_justice_reform)

### **TED Talks**

"How Radical Hospitality Can Change the Lives of the Formerly Incarcerated" by Reuben J. Miller

[https://www.ted.com/talks/reuben\\_jonathan\\_miller\\_how\\_radical\\_hospitality\\_can\\_change\\_the\\_lives\\_of\\_the\\_formerly\\_incarcerated](https://www.ted.com/talks/reuben_jonathan_miller_how_radical_hospitality_can_change_the_lives_of_the_formerly_incarcerated)

### **TED Talks**

"The Human Stories Behind Mass

Incarceration" (2017) by Eve Abrams

[https://www.ted.com/talks/eve\\_abrams\\_the\\_human\\_stories\\_behind\\_mass\\_incarceration](https://www.ted.com/talks/eve_abrams_the_human_stories_behind_mass_incarceration)

### **TED Talks**

"What If We Ended the Injustice of Bail?" (2018) by Robin Steinberg

[https://www.ted.com/talks/robin\\_steinberg\\_what\\_if\\_we\\_ended\\_the\\_injustice\\_of\\_bail?referrer=playlist-the\\_paths\\_and\\_possibilities\\_of\\_police\\_reform&autoplay=true](https://www.ted.com/talks/robin_steinberg_what_if_we_ended_the_injustice_of_bail?referrer=playlist-the_paths_and_possibilities_of_police_reform&autoplay=true)

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## Podcasts

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### **Prison Fellowship**

Reimagining Prison: Making Safer Communities Inside and Out Podcast Series (79 Episodes)

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/reimagining-prison/id1327989083>

### **Prison Radio Association**

Life After Prison

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/life-after-prison/id1646949340>

### **The Delicious Truth**

Episode 8: "Recidivism - Why? Challenges and Benefits of Eliminating the Culture of Repeated Criminal and Antisocial Behavior Patterns in the USA" (2020)

<https://www.thedelicioustruth.com/recidivism-why-challenges-and-benefits-of-eliminating-the-culture-of-repeated-criminal-and-antisocial-behavior-patterns-in-the-usa>

### **The Intercepted**

"Ruth Wilson Gilmore Makes the Case for Abolition" (Parts 1 and 2) (2020)

<https://theintercept.com/2020/06/10/ruth-wilson-gilmore-makes-the-case-for-abolition>

### **Shared Prosperity**

Episode 2: "Mass Incarceration, Poverty, and Prosperity" (2021)

<https://anchor.fm/shared-prosperity-kalamazoo/episodes/Episode-2---Mass-Incarceration-Poverty-and-Prosperity-e17353t>

### **University of Chicago**

*Big Brains*

Episode 65: "Why Life After Incarceration Is Just Another Prison, with Reuben Jonathan Miller" (2021)

<https://news.uchicago.edu/big-brains-podcast-why-life-after-incarceration-just-another-prison>

### **University of Minnesota School of Public Health**

Health in All Matters

Season 2, Episode 3: "Race and Incarceration" (2020)

<https://www.sph.umn.edu/podcast/series-2/episode-3-race-and-incarceration>

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# **FIRSTHAND**

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