LESSON SIX - TO BELIEVE IN THINGS WE HAVEN'T SEEN

A FREE AMERICA

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What are creative and effective approaches to building a more kind, compassionate, hopeful, and just future in our communities and our nation?

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will connect their learning from Lesson Five on the essential work of truth telling and reconciliation to imagine a different future for our nation firmly grounded in hope, equity and justice. Using a film segment from *True Justice: Bryan Stevenson's Fight for Equality* and excerpts from the Interview Archive, first-person interviews collected during the making of the documentary, students will consider the collective legal work of the Equal Justice Initiative alongside its narrative and educational initiatives including the Community Remembrance Project, The Legacy Museum, and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- View a segment from *True Justice* introducing the idea of "believing in things we haven't seen" and understand this premise as a foundational value of the Equal Justice Initiative
- Use information and ideas from the Interview Archive and supplemental resources to broaden their understanding of what a different and more hopeful future for the United States might look like
- Imagine concrete steps they could take to build a more just future for themselves, their community, the country and the world

MATERIALS

Equipment for viewing film clips and interview threads, and copies of handouts

LENGTH

Two 50-minute class periods plus time outside of class to complete the culminating activity

> "I believe we're all more than the worst thing we've ever done. We are a slave state, but we're more than slavers. We are a lynching state, but we're more than lynchers. We're a segregation state, but that's not all we are. The other things we are create an opportunity to do some things that are restorative, rehabilitative, that are redemptive, that create possibilities of reconciliation and repair."
>
> **— BRYAN STEVENSON**

ACTIVITIES

1 . OPENING

Debrief as a class:

- What would a more just and equitable future in your community and nation look like? What would be different?
- What can you imagine believing in and working towards that doesn't yet exist? (Consider the criminal justice system, schools, museums, other public institutions or policies, neighborhoods - any aspect of society that comes to mind

2. ANALYZING FILM AS TEXT

Distribute Handout One - Reflective Writing Exercise

Teacher Note: Unlike the previous lessons, Lesson Six contains one film segment from True Justice. *Rather than take notes to use as they create their storyboard from the lesson, the Note Catcher for Lesson Six asks students to reflect upon their learning and respond to the prompts included on the handout.*

Film Clips

> **Clip One: "To Believe in Things We Haven't Seen" (runtime: 5 min)**
>
> This final film clip captures the visionary work of Bryan Stevenson and EJI to create a more just and equitable country through their legal, narrative, and memorial work. The clip begins with Bryan telling the story of how his grandmother instilled this value of creating a better tomorrow and concludes with the dedication of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice.

3. A HISTORICAL VIEW

Handout Two (Parts I and II)

A Historical Perspective on John Lewis

To deepen students will continue to learn about the journey of the Civil Rights leader, Congressman John Lewis.

4. A CLOSE VIEW - INTERVIEW THREADS

Teacher Note: The film-makers conducted numerous interviews to produce True Justice *and nine of these interviews are free and accessible in the Interview Archive on the Kunhardt Film Foundation website. A selection of these interviews, edited together here to create interview threads, are available for your students' learning.*

For Lesson Six:

- Two interview threads were created for this lesson that teachers and students can choose from, or use together, to deepen their understanding of the lesson topic.
- Print and distribute **Handouts Three and Four** in the "Resources" section in the lesson so students can follow along with the interview transcript
    - **Handout Three: Believing: In Practice Thread, Interview Archive**
    - **Handout Four: On Hope Thread, Interview Archive**
- Watch the Interview Threads and have students follow along on the transcripts, underlining details that catch their attention, and jotting down questions and insights that come to mind after viewing each thread.

5. FINAL ASSESSMENT - IMAGINING A DIFFERENT FUTURE

Teacher Note: One of Bryan Stevenson's most treasured memories is of his grandmother who gave him the confidence to believe in the possibility of a different future for himself and the nation. The work of the Equal Justice Initiative, the Community Remembrance Project, The Legacy Museum, and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice are all expressions of Bryan's vision and commitment to providing equal justice under the law, transforming the narrative of racial difference in the United States through education, and creating the space for reconciliation and healing by honoring sites of memory and memorialization

As a culminating assessment for the True Justice lessons, and with the groundbreaking work of the Equal Justice Initiative in mind, students will identify an area of racial injustice -- or injustice in another area -- they would like to remedy and imagine new and creative approaches to solving the problem. Students are encouraged to review the narrative maps they created from Lesson One through Five and to communicate their idea(s) through a form of expression that reflects their vision. Examples could include a performance piece, a written essay, creative writing piece, poem, visual art, music, short-film, graphic novel, or a digital media creation.

6. CLOSING EXERCISE: TURNING HOPE INTO ACTION

Read aloud Bryan Stevenson's quote from the opening of Lesson Six. "Hopelessness is the enemy of justice." Ask students to reflect on the quote, in pairs or small groups: "What does it mean to have hope in the face of injustice?"

Then return to this passage from the film clip in this lesson where Bryan states:

> "I believe we're all more than the worst thing we've ever done. We are a slave state, but we're more than slavers. We are a lynching state, but we're more than lynchers. We're a segregation state, but that's not all we are. The other things we are create an opportunity to do some things that are restorative, that are rehabilitative, that are redemptive, that create possibilities of reconciliation and repair.
>
> I get frustrated when I hear people talk about, "Well, if I'd been living during the time of slavery, of course I would have been an abolitionist. And most people think if they had been living when mobs were gathering to lynch people on the courthouse lawn, they would have said something to complain about that. Everybody imagines that if they were in Alabama in the 1960s, they would have been marching with Dr. King. And the truth of it is, is I don't think you can claim that if today you are watching these systems be created that are incarcerating millions of people, throwing away the lives of millions of people, destroying communities, and you're doing nothing."

Discuss:

- What are your reactions to Bryan Stevenson's claim?
- What do you feel is in your capacity and create opportunities that are restorative and rehabilitative?
- What acts can you engage in that move towards a more just and equitable country?

7. EXTENDED LEARNING

1. Have students identify a leader from each of these four historical periods in U.S. History: slavery, racial terror lynching, segregation, and today with a particular focus on ending mass incarceration. The leader can be a well-known figure in history or someone within your family or community.

Create a character portrait either in print, online, through the written word or through the visual arts, that illuminates the life and work of each of these leaders. Each portrait will include:

- Biographical and geographical background of the leader;
- At least one source (photograph, document, letter, a transcribed oral history, etc…) that describes how this leader worked on behalf of racial justice;
- Your personal analysis and reflection on why you chose to highlight this leader and how they had to believe in something they had not yet witnessed.

2. Read Mr. Hinton's memoir, *The Sun Does Shine*, watch Video of Mr. Hinton[41] from the Equal Justice Initiative's website, Lynching in America or from the HuffPost interview of Mr. Hinton.[42] Create a character portrait either in print, online, through the written word or through the visual arts, that illuminates his life and work.

Common Core State Standards

Anchor Standards

Reading Literature and/or Information: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas.

RL/RI.X.7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

RL/RI.X.8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

RL/RI.X.9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration

SL.X.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL.X.2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally

SL.X.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

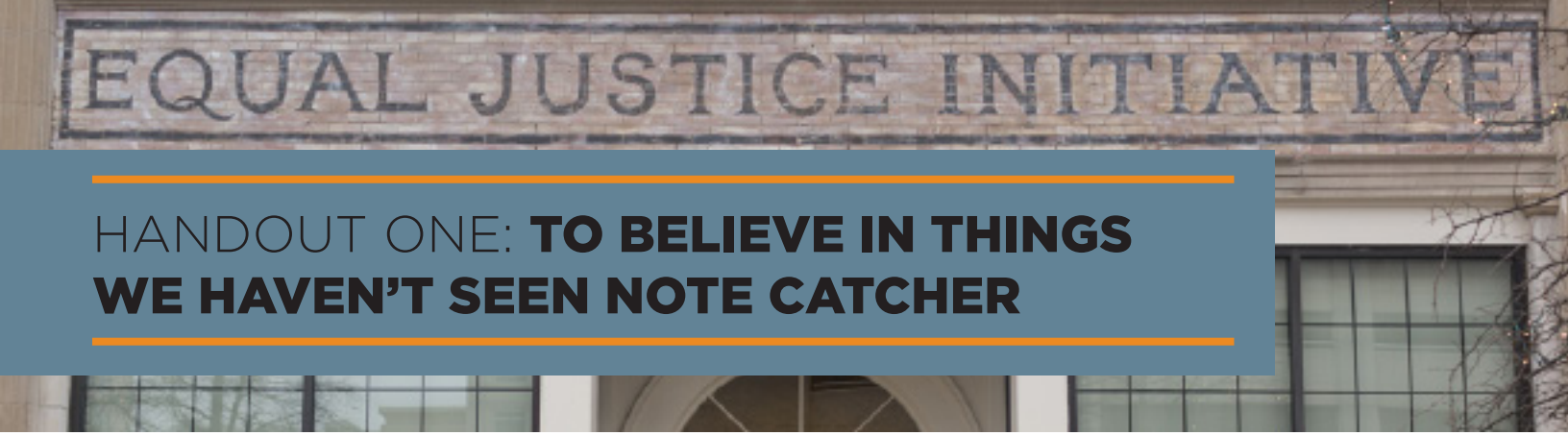
SL.X.5 Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge.

W.X.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

W.X.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

41 https://lynchinginamerica.eji.org/listen/anthony-ray-hinton
42 https://bit.ly/2IXCSac



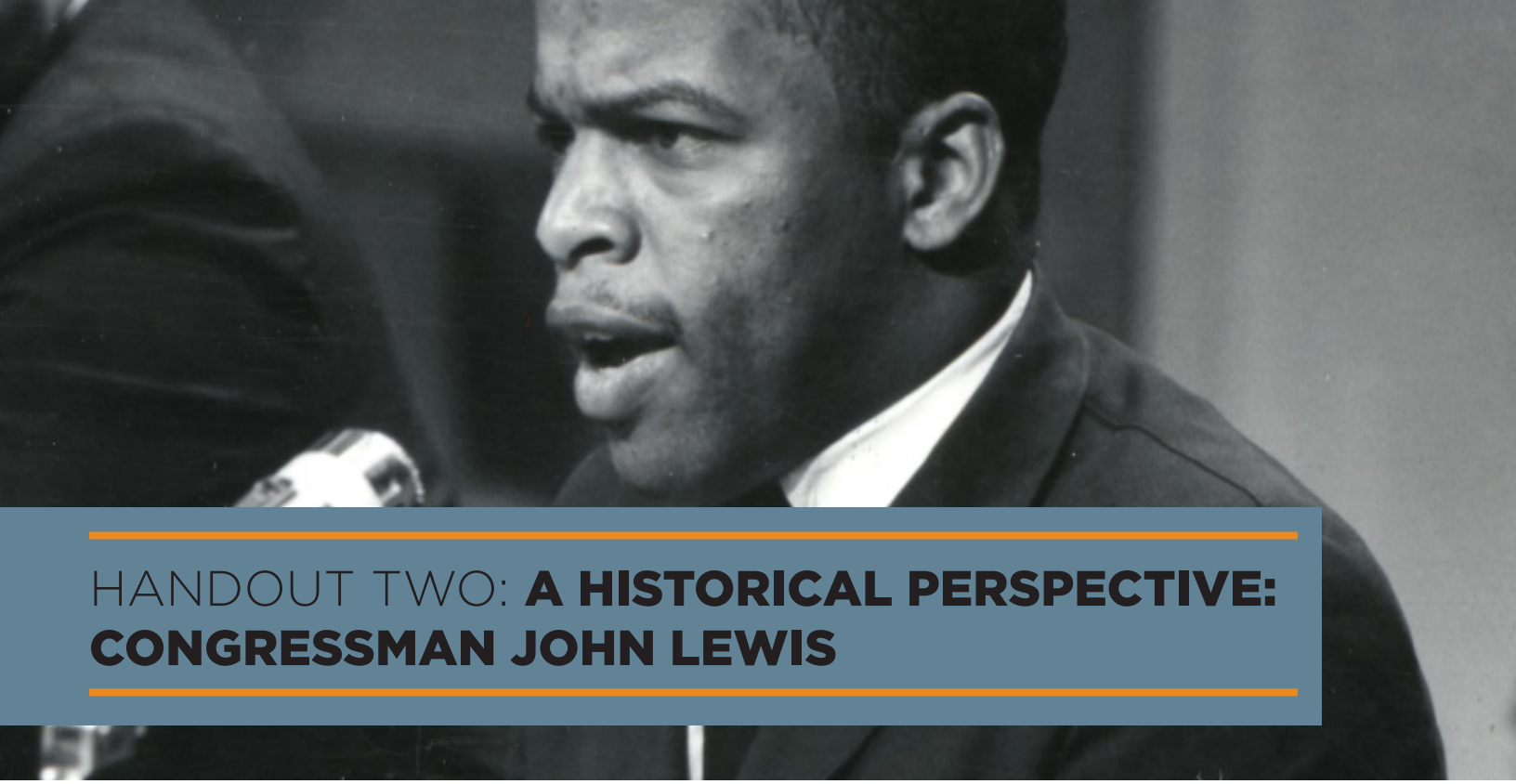
HANDOUT ONE: **TO BELIEVE IN THINGS WE HAVEN'T SEEN NOTE CATCHER**

Directions: At the conclusion of this film clip, respond in writing to these prompt

1. At the opening of The Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Bryan Stevenson asks the audience to join a movement. He says, "Tonight I want you to join us in making the beginning of this movement, this legacy museum, this memorial for peace and justice more than a monument, more than a statue, more than a place. We want you to help us make it a movement." How does this museum and memorial contribute to the larger vision of EJI and to a larger movement?

2. True Justice ends with Bryan Stevenson saying, "I think it's important that we understand all the brutal, all the ugly details, because those are the things that actually give rise to what might allow us to one day claim something really beautiful." What does this mean to you?

3. How do you understand the intersection of history, memory, memorials and healing



HANDOUT TWO: **A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS**

To deepen students' historical understanding and broaden their perspective on the idea of believing in things we haven't seen, students will continue to learn about the journey of another important leader in the Civil Rights movement, Congressman John Lewis. Elected in 1986 to represent Georgia's 5th District, he continues to hold this seat today and serves on the House Ways & Means Committee, and is Ranking Member of its Subcommittee on Oversight.

Circulate or project the selection of photographs documenting moments in John Lewis's life included on **Handout Two - Part I**. It may be helpful for students to do a visual analysis exercise using these prompts:

- What do you see in this image?
- What story does this photograph tell?
- What questions remain?

After reviewing the images, distribute **Handout Two - Part II: The Perspective of John Lewis**. Have students read this passage from John Lewis's biography *Walking with the Wind* and discuss using these prompts:

- What do you learn about John Lewis's life from this passage?
- Does the idea of believing in things you haven't seen appear in John Lewis's life? How? Where?

PART I - IMAGES OF JOHN LEWIS

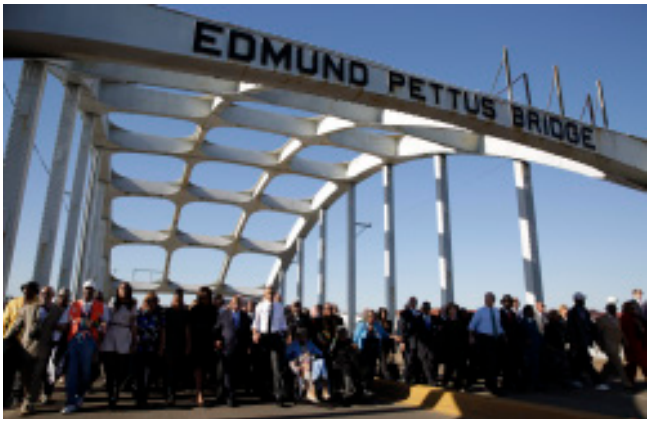
1963

1965

"At the moment when I was hit on the bridge and began to fall, I really thought it was my last protest, my last march. I thought I saw death, and I thought, "It's okay, it's all right —I am doing what I am supposed to do."

-John Lewis, who was beaten at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge
in Selma, Alabama, on Sunday, March 7, 1965

Bloody Sunday
March 7, 1965



50th Anniversary of the Selma
to Montgomery March for Voting
Rights, March 8, 2015.

PART II - THE PERSPECTIVE OF CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS

Directions: Read these excerpts from John Lewis's biography, *Walking with the Wind* and discuss your understanding of how his vision of hope and justice was shaped and how it continues today.

CHAPTER 3 - PILOT LIGHT

I was shaken to the core by the killing of Emmett Till. I was fifteen, black, at the edge of my own manhood, just like him. He could have been me. That could have been me, beaten, tortured, dead at the bottom of a river. It had been only a year since I was so elated at the Brown [Brown v. Board of Education] decision. Now I felt like a fool. It didn't seem like the Supreme Court mattered. It didn't seem like the principles of justice and equality I read about it my beat-up civics book at school mattered. The messages I heard in church, the songs we would sing—"In Christ there's no east or west, no north or south"—declarations of absolute equality in God's eyes, didn't seem to matter either. They didn't matter to the men who killed Emmett Till. They didn't matter to the jury that deliberated for a mere hour before delivering the verdict of not guilty. Nor did they matter to the country that continued to send me to a school separate from white children and forbade me to eat at the same drugstore counter or even use the same public restroom as they.

By the end of the year, I was chewing myself up with questions and frustration and, yes, anger—anger not at white people in particular but at the system that encouraged and allowed this kind of hatred and inhumanity to exist. I couldn't accept the way things were. I just couldn't. . . My parents, and millions of other black men and women just like them, bore their load through an age of unbelievable oppression with a grace and a dignity I could only hope to come close to. Theirs was not a time nor a place for turning and facing the system.

But as I began to come of age in the mid-1950s, the landscape had begun to shift. The time had come. I could feel it. I could see it. I saw it up north, in the rulings that were coming down from the courts. I saw it at home, in the South, where the lines of white backlash and violence were being drawn in response to these rulings. And, in December of that landmark year, 1955, I saw it just up the highway, in Montgomery, where that man, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., took the words I'd heard him preach over the radio and put them into action in a way that set the course of my life from that point on. With all that I have experienced in the past half century, I can still say without question that the Montgomery bus boycott changed my life more than any other event before or since.[43]

CHAPTER 21 - ONWARD

It really does seem like only yesterday that I was sworn in as a freshman member of the 100th Congress. I remember looking around at the inauguration ceremony, at some of my fellow first-term colleagues—former professional basketball start Tom McMillen; a lawyer from Mississippi named Mike Espy; Bobby Kennedy's son Joe; Ben Nighthorse Campbell, who likes to call himself a "half-breed Indian from Colorado—and I marveled at the fact that only in America could you have an Indian, a black man and a member of the Kennedy family standing together to take the oath as newly elected member of the U.S. House of Representatives.[44]

43 John Lewis, Walking in the Wind (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), p. 47-48
44 Ibid., p. 480-481.

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 we 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.

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.

HANDOUT FOUR: **ON HOPE, INTERVIEW ARCHIVE**

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

ANTHONY RAY HINTON

When I met Hayes, I didn't know who Henry was. After talking to him, and getting to know him, when I finally found out who he was, it really didn't matter, because I got to know a person that wasn't who he was when he walked in there. The thing that sticks out with me about Hayes, is the fact that he had the courage to be willing to let someone teach him about love.

He didn't have a choice, that his mother, his father, his neighborhood, taught him about hatred. When people read my book and they, How could you? I say, "How could I what?" "How could you befriend a Ku Klux Klansman?" I said, "Let's back this all the way back. Let's back it back. Hayes was not born a Ku Klux Klansman. Those three Ks were added to his name by his father. Hayes was born Henry Francis Hayes at birth, but I can imagine his daddy being so full of hate, that he probably took his son immediately from the hospital home, because he feared that he didn't want his son laying next to no black person." I often asked people, let's examine this really closely. All of his life, he'd been taught to hate.

Where was Child Protective Service when this young boy was being mentally abused? Where was the school teachers when they went to school and I'm sure they heard him use words that were unbecoming of someone of not of hate. Why didn't they call the police? Had he went to school with marks on his arm, they would have called the police. By law, they have to report it. Then, I have to ask the question, where was this village that we say it takes a village to raise a child. Where was this village, when THIS young boy was being mentally abused? Well, the village came out when Hayes was ordered by his father to go out and kill the first black man that he encountered. Hayes encountered a 19-year-old black male, befriended him for a moment, only to hang him and cut off his genitals.

Well, this village now, decided that this world would be better if he wasn't in it. It sounds nice that it takes a village to raise a child. Oh, that sounds beautiful. Why didn't that village come and rescue this young boy? Now, what I'm more proud of that myself, and the other black men on Alabama's Death Row taught and showed Henry love, and showed him respect. Henry gave us the same love and respect, but on the night of Henry's execution, Henry said, "All of my life, I've been taught to hate black people. My father lied to me all of my life. He told me black people wasn't this way, and they wasn't that way, but I found that to be a lie." Henry said, "And, as I leave this world, the very people that my father taught me to hate, are the very people that taught me how to love, and this night, I leave this world knowing what true love feels like." That came out of a young man's mouth that had been taught hate all his life. I am one that believes that, just as hate is taught, you can teach love as well, and more so than teach it, show it.

BRYAN STEVENSON

In fact, I get frustrated when I hear people talk about, “Well, if I’d been living during the time of slavery, of course I would have been an abolitionist.” And most people think if they had been living when mobs were gathering to lynch people on the courthouse lawn, they would have said something to complain about that. Everybody imagines that if they were in Alabama in the 1960s, they would have been marching with Dr. King. And the truth of it is, is I don’t think you can claim that if today you are watching these systems be created that are incarcerating millions of people, throwing away the lives of millions of people, destroying communities, and you’re doing nothing.