



[Begin clip]

President Bill Clinton: *“There must be no doubt about whose side we’re on. People who commit crimes should be caught, convicted, and punished. This bill puts government on the side of those who abide by the law, not those who break it; on the side of the victims, not their attackers; on the side of the brave men and women who put their lives on the line for us every day, not the criminals or those who would turn away from law enforcement...”*

[End clip]

Josie Duffy Rice: If you listened to politicians give speeches back in 1994, you’d be forgiven for thinking that everyone in prison was broken, unfixable, untamable, uniquely evil.

[Begin clip]

Sen. Phil Gramm: *“Our approach is to grab violent criminals and drug thugs by the throat, and not let them go to get a better grip...”*

Sen. Connie Mack: *“Vicious criminals...”*

Rep. Richard Arme: *“Vicious, violent...”*

Sen. Connie Mack: *“Brutal thugs...”*

Sen. Orrin Hatch: *“Violent criminals...”*

Sen. Frank Lautenberg: *“The forces of evil are still out there...”*

Rep. Bill McCollum: *“What we believe is the remedy to this problem is to get tough on violent criminals, to lock them up for extended periods of time, and throw away the key...”*

[End clip]

[MUSIC]

Josie: During that era, there was a pervasive sense that we were up against an enemy that we could not understand—that the people we were locking up could not be reasoned with. Criminals were not human—they were something more evil and more powerful. And for our own good and theirs, they had to be caged and chained. Punished. The American public has long been a willing audience for fiery rhetoric about people who have been convicted of

crimes. For decades, opportunistic politicians, sensationalized media, and primetime TV have painted these people as incorrigible monsters. As John Pfaff, professor of law at Fordham Law School, said:

John Pfaff: Lord knows our TV shows are nothing but crime, with the occasional firefighter and doctor thrown in to sort of even things out a little bit.

Josie: Those caricatures, of course, don't accurately reflect reality. Nor do the caricatures on the other end. Even people who support reform often have an inaccurate picture of who the system actually has in its claws. On our last episode, *Power*, we highlighted some of the misconceptions about the Crime Bill, challenging some of the prevailing narratives around it. But even if the legislation was less consequential in practice than many people think, the bill contributed to the widespread fearmongering, which affected the national narrative of punishment, crime, and the people that they called criminals. Let's hear from Nkechi Taifa, the President of the Taifa group.

Nkechi Taifa: I mean, the rhetoric was toxic. The climate popularized the myth of the Black child as superpredator. The climate that supported the transfer of young people to adult courts—this was the climate of thugs, criminals, and the like. It was the climate of stripping humanity away from human beings.

Josie: Now, 30 years later, we're left dealing with the fallout from that era, still reshaping our perceptions to clearly understand who we've locked up. Even now, as politics have shifted, many people still don't really have a clear picture of who is trapped under the weight of this system. We put millions of people away over decades. Who are they? Who did we punish?

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Josie: On the 30th anniversary of the 1994 Crime Bill, we take a brief look back on where we are, where we've been, and, most importantly, what comes next. I'm your host Josie Duffy Rice, and from the Vera Institute of Justice; this is *The 30 Year Project*. Episode 2: People. On this episode, the second of four, we're taking a closer look at the people directly harmed by mass incarceration, as we disentangle a few of the myths about the prison population. Because the way out of this sludge of cruelty is, in part, understanding—understanding who we're locking up, and why, and where.

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Josie: So let's answer a fundamental—and fundamentally misunderstood—question: how many people are entangled in the criminal legal system every year? The answer is probably more than you think. Usually, the number that people hear is somewhere in the 1.8 million range, down from a high of 2.3 million. But that number is only a snapshot, representing just a fraction of the people every year who spent time in prison or jail. Each year, the majority of prisons and jails across the country count the number of incarcerated people at their facility

on a single day and report that number. Authorities use those numbers to calculate the total incarcerated population for the year.

But that's not the number of people incarcerated that year, it's the number of people incarcerated that day. When you look at the entire year, the population number almost quadruples. The difference is almost entirely due to the churn in the jail population. Because jail stays tend to be shorter—often days or weeks—a one-day snapshot is going to miss a lot of people. In fact, due to insufficient jail data, we don't even know exactly how many individuals are jailed each year, but experts estimate it's four to five million—many more than the single-day number of 650,000. And even those numbers don't fully represent the number of people under correctional control because in any given year, there are also nearly four million individuals on parole or probation. So, if you add the millions on probation and parole to the number of people admitted to prison or jail, that means somewhere around eight or nine million people under correctional control every year. When we talk about what mass incarceration looks like, these are the numbers that we mean.

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Josie: So now let's talk about who those people are. When we look at who is in prison, we have to talk about race. There is no way to talk honestly about our criminal legal apparatus without talking about race. Countless studies prove what many of us already know; at every juncture, the system is more cruel and more harsh to Black and brown people. And the weight of this bias is particularly burdensome to Black people, who make up about 14 percent of the population and 40 percent of those incarcerated. As Michelle Alexander said in her book, *The New Jim Crow*, "The racial dimension of mass incarceration is its most striking feature." Here's Zoë Towns, the Executive Director of FWD.us

Zoë Towns: When it comes to the rates of policing, the rates of prosecution, when it comes to the rates of conviction, when it comes to the level of sentence that are handed down, the opportunities for release on parole, or earning time, or getting second look sentencing, at every single decision point across the criminal justice, from the very earliest points, to the very end, rates of punishment for Black Americans moving through the system are astronomically higher than for white Americans moving through the system. So, this is true across every single state. It's true across federal sentencing and federal prosecution that one of the most defining aspects of the American criminal justice system is that it is racist.

Josie: Black people are more likely to be arrested, less likely to have their charges dropped, more likely to be detained pretrial, less likely to be granted parole. Their average bail is higher; their average sentences are longer. In 2024, the Bureau of Justice Statistics released data that showed that the national incarceration rate of Black people is six times the rate of white people. It's easy to hear these statistics and conclude that our carceral system has left white America unscathed. But that's simply not the case—white people are also incarcerated at relatively high rates.

The American white incarceration rate is higher than the overall incarceration rate in England, France, Italy, and Germany, among other countries. The reason I mention this is because it underscores just how far-reaching the impact of mass incarceration in America

has been. Almost no broad demographic group has managed to avoid the harm of the carceral state.

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Josie: When most people think of who is in prison, they tend to think of men. This is something that almost every prison system in the world has in common: men make up a large percentage of the incarcerated population. Here in the US, about 90 percent of the incarcerated people are, or identify as, male. But women in the system face a particular set of challenges—challenges which often go unaddressed. Here's Gina Clayton-Johnson, the Executive Director of Essie Justice Group:

Gina Clayton-Johnson: Incarcerated women are a group of our society who go completely without care, resource, attention, and yet are suffering, oftentimes, some of the most heinous human rights abuses that we as a society are responsible for, and our governments are responsible for. And what we also know is that the reason why women are incarcerated has so often to do with the realities of poverty, the realities of patriarchal violence, the realities of just not having enough social supports around child care, around basic assistance for food, and jobs, and other types of basic needs, that it's been a very, very, devastating reality to see the ways in which women's incarceration has been this kind of unaddressed but very, very significant byproduct of all of the mass incarceration policies we've seen over the last 50 years.

Josie: Though women are a much smaller proportion of the prison population, the number of women incarcerated has grown at twice the rate of men. And much of that growth has happened in jails, where women are more likely to be locked up. This is a crisis. The Prison Policy Institute found that jails are often more deadly for women than men. Women are twice as likely to die in jail of a drug or alcohol overdose, and suicide rates for women in jail have increased significantly in the last 15 years. Studies have shown that over 85 percent of incarcerated women are sexual violence survivors. And they are also far more likely to be sexually abused while incarcerated. Here's Vivian Nixon, writer in residence at the Columbia Justice Lab Square One Project.

Vivian Nixon: Prison rape culture inside of women's prisons is a whole different animal because it is a dynamic of power between the correctional staff and the women, and women are often very vulnerable in those spaces. And then when you add other dimensions of intersectionality to being a woman, whether it is ethnicity or whether it is that you are trans—if there's anything different about you other than what has been considered mainstream—your treatment becomes even harsher.

Josie: Nearly one in six transgender people has been incarcerated at some point in their lives, and that number is one in five for trans women. What's more, nearly half of Black transgender people have spent time in prison. And trans people face particular harms, as well: far more likely to be harassed or attacked. And because they are targeted more often,

they are also more likely to be held in what's called "protective custody," which, in many institutions, means ending up in solitary confinement.

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Josie: Here's another aspect of prisons that people often don't think about: the elderly. In 1992, about 9,000 incarcerated people were serving life without parole, meaning that there was no chance of them ever being released. Another 57,000 people were serving life with parole. But by 2020, the number of people serving life with parole had doubled, and the number of people serving life without parole was six times higher than it had been nearly 30 years before. People are often surprised to learn about the growing number of 60-, 70-, and 80-year-olds locked up, many of them sick, dying, and living out their last days in prison. It's a devastating irony that while younger people are far more likely to commit crimes, prisons are increasingly filled with the elderly. Prisons as nursing homes sounds dystopian, but it's exactly where we're headed now. The number of older people in prison is a tragically predictable outcome of a system that spent years ratcheting up sentences and over-punishing. 30 years ago, just two percent of incarcerated people were over the age of 55. Now, they make up 15 percent and growing. In some states, it's even worse. In 1994, only 4 percent of California's prison population was over 50 and now it's more than a quarter. Prison conditions are notoriously deplorable, and healthcare is scant, which means that incarcerated people are much more susceptible to age-related diseases and chronic illness. 50 years old looks very different inside of prison than it does out. Here's Vivian Nixon, again:

Vivian Nixon: Prisons are not physically easy spaces to be in, and as you get older, your body needs some physical comforts. Your body needs a decent place to rest. There are people now who are studying the health outcomes of people who stay in prisons for a long time, and they're horrible—they're horrible health outcomes. They die earlier. They have so many more diseases that they're subject to living with while they're in prison and even upon release. Our aging population in prison is a travesty.

Josie: The aging prison population is a symbol of decades of policy built on revenge and opportunism rather than on rehabilitation and safety. The Vera Institute of Justice found that recidivism rates drop to just two percent in people ages 50–65 years old and to almost zero for people older than 65. Here's Daryl Atkinson co-Director and co-Founder of Forward Justice:

Daryl Atkinson: Probably most importantly, they've aged out of any criminogenic tendencies, right? They are not a threat anymore. These are old, elderly people who can't hurt anybody. And we saw—COVID showed us we can do this successfully, both at the federal and at the state level—we can let a lot more people go. They aren't gonna commit more crimes, they're gonna save us some money, and they get to live the last years of their lives in some semblance of dignity.

Josie: Race, gender, age: these are just some of the elements worth considering when we think about who is in prison. But let's talk quickly about what they're in the system for.

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Josie: Over the past ten years especially, we've seen a massive shift in the public perception of the criminal justice system. Mass incarceration is part of the national lexicon. With that shift, though, comes its own misunderstandings about the reasons that people are in prison. One of the most persistent misconceptions is the belief that a significant chunk of people in prison are in there for non-violent drug crimes. And not only is that not true, it's also not a useful distinction. Don't get me wrong—the drug war is alive and well. Before the pandemic, police were still making over one million drug possession arrests per year, and according to the Prison Policy Institute, “Drug offenses still account for the incarceration of over 360,000 people.” And on the federal level, drug trafficking is still far and away the most common thing people are incarcerated for. But, as we mentioned last episode, most incarceration—about 90 percent—happens on the state and local level, not the federal one. So, when you look overall, 80 percent of people in prison are there for something other than drugs, and about half of them are there for quote-unquote “violent crimes.” Which leads to the next point: the legal distinction between violent and non-violent crime is often kind of a fiction. This binary categorization can lead to a really skewed understanding of the prison population's composition. The term "violent crime" is, in many ways, subjective. It varies significantly across jurisdictions, changes state to state, and even county to county. And, in some cases, non-violent acts can be classified as violent crimes due to the potential for harm, such as certain types of theft or burglaries where no physical harm occurred, but there was a perceived threat. The differentiation between “violent” and “non-violent” is often a signal of something else.

As the Prison Policy Institute writes, “people typically use ‘violent’ and ‘nonviolent’ as substitutes for ‘serious’ versus ‘non-serious’ criminal acts.” When two kids get in a schoolyard fight, that's a violent crime. Bernie Madoff's crimes, on the other hand, were non-violent. But one of those is more serious. There's another issue with how we use violence and non-violence in this context—and that's the conflation of the act with the person. We often extrapolate an act as a character designation. A violent crime begets a violent criminal, and, in America, a violent criminal is a static thing: permanently violent, permanently inclined to harm. But this is, again, a convenient fiction, and one that encourages excessive punishment.

This does not mean that violent harm is never serious, but as a label, the binary contributes to our misconceptions of the population of people in the system. A better system demands accuracy. The last thing we want to mention about the “why” is about technical violations. Every year, a quarter of people admitted to prison have not even committed a crime. Instead, they're people on probation or parole who committed a technical violation—like missing a meeting with a parole officer, failing to pay a fine, or even being late for curfew. For those on supervised release, that's enough to get you sent back to prison. These violations have a profound impact on mass incarceration. And that technical violations have become a common pathway back to prison is more proof of the disconnect between incarceration and public safety.

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Josie: There are so many ways to talk about the dimensions of systemic involvement—the “who,” and the “what,” and the “why.” We couldn’t cover it all in 40 years, much less 40 minutes. But the other critical part of this is, of course, the “where.” Because when we think about the cruelty of the criminal justice system, it's not just the sheer number of people and it's not just the incapacitation. It's the conditions of where those people are held and the ways in which those jails, and prisons, and detention centers, and facilities are built to harm. And this goes back to what you heard at the beginning and is part of the reason it's important to remember how legislators talked about people convicted of crimes in 1994—and even how they often talk about them now.

[Begin clip]

Sen. Phil Gramm: “...violent criminals and drug thugs...”

Sen. Connie Mack: “Vicious criminals...”

Rep. Richard Arme: “Vicious, violent...”

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Sen. Frank Lautenberg: “Forces of evil...”

Rep. Bill McCollum: “...lock them up for extended periods of time and throw away the key...”

[End clip]

Josie: Here's Daryl Atkinson, again.

Daryl Atkinson: Narratively, this country, before they could do really bad things to a group of people, has always had to debase their humanity in language, depictions, and so they did all of those things, right? So they could create a rhetorical, narrative justification for what we are about to do. Otherwise, it would not make sense. You know what I mean? To do other human beings that way, right? So this is something rhetorically, narratively, that they had to do to justify the oppression that they wanted to impose on that group of people.

Josie: There are thousands of correctional facilities in America, but one thing that almost all of them have in common is horrific conditions of confinement. If what Dostoyevsky said is correct, if “*The degree of civilization in a society is revealed by entering its prisons,*” then we are, at our core, uncivilized. Last episode, we mentioned how the '94 Crime Bill incentivized states to build more correctional facilities by allocating billions of dollars to that construction. Now, as we mentioned, the billions that were eventually allocated were less than the bill budgeted for, and overall, they were actually a drop in the bucket given how much money states were spending on the system at the time.

Which only underscores just how much construction was happening in that era. From 1990 to 1995, the total number of prison beds increased by 41 percent. And a recent report found that from 1990 to 2005, 544 new adult correctional facilities were built in the United States. That's a new correctional facility every ten days for 15 years.

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Josie: There are many problems with the resources we've invested in correctional construction. One of the problems, though, is that it is easier to build prisons than it is to maintain them. Being tough on crime may be politically popular, but paying for the basic care of incarcerated people is not. Prisons are factories of disease, and deprivation, and violence. They are wrecked by decay. And it goes beyond the obvious—the tiny windowless cells, the steel bars, are just the beginning. For example, basic needs like clean water go unmet. In Texas, one prison's water had high levels of arsenic. In Arizona, the water tested positive for petroleum. And in many states across the country, water with high levels of bacteria has caused outbreaks of Legionnaires' disease in prison. Toilet water is often used for more than just waste—sometimes it's a place where clothes are laundered out of necessity. And it's not just the water—it's the lack of clean air without any ventilation. It's the no-heat-in-the-winter, no-AC-in-the-summer. In Texas, over two-thirds of prison beds don't have air conditioning, and in the summer, the temperatures inside can rise to 115 degrees. It's the insect and rat infestations. It's the horrific conditions of the food—rotten meat, moldy bread, bug infested food storage, tiny portions, complete lack of nutrition. So, it's no surprise that incarcerated people suffer chronic and terminal illness at rates higher than the general population. In many other countries, carceral facilities are simply not this terrible—not every country believes that incapacitation needs to be so torturous. But here in America, the cruelty is the point. And the horrors of confinement go beyond even these. Violence and sexual abuse is not a bug, but a feature in prisons, both from other incarcerated people and correctional officers. Drug use and overdoses are common, with hard drugs often supplied by the guards, themselves. Plus, there is the physical labor that many incarcerated people experience. Here's Daryl Atkinson talking about the brutal labor he had to endure during his incarceration.

Daryl Atkinson: You were commonly punished. If you were, like, assigned to a farm squad, which I was, you would go out and farm ten hours a day in the top of the heat in the summer with guards on horseback and shotgun, very reminiscent of other times in our country's history. And if you refuse to work, you would be shackled to a pole in the back of the receiving area that was more akin to a stress position, right? So you weren't referred to by your name, you were given a number and your number was used at all times. Things that, you know, were reminiscent of tactics that were done during other horrible periods of the world's history to really debase people and make you forget that you are a person because they're never referring to you by your name or treating you as a human being.

Josie: Legislators have, for years, claimed that part of the goal of incarceration is rehabilitation—to help people who have caused harm change, so that they are less likely to cause harm in the future. But the conditions in which people live in prison make it clear that rehabilitation is not the goal. In fact, you could almost not design a system less likely to rehabilitate. The horror of these conditions is hard to move past, even for those who are no longer incarcerated. Here's Vivian Nixon again:

Vivian Nixon: You can't shake it. Once you've been incarcerated for any period of time, much less years, you are a changed person. There's no horror that you can't imagine because you've experienced so much of it 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for years on end. And so you—you believe that anything horrible can happen, and that's not a pleasant way to live in the world: to—to have that kind of fear. And of course, in reality, we all know that anything can happen, right? We all know that, you know, there are—there are freak accidents that happen to people. There are acts of nature that harm large communities at a time from natural disasters, but we don't think about it all the time. Spending almost four years in prison makes me think about my safety all the time—my personal well being all the time—that it can be taken from me, it can be in the control of someone else, and there's nothing I can do about it. It is a state of mind that—it's not always foremost, but it's there.

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Josie: Even the most common sense measures that give incarcerated people a better chance when they return to their families and communities are blocked by obstacles. And this is something the '94 Crime Bill did do that had a major impact. It got rid of Pell Grants for people in prisons—meaning no subsidies for higher education. Those grants not only provided a learning opportunity, but also gave incarcerated people the chance at a more stable job and career after release. Here's Terrell Blount, Executive Director of the Formerly Incarcerated College Graduates Network.

Terrell Blount: You talk about the school to prison pipeline, and more specifically, in our context, education. With Pell Grants being taken away, you saw a drastic shift in the amount of college in prison programs that were offered in correctional facilities across the country. So we saw something, north of, like, 200 facilities and programs that existed shrink to about less than ten, not necessarily overnight, but rather quickly, following the restriction on Pell Grants, being accessible to people who are incarcerated.

Josie: Again, if rehabilitation was the goal, removing access to education would make no sense. But the goal, of course, was punishment for punishment's sake.

Terrell Blount: It really meant that people who are incarcerated could no longer prepare reentry. It is very different when you're coming home with an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree, or just simply college credits or a certification. And when you're coming home with any one of those things, it really changes the game in terms of what you can do or what you're planning to do when you come home versus coming home with just a high school diploma, a GED. The opportunities that are available to you upon your return are just, like, very smaller. Education has been proven to really decrease the chances of someone recidivating and then going back to prison, but I tend to look at it as a much more important opportunity to invest in human potential and human capital, and the '94 Crime Bill did everything but that.

Josie: Here's Daryl Atkinson again.

Dary Atkinson: I was incarcerated in the state of Alabama in 1996, two years after the passage of the '94 Crime Bill. I consider myself very much a casualty of the bill in the sense of: it incentivized states to really expand their criminal legal systems, incentivize prison building. I was connected to post secondary education at that particular time in my life and could have easily been reconnected, but there was a prohibition on incarcerated students—so if you wanted to be an incarcerated student and receiving a Pell Grant. So when I think of the '94 Crime Bill, I think of how it just impacted my life in a real, personal way.

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Josie: The Pell Grant prohibition is a sign of the harmful—depraved, even—incentives that this system invites. If prisons are intended, at least, in part, to rehabilitate—then why would we take away opportunities for education? This gets back to what we discussed at the beginning: the need to create monsters to justify the harm we impart on them. In some ways, this is the power of the bill—not as policy, but as permission slip; as a system of organization—a way of reinforcing the national consensus of us versus them. To label them “monsters.” To make them almost inhuman. Because, only then, can you torture them and consider it good public policy.

[MUSIC]

Josie: Stripping people of their dignity is not a facet of accountability or rehabilitation. Creating these inhumane warehouses is a policy choice—one that makes it more likely that the 95 percent of incarcerated people who return to their communities will end up in the criminal legal system again. And it doesn't have to be this way. The Vera Institute of Justice has spent a lot of time looking at prisons and facilities in other countries—places where the conditions are more humane than they are here. Part of their work has been literal transformation—through their Restoring Promise initiative, they've opened seven young adult housing units in five states. The units look very different from a typical prison. For example, in Connecticut, they've converted former cells to community spaces for learning, meditation, and conflict resolution, where mentorship and counseling are provided. The correctional officers are trained on how to best engage with the people there, and there are accountability goals and family engagement plans. Here's Nick Turner, the president of Vera:

Nick Turner: We've been able to do a lot of work around conditions of confinement to really reject this warehousing notion. We've worked in a number of states, Connecticut and South Carolina, Idaho, Colorado, North Dakota, to create what I would describe as the very antithesis of warehousing for young adults, so for emerging adults, who are 18 to 24, who are in adult systems. We've helped to establish units that are committed to human dignity, to the belief that these young people have agency and the ability to develop, that they are intelligent beings who can be prepared and help to lead productive lives afterwards. And we've taken a lot of lessons from Germany and Norway, where this is really standard practice, and implemented it here.

Josie: But while initiatives like this are a notable improvement in conditions of confinement, they're not easy to implement. I asked Nick about the challenges in creating these units:

Nick Turner: Well, the biggest challenges on improving prison conditions—there are a few of them. One is that the prison systems are opaque to people; they are behind a gray wall. There is very little public oversight. There's very little ability. I mean, if you think about—one of the things that stirred so much public interest, and revulsion, and anger, and then mobilization in the last decade was seeing Black motorists shot and killed by police on phones. There's nothing that approximates that in prison. So we don't know what happens behind those walls, and we don't get the human experience of it. The second thing that's difficult about improving conditions of confinement is that many legislatures tend to invest much more in, sort of, the security apparatus in prisons, and less in programming, and less in—in Europe, what's called “normalization.” It's a strange term, but it basically means that the only part of the imprisonment experience that is punishment is that you've been deprived of your liberty, and then everything else that that system is supposed to do is supposed to prepare you to be released and to be able to succeed upon release.

Josie: Like college education.

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Josie: There is some good news on that front. In late 2020, Congress included the restoration of Pell Grants for incarcerated students in an omnibus spending bill. That means that today, 750,000 people are now eligible to receive post-secondary education while serving their sentence. And some other things have changed for the better since 1994. For example, the language we use to describe people trapped in this system has, in many spaces, evolved over the last 30 years.

Organizers and activists have begun pushing for “people-first” language—so instead of words like “felon” and “inmate,” we say “person with a felony conviction” or “incarcerated person.” This may sound small, but it matters. When we merge a person’s entire identity with their criminal history, we flatten them. It becomes easier to forget they’re human. There’s also been another key shift in that we see an increase in leadership from directly impacted- and formerly incarcerated people. Here’s David Ayala, the Executive Director of the Formerly Incarcerated, Convicted People & Families Movement:

David Ayala: Because we've gone through it. We have experienced it. I was in and out of the system from the age of 12 to 33. There was never a time that I didn't want something better. And I think us having these experiences, we understand that when—when a young kid, or when someone is doing something, we're able to look at them and understand why they're doing what they're doing, and what we need to put in place, to eliminate what they're doing.

Josie: Here’s Vivian Nixon again.

Vivian Nixon: That's where my hope is. It's in the people, because the people are educated about this stuff now. They know what's happening to them. They know that there's a reckoning that needs to happen here.

Josie: And here's Daryl Atkinson.

Daryl Atkinson: I think the people who've been labeled by society as the castaways are the ones who are actually going to redeem democracy and help us live up to our highest ideals.

Josie: Yes, in some ways, we are on the path towards something better, but the road is long, and the fight has just begun.

[MUSIC]

Josie: On our next episode, we zoom out and look at what mass incarceration has done to families, to neighborhoods, and communities.

Zoë Towns: Mass incarceration has not spared Democratic states, Republican states, urban areas, rural areas. It's really hit every kind of community.

Jocelyn Fontaine: We need to think about incarceration as not just having an impact on the individual but family members.

Vivian Nixon: We were surviving in communities that would—had been stripped of the resources, of a lot of the men in our communities.

SA Kim Foxx: And when you start to see generations matriculating through this system, and you don't see the failures of the system, and try to make it about individual families, and not what we are doing, it's—it's disingenuous. It's a lie.

Josie: That's next time, on *The 30 Year Project*.

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Josie: *The 30 Year Project* is a production of the Vera Institute of Justice. I'm Writer and Host, Josie Duffy-Rice. Ed Chung and I are the Executive Producers. Florence Barrau-Adams is the Producer. Trendel Lightburn is the Associate Producer. Vera's Director of Marketing is Chris Choi and their Director of Digital Engagement is Megan Diamondstein. Special thanks to all our guests. For more information about each episode and to find full transcripts visit vera.org/thirtyyearproject. That's T-H-I-R-T-Y year project. And follow @verainstitute on Instagram. Please take a minute to follow us and rate us five stars on Apple Podcasts and Spotify, and let us know what you think. More reviews help more people find us. Thank you for listening.