

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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INVISIBLE CHESS FACT SHEET

BLACK LIVES MATTER:

In 2017, Ohio's population was estimated by the United States Census Bureau to be 82.5% white and 12.8% Black.¹ However, the prison population in 2017 was a disproportionate 50.16% white and 46.4% Black.²

OLD-LAW CONS MATTER:

In the state of Ohio, there are two classes of prisoners. An old-law prisoner is one who was sentenced prior to Ohio's 1996 Senate Bill 2 criminal sentencing reforms. Out of 46,101 prisoners in Ohio, 4,144 are old-law.³ These prisoners had 1,212 parole hearings in 2017. Only 197 were granted parole.⁴

HUMAN CONTACT MATTERS:

The United Nations has defined confinement of prisoners in isolation for 22 hours or more for longer than 15 days to be a form of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Blacks and Latinx are over-represented in administrative segregation, where cells can be as small as 45 square feet. Nearly 5% of prisoners are released directly from complete isolation into the community.⁵ Self-harm and solitary confinement are strongly associated. Inmates punished by solitary confinement are 6.9 times more likely to commit self-harm.⁶

COSTS MATTER:

Not only is solitary confinement inhumane, segregation is twice as expensive as general prison housing in the state of Ohio.⁷ The annual cost of one prisoner is \$26,364.73.⁸ Goudlock has spent over a decade in segregation.

JASON GOUDLOCK MATTERS:

56% of currently incarcerated old-law cons are murderers. 29% are rapists. Jason Goudlock is neither.⁹

¹ "QuickFacts." U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Ohio, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/OH/PST045217.

² Bennie, R. Craig. JANUARY 2017 CENSUS OF ODRC INSTITUTIONAL POPULATION, DEMOGRAPHIC AND OFFENSE SUMMARY.

³ Kasich, John R, and Gary C Mohr. "Annual Report." Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, Ohio's Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, 2017 Parole Board Report. "Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, OHIO ADULT PAROLE AUTHORITY.

⁴ Baumgartel, Sarah and Guilmette, Corey and Kalb, Johanna and Li, Diana and Nuni, Josh and Porter, Devon E. and Resnik, Judith, Time-In-Cell: The ASCA-Liman 2014 National Survey of Administrative Segregation in Prison (August 2, 2015). Yale Law School, Public Law Research Paper No. 552.

⁵ Kaba, Fatos, et al. "Solitary Confinement and Risk of Self-Harm Among Jail Inmates." Research & Practice, American Journal of Public Health

⁶ DANIEL P. MEARS, URBAN INST., EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPERMAX PRISONS 4 (2006), available at

⁷ "Jan 2018 Fact Sheet." Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction,

⁸ "Ohio Parole Handbook." Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, July 2017.

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JASON GOUDLOCK: AN INTERVIEW

What was it like to give interviews for the film while incarcerated?

It wasn't too difficult, but there were a few tense moments when inmates were upset because my interview sessions were unintentionally scheduled at the video kiosk during their recreation periods. Media requests to interview me in person had been denied. The Ohio prison system is, for whatever reason, fearful of having prisoners tell the media their stories of injustice.

Are there three people you particularly want to see *Invisible Chess*?

Considering the publicity I received from mentioning LeBron James to the Parole Board in 2014, and his involvement in the Black Lives Matter movement, LeBron is the first person I want to see *Invisible Chess*. Upon being released, I would love to work as a counselor with his youth foundation and basketball camp.

The second person is hip-hop mogul Jay Z. In my opinion, he is the most influential Black man in the United States. I truly believe his voice could be used to revolutionize the thinking of poor people whose bad decisions, in many instances, lead to being incarcerated.

The third person I'd like to watch *Invisible Chess* is Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg. He is an opponent of mass incarceration who has the biggest social media platform in the world. Just imagine how quickly slavery might have been abolished if abolitionists would've had the capability to instantly communicate globally with other abolitionists.

If Ohio citizens contact their legislators or the parole board after watching *Invisible Chess*, what would you want them to say?

I would recommend that the state make all its prison sentences equal. There is no logical or moral reason why one prisoner should be serving a prison sentence that's two or three times longer than another prisoner found guilty of the same crime just because one of them committed their crime at an earlier time than the other.

What do you hope the film will accomplish?

Ultimately what I want the film to bring about is fair and just reform of Ohio's criminal justice system--especially its Parole Board--and my release from prison.

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"INVISIBLE CHESS" DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are there any scenes in *Invisible Chess* that you think provide insights about the lives of state prisoners in Ohio?
2. How would you compare the language in Jason's six raps with the language used in his interviews?
3. Jason often prefers to be in solitary confinement. In the film, he explains the appeal of solitary confinement given the old-law/new-law problem. Are you convinced by Goudlock's case for solitary, as a response to his situation? Does the film risk romanticizing isolation?
4. Hough, Cleveland, is possibly best known for demonstrations and riots in 1966. Why is it significant that Mansfield Frazier's vineyard is on Hough Avenue?
5. Writing is key to Jason's development. His encouragement and training came from death row inmates, not from rehabilitation programs or courses offered by the prison system. What does this say about the prison system?
6. In the "use of force hearing," the hearing officer rewords Officer Blankenship's testimony: "You didn't observe him being punched or kicked." How is language use here important?
7. Do you think the use-of-force hearing was just? Could the process change?
8. Does Officer Blankenship's voice call your attention to the absence of women in *Invisible Chess*? How does the absence of women influence your understanding of life in prison?
9. Is the filmmaker developing an argument? Does he allow the interviewees to speak for themselves?
10. How does "costume" influence your take on this film and its apparent purpose?
11. What do you see as the risks and benefits of relying on Jason Goudlock as the chief narrator in *Invisible Chess*? Do you feel you are allowed to reach your own conclusions about his character? How would you sum up his character?
12. Does *Invisible Chess* seem to call for action? If so, what forms might it take?
13. *Invisible Chess* explores more than one kind of injustice resulting from a law passed in Ohio in 1996. Does it touch on broader problems in our country's criminal justice system?