

Keith Black

Prison is a Death Trap

My name is Keith Black. I have lived in the Bronx, New York for the majority of my life. In my younger years, I spent a lot of my time in the streets. I wasn't what you'd call a bad kid, but I didn't think twice about doing "bad" things if I thought I could benefit from it. By the age of twelve years old, I had stolen my first car. I was placed on probation for five years, because I was so young. At fifteen years old, I received my first gun charge. Summarily, throughout the years, there were many more arrests, a lot more charges and overall I've spent over 16 years of my life in the criminal justice system.

During this time, I found myself wondering how I had allowed myself to be in a position to have other people in control of my life. Prison is not just a lack of movement, options, or freedom. Correctional Officers are not concerned with keeping order amongst the prisoners. They prefer to strip away your dignity and self-worth. Guards abuse their authority whenever the opportunity presents itself. I felt like a slave on a slave ship or plantation. I went through different phases in jail. First, I focused on trying to beat my cases(s). Once it became evident that this was not going to happen, I worried about how much time I would get. After sentencing, I just went into survival mode, learning the social rules of prison and tolerating the mundane routines while counting off the days until I could live as a free man.

There is no justice in the prison system; it is designed to break minorities down both mentally and spiritually. In theory, the prison system is supposed to be a consequential punishment for various deviances. Instead, it is specifically designed to gather, break down, and weaken minorities, their families, and their communities. Prosecutors, Lawyers, and Judges lie and cheat to get a conviction with little regard for whether or not the correct person is being prosecuted—you know just—us.

Here's an example of the injustice I've personally witnessed. Three young black men, all from the same neighborhood, one was a very popular basketball player, another, his friend, who was not on the team but did attend school regularly. Lastly, the third young man was a known neighborhood drug dealer. An old woman from the neighborhood was viciously stabbed over 70 times and murdered in her home. The three men were each picked up as suspects based on the testimony of a known crackhead that lived across the street from the old woman's house. As the police researched the case, they find out that the old woman had recently had hit the number and won a substantial amount of money. Now oddly enough, during the same time the old woman's drug-addicted Grandson randomly shows up in town. The drug-addicted Grandson happened to be friends with the crackhead "witness" from across the street and was the person who discovered the body. With all this being said, rather than investigating the possibility that the Grandson may have murdered his Grandmother for the money; the District Attorney relocated the crackhead witness to a nearby hotel and took care of her financially as well as maintained her drug addiction until the Trial was over. The three young men were sentenced to LIFE in prison. WHERE IS THE JUSTICE IN THAT?

THIS is why I want to become a mentor. Everything that I know about prison, I've had to learn firsthand on my own. There were no warnings for me and then it was too late. I'd like to use all those negative years I lost sitting in prison and share my

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experiences in order to help the youth avoid the deathtrap called prison. I know that I can make a difference, and I will one kid at a time.