

INEQUALITY IS

## Max Kenner on inequality, incarceration and education

Max Kenner, founder and executive director of the Bard Prison Initiative, talks about how education is an equalizer, providing those that have been incarcerated with a foundation for future success. He explains how we will fail to address the societal problems we face if we do not invest in individuals.

A conversation about inequality in all its forms.

### **Transcript begins.**

**MAX KENNER:** Right now in the United States we have nearly two and a half million people in prison. Something that not only cost the taxpayer unfathomable sum of money, but destroys lives and families, and exacerbates the problems of inequality.

[Inequality is logo. A graphic black equal sign with an orange slash through it.  
#InequalityIs. Max Kenner, founder and executive director, Bard Prison Initiative. A middle aged white man in a dark blue suit and maroon tie.]

Over the course of a generation, the United States embarked on an unbelievable experiment: the largest investment in prisons and punishment that the world had ever made that begun to overtake all the other things that we believed solved social problems: daycare, education, healthcare and housing.

[A prison class in session.]

**TEACHER:** How would you describe such a society?

**INCARCERATED INDIVIDUAL:** Because it has a caste system, was it unjust...

**MAX KENNER:** When we think about inequality, when we think about poverty, when we think about privilege, we behave as if these things are static; that they won't change. And the most unbelievable thing that we've seen in our work at the Bard Prison Initiative, where we provide rigorous and elite education to incarcerated people across New York and the United States, is that people are curious and incredibly resilient. There is no equalizer in a democratic society like genuine education. So they study the arts. They study literature, They study history, anthropology, sociology. They major in math, major in science, and they go on to graduate schools in the ivy league all across New York City. They manage billion-dollar businesses. And they run not-for-profits in the poorest communities that need them most.

[Graduation ceremony.]

**GRADUATE:** This education, this degree; it symbolizes excellence. Excellence that was birthed out of struggle.

[Graduates receive diplomas and celebrate.]

**MAX KENNER:** Inequality is the lack of faith, on our part, in one another. We do not have a person to waste in this country, and without a real investment in education, we will fail in addressing the extraordinary problems we face.

[Inequality Is Logo. Join the conversation. #InequalityIs.]

**End of transcript.**