

## Racism in the Criminal Justice System

Joshua Amos, J.D., will be joining us as a guest speaker. Josh is a graduate of the University of Denver Sturm College of Law. He began his career by working seven years in the office of the Colorado State Public Defender. During his employment as a Public Defender he represented indigent defendants from the Pueblo, Montrose, and Arapahoe regional offices. He left for private practice to work at a Denver based firm McDermott Stuart & Ward in 2016. Josh's practice still includes representation of indigent defendants in State and Federal Court.

### *Class Assignment*

- **13<sup>TH</sup>**—Watch the full feature documentary film, April 17, 2020. Combining archival footage with testimony from activists and scholars, director Ava DuVernay's examination of the U.S. prison system looks at how the country's history of racial inequality drives the high rate of incarceration in America. The film can be watched on YouTube or Netflix for those who have a subscription. The YouTube link is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krfcq5pF8u8>.

### *Goal for Class*

The goal for the class is to learn how bias and inequity in the criminal judicial system have resulted in disproportionate numbers of inmates of color in our prisons and the importance of addressing the racial disparities in order for our country to move toward equality for all.

### *Additional Resources*

- **“There’s overwhelming evidence that the criminal justice system is racist. Here’s the proof.”** By Radley Balko. Washington Post. June 10, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/opinions/systemic-racism-police-evidence-criminal-justice-system/>
- **“Report to the United Nations on Racial Disparities in the U.S. Criminal Justice System”** submitted by the Sentencing Project. April 19, 2018. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/un-report-on-racial-disparities/>
- **“One Lawyer's Fight For Young Blacks And 'Just Mercy.' ”** *Fresh Air* Terry Gross interview with Brian Stevenson. October 20, 2014. 38 minute listen. <https://www.npr.org/2014/10/20/356964925/one-lawyers-fight-for-young-blacks-and-just-mercy>

- **“Michelle Alexander: Locked Out of the American Dream.”** Bill Moyers’ interview. Ms. Alexander is a civil rights lawyer and author of *The New Jim Crow*. Moyers & Company, December 20, 2013. 35 minute YouTube video <https://youtu.be/om2hx6Xm2JE>. OR **“The New Jim Crow”** Author Michelle Alexander, George E. Kent Lecture 2013. <https://youtu.be/Gln1JwDU164>
- **“Ten Years After ‘The New Jim Crow.’”** The New Yorker Interview of Michelle Alexander by David Remnick. January 17, 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-new-yorker-interview/ten-years-after-the-new-jim-crow>
- **“Criminal Justice Facts.”** The Sentencing Project. The Sentencing Project compiles state-level criminal justice data from a variety of sources. Using our website's state-by-state data feature, you can navigate between interactive maps, tables, and rankings that allow you to access and use these data. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/>

***Questions for Discussion - pick two or three***

- Where does the title of the film come from? What surprised you about this?
- This film is full of statistics, many of them startling. Which statistic stood out to you the most? Why do you think this is?
- How does the incarceration in the United States compare to the incarceration rates in other countries? What surprises you about this?
- How do economics influence prison rates in the United States, both historically and in modern times?
- What is said about police brutality in the film? What did you already know about this going into the film? What information was new to you?
- Typically, things like the war on drugs and being tough on crime are seen as positive aspects of society. However, this film turns that on its head. What does the film say that these programs actually do to minorities?
- What does the film say about the Black Lives Matter movement? What surprised you about this?