

KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY

DISCUSSION FILM GUIDE FOR PARDON ME

1 in 3 Americans has a criminal record



Costing \$280 billion **every year** in lost earnings



A solution exists



PARDON ME

A FILM BY SHUJA MOORE. DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY SEAN GRASSO
CINEMATOGRAPHY AND EDITING BY HUNTER BARTLETT WITH SUPPORT FROM
INDEPENDENCE PUBLIC MEDIA FOUNDATION

ART EDUCATION at
Kutztown University

DEDICATED TO DAVID 'DAWUD' LEE

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Pardon Me film © Do Moore Films, LLC 2023

Director: Shuja Moore

Year: 2023 - Time: 31 minutes

Pardon Me was filmed to combat a pervasive form of discrimination that permanently demonizes "the criminal" long after a judge's sentence has been fully served. The film is meant to inspire discussion about what "a criminal" is, how stigmatizing (and wrong) that label is, and to demonstrate that it is in everyone's interest to encourage rehabilitation and the restoration of rights. To read more about the film or to arrange a screening, visit www.PardonsNow.org.

The Department of Art Education at Kutztown University is a rich community dedicated to advancing the role that visual arts plays in people's lives. The department prepares students by developing their technical skills, aesthetic sensibilities, creative insight, critical faculties, and historical perspectives, by providing cultural opportunities, and community and professional experiences needed to integrate the arts throughout their lives.

Learn more at kutztown.edu.

Educators and others interested in learning more about criminal justice reform, pardons, and *Pardon Me*, including how to use the film in their classroom, should access the free online resource *Pardon Me in the Classroom: A Guide for Educators*.



FILM SUMMARY

A **pardon is a legal mechanism** that allows the governor of a state to forgive a person's criminal past. Through showcasing the stories of two people that have suffered under the weight of their criminal record, *Pardon Me* explains a pardon, the process it takes to be granted one in Pennsylvania, and how all states in the United States can immediately repair the devastation caused to thousands of families and neighborhoods as a result of criminal arrests and the collateral consequences that hold them back as a result.

Pennsylvania has long been among the most heavily incarcerated and heavily supervised states in the country. When a sentence is fully completed, the conviction remains. Criminal records are available 24/7/365 over the internet and used every day, often illegally, to deny jobs, promotions, loans, housing, admission to education or trades, even volunteer activities. The only way to remove a conviction from the record is by a pardon from the Governor, and the only way to get to the Governor is through the Board of Pardons. Pennsylvania has been on the cutting edge of pardon reform since 2019. [n.1]

“When is enough, enough?
When do you pay your
debt to society?”
Evan Figueroa-Vargas



To see how a community can take ownership of this issue and help its members erase their records, visit the [West Philly Pardon Project](#).



FILM FACTS

- *Pardon Me* has received **critical acclaim**. It won the Impact Docs Awards' Award of Excellence (2024) and the IndieFEST Film Awards' Award of Excellence (2024), and was the official selection for both the Justice on Trial Film Festival (2024) and the Northeast Pennsylvania Film Festival (2024). It was a finalist in the ABA's 2024 Silver Gavel Awards for Media and the Arts.



- Director and Producer **Shuja Moore** previously created the documentary series *Walkies* in 2021. “Walkie” is a term used in prison to mean an incarcerated person’s close friend that they walk with – in the prison yard, in the chow hall, etc. *Walkies* tells the stories of some who found success in life after their incarceration and is viewable online .
- **Sean Grasso** (director of photography) and **Hunter Bartlett** (editor and camera operator) worked on *Pardon Me* after contributing to the *Walkies* series.
- First screened in September 2023, the “**Pardons for the People Tour**” over the next 3 months included 13 stops across Pennsylvania where over 2,000 people saw the film followed by panel conversations, pardon trainings, and other events to promote information about and access to pardons in the Commonwealth.
- *Pardon Me* is part of a **larger campaign to promote pardons in Pennsylvania**, and it is intended to serve as a model for other states. Among their goals are to double the number of pardon applications in Pennsylvania to 4,000 in 2024, to cut in half the timeline from application to pardon from 4 to 2 years, to train 1,000 new Pardon Coaches, to double the number of counties with volunteer Pardon Projects to 30, and to pass legislation including automatic expungement of pardoned crimes and other proposals.



FILM

THEMES



Citizenship

The ability to obtain citizenship or exercise your rights that come from your citizenship are limited by a criminal record. Individuals convicted of an “aggravated felony” or certain other crimes, such as domestic violence or a restraining order, are not eligible for United States citizenship. [n.3] For those who are already citizens, those convicted and imprisoned for more than one year may not serve on a jury unless they are granted a pardon or amnesty. [n.4] **Jury duty is one of the most direct ways individuals can engage in our democracy** and is at the core of our nation's pledge to provide "equal justice" to all.

Economic and Social Equity

When someone has a criminal record, it is harder for them to obtain a job, keep that job, and progress in that job in a way that ensures financial security – or even financial stability. [n.2] In addition, the American Bar Association has documented over 40,000 "**post-punishment punishments**" that affect people with convictions, and the United Way has recognized criminal records as a major cause of intergenerational poverty. Pardons are also now beginning to be called a determinant to public health.

“There is a reason that these communities stay entrenched in this poverty, and it’s because most of the adults in those communities are disenfranchised from participating in our economy in a meaningful way.”

Taylor Pacheco, Philadelphia
Lawyers for Social Equity

“If we’re serious about this ‘returning citizen’ rhetoric, we should make it real. We should really make people citizens when they come out of prison.”

Jeff Hornstein, CEO, The Economy League



Activism

The criminal justice system is an area where activism for **social and racial justice** have been increasing in recent years. Potential outlets for those interested in getting involved include training and serving as a **pardon coach**, getting involved in **criminal justice reform organizations**, **opening up employment, lending, and admissions policies** to those with past convictions, and **providing support** for those impacted by the criminal justice system (including those charged with a crime and also their families and communities).

FILM THEMES



“I don’t want the system to continue to hold me down. I’m trying to make a full exit from the criminal justice system so I can continue to be a beacon of hope to those individuals who are hopeless.”

Evan Figueroa-Vargas

Criminal Justice and Reform

Criminal justice reform **seeks to address the various inherent structural issues that exist** in the criminal justice system. This can include **racial profiling, police brutality, over-criminalization, and mass incarceration**. The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, and that mass incarceration disproportionately impacts **poor people and people of color**, especially when you consider the widespread issue of **overcharging by prosecutors** which can coerce the accused to accept a plea bargain even when they are not guilty or unable to post bail.

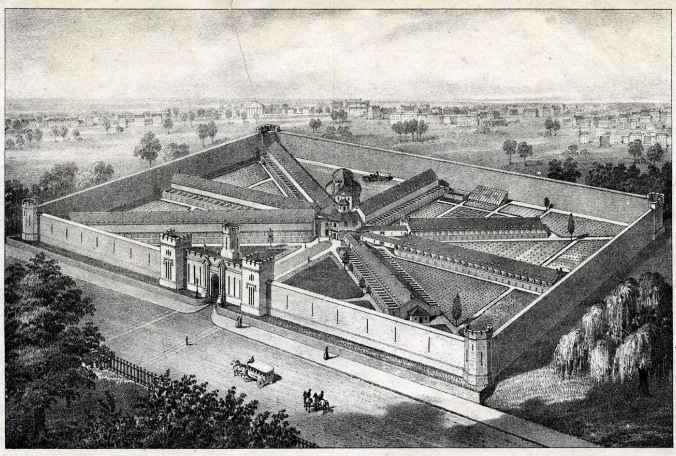
“If you give people an opportunity despite the fact they may have criminal histories, they can perform as well if not even better than those that don’t.”

Brandon J. Flood, Secretary, PA Board of Pardons



TYPES OF INCARCERATION

There are different forms of incarceration: state and federal prisons, jails, and juvenile detention centers. And many who are convicted **do not face incarceration**. We are accustomed to thinking about “returning citizens,” but the majority of people convicted of crimes never “went away” - they were sentenced to time served, probation, a fine, or home confinement. Despite this, we do not have a term for people whose convictions were not considered serious enough to merit confinement - we lump them all under the term “criminal.”



State & Federal Prisons: State prisons are operated and funded by the state government, and they hold individuals charged and convicted under state laws. Federal prisons are operated and funded by the federal government, and they hold individuals charged and convicted under federal law. In January 2021, President Biden issued an

executive order to phase out the federal use of **private for-profit prisons** by the Federal Bureau of Prisons and the U.S. Marshals Service. As of March 2024, the Bureau of Prisons had fully phased out private prisons, but the Marshals Service had not. [n.5] In addition, the 2021 executive order did not cover the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which heavily uses private for-profit prisons. [n.6]

Jails: A confinement facility used to hold those awaiting trial (who have not been convicted of a crime) and those sentenced for misdemeanors. In Pennsylvania, **county jails** are operated by county authorities and hold people convicted of lesser offenses, are transitioning between facilities, or are being held awaiting trial.

Juvenile Detention Center: A short-term confinement facility used after a youth is arrested but prior to determination of guilt or innocence and the court believes the youth to be at risk of committing another crime or fleeing. These centers also may hold youth after their case has been heard while awaiting sentencing or placement.



TIMELINE OF A CRIMINAL TRIAL



1

The criminal process begins with the **arrest** of the individual. The defendant may be taken into custody, or they may receive documents in the mail. This is when they are formally charged with a crime.

1 in every 3 American adults – about 77 million people – have a criminal record. [n.7]

2

The defendant attends their **arraignment**, a proceeding before a judge. At the arraignment, the judge reads the formal charges, sets bail, and collects the defendant's contact information to be entered into the computer system. This allows the Court to contact the defendant for future proceedings.

“Individuals make mistakes. And I don't think that your worst day of your life or a mistake you made in your life is indicative of who an individual is for the rest of their life.”

Christian Stephens,
Director of Field Services,
Department of Corrections

3

Pre-trial proceedings begin, including a **preliminary hearing**, pre-trial discovery (exchanging of information and evidence), motion filing, and plea negotiations. This process can take several months to complete. Defendants who are unable to post bail may remain incarcerated in jail during this time.

The vast majority of prosecutions end here when the accused takes a **plea bargain**. See the following pages.



4

If the defendant does not take a plea bargain and will stand trial, a trial date is set. Most often, the defendant **waives their right to a jury** and has the judge hear all the evidence and decide the case. In about 2% of cases, the trial goes before a jury. [n.8] **Jury selection** occurs when a pool of potential jurors is summoned to the court. Each is examined by the judge and attorneys (defendant and prosecutor) to determine if the potential jurors have any biases that might prevent them from serving in an impartial manner. Jury selection may take a few days or up to a week or more.

5

Once the jury is selected, the **trial** can begin. The prosecution must prove to the judge or jury the defendant's guilt "beyond a reasonable doubt." Most criminal trials take a few days, but more complicated trials can take several weeks or even months. Both sides – prosecutor and defense – present evidence, question witnesses, and submit documents that support their position.

6

After all evidence has been presented to the judge or jury, they will **deliberate**. In a criminal trial, a jury must be **unanimous in their verdict**. Deliberations can take anywhere from a few hours to several days.

7

The jury informs the judge that they have reached a verdict. The judge reads the verdict to the defendant in the courtroom. The jury decides on each charge the defendant faces. A verdict of **not guilty** means the defendant is free to go. A verdict of **guilty** means a **sentencing hearing** is scheduled. At the sentencing hearing, the judge reviews the case and decides what the appropriate sentence will be. In Pennsylvania, some crimes have **mandatory minimum sentences** the judge must give. This may be several weeks to several months after the end of the trial.



WHAT IS A PLEA BARGAIN?

When a person is charged with a crime, they must answer that charge in court during an arraignment. This formal answer is called a plea. A defendant can either admit to the charges by pleading guilty or deny the charges by pleading not guilty. In the course of a criminal case, a plea bargain may be reached between the accused and the prosecutor where the accused agrees to plead "guilty" or "no contest" to some or all of the crimes they are alleged to have committed. In return for their plea, the accused receives a **reduction in the severity of the charges, dismissal of some charges, or the prosecutor agreeing to recommend a particular sentence or some other benefit** to the accused. Often, the plea bargain will also require the accused to provide additional information, such as the names of alleged accomplices. The judge must accept the terms of the plea bargain or it will not be entered.

Accused persons often agree to a plea bargain because **(1) it will shorten the time they are confined and (2) because the risks of proceeding to trial are too great.** Plea bargains have been **prohibited in some states due to the concern that they may pressure innocent people to admit to crimes they did not commit** in order to end the trial process or to secure a more lenient sentence than the one they otherwise may face.



**APPROXIMATELY
95% OF ALL
PROSECUTIONS END
NOT IN A VERDICT
AFTER TRIAL, BUT
WITH A PLEA
BARGAIN. [N.9]**





NEGATIVE EFFECT OF RECORDS



Some of the negative effects of having a criminal record may include:

Prohibited from living in public housing.

Denied hunting licenses.

Legally prohibited from working in several industries, including working in public schools, for the police, or in agencies serving children or the elderly.

Lost access to public benefits.

Denied state licenses for not having the required “good moral character.”

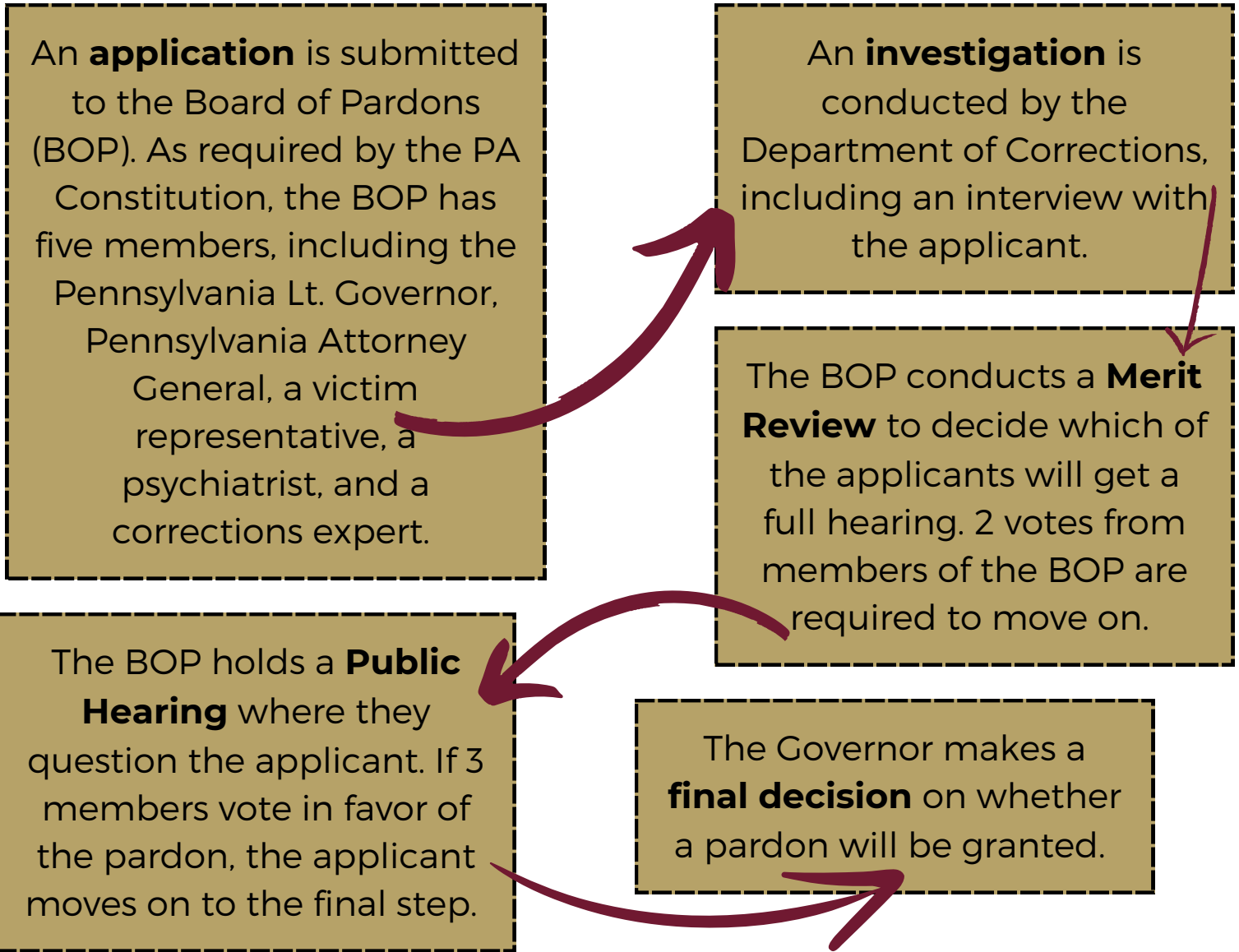
Criminal records available to anyone with an internet connection.

Barred from joining online dating sites.

Blocked from community service opportunities like: chaperoning your child’s school field trips, volunteering with many nonprofits, serving as a legal guardian for an underage family member like a niece or nephew, sibling, or elderly parent.



PARDON PROCESS IN PENNSYLVANIA



Although efforts are underway to shorten it, the entire process takes anywhere from two to six years!

Also consider: Clean Slate laws. First adopted in Pennsylvania, "Clean Slate" is a series of laws that provide for non-conviction data (like arrests and charges that do not end in convictions) and certain convictions (typically misdemeanors, sometimes lower-level felonies) to be "sealed" - that is, removed from public view. Despite the name, the arrests and convictions remain a permanent part of the individual's record unless they are expunged (erased) by court order or after a pardon.



FILM DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS:

BEFORE VIEWING



As you watch *Pardon Me*, consider the following questions. Use the space on page 14 to take notes or write your thoughts, questions, concerns, or anything you would like to discuss after.

1. What is the worst thing you have ever done?
2. Were you caught? If caught, were you punished?
3. Do you know anyone who has been arrested? Were they really guilty?
4. Do you know anyone who has been convicted of a crime? Would you say they are a bad person unworthy of a second chance?
5. How has their conviction impacted them individually, their close others (family, friends), and their community? Does this impact seem fair for what they did?
6. What does it mean to have a second-class citizen status?
7. What are some barriers for people with convictions to transition and move forward in their lives after prison?
8. What stereotypes and myths exist about an individual who has a criminal record?

“I invite people to think of ‘what is the worst thing you’ve ever done’? Is that one thing the thing that you want to be defined for, for the rest of your life?”

Taylor Pacheco, Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity



FILM DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS:

AFTER VIEWING



After you watch *Pardon Me*, use the following questions to reflect on the film and the stories of the people you met. **How did this film challenge your own stereotypes and assumptions about people who have a criminal record?** Use the next page to take notes or write your thoughts, questions, concerns, or anything you would like to discuss after.

1. Think about the stereotypes and myths about individuals with criminal records you identified before watching the film. How does that mental image compare and contrast to the people you met in *Pardon Me*? Has the film changed your mental image of who a “criminal” is?
2. When you hear the phrases criminal record, felon, or convict, what images appear? Did Evan, Tonie, or Brandon match that image?
3. What stands out about **Evan's story**?
 - a. How would you feel if you invested in achieving a master's degree but couldn't work within your chosen profession?
 - b. Do you think a person like Evan should be allowed to help combat substance abuse disorder in his community?
 - c. Do you think it's fair that Evan could not volunteer at his child's school?
4. What stands out about **Tonie's story**?
 - a. Do you think it was fair that Tonie lost her teacher's license?
5. Did you think that **Brandon** was formerly incarcerated before it was revealed in the movie?
6. How did it feel to see the word criminal removed for another label at the end of the film?



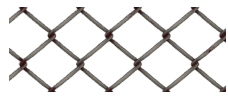


YOUR NOTES

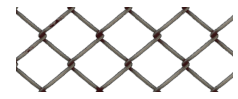


Nearly 3,000,000 (3 million) people have a criminal record in Pennsylvania. Nearly 20% of all Philadelphians have a criminal record, and on average, over 225,000 criminal cases are initiated in the state every year. [n.10]





WAYS TO INFLUENCE



Click the links in this digital document to directly access organizations and resources.

LOWER EFFORT

CONTACT legislators and the Governor about the need to support second chances.

MEDIUM EFFORT

JOIN the list of people who are willing to respond to “calls for action” (like signing petitions) to support second chances.

HIGH EFFORT

HELP ORGANIZE a working group to create a “Pardon Hub” in your local community to help low-income people in your community get pardons.

WATCH one hour of the next round of Pardon Hearings.

WATCH the one-hour training video on how to write a good pardon application (next step: volunteer to be a Pardon Coach).

VOLUNTEER: After being trained as a Pardon Coach, volunteer with a local organization that pairs Pardon Coaches with those seeking pardons.

SUBSCRIBE to the monthly newsletter from Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity.

VOLUNTEER and/or raise money to support the Pardon Me Impact Campaign.

DONATE to the Clean Slate Initiative..

DONATE: Make a tax-deductible donation to help screen *Pardon Me* in more places.





WAYS TO INFLUENCE



Click the links in this digital document to directly access organizations and resources.

LOWER EFFORT	MEDIUM EFFORT	HIGH EFFORT
<p><u>TAG</u> <i>Pardon Me</i> on social media using the hashtags #Pardons4People and #PardonMe.</p> <p><u>EMAIL</u> friends, family, workmates, classmates, and others, telling them how important it is to help people erase their criminal records and suggesting that they do any or all of the above.</p> <p><u>USE AN APP</u> like <u>5 Calls</u> or <u>Resistbot</u> to message your legislators about the importance of pardons.</p>	<p><u>VOLUNTEER</u> with organizations that are working to make pardons accessible.</p> <p><u>DONATE</u> to groups working to improve access to books and educational resources in prisons:</p> <p><u>Books Through Bars Philadelphia</u></p> <p><u>Pittsburgh Prison Book Project</u></p>	<p><u>HOST</u> a screening of <i>Paron Me</i> at your university, organization, or in your community.</p> <p><u>VOLUNTEER</u> with the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program (opportunities for educators, students, correction officials, scholars, and supporters).</p>

Thank you to the Dept. of Criminal Justice at Temple University for providing the template and resources for this table.





ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Click the links in this digital document to access these resources.

Books

- [Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*](#)
- [Antonio Howard, *When a Child is Worth More Than the Worst Mistake He Ever Made.*](#)
- [Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*](#)
- [Nicole Fleetwood, *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration*](#)
- [Nikole Hannah-Jones, Caitlin Roper, & Ilena Silverman, *The 1619 Project*](#)
- [WEology: Transformative Justice Behind Prison Walls.](#)

Pardon Application and Instructions

- [Pennsylvania Board of Pardons website](#)

Social Justice Links

- [Abolitionist Law Center](#)
- [Cease Fire PA](#)
- [Pardons4thePeople Campaign](#)
- [Pardon Project](#)
- [Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity](#)
- [Philadelphia Reentry Coalition](#)

Films and Documentary Series

- *13th*, available on Netflix, directed by Ava DuVernay
- *The Art of Incarceration*, available on Netflix, directed by Alex Siddons
- *Stamped from the Beginning*, available on Netflix, directed by Roger Ross Williams
- *Walkies*, [available on the series website](#), directed by Shuja Moore





ENDNOTES



n.1 Impact campaign (n.d.) *Pardon Me*. <https://www.pardonsnow.org/campaign>

n.2 Goodwin, N., Harris, J.M., Nelson, J.A., Rajkarnikar, P. J., Roach, B., & Torras, M. (2018). *Microeconomics in context* (4th ed.). Routledge.

n.3 Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity (PLSE). (n.d.). Quick facts: Criminal records in Pennsylvania. <https://plsephilly.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/PLSE-Criminal-Records-Legacy-Issues.pdf>

n.4 Applies for crimes that were convicted after November 29, 1990. Project Citizenship. (n.d.). FAQ: Criminal history. <https://projectcitizenship.org/become-a-citizen/faq/criminal-history/#:~:text=Some%20crimes%20prevent%20you%20from,violation%20of%20a%20restraining%20order>

n.5 Virgien, K., & Patel, N. (2024, March 1). President Biden's order to ban private prisons faces a persistent internal challenge: The U.S. Marshals Service. American Civil Liberties Union. <https://www.aclu.org/news/criminal-law-reform/president-bidens-order-to-ban-private-prisons-faces-a-persistent-internal-challenge-the-u-s-marshals-service>

n.6 Cho, E. (2021, January 28). Opinion: Biden is ending the Justice Department's contracts with private prisons. Now end ICE's. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/01/28/biden-is-ending-justice-departments-contracts-with-private-prisons-now-end-ices/>

n.7 PLSE. (n.d.). Quick facts.

n.8 Smith, J. Q. & MacQueen, G. R. (2017). Going, going, but not quite gone: Trials continue to decline in federal and state courts. But does it matter? *Judicate*, 101(4), fn.47. <https://judicature.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/JUDICATURE101.4-vanishing.pdf>

n.9 Smith, M. (2022, June 14). Investigating prosecutorial discretion in the plea-bargaining process: A partnership with the Urban Institute. Philadelphia District Attorney's Office. <https://phillyda.org/investigating-prosecutorial-discretion-in-the-plea-bargaining-process-a-partnership-with-the-urban-institute/#:~:text=All%20of%20these%20decisions%20impact,then%20accepted%20by%20a%20judge.>

n.10 PLSE. (n.d.). Quick facts.





LINKS



Included here are all the links embedded in the document for those reading this in a non-digital format. The links for endnotes are included on that page.

Dedication Page

David “Dawud” Lee: <https://lifelines-project.org/dawud-lee/>

Creative Commons license: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/deed.en>

Pardon Me website: <https://www.pardonsnow.org/>

Department of Art Education, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania:

<https://www.kutztown.edu/academics/colleges-and-departments/visual-and-performing-arts/majors-minors-and-certificates/art-education.html>

Film Summary

West Philly Pardon Project: <https://pardonmepa.org/west-philly/>

Film Facts

Walkies: <https://www.walkiesfilms.com/>

Ways to Influence

Lower Effort

Contact legislators: <https://www.congressweb.com/PLSE/3/>

Watch pardon hearings: <https://www.pa.gov/en/agencies/bop/board-meeting-dates.html#sortCriteria=%40copapwpstartdate%20descending>

Subscribe to the PLSE newsletter: <https://plsephilly.org/news/>

App 5 Calls: <https://5calls.org/>

App Resistbot: <https://resist.bot/>

“In our county, it is the judge who decides what the punishment for a crime should be. Once the corrections system has done its job and the offender has done their time and paid their fine, they should be free to contribute the most they can for their families and their communities. This film speaks to the power and potential of our system of justice, and all should hear its message.”

~ Hon. Ronald J. Castille, Chief Justice (Ret.),
Pennsylvania Supreme Court





LINKS



Medium Effort

Join the list to respond to “calls for action”: <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/sl/Tes1uRD>

Watch the pardon application training video: <https://vimeo.com/901195758?share=copy>

Volunteer and/or raise money to support the Pardon Me Impact Campaign:

<https://www.pardonsnow.org/campaign>

Donate to the Clean Slate Initiative: <https://www.cleanslateinitiative.org/>

Volunteer with organizations working to make pardons accessible: <https://pardonmepa.org/>

Donate to groups working to improve access to books and educational resources in prisons:

Books Through Bars Philadelphia: <https://www.booksthroughbars.org/>

Pittsburgh Prison Book Project: <https://pghprisonbookproject.org/>

High Effort

Help organize a working group to create a pardon hub: Email probono@plsephilly.org

Volunteer to be a Pardon Coach: <https://pardonmepa.org/>

Donate to help screen Pardon Me: <https://donorbox.org/pardonme>

Host a screening of Pardon Me: <https://www.pardonsnow.org/screenings-1>

Volunteer with the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program: <https://www.insideoutcenter.org/how-to-get-involved.html>

Additional Resources

Books

All are available on bookshop.org or your favorite online retailer, and may be available through your public library. Exception:

WEology: Transformative Justice Behind Prison Walls, available as a free download:

<https://lifelines-project.org/2021/09/14/weology/>

Pardon Application and Instructions: <https://www.pa.gov/en/agencies/bop.html>

Social Justice Links

Abolitionist Law Center: <https://abolitionistlawcenter.org/>

Cease Fire PAL <https://www.ceasefirepa.org/>

Pardons4thePeople Campaign: <https://www.pardonsnow.org/campaign>

Pardon Project: <https://pardonmepa.org/>

Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity: <https://plsephilly.org/>

Philadelphia Reentry Coalition: <https://www.fncphilly.org/philadelphia-reentry-coalition.html>

Films and Documentary Series

Films listed are available through Netflix.com with a paid subscription. Exception:

Walkies, directed by Shuja Moore: <https://www.walkiesfilms.com/>





ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Heather Hope Kuruvilla, M.A., J.D. is an independent museum professional and cultural critic who actively challenges what museums can be in the 21st century. She questions what role our cultural organizations play in communities and what they can mean to individuals. Heather Hope is a past member of the Standards and Ethics Committee for the American Association for State and Local History and has worked in a variety of roles – from museum education to rights manager to interim director – for museums across disciplines and sizes. She has taught in a number of schools at the undergraduate and graduate level, including Lincoln University of Pennsylvania, Kutztown University, Seton Hall University, and the University of Kentucky. Her past publications focused on museum collections and artists rights. Outside of museums and arts administration, she has served as a judicial extern and clerk in civil and family law chambers, from the county level through to the federal courts. Her book, *A Legal Dictionary for Museum Professionals*, is in its second edition, and her work in diversity, equity, and justice in museums and society can be seen through the Illinois nonprofit Agate Creatives. A New Jersey native, she now lives in Pennsylvania. Since 2024, she is the Admissions Counselor at Widener University Delaware Law School.

Dra. Leslie C. Sotomayor II was born in New Jersey with a strong connection to her ancestry through her Cuban and Puerto Rican parents. As a first-generation bilingual Spanish and English McNair scholar, she received her PhDs from The Pennsylvania State University in Art Education and Women’s, Gender & Sexuality Studies. She is a writer, artist, curator and scholar centering underrepresented themes in her work. Sotomayor’s studio art process is painting, collage work and installations often with her youngest daughter.

Sotomayor has curated several art exhibitions in the United States and Cuba including, *Hilos Rojos*, *Hide & Seek: A neighborhood art space*, *Let’s Pretend*, and *Comadres en la comunidad/comothers in the community*. Her writing includes *Teaching In/Between: Curating Educational spaces Through Autohistoria-teoría and Conocimiento* (2022), *BIPOC Alliances: Building Communities and Curricula* (2023), and *Uncrating Josefina Aguilar: Autohistoria-Teoría and Testimonio in a Sculpture Series of Muñecas* (2019). She is a Frederick Douglas Institute (FDI) Scholar assistant professor at Kutztown University and lives in Pennsylvania.

The authors wish to acknowledge the contributions to this discussion guide by **Tobey Oxholm**, Founding Director of the Pardon Project, former university president, and attorney who has received many awards for exemplary public service.