



16BARS



Key Issues + Audiences

About The Film

16 Bars offers a rare glimpse at the human stories— and songs — that are locked away in our nation’s jails and prisons. The film follows a unique rehabilitation effort in the Richmond City Justice Center (Richmond, VA) that invites inmates to write and record original music. In the jail’s makeshift recording studio, four men collaborate on an album with a Grammy-winning recording artist, Todd “Speech” Thomas, from the iconic activist hip-hop group Arrested Development. As the creative process unfurls, each of these men must unearth painful memories from the past, which hold a key to a new chapter in their lives.

Compared to other nations, the U.S. incarcerates the highest percentage of its citizens.¹¹ However, of the 95% eventually released, very few so-called “returning citizens” successfully navigate opportunities on the “outside.”¹² In fact, approximately 77 percent of released prisoners are re-arrested within five years, finding themselves back in an institution after committing a subsequent crime.⁷ This is what is referred to as “the criminal justice system’s revolving door”— a challenge facing communities not only in Virginia but nationwide.¹³ It is an ongoing and unfortunately, resilient issue to which the music of *16 Bars* serves as rare testimony.

Why Should You Care?

A complex set of issues that contribute to the high rate and costs of recidivism in the US including substance abuse, homelessness, education, community values, gender and race inequality, to name a few.¹⁴ Exacerbating this, are the following facts that speak to the unique issues here in the US:

- Currently 1 in 35 people in the US are incarcerated.⁶
- Today, the United States makes up about 5% of the world’s population and has 21% of the world’s prisoners.⁶
- 1 in 3 individuals in the US have a criminal record¹⁵; 1 in 4 people in the US has a felony conviction(s)¹⁶
- Between 1980 and 2015, the number of people incarcerated in America increased from roughly 500,000 to over 2.2 million.⁶
- 1 in every 37 adults in the United States, or 2.7% of the adult population, is under some form of correctional supervision.⁶
- African Americans and Hispanics made up 64% of the federal and state prison population in 2016, but represented only 32% of the US population.¹
- Incarcerated persons of all genders and races earned on average 41% less than non-incarcerated people of similar ages.²
- Black people represent only 13% of the U.S. population but 33% of those in prisons.¹⁰
- White people represent 76% of our population and 39% of U.S. prison populations⁹

The Cost of Incarceration

- Expenditures on corrections grew from \$6.7 billion in 1985 to nearly \$60 billion in 2016 -- triple the rate of increase in education spending.³
- States spend between \$45,000 and \$350,000 to incarcerate one juvenile each year – compared to an average spend per public elementary school student of \$11, each year.⁴
- In fact, a Harvard education costs less than the annual cost of keeping one prisoner incarcerated for one year.¹⁷

In the State of Virginia, where *16 BARS* was filmed, it costs about \$35,000 annually to incarcerate one person; other states report costs that range a bit below or above based on cost of living.¹⁸ The State's Department of Corrections spends approximately \$1.2 billion annually for 38 prisons plus another \$977 million annually for 36 local jails.³

Gender Issues

- 1 in 4 women have a family member in the criminal justice system and half of black women have a family member in the system.⁵
- Over 80% of the fees related to the system are paid by women. ⁵
- The imprisonment rate for African American women is twice that of white women.⁶

Substance Abuse

Populating our prisons today are many individuals who are addicted to drugs. And, as has been widely reported in the media, the number of individuals suffering from addiction is on the rise. According to the inmates featured in *16 BARS*, addiction is often a reaction to past trauma, including sexual, emotional, mental, and physical abuse, “unhealthy” family situations, divorce, and/or presence of mental health illnesses. Untreated and unaddressed, a childhood trauma often manifests in other dysfunctional behaviors, including alcoholism, domestic violence, depression and drug use.¹⁹

- 23 million people in the US are in recovery from a substance use disorder.²⁰
- 21 million people in the US are in active addiction.²¹
- 65% of all incarcerated individuals meet the criteria for a substance use disorder, but only 11% of incarcerated people who need treatment are receiving it.²²
- Drug related crimes account for 46% of people⁷ in federal prisons and 15% of people in state prisons ⁸

Recidivism: “The Revolving Door”

The film *16 Bars* explores many of the issues that surround our criminal justice system, but underlying much of the conversation is the question, “Do we want to release better citizens or better criminals?” Can we create rehabilitation programs that work? or in the end, is the cost of incarceration worth the end result?

By addressing the source of inmates’ problems versus the behaviors that limit their productivity, we may be able to increase an inmate’s chances of living a normal life – both in the jail system as well as outside when they are released. This is the thesis that underlies the The REAL Program featured in *16 Bars*. REAL stands for Recovery from Everyday Addictive Lifestyles. While REAL focuses on inmate education and rehabilitation, a sister non-profit called REAL LIFE is working with returning citizens when they are released to break the cycle of release and then subsequent sentencing that puts so many individuals back in jail.

- 626,000 individuals return to their communities each year from state and federal prisons.⁸
- 59% of women released from state prisons are arrested again within 3 years¹⁰
- 5 of 6 people who have spent time in a state prison will be arrested for a new crime within 9 years of their release⁹

Screenings & Educational Opportunities

For Jails/Prisons: *16 Bars* may provide a perspective that has the potential to motivate offenders/inmates to change. By offering first person accounts of four inmates struggling to re-define their own narratives, the film underscores a range of challenges, to which many offenders can relate. For those currently involved in rehabilitation programs while incarcerated, the film has been shown to reinforce a nascent commitment to breaking their own cycles of recidivism. After one screening, a survey of the inmate audience described the film as:

- “...gives you the real look into what offenders are going through and the struggle.”
- “...gripping, hardcore, and full-faced about the struggle of addiction and recidivism.”
- “...so critical that it should be seen in every correctional facility.”
- “...inspired me to never give up.”

For Institutions of Higher Learning

16 Bars can also be a powerful tool to screen for college students to reflect on and discuss these issues in depth. Upon graduation, many students will go on to work with this population, either through law, social work, journalism, or in law enforcement. It is critical for individuals going into these lines of work to develop compassion and insight into the complexities of the issues surrounding incarcerated citizens and their families.

As such, we have developed a discussion guide to use within educational institutions. While we have a generic version that may be used in almost any discipline, it can be tailored for students studying social work or criminal justice

For Middle and High Schools

Unfortunately, the prevalence of substances abuse is high in every high school, regardless of the socio-economic status. Many mistakenly believe that suburban upper-to-middle class areas do not have the issues reported by the low economic class schools of the inner cities. More accurately, the suburban schools and neighborhoods have just a significant of a problem, but it is not as widely known or acknowledged. By showing the raw reality and destruction that drugs, alcohol, and other behaviors can cause to impressionable young people, we may be able to upend this misconceptions. Ensuing conversations post screenings are also critical, as a means to drive home themes and apply them to the life of teens.

How to Get Involved

- Visit www.16barsthefilm.com to:

- Find out how you can host a screening in your local community, educational, religious, or non-profit institution.
- Donate to the REAL LIFE Community Center, which assists returning citizens impacted by homelessness and substance abuse disorders to overcome the barriers and obstacles that hinder their prosperity and ability to thrive
- Purchase the soundtrack and support the artists in the film
- Donate to our nationwide campaign to spread the word about the issues raised in the film and motivate viewers to action.

- Follow us on Social Media at **@16barsthefilm** and stay connected to the film and its music.

Footnotes

- ¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/01/12/shrinking-gap-between-number-of-blacks-and-whites-in-prison/>
- ² <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/income.html>
- ³ <https://sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf>
<https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/other/expenditures-corrections-education/brief.pdf>
- ⁴ <http://www.justicepolicy.org/news/8570>
<https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2017/comm/cb17-97-public-education-finance.html>
- ⁵ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/du-bois-review-social-science-research-on-race/article/racial-inequalities-in-connectedness-to-imprisoned-individuals-in-the-united-states/D015904ED108B3B0A18454450104845A>
- ⁶ <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cpus15.pdf>
- ⁷ https://www.bop.gov/about/statistics/statistics_inmate_offenses.jsp
- ⁸ <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p16.pdf>
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045218>
- ⁹ <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/18upr9yfup0514.pdf>
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045218>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rprts05p0510.pdf>
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045218>
- ¹¹ <https://eji.org/news/united-states-still-has-highest-incarceration-rate-world>
- ¹² <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL34287.pdf>
- ¹³ <https://nicic.gov/state-recidivism-revolving-door-america's-prisons>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3329888/>
- ⁶ <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cpus16.pdf>
- ¹⁵ <http://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/barriers-to-work-individuals-with-criminal-records.aspx>
- ¹⁶ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/10/26/the-big-paradox-of-criminal-justice-in-america/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.83dabb2a511b
- ¹⁷ <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-prison-costs-20170604-htmlstory.html>
- ¹⁸ <https://vadoc.virginia.gov/about/facts/managementInformationSummaries/2017-mis-summary.pdf>
- ³ <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/other/expenditures-corrections-education/brief.pdf>

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/the-facts/#map>

⁵ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/du-bois-review-social-science-research-on-race/article/racial-inequalities-in-connectedness-to-imprisoned-individuals-in-the-united-states/D015904ED108B3B0A18454450104845A>

¹⁹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4091823/>

²⁰ <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/10-percent-us-adults-have-drug-use-disorder-some-point-their-lives>

²¹ <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/324825.php>

²² <https://www.centeronaddiction.org/newsroom/press-releases/2010-behind-bars-ii>

For more information and facts about incarceration, please visit these sites

<https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>

<https://www.brookings.edu/research/twelve-facts-about-incarceration-and-prisoner-reentry/>

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/>

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