

Bringing It Home

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Source: Baltimore Social Justice Seder

Thank you for joining us for tonight's exploration of the racism and other issues within our criminal justice system. Now it is your time to act. One of the easiest and most important things you can do is to decrease the stigmatism against those with criminal records. We encourage you to use your personal seders as an opportunity to share what you have learned and help your family and friends to feel equally invested in this critical social justice issue. Here are some key places where it might be appropriate for you to bring tonight's knowledge and message to your own seder. Of course, feel free to also find your own opportunities to share tonight's message, be it at your seder, in your workplace, among your friends, etc.

- **Ten Plagues** - The ten plagues were cast on the Egyptian people to force them to set the Jews free. As a discussion during the seder, share the ten plagues that result from the unfair, inequitable, and excessive practices in the criminal justice system. Just as we are each asked by the Hagaddah to see ourselves as if we were slaves, ask your fellow participants what it must be like to face the discrimination that those with criminal records face.

- **Dayenu** - Dayenu literally means "it would have been enough." The Dayenu song lists many of our trials in Egypt, claiming after each one that "it would have been enough." What's the point of the song? Doing something halfway is actually never enough. This is an excellent jumping-off point to a discussion about racism in America. We may have ended segregation and Jim Crow, but when as many as 80% of African American men in major American cities hold a criminal record, it is time for us to say "lo dayenu," it is not enough.

- **Maror** - The maror is a symbol of our slavery. Before tasting the maror, share some of what you have learned about the criminal justice system. Encourage participants to focus on this injustice when tasting the maror. Ask people to share how the physical act of tasting the bitter food helped them to connect to the issue on a deeper level.

Glossary:

Haggadah: The Hebrew word for "telling" or "narrative," it is the name of the text that sets out the order of the Passover seder. Reading the Hagaddah fulfills the Torah commandment that we must tell our children about our liberation from slavery in Egypt.

Passover: The name of this holiday comes from the Hebrew word, pesach, whose root is to pass through, to pass over, to exempt, or to spare (referring to the story that God passed over the homes of the Israelites when slaying the first-born sons in Egypt during the 10th plague). Pesach is also the term for the sacrificial offering of a lamb that was made in the Temple on this holiday.

Seder: A Hebrew word meaning "order," this is what we call the ritual festive meal celebrated the first one or two nights of Passover. The meal is called a seder because there is specific information and rituals that must be included, and tradition

has come to specify a particular order for the rituals.

Torah: The Torah is the Hebrew name for the part of the Bible that consists of the Five Books of Moses.

Underground Economy: A market in which goods or services are traded illegally. Throughout this Haggadah, this term often refers to the drug trade, in which people risk arrest and incarceration for possessing or selling illegal drugs.

Criminal Record: A list of every contact an individual has had with law enforcement agencies. It provides details of all arrests, convictions, sentences, dismissals, not guilty verdicts and parole violations. These criminal records are frequently riddled with mistakes, with a government report finding that FBI background checks are out of date 50% of the time.^{xxxii} Moreover, as background checks have become ever more available over the internet, the rate at which employers run them has dramatically grown.

Returning Citizen: An individual who was formerly incarcerated and has a criminal record. This term is intentionally used instead of other frequently used terms, such as “ex-offender” or “ex-felon,” which carry a heavy stigma and increase the challenges that these citizens face. The term returning citizen more fully focuses on the engagement these individuals in the process of reintegration.

Family-sustaining Wage: A wage that allows a family to live above the poverty line and meet their basic needs. Baltimore’s living wage is currently set at \$11.07 per hour.