**“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, the environment, governmental functioning, 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).

Glen Anderson (360) 491-9093 **[glen@parallaxperspectives.org](mailto:glen@parallaxperspectives.org)**

**🡪 This document provides a clear summary of what we said in the one-hour TV program. I encourage people to watch the great interview – and ALSO to read this document for a great amount of additional information and many links to more sources of information.**

**🡪 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 [**glen@parallaxperspectives.org**](mailto:glen@parallaxperspectives.org) 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)**, including the categories for “TV Programs” and “Criminal Justice” and “Race.”**

**“Prison Sentences – Problems and Solutions”**

Glen’s Parallax Perspectives TV Series

April 2024

Glen Anderson (360) 491-9093 [**glen@parallaxperspectives.org**](mailto:glen@parallaxperspectives.org)

**Glen welcomed viewers. He introduced this month’s topic and Alexandra Bailey.**

The April 2024 interview on “Glen’s Parallax Perspectives” TV series provides fresh information and insights into prison sentences. Besides discussing several **problems** about prison sentences, we will also discuss some **solutions** that deserve more public awareness, support and implementation. He said that every program in this TV series discusses **problems** – and also **pivots toward solutions**. He said today’s interview will pivot several times.

Even if you are already well informed about prison sentences, you will learn a lot more from our expert guest for this interview. If you are not already well informed, you will learn a lot!

Glen said he was happy to welcome one expert guest who will help us explore this topic.

**Alexandra Bailey** works for a very smart non-profit organization called The Sentencing Project ([**www.sentencingproject.org**](http://www.sentencingproject.org)). Alexandra works as Senior Campaign Strategist at The Sentencing Project.

She is an expert on the facts about unfair prisoning sentences – and a savvy advocate for how to solve the problems.

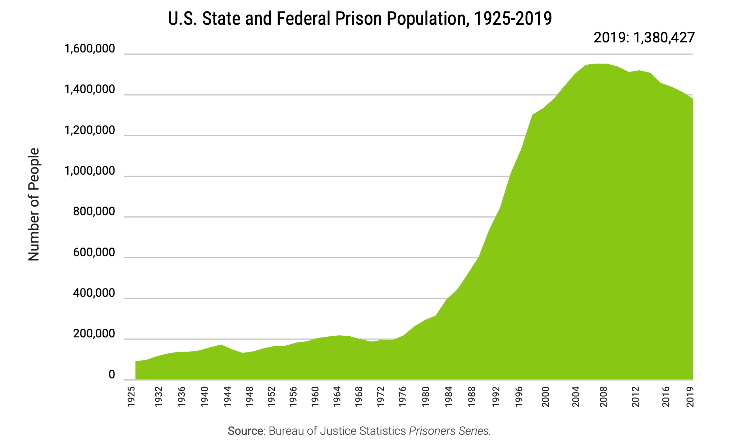
Before joining the Sentencing Project, Alexandra Bailey was a Campaign Strategist and National Organizing Specialist for the ACLU, and she also has worked for a variety of other social justice goals.

Glen welcomed Alexandra and anticipated a great interview. The viewers will have a good time, along with Alexandra and Glen enjoying this hour.

**Summarize the problem: Too many people in prison for too long sentences**

Glen said we’ll start by summarizing the problems. In the United States, too many people are sentenced to prison – and many sentences are too long. He shared some facts and showed two graphs. He said he would follow up by asking Alexandra to share some basic information. After that, we’ll explore other specific problems.

For a long time, state and federal prison populations were fairly stable, but a huge surge began in the late 1970s. A few years ago the total numbers of people in local jails and state and federal prisons reached about 2 million – more than any other nation on earth. Nearly everyone in **local jails** stays there for less than one year. This graph shows how many persons were in **state and federal prisons** from 1925 to 2019.



The next graph shows that the U.S. had the highest rate of incarceration per 100,000 population in a recent year:



The U.S. really is an outlier among the world’s nations. We imprison people at about 6 times the rate that Canada does. Alexandra added the interesting fact that the Canada prevents the U.S. from extraditing Canadians citizens who had committed crimes in the U.S. because Canada does not allow the kinds of sentences that the U.S. does. Canada does NOT have the sentence of “life without the possibility of parole.”

Some European nations’ rates are lower than Canada. Glen said that although the U.S. imprisons many people who have drug habits, European nations typically recognize drug use as a public health matter (not a crime), so European nations use public health methodologies to reduce drug use, while the U.S. – instead of solving the problem – simply throws people into prison.

Even though Americans criticize Russia’s abuses of people’s human rights, in this recent year the U.S. was imprisoning people at about twice the rate that Russia did.

El Salvador ranked #2 because they had recently elected an extreme right-wing government with a mania for attacking gangs and the drug sector.

**Recent decades of “tough on crime” laws made the problem worse**

Glen said he was eager for our TV viewers to hear from Alexandra, because she has such solid, interesting information, but he wanted to lay some basic information on the table first. He said that since the late 1970s, politicians have passed many laws to show voters that they are “tough on crime.” Those “tough on crime” laws made this problem worse, as the graphs show. He asked Alexandra to share information about those laws and policies – and what problems have those laws and policy changes caused.

Alexandra said she works as Senior Campaign Strategist at The Sentencing Project. She said the running joke in the office is that she is not the brains of the organization; she is “the muscle.” She reads the papers written by the organization’s very smart Ph.D. staff, and her job is to make sure state legislatures pass laws that will solve problems of mass incarceration.

She said she would answer Glen’s questions regarding both the federal level and the state level.

She said federal politicians keep claiming that crime is “out of control,” so they provoke fears to get themselves elected to Congress and the Presidency. She said they put ads on TV to frighten the voters as part of their scare campaign. They denounced “super-predators.” She said Ronald and Nancy Reagan promoted this vigorously when they were prominent.

She said the law changes included “mandatory minimums” that took away the discretion of trial judges to decide what sentences would be most appropriate. New laws imposed specific, harsh sentences within a narrow range of many years that judges would have to impose – and judges were prohibited from considering “mitigating factors” that should have been considered to make sentencing more fair.

Laws moved drug offenses into a felony range with severe laws and sentences. She said that until the late 1970s and early 1980s the federal government was not seriously concerned about “crack,” a variation of cocaine. But now “crack” was deemed to be “the #1 enemy,” she said. Glen added that “crack” is used more by African Americans than by white folks, so this provided an additional excuse to put more of those people into prison. She agreed. She said cocaine use had been increasing, but “crack” cost less than regular cocaine, so it hit poorer communities. Poor urban communities already had been suffering from job losses, “white flight” to suburbs, so the tax base had declined. She said the U.S. should have recognized this as a public health problem – and an economic justice problem – but it criminalized it and “tried to arrest their way out of this problem.”

If you were caught with even a tiny amount of drugs, you were subjected to a “mandatory minimum” sentence – and if you are caught more than once, she said that would subject you to an even more severe “mandatory minimum. A third time could put you in prison for the rest of your life (a “third strike”). She mentioned “no tolerance” policies in schools and some other places. Federal prison populations have been skyrocketing.

She said many states did what the federal government had been doing. In New York State, Gov. Rockefeller passed “the Rockefeller Drug Laws,” which led to a massive increase in “mandatory minimum” sentences and an escalating prison population. The problems are still continuing now, decades later.

She said feds started a bad idea, and many states jumped onto the bandwagon: “We want to do that bad idea too.”

Glen followed up on Alexandra’s brief mention of the “three strikes” phenomenon. He said that is a particularly stupid – particularly cruel – example of “tough-on-crime” laws. The U.S. has had some laws targeting “habitual offenders.” Some of these laws require a person who is convicted of an offence – after having been convicted of two previous serious crimes – to be sentenced to **mandatory life in prison**. Even here in Washington State – which is usually sensible – voters passed the U.S.’s first truly “three-strikes” law (Initiative 593) in 1993. He said he produced a TV program on that several years ago.

He said sometimes these laws are called “three strikes and you’re out.” Many Americans who know about baseball intuitively think that’s reasonable because they know about the baseball rule. But we should NOT be basing our criminal justice laws on baseball rules. He said a logical next step would be to pass another criminal justice law based on a baseball rule: Pass a “safe at home” law, so if you commit a crime and get home before the police catch you, you are “safe at home,” and you cannot be arrested.

Alexandra agreed that many of our laws and policies are ridiculous, but many Americans do want to be able to take our system seriously so they have a hard time seeing how ridiculous and arbitrary many laws and policies are. Many of them lack a factual basis.

Glen added that those are not “arbitrary” in the sense of “randomness. They are “arbitrary” in actually reflecting society’s and politicians’ biases, so they are designed to target certain kinds of people.

**Far too many sentences of “Life Without Parole”**

Glen said that research by Alexandra’s organization – The Sentencing Project – shows that violent crime peaked in about 1991, but life sentences kept escalating until 2016. He said we need to understand the weirdness that caused this.

The problem of life sentences is even worse with the increase in sentences of “Life Without Parole.” This means that – even if a prisoner has decades of good behavior – the prisoner can NEVER be able to earn parole and be released.

He invited Alexandra to use her critique of excessively long prison sentences by sharing information about the huge number of sentences of “Life Without Parole.”

She said this is a sensitive issue for many people, because people do care about victims. She said that before answering this question, she wants the TV viewers to know that she is a two-time survivor of violent crime. Someone who committed one of those crimes is serving a sentence of life without parole. She said that she is “not coming from a cheap seat” when she criticizes long sentences.

She said extremely long sentences do not serve any of the purposes that people assume they serve. They do not serve the public good. They do not really serve the survivors.

She said the overwhelming majority of persons sentenced to “Life Without Parole” are Black. Also, she said Black communities also contain the biggest numbers of survivors of violent crimes.

She said The Sentencing Project refers to some persons as “dual victims.” Many Black families have survivors of violent crimes – **and also** have family members serving life sentences for violent crimes. She said we need smarter strategies for stopping the cycle of violence.

“Life Without a Possibility of Parole” is not a workable solution. She said it is problematic in several ways:

**#1.** “People age out of crime.” For many decades the facts have shown that people’s brains do not fully develop until age 25 or a bit later, so young people are more impulsive and less able to fully recognize and calculate risks. Also, they are more susceptible to peer pressure and influences by societal forces. A very large number of persons serving those “Life Without Parole” sentences had committed the crimes when very young. For example, in Michigan, 60% of those persons had committed their crimes before the age of 26. Also, she said, Washington DC passed a law – the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act – which allows a “second look” at long sentences for person who committed their crimes at the age of 25 or younger, because now we understand that their young age means diminished culpability, so they could not understand their behavior as they could if they were older than that. Violent crimes by people in their 30s and 40s are rare, and almost unheard of by people in their 50s or older.

**#2.** This means that when you imprison someone for a crime they committed at age 20, and now they are 30 years into a life sentence, and they are 50 now, you have spent millions of dollars incarcerating them for 30 years – even though they are no longer dangerous. Aging persons have higher medical costs, so this costs taxpayers a lot too. Now we have imprisoned that person for most of their life – for no practical purpose, because they are no longer dangerous.

**#3.** She said when persons are released from prison after long sentences, they return to their communities wiser and serve as “elders” and “violence interrupters” who steer young people away from crime.

**#4.** She said she was an elected commissioner for a Washington DC agency that worked to reduce crime and violence. When those increased a bit, she mobilized her “violence interruption team,” which reached out and reduced the amount of violence there. She said this approach works.

**#5.** She said locking people up for long sentences does not work from a criminological standpoint, and it also interferes with establishing trust between communities and the criminal-legal system.

Glen added that **those ridiculously long sentences also are sentencing taxpayers to waste our money for no good purpose**. Alexandra said she likes that and wants to start using it.

Alexandra said she had the head of the Vermont Dept. of Corrections tell a powerful legislative committee that he was not running a hospital or a retirement home, so he begged the state legislators to stop filling his prisons with elderly persons. He told them that if they don’t stop imposing long sentences, he will be demanding more money every year, more money every year, more money every year, so he can deal with the elderly, sick population of inmates.

Glen invites readers of this document to see graphs from The Sentencing Projects about life sentences – and the aging prison population – at this link: [**file:///C:/Users/Glen/Documents/TCTV%20--%20Parallax%20Perspectives%20--%201-1-2021%20to%20\_\_\_\_\_/2022.08%20Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf**](file:///C:/Users/Glen/Documents/TCTV%20--%20Parallax%20Perspectives%20--%201-1-2021%20to%20_____/2022.08%20Trends-in-US-Corrections.pdf)

**Urge state governments to sharply reduce “Life Without Parole” sentences**

Glen said decent people want state governments to change the laws that force people into prison for extremely long sentences We’ve talked about laws that need to be changed. He asked Alexandra how to change them. Should we educate the public to change public opinion and mobilize them to lobby legislators?

Alexandra said this is her favorite topic! She said the answer really is “all of the above.” Let’s recognize that the state legislators and the governors work for us, the voters and taxpayers. We have a lot of power in deciding who holds power in the government. The politicians make certain decisions – and avoid making some other decisions – in order to keep themselves in power.

She said most taxpayers do not understand that they are being sentenced to wasting money on laws that do not achieve what they purport to achieve. She suggested four practical actions:

#1. She said The Sentencing Project ([**www.sentencingproject.org**](http://www.sentencingproject.org)) is running legislative bills in many states throughout the U.S., so she urged people to contact the organization and join its efforts to promote good bills and oppose bad bills in their respective states.

#2. She urged us to phone our state legislators and ask them what they are doing to reduce the huge prison population – which is increasingly geriatric – in our state.

#3. When relevant legislation arises, reach out to our friends and organizations to mobilize pressure on the legislators and tell them they have two options: EITHER really represent us by taking the action we want, OR we will replace them with a different candidate who really will represent us.

#4. She said that when we educate and mobilize the public (voters and taxpayers), we will either achieve our legislative goals or replace bad legislators with good ones.

**We should cap maximum penalties to 20 years**

Glen said he knows Alexandra has been urging states to cap the maximum penalties to 20 years. Even 20 years is a very long sentence. He said – based on what Alexandra has already said, this is NOT “soft on crime” and would NOT put society at risk. He added that – better than capping sentences – we should be changing society in positive ways to prevent crimes from even occurring. He asked her why capping sentence length would be a sensible reform.

Alexandra said she was part of a parole hearing for a man who had lost both of his legs and was forced to use a wheelchair. Also, he was blind, and he had cancer. She said the parole board did NOT want to parole him. She mentioned on a news broadcast about this man that she was a two-time survivor of violent crime, and she was NOT afraid of a person who could not see her, is weak from cancer treatment, and cannot walk. She said that person would NOT be able to catch her, but on the odd chance that he could, she said she would need to eat more fruit. The parole board made this case a ridiculous example of what is wrong with our prison sentencing.

Glen said we need to actively counter the “soft on crime” accusations that people might throw at us. He said he has been working very hard as a volunteer since the 1980s to abolish the death penalty. He said he testified this a number of times at Washington State legislative committee hearings. He said a few years ago a legislator reacted to his testimony by asking whether he knew any actual murder victims. Apparently, this legislator assumed that Glen’s opposition was merely an “armchair” or “academic” position. Glen replied, “YES!” He stated that four of his friends had been murdered in separate unrelated crimes over a period of several decades. He said that in NONE of those cases would the death penalty have been an appropriate remedy, and would have done nothing to solve the problem. He said his reply took the legislator by surprise.

Alexandra said her family came from Louisiana. She said the person who committed the violent crime against her was eventually sentenced to Life Without the Possibility of Parole. She said the trial began as a death penalty trial, and her family begged that the convicted person NOT be put to death.

Glen said there are organizations of victims’ families who oppose the death penalty. He said one is called Murder Victims’ Families for Reconciliation. He said members attend sentencing hearings, clemency hearings, and other official proceedings and strongly oppose executions. She said another group is Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice. She said research has shown that 60% of victims OPPOSE excessive punishment. They want rehabilitation and other positive alternatives.

Glen agreed that we need to solve the problems instead of keeping the cycle of violence going.

Here is a relevant resource explaining that the U.S. prison population is rapidly graying, but prisons are not ready for what's coming: [**https://www.wrvo.org/2024-03-11/the-u-s-prison-population-is-rapidly-graying-prisons-arent-built-for-whats-coming**](https://www.wrvo.org/2024-03-11/the-u-s-prison-population-is-rapidly-graying-prisons-arent-built-for-whats-coming)

**The “SECOND LOOK” remedy for sentences that are unfair or unjustly long**

Glen said that one of the smart remedies that Alexandra and other experts have been recommending to deal with sentences that are unjustly long or unfair in other ways is called a “SECOND LOOK.” She mentioned it earlier in this interview. Now Glen asked her why we need a “SECOND LOOK” – and how it would work in practice.

She held up her coffee mug, which promotes the Oklahoma Survivor Justice Coalition. She said this bill is working to pass Senate Bill 1470, which would allow for re-sentencing under certain circumstances.

She said Oklahoma is one of the largest incarcerators in the U.S. – and in the world. Oklahoma still uses the death penalty. Oklahoma has a long history as the largest incarcerator of women. Among our 50 states, Oklahoma has the #1 highest rate of domestic violence – and one of the highest rates of women killed by men.

Very often, police neglect to respond to women’s calls for protection from domestic violence such as rape or attempted murder – including while the assaults were underway. Sometimes a victim could find access to a gun and shoot the man while he was committing the assault. If the man died, the police, prosecutors and courts punished the victims. Many women are serving Life Without the Possibility of Parole because they were simply practicing self-defense to stop the violent assaults against them.

She said one example is what happened to April Wilkins. She was a repeated victim. Three rape kits languish waiting to be dealt with, and four restraining orders had been totally ignored. The system kept refusing to protect her. Next he kidnapped her, and she shot him. Now she is serving a sentence of Life Without the Possibility of Parole.

Alexandra said we need a law that lets us review cases whose sentences are grossly unjust and don’t make sense. She said those are called “Second Look” laws. They operate differently in different places. For example, she said, in Oklahoma the law would allow the possibility of re-sentencing in cases where coercion, control, trauma, or interpersonal violence were involved in committing that offense. She said in a state such as Oklahoma that has such horribly unjust conditions, a great many sentences could be affected. She said after the “justice” system had acted unjustly, this would allow justice to occur after the fact.

She said the Second Look laws do not provide a “get-out-of-jail-free card. They can allow the system also to look at how the person has changed and whether they would be safe now to release to society.

[**https://secondlooknetwork.org/page/about**](https://secondlooknetwork.org/page/about)

**How could we solve the problem of imprisoning survivors of domestic violence?**

Glen expressed support for Second Look laws. He asked Alexandra to tell us more about remedies – especially for victims of crime and survivors of domestic violence. They already have been victimized by abusers. They should NOT also be victimized again by our criminal justice system.

Alexandra said the problem is so bad that in Oklahoma many social workers and others who operate homes for survivors of domestic violence are supporting Second Look because they keep seeing police ignore calls to protect victims from domestic violence, but – if the attackers are shot – they go out and arrest the women. She said these advocates for Second Look are going beyond what their normal job of providing direct services because the system is so broken that they have needed to push for this legislation. She said that instead of working only at “the front end” of providing social work services,” they have joined with Alexandra and others at “the back end” of working to change laws about sentencing. She said their clients have become victims of the system that created a hammer and treats everything as a nail.

She said probably every American would say that if someone is trying to kill you or your child or your loved one – but the police refuse to help you even though you have asked them many times to protect you from your attacker – you should be able to protect yourself and not be sent to prison for the rest of your life simply because you were acting in self-defense.

She mentioned the name of a woman who was attacked in her home by a person who had been committing many acts of domestic violence against her. During this most recent crime, he stabbed her in her pregnant stomach, so – in self-defense – she shot him. He died, and she was sent to prison. His record showed that twelve other women had been victims of his domestic violence, and his attacks on one woman required her to use a wheelchair. His latest victim is serving a life sentence. Alexandra said that’s crazy – and she said any American would tell you that’s crazy.

She said the Second Look law would allow re-sentencing for this case and other grossly unjust sentences. She said this would help provide fairness for people who have really changed over their years in prison. Second Look also would help prisoners who are elderly, sick, or mentally ill, so they no longer belong in prison. Also, in some cases the system simply “got it wrong” and imposed unjust sentences that need to be reviewed and corrected.

**How are some states solving problems about prison sentences?**

Glen expressed appreciation for the smart, vigorous advocacy work that Alexandra and The Sentencing Project are doing. He said we have been discussing problems about prison sentences that are too long or unjust in other ways, and now he said that recently some states have started to solve those problems.

He invited Alexandra to tell us about the smart, compassionate solutions some states are considering – and enacting – to reduce unjust sentences and reduce prison populations.

Alexandra said they have more than a hundred pieces of legislation supporting “compassionate release” (for elders and disabled persons who are not a threat to society.

She said The Sentencing Project is supporting Second Look laws in a number of other states besides Oklahoma.

She said Virginia recently passed a law recognizing “good time credits” that can reduce people’s sentences if they behave well in prison.

She said these sensible laws are being promoted in states all across the nation – regardless of which political party controls those states – because they are sensible.

She said that when politicians passed “Life Without Parole” laws they did not think about the long-term consequences. Now prisons are full of inmates who are elderly, disabled, and very expensive to care for, but prisons are not designed or staffed or funded to provide necessary care for them.

**The recent “DC Crimes Act” actually worsens problems in Washington DC**

Washington DC is not a state. Its city government is controlled not only by locally elected city officials, but also by Congress. Alexandra lives in Washington DC. Glen asked her to explain two bad things that recently happened there:

(1) Glen said the U.S. House Oversight and Accountability Committee pushed forward a stupid, cruel bill called the “DC CRIMES Act.” Alexandra reminded us that George Floyd was suffocated to death on a street while a police officer kept his knee on Mr. Floyd’s neck for 8 minutes and 32 seconds, even though the victim kept saying, “I can’t breathe.” She said Washington DC passed some laws to prohibit such recklessly abusive police behaviors, but the “DC CRIMES Act” reverses those reforms. This new law also extends sentences, especially for young people, by sentencing them like adults. Instead, young people who make mistakes really need our guidance, our care, and better services, but this law is purely punitive.

(2) Glen said that the DC Council also passed the “Secure DC Crime Bill.” Alexandra said this was developed and aggressively promoted by one city council member who represents one of the city’s richest areas. This law is grounded in fear rather than facts, so it imposes more severe sentences. It allows the police to do very dangerous things (*e.g*., high speed chases in the city). Alexandra said many pedestrians had died from high-speed police chases, so those were stopped, but this bill reverses the public will and allows high-speed police chases. This bill tried to overturn Second Look, but the public pushed back and kept Second Look. We know it is very wrong and harmful for the criminal justice system to treat young people as adults, but this bill reverses recent reforms and does that again. Alexandra said Washington DC’s police already had a history of bad behavior, and this makes it worse.

Glen reminded our TV viewers that we need to pay attention and solve problems about our law enforcement system at all levels: federal, state and local.

Alexandra pointed out that any of us could have a mental health crisis. If we do, we should not be shot, put into a choke hold, or suffocated because of this health emergency. She said people don’t pay attention – and then when we watch George Floyd suffocate for 8 minutes, we notice – but then we forget again.

She said effective solutions do exist for mental health emergencies, and when they occur – to any of us – we need effective solutions, not police brutality.

Glen added that often the police act like an “occupying army” in a city. He said police departments often hire military veterans who have been trained to occupy areas where dark-skinned people live, so they transfer that training and experience to how they perform as police officers in American cities.

Alexandra said she came from a military family, and all three of her brothers – men of color – are serving in different military branches. She said that her brothers know that there are “rules of engagement” that must be followed. Troops are required to obey the “rules of engagement” in situations where violence may occur. She said local police here need “a reasonable, articulable suspicion” that a specific crime is happening. So, for example, she said the Constitution protects us from unlawful search and seizure.

**We must solve problems of bias based on race, economic class, and disability**

Glen said nearly all Americans know that justice is NOT “blind.” The criminal justice works differently depending on people’s race, economic class, gender, and disability, so we need to fix many aspects of our system to eliminate the injustices that are embedded in various parts of our system.

**North Carolina passed the “Racial Justice Act some years ago.  
What would it do? What happened to it?**

Glen said that since the 1980s he has been working very hard to abolish the death penalty everywhere. He was tremendously happy when in 2009 North Carolina passed the Racial Justice Act. This new law allowed defendants to change their death sentences to regular sentences of life in prison if they could show that racial discrimination had been a factor in their prosecution. He said extensive research has proven that racial bias affects how police conduct their investigations, how prosecutors decide which charges to bring, how jury members are chosen, and on and on and on.

Alexandra mentioned the legal concept of “strict scrutiny” regarding bias on any federally protected category (race, gender, religion, etc.) is a very, very high standard for courts to meet. She said police departments very often do not tell the truth about what happened in the events they’re working on, so racial bias in a case can be very hard to prove.

Glen said some defendants used North Carolina’s 2009 Racial Justice Act successfully. But in 2013 their state government repealed the law. He said he wishes other states would pass similar laws.

Glen said that in Washington State, where he lives, meticulous research proved that Washington State’s use of the death penalty has been thoroughly perverted by racial bias throughout all of our state’s history.

The problem is so pervasive that the Washington State Supreme Court UNANIMOUSLY ruled in 2018 that the death penalty is UNCONSTITUTIONAL because it is so arbitrary, cruel, and racist.

Alexandra said that it was during the “crack” epidemic that Washington State’s legislature abolished parole for new cases entering the system. Glen said he had first-hand experience in late 1979 conducting research for the state agency that managed prisons. That research led into House Bill 440, which passed in about 1981. That new law abolished parole for new cases and reduced judicial discretion (judges’ ability to make decisions based on factors on a case-by-case basis) with “determinative sentencing” that imposed sentences for a specific length of time (or within very narrow ranges) based on various factors.

**Restorative Justice is a bold, compassionate, practical alternative that protects the public without causing more problems**

Glen said people tend to assume that there is a straight line between “public safety” and “fairness” at opposite ends of a spectrum. People assume a “zero-sum” game in which to get more “public safety,” we have to sacrifice “fairness,” or to get more “fairness,” we have to sacrifice “public safety.” That assumption leads to bad public policy and gross unfairness – both to defendants and to victims.

Actually, it is possible to **improve both “public safety” and “fairness” at the same time**. For many years Glen has supported “RESTORATIVE JUSTICE,” which provides a bold, compassionate and practical alternative to the status quo. It protects the public while also providing authentic justice. **See the link below to his April 2010 TV program about this:** [**https://parallaxperspectives.org/tv-restorative-justice-and-restorative-practices**](https://parallaxperspectives.org/tv-restorative-justice-and-restorative-practices)

Alexandra shared more information and insights about what “RESTORATIVE JUSTICE” is – and how it works. She said she has witnessed this. The process brings together survivors and the persons who had hurt them, so they can talk in a safe setting. She said this process allows a lot of pain to leave the scenario. Our current system fails victims by not healing them, so they still suffer 10, 20, 30, 40 years later. Our system imposes extreme sentences but fails to provide victims the services they need (mental health, etc.). Our system does not even allow the perpetrator a way to meaningfully apologize and take responsibility for their offenses.

She said “RESTORATIVE JUSTICE” creates the opportunity to do all of these helpful things. It deals constructively with both sides of the scenario. It brings healing and responsibility to a very difficult situation. Outside of the brutal system, the victim and the offender can express what they want and need for themselves and each other. This is a much better and more wholistic process than our current system. She said this is the closest thing to a miracle that she has ever witnessed.

Glen said this has been part of some traditional cultures in some Native American communities, in various parts of Africa, and in other parts of the world. He said if somebody does something bad in their village, instead of simply expelling them from the village, they bring the whole village together to accomplish healing. The whole village learns what happened, learns how it affected the victim, creates the opportunity for the victim to speak on their own behalf, understands what the offender was experiencing, creates the opportunity for the offender to apologize and take some action to set things right, and restores the wholeness of the village.

Alexandra said serious bad behavior hurt the whole community, so restorative justice is what the community needs. Sending someone away to prison simply breaks the community apart and seriously hurts the prisoner.

Glen invites people to search the internet for “restorative justice” to learn more about it and find some great information resources and non-profit organizations working on it. A great organization working for restorative justice is Equal Justice USA: [**www.ejusa.org**](http://www.ejusa.org)

Click this link for “Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices” to watch Glen’s April 2010 TV program on the topic and/or read what we said during that interview: [**https://parallaxperspectives.org/tv-restorative-justice-and-restorative-practices**](https://parallaxperspectives.org/tv-restorative-justice-and-restorative-practices)

Furthermore, we really can RE-DESIGN public safety away from typical policing! See many resources at this part of Glen’s blog: [**https://parallaxperspectives.org/yes-we-really-can-re-design-public-safety-away-from-typical-policing-see-many-resources-here**](https://parallaxperspectives.org/yes-we-really-can-re-design-public-safety-away-from-typical-policing-see-many-resources-here)

National Urban League Unveils “21 Pillars,” A Comprehensive Framework for Redefining Public Safety: [**https://parallaxperspectives.org/national-urban-league-unveils-21-pillars-a-comprehensive-framework-for-redefining-public-safety**](https://parallaxperspectives.org/national-urban-league-unveils-21-pillars-a-comprehensive-framework-for-redefining-public-safety)

[**https://www.vera.org/news/looking-beyond-bars-to-meet-crime-survivors-needs?ms=cul\_comm\_all\_email\_Vera24\_ctr\_Mar13&emci=0adbd694-5bdd-ee11-85fb-002248223794&emdi=73212998-39e1-ee11-85f9-002248223848&ceid=254541**](https://www.vera.org/news/looking-beyond-bars-to-meet-crime-survivors-needs?ms=cul_comm_all_email_Vera24_ctr_Mar13&emci=0adbd694-5bdd-ee11-85fb-002248223794&emdi=73212998-39e1-ee11-85f9-002248223848&ceid=254541)

Read Howard Zehr’s books about restorative justice. They are easy to read and creatively insightful and practical.

**How could people take smart, effective actions?**

Glen said we have been talking about problems and solutions. He said governments are usually too slow to solve problems, so what we need is strong advocacy that will pressure governments. He said leadership and political pressure must come from the bottom up. One early step is to educate the public, so the public will join with us in wanting to solve the problems with the smart solutions we are urging.

He said if the politicians think they are doing what the public wants – but if their actions are stupid – we need to build a strong grassroots movement that will tell the politicians, “We do NOT want what you are giving us. We want these smart solutions instead.” If enough people use smart strategies to pressure the politicians, they will start moving our way and start solving the problems.

He said from time to time he offers FREE online workshops to help people strengthen their insights, skills and strategies for organizing grassroots movements to work on various issues. He invites people anywhere to contact me if you want to bring together a few persons to take these FREE online workshops to solve problems related to the criminal justice system – or other issues you care about. He is at (360) 491-9093 [**glen@parallaxperspectives.org**](mailto:glen@parallaxperspectives.org)

Alexandra added that if you don’t like what they are doing, you can tell them to do something else. And if they don’t do SOMETHING else, you can replace them with SOMEONE else.

Glen added that a number of excellent non-profit organizations are working with people nationwide to fix our dysfunctional criminal justice system in a variety of ways. Other excellent non-profits are doing this on other issues we care about (environment, climate, economic justice, human rights, foreign policy, etc.) ***See resources on pages 10-11***.

**Let’s work together to solve these problems.**

Glen said that long before people go to prison, they suffer various kinds of unfairness and injustices from problems in policing. We need to solve those problems too by organizing at the local level and for state legislative solutions.

Alexandra said the organization for which she works – The Sentencing Project – is doing a lot of high-quality work. She encouraged people to learn more by visiting [**www.sentencingproject.org**](http://www.sentencingproject.org). Learn about the specific issues they work on – and about the organization’s work in various states. She said she is listed on the website, along with other staff members. Sign up to receive e-mails, action alerts, and so forth.

She said the U.S. incarcerates so many people – more than any other nation – that “if incarceration made America safe, we would be the safest nation on earth.” Actually, she said, the U.S. usually ranks in the bottom 50% of the world’s nations in terms of public safety. She said we need to do new things. She encouraged the people watching this TV interview to become part of the grassroots movement we need.

**Promote The Sentencing Project,** [**www.sentencingproject.org**](http://www.sentencingproject.org)

Glen said he invited Alexandra to be the guest for this TV program because she works for The Sentencing Project.

He said that for a great many years he has been working for reforming our prison system. For many years he has been reading information about the excellent work that The Sentencing Project does – in research and advocacy.

For more than 30 years, the Sentencing Project has been researching, reporting, and advocating for more fairness in the criminal justice system. They have many great experts who conduct research and write smart reports identifying problems and proposing solutions. The organization’s experts tackle racial disparities and other systemic problems. They work with advocates at national, state, and local levels.

Because of this, Glen said 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 The Sentencing Project’s high-quality research and advocacy for longer than 30 years. He invited people to consider providing financial support, as he has been doing for a number of years.

**More sources of information**

Glen said a huge amount of information is available about various problems and solutions regarding prison sentencing. He encouraged people to learn more about the issues we have been discussing.

**More from Glen’s blog and TV programs:**

Glen said that when he posts this TV interview video to the “TV Programs” and “Criminal Justice” categories of his blog, [**www.parallaxperspectives.org**](http://www.parallaxperspectives.org), he also will post a thorough summary of we said during the interview. *(You are reading this now.)* This thorough summary also includes links to more information, including the graphs we showed on the TV screen.

Glen’s August 2022 TV program focused on felony sentencing. He interviewed a different expert from The Sentencing Project. You can also watch that interview – and/or read that program’s thorough summary – at this link: [**https://parallaxperspectives.org/fresh-insights-into-felony-sentencing-glens-august-2022-tv-program-and-more-resources**](https://parallaxperspectives.org/fresh-insights-into-felony-sentencing-glens-august-2022-tv-program-and-more-resources)

Glen’s August 2012 TV program features two guests who explain other ways to reform prisons and sentencing: [**https://parallaxperspectives.org/tv-how-to-reform-prisons-and-sentencing**](https://parallaxperspectives.org/tv-how-to-reform-prisons-and-sentencing)

Glen’s February 2017 TV program – **“Innocent, But 49+ Years in Prison, Including Death Row”** – interviewed someone who lived all of his life in Washington State. Dawud al-Malik was completely innocent of the crimes for which he was prosecuted and imprisoned for more than 49 years, including some years on death row. Dawud went to prison in 1966 at the age of 19, and was released on parole in February 2015. Despite the horrible injustices he experienced, Dawud survived with a warm sweetness about him. Our TV interview discussed his case – and the problems of racial bias and innocence in death penalty cases. Watch the video and/or read the thorough summary at this link: [**https://parallaxperspectives.org/tv-innocent-but-49-years-in-prison-including-death-row**](https://parallaxperspectives.org/tv-innocent-but-49-years-in-prison-including-death-row)

Glen’s blog has a category for “Criminal Justice” and another for “Death Penalty.” These links will take you there:

* [**https://parallaxperspectives.org/category/criminal-justice-also-see-death-penalty**](https://parallaxperspectives.org/category/criminal-justice-also-see-death-penalty)
* [**https://parallaxperspectives.org/category/death-penalty**](https://parallaxperspectives.org/category/death-penalty)

**More from The Sentencing Project:**

Earlier in the program we showed on the TV screen two graphs from an 8-page .pdf document about Trends in U.S. Corrections. Click this link to see the full 8-page collection of relevant graphs about trends in sentencing in the U.S.: [**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 in learning about the consequences of long sentences and to support advocacy efforts to reduce the use of life imprisonment. We need to end mass incarceration, so we need smart strategies 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/)

Another expert at The Sentencing Project is Ashley Nellis, who researched and wrote a smart report about the stupidity of long prison sentences: “Nothing but Time: Elderly Americans Serving Life Without Parole.” [**https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/nothing-but-time-elderly-americans-serving-life-without-parole/**](https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/nothing-but-time-elderly-americans-serving-life-without-parole/)

**Other organizations:**

Another organization conducting smart and effective research and advocacy is Vera ([**www.vera.org**](http://www.vera.org)). They work to end the overcriminalization and mass incarceration of people of color, immigrants, and people experiencing poverty. They work to accomplish safe, healthy, empowered communities and a fair, accountable justice system. See this link to an article about the issues we’ve been discussing: [**https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/People-in-Jail-and-Prison-in-2022.pdf**](https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/People-in-Jail-and-Prison-in-2022.pdf)

Here are some more good sources of information:

* American Civil Liberties Union: [**www.aclu.org**](http://www.aclu.org)
* Equal Justice Initiative: [**www.eji.org**](http://www.eji.org)
* Equal Justice USA: [**www.ejusa.org**](http://www.ejusa.org)
* Innocence Project: [**www.innocenceproject.org**](http://www.innocenceproject.org)
* Death Penalty Information Center: [**www.deathpenaltyinfo.org**](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org)

**Glen’s closing encouragement**

Glen thanked Alexandra Bailey for sharing her information and insights during this interview.

He also thanked the people who have been watching this TV program.

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

Please invite your friends everywhere to visit Glen’s 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 [**glen@parallaxperspectives.org**](mailto:glen@parallaxperspectives.org)

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!**