

# *We Need to Talk About Ending Injustice:*

**Beginning with the Work and Path of Bryan Stevenson and Moving  
to the Work of Danielle Sered**

*"Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done."*

*---Bryan Stevenson*



# Healing Harm with the Equal Justice Initiative

When the [United States Congress](#) eliminated funding for death-penalty defense, Stevenson converted the center and founded the non-profit [Equal Justice Initiative](#) (EJI) in Montgomery.

He guaranteed a defense of anyone in Alabama sentenced to the death penalty, as it was the only state that did not provide legal assistance to people on death row. It also has the highest per capita rate of death penalty sentencing.

One of EJI's first cases was the post-conviction appeal of Walter McMillian, who had spent months on death row before being convicted of murder. Stevenson was able to discredit every element of the prosecution's initial case, which led to McMillian being exonerated and released from jail in 1993.

Stevenson has been particularly concerned about overly harsh sentencing of persons convicted of crimes committed as children, under the age of 18.

One case that particularly interested him occurred in 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Roper v. Simmons* that the death penalty was unconstitutional for persons convicted of crimes committed under the age of 18.

EJI mounted a litigation campaign to gain review of cases in which convicted children were sentenced to life-without-parole, including in cases without homicide.

In [Miller v. Alabama](#) (2012), the US Supreme Court ruled in a landmark decision that mandatory sentences of life-without-parole for children 17 and under were unconstitutional; their decision has affected statutes in 29 states.

In 2016, the court ruled in [Montgomery v. Louisiana](#) that this decision had to be applied retroactively, potentially affecting the sentences of 2300 people nationwide who had been sentenced to life while still children.

By Aug 2016, EJI had saved 125 men from the death penalty. In addition, it has represented poor people, defended people on appeal and overturned wrongful convictions, and worked to alleviate bias.

# Changing The Narrative

“Racial bias has also created a presumption of guilt that black and brown people must overcome when they are confronted by police, accused of a crime or tried in a court of law.

“This presumption of guilt and dangerousness has resulted in horrific police killings of unarmed citizens, mistaken arrest and police brutality, and a shocking number of wrongful convictions of innocent people. Hundreds of innocent people have been exonerated in recent years after being proved innocent as a result of DNA testing or other evidence.”

**EXAMPLE** from Stevenson: Anthony Ray Hinton was on Alabama’s death row for 22 years for a crime he did not commit. He faced the threat of execution because of the systemic failure in the United States to adequately address racial bias.

*BRYAN STEVENSON’S TESTIMONY ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON RACISM - 2008 (Hinton, freed in 2015)*



# How do We Heal Harm?

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- “We will not end mass incarceration until we take on the question of violence” --Danielle Sered
- “Drivers of violence are shame, isolation, exposure to violence and an inability to meet one’s economic needs.”—Danielle Sered
- Drivers of incarceration, same as above. Prison adds to violence rather than reducing it –Danielle Sered
- Restorative Justice instead of retributive justice
- *Until We Reckon: Violence, Mass Incarceration, and a Road to Repair* by Danielle Sered of Common Justice





common justice

# UNTIL WE RECKON:

VIOLENCE, MASS INCARCERATION, AND A ROAD  
TO REPAIR

# A Few Useful Resources on Healing Harm

*Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* by Bryan Stevenson

*Until We Reckon: Violence, Mass Incarceration and A Road to Repair* by Danielle Sered

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- **Center for Restorative Justice at Suffolk University** <https://www.suffolk.edu/cas/centers-institutes/center-for-restorative-justice> Supports a growing social movement to build just and equitable communities and to institutionalize restorative approaches to problem-solving, harm and violations of legal and human rights. Trainings offered.
- **Families for Justice as Healing** <https://justiceashealing.org/> Grassroots organization in Boston to end mass incarceration, highlighting voices of formerly-incarcerated people and their families
- **Louis D Brown Peace Institute, Boston** <http://www.ldbpeaceinstitute.org/> Serves as a center of healing, teaching, and learning for families and communities impacted by murder, trauma, grief, and loss.
- **Mothers for Justice and Equality** <https://mothersforjusticeandequality.org/> The mission of MJE is to end neighborhood violence by empowering mothers and youth to challenge the normalization of violence and become effective catalysts for change in their homes, schools, and communities.
- **Project Nia** <https://project-nia.org/educational-resources> Works to end the arrest, detention, and incarceration of children and young adults by promoting restorative and transformative justice practices. Educational resources to help grassroots activists teach transformative and reformative justice practices in their communities.
- **TransformHarm.org** <https://transformharm.org/> A resource hub about ending violence created by best-selling author and activist Mariame Kaba
- **University of Massachusetts Boston, Center for Peace, Democracy, and Development** [https://www.umb.edu/cpdd/key\\_areas/law\\_justice\\_reform/restorative\\_justice\\_project](https://www.umb.edu/cpdd/key_areas/law_justice_reform/restorative_justice_project) The Restorative Justice Project at UMass Boston provides conflict resolution, mediation and restorative justice services to Boston's youth and families and to incarcerated populations.

*Info and slideshow compiled by Jean Trounstine. For more information about Jean, please go to [www.jeantrounstine.com](http://www.jeantrounstine.com)*