

JUST WORDS

The Stories of Working People In Our Community

Episode 11: Community Activists

Welcome to Just Words—the stories of working people in our community.

This is what former city undercover narcotics officer Larry Grandpre had to say about drug dealers in Baltimore City during an interview with the WYPR News department

They reject our way of life. Our morals, our traditions, our laws. They think that people who work 40 hours a week, that we're fools, that we are chumps.

I shared his thoughts with some community activists, each of whom has experienced incarceration in the past, at a meeting in East Baltimore, and listened as they responded to this view. They spoke of a tremendous gulf between what they see as the reality of their lives and how people on the outside see it.

Tim is 17 years old.

First of all, that is not true, and that is a problem right there why people disrespect people like that. If that was the case I wouldn't be sitting here right now. I'm 17 years old and work for the health department. So, for him to sit there and say that, that shows that they don't really care about us.

Walker Gladden is a former convict who now works as a youth coordinator at Rose Street Community Center.

Okay, there is a 1% that may feel that way. One of the reasons they do feel that way because, they being judged, but they don't understand how deep certain aspects of racism and other cultural barriers if you will. There was times I was out on the street where I periodically, I went and searched for jobs. One, I wasn't aware they was listening to my language, they was listening to how I was talking. You know, I went in there with straight up slang not knowing they was judging me according to that. They told me, I will call you back and things of that nature. And then, over a period of time, what's gonna happen, yeah I have developed a mindset like, Look, I don't want no job. They ain't gonna hire me anyway, so forget it.

Ray Cooke is an ex-con who runs a youth rec center called On Our Shoulders in West Baltimore.

When kids look at something they feel they are being denied, like that world, so then they say that is my enemy. So if you put that image out there that you in corporate America and you don't want to deal with these kids, that's judging them like Walker said. So what you do, you hate the thing that judged you. So you turn against it, and that's what happened. You pitting these two entities against each other, and that's what he did

17 year old Tim.

Ya'll want me to live the way you are living. But am not living like that because after my job is over, like Mr. Ray said, we still gotta deal with this 24/7 man, ya'll only got to deal with it from 9-5.

Ray Cooke.

The street is going to be the street. So don't ask him to come in there with the mentality of corporate America, because when he leaves that eight hour job, he has to step back into the jungle. Because the street is not changing, it is getting worse. It's getting worse.

Music: Grandmaster Flash, *The Message*



a 360° view of the people and stories behind the issues

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