

POV

Community
Engagement & Education

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Return

A Film by
Katie Galloway and Kelly Duane de la Vega



www.pbs.org/pov



Katie Galloway.

Photo courtesy of *"The Return"*

Kelly Duane de la Vega.

Photo courtesy of *"The Return"*

We've spent much of our professional lives making films about the broken criminal justice system in the United States. **The Return** explores the impact of unjust policies at every level of society: for individuals, families and communities and in the legal and prison systems.

While the stories we tell in **The Return** are unique, they are also universal. Such stories unfold every day, all around the nation. The United States incarcerates more than 2.3 million people, more than any other nation in the world, and more than 650,000 return from prison each year only to encounter extraordinary and nearly insurmountable obstacles.

We spent the last four years making this film with as much intimacy and honesty as we could because it deals with so many issues we care about, from institutional racism to the lack of mental health support in prison to the criminalization of addiction and "collateral damage" to families and communities.

When we heard that lawyers and professors from Stanford Law School planned a California ballot initiative aimed at reforming the state's draconian "Three Strikes" law—the harshest in the nation—we were compelled to follow the story.

"Three Strikes" was sold to the public as a way of locking up the "worst of the worst," but its ultimate effect was to incarcerate more than 10,000 people—for life—for crimes as petty as trying to steal a car radio, possessing \$10 worth of meth or purse-snatching.

In 2011, the United States Supreme Court declared that overcrowding in the California prison system had become so extreme that it constituted cruel and unusual punishment—a direct result of "Three Strikes" life sentences and exaggerated second-strike sentences.

In anticipation of the vote on what became Proposition 36, we began producing a series of mini-docs profiling nonviolent offenders serving life sentences and the impact of those sentences on their families. Not surprisingly, we encountered stories of people struggling with extreme poverty, people undeniably treated as if their lives—in the words of one woman we interviewed—“could just be thrown away.”

Many of those we interviewed came from families struggling with mental illness and drug addiction. Because African Americans and Latinos receive disproportionately longer sentences than whites, most were people of color, people who needed support, not incarceration. People who were locked up due to bad policy based on fear, without any understanding of the structural barriers they faced.

In 2012, when California voters passed Proposition 36, it was the first time in U.S. history that citizens voted to shorten the sentences of people currently in prison. When the election results were announced we knew we were going to make a feature film, and we hoped that we might finally be able to tell an uplifting story about the criminal justice system correcting itself. And while much of our story is inspiring, it is also heartbreaking. We sought to paint a realistic portrait of what it means to return to society after decades behind bars. We share beautiful moments of families reuniting, like Ken Anderson meeting his granddaughter for the first time, looking closely at her hands to see that they are nearly identical to the hands of the daughter he left behind when he was imprisoned for life. We witness other former prisoners thriving, too, like Kevin “Bilal” Chatman, once sentenced to 150-years-to-life and now rising professionally, but we also shed light on the obstacles and profound scars suffered by the recently freed and their families.

After decades of inhumane criminal justice policies, we stand now on the precipice of change. Bipartisan lawmakers are calling for sentencing reform and uniting around legislation that prohibits employers from demanding that applicants disclose criminal records. Businesses are beginning to voluntarily “ban the box.” Select states are just beginning to re-examine reentry strategies, and there is a growing movement to expand mental health and drug courts. U.S. Congressmen Elijah E. Cummings (D., Md.) and Jim Sensenbrenner (R., Wis.) recently hosted a screening of **The Return** on Capitol Hill to build support for federal sentencing reform.

The Return is designed to amplify the national conversation around this horrific human rights issue. We sincerely hope the film will inspire further efforts to correct the terrible injustice of misguided sentencing laws. While **The Return** tells individual stories, we must respond as a community and a country.

Katie Galloway and Kelly Duane de la Vega

Directors/Producers/Writers

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In 2012, California amended its “Three Strikes” law—one of the harshest criminal sentencing policies in the country. The passage of Proposition 36 marked the first time in U.S. history that citizens voted to shorten sentences of those currently incarcerated. Within days, the reintegration of thousands of “lifers” was underway. **The Return** examines this unprecedented reform through the eyes of those on the front lines—prisoners suddenly freed, families turned upside down, reentry providers helping navigate complex transitions and attorneys and judges wrestling with an untested law. At a moment of reckoning on mass incarceration, what can California’s experiment teach the nation?

Kenneth reuniting with Monica and Christian.

Photo courtesy of “*The Return*”

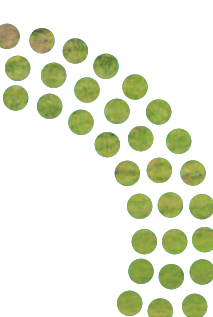


The Return is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- Your local PBS station
- Groups that have discussed the filmmakers' previous POV films: *Prison Town, USA* (by Katie Galloway and Po Kutchins, POV 2007) or *Better This World* (by Kelly Duane de la Vega and Katie Galloway, POV 2011), or other POV and PBS films related to prisons, reentry and criminal justice, including: *15 to Life: Kenneth's Story* (POV 2014), *A Hard Straight* (Independent Lens, 2005), *Herman's House* (POV 2013), *Give Up Tomorrow* (POV 2012), *Manhood and Violence: Fatal Peril* (American Public Television 2004) and *Omar & Pete* (POV 2005).
- Those who are incarcerated, recently returned citizens and their families
- Organizations and agencies employing law enforcement and corrections professionals
- Reentry and social service programs serving individuals who are incarcerated or recently released
- Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the Key Issues section
- High school students, youth groups and clubs
- Faith-based organizations and institutions
- Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums
- Civic, fraternal and community groups
- Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools
- Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as local libraries.

The Return is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people looking to explore the following topics:

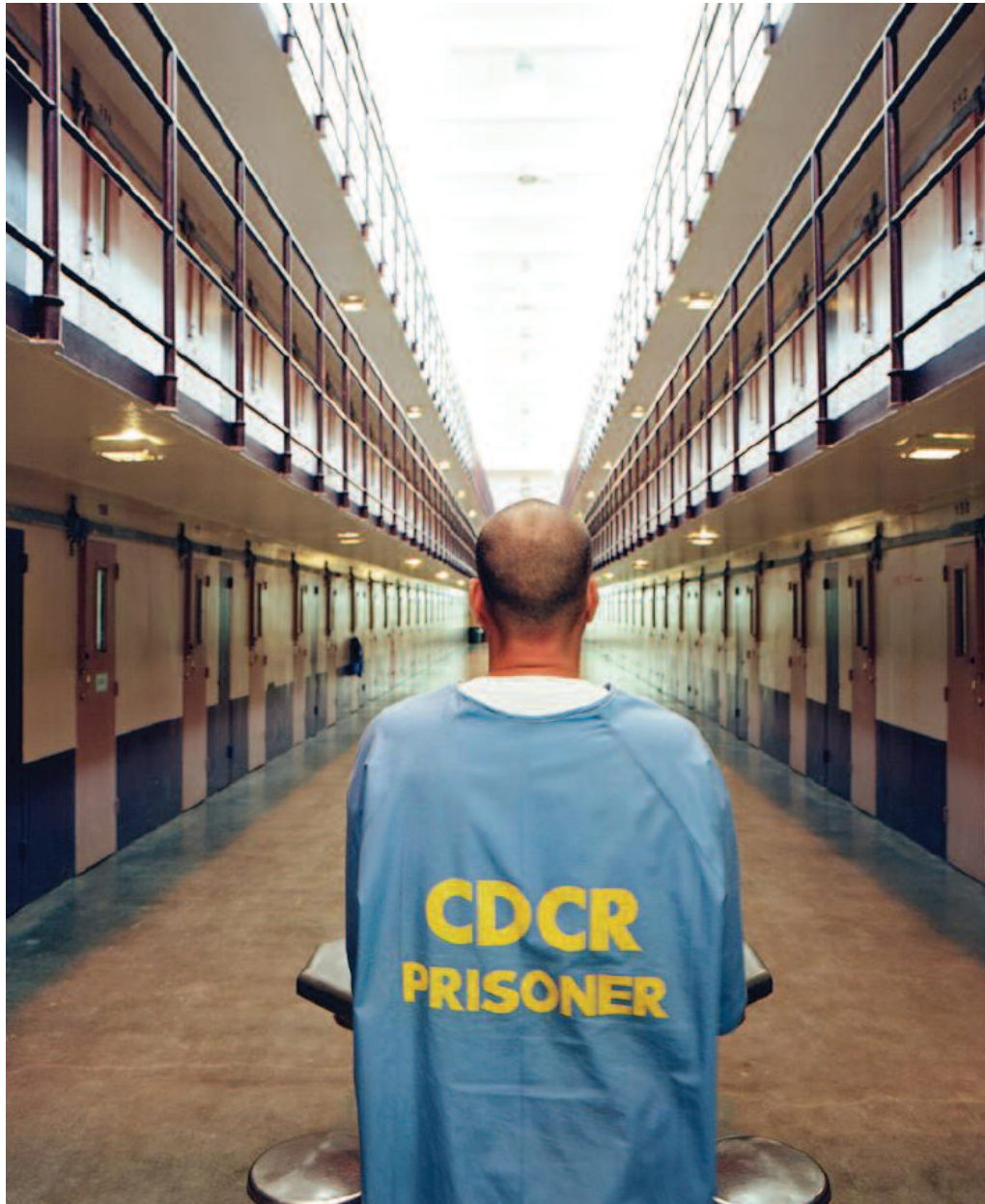
- California laws
- criminal justice system
- economic equity
- employment and fair hiring practices
- family dynamics
- law
- law enforcement
- mass incarceration
- mental health issues
- new Jim Crow
- prison industry
- prison reform
- psychology
- public policy
- racial justice
- reentry and reintegration
- reentry programs
- socioeconomic class
- sociology
- substance abuse
- "three strikes" laws
- voting rights



This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use **The Return** to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit www.pov.org/engage



Shane Taylor in prison.
Photo courtesy of Todd Hido



Prisoners at Soledad State Penitentiary.

Photo courtesy of "The Return"

Reentry: A National and Community Issue

Today, more than 2 million Americans are incarcerated in state and federal prisons, jails and detention centers. In total, over 6.8 million people across the country are under some kind of correctional supervision. According to a report from the White House, the number of people incarcerated today is 4.5 times larger than it was in 1980, and spending on incarceration is now more than \$80 billion. As the incarcerated population grows, so too do releases, and every year more than 600,000 prisoners return to communities from state and federal prisons. With their release, former prisoners, or "returned citizens," face obstacles related to housing, employment, education, health care, credit, public assistance, cultural assimilation, reunification with family/loved ones and more. It's estimated that about half will be re-incarcerated within three years. Communities, corrections and criminal justice professionals are reckoning with the need to support the successful reintegration of returned citizens—for the sake of the individuals and their families, as well as for public safety, and the social and economic health of communities nationwide.

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Inside Soledad State Penitentiary.

Photo courtesy of *"The Return"*

"Three Strikes" Laws

First introduced in the 1990s, "three strikes" laws (also known as "three strikes and you're out" laws) were initially presented as a means to prevent crime by keeping habitual violent offenders off the streets. These laws vary by state, but in general enforce harsher sentences for crimes committed by individuals who have had two prior offenses, or "strikes."

The laws were born out of the War on Drugs in the Nixon era of the 1970s. At the time, the nation was in the midst of the social, economic and political turmoil of the civil rights movement and Vietnam War. Heroin and cocaine use was growing in popularity, and crime rates were on the rise. In the years that followed, and with significant voter support, politicians on both sides of the aisle enacted increasingly strict anti-crime legislation. This "tough on crime" movement resulted in an "incarceration explosion." Between 1973 and 2009, the estimated number of incarcerated adults housed in U.S. state and federal prisons mushroomed from 200,000 to 1.5 million; today, the United States has the highest rates of incarceration in the world. Since

1980, drug arrests nationwide have increased by more than 90 percent, and half of those in federal prisons today are serving time for nonviolent drug crimes. In 1994, under overwhelming political pressure to appear "tough on crime" in the ongoing War on Drugs, President Bill Clinton signed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, kicking off a number of unprecedentedly strict sentencing laws, including a federal version of the "Three Strikes" law. The federal law stated that anyone convicted of a violent federal crime with two convictions already on their record would be sentenced to life in prison. Between 1993 and 1995, 24 states passed their own versions of the law, and today, more than half of all U.S. states have such laws.

California instituted its "Three Strikes" law in 1994 with 72 percent of the vote, after the tragic murders of two children, Kimber Reynolds and Polly Klaas, by men who had histories of violent crimes. The law mandated that a person convicted

of any crime, violent or nonviolent, serve twice the term required for the crime if they had a previous conviction for a serious or violent felony (which can include a range of crimes, from murder and assault to robbery). Any offender with two strikes already on their record would be sentenced to 25-years-to-life for any felony, violent or not. According to the California state auditor, 25 percent of those incarcerated in California prisons today have been sentenced under “Three Strikes” laws. Those sentenced under the laws receive an average of nine additional years in prison, and the laws result in more than \$19 billion in additional costs.

Critics of “three strikes” laws cite evidence against their effectiveness in deterring or reducing crime and claim that they disproportionately affect minorities, those with mental illness and those from low-income backgrounds. The War on Drugs has also been criticized for disproportionately affecting minorities—for instance, crimes involving crack cocaine, which was more commonly used by African Americans, were punished more severely than crimes involving powder cocaine, which was more commonly used by white individuals. In the United States, African Americans are incarcerated at more than six times the national average. Studies show that overall illegal drug use is similar across racial and ethnic lines, but black and Latino individuals are much more likely to be criminalized than whites. Nearly 80 percent of those incarcerated for drug offenses in federal prisons, and 60 percent of those in state prisons, are black or Latino.

On a national level, studies show that “three strikes” laws have “little or no effect on crime rates.” According to the Pew Center, the nation’s prison population boom does not correlate with crime rates or social/economic factors, but is rather “the direct result of sentencing, release and other correctional policies that determine who goes to prison and how long they stay.” The United States imposes much longer sentences for drug-related crimes than other countries. “Three strikes” laws are also thought to be inefficient due to the “replacement effect,” in which those who commit crimes like stealing or drug dealing are simply replaced, creating openings for more people to enter into criminal systems and resulting in a negligible impact on crime rates. As incarceration rates increase, fewer and fewer harmful offenders are captured, and the cost-effectiveness of the prison system in preventing and stopping crimes is diluted significantly.

In California, the “Three Strikes” law has reduced crime by no more than 2 percent since its implementation. In November 2012, voters amended California’s “Three Strikes” law with the passage of Proposition 36,

which states that the third strike must have been a violent crime for the perpetrator to qualify for a 25-years-to-life sentence. The new law also allows offenders who were sentenced to 25-years-to-life under the original law to petition for reductions in their sentences or release, if the third-strike offense was nonviolent.

Since 2012, nearly 2,300 people have been released from California prisons as a result of Proposition 36. The reform is estimated to save California an average of \$100 million per year.

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Susan Champion talking with a client.

Photo courtesy of **"The Return"**

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Challenges to Reentry

The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that more than 100 million Americans have a criminal record of some kind. According to the Sentencing Project, “Having even a minor criminal record, such as a misdemeanor or even an arrest without conviction, can create an array of lifelong barriers that stand in the way of successful reentry. This has broad implications for individuals’ and families’ economic security, as well as for our national economy.”

As they make the transition back to society, returning citizens need support in housing, mental health, substance abuse, health, education, employment and family relationships. The incidence of mental illness is two to four times higher among people who are incarcerated than the general population, and three quarters of those released from prison have a history of substance abuse. More than 10 percent of all those incarcerated and approximately 20 percent of those incarcerated with mental illness were homeless prior to their arrests, and they are almost five times more likely to end up in shelters again after release. The average probation officer has 100 individuals under supervi-

Men at Amity, which offers reentry support for the recently released.

Photo courtesy of Mario Furloni

sion, and the average parole officer has 60. With these high caseloads, probation and parole officers often lack the capacity to offer adequate supervision and support services to those returning from prison in order to prevent destructive behaviors and re-offending. According to the Ray Brook Reentry Initiative’s Essential Reentry Sourcebook, “A disproportionate number of offenders return to communities with no job, nowhere to live and limited financial resources. The implementation and use of successful reentry strategies play an essential role in the overall success of those most in need while helping to reduce the cycle of recidivism.”

Education Programs in Prison

One major challenge faced by individuals anticipating release is education. Approximately 65 percent of prisoners don’t have a high school diploma, and 14 percent haven’t received more than an eighth grade education. Lacking a high-school and post-secondary education adds a major barrier to post-release employment and makes it even more diffi-



Kaya, one of Kenneth's grandchildren.

Photo courtesy of Mario Furloni

cult for returning citizens not only to find jobs that offer a living wage, but also to build careers that they are passionate about and thrive in. Academic and vocational training plays a significant role in reducing recidivism and results in financial savings. For every dollar invested in prison education, four to five dollars are saved in the first three years after release, when recidivism is most likely to occur.

The educational opportunities provided differ from state to state and prison to prison; in some states, programming is contracted out to community colleges or other educational institutions, while in others, prisons facilitate programming themselves. Texas, for example, has an entire school district dedicated to incarcerated adults. Some prisons have strong programs in place, while others may not have necessary programs, or may be out of date with respect to shifting technology in society. Participation in educational programs has declined over the years, which may be attributable to prison overpopulation and budget cuts that have reduced the number of in-prison education programs. As stated in the film,

when programs are cut, those who have been sentenced to life in prison, such as those sentenced

under “three strikes” laws, are the first to be denied these programs. On average, those who participate in in-prison education programs are more than 40 percent less likely to return to prison than those who do not.

Transitional Programs Post-release

Though it may seem counterintuitive, it is not always in the best interest of a recently returned citizen to return straight home. Relationships with spouses, children and friends may have changed or disintegrated in their absence, and families may not be equipped to meet the challenges of supporting their returned loved ones. Environmental factors and temptations can trigger returned citizens to return to old habits. They may be exposed to or go back to unstable or unhealthy environments. This can present serious challenges to making a successful transition, which may in turn lead to struggles with addiction, depression and other mental health and emotional issues, as well as reoffending. Those who have been

released from prison are 129 times more likely to die of an overdose than other drug users and experience high rates of suicide. In response to these serious challenges, the United States government, along with various corrections agencies and nonprofits, has developed transitional support programs and granted funds to jurisdictions across the country to create reentry programs that focus on employment, housing, education and health care.

Resources have also been devoted to government-subsidized transitional employment programs, though more and improved programs are still needed. Though many prisoners receive job training leading up to their releases, those with no work histories or résumés may require more long-term and extensive job training than is available. Some researchers suggest extending the transitional job period and encourage a greater focus on vocational training—specifically training in computer skills and other technologies—in subsidized job programs.

Culture Shock and Institutionalization

Anyone who has spent significant time in another culture knows how strange it can feel to return home. Adjusting to different cultures can cause anxiety, confusion, uncertainty, doubt and discomfort. For those who have been incarcerated, this process is greatly intensified. Institutionalization, the psychological result of having to adapt to life in an institution, can make returning to society challenging and overwhelming. At the very least, returned citizens transitioning from a highly structured environment in prison to one in which they control their own schedules can feel disoriented and unsettled. Individuals who have served extensive sentences may also find themselves suddenly plunged into a world of unfamiliar technology, like the Internet and smartphones. Those who have served a number of years in prison, especially, may find that once-familiar places, people and ways of life have changed or disappeared entirely, while many of the temptations and problems that led them to offend in the first place may still be present.

Family

Incarceration deeply impacts families. Maintaining contact with supportive family members while in prison increases the likelihood of success upon reentry, but released prisoners will also likely return to families who have been altered during and by their absence. Incarceration places economic and emotional stress on families, and divorce rates are high among prisoners and their spouses. Families of those incarcerated deal with the loss of an income, hefty

legal fees and travel costs to visit loved ones housed in prisons far away. A family with an incarcerated father is nearly 40 percent more likely to live in poverty. For couples, this, combined with a lack of privacy, intimacy and physical contact for the duration of the imprisonment, can lead to resentment and anger, especially if they have children. More than 5 million children are estimated to have a parent who is or has been incarcerated. Children not only experience the financial stress of missing parents, but may also face bullying and social hardships from the stigma of having parents in prison. They are also more likely to have behavior problems, drop out of school and face unemployment. Returned citizens themselves may be working through psychological traumas and the shock of having returned, making it especially challenging to reintegrate into family life. Support for families is crucial and therapy and support programs play an important role in helping families through the transition.

Employment

Access—or lack thereof—to permanent employment is both one of the most significant barriers to successful reentry and one of the greatest factors for success. Although it is illegal for prospective employers to ban those with criminal records from employment outright, many employers are resistant to the idea of hiring anyone with a criminal record. Beyond issues of stigma, employers are in some cases required to ask about the criminal records of prospective employees due to liability laws. In one study, 40 percent of employers surveyed reported that they would “not even consider” an applicant with a criminal record, regardless of their qualifications. Applicants with criminal records are 50 percent less likely to get an interview or job offer than those with identical qualifications, and earn between 10 and 40 percent less.

There are also restrictions on employment opportunities available to those with criminal records. Some states have banned anyone who has served time from working in certain industries, including catering and cutting hair. Transportation can be a challenge for those who are not emotionally or financially ready to drive, and some states revoke the driver’s licenses of people who have been in prison, making it difficult to find transportation even once they’ve managed to find jobs. As we see in the film, returned citizens also have strict probation rules to follow and may face challenges in meeting their requirements for parole or probation while keeping full-time jobs. These barriers to gainful employment can lead to a host of problems, including a return to substance abuse, family issues and re-offending.



Sam, Kenneth's youngest son, anticipates his father's return.

Photo courtesy of Mario Furloni

Returned citizens who are able to find employment are significantly less likely to reoffend. A study conducted in 2005 in New York City showed that the re-arrest rate for returned citizens who had found jobs within one year of their release was reduced by two thirds. Obtaining steady employment is believed to be one of the most significant factors in combating recidivism.

In response to this, a series of “fair chance” policies have surfaced, including the “ban the box” initiative. The “ban the box” initiative calls for the elimination of questions regarding criminal history—such as “Have you ever been convicted of a felony?”—early on in the hiring process. Instead, the criminal history of a candidate is only revealed after the employer has made an offer of employment. Several large U.S. companies—including Walmart, Target and Starbucks—have taken questions regarding

criminal histories off of their applications. As of 2015, 19 states had enacted legislation or had created policies designed to give returned citizens the chance to keep their criminal histories private until a later stage in the hiring process than the initial application. “Ban the box” and other fair chance policies have proven effective in states that have implemented them, resulting in greater numbers of job offers for returned citizens, including jobs that offer more than just a paycheck and also utilize their strengths, passions and skills.



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Combating Recidivism

Nationally, the recidivism rate of for those released from state prisons in the year following their release is 43.4 percent. In California, the recidivism rate for those released through the passage of Proposition 36 is 1.3 percent. The Three Strikes Project, featured in **The Return**, attributes this low recidivism rate to “the hard work and rehabilitation of the individuals released,” as well as to the support of a number of organizations that have been created in California specifically to help facilitate the reentry of citizens released under Proposition 36.

Research indicates that longer sentences actually increase recidivism and have little impact on deterring crime. As the economic and social costs of incarceration come to light, policies have been trending toward treatment, rehabilitation and reentry support, rather than punishment. In 2008, Congress passed the Second Chance Act, which provides a “second chance” for returned citizens participating in reentry programs that have been designed to reduce recidivism. Through the act, organizations providing innovative reentry programs can receive grants to support their programming. In 2010, the Fresh Start Act was initiated to allow returned citizens convicted of nonviolent crimes to request that their criminal records be expunged, usually for the purposes of obtaining employment.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation has created a number of parole services and residential reentry programs to help returned citizens released as a result of Proposition 36 find housing and jobs. Reentry and rehabilitation programs like these are on the rise, whereas institution of “three strikes” laws has dropped off dramatically. While a number of states still have “three strikes” laws, only two states have created new “three strikes” laws since 1995.

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Selected People Featured in **The Return**



Kenneth Anderson – A former “lifer”



Monica Grier – Kenneth’s ex-wife



Kaylica Anderson – Kenneth’s daughter



Christian Anderson – Kenneth’s son



Sam Anderson – Kenneth’s son

Selected People Featured in **The Return**



Kevin "Bilal" Chatman – A former "lifer"



Mike Romano – Attorney, director and founder of the Stanford Three Strikes Project (now the Justice Advocacy Project)



Susan Champion – Attorney with the Stanford Three Strikes Project (now the Justice Advocacy Project)



William C. Ryan – The presiding judge at the hearings shown in the film

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen or pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion:

- What did you learn from this film?
- If a friend asked you what this film was about, what would you say?
- Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it that was especially compelling for you?
- If you could ask anyone in the film a question, whom would you ask and what would you ask them?

To help people synthesize what they've experienced and move the focus of the discussion from the film to action steps, you may want to choose one of these questions:

- What did you learn from this film that you wish everyone knew? What would change if everyone knew it?
- If you could require one person (or one group) to view this film, who would it be? What do you hope their main takeaway would be?
- Complete this sentence: I am inspired by this film (or discussion) to _____.



A photo of Kenneth and his family, before his incarceration.

Photo courtesy of *"The Return"*



Institutional/Systemic Challenges and Changes

The end of the film notes that 2,300 people incarcerated under the “Three Strikes” law have been released, their recidivism rate is under 5 percent (far below the national average) and it is estimated that the reform will save California nearly 1 billion dollars over the next 10 years. What can the rest of the country learn from California’s experience?

Why do you think that the “three strikes” approach was initially seen by so many people as an effective response to crime? Why didn’t it work? What do you think should happen to repeat offenders?

According to federal law, robbery is a violent offense. What did you learn from the film about how violent and nonviolent offenses are sentenced? Do you agree with the way the laws are classified? Do you think the punishments fit the crimes?

Attorney Mike Romano observes, “For a generation the solution to poverty, addiction, and mental illness was to just put them in prison for the rest of their lives... The

Michael Romano, director and co-founder of the Stanford Justice Advocacy Project (formerly The Three Strikes Project) co-authored the Three Strike Reform Act of 2012 (Proposition 36).

Photo courtesy of Mario Furloni

conditions within the prison are exacerbating people’s mental illnesses, and people who are mentally ill self medicate with drugs and there’s just not enough resources available to them.” How did we end up with a system that imprisons those who are poor, addicted or mentally ill? What are the consequences of using prison to house people who struggle with mental illness and/or substance abuse? What are the possible alternatives to incarceration for people like Lester Wallace (who has been diagnosed as having a schizoaffective disorder)?

Attorney Susan Champion notes that “Three Strikes” led to mass incarceration of “almost exclusively people of color.” How does this racial inequity affect the system’s ability to achieve justice? What should happen to laws or practices with such inequitable outcomes?



Susan Champion represents clients petitioning for release.

Photo courtesy of Mario Furloni

Bilal describes witnessing a shooting. Monica Grier says, “How many people go to jail and come out different because of the stuff they see? I have been on the phone with Ken and heard screaming and hollering in the background. What is that? Oh, they are beating somebody up in the shower.” Do the expectations placed on returned citizens or parolees in your community take into account the possibility that the released person might have PTSD? If so, how? If not, what could/should change?

In describing a client, Susan Champion explains, “Shane is like so many of our clients. He and his family were practically homeless half the time. He was exposed to drug use when he was really, really young, and you just think, wow, this person never had a chance.” What is your reaction to her statement?

Attorney Mike Romano says, “People are being released with, in some cases, literally a paper jumpsuit and not even any money sometimes. And they are ex-

pected to find their way.” What do you think the prisons (i.e., taxpayers) should provide to people being released from prison? Based on what you see in the film, what do they need?

Chatman encounters a catch-22: He must hold a job and must also report to a parole officer for regular drug tests, but the times that each requires him to show up overlap. Brainstorm ways that such conflicts could be resolved.

Mike and Susan wonder if they are doing the right thing. One says, “Should we be here spending the day visiting Shane and Curtis and all this, or should we be filing more petitions and dealing with the reentry folks and what not? And there’s only so much you can do.” Have you ever had a similar dilemma or felt like you should be doing more? How did you handle that?



Bilal filling out job applications after his release.

Photo courtesy of *"The Return"*

After hearing about Kenneth's prison experiences, Monica says, "They needed help, not a long prison time. Because if we can help them, think about who they can help." How might helping those who are or have been incarcerated actually benefit everyone and not just the direct recipients of services?

The meeting of reentry service providers underscores the importance of intensive services to the success of former lifers. In your view, who should pay for these services? What are the consequences of not funding such services?

Personal Challenges and Adjustments: Society

A preacher reminds his congregation (which includes Kenneth) that "your past is not your future," and Kaylica recognizes that her father "wants to show us that he is more than what he has been looked at." But the reality that returned citizens often confront is summarized by Bilal: "I paid my debt to society. I paid my restitution. I stayed out of trouble.

Why is my criminal history always gonna be at the forefront of who I am? It does not define who I am anymore. Brutally honest, that bothers me, and hurts me and worries me." Why does Bilal's criminal history continue

to define him? What societal structures, practices, or beliefs make it difficult for returned citizens to get past the perception that they are perpetual criminals and nothing else? What do you think it would be/is like to be reduced to being identified exclusively by your mistakes?

Shane knows that a driver's license could help him get a job, but adds, "Right now I'm kind of caught like in between. If I get my license, it gives me too much freedom. You know what I mean?" What do you think he means? How would you help him gradually adjust to handling more freedom?

Kenneth is frustrated that he has to apply for school online and can't do it in person. How could you help those who are reentering your community take advantage of educational opportunities?

There's a sign at the Amity reentry center that reads "Welcome to Amistad." What connections might be drawn between the work of the center and the ship that was the site of a successful slave revolt?



Monica and Christian waiting for Kenneth on his release day.

Photo courtesy of *"The Return"*

Personal Challenges and Adjustments: Family

Was there a person in the film with whom you identified? What do you have in common?

What did you learn from the film about the impact of incarceration on families? How did Kenneth's incarceration affect Monica (his ex-wife), Kaylica (his daughter), Christian (his older son) and Sam (his younger son)?

Kenneth says, "When I first got out, I was like wow, I get back my family. Now, I'm at home. My kids have babies, but in my mind I am still seeing them as those kids that I left." What steps would you recommend that Ken and his family take to rebuild their relationships?

Kenneth's son Christian says, "You remember when you told me, when I turned 13, 'You a man now'? I didn't get it until I was 21. Honestly, it was difficult...I didn't know how to be a man." How could you help sons of incarcerated fathers find guidance into manhood?

After Kenneth disappears, one of his sons says, "[I] don't think he's ready to be that person that I want him to be." What do you think would help Kenneth be ready?

What do you see in the film that explains the Three Strikes Project's recommendation that ex-lifers who are released spend some time in transitional housing rather than immediately going to live with family? What sorts of housing options are available in your community? Are they adequate? If not, what could be done to help improve the options?

Kenneth's son Sam recalls, "When I was growing up I ended up getting two strikes just living wild as a child. So I didn't really think about what my life would be like if he came back because it didn't matter. He wasn't there." How do crime and incarceration influence the next generation? What could you do to break the cycle?

Additional media literacy questions are available at:
www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php

Taking Action

Help create pathways for employment for returning citizens in your workplace. Talk to your human resources department and arrange a screening of *The Return* for your staff/co-workers. Discuss how you can create opportunities for returning citizens.

- Conduct an education campaign for local employers about employing people who have served time. Share stories of people (especially locals) who have been incarcerated but have succeeded after release because people were willing to give them jobs. Create a list of employers who would be willing to provide a job for someone coming out of jail, then share that list with reentry programs and social service and employment agencies.
- Having a positive connection with their local communities can be a big help for those anticipating reentry. Look up prisons/jails in your local area and write letters to those who are incarcerated.
- Look up and join a volunteer program at a local prison. Offer to share a hobby, talent or area of expertise.
- Meet with local legislators to discuss policies that ban people who have felony records from voting, receiving student loans or obtaining publicly subsidized housing. Let them know how you think those problems should be addressed.
- Based on what you see and hear in the film, join together with others in your community to create “care packages” for people being released from prison to help them through their first few days back in the community. Work with existing reentry initiatives and prison officials to distribute the packages.
- Inquire about the education and reentry programs at your local prisons. Are they being implemented and meeting the needs of those incarcerated? Discuss with the warden, local reentry/education programs and government officials how to support the prisons in implementing these programs.
- Partner with a local reentry organization to form support groups in your local community for returning citizens, their families and those who are most often interacting and working with them (employers, for example).
- Hold a fundraiser to support local reentry programs and/or increase available spaces in local substance abuse treatment facilities.
- Form a book club or study circle to read Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (to look at racial disparities) and/or examine the shift to privatization of prisons in the U.S. and the impact of the “prison industrial complex.” Go online or host an event to share what you learn with people outside the group.
- Help prevent incarceration by supporting local at-risk youth. Volunteer with a local school, mentorship organization and/or youth program (e.g., Big Brothers Big Sisters, YMCA, City Year).



Kenneth studying.
Photo courtesy of “*The Return*”

FILM-RELATED WEB SITES**thereturnproject.com**

The film's official website provides information on the film and filmmakers, as well as a link to a *New York Times* Op-Doc by the filmmakers

facebook.com/thereturnproject**Original Online Content on POV**

The Return website—To enhance the broadcast, POV has produced an interactive website for **The Return** to enable viewers to explore the film in greater depth. The website—www.pbs.org/pov/thereturn—offers a streaming video trailer for the film; an interview with the filmmakers; a list of related websites, articles and books; a downloadable discussion guide; and special features.

Reentry Resources and Information**ESSENTIAL REENTRY SOURCEBOOK**

https://www.fairshake.net/process/index.php/download/reentry_directories/97

This comprehensive publication was created by the Ray Brook Reentry Initiative in Ray Brook, New York (a collaboration between Federal Correctional Institution Ray Brook staff and inmates dedicated to reentry skills enhancement on a local, state and national level). It contains more than 3,500 local, state and national resources.

FAIR SHAKE**www.fairshake.net**

Fair Shake is dedicated to reducing the recidivism rate through personal and community focused ownership and engagement opportunities for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals in connection with families, employers, property managers, corrections and communities.

FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS: RESOURCES FOR FORMER INMATES

https://www.bop.gov/resources/former_inmate_resources.jsp

The Federal Bureau of Prisons "Resources for Former Inmates" page includes a handbook in English and Spanish with checklists, helpful tools and resources for returned citizens, employment assistance info and other resources.

NATIONAL HIRE NETWORK: RESOURCES, INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

<http://hirenetwork.org/clearinghouse>

This clearinghouse links to state-specific governmental agencies and community-based organizations to assist people with criminal records, practitioners, researchers and policymakers. It may be of assistance in providing job-related and legal services, answering questions arising from having a criminal record and offering referrals to other useful organizations.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CORRECTIONS, TRANSITION AND OFFENDER WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

<http://nicic.gov/owd>

The community services division coordinates the efforts of federal, state, local and nonprofit agencies to improve employment programs for offenders and ex-offenders. The division assists corrections professionals who provide direct services to offenders and ex-offenders.

PRISONER REENTRY INSTITUTE

johnjayresearch.org/pri

This project from John Jay College of Criminal Justice provides research studies about many facets of reentry and programs that serve recently released ex-prisoners

REENTRY CENTRAL

reentrycentral.org

This is a non-government source of news and information related to reentry, run by One Million Americans, a nonprofit serving ex-offenders

REENTRY.NET

www.reentry.net

Reentry Net, a project of the Bronx Defenders and Pro Bono Net, is a collaborative education and resource center for individuals and organizations in New York state that advocate for people with criminal records and their families. Reentry Net also hosts a clearinghouse that includes academic research, evaluations of programs and initiatives and policy reports on the full range of issues that affect the reentry community.

STANFORD JUSTICE ADVOCACY PROGRAM

<https://law.stanford.edu/stanford-justice-advocacy-project/>

Formerly the Three Strikes Project, this Stanford Law School program provides information on reentry, policy analysis, justice system reform and more.

Government Programs and Resources

NATIONAL REENTRY RESOURCE CENTER

csgjusticecenter.org/nrrc

This clearinghouse of resources and stats from the Council of State Governments is searchable by state.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

justice.gov/archive/fbci/progmenu_reentry.html

This website's resources include a toolkit for establishing faith-based reentry programs.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS

<http://www.bjs.gov/>

This is the country's primary source for criminal justice statistics.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR: "MENTORING EX-PRISONERS: A GUIDE FOR PRISONER REENTRY PROGRAMS"

doleta.gov/PRI/PDF/Mentoring_Ex_Prisoners_A_Guide.pdf

This 2007 guide for mentoring ex-prisoners provides concrete information for assisting those undergoing reentry.

Reentry services must be local by definition, so in addition to the national resources listed here, be sure to search for reentry programs in your city, county and state. To search for resources by location, visit <https://www.fairshake.net/reentry-resources/search-for-a-resource/>.

HOW TO BUY THE FILM

To purchase **The Return** visit www.thereturnproject.com

POV



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Front cover: An image from **The Return**.
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