

INVISIBLE CHESS

THE JASON
GOUDLOCK
STORY

A DOCUMENTARY FILM BY SAMUEL CROW AND WILLIAM NICHOLS

INVISIBLE CHESS SYNOPSIS

“Invisible Chess” is a feature-length documentary exploring a deeply flawed provision of Ohio’s criminal justice system that has drawn little media attention. In 1996, Ohio changed sentencing procedures from an indeterminate system – 7 to 25 years, for instance – to a “truth in sentencing” scheme giving judges far greater control over time served.

The new law has reduced the incentive for inmates to participate in programs intended for rehabilitation, and because the law passed in 1996 was not retroactive, inmates sentenced under the old law suffer disproportionately.

Jason Goudlock – African-American, Cleveland native, published author, prolific internet figure, and Ohio inmate #284-561 since 1994 – has been a victim of this injustice. His story reveals a situation so convoluted and daunting that Goudlock has called it a game of “invisible chess.”

New-law inmates might serve only eight or nine years for crimes that put Goudlock behind bars for more than twenty. Because terms of their sentencing do not allow parole board review, new-law inmates have little reason to be on good behavior. Goudlock already has been turned down for parole five times.

When a new-law inmate attacks Goudlock and he fights back, the parole board takes punitive action and extends Goudlock’s stay in prison. The sentences of his attackers are unlikely to change. Despite the crippling aspects of solitary confinement, Goudlock has chosen years in segregation to avoid fights with new-law prisoners. The disparity is unjust – and dangerous.

Jason Goudlock went to prison in February of 1994. If he had been convicted sixteen months later, after new sentencing laws were enacted, he might well have been released in 2003. *Finding Nemo* was in theaters in 2003, and 50 Cent dropped “Get Rich Or Die Tryin’.” George W. Bush hadn’t finished his first term. A person convicted of Goudlock’s crimes that year, likely would have been released in 2015. Goudlock won’t have another parole hearing until 2019 at the earliest.

Using interviews with Goudlock and with others who have been incarcerated in Ohio, as well as criminal justice experts, we created “Invisible Chess” to promote institutional reform, address the inequities of a warped sentencing system, and help Jason Goudlock win freedom too long denied.

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THE FILMMAKERS

WILLIAM NICHOLS - Producer



William Nichols was raised in Oregon and educated at Park College, Johns Hopkins, the University of Missouri, and Yale. For over thirty years he taught literature, writing, and environmental studies at Ohio's Denison University, where he also worked as an academic dean. For several years he served on the Criminal Justice Committee with the Ohio American Friends Service Committee. From 2007 to 2013 he taught as Visiting Professor of Writing at Dartmouth College. His publications

include *York's Journal: A Novel* (2005), an account of the Lewis and Clark Expedition as told by York, the only slave to make the journey; *Fleeing Ohio* (2010), a novel about an improbable escape from a "supermax" prison, and *Finding Fox Creek: An Oregon Pilgrimage*, a memoir. His published essays focus on autobiography, poverty, violence, the Lewis and Clark Expedition, African American literature, Native American oral traditions, nuclear technology, ecology, and college social life.

SAMUEL CROW - Director



Writer / Director Samuel Crow was born and raised in New York City and educated at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. He began making movies on Super-8mm film in high school. He has spent two decades as a film crew member and technician, primarily in location sound. He has won numerous awards for his music videos, animations, and documentaries. These productions have screened theatrically and on cable and network television both domestically and internationally. As the head of Crow-Tone Productions, he enjoys bringing his extensive experience to bear on issues of equality and social justice.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

GENRE: Feature-length documentary

COUNTRY OF PRODUCTION: United States of America

BUDGET: \$23,500 USD

DATE OF COMPLETION: June, 2018

FORMAT: Color, NTSC HDV

RUNNING TIME: 1:35:35

LANGUAGE: English

ASPECT RATIO: 1.78:1

SOUND: Stereo

EXHIBITION FORMATS: DVD, DigiBeta, BetaSP, .MOV, .MPG, DCP

DESCRIPTION: *Invisible Chess: The Jason Goudlock Story*, a feature-length documentary, tells how an unjust Ohio law shaped the lives of Jason Goudlock, 4,000 other “old-law” prisoners, and 45,000 “new-law” prisoners. The story begins with Goudlock’s disrupted life in Cleveland, which led him to prison at the age of eighteen. Taken under the wing of older death row convicts, Jason became an activist and author – but the struggles of being an old-law con have led him to voluntarily spend years in solitary confinement. Current and former prisoners and officials help explore the ramifications of this injustice.

LOGLINE: Twenty years ago, Ohio made four thousand prisoners the underclass of the underclass.

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WHY I PRODUCED "INVISIBLE CHESS" BY WILLIAM NICHOLS

The chain of events that led me to produce a documentary about flaws in our criminal justice system probably began in 1960, almost 20 years before Jason Goudlock was born. That was when one of my English professors at Park College invited me to attend a Dale Carnegie class graduation ceremony at the federal penitentiary in Kansas – USP Leavenworth – where I sat next to a lifer who was my professor’s star pupil in a prison writing course. I told the lifer I was hoping to study literature at Johns Hopkins University, and when an inmate told in his graduation speech of the day he bought programs outside the racetrack at the Kentucky Derby and sold them for twice as much inside, the lifer whispered, “Forget Johns Hopkins. Try Churchill Downs.” As we talked later with my professor, the lifer added that Dale Carnegie’s “power of positive thinking” sharpened the skills of con men. The Leavenworth lifer’s wit and candor surprised me, and for years I thought of him as an exception when I thought of inmates at all.

Then my oldest friend went to prison twice on drug convictions in the 1980s, and I knew he fit none of my assumptions about prison inmates. He had never stolen anything. He was a gentle, loving father. When his then-primitive lithium prescription gave him no relief from his depression, he turned to self-medicating with illegal drugs. And my friend’s experience in prison was bad enough that, faced with the possibility of a “third strike” conviction in California, he told a reporter he would choose suicide rather than go back inside.

It was probably my old friend’s grim prison experience that led me to work with an American Friends Service Committee’s criminal justice group in Ohio, visiting prisons and corresponding with prisoners isolated in the Ohio State Penitentiary, a high maximum security prison, or “supermax.” In 1994 I accompanied the AFSC to meet with several lifers at the Gus Harrison Facility in Adrian, Michigan. Their life sentences mostly resulted from repeated non-violent drug convictions, and they talked about how the politics of “getting tough on crime” had shaped their experience. A musician told of a time when he had been allowed to practice almost daily in prison. In 1994 he was lucky if he could spend an hour a week with his guitar. I began to understand that these men were victims of a national trend away from rehabilitation and toward increasing use of isolation in what critics had begun to call “the prison-industrial complex.”

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WHY I PRODUCED "INVISIBLE CHESS" (CONTINUED)

The inmates I have met probably would not have been surprised by Michelle Alexander's 2010 book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. I used Alexander's book in class at Dartmouth College in 2012. It shocked my students and continues to shock readers today. Alexander reveals how our approach to criminal justice, especially our war on drugs, has helped to create a racial caste system that fortifies injustice in our country. In fewer than thirty years, she points out, our nation's prison population grew from 300,000 to two million, and a high proportion of the new inmates were people of color. At the same time, sentences grew increasingly harsh, and we came to rely more heavily on solitary confinement.

By the time I read *The New Jim Crow*, I'd been corresponding with Jason Goudlock for more than two years, writing essays about his sentencing injustice, as well as a novel, *Fleeing Ohio* (2010), that focused in part on the potential for psychological damage in solitary confinement. Discouraged because my essays and the novel were showing no signs of inspiring reform, I thought of Samuel Crow, a filmmaker who once played in a band put together by my grandson. His most recent documentary (see twelvefootrabbits.com) won prizes, and he had filmed in prisons. He was interested in Goudlock's story, including the sentencing injustice it embodies and his desperate retreat into solitary confinement. So we set out to make a documentary film to foster activism and promote institutional reform. The result is *Invisible Chess*, which turns out to be timely, as the public often seems to oppose sentencing reform and favor expansion of the private prison industry, policies certain to increase mass incarceration. We hope it will help Jason Goudlock and thousands of others win freedom too long denied.

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CROW-TONE PRODUCTIONS IN ASSOCIATION WITH WILLIAM W. NICHOLS PRESENTS INVISIBLE CHESS: THE JASON GOUDLOCK STORY BASED
ON THE CORRESPONDENCE OF JASON GOUDLOCK AND WILLIAM W. NICHOLS CINEMATOGRAPHY BY RUBI ROSE ADDITIONAL CAMERA SASHA BUSH
PRODUCED BY WILLIAM W. NICHOLS SPOKEN WORD BY JASON GOUDLOCK PERFORMED BY LONGMA DIRECTED AND EDITED BY SAMUEL CROW

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