

Where to watch 13th

- Watch the trailer here:
youtube.com/watch?v=K6IXQbXPO3I
- Watch for free here:
youtube.com/watch?v=krfcq5pF8u8
- Watch on Netflix here:
netflix.com/search?q=13th&jbv=80091741

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13th: A Catholic Study Guide

FROM **AVA DuVERNAY**
DIRECTOR OF SELMA

13TH

A NETFLIX ORIGINAL DOCUMENTARY
NOW STREAMING

CREATED BY
CATHOLIC PRISON MINISTRIES COALITION

About 13th

Titled after the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the award-winning documentary *13th* presents the ways that unjust laws and the criminal justice system in the U.S. continue to disproportionately punish and incarcerate African Americans and other minority populations. Although the implementation of the 13th Amendment in 1865 abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, the film shows how legal and illegal forms of oppression since that time led to present-day mass incarceration and a prison industrial complex that regularly denies justice in favor of economic and political agendas.

**“From slave
to criminal
with one
amendment.”**

Reflection Questions

You can record written responses on a separate piece of paper.

Your 13th Experience

1. Describe your knowledge and understanding of the criminal justice system before watching this film. Has your understanding changed? How so?
2. What are three things that you learned from watching the film? Was there one thing that you learned that especially surprised you or challenged you? Explain.
3. Did any components of the film cause you to feel uncomfortable? For example, a statistic, a spoken perspective, a video clip from history? How was it for you to feel this discomfort and what was the source of the discomfort? Is there something the discomfort can teach you?

About this Guide

This study guide includes reflection questions and discussion topics for individual and small group use that allow viewers of *13th* to better understand the presence of racial injustice in the U.S. criminal justice system and to explore how members of the Catholic Church are called to respond.

Mass Incarceration and Our Catholic Faith

1. Prior to watching *13th*, had you ever engaged in conversations with other people about mass incarceration in the U.S.? If yes, did you ever engage in a conversation with someone from your Church and faith community? Explain the context and content of the conversation(s).
2. Harvard professor Henry Gates, Jr. explains that for black people during the Civil Rights Movement, “For the first time being arrested was a noble thing.” What are examples in the Judeo-Christian tradition when people were intentionally or unintentionally arrested for upholding their faith and justice?
3. How did Jesus interact with and encounter persons who were seen as unclean, outcasts, and criminals in the Gospels? How does this compare to the ways that you encounter and interact with suspected criminals?
4. A key message taught by Jesus in the Gospels concerns forgiveness and reconciliation (i.e. Lk 23:34, Lk 15:11-32, Mt 5:23-24, Mt 6:14, Mt 18:21-22). What are ways that forgiveness is present or not present in the U.S. criminal justice system?

Injustices of Mass Incarceration

1. What connections does the film make between the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, race, and mass incarceration today?
2. Bryan Stevenson states, “We have a criminal justice system that treats you better if you’re rich and guilty than if you’re poor and innocent.” What is your response to this statement? Are there examples that you can think of that support Stevenson’s statement?
3. During the film, the claim is made that 97% of people who are incarcerated accept a plea bargain and never go to trial. What are reasons that a person might choose a plea bargain instead of a trial? Do you consider this representative of a fair criminal justice system?
4. A focus of the film is the injustices that are associated with the sentencing and treatment of persons accused of committing crimes. How do the people who are victims of crime fit into these conversations? What are the ways that they do or do not experience justice, restoration, and healing?