

NICOLE BEHARIE TIM BLAKE NELSON WILL PATTON MICHAEL O'KEEFE  
XZIBIT WITH CHARLES DUTTON AND ALFRE WOODARD



WHEN LAW IS WITHOUT ORDER

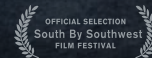
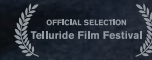


AND JUSTICE IS FAR FROM JUST



ONE WOMAN MUST TAKE A STAND

# AMERICAN VIOLET



SAMUEL GOLDWYN FILMS AND UNCOMMON PRODUCTIONS PRESENT "AMERICAN VIOLET" NICOLE BEHARIE TIM BLAKE NELSON WILL PATTON  
MICHAEL O'KEEFE XZIBIT WITH CHARLES DUTTON AND ALFRE WOODARD WRITTEN BY SUSAN SHOPMAKER DIRECTED BY CAROLINE ESCLIN-SCHAEFER COSTUME DESIGNER JENNIFER NASH  
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americanviolet.com



Discussion guide developed by Heartland Truly Moving Pictures to accompany *American Violet*, a Truly Moving Picture Award-winning film. A Truly Moving Picture Award winner is a film that unlocks the vast potential of the human spirit and enables us to view stories that display courage, integrity and hope, taking entertainment to a higher level.

[www.TrulyMovingPictures.org](http://www.TrulyMovingPictures.org)

# AMERICAN VIOLET

## One Film Can

Heartland Truly Moving Pictures, a non-profit organization, recognizes and honors films and filmmakers whose work explores the human journey by expressing hope and respect for the positive values of life. We believe that one film can move us to laughter, to tears, or to make a difference. *American Violet* is a movie that demonstrates that **One Film Can**.

## Synopsis

Based on true events in the midst of the 2000 election, *American Violet* tells the astonishing story of Dee Roberts (critically hailed newcomer Nicole Beharie), a 24 year-old African American single mother of four young girls living in a small Texas town who is barely making ends meet on a waitress' salary and government subsidies.

On an early November morning while Dee works a shift at the local diner, the powerful local district attorney (Academy Award® nominee Michael O'Keefe) leads an extensive drug bust, sweeping her Arlington Springs housing project with military precision. Police drag Dee from work in handcuffs, dumping her in the squalor of the women's county prison. Indicted based on the uncorroborated word of a single and dubious police informant facing his own drug charges, Dee soon discovers she has been charged as a drug dealer.

Even though Dee has no prior drug record and no drugs were found on her in the raid or any subsequent searches, she is offered a hellish choice: plead guilty and go home as a convicted felon or remain in prison and fight the charges, thus jeopardizing her custody and risking a long prison sentence.

Despite the urgings of her mother (Academy Award® nominee Alfre Woodard), and with her freedom and the custody of her children at stake, she chooses to fight the district attorney and the unyielding criminal justice system he represents. Joined in an unlikely alliance with an ACLU attorney (Tim Blake Nelson) and former local narcotics officer (Will Patton), Dee risks everything in a battle that forever changes her life and the Texas justice system. *American Violet* also stars Emmy Award® winner Charles S. Dutton and Xzibit.

Visit **[www.AmericanViolet.com](http://www.AmericanViolet.com)** to watch the trailer, see clips from the film, read cast bios, join *American Violet* Facebook and MySpace groups, and much more.

# AMERICAN VIOLET

*American Violet* filmmakers, Director Tim Disney and Writer/Producer Bill Haney, have worked together on a number of different projects in the past, both documentary and feature film. *American Violet* is their sixth joint project, and according to the “American Violet Production Notes”, Haney first heard about the story that inspired this movie on NPR on his commute home from work. As he began to think about the effects of the case on the woman and her children he called the ACLU to get the name of the attorney representing the woman, and from that call sprang the beginning this film. Below is the Director’s Statement about the film to help you generate dialogue about this impactful story.

The following excerpt courtesy of “American Violet Press Notes,” courtesy of Samuel Goldwyn Films.

In November 2000, with local and national elections days away, heavily armed police in rural Texas raided their town’s low income housing project. Of the 30 people arrested that day, one was an impoverished 24 year-old single mother of four. Let’s call her Dee. Dee was charged as a drug dealer.

She was offered a plea bargain. As is almost everyone arrested in America. In Dee’s case, her choice was simple. Either plead guilty to a crime she didn’t commit and leave the fetid, overcrowded Texas prison as a convicted felon or, stay and fight the government, risking more than a decade in prison and her children being hurled into the state’s foster care system.

Inspired by this heart-rendering true story and by painfully similar stories across the country, *American Violet* is a tale of extraordinary personal courage – the story of a mother forced to choose between her children and her principles – a mother who fights to defend both.

America has the world’s largest prison population. More than Russia. More than China – a country with over four times our population. Over two million Americans are in prison.

More than 90% of these convicts accepted a plea bargain. They never faced a jury of their peers because in our country we do not adjudicate cases, we dispose of them. Vote-seeking tough-on-crime prosecutors fill for-profit prisons with plea bargain convictions. Thirteen million Americans are convicted felons. Most pled guilty because prosecutors made the risk of fighting the government and losing almost unbearably high.

Convicted felons lose federal benefits like food stamps, Medicare and Medicaid benefits, housing subsidies and Pell grants. In many states they also lose the right to vote – for example, millions were unable to vote in the 2000 election. And, having pled guilty, the convicted and their children suffer together, left with only the poorest of prospects. Few voices rise in defense of convicted felons.

But, sometimes in the darkest of circumstances, a voice emerges to inspire us all. Scared, lonely, worried for her children and overwhelmed by the power of her prosecutors, Dee still refused to plead guilty to something she didn’t do. She gambled her life to stand for American values as she understood them. Her courage inspired others to rally to her side. Six years ago, when my partner Bill Haney and I first heard her story, it inspired us. It still does.

- Tim Disney

# AMERICAN VIOLET

The American Civil Liberties Union, or the ACLU, is an important driving force in *American Violet*, giving Dee the resources and confidence necessary to fight the district attorney in her small Texas town. The ACLU has been a part of several important cases in the United States since its formation in 1920. Some of these cases include such high profile cases as 1967's *Loving v. Virginia* striking down the state's anti-miscegenation laws, laws that prevent a man and woman of different races from marrying, and 1974's *U.S. v. Nixon*, requiring Nixon to turn over the Watergate tapes to Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski.

\* The ACLU is our nation's guardian of liberty, working daily in courts, legislatures and communities to defend and preserve the individual rights and liberties that the Constitution and laws of the United States guarantee everyone in this country.

## **These rights include:**

- Your First Amendment rights - freedom of speech, association and assembly; freedom of the press, and freedom of religion.
- Your right to equal protection under the law - protection against unlawful discrimination.
- Your right to due process - fair treatment by the government whenever the loss of your liberty or property is at stake.
- Your right to privacy - freedom from unwarranted government intrusion into your personal and private affairs.
- The ACLU also works to extend rights to segments of our population that have traditionally been denied their rights, including people of color; women; lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people; prisoners; and people with disabilities.

\* *Information excerpted from [www.ACLU.org](http://www.ACLU.org)*

*American Violet* brings to light issues surrounding current criminal sentencing and drug laws. The ACLU's Drug Policy Reform Project is a division of the national ACLU. Its goal is to end punitive drug policies that cause the widespread violation of constitutional and human rights, as well as unprecedented levels of incarceration.

For more information about all programs and projects of the ACLU, or how to contact an affiliate in your state, visit:

**[www.ACLU.org](http://www.ACLU.org)**

# AMERICAN VIOLET

The ACLU plays a critical part in *American Violet*. It also plays a critical part in shaping America's treatment of people's rights.

Over the years the ACLU has tackled a number of important cases. Some have been cases with very clear distinction about which side to be on, but other cases have been divisive both within and outside of the ACLU and blurred lines between right and wrong. The ACLU, no matter what opinion is regarding the cases, focuses on individual rights and liberties for everyone.

Use the following questions to think about the rights and liberties that all Americans should enjoy.

## Discussion Questions

- Which rights of Dee's and others living in Arlington Heights were violated in the movie?
- Discuss the focus of the raid at Arlington Heights in the movie and compare to a similar situation in the local or national news, whether current or historic. What aspects of this raid were similar? What were different?
- Discuss some of the individuals portrayed in *American Violet* and examine the different ways in which each individual was impacted as a consequence of the raid and subsequent results of being tried and jailed.
- Think about those rights that all Americans are entitled to as listed on page three of this guide. Of these rights are there some that you take for granted? Are there others of which you are very aware?
- Are there current issues in the news in which people's rights and liberties are being violated? How are these rights being violated and what is being done about it?
- What action can you take to bring awareness to a situation in which an individual's rights are being violated?

# AMERICAN VIOLET

**“She ain’t no angel, but she ain’t no drug dealer.”** Dee’s mother about Dee

Stereotyping plays a tremendous role in *American Violet*. Dee, an African American female living in government subsidized housing, is a young, single mother of four children. Because of the stereotypes that surround her, Dee faces many struggles throughout her trial. However, Dee is a very strong individual and demonstrates tremendous courage when standing up to those individuals who attack her character based on stereotypes and associations.

Think about the impact that stereotypes have on individuals throughout the movie as well as the courage that these individuals exhibit when they stand up against not only stereotypes, but against wrongful accusations.

## Discussion Questions

- Dee’s mother comments in the film that Dee “ain’t no angel, but she ain’t no drug dealer.” Dee’s mother realizes, although Dee hasn’t always made decisions that have helped her in life, that doesn’t make her a drug dealer. Dee’s mother can see her in shades of grey, but several individuals in the movie see Dee only in a negative light because of the decisions she made in the past. How do you view your ability to see individuals for who they are and not judge them based on their past or the stereotypes that surround them? What are ways in which you might become better about withholding judgment if this is a quality which you feel you need to improve?
- Are there stereotypes that surround your character? What are they? How do you deal with them?
- Dee demonstrates tremendous courage throughout the movie. Her options are not easy ones to consider. If Dee accepts the plea bargain, she will become a convicted felon and lose her right to vote, to receive food stamps and to be eligible for government housing, but she will be able to be at home with her children and be a good mother. On the other hand, if she fights her conviction she risks losing several years of her life to jail time and will not be able to provide for her family. If faced with Dee’s situation, what choice do you believe you would make? Have you ever been faced with a decision of a similar magnitude? What was it and how did you deal with it?
- Dee experiences several hardships and setbacks in the movie and she is up against a very powerful force, the District Attorney. With so many things conspiring against her, how did Dee stay strong? Discuss all the people in Dee’s life and how each of those individuals or groups of individuals gave her the strength she needed to continue.
- How did wrong accusations and stereotypes affect those who surrounded Dee? Think about her employers, her mother and her children, particularly her oldest daughter, when you discuss this question.

# AMERICAN VIOLET

## Truly Moving Moments

*American Violet* has been honored as a Heartland Truly Moving Picture Award-winning film. This award was created to honor theatrically released films that align with Heartland’s mission to recognize and honor films and filmmakers whose work explores the human journey by artistically expressing hope and respect for the positive values of life.

These award-winning movies are made up of moving and inspiring moments – those moments that cause you to think, see something in your life differently, or be inspired to do something. It’s what makes the movie and its message remain with you well after you’ve left the theatre.

Think about *American Violet*. What were the moments that stood out to you? How did they make you feel? How will they cause you to think about things differently in the future? Share those Truly Moving moments with others at [www.TrulyMovingPictures.org](http://www.TrulyMovingPictures.org). Simply create a membership or login if you already have one and then search the movie list for *American Violet*. You can leave your review of the movie or thoughts about this Truly Moving Picture in the “Thoughts and Reviews” section.



*American Violet* © 2009 Samuel Goldwyn Films

Are you inspired by Dee’s story? Do you want to make a difference in your community, city, state or country? There are many resources to help you take action and advocate for a cause for which you are passionate. Visit the *American Violet* website for a list of resources and information about how you can personally get involved and make a difference.

[www.AmericanViolet.com](http://www.AmericanViolet.com)