



A COMMUNITY SERVES TIME

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT KEITH MCQUIRTER

With so many families living with the impact of incarceration, it was important to find real stories that allow a rare glimpse into how incarceration impacts family systems and the community at large. The stories of Beverly Walker, Dennis Walton and Chad Wilson, give a rare lens into the daily lives of those living with incarceration. These human stories focus on what it is like to raise a family and care for aging parents with a loved one who is incarcerated, the on-going fight to curb the steady stream of black men entering the criminal justice system, and helping returning citizens rebuild their lives.

I look forward to this documentary becoming a part of the national dialog for change in our criminal justice system, and I hope it will open up the hearts and minds of audiences who may be exposed to this crisis for the first time. The change is already catching fire and the policies are being reformed in the US congress as I write this statement. I hope we continue to see reforms that will further unite families, eliminate racial disparities and keep examining and finding new solutions to treat old problems.

In 2008, I visited a correctional facility in New Jersey for research for a documentary film project. It was my first time visiting a correctional facility of any kind. As I sat in the cafeteria with the general population, and listened to community leaders give speeches about what's in store for the men when they return to society, I couldn't help but be stunned by what I saw a sea of young Black men around my age and who looked like me. Intellectually, I've always been aware of the staggering number of black men incarcerated in America, but after seeing it for myself firsthand, I left the facility physically sick and deeply disturbed.

Here I was at the beginning of my career and here they were, nearly one hundred young men, serving time and eventually re-entering society marked as felons. The barriers stacked against them to better their lives and their family's lives were vastly more challenging than anything I would ever experience. Statistically, half would probably be returning to the same or a similar correctional facility in the near future. Even more disturbing is the fact that in most cases, their children and grandchildren will follow.

Coming from a black family that hails from the Deep South, my grandparents' and parents' generation fought on the front lines of the civil rights movement. They worked and fought their entire lives to break down barriers so that their families and communities of color could live better lives. That fight continues to this day, but for a long time stopped at the gates of the criminal justice system, where communities of color continue to be systematically decimated by its policies and practices nationwide. Additionally, a booming market for privatized prisons has turned inmates into a very lucrative commodity in the business sector. All this and my unresolved experience in 2008, led me to Milwaukee's ZIP code 53206, 2.7 square miles that holds the title of the most incarcerated ZIP code in America.

I firmly believe that the civil rights movement has never ended, but rather continues to keep pressing forward with each new generation. The fight for change is never easy, but it is a necessity if we are to keep striving for a better society.