



## Awakened for Change

### Glenn Martin, Founder and President of JustLeadershipUSA

Good evening. My staff told me there was a video, I had no clue what video it was. It's a short version of a much longer video, but it's really a great place to start, and you'll understand as I talk a bit about the organization that I founded three years ago, and now run today. I'm really honored to be here. I'd like to thank the organizers, the Institute for Prison Ministries, the Billy Graham Center for Evangelization, and the IPM's director, Karen Swanson, welcome to the audience.

A little bit about me. I find that when I am listening to speakers, I spend quite a bit of time trying to figure out, who is this person in front of me, and so I like to start out by giving people a sense of who they're listening to. My name is Glenn Martin. I am the founder and president of this organization, Just Leadership USA. But, I am also a person who grew up in Brooklyn, New York during the 1990s and the early 2000s, at the height of the crack epidemic, at the height of decisions that got us to the point of mass incarceration in this country.

At 16 years old, I got arrested for shoplifting in New York. In New York, if you're 16 years old, you get charged as an adult automatically, no discretion by judges. It means that you go straight to adult jail. In New York, going to adult jail means going to Rikers Island. Anyone ever heard of Rikers Island?

Audience: Yes.

Yeah, Rikers unfortunately has a reputation that precedes it. When I get to Rikers Island, there's all these other children there, I'm very deliberately using the word children. We tend to use words like offender and inmate, and detainee and convict, but I like to use words that humanize people, and that give people a real picture of who we lock up in this country. We lock up brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles, and children and nephews, and anything that is humanizing, I think is extremely important to the conversation.

We can talk about what the policy levels are that got us here. But I think if we're not talking about the humanity of the people we incarcerate, and tell a different story about who we lock up, and why we lock them up, we'll never get to the finish line. I'm going to talk a little bit about that today. When I got to Rikers, I quickly learned that this place was called Gladiator School. 30

years later today, it continues to be referred to as Gladiator School. They call it Gladiator School 'cause you really have two choices, predator or prey.

It is an extremely dangerous place for a bunch of different reasons. One is the proximity to the airport. Literally, it's so close to LaGuardia Airport, that the airplane path means that's you can't build a safe jail structure, so the buildings are flat and linear, as opposed to podular. It is a dangerous place because of the history of it. It was purchased from a man named Richard Riker. Richard Riker was the recorder in New York. The title of recorder in New York in the 1800s, was someone who oversaw the courts in New York City.

Except at night, he was part of the Kidnap Club. The Kidnap Club would go out and kidnap black men who were free, and bring them in front of Richard Riker in his court, and he would hold property hearings. He would send these black men back into the slave holding cell. That's the history of Rikers. That's a little bit about what Rikers is like now. I was there for two days the first time. On my way back to court, I was in a cell and a child walked up to me and he said, "Give me your jacket." And if you know anything about Rikers, predator, prey.

That was the moment to make a decision. We started fighting, and I emerged from it with four stab wounds in my body. The fourth one, here on my neck. I walked away from that and went to court, because the correction officers told me, "If you get medical attention, you won't go to court today, and you'll be labeled a snitch, and you won't survive here." I went to court with those stab wounds. I learned a lesson that the judge wanted to teach me, which is if Rikers is the worst that New York city has for me, I can do this.

I went back to Rikers five years later, spent a year there. Instead of being a victim, I became part of the culture. I learned how to survive there. I couldn't survive for two days the first time, but I survived for a year the second time. Then I did five more years in state prison. Except when I left Rikers, and I got to state prison, there was this moment where I'm thinking to myself, "Well, I got to get my hand on a weapon to protect myself to live in this environment, because if it's anything like the year I just did on Rikers, I need to do everything I can to protect myself."

I saw this young man, and he was opening a can of soup. So I'm saying to myself, "I need to get my hand on that weapon. I need to make sure I have that weapon." That can top is a weapon. He opened the soup, and he took the can top off. He threw it in the garbage, and he ate soup. It just struck me the difference between the culture in the state prison, and the culture at Rikers. It made me inquisitive about what it is about the culture at Rikers that lent itself to so much damage being caused to so much many children.

Now, 30 years later, asking myself how in the most progressive, resource rich city in the country arguably, do we allow this torture island to exist in our backyard, and continue to operate for decades, eight and a half decades, at a cost of \$247,000 per bed, per year. I've always held on to that. My experience in the criminal justice system guides the way I think about doing the

work to undo mass incarceration. The things that I believe need to happen to undo mass incarceration.

Why am I so honored to be here today? Why did I have a set of meetings in New York, and then get on an airplane to come here? Because there are things that are driving this Summit that really resonated with me. First, that we all need to see and understand the problem of mass incarceration. I think it's an extremely complex issues, and the average person has just enough ephemeral sort of understanding of our criminal justice system. Most people get their information about criminal justice from the evening news. If it bleeds, it leads.

What we tend to see on television is the worst of it. We don't see people who emerge from our criminal justice system and do amazing things. We see people who emerge and once again, re-offend, and end up back in prison. Knowing that part of this summit is to help people understand mass incarceration is important to me. The other thing is that we all have an important role to play in undoing policies and practices, that have led to the criminalization of over 70 million Americans.

Then lastly, compassion for one another, and recognizing humanity of others, and how vital that is to criminal justice reform. I should have named that as bullet point number one, and I'll tell you why, as I can continue my talk. I think that in this country, we're having this bipartisan conversation about how our criminal justice system doesn't work. I'll tell you why I don't put a whole lot of stack in that conversation. Or the conversation about mass incarceration beginning amongst policymakers and elected officials.

I'm proud to be here at an organization hosted in a place named after Billy Graham, an advisor to presidents, an opponent of segregation, and an ally to Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King. Someone who bailed him out during the Albany movement when he was arrested. As someone who served time in prison, I'm okay with anybody who bails people out. In the video, you had me talk about Dr. Martin Luther King, and what he would think about the challenge that confronts us with respect to our current criminal justice system.

And about the need to empower those most impacted by the injustices of that system. That approach and Dr. Martin Luther King's vision has guided and served as an inspiration to Just Leadership USA. In many ways, Just Leadership USA was actually born at the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King's, *I Have a Dream* speech. I had been out of prison for 13 years, at that point. I noticed that the country was beginning to have a different conversation about reform. That there were more conservative voices at the table.

And that because of president Bush's statement during the State of the Union address in 2004, and his investment in the office of faith-based and community initiatives, that there was just a group of folks who traditionally were saying, "We just need to be hard, and we need to be tough, and we need to lock people up, we need to throw away the key," who are now saying, "Something's not working. Something's not right." And beginning to look at the backend of the system, what we call reentry.

The thing about working on reentry and helping people to return into society. The thing about doing that work downstream is that as hard as you work, and as many bodies as you pull out of the river, you have to say to yourself, the problem is somewhere much farther upstream. The recidivism rate is so high that you can be down there doing your best, but it will pull you further upstream to figure out where the bodies are coming from.

I noticed that the country was moving in that direction, even though it started out strong on reentry. People started saying, "Well, what is it about sentencing that got us here? What is about mandatory minimums? What is it about truth and sentencing, and three strikes laws, and the things we do on the front end, that's leading to the fact that we have 630,000 people exiting our criminal justice system each year, and two thirds of them going back within three years." I'm home, and with my child, Joshua, who was three at the time.

I'm listening to Dr. King's speech playing the background. I'm watching Joshua run all over the apartment, and I'm thinking like, this child has a one in three chance of going to prison by the time he's 18. I'm thinking like I'm doing great work, but it feels extremely incremental when you think about the price that we pay if we get it wrong. When people say to me, "Glenn, how do you run an organization that has a goal of cutting the number of people under correctional supervision in half by 2030?" I say, "I'm trying to save my child. His name is Joshua."

When I wake up every day with a sense of urgency around this work, and when I wake up every day believing in something that many people around me have yet to believe in and invest in, it's because I'm trying to save Joshua. At the same time, I'm trying to save everyone else's Joshua. But that's what drives me every day, the fact that there's a very personal and intimate reason for me to do this work. At the same time, I feel as though I have a responsibility to humanize the people I left behind, and to help people who will never go to prison to understand why this work is so important.

What would Dr. Martin Luther King say? We have 70 million Americans with a criminal record on file. You don't criminalize so many people unless you have dehumanized them first. To re-humanize people is to bring people from the margins to the center, and to recognize that those with the least diversity right now sit at the center. In many ways, whether it's proactive or not, it reinforces the narrative that allows mass incarceration, and system of oppression to exist.

It allows for the other ring. It is the people at the center with the most privilege, that if you look historically, if you look at the civil rights movement, who recognized their privilege, and not step away from it and say, "I don't want to own that." Recognize it and aligned it alongside people who were marginalized, and support them in their vision for a different system. One that offers hope, 'cause our current system is built on fear. The only thing that is ever pushed back on fear is hope.

Yet it can't be the people who have the least access to power and privilege. At Just Leadership USA, it can't be them alone. At Just Leadership USA we say, people who are closest to the problem, are closest to the solution, but furthest from power and resources. Yet, I look out on

to an audience now that has a tremendous amount of privilege, and people who have decided to invest their privilege to help others. That inspires me. It's no easy task to get people to recognize their own privilege.

In many ways, when you're accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression. Why do I focus so much on the humanizing of people in the system? Why do terms like offender and prisoner and convict and inmate bother me so much? I have a brother, I grew up in a very poor household with two brothers. One older brother named Sheldon, and a younger brother named Adam. My younger brother and I both went to prison. My older brother grew up to be a correction officer. You can imagine what Thanksgiving is like at my house, right?

Now, he's a US marshal. When I talk to Sheldon about his job, I find that even as someone who grew up in the same household I grew up in, and who has two brothers who found themselves in the criminal justice system through bad decision-making, and a system that is on autopilot, he himself uses the very dehumanizing terminology, to distance himself from the people that he either incarcerates, or that he guards when he was a correction officer. My brother is a good person. My brother is a person I love. My brother is a compassionate person.

And yet, I recognize that for him to operate in that system, he needs to hold on to that language. I would urge us to think about that. How we not use the language of the system to describe the system and the people in it, because the language itself is very deliberately loaded to allow people to be able to operate a system like that. Joshua doesn't call me prisoner, he calls me daddy. That drives my thinking about how I do the work. Where are we as a country?

We have 5% of the world's population, 25% of the world's prison population. 2.3 million people in a cage on any given day. Another 5.6 million under some form of criminal justice supervision, where there's probation, parole, electronic monitoring, you name it. We've had a 500% increase in the people in prison in this country over the last 40 years. 800% for women over the last 20 years. The racial disparities, which I alluded to earlier, one in 10 black men in their 30s is in prison today, one in 10.

How much do we spend on this system? One trillion dollars a year. That doesn't count the courts, that doesn't count policing. That's just incarceration, our jails and prisons, one trillion dollars, with a failure rate of 60 plus percent. I can't think of any other industry that would operate with such a failure rate. Not only continue to operate, but continue to be fed resources. It is a system that is insidious. It is a system that currently lacks a moral compass.

But as Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King would say, "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle. The tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals." Dedicated individuals like each of you in this audience. People who should be saving people, yes, and simultaneously working to eliminate decades of systemically racist and classist policies in this country. To help create a system that does more than simply serve up punishment and retribution.

People harmed by our criminal justice system, both people who've served time, and survivors, don't want incremental reform, they want re-envisioning. Why do I use terms like survivor and people in prison, all in the same sentence? What do I not draw that thick line that we do in our criminal justice system? We have a criminal justice system that is very bifurcated. That is very adversarial. That is so large that it's almost factory-like in the way that it operates.

I'm very deliberate about my language because I know what the data tells us, which is that people don't get on airplanes to go commit crimes. People commit crimes in their communities, on their block, in their home, in their neighborhood, against their family. Crime is extremely intimate. It's up close. What does that mean? Communities that are high crime are also high victimization. Yet the people who are victims of crime in this country today, the most prevalent victim of crime, young black men, are not seen as deserving victims.

I remember being on a panel with the Manhattan district attorney, and halfway through a discussion about reentry, he said, "Glenn, we've been talking about reentry and helping offenders for 20 minutes. Let's talk about the victims of crime." I said, "With all due respect, I didn't learn how to pull a gun on someone till someone pulled a gun on me. And your office wasn't interested in me as the survivor of a crime, but your office became extremely interested in me when I was the perpetrator, and willing to spend a quarter million dollars a year to lock me up on a place like Riker's Island.

So if you really want to talk to me about supporting survivors of crime. Guess what, we're probably talking about the same people." We're talking about people that yes, have committed a crime, and have a responsibility to repair the harm that they have caused. But I would argue that we all also have a responsibility to address the trauma, when they are the victims of crime. That if we did a better of that, that that trauma wouldn't calcify and present itself as offending behavior at some other point. If we really want to have less crime in this country, let's also think of how we serve victims, yes.

But let's not draw this thick line, this thick bright line between offender and victim, when the truth is that, that's not the reality of the experiences of people who end up in our criminal justice system. We want reform, we want re-envisioning. This iPhone, this is not pay phone reform. This is a total re-envisioning of how we communicate with each other. This is what people want to see. People who are harmed by the system want to see us emerge with a totally different criminal justice system.

I remember sentencing for me. If you've ever been in a court room. I was just in an Uber. I was rushing here, I was late, I apologize. I was talking to the Uber driver. His name is Frank, and I told him I was rushing here because I had to get on stage, and he said, "Are you performing?" I said, "Sort of." I told him I was doing a speech. He said, "About what?" I said, "Criminal justice reform." I started explaining to him what I do. He said, "Oh," he said, "I am part of Manny Mills organization." Does that resonate with people in this audience?

Yeah, and he says he goes into prison and he does prison ministries. I'm like, the Lord works in mysterious ways. I was like, I know I'm going to get there on time, no matter what time I get there, at this point. We talked about my own experience in the criminal justice system, which I usually don't share with random cab drivers. I told him what it was like at sentencing. If you've ever been to a sentencing in this country, it is like an extremely ceremonial moment. You have the prosecutor, and the defense attorney, and the judge, and the defendant. You are either taking a plea, or you've been found guilty.

There's this moment where the judge sort of knocks you down a few notches. You're no longer like us right now. We're going to strip some of that stuff away from you. We're going to send you far away to a place with a high wall, and a guard tower, and you're to stay there for a while. Guess what folks? There is no equal ceremony in this country to bring people back up. We leave them there. We leave them there. I'm going to tell you a story about how real that was for me, just a few years ago. I'm going to tell you my story about the White House. If I forget, someone please remind me to tell the story about the White House.

When people hear about mass incarceration, they tend to, even if you hear it all and you hear about the statistics that are shared with you, it seems really daunting to think about how to get to half by 2030. But it also, people sort of say to themselves, what can I do about that? That sounds like an insidious system, but I'm just one person. What can I do about that? That brings me back to my sentencing, where prosecutors have this manual that tells them how to conduct themselves in the courtroom.

Many of those manuals actually tell them not to ever look sideways at the defendant. That you should stay looking this way at the judge, and looking down at the rap sheet and the paperwork. So my prosecutor never looked over at me, and I really wanted him to look over at me. I wanted him to see a human being. He said, "Your honor, I can't believe you're giving Mr. Martin six years. I think he should have 18 years." He said, "Mr. Martin is always going to be a criminal, and I think it's a mistake to think that he's going to be anything but."

I remember how that felt. I was standing there taking responsibility for what I had done. I was getting sentenced to time in prison. I didn't understand why that wouldn't be ... I mean, the punishment is a deprivation of liberty. I didn't understand that there was going to be a lifetime of punishment stemming from that moment. I couldn't understand why this prosecutor was suggesting that I didn't have value. Then a month later, and this is what I want people to really hold on to, when you think of how daunting this issue is, and how you as an individual can do something. This is the story I want you to hold on to.

Because just a month later, 30 days later, I go through orientation in the prison system. When you go through orientation and they're trying to figure out what job you're going to have. You take a test to figure out what you're learning aptitude is, and the guy is testing me, he says, he said, "Wow, look at your grades. You should go to college." It was the first time anyone had ever said that to me. I almost thought it was sarcasm. Even now, I look back on the moment,

and I romanticize it, but the truth is, I'm not even sure if I understood the gravity of that moment.

Because in that moment, people say to me, "Glenn, how did you turn your life around? How do you go from like getting locked up for robbery, to like meeting with the president, and doing all this important work?" I usually say, "Like, I earned the quality two year liberal arts degree. I learned Russian literature and sociology and psychology," but it wasn't that. It was this guy who said, "You should go to college." Like that person planted a seed in that moment that grew into a tree, that car shade that he will never enjoy. The same thing people in this room do.

I did my research. I know who's in the room. I know why you're here, I know what you do. If you think about challenging mass incarceration, that person if he was sitting in this audience, unfortunately, I wouldn't recognize him. That probably actually is part of the intrinsic value in what he did, is that he wasn't looking for that recognition. Yet arguably, all the work I've done since then to remove barriers to employment, and barriers to housing, and barriers to education, and bringing college back to prison for 12000 people a couple years ago.

That was the seed that he planted that night. I want you to hold on to that because it is not everyone that will stand on the steps of City Hall, that will go to the White House. It is not everyone who will stand up for a piece of legislation, but everyone has the ability to have a conversation with someone who doesn't see something in themselves in the moment, and tell them what you see in them in the future. He saw something in me that I didn't see in myself in that moment. How do we get to the vision of half by 2030?

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, he had a vision, and even when others couldn't see it or understand it, he held on to that vision. Part of it is recognizing the humanity of those impacted. Part of it is pushing for fair, just and humane policies. Part of it is building a community of support. You can organize two things in this country, you can organize money, and you can organize people. There's something much more powerful than organizing money, when you organize people around a vision.

This group is already engaging a very diverse array of folks, not just incarcerated people, but also their families, people from the community and loved ones, and correction officers. For me, as an advocate, it's actually not hard for me understand why it's so important to be inclusive. I have a white father, I have a black mother, I have brother who grew up to be law enforcement, I have a younger brother in prison. Like I am constantly thinking of how we create an umbrella so large that humanity gets under it.

That we all come together around a set of values. Because if you go too quickly to the nuance, then we disagree quickly. But if you hold on to the value conversation long enough, then people realize like, wow, I agree with that. Fairness is important. Human dignity is important. Strong families, that's important to me. Communities, that's important to me. In my opinion, policy reform work is empty if it's not human-centered. I don't believe in people who are voiceless. I believe that people have been silenced.



I believe it's our job to create a space for those voices to be heard. I think the concrete example is the Close Rikers Campaign, which is briefly mentioned during my bio. About 19 months ago, after this organization was only a year old, and we had invested in the leadership of people like Jerry and other folks, who were formerly incarcerated from all across the country. We said to them, "What should we work on?" We looked to the New York formerly incarcerated folks, the people who had been through our criminal justice system.

They said, "Glenn, you got to grab the most insidious part of this system, 'cause that's what, if you do that, we will follow you to the finish line." I said, "So what does that look like?" They said, "We have to work to close down Rikers." It was a lonely place to be 20 months ago, to say out loud in front of an audience, that we need to shut down Rikers. Rikers is an institution in New York that one would believe will never go away. But Dr. King had a vision, and at that moment, I had a vision.

I wasn't sure how to get to the finish line, but it didn't matter. If you hold on to the vision long enough, and you help people understand that it's a real thing, and that we can get there, and that we can get there collectively, I find that people help you answer the question of what it looks like, and how we get there, and what the details are. In 12 months, we got a mayor who was telling us, "Oh, you guys are naïve." Oh, it's too expensive. Oh, it's too difficult. To say New York city's policy is that we're going to work to shut down Rikers.

Why? We didn't invest in elected officials. This issue is all about risk. I can't think of anyone that has a least appetite for risk than our elected officials. I love them, they're a vehicle to get the work done, it is not where you want to start the work. You want to start the work with folks like the people right here in this room. We invested in people who had been harmed by Rikers. Why? Because they were able to tell the story to New Yorkers about what their experience was like.

Anyone ever heard of Kalief Browder? So Kalief Browder was a child. He was 16, like me. He got locked up for allegedly stealing a backpack. He was sent to Rikers, like me. He stayed there for three years. He was beat up. He was put in solitary confinement. Three years later, the prosecutor said, "We don't really have a case, sorry, you can go home." At that point, the punishment was in the process. He had already been punished. He went home, and he committed suicide. It was a story that allowed New Yorkers to better understand why Rikers needed to go, and yet we run into the danger of people thinking that this story was the exception.

We wanted to bring on board hundreds of other Kalief Browders. Hundreds of women who had been through Rikers. Women who had to give birth on Rikers while shackled to a bed. We wanted New Yorkers to think about that. The fact that this island, where a 130000 people go through each year, at the same time, the majority of New Yorkers will never go through it. If you can't bring people to Rikers, how do you bring Rikers to them? How do you help them understand the humanity of the folks who had been harmed by it?

A place where 80% of the people who are there on any given day are not even convicted of a crime. When I was there, there were 22000 people there. Today there's 10000. We've already cut the population in half. We need to cut it in half again to close the place down. But you have to help people understand, wait a minute, 80% are not even convicted of a crime? But some stay there as long as 10 years, waiting to go to court, waiting to go to court. May be found innocent at the end. 41%, mental health diagnosis. 89%, people of color in a city where we're 56% of the population.

One correction officer for every detainee. Unheard of anywhere in the world. Even in some of the most amazing prisons like Norway, you don't have one officer for every detainee. \$247000 per bed, per year, in a place that was purchased from Richard Riker. But it was the human stories that got us to the finish line so quickly. I want to tell you a story of a person I met in prison. Because I think stories are just so important to help people who will never serve time, to put themselves in the shoes of people who are serving time.

In New York, if you go from one prison to another, if it's a 10 hour drive for the average person, it can take days. Part of it is that you have a correction facility worth of correction officers on the road on any given day, moving people around. They suggest that there's some, a method to this madness, except when you're serving time, it seems insane that a 10 hour drive takes days. Here I am shackled in the back of a bus, with 40 other mostly young people of color. We're on our way upstate, to a prison.

It was just so ironic that I'm from New York city. You have New York, and then you have the rest of the states. We call it all upstate. It's not true, but we call everything outside of New York city upstate. If you grow up in New York city and you're poor, you usually never even leave your borough, much likely the city. You definitely don't go upstate. The first time I'm going upstate, and I'm seeing, "Wow, New York has mountains and horses, and farms, I'm shackled like cattle in the back of a bus, being delivered to a prison."

We get to this town called Auburn, upstate New York. It's this beautiful picturesque town, and the juxtaposition of like my experience sitting in that bus shackled hand, feet, to like the beauty of freedom outside of that window, the new fallen snow, the post office, the deli. Then this beautiful gas station. Then the bus makes a left turn, and there's this huge fore-boarding prison wall. It's about 20 ft high, and it's dark, and it's gray, and it's red. There's two guard towers, and these two huge bronze doors open up, and almost swallow the bus.

We drive in, and I was there on a Friday. If you're there on a Friday and you're not going to that prison, and you're just stopping over, then you know you're going to be there for the entire weekend. It was at the time when New York's prisons were overcrowded. Not only are you going to be there for the weekend, but you're going to be in a cell with someone else. We walk in with the shackles, and they take the shackles, and they put in a cell. As soon as I go in the cell, they slam the door behind me, and it's really dark.

This prison was the second prison in New York, so really old, really dark, paint peeling off the walls. I'm in the cell, and the first thing I notice is a set of eyes on the bottom bank, and there's like a shadow, so I'm having a hard time seeing him. He's talking to me, as if like he just started right in the middle of a conversation. I get scared. I know it's hard for people to imagine that a person serving time for robbery could be scared, but I was scared. I said to myself, "Well, the best thing to do is probably to talk to this person and get to know them."

I did, and I asked him his name, and he said, "My name is Arthur." I said, "My name is Glenn." We started talking, and I found out that he was Latino, and he was from The Bronx, and his dad sold crack, and that he started smoking cigarette at 12. He started smoking marijuana at 13. He started selling crack at 14. Then he got locked up at 16 for having a key of coke in the trunk of his car. In New York, we have mandatory minimums. We have this thing called Rockefeller Drug laws. We got rid of them few years ago, but we had them for 40 years.

It means that if you get caught with a key of coke, whether you're the guy selling keys of coke, or the guy who gets 500 bucks to drive a key of coke across town, you're both facing 25 years to life. Arthur was facing 25 years to life. The prosecutor said, "You're facing 25 years, but I'm willing to give you 15 today if you take it today, 'cause I'm going to take you to trial tomorrow, and I'm not going to offer it again." Arthur said, "Let's go to trial." He was 16. That's the age where you make the right decisions.

16, he said, "Let's go to trial." He lost trial. He got 25 years. When I met him, he had 17 years in on the 25 years. He was about 30, 34, 35, good looking guy, still young, addicted to heroin. He got addicted in prison, so he was getting medication through the cell. But here's the story. In this prison, the guards to punish you ... One day I'm going to find a good story about correction officers, so it doesn't sound like I'm just bashing them all the time. I love my brother, how about that? He's a ...

The guards open all the windows on the tier, and it's the middle of winter. It's like 50, 40 degrees outside. At night, it goes down to 20 degrees. We're freezing in this cell like, if you've ever seen a cell. You get this really thin, crappy blanket, and there's like this metal plate, and I start getting sick. Like, I don't know about you, but when I get sick, I get a sore throat first, so I sort of feel it coming. It's like once I get the sore throat, I'm like I'm going to be sick.

I started coughing, and I just went to bed. I figured if I went to bed, maybe I'd wake up and I'd feel better. I woke up the next day, and I was coughing again, and Arthur said, "You're getting sick." I was like, "Yeah, I'm getting sick. It's freezing in here." He said, "Well, do you want me to make you a cup of tea?" So remember, I said he was talking to himself when I walked in the cell, right, I almost ran and called the correction officer. I said, "Arthur, yeah, sure, I'd love for you to make a cup of tea."

He sprang up, and he said, "Go watch the gate, watch for the correction officer." He grabs a plastic bottle, and he ties a string to the lead of the plastic bottle. He fills it with water. He ties the string to the light fixture. Anyone who's ever been to prison knows the end of the story

already. It hangs just over the bunk. He pulls back the mattress on the bunk. He asked me to pass him the toilet tissue. He rolls it really tightly, and he put it under the bottle. Then he takes a pencil, and uses the lead in the pencil and the outlet in the cell to heat the lead, and catches the tissue on fire.

The bottle begins to spin just over the flame. It doesn't burst, but it shrinks. Then the water in the bottle begins to boil. He rips open his prison collar, and he pulls out a teabag, and he shoves it in the bottle, and he hands me a cup of tea. Why do I tell that story? I've told it 30, 40, 50 times. I tell it because we forget about the humanity of people that we lock up. We forget about, not just the human capital that goes down the drain in our criminal justice system.

But here's a person who by all stretches of the imagination has no need to show compassion for anyone, much less this guy he just met 12 hours ago. We ask people who are in prison to do amazing things, to turn their lives around, to do the right thing, to behave differently than they've behaved for the last decade or two, or three. I think we don't hold ourselves to that same level of accountability. I think for us, the larger us as a country, that if we just showed half the heroism that we ask other people to show, around humanizing people in prison, that that actually is half the battle.

That getting to the finish line is not just about eliminating mandatory minimums, not just about changing our sentencing laws, three strikes laws, all those other things I mentioned earlier. Those things happen because we weren't talking about people. Because the policies weren't about people. They were about the other, the folks that are not like us. The offenders, the scary people. We lock people up not because they hurt us, but because we fear them, because they're not people. They're not like us.

You can't humanize other people. You have to create space for them to humanize themselves. I feel like that is all of our responsibility. The fact that our criminal justice system, the punishment that most people face who enter our criminal justice system really starts at the point where they're sentenced. If you talk to people in prison about their life, their trajectory, what they've been through, what got them there, you realize that the suffering started much earlier. I think of all the beatings I got coming from a Caribbean family.

How the response to everything I did wrong was a beating. How my brother would beat me up in the house to show me that I needed to be tough growing up in Bed-Stuy Brooklyn. Like that was his way to save his brother, was to actually beat him up, so I wouldn't be scared to get into fights with other. What role did that play in my decision to harm other people? We don't ask those questions. Then on the other side of it, punishment doesn't abate when people leave prison. I'll tell you my White House story. Three years ago, I get invited to a meeting in DC.

It's a meeting with about 50 of my colleagues, prosecutors, academics, advocates, organizers, researchers, all of us in the same room together. The topic of discussion, mass incarceration, policing in America, and collateral consequences, or the lifetime punishment associated with having a criminal conviction. We had a great conversation, five hours long. But I was excited

because the agenda said, we were going to walk over to the White House afterwards, and we were going to meet the senior policy advisors to the president of the United States.

I was like, "Wow, this is what I've been waiting for, like culmination to my career. I get invited to the White House, I get to talk to the people who talks to the man." We get to the White House, and I'm walking with the prosecutor from Atlanta, Georgia, and he's telling me about his program to keep children out of the criminal justice system, and he's so proud of it. Then if you have a criminal record, I don't know if anyone in this room does, I think I can tell who does just by who's shaking their heads when I'm telling certain stories.

If you have a criminal record, if you're in a situation where there's law enforcement, or where you have to like give up your ID and go through some sort of background check, or application process, you get this feeling in your guy that it's not going to go well. I came back from a great vacation a couple of months ago in Dominica, and I remember landing at JFK, and then I get to immigrations, immigration officer stands in front of me and he says, "Oh, where are you coming from?" I was like, "Oh, vacation." He was like, "Where?" I was just stuck, I just couldn't answer.

Like as a black man in this country with a criminal record, I couldn't even honestly answer this guy about a vacation I just came from, where I had an amazing time. Why? 'Cause he was law enforcement, and it scares the crap out of me. Like law enforcement doesn't have legitimacy in my eyes. Because of all what I'd experienced. Like people pick up the phone and call police officers when they believe the person on the other side of their phone is going to do something to help them. There's a lot of people in this country who don't believe that that's what's going to happen when law enforcement shows up.

I'm at the White House, and the prosecutor hands in his driver's license, and he gets this ID, and he puts it over his head, and it's a green ID. Then I come and I hand him my driver's license, and I get an ID, and it's pink. It says, "Needs escort." Talk about scarlet letter, like literally now I'm wearing the scarlet letter. I walk into the White House, and I go through two, three other levels of security. I get to this last secret service agent sitting on this really high podium looking down at me, and he says, "You can't go any further." I was like, "Why not?" He says, "You need an escort."

I say, "Well, who's going to escort me?" He said, "Who invited you?" I said, "Valerie Jarrett, Roy Austin." He's like, "Then they need to come get you." I'm like, "Really, the senior policy advisor to the president's going to run downstairs and get me?" I stand aside, and I watch the rest of my colleagues go through, and most of them don't even realize what's happening. 35 minutes later, this young intern comes and like kicks the door from behind him, and walks over to me, and she's like, "You are ..." I was like, "Yes." She's like, "Oh, I'm so sorry, I'm going to take you upstairs." I was like, "Thank you."

We walk about a hundred feet away, and we get to the elevator, and we're standing there, and he's like, "You're Mr. Donaldson, right?" I was like, "No, my name is Martin, but do not take me back. Take me upstairs please." She takes me upstairs to the meeting. I'm sitting in this room

now with all my colleagues. I've already missed three quarters of the meeting. They finally get to me and say, "Glenn, but what do you think was the most important thing today that you'd like to share with these folks?"

You know, I believe that leadership is when your knees are shaking the most. Leadership is speaking up when you have the most to lose professionally, personally. It was one of those moments for me where I could have just said, "Oh, you know, we talked about sentencing, I think that's important." Or, what I did say, which is, with all due respect, I want to talk about what happened downstairs just now. I want to talk about living in a country where we've created an entire underclass of citizenship.

Being in a country where you have a black president who says that he cares about ending mass incarceration, but doesn't want people like me in his home without an escort. A person with a 21 year old conviction that's done a tremendous amount of work since then, not just to rebuild himself and make himself whole again, but also to repair the harm he's caused, and to invest in others. That's what I want to talk about. I want to talk about how this country hasn't really moved forward, and how the criminal justice system takes everything Dr. King fought for, education, employment, equality, enfranchisement and strips those things from everyone who has a criminal record.

We don't have to say black men can't go to school here, we just say people with families can't go to school here, and then poor Joshua. 'Cause that's what we do in this country, criminal record discrimination is a surrogate for race-based discrimination. Whether it's intentional or not. Standing here today, and I want to wrap up, I think I'm almost out of time. I want to talk about the story of Lazarus, to take us full circle back to the beginning of the conversation, about how daunting this stuff is, but how everyone has a role.

Because what did Jesus say when he went to the cave where Lazarus was, could Jesus not have moved that rock and then decided to take off the death clothing from Lazarus? But he didn't. He looked out on to the community, and he said, "Unbind him." It's your responsibility. You say he stinketh and he's no longer like you, unbind him. When we think of the 70 million Americans that have a criminal record, when we think of the criminal justice system and what it looks like today, and how daunting it feels, the truth is all of that exists because we believe in it.

All the collateral consequences, the lifetime punishment, the humiliation, the fact that you never get away from that moment in sentencing where you're knocked down a few levels. Like we all have the power to undo that, every single one of us. We all have the power to unbind people. We all have the responsibility to do so. Because one day, we'll all be held accountable for that. The same way we look back now with the passage of time and we talk about slavery, and we say, "Where were the good people? What was going on back then? Where were the people that had the right values, who believed in all the right things?"

The same way now, our children and our grandchildren will say, "Well, how did you have a system that only had retribution and punishment? Rhetorically, you talked about all these other

things, second chances, where is the parsimony? Where is the proportionality? Where's the redemption, the transformation? Where are those opportunities in the criminal justice system? And who were the people who stood up and said, "Not in my name." We are those people. Thank you.