

## CCGRS Speaker Series: Cynthia Chandler

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**SPEAKER 1:** We're going to get started in a few minutes. There's a few seats in the middle. There's one more down here. Otherwise, come on. One over there. All right.

I'd like to welcome everyone to the CCGRS speaker series. Welcome, everyone here. Welcome, if you're watching at home, streaming on one of our many campuses, or any number of places. So before I introduce Cynthia Chandler, I'd like to thank our many sponsors that made this event and our other speakers events possible. We had one already earlier in the fall and two more in the spring.

So thank you to the Humanities Planning Group, the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Ed, the Department of History, the Department of Teaching and Learning, *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, the School of Politics, Philosophy, and Public Affairs, the Department of Sociology, the Women Studies Development Fund, the Office of Equity and Diversity, The George and Bernadine Converse Historical Endowment, Diversity Education, Roots of Contemporary Issues, Department of Foreign Languages, the Common Reading, the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures, the Department of English, and the Multicultural Student Services. That's the hard part. So again, thank you.

There are seats somewhere. Otherwise, you can kind of just come on up. It's great to see so many people here.

Cynthia Chandler is the Director of the Public Interest Programs, Interim Associate Dean of the Law Career Development and a member of the teaching faculty of the Golden Gate Law School in San Francisco, California. She received her JD from Harvard University School of Law and her M philosophy in criminology from the University of Cambridge. She is co-founder of Justice Now, a human rights organization working with women in prisons and local communities to build a safe, compassion world without prisons.

Cynthia speaks and publishes regularly on prison industrial complex, prison abolition, racial justice, and women's health. In 2010, Cynthia was awarded a Gevelber Distinguished Lectureship on public interest law from Northeastern University School of Law. She has worked on issues of women's health, racial justice, and abolition from now 20 plus years.

Before co-founding Justice Now, Cynthia founded and directed the Women's Positive Legal Action Network, the first organization in the US advocating on behalf of HIV-positive people in

women's prisons. Cynthia has helped launch numerous social justice organizations including Critical Resistance, the TGI Justice Project, and the Eviction Defense Center. In recognition of her support of the leadership of people in prison towards social change, Cynthia Chandler was selected as an original recipient of the Ford Foundation Leadership for a Changing World Award.

In 2005, she was selected by the Women's Health Activist Network as a "Top 30 Activist for Women's Health." Cynthia helped create the practice of compassionate release for people dying in prison through sponsorship of model decarceration legislation for which she was designated the 1997 "Attorney to Whom California Could Be Most Grateful For" by California Law Business. So I'm very excited for today's talk, which is entitled "Unstuck-- Resisting Slavery, Eugenics, and the Prison Industrial Complex" given this amazing resume and her tireless work to end mass incarceration and transform a criminal justice system that is devoid of both empathy and justice.

I'm also really appreciative and need to thank her directly. Because when I told her what the Common Reading book was, she not only graciously said she would address and incorporate it into the talk, but she said, I've been meaning to read it. And it speaks to the investment in this space. So we're lucky to have Cynthia Chandler. And surely, she will leave us with much to talk about and think about in the coming weeks and months. Thank you.

Oh, before I turn it over, after the event, after Cynthia speaks about 45, 50 minutes, we'll have Q&A for 20, 25 minutes. And then at that time, for those who need a Common Reading stamp, it will be available from Karen outside in the atrium, but not until after the Q&A. Thank you. Now you can applaud for Cynthia.

[APPLAUSE]

**CYNTHIA  
CHANDLER:**

Did I get this on? OK. I'm seeing if this mic works if I don't lean over towards my boob. Here we go. All right. So I'm really excited to be here. And look, I proved it. I got the book.

What I also said when I heard about this, is I said, oh, wow. I'm a fan of Bryan Stevenson. I haven't read the book because, honestly-- I'm going to confess something. I like to read a little bit of a lot of things.

I tend to skim a lot of things. I tend to look at stuff a lot on the internet. And for me to sit down and read an entire book, I have to really believe that there's an incredibly good purpose for it.

So I'm just going to confess that, which is not necessarily a good habit. But it's real. And I read a lot. But again, little bits.

And I'm glad I read this book. But I'm also going to confess something else, which is that I have a strange relationship now to this book. There are components of this book that I love. I love the fact that Bryan, who I actually know, conjures up and talks about the people who have shaped who he is today, who he met while they were locked up. And that kind of haunts me because it reminds me of all the people inside that I've met who have shaped who I am today.

And then on the other hand, I actually disagree with a lot of it. I wanted to throw it out the window a lot. So I have this strange relationship with this book where I'm like, oh, ugh. Oh, ugh. So OK. We'll talk about why.

I don't know if anyone has some problems with this book or not, but I do. And here, I think I'll start off with talking a little bit about some of the people. So whenever I speak places, I try to dedicate my talks to people in prison who have shaped who I am today.

And I wanted to dedicate today's talk to two people, Charisse Shumate and Beverly Henry. Beverly Henry, everyone calls Chopper or called Chopper. Both women have passed away. Chopper passed away just about a year ago. Charisse passed away about 14 years ago.

They were really good friends and comrades at the Central California Women's Facility, which was then and is today still the world's largest women's prison. I met them when I was a baby lawyer. So I graduated from law school in 1995 with this idea of creating an underground network inside the women's prisons in California, and potentially even nationally, of getting people access to legal information, political information, and health information so that people would have the tools they needed to stay alive.

So going back to 1995, it was a really interesting moment. The HIV epidemic had started to decimate communities of color. In 1995, there was this new hope of triple combination therapies, which now have transformed HIV, if people have access to those therapies, into a much more manageable disease.

But at that time, they were still experimental. And people in prison couldn't access them because there's a long history of experimenting on people in prison under the name of science and doing pretty horrific things to people. And because of that, there are safeguards.

And so this is one of those times where safeguards can kind of kick you in the rear. And

because of those safeguards, they wouldn't let anyone in prison access those drugs. And people were dying. Women were dying every week in prisons across our country because many of the same things that make people at risk of being in prison also are the things that make people at risk of premature death due to things like HIV.

For example, intravenous drug usage, poverty so you can't access health care services, and preventative education, things like that. So the death rate was incredibly high inside women's prisons. And I thought, well, if I can work as basically a tool for people inside and figure out what information they could get to help keep themselves alive, maybe that would help keep people alive until they could get these therapies. Or we could figure out a way to change the laws and get them access to it.

So I went looking for leaders inside the women's prisons that could help me create these underground networks because I was this baby lawyer, white, upper middle class, ridiculously educated person who, quite frankly, most people in the women's prisons were not going to turn to for help. And so I thought, well, I'll see if I can find people who are already leaders. And I found Charisse and I found Chopper-- or Beverly.

So Charisse was a woman who went to prison and was serving a life term. She was a woman who was in a very violent relationship. Her husband was extremely abusive. At one point, she eventually shot and killed her husband. She pled guilty immediately, refused to fight her case, because she didn't want her husband's family to endure the trauma of a trial knowing how much they suffered in his passing away.

When she got to prison, she decided to dedicate her entire life to atoning for the violence she had caused by helping other people live better. She was someone who was living with sickle cell anemia, which, for folks who don't know, is a really serious illness. And she also had hepatitis C, which she was public about. So I'm not putting her stuff out in the world without her permission.

And she was constantly struggling to maintain her own health in conditions where she regularly didn't get the care she needed. And for folks don't know, sickle cell is an incredibly painful illness. And in prison, if people are seeking pain medication, they're usually looked at as being drug addicts. And so she was constantly dealing with a level of pain that was really quite spectacular and debilitating.

And she got a reputation as being someone who would never say no to someone in need. Her thought was that she needed to be a servant to helping others. If anyone ever came to her who was in crisis, she would find a way to make it so that she could help. She might not be able to solve everything, but she would be really determined to make change. And so that was her reputation. And I was like, I have to meet this woman.

And then I heard about Chopper. So by the way, that's a picture of Chopper in a sweatshop in the Central California Women's Facility, which has the contract to sew American flags in the US. So disenfranchised women, who are not allowed to vote, make our symbol of democracy. I just want y'all to think about that.

She called herself sarcastically, the new age Betsy Ross. I would like to point out to folks that that's what Betsy Ross is now-- someone who can't vote, sewing flags, making about a dollar an hour, which is good money in prison by the way.

So Chopper was known, quite frankly, as kind of the godfather of that prison. Chopper was the go-to shock collar. If you needed something, she was incredibly generous. If something had to be done, she would never ever-- like Charisse-- say no. She would also come back to you for a favor later. OK?

Chopper was very complex. She was known as helping in keeping thousands of people alive. If your medications ran out and you had a heart condition, if you didn't have your medication you might die, she would find you medication. If you were desperate for-- actually, there was a woman who came to her who was desperate for a prosthetic leg. And the Department of Corrections decided that that was not a necessary medical device. That was superfluous, so she couldn't have it.

She went to Chopper. Somehow, something changed. And suddenly, that prosthetic leg was medically necessary. Chopper was someone who made things happen. Chopper was also someone living with HIV and was really public about it because she knew people were so scared of HIV-positive people that if she hid her status, given how much power she played with, that would render her incredibly vulnerable to violence, and retaliation, and blackmail.

So she was definitely someone else I wanted to recruit. So sure enough, at different times, I met with them and worked really hard to build their trust. But frankly, they were looking to use me much more than I was looking to use them. And it was an honor to learn from them and figure out how to support them in what they were already doing, keeping their peers alive.

And about, I'd say, 18 months after I met the two of them, I was getting really, really depressed in the work, which I think Bryan's book does a good job, eloquent job, of highlighting the level of secondary trauma that can happen when you do social justice work, when you're exposed to people, when people's trauma and pain can bear an enormous weight. And about 18 months into doing this work, so many of the people that we were working with, and training, and developing relationships with were dying. And there wasn't even a list of them. There wasn't even a way to actually make sure that they wouldn't be invisible.

And I was carrying all this weight of trying to keep the names of the people in my mind who had died and the dates that they died on so they would live somewhere. So I went on a visit to see the two of them. And it's against the law in California for prisoners to organize, meaning they're not to associate with one or more-- more than one prisoner cannot associate in a group unless it's authorized by a staff person. So you can't just sit with someone else without having approval.

Like you can sit at lunch only together with someone only because of the discretion and the whim and the willingness of whoever's watching that lunchroom. So when attorneys go in to visit people, I could never sit at a table of multiple people. So we were always having these strange, three-way conversations, which makes it really hard to build communication and community with people.

But for some very strange reason, that day, the guard on duty decided that he wanted to leave early. And he asked me if it would make my visit go quicker if the two of the people could sit at the table together with me. I was like, yeah. That would work.

So Charisse and Chopper got to actually sit down with me. And we got to actually talk about the heaviness of this work and what it means to bear witness to real atrocities. And there had been a woman who had died just a week earlier who the prison system had been completely denying care and saying she wasn't ill, refusing to acknowledge that she was even ill. And then after she died, they then were saying, well, of course she died. There should be no investigation into her death because she was terminally ill, for example. Things like that.

It was really frustrating work. And I was sitting down with Charisse and Chopper. And I was like, god, I just can't wrap my mind around this. Because even if you just think about things in terms of finances and what costs more money or not, what are they doing? They're letting people get into such states of crises that then they have to do this incredible intervention. It

would be so much cheaper if they could just do preventative care.

If they could just intervene earlier, it would just cost less. Like even if you don't care about people suffering or being in pain, if you do it earlier, it would cost less. And remember Charisse reached over and patted my hands because, really, I was a baby to her. And she's like, baby, you got to remember it's cheapest if they just let us die. If we hurry up and die, that's the cheapest thing they can do.

And I was like, oh, I guess you're right. And I don't think that everybody working in that institution was thinking that. I do think that that was the systemic aura of that institution, that that was how people in that institution felt. They were being treated as so worthless that they were being somewhat warehoused and that it was cheapest to let them hurry up and die.

And so I sat there thinking about that. And it was incredibly hard, and horrible, and true. And then Chopper said, hold on now. What are you going to do about it? What are you going to do about it?

We're not victims. I don't ever want to hear you say in public that we are just victims sitting around here waiting to die. What are you going to do?

The choice here is-- it was very clear to me-- was that you can make a stand. Right? And then she was really clear, and Charisse was really clear. They had not given up. I should say Chopper was in prison for 15 years for selling \$20 worth of heroin to an undercover police officer. Under California's three strikes law, she had been picked up for sales before. 15 years, 80% time. She would do over 10 years in prison for selling a \$20 amount of drugs because she was hungry.

She wasn't even a primary dealer, which is why she didn't know that the cop was the cop. Right? But they didn't give up.

Instead, they decided to actually figure out how to create lives for themselves, how to be important figures in their community, how to have a sense of purpose, how to keep people alive, how to be resistant. And then they wanted to know what I was going to do about it [INAUDIBLE]. I think what I learned from that day was that all of us have in us the power to make change, that everybody has a choice you make for yourself.

You can either decide to maintain systems the way they are, and lay down, and not change

things. Or you can draw upon power that all of us have inside us and decide to make change in the world. And I felt like shit-- excuse my language. But really, if they were doing what they're doing, and they're locked up facing whatever time they're doing-- and Charisse, really, frankly, had no hope at that point of ever getting out on parole.

Virtually no people at that time were getting parole who were in prison for life. And she eventually did die in prison. If she was willing to make change and risk everything-- risk against retaliation, risk against not getting her pain meds, risk all kinds of things to save people, then it behooved me, as someone on the outside, to do so myself and to try to make change.

So in their honor, I hope we can have a conversation about what it means to get us unstuck from what I think is an incredibly divisive moment that we're in in our society today. A thing I want to touch on around *Just Mercy*, by the way, one of the things that aggravated me the most about the entire book, throughout the whole thing, is the objectifying passive language which Bryan refers to his clients with.

So he calls them "incarcerated people," I think, or imprisoned. No, it's not even that. "The imprisoned." I wrote this down somewhere. I was like, really? Seriously? He also uses the word "inmate."

I would just say, I will pull up an example of this in a little bit. I would say, please, check out the language in this book. Because he doesn't actually usually refer to people-- oh, that's what it was. "The imprisoned." "The imprisoned."

If you call someone "the imprisoned," you're reducing them down to their status of being caged and nothing else. It's the ultimate objectification. It's the ultimate victimhood. That's exactly what people inside have told me that they are not. And their resiliency-- and quite frankly, the resiliency of the examples given in *Just Mercy* are spectacular. These are not people who are just rolling over. They are people who are exerting and demonstrating dignity, a sense of self, in the face of incredible adversity. They don't deserve to be called an objectifying term.

So I'm going to refer to folks as people throughout my talk. That's going to be one different thing. So just in terms of where we are, I would say we're at this really interesting precipice in our society right now.

We imprison more people, more of our people, than any other country in the world. We

imprison people at a larger rate than Nazi Germany did, in terms of our population.

Meanwhile, the flip side of it is that we have an incredibly powerful, strong victims' rights movement because people who have been harmed are not given an opportunity for healing.

So we're imprisoning lots of people, and something's going wrong where people who experience harm do not feel like they've been listened to, do not feel like they've gained accountability, do not feel like they've experienced reparation. And there's been no opportunity for atonement. They've been failed.

There's something really not healthy, I would say, about a situation where we're removing so many of our people from society and we also don't seem to have a sense of justice. With a group of adults this large, I know that there are people in this group like me who have survived violence. This work is really personal to me because I am really committed to creating a world without violence.

For me, that means both thinking about interpersonal violence, like violence between people. But it also means challenging violence that the state creates as well. For me, an ideal world would be a world without violence. And for me, I see a lot of the roots of violence that happens between people being similar to the roots that happen when the state oppresses or represses people as well.

So we have a system where we're imprisoning more people than any other place on Earth. We lack a system of healing and accountability. We use prisons increasingly as a punitive response to just about any of our intractable social problems. Increasingly, we're using prisons to deal with mental health issues. We're dealing with prisons to deal with homelessness and hunger.

When I talk about the needs of people in prison, I will frequently get a common retort of being like, what are they complaining about? At least they get three hots and a cot. I'm like, that's what I'm complaining about. We should not think it's normal to take away someone's liberty and lock them up because they don't have food and shelter. That's a problem, at least for me.

We also increasingly are putting police and the sort of a punitive response into our schools. I don't know if folks here had police in your high schools, but across the country, there's more and more police. There's even a new term for them. They're called SROs. They're Security Resource Officers. Lots of federal funding for them.

Just two or three weeks ago, in my town-- I live in San Leandro, California-- a police officer was called into a classroom to remove a girl for not wearing a bra. So she posted a selfie of herself on Facebook after it happened. And lo and behold, she appears to have nipples.

[LAUGHTER]

It's not see-through or anything. They're just kind of poking there. OK? And somehow, it seemed like a good idea of the administrators of that high school to send a cop to confront a child for having nipples. I'm just putting it out there because that's like where we are in our communities, in our society.

I promise you, in the 1970s, when people were burning bras, they were not sending-- and we had to deal with the Vietnam War and lots of protests and everything-- they were not sending police in to deal with girls not wearing bras. This is new. It's a new thing that's happening. The level of repression that kids are dealing with in classrooms is at a heightened level that we have never seen before.

We also, interestingly, have an incredible level of violence within our policing and prison institutions. Courts, including the Supreme Court, regularly have documented that people die prematurely, suffer abuses at the hands of the state. And there's never, for some reason, no matter what reform happens, ever been a model of a prison that's been free of violence. We have failed. It's interesting.

So prisons are actually-- the history prisons, Angela Davis would say, is sort of the history of state violence reform. The Quakers came up with the idea of using prisons. It's a fairly new institution. It's about 200 years old. The idea of punishing people by removing them and placing them in prison is not something that's been around for a long time. And it was started as a reform to get rid of corporal punishment and to get rid of state violence.

And yet, the minute the first institution opened, there's been a non-ending effort to reform prisons because of the level of violence that seems to perpetually be present in those institutions. So we have lots of people in prison experiencing violence. And yet, somehow, we don't have a sense of justice among people who are victimized in the broader society, inside or outside of prison. And we also have an acknowledged pattern of racism embedded in our criminal legal system.

So the US Supreme Court heard a case called *McCleskey versus Kemp* a few years ago. And

they were deciding whether or not the death penalty was constitutional if you could show that the most clear predictor of whether or not someone would get the death penalty is the race of the person who commits the crime and the race of the victim. And the Supreme Court had already hinted a few years earlier that it would consider undoing the death penalty if there was longitudinal evidence of racism in the way that the death penalty is carried out.

And so all these social scientists were running around, and they did this huge study over a decade. And they came into the Supreme Court, and they said, look, actually, yes. The factor that predicts that someone gets executed or not is not the crime itself. It's the race of the person who is accused and the race of the victim.

The Supreme Court in *McCleskey versus Kemp* did something very unusual. It said, basically, huh. You're right. There's this level of racism that permeates our criminal legal system. And there's really nothing we can do about it. If we were to overthrow the death penalty, we would have to overthrow every kind of criminal legal sentence we have because this level of disparate impact, the level of racism is "inevitable--" using the court's language-- inevitable in our legal system. And we would have to undo our legal system if we were to actually deal with racism.

That court case has had huge impact. So basically they said, so instead, we'll only deal with racism if you can show it was intentional. If you can bring us evidence that this particular legislator when developing this policy for criminalizing something intended it to be racist, then we'll deal with it. If it just permeates everything, we can't do anything about it because it's inevitable.

That doctrine now has carried over to [AUDIO OUT] other kinds of cases where now you have [AUDIO OUT] It's because it would almost be too much justice for the court to actually respond to it is the court's logic.

So we have a criminal legal system that imprisons more people than anywhere else in the world. And it's not just people. Right? It's people of color. It's poor people of all races. It's transgender people disproportionately. It's people who don't fit into our societal norms. It's vulnerable people in our society, specifically vulnerable people who experience discrimination.

And then, we put them in institutions that are violent, that are known to be violent, that we have not figured out how to not make violent. And meanwhile, we don't seem to have a response for

dealing with violence effectively when it happens and making people feel whole. I'm going to switch over to the next slide. OK.

So in light of this, there's a conflict brewing. People are taking this information and dealing with it in very different ways in our society. Some people are standing up and saying, we're spending too much money on prisons and policing now. We have to reign this in. It's gotten to the point where we can't spend money on education. It's gotten to the point where we can't spend money on any social services. It's gotten to the point where we don't have other services, like mental health services, because we've invested so much in prison, and we have to shift something. It's not sustainable.

Other people, particularly communities targeted for surveillance and imprisonment and, I would add, also particularly vulnerable to violence that goes unreported, unrecognized, and unaddressed by the state, the same communities that are vulnerable to imprisonment are disproportionately vulnerable to violence that is never acknowledged. And they don't receive safety.

A lot of those communities are rising up. Right? We have the Black Lives Matter movement. We have different liberation movements, the Trans Liberation movement. A lot of different communities that are rising up more and more and demanding justice. What's interesting is that we also have an incredibly strong push back. Surveillance is at an all-time high. We live in a society where just about everything is tracked.

I don't know if folks saw on the news that Ancestry.com, where you can track your family tree, they've just been unearthed to have-- so I guess people could send in their DNA samples to Ancestry.com or something. Because then you could try to find your relatives. So they turned over their database to the FBI. I don't know that people were thinking they were going to be surveilled when they went and hung out with Ancestry.com.

Torture is now unabashedly used by the United States in global conflicts. When I was a kid, if someone had said the US was actually the torture someone, that was unimaginable. There's no way. It would have been scandalous. There's absolutely no way.

We now live in this society, in a US society, where it's accepted. It's debated publicly that the US has engaged in torture under international definitions. We might have people resisting it, but we also have people now using these stronghold tactics that are really quite spectacular. As I said, it's now normative to have cops in schools. And I think you can see the conflict come

out when you look at the social media around many recent events.

So for example, the top picture on the top right-hand side up there, is of a young girl who was just tossed over in her chair by a police officer in South Carolina that was all over social media and the regular media over the last week. While you have some camps saying, what are we doing? How could a child who's been in foster care because she lost her mother and her grandmother in the last few months, who's new to a school, who apparently doesn't talk to anybody, is looking at her phone, how come looking at her phone could possibly lead to her being tossed over and having her arm broken by a large police officer in her classroom? How could that happen?

And then you have other people saying, well, she should have put her phone away. Youth today are too anti-authoritarian. What did she expect would happen? What do you think is going to happen if you don't put your phone away?

And then people like me might say, well, you know, my staff at work doesn't put their phones away at staff meetings. And I don't throw them upside down. Just saying. But really.

And one of the things-- has anyone watched the video of her being tossed down? Yeah? Some people have?

One of the things I thought was interesting was the man, the police officer, saying to her, you know me. Last year, didn't I treat you right? Didn't I treat you right last year? Well, she wasn't even in that school.

So what's going through her head? This guy can't tell me apart from any other black girls. Does he confuse us all? He wants me to go outside with him? Maybe I'll just lay low and hope this big man, who I don't even know goes away. And pretty soon, she's tossed over backwards and injured.

But there's two discourses. Right? There's the discourse, direct conflict of one saying, what are we doing? How could we have these police in schools? Since when will you call the police for a child holding a cell phone in a classroom?

On the other hand, you have, what did she think? How anti-authoritarian could she be? We have to have swift response. Chaos is going to ensue. Cellphones will be everywhere. And the reason we know about this is because cell phones are everywhere. Just pointing that out.

But we're at this precipice. And this bottom one is a picture of a girl in Texas who was thrown to the ground for refusing to leave a pool party in her bikini this summer. Similarly, lots of social media going both ways with people are being like, well, they should have left. I don't know.

I don't know how many of you ever went to a large party when you were a teenager in high school. And maybe you all were told to leave. I don't know how many of you thought you should be slammed to the ground by a police officer in that moment. But apparently, some people do.

We're at this precipice with these two totally different discourses hitting each other. So Bryan, in *Just Mercy*, would have us say that maybe we could resolve this all if we could all recognize that we're all broken, that we have a broken institution of justice, that we have broken people, that we are all broken, and that we should open up our hearts and have more compassion and empathy. I think that's a bunch of bull. I don't think you build a movement being like, let's come on. Let's build a movement of broken people. Come join my crew. We're all broken.

We're going to stop stuff like that because we're all broken. We're going to have mercy because we're all broken. I don't think that that's going to make a difference.

I also think that mercy is the wrong word to use when there is no accountability. Part of what's going on is that people are being harmed and we don't have accountability. I want us to think about who actually goes to prison or who's actually arrested.

So when I was a teenager, I was an on again-off again runaway. And I spent a lot of time with kids in the street economy. And I saw a lot of illegal drug usage and sales in that world. I'm just going to put that out there. I saw a lot of it.

When I went to Harvard Law School, there was an enormous amount illegal drug usage and sales. There were a whole lot of students who had older brothers and sisters who were doctors who were writing prescriptions. You could get just about anything you ever wanted in the Harvard Law School dorm.

Are they going to do a raid of the Harvard Law School dorm? No. Because those folks are destined to become the leaders of this society. Ted Cruz was one of my classmates in law school. So he and I graduated together.

So there are certain people who are destined to be rulers. Part of what's happening with victim's rights movement is that there is this aggregation between conduct and criminalization. 80% of violent crimes go unreported in our country. When we look at self-report studies of victimization and then how many people actually call the police, 80% of acts of serious violence go unreported.

That means that most people are not feeling like they can rely on our legal system for any level of security, safety, or justice. I don't think that we're going to get somewhere saying, come, let's all have mercy. I also don't think that the system's broken.

Frankly, while the people may be broken, to me, as I said, the thing that I learned from folks inside prison that binds us all is our resiliency. It's our strength. You can build a movement around resiliency and strength. OK?

If that girl gets up, and her arm is healed, and she goes around speaking about things, do you think people are going to come talk to her, listen to her if she's doing a message of mercy? Or are they going to listen because she is resilient?

If she has overcome the death of her grandmother, the death of her mother, overcome this, overcoming being a poster child all over social media without even wanting to be, overcoming all kinds of hatred, people are going to admire her because of her strength. And they're going to think, I can hold onto that strength, too. And that's where revolution, I think, comes from.

So I want to talk a little bit. And really, I want to talk about this thing of like is our system broken. I really don't believe our system is broken at all. I think it's doing the work it's exactly designed to do.

So I'm a self-defined prison industrial complex abolitionist. Has anyone ever heard that before? A couple? A few people? OK. I got my peeps over there. Thank you. OK.

So let me break that down. By prison industrial complex-- what I mean by that is all the interconnections of the economy and institutions with imprisonment and policing. And prisons and policing is helping shore up our economy as a capitalist economy and shore up institutions that are also further supporting it.

And actually, I'm going to skip a couple of slides. OK. Check this out. This is LEGO jail. OK. I believe that a broken system would probably not be seen as the core fabric of our society. So I have two kids. The older one is now 14. When she was three, before my second one was

born, I took her on a little trip to Legoland, like a mommy-daughter, let's go have fun at Legoland before the next baby comes and ruins your life thing. OK.

[LAUGHTER]

They actually get along real well now, but there was a lot of jealousy in the beginning. Right? OK. So we go to Legoland, and my three-year-old goes running into the Duplo Legoland toddler town. There's like this town. It's in San Diego. Anyway, there's this town. And it's an American town. It's built out of Legos or Duplo blocks. And kids are running through all the buildings. Right?

So what do you have in that town? You have a bank because we live in a capitalist society. Right? You have an individual looking house, not an apartment building, representing the idea, the desire, for individual home ownership, which is also about capitalistic society.

You have a fire department, which is a residual, I would argue, of the welfare state, but still important to American folklore. And then you have the jail. You have a jail.

And all these kids are running into the jail holding onto the bars and getting their pictures taken. And I'm like, don't you go in there. Our family doesn't play jail. It's not funny. It's not funny.

I don't ever want to see you behind bars. Too many people I love have died there. We're not doing this. I'm like, if mommy is successful by being a prison industrial complex abolitionist, if I'm successful, someday, we will come back with a bulldozer, and we will rip that out of Legoland. And that's how we'll play jail. OK.

But my point is that if something is in the Legoland, it's installed in Legoland, it is part of our core fabric at this moment. That's really intense for an institution that's only about 200 years old to have already made it into our mythology, our fabric of our culture so that it's part of the installation at Legoland. That's pretty deep, right? It's there. It's entrenched.

I don't believe for a minute that something is there and entrenched because it's all broken. I think it's doing work and that we can't build a movement or figure out how to get-- even if you want to fortify it, you got to know what you're fortifying. If you want to challenge it, you have to know what you're challenging.

We're at this precipice and this divide. People have to know what the work is that this

institution is doing. So by the prison industrial complex-- there are certain components of it. One component is the influx of profitability and capitalism into this business of punishment. And one way to look at that might be like private prisons. There's a lot of talk right now that privatization of prisons.

I think that that actually misses how deep this actually is. The smallest number of prisons are actually private prisons. And yet, corporations have infused our states, our politics, right? And corporations have enormous amounts of control. And they have a lot of control over public prisons as well.

So if you make a phone call from a public prison, there's some company that pays a kickback to get the contract, not based on who does that service cheap, but how much they pay the state. So they're actually charging people astronomical rates just to make a phone call.

If you want a bar of soap in prison, you're going to pay about five times more than you would pay in the free world for that same dollop of soap. But you're only going to make, on average-- not one of the fancy jobs sewing the flags-- you're probably going to make about \$0.10 an hour. And you're going to be paying a whole lot more than \$1 for a dollop of soap.

Corporations have infused our prisons. But more than even just the business of it, there's a way in which capitalism is used as part of the punishment rhetoric. Cost savings is used as a way to justify brutality.

So a prime example is that California decided it was going to try-- it made this huge announcement. It actually had a legislative hearing on the fact that they were going to save money in prison by rationing toilet paper. They had a hearing, a legislative hearing. They're going to ration toilet paper.

From now on-- and they piloted it out of one of the women's prison. From now on, the women were only going to be allowed to have three rolls of single-ply toilet paper per month. OK. Let me just say, for folks who have not spent time in prison or don't know loved ones in prison-- and I'm going to assume some of you do have loved ones in prison because, again, any group this size, I know that there are people out there.

If you have loved ones in prison, you know that toilet paper is precious. It is your paper plates. It's what you use to clean your cell. It's also your toilet paper. It's your tissue. It's your paper towels. It's any kind of paper product you could have. Your toilet paper is that.

So to have three rolls of single-ply for the whole month is really overwhelming. They also decided to ration Tampax and Kotex, sanitary supplies. So women were allowed two tampons and one pad per month, or per week, sorry day. Per day. Per day! Two tampons, one pad, one day.

For folks who don't know, that's not a lot. And so you need to use toilet paper so you don't bleed all over yourself and get humiliated. OK? So if you're rationing toilet paper, this created a huge contraband toilet paper problem. Right? Toilet paper becomes even more processes than it ever was.

So then they start paying guards overtime to stay late and raid cells for toilet paper. OK. So are they really saving money by rationing the toilet paper? No! The guards are making over \$100,000 a year. Single-ply, crappy toilet paper, it doesn't cost very much. OK?

But the lens of profitability, the lens of costs savings is used to then justify. What really was happening was a culture of terror where people at any moment were having their whole cell turned upside down. Anything precious for them was broken or taken away because they were using the toilet paper to toss up everyone's cells. So that's an example.

The next component, in addition to the influx of profitability into punishment, I would say is really important to think about is the shift, a real shift from a welfare state to a crime control state. So Ronald Reagan and a few of his cronies, back when he was governor, decided to have a real agenda to reduce social services and get rid of the social network-- social safety network in the US. And that was part of his presidency, for folks who aren't old enough to remember him. I grew up with him as president.

And so one of the big pushes he did was to close mental hospitals first in California and then also nationally. He also worked to defund education significantly. And it started-- he's not solely responsible for it-- it started a push towards prison construction as well. And more and more and more, we started using prisons as this response to people who are in need for just about anything.

And there was sort of an increased normalization of a punitive response rather than an empathetic response to people in need. And perhaps that's what Bryan is trying to get to with *Just Mercy* is to shift us back towards having empathy rather than a punitive knee-jerk response of being like, oh well. I guess you should have put your phone away. Of course

you're going to get slammed. Right? Maybe empathy would be helpful there.

But one of things we see in prisons is that any kind of program that slips through that first lens of profitability get tainted by a lens of punishment. So ways that this come out-- one of the ways that this comes out that I wanted to talk about was around eugenics in prisons. So does anyone here-- can I see a hand-- did anyone ever heard of eugenics before? Yay. OK, so some people.

For folks who don't know, eugenics was a philosophy, frankly, a political movement. This idea being that-- and it became very popular in the early 1900s to mid 1900s. The idea was that we could, with our new knowledge of medicine, we could figure out how to cleanse the gene pool of bad seeds and create a better human race. And we could do that by eliminating people who are undesirable, either by making it so they couldn't be born or by leading to their premature death, and that we could then encourage more desirable people to fill the gene pool.

In the US-led eugenics efforts, Planned Parenthood was founded as a eugenic organization with the idea of pushing birth control into communities that were undesirable, particularly poor communities and communities of color. And in many sites around the country, there was a real effort to systematically sterilize communities of color. So Los Angeles sterilized a huge fragment of the Latina population of childbearing age. By the mid '70s, about 45% of Puerto Rican women of childbearing age had been sterilized.

And one of the main ways-- and also, there were pushes to sterilize people on public benefits, people in prison, people who were seen to have cognitive disabilities. And frequently, the way that people were sterilized was by tying benefits procurement to whether or not they were sterilized. So if you had a teen daughter who was pregnant and had a baby, when you're in the hospital and your daughter is giving birth, they would come to you and say, you know, you can't get benefits for this baby unless you agree to have your daughter sterilized while she's having a baby. Right?

Or they would say, especially for Catholic women, impoverished Catholic women throughout the Midwest, they would say, you've already had three children. You're not going to get any more benefits anymore unless you agree to be sterilized. And Catholics were very systematically targeted as well.

People in prison and the mental hospitals were not really given the choice at all. They were some very courageous people who tried to challenge it. The Supreme Court denied their

appeals. They were forcibly sterilized.

And medical providers from California, in particular, went to Nazi Germany and trained the Nazi government and their medical providers on systems of eugenics, which led to the genocide. So we have a really ugly history of that. One of the early civil rights victories-- and if you can read some of the propaganda, the signs, these are pro-eugenic.

Most states in the country ended up with eugenic policies. And these are folks who are challenging it in the 1960s and '70s. So one of the earliest civil rights and women's rights victories during the Civil Rights Movement was to put caps on eugenic policies and safeguards in place and to make it very difficult to coercively sterilize people in the US. So now, if you want to be sterilized, there's a whole lot of safeguards you have to jump through, different kinds of consent forms, your benefits can't be conditioned on it. You can't ask a woman who's in labor if she wants to be sterilized any longer.

I don't know if any of you have children, but let me tell you, when you're giving birth, if someone says, I can make this never happened ever again, it's very tempting. It's not really an appropriate time to ask someone to permanently give away a fundamental right to have children. So there's all these safeguards now in place.

And the federal government also put into place, was pressured to put in place, a special law that says it's prohibited for any entity that gets federal money, which is, frankly, almost every state agency or municipality in the US, to sterilize someone in prison or a mental hospital for the purposes of birth control period. You can't even attempt to procure consent. Because the idea was that was such a coercive environment-- and in fact, prison is an environment where you are told what to do under threat of force at every moment.

If you do something wrong, you can be shot at any moment. Right? So in that environment, it's too coercive to attempt to procure consent to, again, permanently getting rid of a fundamental human right. So you can't do it.

So California, in its great wisdom, decided that it was going to set up a special committee to look into conditions in women's prisons about 10 years ago. And they heard lots of testimony of problems in the women's prisons. And one of the things they came up with was that there needed to be better reproductive health care, that there was virtually no baseline care. They also had a problem with doctors doing unnecessary pelvic exams when they weren't supposed to be.

People would go in and say they had a cold and have to get a pelvic exam if they wanted care. And so they had really abusive gynecologists. And people were afraid of getting care. And then they had no system providing baseline care. And what this committee did was they took this information and said, OK, we're willing to put some resources into it. It's getting through that first lens of profitability and cost saving. And we're going to create a new reproductive health care plan.

And what they did and what I spent the last six years uncovering was they then adopted a new policy to start offering sterilization to women during labor and delivery. So this punishment lens took the intention of providing comprehensive reproductive care, twisted around, and popped out eugenics. I was able to document with the organization Justice Now, that I co-founded, that the state illegally sterilized over 200 women over the last 10 years while they were giving birth.

Most of those women were women of color. Many of them are monolingual Spanish speakers. There were no interpreters used. There were no consent forms used in many of the cases. If there were, frequently the doctors signed the consent forms.

It's unclear if any of the women who were sterilized even know they were sterilized to this day. So that's an example of what happens when you get a shift away from a social welfare state into a crime control state, where your intervention when someone's in need is a punitive response.

And then this wraps into the last and final element of the prison industrial complex that I'm going to talk about, which being an abolitionist, and wanting to eradicate it, using the word abolition specifically, is that there is a deep connection between our current criminal legal system and systems of slavery in the US. The eugenics piece is important.

So there's this academic from Harvard named Orlando Patterson who's done a really interesting 100-year-- sorry-- 1,000-year survey of slavery and humankind and tried to tease out the common elements of systems of slavery. And what he found was that systems of slavery have three elements. One is base degradation, which happens all the time in prison.

I mean, people are stripped of their names. They're given a number. They're not treated as humans.

The next is that you're held in systems of slavery by threat of force. And if you leave prison, you're shot. That's threat of force. OK.

The third is not that you get used as sort of a system of chattel. It's not that you have monetary value as a slave. The third element that he found that was actually common was a thing that he calls "natal alienation." And what that is is a sociological term of the slaveholder having the power to cut off the slave from their lineage going back, going forward, or across the same generation. So basically the power to control whether an enslaved community has the right to have a future, whether it has the right to have family, to have a lineage at all.

So when you think about that eugenics example, you can see how the state functioned to cut off people's connection to the future possibility of children. In talking to legislators who were part of that protocol that developed the eugenic plan, over and over again, legislator's aides told me, but we thought we were being helpful because surely those women wouldn't want to have those children anyway. They don't have any money. It was clearly designed with eugenic intent.

But there's other ways, too. Just imprisoning people for longer and longer and longer sentences means that people are spending more and more of their reproductive years confined and physically creating a barrier to their ability to reproduce. It removes family members from family members. It cuts off ties permanently.

I was just with a woman who had been out of prison and off parole for five years. And I just drove her around the outside of a prison so that she could wave from about a quarter mile away to her cousin because she can't get permission to go back to that prison because she used to be there. And she and her cousin are the only family they have anymore. And she can't physically see her cousin and get into the prison to see her. It's a complete barrier.

And there's also ways that parental rights are terminated very rapidly when people go to prison. So the prison industrial complex, as I would say, is this system which shores up the economy, treats the most needy with brutality, and also is a form and system of slavery itself. And to be an abolitionist, to me, means to try to imagine a different kind a world where we have safety and accountability without state violence.

So I'm just going to turn it to talk about, for the last 5, 10 minutes, 5 minutes, last 5 minutes, about then what that would look like. How can we do work that would actually create a safe, just society where there is that kind of safety? I think we need a few elements.

One is I think we need to start investing in non-harmful responses to harm. And what I mean by that is ways that we can deal with harm, serious harms that happen to people, without using violence to deal with those harms. I would argue-- I'm going to go on to an additional slide-- that it's infinite like our galaxy. Aw, pretty. OK. Our universe is pretty. OK.

My older daughter went to school with a child who suffered from pretty severe autism. And at one point, he was moved to a different classroom. And he had generated an affinity with her as much as he could with anyone. And it had been a couple of months before he had seen her. And apparently, during recess, he was at recess at the same time after he had gone onto a higher, because he was a little bit older, and he saw my daughter. And he went charging across the entire field and head butted my daughter to say hello.

And my daughter was in second grade. And she went flying. And I get this telephone call from the principal saying don't be alarmed. I'm like, why are you calling me? Don't be alarmed, but why are you calling me? Like why in the world?

And she's like, there was an incident. Your daughter was head butted. I'm like-- don't be alarmed. I'm OK. And she's like, I'm really concerned because your daughter wasn't really angry. And I'm like, what happened?

So she explains what I just explained to you. And she's like, and your daughter isn't angry. Well, I'm like, what did she do? And she goes, well, she asked me what I was going to do to make sure it wouldn't happen again. I'm like, what are you going to do? That's a really good question. What are you going to do?

She's like, well, we have this plan. He has an aide. Now that we know that he really likes and la la la, la la la. I'm like, OK, well, what did she say? She goes, she seemed to feel comfortable. I'm like, me, too. OK.

She's like, but she wasn't angry. I'm like, well, she knows this kid. She knows he has a serious illness. And you have created a safety plan for her. You're in authority. You created a safety for her. Should she be angry?

And the principal's like, well, I mean, I think you just don't give her license to be angry. I'm like, well, would you? What would have happened if she had smacked him upside the head? What would you have done? Would you really give her license to be angry?

And the principal literally said, oh, I didn't know who I was calling. And I was like, OK, now, now you have angry mother. Right? But this is just an example. My daughter understood in second grade that she could create safety for herself. Right? That she could create a plan with people who have ability and tools that she didn't have to implement that plan, that she could create accountability, that she could be heard. OK? And that that would be OK. That she didn't need to also then screw in that nail or whatever. Screw in the screw, I guess. Right? And be punitive about it.

And that principal was trying to police her out of that, police her towards a more punitive response. We have solutions all around us all the time. Again, 80% of violence is never reported. People deal with it in ways that are healthy and unhealthy all around us all the time. What I think we need to do is start investing resources and documenting how people create safety and accountability for themselves and learning from that.

There are also communities and cultures all around us, around the world, that are doing network all the time. There's an organization called Generation Five based out of San Francisco that was founded by and for survivors of child sexual abuse, dedicated to eradicating child sexual abuse in five generations.

What they do is that they train communities in how to see signs of child sexual abuse and then how to intervene and create accountability plans that force the person who's doing the harm to get treatment, that force accountability and monitoring of that individual, that allow the individual though to continue being employed and support the family, which is frequently a big hindrance in being reported. And they demand that that person be accountable to that plan. Right?

They've been able to get service providers to actually then go and do their mandatory reporting and promote these safety plans that have been accepted. And those plans have actually created really positive results. But that's about people who have experienced some of the worst atrocities figuring out what would have actually helped their families to start breaking that cycle of violence and doing it in a way which allows their family to heal and that child to know that they've been listened to and not re-traumatized in court.

If we can do that with instances of the child sexual abuse, I think we can do that with just about anything. In Rwanda there's been transformative justice circles done with people who have experienced genocide and horrific atrocities. What's common to those solutions is, again, they

create a safety plan. They create a plan where the person who's done harm has to atone for what they did. They have to take responsibility.

That's not mercy. That's going to be hard. That's also not breaking a person in two. OK?

And what's also a key element is that they look around at the social structures that are failing. It's not just placed on the individual. It's saying, what is society lacking? What can society do better? How did we lose that person? How can we hold them tighter and create better institutions?

Our current legal system has no apparatus for us to do an audit and figure out what we might have done structurally to contribute to a harm taking place. And I think that has to change. We can't do this work, though, of again finding nonviolent responses to harms unless we have some more resources. And for those resources, I think we have to start reducing the numbers of people going to prison. We have to do that in a way that doesn't pit deserving people from others.

It is not helpful to say, I'm only going to help innocent. I'm not going to help the others. It's not helpful to say, I'm only going to help the ill, but then the healthy deserve to be tortured. We have to say, we're really going to look very carefully at squeezing out imprisonment and doing it in a way where we recognize there are much more challenging cases than others, but that we're not going to just throw those away. We're going to do even more investment and resources to figure out how to deal with the hard cases.

And then finally, we need to support communities and not prisons. So Obama's created this new proposed plan to start shrinking prisons and divert resources into communities. But he wants to put a lot of that resource into cops and into policing. What I'm saying is that we need to actually give resources to communities so that we have housing, we have food, we have the basic needs met that will help eradicate many harms. And investing in the community is not the prisons and the policing system.

And I'm going to end with a quote. So this is Jane. Jane Dorotik is a good friend of mine who's in prison at the California Institution for Women. She's an incredibly prolific jailhouse lawyer. She in prison having been convicted of killing her husband. It went dark. OK.

She's in prison for having been convicted of killing her husband. She's maintained her innocence the entire time that she went through trial and is in prison. And she feels really

strongly that the reason she was convicted was because she had been, frankly, a housewife who had always trusted men with her business and trusted an attorney who did a terrible job. And having looked at the documents, I kind of agree.

When she went to prison, she decided she was going to learn everything she could about the law. And if she couldn't help herself, she would help other people. She's been responsible for winning the freedom of several other people who have been wrongfully convicted. She's still working on her own case.

And she has a beautiful quote that I want to end with that she asked me to share. And she said, "The future is not a place we're going to. It's something we're creating. We have a responsibility to create a better world, to leave a more hopeful legacy for the future generation." So with that, I just want to say, please, reach inside yourself. Figure out the smallest thing that you can do to create a better and just world and share that. Because you have that power in you. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

And I'm sorry I talked so long. If anyone has questions, you actually could ask them.

**SPEAKER 1:** [INAUDIBLE] is not going to be available for 15 minutes.

**CYNTHIA** Sam's not available for 15 minutes. It's like I have you trapped. In the back?

**CHANDLER:**

**SPEAKER 2:** [INAUDIBLE] Are you saying you don't want prisons in America? Is that what you're saying?

**CYNTHIA** Yeah. I'm saying I don't want prisons in America. I believe that prisons are a fairly new

**CHANDLER:** institution for mankind. And I can imagine the day when there will not be prisons again. And that's what I'm working towards. Yeah?

**SPEAKER 3:** I'm curious. What was the legal action that was taken for crimes before prisons?

**CYNTHIA** That's a really interesting thing. That is totally different depending on where you go. You have communities that had justice circles. You had circles of elders who would try to figure out how a person could atone and actually give back to the community as well as the individual. You have places where they might cut off someone's arm. Completely varied and different, just like it now in the world is completely varied and different, although the US puts a lot of pressure on

folks to emulate what we do.

A modern example of a different kind of justice system came out of South Africa's anti-apartheid movement. When Nelson Mandela's government came into power, there were so many people who had committed atrocities. And there was this sense that the nation would not be able to maintain itself as a nation with stability unless there was some level of justice around war crimes.

And so the Mandela government created a series of truth and reconciliation hearings where, if people came forward and truthfully confessed to the harms that they had done and we're willing to work with either the individuals or the whole communities that they had harmed in slaughters and things with a plan of atonement, where they would dedicate their life of service to that plan, if they were willing to do that, they wouldn't be imprisoned. And it became so successful and created such a level sense of unity, that people asked if they could do that for instances of interpersonal violence as well.

And so you had a pattern of people coming in and confessing to things that happened during this incredibly tumultuous, difficult era. One of those cases that's been followed and studied a lot was two men who came forward, two black men who came forward to say that they had carjacked, raped, and killed a young white anti-apartheid activist from the US. And they asked to meet her family and go through a truth and reconciliation process with her family from the US. This has been highly documented.

Her family went. They went through this process. The town or community in which she had been volunteering as an activist agreed to help build a community center to serve the principles for which she stood. And the men agreed to serve that center for the rest of their lives. The family is still in touch with those men and participates in things with that community and feels like it has provided a level of healing.

That's certainly not a standard model that we would see in the US. And it's very different. So anyway, those are some of the things that could be done differently.

And there's tons of models. As I said, like with the universe thing, there's a lot of things out there. What happens is people will quickly say, oh god. That sounds wacky or really complicated or not possible. And it gets dismissed. And yet, we have examples all around us. So thank you for that question. Yeah?

**SPEAKER 4:** I have a question. There's been recent conversations about the recent white middle class addiction to heroin.

**CYNTHIA** Yeah.

**CHANDLER:**

**SPEAKER 4:** And historically in the world was and tough-on-crime policies have targeted communities of color [INAUDIBLE]. How do you see in any way the shift, because of the skyrocketing numbers of white, middle class addiction to heroin, the shift of-- or do you see a shift of rehabilitation as punishment to more of rehabilitation [INAUDIBLE] since now a community that are privileged [INAUDIBLE] economic structures.

**CYNTHIA** Well, one of the things that Chopper-- one of the people in the beginning-- used to always say is some people get to go to Betty Ford. Some people get to come here. That's always been an issue. Right? I mean, the middle class has always had some component that has used highly illegal criminalized drugs.

**CHANDLER:**

And in fact, if you look at the data during the time of the war on drugs, too, black male youth use and sell a lot less drugs than white male youth do. And yet, white male youth do not have their lives thrown up. Right? Historically, they would have their kids go into rehab. They'd have their kids off to boarding schools. They would deal with their children in different ways.

I don't know that the heroin-- the heroin stuff is fascinating to me. What will be interesting to me is to see if we start moving towards decriminalization or heroin with it becoming more of a white affluent drug the way that we've now moved towards decriminalization of marijuana.

And I want to mention, with decriminalization of marijuana, many municipalities and/or states are creating strict regulations on who can be part of dispensaries and doing criminal record checks or whatever. So you have the person who used to sell marijuana who is criminalized can't work legally now anyway in that industry. And it would be interesting to see if that gets replicated if there's other drugs that roll out with that model. Yeah?

**SPEAKER 5:** So as I'm sure you're well aware, the 2016 presidential election is in full swing right now. So out of the candidates running, which candidate or candidate do you think shares a vision that is most closely going to work for what you're advocating for in any event.

**CYNTHIA** None. Look, the major party candidates are deeply wedded with our capitalist state. And quite frankly, I'm just going to throw this out there. I think that we're moving towards an era of neo-

**CHANDLER:**

fascism with the incredible influx of capitalism into our government apparatus, with the resurgence of eugenics and nationalism. And I don't see any of those candidates being a huge radical departure.

I will likely still find someone to vote for as a least negative choice. I don't think any of them are going to share my political views. Yeah. And actually, change needs to happen from the grassroots on this. I don't think we can expect the state to undo the state, the state's apparatus.

Change has to come from municipalities. It's on the municipal level that people are suffering without funding for education, without funding for baseline services. People have to rise up and start demanding that their local governments, that their local communities start serving them. And I think that the change will happen from the grassroots anyway. They're going to do what they're going to do and be war mongers. And that will be that. Anyway. Yeah?

**SPEAKER 6:** [INAUDIBLE] high rates of unrecorded acts of violence and then also about people are more likely to get stopped, like Chopper, for a \$20 heroin thing, but those kids in Harvard aren't getting stopped. I think that manifests itself on a college campus in that most people don't even trust administration to report the violence. But then once it's reported, nothing really happens.

But if you're caught cheating on an exam, you'll be kicked out of the school. Whereas, maybe a perpetrator, someone who's been accused, will maybe suspended for a semester. If that dismantles the prison industrial complex, would that also, do you think, carry down into the academic education [INAUDIBLE].

**CYNTHIA CHANDLER:** Yes. And I also think it will carry down to families. I think it's going to carry down to all of our institutions. So things like tough love in families, hopefully, I think will be eradicated and shifted, especially if families have more services that they can use to help them deal with situations where people are engaging in self harm in a major way. And yes, I think academic institutions, mental hospitals virtually every kind of institution you can imagine would experience a massive shift. Because what would have to happen to get rid of the prison industrial complex is this shift away from a crime control state.

And the crime control state is influencing all of our institutions at this point, I think. Yeah. So it's a big shift. But honestly, I think we're hitting a point of extreme polarization in our society.

We're at a moment where change is going to happen. It's either going to be extremely more repressive or it possibly can be a little bit more progressive. But change is upon us. And I think it's going to be a very tumultuous time. Anybody else. Yeah?

**SPEAKER 6:** How do think that change is going to be initiated. So is that through social media, grassroots as in [INAUDIBLE].

**CYNTHIA CHANDLER:** I think that change is really going to happen through grassroots organization building but not nonprofit organizations. I think community-based, organic organizations where people are deeply invested in their communities and the outcomes and where people are, quite frankly, fighting for their survival. I think that's how change is going to happen. And so I think that's why it's so important, I think, not to lead a movement in a way that further objectifies one's clients, as an attorney, and things like that.

Because the change makers are the people who are experiencing the oppression who should be given the huge level of success-- respect. I mean, if we're going to have success. Anybody else?

So what do I do if they're not allowed to leave yet?

**SPEAKER 1:** We thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

**CYNTHIA** Thank you all.

**CHANDLER:**