



Injustice and Identity

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[This TED talk by Bryan Stevenson](#) about injustice and identity is worth watching. I first learned about his work as the founder and Executive Director of the [Equal Justice Initiative](#) through our own Alyson Grine. In this highly personal and engaging talk, Stevenson challenges his audience to examine our complacency about the criminal justice system's massive imbalance along racial lines. Go to criminal court or visit a prison and the impact of the racial imbalance is overwhelming. I used to take our summer law clerks to visit Central Prison and it always generated intense questioning and uneasiness about race and crime. Stevenson also quietly but firmly challenges society's too-easy comfort with the death penalty, as well as the practice of treating children as adults and holding them in adult prisons. [Stevenson recently testified](#) in the first hearing to take



place under North Carolina's Racial Justice Act.

Like all good advocates, Stevenson is a terrific storyteller. His talk is serious and passionate, but also funny at times. He tells a story about his grandmother, whose parents were slaves, that is wonderful. Stevenson's talk evidently "[inspired one of the longest and loudest standing ovations in TED's history.](#)"

The School works with prosecutors, public defenders, and judges to insure that they carry out their individual responsibilities as effectively as possible within the criminal justice system. We are educators, not advocates. Bryan Stevenson is a quiet but powerful advocate, and I encourage you to listen to his talk. He may not change your mind. Whatever your views about crime and punishment, however, he will make you think. That's not a bad thing.

If you want to read more about prisons, and who doesn't, [here is an earlier blog post](#) and [an interesting article in today's The New York Times](#) about a move away from solitary confinement in some super-maximum security prisons.