

My Young Brothers And Sisters:

I've been in prison altogether for more than 20 years of my life. I hope that this brief message will get you to think about your future, the future of your family, and the future of America.

In your mind you probably feel that no one understands what you're going through - or what it's like being you. I can tell you that I understand, because I began my life of crime at the age of 13. Today, I am 38 years old and serving 35 years in a maximum security Federal Penitentiary. Looking back over my life, I never really had a true friend in the streets. The ones I thought I had got me sent to prison. I don't want to scare you; I do want to help you understand that there is no real love in the streets. There's only death and destruction. Most of the people who hustled with me when I was your age are dead or in jail.

I was led to believe that standing on the corner and selling crack cocaine would get me rich. It got me sentenced to Life plus 5 years in Federal Prison. By the grace of God my sentence was reduced last year to 35 years.

When people try to get you to sell drugs, what they don't tell you about is the penalties and consequences of it. I am in prison with thousands of young inmates serving Life without parole for selling drugs. In America, there are over 140,000 juveniles serving Life without parole for violent crimes. Their lives are all but gone. If they had to do it all over again, they would stay in school and learn as much as they can to be something in life. But life isn't that fair. It can't be done over again for them - it can be done over again for you.

I used to believe that guns could help me get the respect that I wanted. That was a lie. Carrying a gun and robbing someone when I was 16 years old got me sent to prison for 66 months. That was in 1988. Today, you can get a mandatory five years in Federal Prison just for carrying a gun. Times have changed. And when times change, so should you.

In closing, I want to ask you a few questions: Do you care about living? Do you want to end up dead or in jail? Or do you want to be free to live your life? I can tell you this - in prison you have no freedom and no life. Believe me when I tell you this: What you see on TV is nothing like living in prison all day, every day. Instead of expecting others to save you, I want you to consider saving yourself. It's so easy to do if you stop letting others think for you and you start thinking for yourself.

God Bless You,

Cedric Dean - Someone Who Really Cares About You