

BUUF Racial Justice Ministry

Suggested Video of the Month – August 2021

Slavery by Another Name, PBS (2017), 1: 24:41.

<http://www.pbs.org/tpt/slavery-by-another-name/watch/>

Information about the video

This PBS documentary is based on a Pulitzer Prize winning book of the same name (written in 2008 by journalist Douglas Blackmon) about the system of convict labor that existed in the South from the 1870's to the 1940s. Convict labor is not well-known, though it lasted for ~70 years, well into the 20th century. It's also an example (in broad historical terms) of how systemic racism has evolved during the past couple of centuries. The system of slavery, outlawed after the Civil War, evolved into a system of convict labor after the end of Reconstruction, which eventually included “chain-gangs” and other forms of state-run convict labor and was perhaps the starting point for the “mass incarceration” that historian Michelle Alexander describes in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, written in 2010.

Several questions to consider and discuss with others

- What did the producers of the documentary want viewers to learn or understand?
- What is the value of knowing about this part of US history? What can/should we do with this information? How does it influence your understanding of current events?
- About 30 minutes into the video, historian Adam Green describes convict labor as “fiendishly rational.” Do you agree with this description? Can you think of anything going on today that you think merits this description?

Additional resources

- Whitney Bennis (2015). American slavery reinvented. Includes a link to “Angola for Life” (video – 13:18). *The Atlantic*.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/09/prison-labor-in-america/406177/>
- David Brancaccio (2021). The hidden side of the prison labor economy. Marketplace.
<https://www.marketplace.org/2021/06/17/the-hidden-side-of-the-prison-labor-economy/>
- Kathy Roberts Forde & Bryan Bowman (2017). Exploiting Black labor after the abolition of slavery. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/exploiting-black-labor-after-the-abolition-of-slavery-72482>
- Tom Micheal (2019). Inmate labor and “convict leasing” in Idaho. This American Life, Boise State Public Radio (audio – 24:29). <https://www.boisestatepublicradio.org/show/idaho-matters/2019-07-03/inmate-labor-and-convict-leasing-in-idaho>
- Paul Ortiz (1998). Conflict labor in America. *Against the Current*.
<https://againstthecurrent.org/atc072/p1974/>