

# Vera Institute of Justice

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/key-takeaways-from-pod-save-the-people-live-show>

### Public Facing Advocacy Writing

This weekend, inspired by crowd-sourced [suggestions of the best criminal justice podcasts from 2017](#), we attended and live-tweeted the first-ever live show from the popular social justice podcast, Pod Save The People, hosted by DeRay McKesson, Sam Sinyangwe, Clint Smith, and Brittany Packnett. We also were able to go backstage to meet the hosts and obtained exclusive behind-the-scenes footage from the show.

Hosted every Tuesday, the podcast brings people into conversations about critical social justice and cultural issues, particularly as they relate to race, incarceration, and policing. Sundays Black History Month showtaped in Washington, DC in front of an audience of nearly a thousand fans shed light on how we can all work toward building The World We Want to Live In, as the episode is aptly titled. In a charged conversation, the hosts along with special guests Wesley Lowery, national reporter for the *Washington Post*, and Ben Jealous, Democratic candidate for the governor of Maryland discussed the direction our country is taking, and harnessing the power we have to affect change.

#### Building the World We Want to Live In Takes Work And Resistance

The team at Pod Save The People created the show so Americans could learn the historical context behind some of our country's most pressing social issues and have the information they need to be thoughtful agents of change. However, DeRay cautioned that people are more in love with the idea of resistance than the work of resistance. He recalled how he and other Black Lives Matter activists initially faced doubt about the methods of their movement: marching, taking to the streets, and demanding accountability for police violence. I remember in the early days in Ferguson, people told us we were doing it wrong that we should call, we should email, he said. It took a while for people to realize that it wasn't just Ferguson that had a problem. It was America that had a problem. Wesley Lowery spoke with the crew about his responsibilities as a journalist in this regard. People want to see something. They want to change something. I have a role in that moment to ask those basic questions to empower people to build the world they want to live in.

#### Understanding Dualities in American History

Clint Smith read a powerful poem as a letter to the five U.S. presidents who owned slaves while in office. When you wrote the Declaration of Independence, did you ever intend for black people to have freedom over their bodies? he recited. The promise of the Declaration of Independence has not rung true for most of America's history, particularly for people of color who have endured systemic oppression and discrimination since the country's founding. In many respects the words of the Declaration still do not ring true. Mass incarceration has devastated communities of color creating obstacles for reentry and accessing voting rights, among other things. Indeed, as Smith pointed out, to understand American history is to recognize that it is full of complex dualities between white Americans experience and history and black Americans experience and history. We have to hold those dualities together at once in order to understand the full context of who we are as a country, he said.

#### The Quiet Trauma of Incarceration

The hosts also opened up a conversation on the daily, quiet toll that incarceration has on so many Americans. We want folks to imagine something different. We have gotten so used to people being locked up, us throwing away the key, and we all move on and pretend these people aren't people anymore, Brittany said. What is going to take for us to make a different calculation about how we rehabilitate people and include their dignity in that conversation?

#### The Importance of Diverse and Representative Media

Of course, the hosts had to talk about Black Panther. The critically acclaimed cultural phenomenon has already broken box office records, but is even more astonishing in its depiction of nuanced, diverse black characters. When people of color and young people in particular see themselves on screen in roles predominately reserved for their white counterparts, they're able to imagine a future where they're not just superheroes, but also directors, actors, writers, and filmmakers. When people talk about the importance of Black Panther, it is that black people aren't an allegory in the future, DeRay said, black people are real whole beings in the future.

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