

# HANDOUT THREE: **BELIEVING: IN PRACTICE** **THREAD, INTERVIEW ARCHIVE**

**Directions: Underline key phrases and new details as you watch and listen to the interviews.**

## **BRYAN STEVENSON**

My grandmother died when I was in college, it was before I made any decision to go to law school, but she was always saying you can do anything. And she said it as if that was something special and unique about you. I just think that consciousness is necessary when you're trying to do things that you haven't seen people do before.

Like I said, I never met a lawyer before. Certainly never met a black lawyer before so I had to believe I could be one even though I had never seen one, and believing things you haven't seen becomes sort of addictive. It becomes a way of life. We had to believe we could create an institution that could help condemned prisoners in a state that was very hostile to condemned prisoners.

We had to believe we could make a difference in the lives of children being sentenced to die in prison, even though there wasn't clear doctrine to support that. We had to believe we could create a national memorial that honors thousands of victims of lynching even though there wasn't really precedent for that.

I think if my grandmother gave me anything she gave me the confidence to believe things I haven't seen because she would talk about that all the time. She said her father never doubted that he would be free one day, never doubted it, even though he couldn't have anticipated what was going to happen at the end of the Civil War. She was somebody who never doubted that she would have an amazing family. She would say, "I have an amazing family. I've always known I was going to have an amazing family." I do think that consciousness is really important if you're trying to do things that are difficult.

## **RANDY SUSSKIND**

When Bryan first started talking about doing the narrative work outside of our legal cases I think we all were feeling like we're busy enough with our legal cases and where are we gonna find the time to do anything beyond what we're already doing on behalf of clients and in the courts, but I think we all sensed that there was something necessary beyond the court system that we needed to try to take on. Bryan stepped ahead of us in terms of understanding this and explained that we can't affect change in the court system if the broader society, including the people who are administering the criminal justice system, are not confronting the issues in our society that we think need to be confronted. So this idea that we're trying to make an argument about race bias in the death penalty, in the abstract, without thinking about anything else, if you presume that there's no problems in society and that there's no racial bias and there's no history of discrimination, to go into court and to say, "This is a problem that the prosecutor is aggressively prosecuting. This case as opposed to others, this is an African American defendant with a white victim, same crime happened a week before with a White defendant and an African American victim, they're not prosecuting that case in the same way." If you're trying to make those kind of arguments they're very hard to understand if the people you're making the arguments to aren't on the same page with broader societal problems, broader societal bias, history of bias in our country.

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