It is a great honor to introduce Professor Bryan Stevenson, my faculty colleague at NYU Law School and the founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama.

Bryan’s successes as a lawyer are legendary. His work has led to reversals, relief, or release of over 125 prisoners on death row. In recent years, Bryan has turned his attention beyond the death penalty, confronting other components of the criminal justice system. In *Miller v. Alabama*, one of several cases that Bryan argued and won before the U.S. Supreme Court, the Court held that a mandatory life sentence without the possibility of parole violates the Eighth Amendment if it is imposed on defendants under the age of 18 at the time of their crimes.
Bryan has also devoted significant attention to issues of racial and economic justice, and, in particular, to acknowledging the legacy of slavery, lynching, and racial segregation. Just last month, the Equal Justice Initiative, under Bryan’s direction, opened two significant institutions in Montgomery. The National Memorial for Peace and Justice is the nation’s first memorial dedicated to the victims of slavery, lynching, and racial segregation. It chronicles the lynching of more than 4000 African-Americans in a decades-long campaign of racist terror. The New York Times ran a long, powerful article on the Memorial with the title: “A Lynching Memorial Is Opening: The Country Has Never Seen Anything Like It.”

The Memorial’s companion, the Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, challenges visitors to reexamine the narrative of racial difference in the United States and shows the connection between the post-Reconstruction period of lynchings to the current high rate of executions and incarceration of people of color. In a 60 Minutes segment aired last month, Oprah Winfrey indicated that
“Stevenson wants people to understand that lynchings were not just brutal footnotes in history, they reflected a belief in racial differences that reinforced segregation in the 1950s and 60s, and … resulted in a pattern of unequal justice today.”

Bryan’s memoir, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* was selected by *Time* magazine as one of the "10 Best Books of Nonfiction" for 2014, and was among the *New York Times* "100 Notable Books" for the year. It won the 2015 *Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction* and the 2015 *Dayton Literary Peace Prize* for Nonfiction. Reviewing the book in the New York Times, Nicholas Kristof called Bryan “America’s Mandela.”

Bryan has received broad recognition for his work. In 1995, when he was only 36, he was awarded a MacArthur genius award. His 2012 TED talk, “We Need to Talk About Injustice” has been viewed by around 5 million people. Just last week, Bryan was awarded an
honorary degree by NYU. He has also received honorary degrees from a number of other institutions, including Williams College, Wesleyan University, and the University of Delaware. Fittingly, the American Bar Association’s Section of Civil Rights and Social Justice, gave Bryan its 2016 Thurgood Marshall award. Like Justice Marshall, for whom I had the privilege to clerk, Bryan is a brilliant legal strategist who is using litigation as a means to remedy the ravages of slavery. Just like Thurgood Marshall led the fight in the courts against segregation in the public schools in the 1940s and 1950s, Bryan Stevenson is now leading the fight against racial disparities in the criminal justice system, with a similarly sophisticated strategy and similar faith in the courts as instruments of redemption.

Rachel Barkow, my faculty colleague at NYU and a member of the U.S. Sentencing Commission said recently: “The efforts of Bryan Stevenson to teach Americans about the history of racial injustice in this country and how that history affects the present day is nothing short of heroic. One person really can change the world for the better.”
I feel so privileged to be Bryan’s colleague and I’m so grateful that he agreed to address us today.