

INEQUALITY IS

## Bryan Stevenson on mass incarceration and criminalization

Bryan Stevenson, founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, explains how inequality and the abuse of power exploit people of color and the poor.

A conversation about inequality in all its forms.

**Transcript begins.**

**BRYAN STEVENSON:** Mass incarceration has had a devastating impact on all Americans. But it's been particularly devastating to the poor and people of color. Black men are six times more likely to go to prison for committing the same offenses that white people commit. So to confront that, we've got to do something about these basic inequalities in American society.

[Inequality is logo. A graphic black equal sign with an orange slash through it.  
#InequalityIs. Bryan Stevenson, founder, Equal Justice Initiative. A Black man with very short hair, wearing a royal blue shirt and sweater.]

Inequality is racism. Inequality is exploitation of the poor. Inequality is abuse of power. Late one night when I was a young lawyer in Atlanta, Georgia, I got in my car and I drove home. I had an old beat up car and the car didn't always have the radio operating but this night the radio was operating. And I was just enjoying it so much that when I got to my apartment I stayed in the car to listen to these songs. And after 10 or 15 minutes, an Atlanta SWAT car showed up. I got out to see what he wanted, and in that instant, this officer drew his weapon. And he said, "Move, and I'll blow your head off." I was 28, been practicing law for about a year and I knew to say to that police officer, "It's alright, it's OK." But if the same thing had happened to me when I was 16, I probably would've run. And it burdens me that we have kids in this country that have to know how to navigate those situations, who have to deal with the presumption of dangerousness and guilt in ways where their lives are at risk. When you tolerate racial inequality for generations, these inequalities become part of the culture and the political system. We need a generation of people in this country who are dedicated to fighting inequality. Justice doesn't come when you only choose to do what's comfortable and convenient. It sometimes requires you to do uncomfortable and inconvenient things.

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**End of transcript.**