

Injustice: A film about prison, crime and us: A Film Review

Peter Squires: *Professor of Criminology, University of Brighton*

Weblink: <http://www.injustice-film.com/>

Injustice is a new, independently produced, film about the self-perpetuating crisis of the British Prison System – in simple terms, the film argues, the overcrowded prison system is the prison crisis. The causes of the crisis are deceptively simple, we send too many people to prison for the wrong reasons; and the consequences are abundantly clear. 2016-17 saw some of the worst prison riots for a generation. Assaults in prison are at record levels, the prison population is higher than ever, and staff are leaving in droves. Even the prison inspectorate has expressed alarm at the falling officer/prisoner ratios and the impact this has upon safety and regime management. Prisoner suicide rates are higher than ever, with a suicide once every three days and an attempt every four hours.

The story of the film is told across a series of interviews with a surprising variety of people who have deep and personal experience of the British Prison system: from prison governors and prison officers to former inmates; and from magistrates to academics, from prisoners' family members to prison reform campaigners. Each of these interviewees, including a former chairman of the prisoner governors association, despite their differences of role and perspective, have drawn similar conclusions about the failings of the prison system. The dilemma that, each in their own way, exposes concerns how a system supposed to deliver criminal justice can rest upon an institution that so thoroughly epitomises injustice.

Injustice is a hard-hitting contemporary documentary it poses the really fundamental questions: what is prison for? Where did it come from? Who gets sent to prison and

why? What are prisoners like? What does prison do to people? The film weaves a narrative through seven chapters. It starts with introductions, and moves through the prison process from conviction to release. The story is told through personal narratives of prison governors, officers, prisoners, prisoner families, campaigners and academics. Whether the partners and children of prisoners, the people working in the system, prisoners themselves or members of our community concerned about crime, Injustice is for everybody.

One of the real stars of the film, Jimmy, pictured in some of the film publicity material, is surprisingly frank, articulate and reflective about the decisions that took him into prison in the first place. But he is also clear about the way in which imprisonment compounded and entrenched his problems.

The film, always provocative and challenging, is eminently suitable for an undergraduate criminology audience as it really does pose the questions that need asking. Two of the key interviewees, for instance, are amongst the UK's leading prison criminologists, and always worth listening to. Many of the prior screenings, for instance in Middlesex, Brighton, Leicester, Liverpool JM and London Southbank have been associated with university social science – and especially Criminology – departments, many of the upcoming screening events are similarly affiliated. The film's companion website has a fascinating array of research data, statistics, blogs and links to support further investigation, all of this especially useful and student friendly – this is a really useful resource.

Future screenings are currently planned for:

London

Bernie Grant Arts Centre, 25th January 2018, 7.30pm.

<https://system.spektrix.com/berniegrantartscentre/website/EventDetails.aspx?EventId=9201>

The Exchange, St Mary's University, 15th February 2018

<http://exchangetwickenham.co.uk/>

Birmingham

University of Birmingham, 15th January 2018, Muirhead Tower G15, 5:00pm.

<https://www.guildofstudents.com/events/23405/2781/>

Canterbury

The Gulbenkian, University of Kent, 18th January 2018, 5:15pm

https://thegulbenkian.co.uk/?start_date&end_date

Bristol

The Arnolfini, 19th January 2018, 6pm

Worcester

The Hive, 26th January 2018, 6.30pm.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/injustice-worcester-screening-tickets-41121110348>

Manchester

The Old Cornerhouse (Manchester Metropolitan University Culture & Arts Hub), 7th February 2018

Bath

Bath Spa University, 8th February 2018