



TRUE CONVICTION

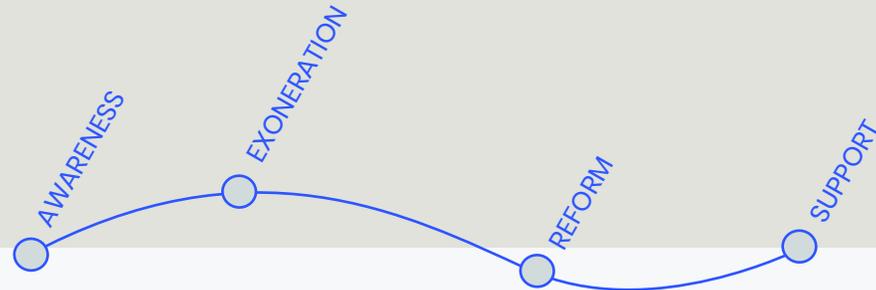
Event Guide



photo: Sarah Lim

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Introduction



How to Use this Guide

This guide provides a roadmap for innocence organizations, university faculty, and community organizations wishing to host a community screening of the film TRUE CONVICTION and leverage its impact to incite action around wrongful conviction and exoneration. By providing contextual information, screening tips and suggested questions for discussion, this guide will assist you in maximizing a screening of TRUE CONVICTION in order to unpack, discuss, and take action on the following:

- The personal toll wrongful conviction and incarceration has on a person, family and community
- The pervasive issue of wrongful convictions and its implications on the criminal justice system
- What can be done to exonerate and support wrongfully convicted individuals.

“By focusing on the experiences of a group of exonerees who are themselves learning to investigate ... this project is unique. It celebrates the indomitable spirit of these men... follows a gripping storyline... and highlights the challenges and roadblocks of investigating and proving another man’s innocence. This unprecedented approach sets the film apart from other documentaries that have explored the lives of the wrongly convicted.”

**– BARRY SCHECK AND PETER NEUFELD
CO-FOUNDERS & CO-DIRECTORS
INNOCENCE PROJECT**

3: Introduction

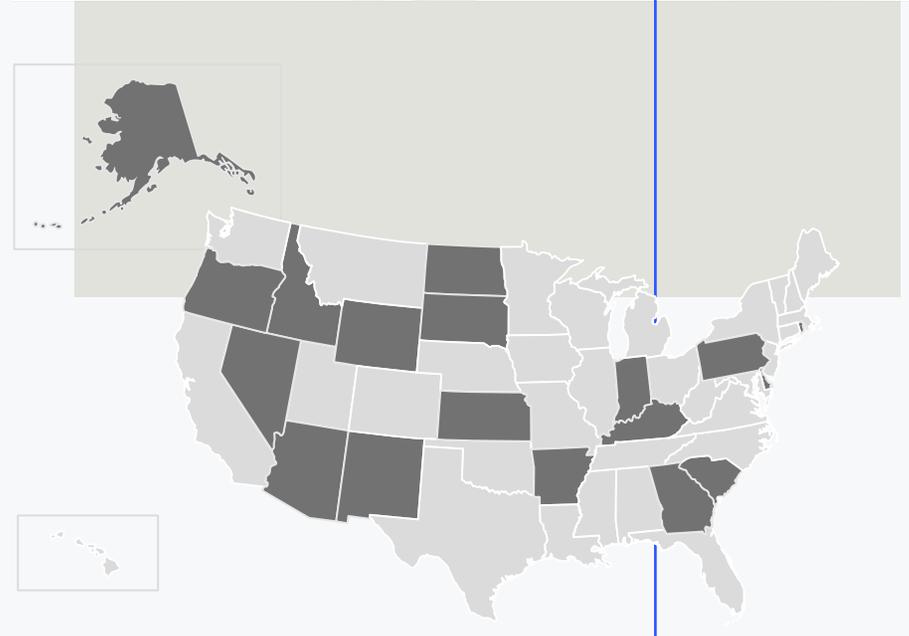
Setting the Stage

Since 1989, 2,023 U.S. men and women have been exonerated for crimes they did not commit. Wrongful convictions derail lives, leave the real perpetrators of crimes at large, steal years away from families and can result in an innocent person being executed — a miscarriage of justice that amounts to a human rights crisis. In 2016 the Huffington Post reported that an estimated 1 in 25 people on death row are innocent of the crimes they were convicted for.

The critical, national issue of wrongful conviction is unfolding right now in Dallas, Texas, where the largest exoneree community in the country is taking on the issue of wrongful conviction and advocating in unique ways — with inspiring results that offer a model to the rest of the nation. Due to the lobbying efforts of exonerees, Texas is a leader in adopting reforms to prevent wrongful convictions. The state also offers financial support and healthcare to exonerees, so that people who have lost decades of work experience and income, had their families shattered, and suffered emotional and physical problems in prison can get their lives back on track.

Despite this accomplishment in Texas, there are still 18 states in this nation that offer exonerees no form of compensation whatsoever. Many of the statutes in the states that do provide some form of compensation are woefully inadequate.

4: Introduction



Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Wyoming provide no compensation to exonerees. For more information, please reference [this article](#).

Key Issues

2,161
US exonerations
since 1989

1.

The alarming number of confirmed wrongful convictions in the U.S.

- a. 2,161 innocent people have been exonerated since 1989.
- b. This includes death sentences in wrongful conviction cases.

2.

The need for criminal justice reform, particularly in cases involving African American men.

- a. Nearly half (1,014) of the national exonerates in the U.S. are African American men.
- b. Over half of wrongful convictions are due to police misconduct. (1,131/2,184).
- c. 29% (641/2,184) of national exonerations were due to mistaken witness ID.

3.

Exonerees need comprehensive support systems and compensation after release.

- a. Emotional, psychological and financial support are needed for exonerees once they get out to get their life on track.
- b. The average exoneree loses 8.7 years of their life incarcerated for a crime they did not commit.

All statistics are as of March 18th 2018.
For more quantitative information and statistics, please reference [this article](#).

The Film

Synopsis

After serving a combined sixty-three years in prison for crimes they did not commit, Texas exonerees Christopher Scott, Johnnie Lindsey and Steven Phillips form the unlikeliest of investigative teams — helping wrongfully convicted prisoners obtain freedom like they did, through the emergence of DNA evidence or new information.

In Jamie Meltzer's hardboiled yet rousing documentary TRUE CONVICTION, brotherly bonds are formed out of life-or-death circumstances — lengthy prison sentences in a state that executes more inmates than any other. Through the steadfast fieldwork of this grassroots "dream team," these Dallas detectives transform decades of hard time into a new career helping others.

Focusing on two cases — Max Soffar, a Death Row inmate of 35 years who was forced into a



photo: Sarah Lim

triple murder confession in Houston when he was a young man, and Isaiah Hill, sentenced to life in prison on aggravated robbery charges after refusing a plea bargain — the trio logs in hundreds of miles digging up fresh evidence on behalf of their incarcerated clients.

Through tenacity, hope and determination these freedom fighters work together to rebuild broken lives and families as they campaign to fix the criminal justice system with each new case they take on...

6: The Film

Director's Statement



photo: Sarah Lim

I began working on a documentary film with three Dallas exonerees in 2012. I came to this subject with little knowledge of the criminal justice system, but a deep interest in how wrongful convictions happen, and what impact they have. Over the last five years, in getting to know the subjects at the center of my film – Christopher Scott, Johnnie Lindsey, and Steven Phillips – I’ve learned a great deal about this issue and the remarkable ways in which these men have turned this horrible experience into an opportunity for positive change.

Since 2012, these three men have spearheaded a grassroots effort to investigate and attempt to overturn cases where someone has been wrongfully convicted. It’s an uphill battle, but one they embrace and approach with a tenacity and passion that is humbling to witness. If a problem on the scale of wrongful conviction is ever going to be addressed, then change will need to come from all parts of the criminal justice system. We believe the exonerees are a unique and critical resource to that process, and so are their stories. I hope my film, TRUE CONVICTION, will add to that process by untangling the issue of wrongful conviction in an emotional, character-driven way that inspires audiences to engage with this important issue.

– JAMIE MELTZER

About The Subjects



Christopher Scott

In 1997, Christopher Scott was wrongfully convicted of capital murder as a result of faulty eyewitness identification. Scott was exonerated in 2009, based on another man's detailed confession. After his release, Scott founded the House of Renewed Hope, a non-profit organization whose goal is to investigate individuals claiming actual innocence. In 2012, Christopher was named Dallas Morning News "Texan of the Year" for his good work. Scott continues to advocate for reform of the Texas criminal justice system.



Johnnie Lindsey

After serving more than 25 years in Texas prisons for a crime he did not commit, Johnnie Lindsey was proven innocent through DNA testing and freed in September 2008. He was 30 years old when he was arrested and 56 when he was freed. Sadly, he passed away in early 2018 due to liver cancer.



Steven Phillips

More than 25 years after he was sent to prison for a string of Texas sex crimes he did not commit, Steven Phillips was released on parole in 2007. One year later, DNA testing proved his innocence and he was exonerated. The DNA testing that exonerated Phillips also implicated another man – who allegedly committed at least 16 other sexual assaults and related offenses while Phillips was incarcerated.

Organizing Your Screening

Goals & Audience

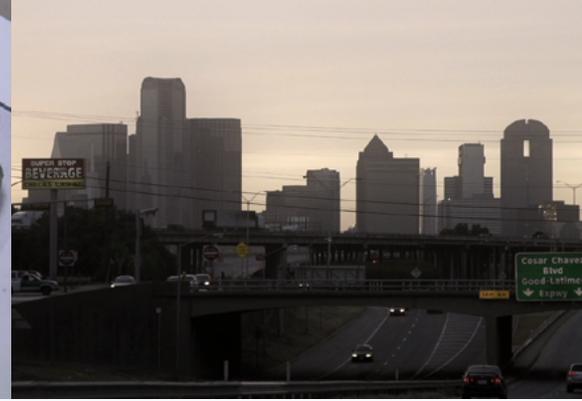
We've identified two potential scenarios of audience and purpose for screening TRUE CONVICTION. These are not the only ways the film can be used, but are two examples of ways you can leverage the film screening for organizational goals.

Community Screenings for a General Audience

To raise awareness about the extent of the issue of wrongful convictions among the general public in your community and incite them to take personal action, consider organizing a community screening open to the general public. Because TRUE CONVICTION intimately shows the personal impact of wrongful conviction on three individuals, it's a great tool to raise awareness about this miscarriage of justice and educate your community about the faults in the criminal justice system.

"...TRUE CONVICTION was a surprising and profound experience...The men are superbly charismatic, and their passion combined with the film's depiction of jaw-dropping corruption within the Texas judicial system makes for a rousing piece of work."

– MEREDITH ALLOWAY. FILMMAKER MAGAZINE



Educational Screenings for Students

To engage students of law, criminal justice, and sociology in the work of your local innocence organization, thereby preventing future wrongful convictions through criminal justice reform and exonerating wrongfully convicted individuals, consider organizing an on-campus screening for students. Because the film demonstrates the process of investigating a potential wrongful conviction, including the challenges, screening the film can engage current law students in getting involved with this work through their local innocence organization. The film also demonstrates the miscarriages of justice in several cases, and can inspire students to engage in criminal justice reform efforts.

Additional Goals

Other potential themes and goals that you can focus your screening on are:

- Recognize the personal and intergenerational impact of wrongful convictions.
- Prevent wrongful convictions through reforms within the judicial system.
- Understand the process of investigating and exonerating wrongfully convicted.
- Advocate for resettlement support for exonerees.
- Honor the role of hope and redemption.

10: Organizing Your Screening

Planning Checklist

A screening of TRUE CONVICTION is a unique opportunity to explore the personal impact wrongful conviction and incarceration have on an individual. The nuance of former exonerees forming their own investigative team shows two sides of the issue: the personal impact each subject carries and the investigative process involved in attempting to uncover evidence to help exonerate someone. Here's a step by step guide to organizing your screening for maximum impact.

○ Set Clear Goals

What do you want audiences to come away with? How will you plan to inform these goals?

○ Acquire the Film

A DVD or blu-ray can be purchased at www.trueconvictionfilm.com.

○ Book a Venue

We recommend utilizing community spaces and campus venues.

○ Organize a Panel

Find local exonerees willing to speak about their experience and professionals working on criminal justice reform/innocence investigation in order to localize the issues and enrich the screening experience. Appoint a panel moderator who also provides context for the issue with relevant statistics (reference "[Setting the Stage](#)" section above). Feel free to contact the [Innocence Project Speakers Bureau](#) for help with finding speakers for your event.

○ Conduct Outreach

Allow yourself 4-6 weeks to build buzz about the screening. List the event on Facebook, Eventbrite, or both. Connect with local community partners to include the event in their newsletters and social media. List the event in local event calendars.

○ Invite the Press

Invite local press to your screening to report on the event.

○ Test your Tech

Be sure to have a technical run through with the film in the space before your event to make sure things run smoothly, checking sound and projections.



Introducing the Film

Before you hit play, thank audiences for attending. Their presence is a recognizable step in the effort to raise awareness about wrongful conviction and institute reforms. Invite audiences to stay for a post-screening discussion, and remind audiences to practice self-care if the content of the film is upsetting.

12: Organizing Your Screening

Post-Screening

Discussion Questions

Consider rephrasing these questions depending on if you will be asking these questions of a panel or of the general audience.

1.

Investigating a potential wrongful conviction

- a.** What surprised you about what is involved in researching a potential wrongful conviction? What are your take-aways about this process?
- b.** What are the policies in place to support exonerees in your city/state?



2.

Impact of incarceration

- a.** What are the impacts of incarceration on the characters in the film? How does it show up on a personal, familial, and community level?
- b.** What healing work is engaged by the characters in the film? What roles do hope, forgiveness and redemption play?
- c.** What are the ways that the cycles of incarceration and reentry can be interrupted, demonstrated in the film or beyond?



3.

Corruption in the criminal justice system

- a. What ways does the film explore and uncover instances of injustice in the (so-called) criminal justice system?
- b. What reforms are possible in order to reduce the number of wrongful convictions?

4.

Taking action

- a. What work is being done in your community around wrongful conviction? Are there organizations doing similar work to what we see in the film, including resettlement, investigation, housing, compensation, etc?
- b. What advocacy work can you take on in your city and state around this issue?

Evaluation

Ask audiences to complete a post-screening survey and sign up for any action steps. At the very least, ask audiences to sign up for your mailing list so that you may keep them up to date about future issues and engagement opportunities.

Taking Action

Capitalize on the energy of the audience by providing avenues for students and community members to take action after the event. Some ideas:

- Check with the Innocence Project to see if there are efforts underway to pass wrongful convictions legislation and if so, how you can help.
- Have a sign-up for an upcoming volunteer opportunity.
- Pass out postcards for viewers to send to their legislators that call for the reform your advocating for (support for exonerees to rebuild their lives, pass reforms to prevent wrongful convictions).
- Have community organizations present on current advocacy initiatives and offer attendees ways to get involved.





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Contact us at natalie@trueconvictionfilm.com with your questions and feedback.

