

FILM DISCUSSION GUIDE

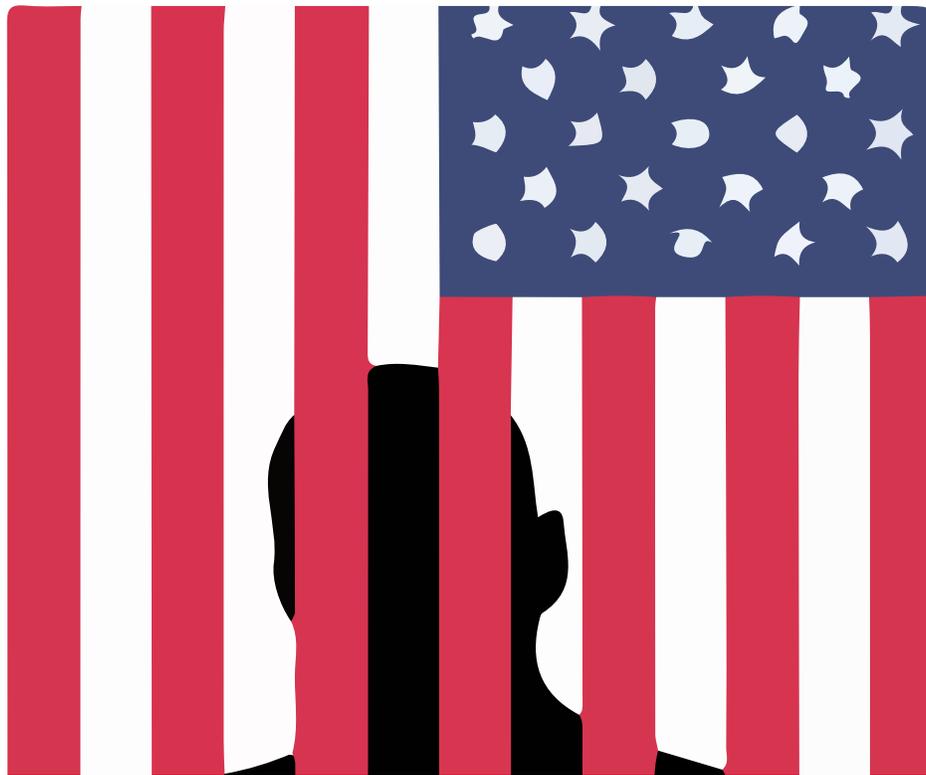
FROM SLAVE TO CRIMINAL WITH ONE AMENDMENT



13TH

Created for Youth Specialties
by Amy Williams, aHopeDealer.org

Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude,



except as a punishment for crime
whereof the party shall have been duly convicted



shall exist within the United States,
or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

The 13th Amendment to the US Constitution

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



The United States is home to 5% of the world's population, but 25% of the world's prisoners.

Think about that.

—Former President Barack Obama

Our justice system is a **human rights catastrophe** and one of the biggest moral crises of our time.

—Van Jones

It's intense.

It's emotional.

It's mind-blowing.

This guide will help you dissect what you learn, and it will allow you to move at a pace that gives you space to process it emotionally, spiritually and intellectually.

This guide is an invitation to dialogue—not to debate. This guide was created for those entering this time with an open spirit. Our hope is that it will spark conversations that lead to others expanding their worldviews, sharing their viewpoints, and actively listening.

There are two main ways to use this guide:

1. Because of the intensity of the documentary, this guide breaks the movie into three parts (approximately 35 minutes per section) to allow space for viewers to process it individually and as a group.
2. If the viewer chooses to watch *13th* in its entirety with no breaks, there are four questions in the Summary Discussion section to discuss as a group.

The discussion questions are meant to guide these conversations rather than to direct them. Choose one question or all of them. Decide what works best for the group . . . or feel free to create your own.

STRONG RECOMMENDATION:

This film has the most impact when viewed at least twice. Use this discussion guide and the additional resources as an opportunity to share the experience and engage with members of your community.

THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

About *13th*
Before You Start

Notes (1)
Discussion 1
 Checking Your Pulse
 Just WOW
 Group Discussion

Notes (2)
Discussion 2
 Checking Your Pulse
 Just WOW
 Group Discussion

Notes (3)
Discussion 3
 Checking Your Pulse
 Just WOW
 Group Discussion

Summary Discussion
Before I Forget
Jesus Was a Prisoner
Action Steps
Additional Resources

ABOUT THE 13TH



FILM DETAILS

DIRECTOR: Ava DuVernay
RELEASED: Oct 7, 2016
LENGTH: 1 hour 40 minutes
FEATURED: Michelle Alexander, Angela Davis, Bryan Stevenson, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Jelani Cobb, Van Jones, Malkia Cyril, James Kilgore



FILM SUMMARY:

Chronicling the history of racial inequality in the United States, *the 13th* examines how our country has produced the highest rate of incarceration in the world, with the majority of those imprisoned being African-American. The title of DuVernay's extraordinary and galvanizing film refers to the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. The progression from that second qualifying clause to the horrors of mass incarceration and the prison industry in the U.S. is laid out by DuVernay with bracing lucidity. DuVernay argues that a prison-industrial complex which statistically imprisons black men disproportionately and allows for their disciplinary servitude, has taken advantage of America's black population and brings into question if this system ultimately acts as a form of modern day slavery.

"This film was made as an answer to my own questions about how and why we have become the most incarcerated nation in the world, how and why we regard some of our citizens as innately criminal, and how and why good people allow this injustice to happen generation after generation," said DuVernay at her premier at the 54th New York Film Festival.

FILM THEMES (written by influencefilmclub.com)

AFRICAN AMERICANS PORTRAYED AS CRIMINALS

Dating back to D.W. Griffith's 1915 *BIRTH OF A NATION*, African Americans have continually been portrayed as criminals in many forms of American media. Through this lens, the public at large has come to unconsciously believe that black people are more likely to become rapists, drug addicts, murderers or thieves purely because of the color of their skin. The more one sees images and hears stories of African Americans committing crimes, whether it is true or not, the more likely one is to believe that African Americans are indeed criminals.

MASS INCARCERATION AS REPLACEMENT FOR SLAVERY

As Amendment XIII states, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." Yet, countless corporations have prisoners who have been put to work without pay as part of their sentencing. Since the abolishment of slavery, politicians have implemented policies that feed off of the media-generated fear of black criminals, disproportionately putting African Americans behind bars where they can be used as free labor.

CORPORATE INTERESTS SHAPE PRISON POPULATION

The American Legislative Exchange Council, better known as ALEC, a coalition of corporate interests like Walmart and Verizon, introduces federal policies which arguably result in putting African Americans and immigrants behind bars in the interest of profiteering from the success of private prisons, surveillance, and prison labor. One in four US legislators have ties to ALEC, some of whom have introduced bills and policies without even bothering to remove ALEC's branding from them before dispersing them to colleagues.

THE DEHUMANIZATION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

By portraying black people as criminals, depriving their communities of financial resources that put them on a level playing field to their white compatriots, developing public policies that are more likely to see people of color placed behind bars, and creating prison systems that are meant to punish and break people rather than help them rehabilitate and reenter society, America has consciously, or unconsciously, dehumanized its black population.

BEFORE WE START



Open in Prayer

2-3 minutes

Take a few minutes to ask God to prepare your heart, open your eyes, and show you what He needs you to see in order to take action against injustice.

Checking Your Pulse

5 minutes

Before you begin to view the film, let's check your pulse. Take a few minutes to answer the following questions as honestly as you can. We will come back to these questions later.

1. Why are you interested in viewing this documentary?
2. When you hear the word *prisoner*, what images and terms come to mind?
3. This film addresses the injustice of mass incarceration and race – the disproportionate incarceration of poor people of color, particularly black and brown men. Take a second to examine where you are concerning race. Write down a couple of words describing your state (ex: sensitive, struggling with seeing racism, angry, etc). **This will help you to understand and pay attention to the filter you will be watching the film through.*
4. Write down 1-2 questions you have about mass incarceration, prisoners, the Church's call to the prisoner, etc?

NOTES (1)



Use this page to write down things that challenge you, points to remember, thoughts you want to discuss, etc.

DISCUSSION 1

MOVIE TIME: 0:00 – 27:23 minutes



Checking Your Pulse

2-3 minutes

1. Notice your emotions. Write words or phrases to describe what you are feeling right now.
2. Go around the group and share 2-3 of your words or phrases.

DO NOT go into detail. *This will allow participants to take the temperature of the group before going into further discussion. Be aware of and sensitive to what others are feeling, affirm them, and remember this is their lens at the moment.*

JUST WOW!

2-3 minutes

List one **WOW** moment or fact from the last segment:

Group Discussion

15 minutes – Choose one or two to discuss.

1. *History is not just stuff that happens by accident. We are the products of history that our ancestors choose, if we're white. If we are black, we are the products of the history that our ancestors most likely did not choose. Yet here we are all together, the products of that set of choices. And we have to understand that in order to escape from it.* — Kevin Gannon, 13th

What are your thoughts on this quote? Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

2. President Lyndon B. Johnson ushered in the War on Crime, Nixon began a figurative War on Drugs that became a literal War on Drugs in the Reagan era. Were you surprised to learn about the racial underpinnings of these legislative policies, and the active role of the state in criminalizing and targeting communities of color? Discuss using the quotation below.

The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did. – John Ehrlichman, Nixon Administration Advisor

3. Crack vs Cocaine. Same drug (one powdered, one cooked) but used in different racial communities and carry different sentencing. Share your thoughts on how this contributed to mass incarceration.

NOTES (2)



Use this page to write down things that challenge you, points to remember, thoughts you want to discuss, etc.

DISCUSSION 2

MOVIE TIME: 27:23 – 1:09:20



Checking Your Pulse

2-3 minutes

1. Notice your emotions. Write words or phrases to describe what you are feeling right now.
2. Go around the group and share 2-3 of your words or phrases.
DO NOT go into detail. *This will allow participants to take the temperature of the group before going into further discussion. Be aware and sensitive to what others are feeling, affirm them, and remember this is their lens at the moment.*

JUST WOW!

2-3 minutes

List one **WOW** moment or fact from the last segment:

Group Discussion

15 minutes—Choose one or two to discuss.

1. Super predator. Criminal. Think about the power of media and the power of words. Discuss media and how words impact the perception and criminalization of people of color, both in the past and the present (animalistic, violent, to be feared, threat to white people, criminals, etc.). Give modern-day examples.
2. According to the documentary, President Clinton built the infrastructure for mass incarceration: mandatory minimums (taking the discretion away from judges), militarization of police (SWAT teams), three-strikes law, and truth-in-sentencing laws (must serve 85% of sentence). Discuss the role of politics and crime and how you see it impact our communities today (both past and current administrations).
3. PRISONERS FOR PROFIT. Were you aware of the Prison Industrial Complex and how corporations are profiting from incarceration?
 - Were you surprised to know about ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council—a committee of politicians and corporations influencing laws that benefit its corporate founders and pushing forth policies to increase the number of people in prison and increase sentences)?
 - Talk about CCA (Corrections Corporations of America, leader in private prisons that is required to keep prison beds filled—the leading corporation responsible for the rapid increase in criminalization) and how that impacts our communities.
4. The film argues that there is a direct link between American slavery and the modern American prison system. What is your take on this argument?

NOTES (3)



Use this page to write down things that challenge you, points to remember, thoughts you want to discuss, etc.

DISCUSSION 3

MOVIE TIME: 1:09:21 – 1:40:21



Checking Your Pulse

2-3 minutes

1. Notice your emotions. Write words or phrases to describe what you are feeling right now.
2. Go around the group and share 2-3 of your words or phrases.
DO NOT go into detail. *This will allow participants to take the temperature of the group before going into further discussion. Be aware and sensitive to what others are feeling, affirm them, and remember this is their lens at the moment.*

JUST WOW!

2-3 minutes

List one **WOW** moment or fact from the last segment:

Group Discussion

15 minutes—Choose one or two to discuss.

1. *“No one in the hood goes to trial.”* Discuss your understanding (or what you learned) about bail, plea bargains, and refusing to settle your case. How did the story of Kalief Browder impact you?
2. *“You immediately become numb. That’s what jail does to humans, that immediate dehumanization, and sensory deprivation that nobody can really understand unless they live through it.”* Discuss the impact this has on those currently incarcerated and what this could look like upon release.
3. *“So many aspects of the old Jim Crow are suddenly legal again once you’ve been branded a felon. And so it seems that in America we haven’t so much ended racial caste, but simply redesigned it.”*
—Michelle Alexander

The impact of incarceration doesn’t end when one returns to society. As stated, there are over 40,000 collateral consequences that follow the returning citizen. This does not reflect our God (repent, forgiven, forgotten, healed), but we call ourselves a “Christian nation.” Discuss your thoughts.

4. Angela Davis stated, *“Efforts to create reforms, they inevitably lead to more repression.”* What does this statement mean to you? How do you see this playing out today?

SUMMARY DISCUSSION



1. After watching the full documentary, how would you sum up your current emotional/spiritual state (helpless, inspired, challenged, angry, stirred to action, a combination of feelings)?
2. Did you learn concepts that were contrary to what you initially thought or believed? How did this film shape your understanding of the prison system? What challenged your pre-existing view?
3. How should the church be responding to mass incarceration? How can the body of the Christ address systemic injustices associated with mass incarceration?
4. Go back to the section Before We Begin: Checking Your Pulse. Reread what you wrote, and see if you feel any different. Were your questions answered? Have the images and terms you wrote down for the word *prisoner* changed at all?

Close in Prayer



BEFORE I FORGET



MY TAKEAWAYS

List three ways this documentary has impacted you. What did you learn? What insights did it provide? What questions do you still have?

1.

2.

3.



“PEOPLE SAY ALL THE TIME, ‘WELL, I DON’T UNDERSTAND HOW PEOPLE COULD HAVE TOLERATED SLAVERY. HOW COULD THEY HAVE MADE PEACE WITH THAT? HOW COULD PEOPLE HAVE GONE TO A LYNCHING AND PARTICIPATED IN THAT? THAT’S SO CRAZY. IF I WAS LIVING AT THAT TIME I WOULD NEVER HAVE TOLERATED ANYTHING LIKE THAT.’ AND THE TRUTH IS WE ARE LIVING IN THIS TIME, AND WE ARE TOLERATING IT.”

-BRYAN STEVENSON

JESUS was a PRISONER



Written by Amy Williams

(for CCDA Theological Reflection on Mass Incarceration)

When we hear the word *prisoner*, certain images immediately come across our minds: violent, angry, mental issues, poor, throwaway, to name a few. Our understanding and experience with the criminal justice system (probation/parole, prisoners, returning citizens) and those involved in it is very limited unless we are directly involved or connected . . . or so one thinks. The church is more closely connected to the experience of the prisoner, because the One we worship was a prisoner himself.

The story of Jesus's incarceration parallels the life of today's inmates. He was seen by political leaders/powers that be as "less than," a lawbreaker (Mark 9:3, Mark 12:2, Mark 12:10, Mark 2:16). He was arrested (John 18: 3-12) and given an unfair trial (John 18: 28-38).

This is a prime example of a broken criminal justice system. Jesus was unjustly condemned—"framed"—and sentenced by the corrupt ("jury of peers") (John 18: 38b-40). Jesus was given the death penalty (Galatians 3:1). Once convicted and locked up, he was allowed visitors and fondly remembers the impact that had on his time of incarceration: "I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me (Matthew 25:36).

Prisoners who have done their time eventually return to the community (10,000 a week). Could the resurrection of Jesus (Mark 16:5-6) be a parallel story for the returning citizen (Luke 24:6-7)? A story of second chances. A story of a rebirth of a new life and opportunities. A story of redemption.

Even the Prodigal Son experienced the joy of returning home after "paying his dues." When Jesus returned, He became fully recognized as the Savior and changed the world. Returning citizens—given the right resources, support and opportunities—can become community changers as well.

The parallels can be summarized as follows:

- Must be delivered into the hands of sinful men—criminal justice system
- Be crucified—sentenced, served their time, treated inhumanly
- On the third day, be raised again—reentry into society
- FULLY recognized as Savior,

changed the world—indigenous leaders, community changers

As we engage the issue of mass incarceration, one of the most effective ways to connect with the incarcerated and returning citizens is to see them the way God sees them—as His children. We have to recognize and acknowledge their inherent worth as God's creation.

- *Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body (Hebrews 13:3-5).*
- *So, God created humankind in (God's) image. . . . God saw everything that (God) had made, and indeed, it was very good (Genesis 1:27, 31).*



ACTION STEPS



KEEP LEARNING

- Continue gaining information and knowledge around mass incarceration, school-to-prison pipeline, privatization of prison, prison industrial complex, juvenile justice, women in prison, and mental illness/incarceration.
- Watch other documentaries, including series on prison life.
- Subscribe to email lists to stay up to date with issues around mass incarceration and juvenile justice. (Example: Campaign for Youth Justice, Equal Justice Initiative, Just Leadership USA, Juvenile Justice Information Exchange, the Sentencing Project, #cut50, the Marshall Project, the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, etc.).

AWARENESS

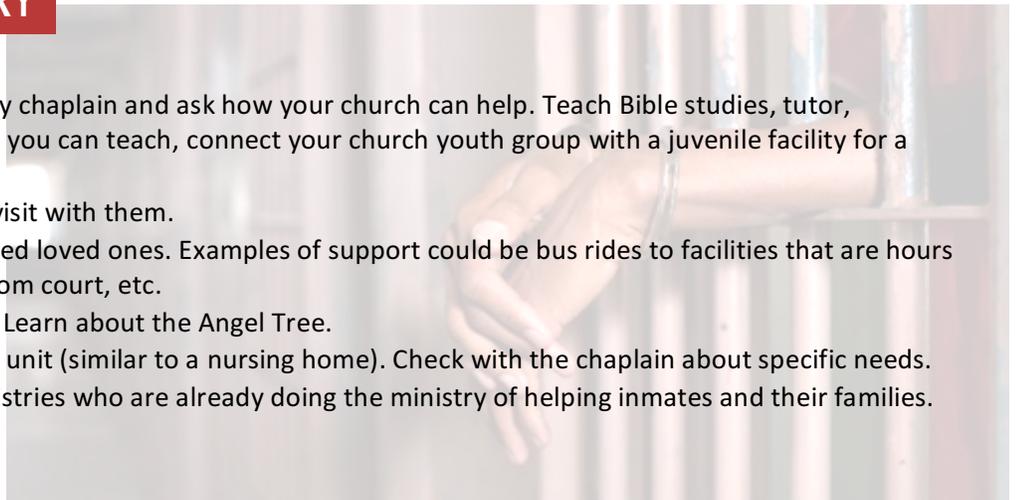
- Host a documentary viewing at your church or in your home.
- Hold a book club to read and discuss *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander.
- Host an event at your church. Invite formerly incarcerated individuals, family members of currently incarcerated individuals, advocates, attorneys, etc., to share their voices and experiences.

POLICY ADVOCACY

- Organize, track legislation, and write letters/make phone calls to your congressman around local and state laws that perpetuate mass incarceration. (Example: <http://lac.org/toolkits/Introduction.htm>)
- Meet with your representative or their staff in person.
- Start a media campaign, blog, etc. to organize and educate others on policies and legislation around prison reform.

MINISTRY

- Contact your local jail or prison facility chaplain and ask how your church can help. Teach Bible studies, tutor, volunteer, offer short-term programs you can teach, connect your church youth group with a juvenile facility for a sports day, etc.
- Write to inmates, send them books, visit with them.
- Support families who have incarcerated loved ones. Examples of support could be bus rides to facilities that are hours away, support groups, rides to and from court, etc.
- Collect gifts for children of prisoners. Learn about the Angel Tree.
- Provide supplies for a geriatric prison unit (similar to a nursing home). Check with the chaplain about specific needs.
- Partner with other churches and ministries who are already doing the ministry of helping inmates and their families.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



DOCUMENTARIES

- *The House I Live In*—www.TheHouseILiveIn.org
- *Broken on All Sides: Race, Mass Incarceration and New Visions for Criminal Justice*—www.brokenonallsides.com
- *Rikers: An American Jail*—rikersfilm.org

YOUTH FOCUS:

- *TIME: The Kalief Browder Story*—series on Netflix
- *Young Kids, Hard Time* (45 min.)—www.msnbc.com
- *Children Behind Bars: American Youth Violence* (46 min.)—www.msnbc.com
- *Children in Prison: Locked Up for Life* (55 min.)—www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLrlajvhUaQ
- *Alone: Teens in Solitary Confinement* (22 min.)—www.csgjuscecenter.org/youth/publications/alone-teens-in-solitary-confinement

WOMEN FOCUS:

- “A Nation of Women Behind Bars” 20/20 (30 min.)—<http://abc.go.com/shows/2020/listing/2015-02/27-2020-022715-a-nation-of-women-behind-bars-a-dianesawyer-hidden-america-special>
- *Women Behind Bars* (30 min.)—www.aljazeera.com/programmes/faultlines/2013/09/women-behind-bars-201393010326721994.html

BOOKS

- *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*—Alexander, Michelle. 2012.
- *Just Mercy*—Stevenson, Bryan. 2014
- *Are Prisons Obsolete?*—Davis, Angela Y. New York: Seven Stories, 2003.
- *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States*—Committee on Causes and Consequences of High Rates of Incarceration, et al. National Academic Press, 2014.
- *The Collapse of American Criminal Justice*—Stuntz, William J. 2013.
- *Arrested Justice Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation*—Richie, Beth. 2012.
- *The Justice Imperative: How Hyper-incarceration Has Hijacked the American Dream: A Collaborative Examination of Connecticut's Criminal Justice and Corrections System*—Moran, Brian E, 2014.
- *Building a Movement to End the New Jim Crow: An Organizing Guide*—Hunter, Daniel, and Michelle Alexander, Veterans of Hope Project, 2015.
- *Monster*—Myers, Walter Dean. 1999. (Juvenile Fiction novel)

WEBSITES

- Campaign for Youth Justice: www.campaignforyouthjustice.org
- The Sentencing Project: www.sentencingproject.org
- Juvenile Justice Information Exchange: www.jjje.org
- Free America (John Legend's Org): www.letsfreeamerica.org
- Just Leadership USA: www.justleadershipusa.org
- Justice Fellowship: www.justicefellowship.org
- Justice Policy Institute: www.justicepolicy.org
- Prison Policy Initiative: www.prisonpolicy.org
- Equal Justice Initiative: www.eji.org
- Vera Institute of Justice: www.vera.org
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention www.ojjdp.gov



ABOUT AMY WILLIAMS



A 23-year youth ministry veteran, AMY L. WILLIAMS follows her passion to minister to teens involved in gangs, youth on probation/parole, and those lost in the criminal justice system—at the core of which life-on-life mentoring is her key strategy. As a certified gang intervention specialist, she heard God’s call to move into a Latino gang neighborhood in Chicago’s Humboldt Park community to be a “hope dealer” to the dope dealer, doing street outreach and walking life with young people on her block.

Her areas of expertise and passion include

- Youth and young adults
- Gang intervention and strategies
- Juvenile justice
- Mass incarceration
- School-to-prison pipeline
- Community development
- Mentoring (youth and youth workers)
- Youth culture

She currently serves as a(n)

- Advisory board member for the National Institute for Juvenile Justice Ministries (IJJM)
- Steering committee member for the CCDA (Christian Community Development Association) Mass Incarceration Task Force
- Advisory board member for the North Park University Center for Youth Ministries Studies (CYMS)

Amy is blessed to speak and train for many organizations including (but not limited to)

- Urban Youth Workers Institute (trainer)
- Youth Specialties
- National CCDA (trainer)
- DeVos Urban Leadership (alumna and trainer)

Amy mentors other leaders across the country, sharing her passion to reach as many youth with the message of HOPE.

She is changing the ‘hood one kid at a time!

Find out more information about Amy and connect with her online:

<http://www.AHopeDealer.org/>

ABOUT YOUTH SPECIALITES

Youth Specialties has helped Christian churches of every denomination lead students to find and follow Jesus for more than 40 years. Each year we serve more than 100,000 youth workers worldwide through our training seminars, conventions, resources and online communities. Whether you're new to youth ministry or a veteran, we're here to help you.

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