**“Glen’s Parallax Perspectives”** is a series of TV programs offering fresh ways for people to see issues such as foreign policy, social and economic justice, governmental functioning, the environment, and so forth. We provide voices and viewpoints that are rarely heard in mainstream media.

**Mainstream media, politicians, and culture see the world in conventional ways. Therefore, in order to solve problems, we need to see things in fresh ways.** Glen Anderson created this TV series to help people see things differently so we can solve problems at all levels from the local to the global.

This series title refers to “***parallax***,” which is the view you get by looking from a different perspective. For example, put one finger in front of your nose and another finger farther away. Close one eye. Then open that eye and close the other. Your fingers will seem to move. This is called a “parallax” view. **This TV series invites you to look at issues from fresh perspectives.**

Each program airs three times a week (currently every Monday at 1:30 pm, every Wednesday at 5:00 pm, and every Thursday at 9:00 pm) for the entire month on Thurston Community Television (TCTV), channel 22 for cable TV subscribers in Thurston County, Washington. TCTV is part of Thurston County Media. You can see their schedule at [**www.tcmedia.org**](http://www.tcmedia.org)

**You can also watch the program summarized below through your computer** at [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org). All episodes of “Glen’s Parallax Perspectives” are posted on this blog’s “TV Programs” part and also in one or more of the categories listed in the right side of the blog home page. Also, see information about various issues at the category headings at [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org).

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**🡪 I saved this document in Word format with live links.** If this document does not load or print properly for you, please e-mail me at **glenanderson@integra.net** and I’ll promptly send you the links you request.

**🡪 Please invite other people to watch this video and/or read this thorough summary through these parts of my blog,** [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org)**: “TV Programs” and “Criminal Justice” and “Parallax Examples.”**

“Fresh Insights into Felony Sentencing”

Glen’s Parallax Perspectives TV Series

August 2022

Glen Anderson (360) 491-9093 **glenanderson@integra.net**

**Glen introduced our topic and our guest, Nazgol Ghandnoosh:**

This month’s interview on “Glen’s Parallax Perspectives” provides fresh information and insights into prison sentences. Besides discussing several **problems** about felony sentencing and imprisonment, we will also discuss some **solutions** that deserve more public awareness, support and implementation.

Even if you are already fairly well informed about felony sentencing, you will learn a lot more from this interview. If you are not already well informed, you will learn a lot!

An expert guest will help us explore this topic. I am happy to welcome Nazgol Ghandnoosh. She earned a Ph.D. in sociology and wrote her doctoral dissertation about reducing long prison sentences.

Nazgol works for a non-profit organization, The Sentencing Project, where she conducts research on criminal justice policies. She has written about racial disparities in the justice system, public opinion about punishment, and the scope of reform efforts. She writes extensively and speaks to a variety of professional audiences.

Her latest report, “A Second Look at Injustice,” is a comprehensive analysis of a growing, powerful tool to curb mass incarceration. The “Second Look” is a set of policies that enable extreme sentences to be re-evaluated. At about 30 minutes into this interview, we discussed the “Second Look” remedy that Nazgol has researched and written about.

Glen welcomed Nazgol and began the interview.

**We summarized the past few decades of the overall public and political climate about crime and felony sentencing:**

Glen said that in the 1960s a huge number of Americans started opposing long-standing racial injustices. People started to recognize that racial biases were pervasive throughout American culture. But – for a few years starting in 1965 – riots occurred in many American cities, and some white people reacted against the Civil Rights Movement and wanted to clamp down on African Americans again.

Richard Nixon and some other prominent politicians who were insensitive to racial injustice reframed the issues as a breakdown of **“law and order**” in order to make white Americans afraid of Black Americans, and to stop the Civil Rights movement. For several decades the U.S. experienced politicians rising to power with **“tough on crime”** platforms that especially aimed at hurting racial minorities. Federal and state legislatures passed laws to criminalize more behavior and impose longer sentences.

Glen said that now we are emerging from that era – thanks to a variety of many organizations working for smart reforms, including The Sentencing Project, where Nazgol has been doing good work.

Before we explore specific problems or solutions, Glen asked Nazgol to **summarize** the **overall political climate** of those past few decades regarding crime and felony sentencing.

Nazgol said Glen’s summary captured a lot of those decades’ realities and the need for our political climate to move ahead. She said the U.S.’s prison population had massively increased from 1972, when about 200,000 persons were in prisons, to 2009, when the prison population peaked at 1.5 million persons. This was a 700% increase. She said we have made smarter decisions since then to moderately reduce prison populations, and we’ll discuss some solutions later in this interview. She said the period of growth from 1972 to 2009 was quite dramatic. Other nations – along with the U.S. – experienced higher crime rates, but other nations did not expand their prison populations like the U.S. did. She said crime rates have been declining a lot since the 1990s, but the U.S. continued its policies of mass incarcerations, even while crime was declining.

Glen said that many other modern, wealthy, industrialized nations do more than the U.S. to humanize their prisons and conduct rehabilitation. Some Scandinavian countries are especially humane and effective.

**We did not have time to mention this new report from The Sentencing Project:**

“New Report Debunks Widespread Myth of Youth-Led Crime Wave” -- The Sentencing Project’s announcement of its recent article starts with these two paragraphs: A [**new analysis**](https://click.everyaction.com/k/46496922/350529032/832816259?nvep=ew0KICAiVGVuYW50VXJpIjogIm5ncHZhbjovL3Zhbi9FQS9FQTAxNS8xLzkzOTE0IiwNCiAgIkRpc3RyaWJ1dGlvblVuaXF1ZUlkIjogImEwNGM5NTRiLWVhZWItZWMxMS1iNDdhLTI4MTg3OGI4M2Q4YSIsDQogICJFbWFpbEFkZHJlc3MiOiAiZ2xlbmFuZGVyc29uQGludGVncmEubmV0Ig0KfQ%3D%3D&hmac=APu92so3F0-lFkClTguJDibkFGXLq3q5xF61CGcHRBQ=&emci=3ee764f4-4beb-ec11-b47a-281878b83d8a&emdi=a04c954b-eaeb-ec11-b47a-281878b83d8a&ceid=10196583) from The Sentencing Project debunks the widespread narrative that youth crime exploded during the pandemic. The report finds scarce evidence of a new youth-led crime wave. Rather, most of the data suggests that rates of violence among people under 18 have been flat or declining.

The share of crimes in the U.S. committed by youth has fallen by more than half over the past two decades and continued to fall for all major offense categories in 2020 (the most recent year for which data is available). Additionally, the overall number of offenses categorized by the FBI as violent (murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) committed by youth declined in 2020.

**We summarized the past few decades’ changes in sentencing and imprisonment:**

Glen showed on the TV screen some graphs that Nazgol had provided to illustrate some changes during recent years in rates of sentencing and imprisonment.

Nazgol explained that this first graph shows the gigantic increase of the U.S.’s state and federal prison populations from 1925 to 2019. The surge began in the late 1970s. She said many people know that 2.2 million is the total population – including local jails – of incarcerated Americans. The 1.5 million figure she had mentioned before – and this graph – does not include those persons. Local jail sentences are usually less than one year, while state and federal sentences are usually for one year or longer. The recent decline in incarceration is very small, compared to the massive increase, so Nazgol said we must work harder and smarter to reduce prison populations.



Next Glen showed on the TV screen another graph Nazgol had provided:



This graph compares the U.S. and other nations in their rates of incarceration per 100,000 population. We imprison people at about 6 times the rate that Canada does. Some European nations have much lower rates.

Nazgol mentioned, “We’re closer to other nations that we don’t typically consider ourselves to be peers with.” She said we think Russia has a lot of problems, but the U.S. imprisons people at about twice the rate that Russia does.

Glen added that when we look at various other indicators of human rights and well-being (such as voting turnout rates, health care outcomes, etc.), the U.S. ranks down those lists below dozens of other nations.

**We debunked the myth that long sentences deter crime. We explained that long sentences imprison many persons who are elderly and no longer dangerous. Long sentences increase medical costs without protecting public safety.**

Glen said that many injustices occur because people assume things that are not true, and people do not have the information necessary in order to make smart decisions about public policy. Many people assume that long prison sentences deter crime. He asked Nazgol to summarize what the actual research shows about that assumption.

Nazgol began by explaining why this is such an important question. She said one reason why so many people in the U.S. are given long sentences and why so many people languish in prison – compared to other countries – is that sentences in the U.S. are excessively long.

The U.S. does have a relatively high rate of violent crime – especially crimes involving guns – but even so, the U.S. imprisons people at a much, much higher rate than other industrialized nations. She said the reasons for this include (1) the “war on drugs” and (2) the greater likelihood of going to prison nowadays instead of getting community supervision, and (3) prison sentences are much longer than they used to be – and also compared to other nations.

She said that recently some American prison officials and criminal justice reform leaders have visited other nations (Germany, the Netherlands, and so forth) to learn about those nations’ prisons. Many prisoners there have explained to the American visitors the crimes they had committed and asked how long their sentences would have been if they had done those crimes in the U.S. She said those European prisoners have been astounded when the Americans said how long their sentences would have been in the U.S. for the exact same offenses.

Nazgol repeated that one of the reasons the U.S. imprisons so many people is that courts in the U.S. impose such terribly long sentences. She said this problem occurred because policy-makers passed “mandatory minimum” laws and so-called “truth in sentencing” laws that required people to serve much more of their sentences than had been required before. She rebutted the assumption that longer sentences would make our society safer.

Actually, she stated that The Sentencing Project’s research has **proven** that long sentences are **not only ineffective** but they are also **counterproductive** to the goal of advancing public safety. She identified a few reasons for this:

(1) Long sentences are not effective at deterring people from committing crimes, because most people do not expect to get caught. Also, people who commit crimes under the influence of drugs or alcohol are not even thinking about getting caught. We need to address those underlying problems instead of mistakenly thinking that long sentences will deter them. In fact, she pointed out, assuming you won’t get caught is not an unreasonable expectation. She said in July 2022, CBS reported on the “clearance rates” [the rates of crimes that are solved with arrests made]. During the pandemic the “clearance rate” for homicides dropped to only 50%. You’d expect homicide cases to be solved and person arrested, but this happens only half of the time. She added that criminologists keep proving that increasing the certainty of being punished is more important than increasing the severity of the punishment.

(2) People age out of criminal activity. She said most people do not commit crimes after ten years have passed since their initial crimes. When you incarcerate people for more than a decade, you are imprisoning people who no longer are a risk to public safety.

(3) People are serving very long prison sentences keep getting older, so they develop health problems and require increasingly expensive health care. If a prisoner needs to go to a hospital, several guards must go with the prisoner. There are much more effective ways to spend this money to improve public safety. It makes no sense to continue incarcerating people in their 40s, 50s, 60s, and beyond.

Glen said that when he talks with people about long sentences, he says they are actually sentencing taxpayers to waste a huge amount of our money to imprison people who are no longer a threat to society. Long sentences hurt taxpayers.

Also, he said long sentences also break up families. A short sentence allows a person to return to their family and help the family get going again, but a long sentence is very likely to break up the family. He said that our society likes to think that we care about families, but NO we do NOT, because we impose long sentences that break families up.

A few years ago, The Sentencing Project launched The Sentencing Project launched the Campaign to End Life Imprisonment ([**Campaign to End Life Imprisonment**](http://endlifeimprisonment.org/)) to engage the public about the consequences of long sentences and support advocacy efforts to reduce the use of life imprisonment. We need to end mass incarceration, so a smart strategy is to reduce the number of life sentences and stop them altogether.

**We provided information about various problems caused by life sentences:**

Glen said that the past few decades of “tough on crime” mania has caused many, many people to be serving life sentences. When we were preparing for this interview, Nazgol told Glen that more than 200,000 Americans – 1/7 of all prisoners nationwide – are serving life sentences. She told him that 19% of persons in Washington State’s prisons are serving life sentences.

Nazgol provided a .pdf document with a number of graphs. The Sentencing Project posted them to their website at this link: [**https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf**](https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf) The final three graphs in this 8-page document show some of the realities of life sentences. Glen showed those three graphs on the TV screen, and Nazgol explained them to us.

She said The Sentencing Project tracks the numbers of people in each state who are serving life sentences with – and without – the possibility of parole. They also track what she called “virtual life sentences” of 50 years or longer. The 200,000 Americans (1/7 of all prisoners) who are serving life sentences illustrate the extremely high rates of punishment in the U.S.

She pointed out that if we really want to end mass incarceration, we really must scale back the extremely long sentences that are so common. The Sentencing Project recommends completely ending life imprisonment. She said a number of the U.S.’s industrialized peers have completely moved away from life imprisonment. The U.S. has not even ended life imprisonment without parole for youths, but we have scaled that back.

She said most people who are serving life sentences were convicted of murder. She said even these people who had committed horrible crimes do age out of criminal activity, so after 10, 15, or 20 years in prison. Therefore, when someone stops being a risk to public safety, we should reintegrate them into society – and invest the financial savings into practical ways to reduce serious crimes.

We showed on the TV screen a graph of the dramatic increase from 1984 to 2020 in the numbers of persons serving sentences. (It’s on the upper right corner of page 8 of this .pdf: [**https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf**](https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf)) She said The Sentencing Project recommends limiting most sentences to 20 years.

Glen said the graph on the top left of that page shows how sharply sentences of Life Without Parole have increased from 2003 to 2020. On that graph, the shorter bar on the left shows the increase in sentences of Life WITH the possibility of parole, while the very tall bar next to it shows the dramatic increase in sentences of Life WITHOUT ANY POSSIBILITY of parole.

Below that, the pie chart shows that 30% of persons serving life sentences are aged 55 or older. Nazgol repeated now what we had said a few minutes ago: only a very, very few of these people are still a danger to society. Nazgol said that the data have proven this. In fact, when older people have been released from life sentences, those people have just about the lowest rate of recidivism.

Glen said that just now he remembered that decades ago when George Wallace was the right-wing “law & order,” “tough on crime” Governor of Alabama, he used convicted murderers from prison to be his servants in the Governor’s Mansion. He used convicted murderers from prison because he would not have to pay them, and he knew they were safe to work in his home. Glen said Wallace’s 1968 presidential campaign was not only racist, but also “law & order” and “tough on crime.” Glen mentioned that shortly before Wallace died, he repented of his racism.

**We did not have time to mention these facts:**

Ashley Nellis, Ph.D., (another professional at The Sentencing Project) produced this highly informative report: [**Our analysis of life imprisonment**](https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/no-end-in-sight-americas-enduring-reliance-on-life-imprisonment/): [**https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/no-end-in-sight-americas-enduring-reliance-on-life-imprisonment/**](https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/no-end-in-sight-americas-enduring-reliance-on-life-imprisonment/)

The Sentencing Project released an extensive [**analysis**](https://click.everyaction.com/k/46857874/352074818/-531514161?nvep=ew0KICAiVGVuYW50VXJpIjogIm5ncHZhbjovL3Zhbi9FQS9FQTAxNS8xLzkzOTE0IiwNCiAgIkRpc3RyaWJ1dGlvblVuaXF1ZUlkIjogIjQzYzZjY2IwLWZlZjItZWMxMS1iNDdhLTI4MTg3OGI4M2Q4YSIsDQogICJFbWFpbEFkZHJlc3MiOiAiZ2xlbmFuZGVyc29uQGludGVncmEubmV0Ig0KfQ%3D%3D&hmac=Bm5QZWNxV-HsnZU0AiAhdkdGfcIe_nciaWDuCc4HsJU=&emci=0c9f579b-9cf2-ec11-b47a-281878b83d8a&emdi=43c6ccb0-fef2-ec11-b47a-281878b83d8a&ceid=10196583) of 40,000 people serving life without parole (LWOP) in the United States, revealing that almost half (47%) are at least 50 years old.

[***Nothing but Time: Elderly Americans Serving Life Without Parole***](https://click.everyaction.com/k/46857875/352074819/-531514161?nvep=ew0KICAiVGVuYW50VXJpIjogIm5ncHZhbjovL3Zhbi9FQS9FQTAxNS8xLzkzOTE0IiwNCiAgIkRpc3RyaWJ1dGlvblVuaXF1ZUlkIjogIjQzYzZjY2IwLWZlZjItZWMxMS1iNDdhLTI4MTg3OGI4M2Q4YSIsDQogICJFbWFpbEFkZHJlc3MiOiAiZ2xlbmFuZGVyc29uQGludGVncmEubmV0Ig0KfQ%3D%3D&hmac=Bm5QZWNxV-HsnZU0AiAhdkdGfcIe_nciaWDuCc4HsJU=&emci=0c9f579b-9cf2-ec11-b47a-281878b83d8a&emdi=43c6ccb0-fef2-ec11-b47a-281878b83d8a&ceid=10196583), authored by Ashley Nellis, Ph.D., The Sentencing Project’s Senior Research Analyst, investigates demographic, crime, and sentencing data of individuals in 20 states serving LWOP,  which represents three-quarters of people serving LWOP nationally. [**Click here to read the full report.**](https://click.everyaction.com/k/46857876/352074820/-531514161?nvep=ew0KICAiVGVuYW50VXJpIjogIm5ncHZhbjovL3Zhbi9FQS9FQTAxNS8xLzkzOTE0IiwNCiAgIkRpc3RyaWJ1dGlvblVuaXF1ZUlkIjogIjQzYzZjY2IwLWZlZjItZWMxMS1iNDdhLTI4MTg3OGI4M2Q4YSIsDQogICJFbWFpbEFkZHJlc3MiOiAiZ2xlbmFuZGVyc29uQGludGVncmEubmV0Ig0KfQ%3D%3D&hmac=Bm5QZWNxV-HsnZU0AiAhdkdGfcIe_nciaWDuCc4HsJU=&emci=0c9f579b-9cf2-ec11-b47a-281878b83d8a&emdi=43c6ccb0-fef2-ec11-b47a-281878b83d8a&ceid=10196583) The analysis shows that:

* 47 percent of people serving LWOP are at least 50 years old.
* 60 percent of the elderly imprisoned serving LWOP have already served at least 20 years.
* Half of aging people serving LWOP are Black and nearly 60 percent are people of color.
* One in 7 of the elderly LWOP population was under 25 at the time of their offense.
* In ten years, even if no additional LWOP sentences are added in these states, 30,000 people will be 50 or older.

**Felony sentences are too long for crimes involving VIOLENCE and also crimes NOT involving violence. We also discussed the criminalization of drug use.**

Glen said that many people do not realize that many people serving long sentences were sentenced for crimes that did NOT involve ANY violence. These include thefts, financial crimes, drug crimes, and so forth. He said he wants people to understand sentences for crimes that did NOT involve violence.

Nazgol said she encourages people who are thinking about the prison population to estimate what portions of the inmates were sentenced to prison because they committed violent crimes vs. those sentenced for crimes not involving violence. She said that actually most people in prison had been sentenced for violent crimes, including robbery and assault, along with more serious crimes such as rape and homicide. She said the longest sentences typically get imposed for the most serious violent crimes.

But, she said, for the prison population overall, lower-level violent crimes are very prevalent. If we want to end mass incarceration, we need to pay attention to the crimes people have committed and the length of those sentences. We must reform the sentencing for all kinds of crimes – including those involving violence – and we also must reduce the sentences for nonviolent crimes, such as drug crimes and property crimes. A significant number of people in state prisons had committed crimes that did not involve violence. She said federal prisons also include people who had nonviolently broken immigration laws.

Glen showed on the TV screen a graph that Nazgol had provided comparing jail and prison time for **drug** offenses in 1980 and 2019. (It’s on the upper left corner of page 3 of this .pdf: [**https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf**](https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf))

Three pairs of vertical bars show numbers for 1980 (gray) and the huge increases for 2019 (red). The first pair of vertical bars show state prisons, the second pair shows federal prisons, and the third pair shows local jails. The increases during those four decades were truly gigantic.

Glen said that a person who has a drug problem needs treatment, not imprisonment. They need healing and rehabilitation and other services so they can function in their lives without the drugs. However, instead of solving the problem, the U.S. and our state and local governments cruelly imprison them and make the taxpayers suffer.

Nazgol agreed. She said this chart shows imprisonment in state and federal levels, especially targeting people who have sold drugs, and many of them also has substance abuse problems in their own lives, so they sold drugs in order to fund their own habits. She said a good remedy would be to make sure that anyone who has a drug problem has **immediate** and **free** access to **effective** treatment for their drug problem.

Also, she said that many people who have drug problems commit property crimes and violent crimes that are related to their drug problems – for example, either while under the influence or in order to get money to buy drugs. If we had universal access to **immediate** and **free** and **effective** treatment, fewer of those crimes against persons and property.

Glen said his previous study of these problems has shown that there is a rather limited window of time during which a troubled person is eager to get treatment, but after a while that window closes. Instead of putting people on a waiting list, we should make treatment **immediately** available as soon as a person wants treatment, instead of adding them to a waiting list for some future time. Without **immediate** treatment while they are interested, they’ll be back into the habit again after that window of opportunity closes. Nazgol agreed about this.

Glen said our drug laws are set up with the intention of punishing people instead of solving problems. He said they are evidence of bad politics.

Nazgol agreed. She said the politics appeal to people’s emotions so they will feel good about sending people away for harsh punishment instead of solving the root problems. Also, she said, if someone is incarcerated for a reason related to their drug problem, let’s make sure they get access to some of the best drug treatment possible. But most institutions around our country do not offer access to effective, professional quality drug treatment.

Nazgol said that incarcerated people with opioid addictions generally cannot access effective therapy. This failure to provide therapy in prisons makes our nation’s opioid crisis even worse. Without therapy to kick their habit, people who are released pick up the habit again, and research shows they are at especially high risk for overdosing and dying. Our incarceration system keeps the deadly cycle going.

Glen said he keeps seeing data showing that while this is a very serious problem in the U.S., other nations take smarter actions to solve the problem. He said other countries use “harm reduction” strategies instead of punishment. They know some people will use drugs, so they create systems that allow people to use drugs safely (providing safe spaces, providing fresh needles instead of sharing them, etc.). Those nations treat drug use as a public health concern, but the U.S. sees it as a crime, so we punish people instead of reducing the danger, and we force taxpayers to pay too much for NOT solving the problem.

He said the U.S. has big, capitalist pharmaceutical companies that have made huge amounts of profits by producing huge amounts of opioids, advertising them in the “free market,” and sometimes violating laws about reporting suspicious prescriptions. These Big Pharma companies are the worst “drug dealers,” so they must be held accountable, but Congress and law enforcement agencies let Big Pharma get away with their abuses.

We did not have time for Glen to add that other countries’ governments fund health systems that provide high quality care for every person in their nations instead of the U.S.’s capitalistic system that rations health care based on ability to pay.

**We discussed racial disparities in crime victim rates – and racial disparities in prosecutions and sentences:**

Glen said that racial disparities occur throughout every sector of American society – very obviously in the criminal justice system and also in all other sectors.

He said many white people jump to conclusions about race-related matters that are not valid – either because they simply do not know some important facts, or because they have been herded into a racist back alley of baloney.

He said one stereotype assumes that Black people tend to kill White people. Actually, however, Black people are disproportionately the victims of homicide. He invited Nazgol to help us understand the facts.

She said homicide offenders and victims both tend to be members of each other’s same racial group. She said that in the U.S., Black people are disproportionately victims of homicide. She said the higher rates of homicides among Black people are consequences of the pervasive racial disparities that exist in our society.

Concentrated urban poverty makes crime worse. We must solve the poverty and other systemic injustices that end up making Black people more likely to be the victims of serious violent crimes, including homicide.

She said if racial residential patterns were reversed – with Black people living in affluent suburbs and White people being poor and living in dense urban settings – we would see a higher rate of homicides among White people.

She said the racial inequality within the criminal justice system actually has its roots in our overall society’s broader inequality, including various kinds of racial disparities in housing, economics, employment, education, and so forth. If we want to make Black Americans as safe as White Americans, we need to address all of those kinds of disparities.

She added that when she discusses racial disparities and crime rates, she wants people to understand more than just those numbers. She explained the graph that Glen showed on the TV screen. (It’s on the bottom of page 5 of this .pdf: [**https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf**](https://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf))

She said this graph was based on research done a while ago and needs to be updated. It shows that among people born in 2001, men are much more likely than women to be imprisoned at some point in their lives, and the likelihood of Black men being imprisoned is 1 in 3. They are 6 times as likely as White men to experience imprisonment at some time during their lives. She said the rates have improved a little since this research was done. She said Latinx men are 3 times as likely as White men to be imprisoned. Racial disparities for women also exist. She said these numbers pertain to people serving sentences of a year or more in prisons, not people spending less time in local jails.

She pointed out that the criminal justice system treats people of different races differently for drug crimes. So, for example, even though Black and White people possess and use marijuana at similar rates, Blacks are much, much more likely to be arrested and also to be sentenced more harshly. She thanked the ACLU for their great research on this. She said these disparities occur regarding other kinds of drug offenses, property crimes, and so forth. Wide disparities occur regarding who is stopped and searched, who is arrested, who gets longer sentences, and so forth.

She said – even beyond the racial disparities that exist throughout our society – the criminal justice system introduces additional disparities in outcomes. For example, wealthier persons are treated better than poorer people in our criminal justice system. They are more likely to avoid pre-trial detention. They are more likely to be able to afford a skilled defense attorney. They are less likely to go to prison – and if they do, their sentences are likelier to be shorter. She said in the U.S., White people are likelier than Black people to be wealthy, so race/wealth disparities persist here.

Nazgol said that in order to eliminate racial disparities in the criminal justice system, we need to do two things:

(1) We must address the sources of disparities in the system; and

(2) We must address the differences in criminal offending in serious crimes by solving problems in economics, housing, education, and so forth.

Glen said we keep coming back to the need to deal effectively with systemic issues, which also include the politics and the stereotypes. Politicians avoid dealing with the systemic issues; they try to change the subject and blame people instead of actually solving the underlying problems.

The Sentencing Project (the organization for which Nazgol works) analyzed recent facts about racial disparities in incarceration. This report summarizes their analysis: [**https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/**](https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/) Scroll down to read the full report and/or download the .pdf.

The Sentencing Project also reported this about racial disparities: [**https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/black-lives-matter-eliminating-racial-inequity-in-the-criminal-justice-system/**](https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/black-lives-matter-eliminating-racial-inequity-in-the-criminal-justice-system/)

**We did not have time to mention these facts:**

In the State of Washington, the Black incarceration rate is 5 times the white incarceration rate. Other states also have big disparities.

Some drug laws impose harsher sentences for offenses that occur near schools. In urban areas, schools are pretty much everywhere, so drug laws in school zones impact people in urban areas more than suburban and rural areas. This is another way in which poor and minority people suffer more than rich or White people.

The most racially disparate outcomes come from Black killers of White victims.

On October 11, 2018, in *State v. Gregory*, Washington State’s Supreme Court unanimously ruled the state’s death penalty unconstitutional because of a very, very long history of being applied in an arbitrary and racially discriminatory manner.

An interesting aspect of gender disparity in violent crime is the grossly disproportionate rate of mass murder by men instead of women. While mainstream media do report on mass shootings, the media almost never point out clearly that nearly all mass shooters are male – and that “toxic masculinity” is a serious factor in gun violence. Here is the link to an article about this bias in news reporting: [**https://fair.org/home/mass-shooters-most-common-trait-their-gender-gets-little-press-attention**/](https://fair.org/home/mass-shooters-most-common-trait-their-gender-gets-little-press-attention/)

**We discussed the political pressures on legislators, law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, judges, parole boards, etc.:**

Glen said that systemic causes of injustice include the various kinds of pressures that are put upon legislators, law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, judges, parole boards, and so forth. He said each of these entities has a hand in various parts of the criminal justice system, so we really must recognize the political pressures that are imposed upon them and – therefore – distort the outcomes, because these entities really do bend to accommodate those pressures.

For example, he said a prominent well-known psychiatrist interviewed people who had retired from long careers as prosecutors and as judges. These retirees told the psychiatrist that they did knowingly distort their professional behaviors because of those pressures, and they did knowingly convict innocent persons. Only now – after they had retired – did they feel free to tell the truth about those gross injustices. Glen said that – likewise – when legislators feel that the voters want them to be “tough on crime,” they will enact laws that they know are grossly unjust. He invited Nazgol to any anything further about these kinds of systemic pressures and problems.

Nazgol said that an extremely powerful role is performed by the media, including journalists and editors. She said they have a strong responsibility to report accurately about crime-related issues. She said research has proven that the media overrepresent people of color as criminal offenders. She said the general public does not know that crime rates in the U.S. have been falling since the 1990s, because media keep reporting so vigorously about crimes. She said TV news broadcasts often lead their broadcasts with a story about a violent crime. She said much reporting is irresponsible – and also fails to inform people about the fact that people who have served long prison sentences are very unlikely to reoffend. She said that if news media would do a better job of informing people about the realities, we could better hold elected officials accountable so they would produce better public policies.

Glen agreed with Nazgol. He said that his July 2022 TV program is all about how to recognize and counter the biases in mainstream news media. People can watch that interview video – and/or read a thorough summary like the document you are reading now – at this link: [**https://parallaxperspectives.org/recognize-and-counter-mainstream-media-bias**](https://parallaxperspectives.org/recognize-and-counter-mainstream-media-bias) He said his guest for that TV program is an expert from a non-profit organization that researches and publicizes bias in mainstream news media. Those kinds of biases misinform – and actually dis-inform – the public with wrong information that leads lead to bad public policies.

He added that a well-known slogan about the kinds of news stories that are featured most prominently in newspapers and news broadcasts is: “If it bleeds, it leads.” So even when crime rates have been dropping since the 1990s, the public is repeatedly alarmed by biased news media’s reports that exaggerate how much crime actually is occurring now.

**We did not have time to mention these facts:**

Even when legislators pass laws that limit the discretion of judges to impose sentences, prosecutors still have enormous power and discretion in deciding what charges to bring. This is another source of injustice.

Legislators have passed “tough on crime” laws that make sentences long and interfere with allowing parole, even for people who are no longer dangerous.

In the rare instances when a recently released person does get into trouble, mainstream news media vigorously publicize those cases and frighten people unnecessarily instead of reporting that very little crime is caused by persons who have served long sentences.

Parole boards feel political pressures to deny parole to inmates who are safe to be released. Indeed, some families of victims want those persons to be paroled.

The extreme length of many sentences has skewed public understanding of what an extremely long sentence is. Even 5-10 years is often too long.

Solutions do exist – both for individuals who could be paroled or have their sentences commuted by governors – and for legislators and prosecutors who could recommend much shorter sentences. We need to educate the public and government officials about how to solve the problems we’ve been discussing during this TV interview.

**We discussed a little-known – but seriously unjust – concept: “felony murder.”**

Before we discussed solutions, we discussed one more problem that very few people know about.

The term “felony murder” is NOT a redundancy. The term means that people who did NOT actually commit a murder can still be convicted of murder if they had any tangential role in the crime – such as a lookout or driver. Nazgol researched and wrote an excellent report about this. People can read it here: [**Felony murder report**](https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/felony-murder-an-on-ramp-for-extreme-sentencing/)

Nazgol said that when she started researching this, she discovered that the kinds of charges that a prosecutor can file can be much more serious than the crime the defendant actually committed. So, for example, if you commit a burglary in the evening when nobody is home, this could be classified as a violent crime because somebody could have been at home.

She said that while all murders are felonies, not all crimes covered by “felony murder” laws are actually murders and are not necessarily intentional killings. Rather, this term describes a crime committed by two or more persons in which a victim is killed either deliberately or unintentionally. When this happens, everyone in that group could be convicted of “felony murder.”

In most states, these are treated in the same way as actual murders. She said this violates a key principle in criminal justice sentencing, which is “proportionality.” Somebody who committed a crime that was somehow connected with someone else’s crime of murder should not be sentenced as harshly as the person who actually committed the murder. This sets them up for a sentence of Life Without Parole (LWOP), when instead they should have been charged with something lesser, such as manslaughter. She said that in Washington State, LWOP is permitted as a sentence for “felony murder.”

She said her organization, The Sentencing Project ([**www.sentencingproject.org**](http://www.sentencingproject.org)) recommends repealing “felony murder” laws and treating those crimes as exactly what they are (*e.g*., burglary or manslaughter), instead of using the fiction of “felony murder.” She said the U.S. is unlike other nations in having these kinds of laws that result in such extreme penalties.

Glen thanked Nazgol for writing her report about this: [**Felony murder report**](https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/felony-murder-an-on-ramp-for-extreme-sentencing/)

**We discussed “second look,” a smart solution to excessively long sentences:**

**After discussing a variety of problems, we devoted the rest of the interview to ways of solving them.**

**We identified some smart solutions – including some that the general public does not yet know about.**

One very positive solution has been called a “second look” – a way to take a second look at sentences that had been imposed but now seem excessive. Nazgol explained that the “second look” concept has been recommended by legal experts, including those at the American Law Institute, as well as by The Sentencing Project. She said criminological research supports the “second look” solution.

She said that after someone has served a period of time in prison, they should be able to petition the court to have their sentence reviewed to determine whether it was excessive. Nowadays some sentences are shorter than what had been imposed, so a “second look” makes sense, because if the person were sentenced nowadays, they would likely have received a shorter sentence, especially if the person has been a good prisoner and has made progress toward rehabilitation. The person can ask the judge to release them or shorten their sentence.

She said that right now, very few jurisdictions allow a “Second Look,” but a growing movement is making this a new possibility. She said the American Law Institute supports looking at sentences in the light of new information about what actually works in sentencing and how to reduce crime rates. She said our improving norms and values also are helping us recognize that our society has gone overboard with excessive punishment.

She said one of the best examples of using “Second Look” is in Washington DC, where people who have served at least 15 years in prison for crimes they committed before the age of 25 can petition the courts for resentencing. She said that by July 2022, the “second look” has allowed more than 100 persons to be released from prison, and they have been tremendously successful in getting reintegrated into their community and staying safe and not reoffending.

She said Washington State passed a related law (SB 6164 in 2020) that is somewhat lighter than Washington DC’s law and is modeled after California’s “Second Look” law. Washington State’s new law allows prosecutors to ask judges to review sentences and shorten them. It would be better if prisoners could make requests to judges directly, but even allowing prosecutors to do this is a step in the right direction. Many persons in prison should have shorter sentences. The Sentencing Project produced this report on the “Second Look” concept: [**second look resentencing**](https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/a-second-look-at-injustice/).

Glen said throughout our nation’s history, positive reforms have popped up in various cities or states, and – if they seem to be working – they are copied by growing numbers of other cities and states until they become common. Eventually Congress or the U.S. Supreme Court can extend them nationwide.

He said he knows that when a good idea for legislation arises, the Washington State Legislature conducts research to find out what other states have done about it. The Legislature accumulates the best ideas from other states and develops them into legislation for our own state legislature to consider.

He urged people watching this interview – regardless of where you live – to find out what’s happening in your state and to urge your state to explore “Second Look” legislation. After a number of states have passed these reforms, eventually Congress passes such laws nationwide. The “Second Look” seems to be this kind of reform that needs to be replicated in many places.

**On August 5, 2022 (after we produced our TV interview), The Sentencing Project released news of a victory in Michigan. The first three paragraphs of their announcement said:**

Last week, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional a mandatory life without parole (LWOP) sentence issued to an 18-year-old because factors such as Kemo Knicombi Parks’s young age, maturity level, and prior trauma were not accounted for at sentencing. This decision builds on recent rulings from the U.S. Supreme Court which limited life without parole sentences for people under 18.

The Sentencing Project has been following these developments with great interest; our Campaign Strategist Alexandra Bailey has been on the ground in Michigan pushing for “Second Look” legislation that would allow individuals sentenced for crimes committed under 26 to seek a sentence review after serving ten years in prison.

As a result of this ruling, Parks is entitled to a resentencing hearing for a lower court to consider the attributes of youth as factors in determining the length of his sentence. Michigan now joins Washington State and the District of Columbia in extending to some emerging adults the U.S. Supreme Court’s precedent invalidating mandatory LWOP for youth under 18.

**We discussed some ways in which we have made progress recently:**



Glen said we have made some progress recently. He showed on the TV screen this graph showing trends in the prison population by offense type.

He said that after prison population had increased sharply since 1980, the prison population for violent crimes declined by 2% since 2009

Likewise, the prison population for drug offenses also had increased sharply since 1980, but the numbers of drug offenders in prison declined 34% from their peak in 2007.

The prison population of persons convicted of property decreased by 29% since its peak in 2007, after having increased from 1980 to 2019.

Nazgol summarized the data and pointed out the sharpest decline in prison population since 2007 was for people convicted of drug or property crimes. She said a much smaller percentage decline in prison population occurred for people convicted of violent crimes, even though the rate of violent crime was cut in half from the 1990s to the start of the pandemic. Large numbers of persons convicted of violent crimes remained in prison.

Glen repeated that the mainstream news media are not reporting adequately about these trends. He said mainstream news media have not gotten off the bandwagon of fear-mongering and a “lock them up and throw away the key” attitude. He said people who are watching this TV interview and/or reading this blog post need to write letters to newspaper editors, contact elected officials, and say we really can solve these problems. We really can make reforms, and we really can reduce prison populations. Let’s build a strong grassroots movement to reform our criminal justice system in a variety of ways.

He said some states are restoring voting rights for people who have left prison, and – better yet – a few states let people vote even while they are in prison.

He said we need to help people re-integrate into society after release, so restoring voting rights is one way to help this. So, also, are eliminating the ongoing penalties against eligibility for public services such as public housing and employment. Society hurts itself by holding a grudge against people who have served their sentences and need to get on with their lives.

**We did not have time to mention these facts:**

In North Carolina, theWake County Superior Court overturned North Carolina’s voting ban for people serving felony probation, parole, and post-release supervision, joining [**22 other states**](https://click.everyaction.com/k/46769952/351699843/1779809755?nvep=ew0KICAiVGVuYW50VXJpIjogIm5ncHZhbjovL3Zhbi9FQS9FQTAxNS8xLzkzOTE0IiwNCiAgIkRpc3RyaWJ1dGlvblVuaXF1ZUlkIjogImYwZjkxZjZjLTZhZjEtZWMxMS1iNDdhLTI4MTg3OGI4M2Q4YSIsDQogICJFbWFpbEFkZHJlc3MiOiAiZ2xlbmFuZGVyc29uQGludGVncmEubmV0Ig0KfQ%3D%3D&hmac=fkkPM9pVEO19z7EgxQ7vI06UVxKgGA-wxlrCez4hew0=&emci=6f277fba-b4ec-ec11-b47a-281878b83d8a&emdi=f0f91f6c-6af1-ec11-b47a-281878b83d8a&ceid=10196583) that allow all citizens who are not incarcerated to vote. This ruling re-enfranchises 56,000 North Carolinians—42% of whom are African American. In [***Community Success Initiative v. Moore***](https://click.everyaction.com/k/46769955/351699848/2003242844?nvep=ew0KICAiVGVuYW50VXJpIjogIm5ncHZhbjovL3Zhbi9FQS9FQTAxNS8xLzkzOTE0IiwNCiAgIkRpc3RyaWJ1dGlvblVuaXF1ZUlkIjogImYwZjkxZjZjLTZhZjEtZWMxMS1iNDdhLTI4MTg3OGI4M2Q4YSIsDQogICJFbWFpbEFkZHJlc3MiOiAiZ2xlbmFuZGVyc29uQGludGVncmEubmV0Ig0KfQ%3D%3D&hmac=fkkPM9pVEO19z7EgxQ7vI06UVxKgGA-wxlrCez4hew0=&emci=6f277fba-b4ec-ec11-b47a-281878b83d8a&emdi=f0f91f6c-6af1-ec11-b47a-281878b83d8a&ceid=10196583), the court concluded that North Carolina’s voting restriction violated the state’s constitution, “both because it discriminates against African Americans and because it denies all people on felony supervision the fundamental right to vote.”

Recently, a few reform-minded prosecutors have been changing local policies for the better.

While Washington State has somewhat reduced its prison population since its peak in 2017, our state’s pace of decarceration is less than elsewhere.

By the end of 1999, Illinois suffered serious embarrassment because many persons on death row were found to be actually innocent. In fact, Illinois had to release from prison about the same number of persons who were actually completely innocent that it had executed. In some cases, the police and prosecutors knew they were innocent but faced pressure to convict someone. In other cases, other problems led to the conviction and death sentences of innocent persons.

Illinois’ Governor Ryan, a Republican, supported the death penalty, but he wisely saw that the system was extremely broken, so on January 31, 2000, Governor Ryan imposed a moratorium on executions to create some time for a thorough study of how the death penalty was actually operating in Illinois. He appointed 14 experts from various backgrounds – evenly matched with 7 supporting the death penalty and 7 opposing it. Governor Ryan told them to examine anything and everything that pertains to the way Illinois practices the death penalty. They worked for two years and produced a report on April 15, 2002. Their report recommended 85 reforms for every step in the process, including police investigations, forensic testing, prosecutors’ decisions, jury selection, and so forth. Before the report came out, the governor had commuted all death sentences to life sentences, because he said the system so badly screwed up that it would be impossible for him to make decisions for commutation on a case-by-case basis.

Illinois finally abolished its death penalty in 2011. While this did not reduce prison population, it did abolish a horrible systemic tragedy of injustice.

For a number of reasons, the death penalty is a cruel compilation of various kinds of injustices. Abolishing the death penalty would reduce those injustices, even while it would not particularly reduce prison population. Even so, we should do everything we can to reduce injustices in every aspect of the criminal justice system.

**On August 11, 2022 (after we had produced the TV program), The Sentencing Project produced a new report on progress in reducing prison populations:**

Since 2000, 21 states have fully or partially closed at least one correctional facility and reduced correctional capacity in the United States by 81,444 prison beds, according to a [**new report**](https://click.everyaction.com/k/49082266/360770642/-2101241645?nvep=ew0KICAiVGVuYW50VXJpIjogIm5ncHZhbjovL3Zhbi9FQS9FQTAxNS8xLzkzOTE0IiwNCiAgIkRpc3RyaWJ1dGlvblVuaXF1ZUlkIjogIjViNDYyNDJiLThlMTktZWQxMS1iZDZlLTI4MTg3OGI4M2Q4YSIsDQogICJFbWFpbEFkZHJlc3MiOiAiZ2xlbmFuZGVyc29uQGludGVncmEubmV0Ig0KfQ%3D%3D&hmac=2oUM-uevrT5Qfeeu65Wyh21NWuRFNhnYao0zcIFgmXI=&emci=0753dddf-8519-ed11-bd6e-281878b83d8a&emdi=5b46242b-8e19-ed11-bd6e-281878b83d8a&ceid=10196583)released today by The Sentencing Project. This reduction in capacity reflects decades of work to reduce imprisonment rates in this country and growing public recognition that mass incarceration has not been a successful public safety strategy.

[***Repurposing Correctional Facilities to Strengthen Communities***](https://click.everyaction.com/k/49082267/360770643/-2101241645?nvep=ew0KICAiVGVuYW50VXJpIjogIm5ncHZhbjovL3Zhbi9FQS9FQTAxNS8xLzkzOTE0IiwNCiAgIkRpc3RyaWJ1dGlvblVuaXF1ZUlkIjogIjViNDYyNDJiLThlMTktZWQxMS1iZDZlLTI4MTg3OGI4M2Q4YSIsDQogICJFbWFpbEFkZHJlc3MiOiAiZ2xlbmFuZGVyc29uQGludGVncmEubmV0Ig0KfQ%3D%3D&hmac=2oUM-uevrT5Qfeeu65Wyh21NWuRFNhnYao0zcIFgmXI=&emci=0753dddf-8519-ed11-bd6e-281878b83d8a&emdi=5b46242b-8e19-ed11-bd6e-281878b83d8a&ceid=10196583)illustrates both positive outcomes and challenges faced in accomplishing decarceration and community reinvestment goals through the closure and repurposing of correctional facilities

**We discussed some additional reforms and solutions:**

Glen said some other kinds of reforms and solutions are possible. These include better access to defense attorneys and more reasonable ways of dealing with bail. He said he has read about a variety of reforms that people are working for – and sometimes accomplishing – in various parts of the country.

Nazgol said there is a nationwide movement to minimize holding people in jail pre-trial because they can’t afford bail. She said that people who are not a public risk are held pre-trial simply because they are poor. Some of them feel pressured to accept a plea offer that includes some incarceration. This disproportionately hurts Black people.

She also added that Washington State has made some progress for voting rights. The Governor signed legislation allowing people who are on community supervision (probation or parole) to vote. She said the only people in Washington State who are denied voting rights because of the criminal justice system are the approximately 15,000 who are actually in prison. But even this is not acceptable, she said, because Vermont and Washington DC allow people who are in prison to vote. She said The Sentencing Project would like the U.S. to join some of our peer nations in this pro-democracy reform. She said there is no reason why incarcerated persons should be prohibited from voting.

Glen mentioned another systemic injustice that cause dysfunctional disparities in the sentences for various kinds of crimes. Big business corporations can get away with cheating many people out of a total of many millions of dollars – or selling dangerous products that cause serious health damage or kill many people – with only a modest financial fine, while a poor person suffers prison time for property crimes involving smaller dollar amounts or assaults hurting only one or a few persons. Big business executives are almost never sentenced to prison, but ordinary people are given long prison sentences for much less serious crimes.

He said just a few days ago he read about a company that owns “online charter schools” and conducted a massive scam that involved enrolling thousands of students who never took any classes, [**as Voice previously reported**](https://voiceofsandiego.org/2019/06/12/inside-the-charter-school-empire-prosecutors-say-scammed-california-for-80m/). The company’s “online charter schools” raked in roughly $400 million from one state between 2015 and 2019, but not a single person from that business will spend even one day behind bars. The sentence was merely “home detention” for this $400 million theft from taxpayers. The news item is reported here: [**https://www.opednews.com/Quicklink/No-Jail-Time-for-Grifters-in-General\_News-Charter-School-Failure\_Diane-Ravitch\_Education-Funding\_For-profit-Education-220617-92.html**](https://www.opednews.com/Quicklink/No-Jail-Time-for-Grifters-in-General_News-Charter-School-Failure_Diane-Ravitch_Education-Funding_For-profit-Education-220617-92.html)

Glen urged people to pay attention to these kinds of disparities between ordinary people who are harshly sentenced, versus the people who have wealth and power who avoid serious sentences. He says we should pay attention to who is really doing more harm to society: somebody who stole $400 million in a massive fraud, or someone who holds up one retail location.

Nazgol expressed appreciation for raising this kind of issue, and she urged people to look not only at who else should be incarcerated, but also how we could prevent these crimes from happening at all – and how we could help victims recover from crimes. Trauma leads to crimes, and crimes cause trauma.

She said our criminal justice system does not provide the services and support that would help crime victims recover and heal from their experiences. In her professional work for reforming our criminal justice system, she has noticeably seen a number of organizations that advocate for victims and survivors say they are not seeking extreme punishment, because those do not help crime victims recover. She said these advocacy organizations want public policies that actually will prevent crimes from happening, and they want help so victims can recover and heal. She wants to elevate those voices.

Glen said we have giant business corporations that make a lot of money from oil, pipelines, plastics, etc., that have polluted the air and water, caused cancers and other diseases, and caused horrible problems, but those corporate executives never get held accountable in any way. He said that just yesterday he read an article that reported – even though we have laws against unsafe products – a federal law explicitly prohibits anyone from holding gun manufacturers accountable for producing their products that are so horribly unsafe that they kill many, many, many people every year. Congress refuses to hold them accountable. He said we must look at the big picture and recognize how big, rich capitalists that are “above the law.”

**We did not have time to mention these facts:**

Another systemic injustice is that a great many people cannot afford to hire skilled defense attorneys, and the public defenders are overloaded with cases, so many people simply cannot put on an adequate defense like rich people and big businesses can do.

There are pros and cons of limiting the discretion of judges in imposing sentences. On the one hand, we want to protect honest justice from judges who have racial biases or extremely cruel or punitive biases. Even without those biases, different judges might hand down very different sentences for the same crimes and circumstances, so legislatures (including Washington State in about 1981) passed laws to narrow judges’ discretion by setting up criteria and calculations for various details related to the crimes, the defendants’ prior behaviors, and so forth, in order to significantly narrow the range of sentences within which a judge can exercise discretion. But on the other hand, these “determinate sentencing” laws can restrict judges from appropriately considering unique circumstances on a case-by-case basis, so unfortunate sentences might be required outside of the prescribed range, instead of a wiser and more compassionate kind of sentence.

**Glen encouraged the public to consider their best values – and to get better
information – and to advocate for better public policies for smart solutions:**

Glen said that on every issue we discuss in this TV series, he always encourages the public to inform themselves and consider their best values to urge smart solutions, including better public policies.

Our nation’s current problems exist partly because of widespread public ignorance and some mean-spiritedness among some people who have power. If we inform ourselves and practice wisdom and compassion, we can urge our elected officials to create better public policies. He said sometimes the elected officials he has talked with seem poorly informed, but sometimes they say they know better but are afraid that they can’t do the very good things we need because they are feeling political pressures, so they tell me they will take only very small steps in the good direction.

He said that when we were preparing for this interview, Nazgol told him that some people in positions of power have put their jobs and careers ahead of a commitment to real justice. A few minutes ago, he said that many problems occur because of professional careers and jobs and income, rather than justice. Many retired prosecutors and judges know they were convicting innocent people, but they could not speak out until after retiring.

He said this is why ordinary people need to keep lifting up better values and making our voices known in the political arena, so we can empower officials to be ethical and fair.

**We discussed The Sentencing Project, the excellent organization for which Nazgol works:**

Glen said he invited Nazgol to be the guest for this TV program because she works for The Sentencing Project. He said the many years he has been reading information about the excellent work that The Sentencing Project does – in research and advocacy – and he has enjoyed providing financial support for The Sentencing Project. He encouraged people to visit [**www.sentencingproject.org**](http://www.sentencingproject.org) and learn more about the issues and this organization’s high-quality research and advocacy for longer than 30 years.

Besides Nazgol’s work, Glen also thanked Ashley Nellis, who researched and wrote the report we mentioned earlier about the stupidity of long prison sentences: [***Nothing but Time: Elderly Americans Serving Life Without Parole***](https://click.everyaction.com/k/46857875/352074819/-531514161?nvep=ew0KICAiVGVuYW50VXJpIjogIm5ncHZhbjovL3Zhbi9FQS9FQTAxNS8xLzkzOTE0IiwNCiAgIkRpc3RyaWJ1dGlvblVuaXF1ZUlkIjogIjQzYzZjY2IwLWZlZjItZWMxMS1iNDdhLTI4MTg3OGI4M2Q4YSIsDQogICJFbWFpbEFkZHJlc3MiOiAiZ2xlbmFuZGVyc29uQGludGVncmEubmV0Ig0KfQ%3D%3D&hmac=Bm5QZWNxV-HsnZU0AiAhdkdGfcIe_nciaWDuCc4HsJU=&emci=0c9f579b-9cf2-ec11-b47a-281878b83d8a&emdi=43c6ccb0-fef2-ec11-b47a-281878b83d8a&ceid=10196583).

He said he has produced and hosted a number of TV programs about criminal justice issues over the past 35 years, and this time he asked The Sentencing Project to provide an expert guest, and he is glad Nazgol Ghandnoosh was available.

He invited people to visit [**www.sentencingproject.org**](http://www.sentencingproject.org) and to donate financial support for The Sentencing Project’s excellent work.

He invited Nazgol to tell us about The Sentencing Project – and the work she does.

She said the organization has been active for more than 30 years. They research, report, and advocate for more fairness in the criminal justice system. She said they tackle racial disparities and gender disparities. They work with advocates at national, state, and local levels. They share their research, testify at legislative hearings, and reach out to the public for conversations such as the one we are having now. They also work with practitioners in the criminal justice field, so those folks can get the latest and best information, including patterns that affect justice and injustice. She invited people to visit their website to get informed and involved. She said informing the public and building a stronger movement are necessary in order to achieve our goals and end mass incarceration.

Glen encouraged people to learn more. This information is fascinating. He said he has been working on these issues for decades, but most people do not know enough, and the mainstream news media do not inform us well enough. As a result, the politicians are not sufficiently well informed, so they are not doing enough to solve the problems. He said we need to inform public officials so they will understand more – and we need to urge them to adopt smarter, more compassionate public policies.

**Many good sources of information exist:**

Glen encouraged people to learn more about the issues we have been discussing. He said many good sources of information exist. He said when he posts this TV interview to the “TV Programs” and “Criminal Justice” categories of his blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org), he also will post some links to good information, including the graphs we showed on the TV screen. These are sprinkled throughout this document y. Here are some more:

He said that besides [**www.sentencingproject.org**](http://www.sentencingproject.org), other good sources include the American Civil Liberties Union ([**www.aclu.org**](http://www.aclu.org)) and the Death Penalty Information Center ([**www.deathpenaltyinfo.org**](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org)). There are many more.

You can click the “Criminal Justice” category on his blog. The direct link to that is [**https://parallaxperspectives.org/category/criminal-justice-also-see-death-penalty**](https://parallaxperspectives.org/category/criminal-justice-also-see-death-penalty), and the direct link to his blog’s “Death Penalty” category is [**https://parallaxperspectives.org/category/death-penalty**](https://parallaxperspectives.org/category/death-penalty)

Earlier in the program we showed on the TV screen some graphs from an 8-page .pdf document about Trends in U.S. Corrections. Glen posted it to his blog at this link: [**https://parallaxperspectives.org/trends-in-u-s-corrections-an-8-page-pdf**](https://parallaxperspectives.org/trends-in-u-s-corrections-an-8-page-pdf)

A few years ago, The Sentencing Project launched the Campaign to End Life Imprisonment ([**Campaign to End Life Imprisonment**](http://endlifeimprisonment.org/)) to engage the public about the consequences of long sentences and support advocacy efforts to reduce the use of life imprisonment. We need to end mass incarceration, so a smart strategy to reduce the prison population is to shorten sentences, reduce the number of life sentences, and stop life sentences altogether.

Here is The Sentencing Project’s latest analysis about racial disparities in incarceration: [**https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/**](https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/)

The Sentencing Project also reported this about racial disparities: [**https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/black-lives-matter-eliminating-racial-inequity-in-the-criminal-justice-system/**](https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/black-lives-matter-eliminating-racial-inequity-in-the-criminal-justice-system/)

**Glen offered his closing encouragement:**

Glen thanked Nazgol Ghandnoosh for sharing her information and insights during this interview.

He also thanked the people who have been watching this interview.

He said he often hears people say that you can know how civilized a society is by seeing how they treat the people on the bottom rungs of society. People who commit crimes are stuck onto society’s bottom rungs. To improve our society, we need to understand the processes that put people there – and we need to reform the processes so those rungs are not so far down, and so people can be helped off those bottom rungs and re-join society so we can all live together in a truly fair society.

He encouraged us to apply wisdom, information, and compassion so we can solve the systemic problems in our criminal justice system.

And he asked people to invite their friends everywhere to visit his blog – [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org) – where they can watch this TV video and/or read the thorough summary AT ANY TIME from ANYWHERE long into the future.

You can get information about a wide variety of issues related to peace, social justice and nonviolence through my blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org)or by phoning me at
(360) 491-9093 or e-mailing me at **glenanderson@integra.net**

Glen ends each TV program with this invitation to help make progress:

**We're all one human family, and we all share one planet.**

**We can create a better world, but we all have to work at it.**

**The world needs whatever you can do to help!**