

Saratoga Jewish Community Arts,  
sponsored by the Jewish Federation of NENY, and Temple Sinai  
Present  
A panel discussion  
of the film *American Son*



Saratoga Jewish Community Arts, with Temple Sinai and the Jewish Federation of Northeastern NY, presents a panel discussion on *American Son*, an adaptation of a Broadway play of the same name. Written by Christopher Demos-Brown and directed by Kenny Leon, while not based on one specific real-life story, *American Son* explores the truth of the real issues that exist among law enforcement.

Kendra Ellis-Connor and her husband, Scott Connor, learn that their biracial 18 year old son, Jamal, a student about to enter West Point, was not actually arrested, but was shot by a Black police officer who had pulled over the teen and his friends after the officer had witnessed the driver – not Jamal – buying drugs. The boys exited the car without the officer’s instructions to do so, and he fired.

As we spend the night in the police station, we see that the director and writer focus less on Jamal and the confrontation than on the pain of his parents.

The film received negative reviews, citing its social commentary on the subject of race as too heavy-handed. However, as you walk through the 90 minutes of this film, as you let yourself be in this nightmare, you cannot say that communities that are disenfranchised and that are in hostile relationships with police are overreacting. You must understand what the experience is when you allow yourself to spend an evening with this film.

As community members, we share many of the same values: family, fairness, due process, community safety and stability, and equal justice. Ensuring that everyone experiences the ideals behind these values requires that we all be open to having sometimes uncomfortable conversations that will allow us to grow as individuals and as a nation.

**American Son** forces us to ask questions, examine societal norms, and dig deeper into stereotypes. During the viewing of this film, there are times audiences are able to see themselves and their perspective, and have a moment when they say, “Wow, I didn’t know that I was doing that.”

We encourage all to enter the discussion about **American Son** with an open mind, willing to put yourself in the other’s shoes. Questions you may want to think about: How did you feel after watching **American Son**? Did this story challenge previously held assumptions that you had about race, policing or police-community relations? How do Jamal’s parent’s personal racial and class identities influence their differing assumptions about the treatment their son likely received at the hands of the police?

Systemic racism in research shows that Black and Latino communities historically experience racial profiling and other disadvantages within the criminal legal system even when they are less likely to commit certain crimes. However, in many communities these same Black and Latino officials administer the criminal legal system and are the primary faces of the criminal legal system. What are your thoughts on how this happened and in what ways can this be transformed?

Please join the discussion.

You must register in advance at: Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85060070196?pwd=NIUvcEpxaHhyUnRZdINzbnA4dGNiZz09>

## Bios

**Reverend Michael D. Bell, MDIV**, is a native of Buffalo, New York, who received his education in the Buffalo public schools. Rev. Bell is a graduate of Roberts Wesleyan College and Northeastern Seminary, and holds several degrees including a Masters of Divinity. Rev. Bell has pastored in Jamestown, Buffalo, Auburn, Ithaca, Elmira, and is presently in Saratoga Springs. As part of the leadership of the NYS Poor People’s Campaign, he has successfully co-organized the Elmira/Eastern Region of the NYS Campaign. Rev. Bell organized a trade association for minority contractors in Rochester, led two redresses of the Rochester City School District and Eastman Kodak minority employee abuse issue, while also working for one of the nation’s largest financial services business for 30 years and 35 years total. As a pastor, community organizer, and activist, Rev. Bell was nominated to participate in Oxford University’s Round Table, the Rhodes Scholar program in 2007. Presently, Rev. Bell sits on several boards, including the Harriet Tubman Home, Inc. board, the Multicultural Board of Northeastern Seminary, the Saratoga Springs and NYS PPC, and several ministerial groups. Rev. Bell takes great pride as a family man and community advocate. Nothing else is more important.

**Bob Cornute** is a martial arts instructor at Saratoga Kyokushin Karate, a fitness trainer, and biking enthusiast. He is a past member of the NAACP and Saratogians for Equality and Acceptance of Diversity. He was born in Albany, NY, but has called Saratoga Springs home for the past 50 years. He attended school at The Ohio State University in Columbus and currently works at Northeast Controls, Inc. in Clifton Park, NY, as the Sales Associate - Supervisor. Bob is married to Patricia Ashton Cornute and they have a daughter, Noelle, who is currently attending Saratoga High School as a junior this fall. As a person of

color in a community lacking it for most of his life, Bob has a unique perspective on what it means to be a black man in a hostile educational, social, as well as professional, environment.

**Pattie Cornute** just celebrated her eight year anniversary as the Temple Administrator for Temple Sinai. She is the founder of Lipedema Fitness, an organization she started in 2013 as a way to spread awareness for Lipedema, and the importance of those with Lipedema staying active, as the chronic and progressive condition tries to take away their mobility. Pattie also started a Facebook support group for those with Lipedema; being able to support nearly 7,000 others with the same condition is very rewarding to her. Pattie graduated from Endicott College in Beverly, MA, and is a writer and artist. She is married to Robert S. Cornute, and together they have a lovely daughter, Noelle, who will be a junior at Saratoga Springs High School in the fall. Pattie is a past member of the local Chapter of the NAACP, and worked with her mother-in-law, Carmen Cornute, who was President of the Chapter at that time.

**KB Goodkin** is the Director of Community Engagement and Advancement at the Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York where she has instituted new methods for engagement, partnerships within community agencies, and inclusion of all Jews. KB has spoken throughout the country on person centered engagement tactics and methods. She also is a coach, mentor, Doula, the very grateful mother of three rambunctious kiddos, and proud wife of the most patient man in the world, Lenny Goodkin.

**Leonard Goodkin** relocated to Albany in 2012. Leonard taught high school subjects to youths assigned to court-ordered programs and helped operate a community-centered family business in the Crenshaw District of South Los Angeles. He now works as the New Media Manager for the New York State Senate and volunteers for the Jewish Multiracial Network, Temple Israel of Albany, and the Hebrew Academy of the Capital District.

**Mark Kehrer** is Lead Pastor at Pine Grove Community Church, Saratoga Springs, NY. Raised on a farm in Michigan, his parents taught him early about responsibility and instilled Biblical morals. Mark started working at the age of 14 at the local ski hill and worked through high school, while keeping up his grades, participating in athletics and band. At 17, he joined the US Navy. Over the next 24 years, Mark served with distinction, reaching the rank of Master Chief. He met and married Jody in 1986 and they raised three children. Upon retiring from the Navy in 2006 after 24 years of service, Mark worked for seven years in the biotech/pharmaceutical industry as a Project Manager. In 2013, Mark was called into full-time ministry. As part of Revelation Church, he served as Executive Pastor in Connecticut and Campus Pastor in Saratoga Springs. In June 2019, Pine Grove Community Church was launched out of the Saratoga Campus. As Lead Pastor, Mark has partnered with several social justice and support organizations in Saratoga and works with others in the faith community.

Watch for our fall programming schedule to be published soon

Thank you to our esteemed panel and to all of you who choose to spend this evening with us.