



Chesa Boudin  
District Attorney

Thank you, Mayor Breed, for your kind words, for swearing me in after your own swearing in, just a few hours ago. I am excited to work with you and the rest of the leadership in this great city. We will go further together.

I'm so honored to stand here tonight. I have to start by thanking a few people who have been working so hard these last two months to get us ready for the serious tasks ahead.

Thank you Anne Irwin, Kate Chatfield, Cristine DeBerry, Simin Shamji, James Bell, and Emily Lee. I also want to thank Dylan Yep, Kelsey Love Russom, Lara Bazon, Dana Drusinsky, Becky Bond and the Real Justice Team, and SEIU 1021. Thanks to all of the judges, elected officials and community leaders who are here in the audience today. Hillary Ronen, thank you for your generous words and for being the very first elected official to support my campaign. And thank you Justice Sotomayor for your leadership, the example you set for all of us, your presence with us via video, and your words of support.

I am also grateful to all of you I did not name. So many of you have contributed to this movement for justice, not because you expect personal recognition, but because you understand that the fight against injustice is so much greater than any one person. It is a stage on which individual victories are victories for all. To all of you here today, thank you. Thank you for believing in me. Thank you for believing in change. Thank you for believing in humanity. And thank you for believing in our movement to make this great city safer and more just for all of us.

Finally, I want to mention a few more people without whom I would not be here.

My wife Valerie -- Thank you for your intelligence, your support, your love, your patience -- seemingly infinite -- and for being my best friend. You were our secret weapon during the campaign and, as an immigrant, you aren't even allowed to vote!

My mother Kathy, who is here today -- Thank you. Your incarceration lasted 22 years, but your love and support are endless.

And my father David, who can't be here today, who sits in a cage in a prison thousands of miles away. Thank you both. Your lives instilled in me lessons that continue to guide me, to give me clarity.

You taught me that we are all more than our worst mistakes.  
That taking responsibility for our lowest moments requires dignity and courage.  
That familial bonds can be stronger than steel gates.



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Even in maximum-security prison, you found ways to save lives through AIDS education and anti-violence trainings.

The crime you both participated in when I was an infant cost innocent men with families their lives. It did not matter to the DA or the judge that neither of you was armed nor that you did not personally hurt anyone. Those details matter to me. What matters even more is that since that terrible day you and my father have focused your lives on love.

Thank you for teaching me about forgiveness and redemption.

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This is not a day I could have imagined for myself as a child. As the son of incarcerated parents, the odds were not in my favor.

Like so many children with incarcerated parents, I struggled with guilt, anger, and shame. I fell behind in school and demonstrated behavioral issues.

I met my childhood friend, Lorenzo, in a prison visiting room -- our moms were incarcerated together. His mom was a casualty of the war on drugs and served nearly two decades in prison. We came from different worlds. He was poor, black, and an immigrant, while I was upper middle class, white, and US-born. He was every bit as intelligent as I was, and a role model for me. When I didn't learn to read until I was 9, my mother urged me to be more like Lorenzo, who excelled in school. When I'd throw a temper tantrum during a prison visit, he would gently calm me down.

Parental incarceration meant we both had a significant risk factor for incarceration ourselves. But I was adopted by friends of my parents who had the means to provide me with the help that I needed -- therapists, tutors, specialists, and big brothers. A vast network of family and friends afforded me the endless second chances I needed to overcome the odds.

My freshman year at Yale, I received a letter from my biological father. He had a new neighbor on his cell block in maximum-security prison. It was Lorenzo. I had privilege. Lorenzo did not. A few years later, Lorenzo was deported to a country he had never known even as I was on my way to Oxford. For him, the odds played out.

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Anyone who sets foot inside a criminal courtroom will see these odds play out time and time and time again -- an endless parade of predominantly Black and brown faces, nearly all of whom lack



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the opportunities that I was granted. Until we distribute opportunities with more equity, until the institutionalization of punishment and retaliation is replaced with the institutionalization of restoration and redemption, we will continue to fail those harmed by crime.

Our criminal justice system is failing all of us. It is not keeping us safe. It is contributing to a vicious cycle of crime and punishment. More than any country in the history of the world, we have the longest sentences, the largest prison populations, the most bloated law enforcement budgets, and the highest recidivism rates. We consistently fail to address the needs of survivors of sexual assault; to offer restitution to victims of property crime; to include non-English speakers; to heal the trauma caused by violent crime. These failures have led us, as a community, as a nation, to accept the unacceptable.

Join me. Join this movement. Join us in rejecting the notions:

That to be free we must cage others;

that to seek justice we must abandon forgiveness;

that to empower our protectors requires tolerating excessive force;

that to be safe we should put the mentally ill and addicted in cages; and

that jails and prisons should be the primary response to all of our social problems.

Over the course of the last few months, we've often seen my name beside the word "radical." But consider this: My friend, Angela Davis, who is here in the audience today refers to the Latin root of the word "radical" to explain: "Radical simply means, 'grasping things at the root.'" For too long, criminal justice policy has been shaking the trees, when the plant itself has rotted out. The solution lies beneath the surface.

In November, the people of San Francisco joined the chorus of voices in other jurisdictions across the country, from Philadelphia to Chicago, from Baltimore to St. Louis from Virginia to Vermont to say, "Enough."

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I begin fulfilling my promises today.

1. Today -- we prioritize giving victims of crime closure and a path to restoration.



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There are over a thousand cases in San Francisco where a member of our community has been harmed Someone who has waited over two years for their case to conclude.

We have already begun working to clear this backlog of cases. Accountability must be swift, certain, consistent, and predictable. By finding resolutions for old cases, we can address the needs of crime survivors and heal as a city.

2. Today -- we end. cash. bail. We end a system by which innocent people can be kept in jail because they're poor, while wealthy people who are guilty and dangerous go free.

3. Today – we end racist, punitive sentencing enhancements that punish people for who they are, where they live or something in their distant past rather than the harm they caused. Three strikes ends now in San Francisco. These enhancements have added years and decades to prison sentences. These “tough on crime” enhancements, borne of an age when children were referred to as “super predators” has destroyed communities, taking fathers, mothers, brothers, husbands, and sisters away from their loved ones. These sentences have not improved public safety. There is no evidence they deter crime. They do not rehabilitate those convicted. They do not heal victims. There will be no more baseball in the courtroom.

4. Today - we begin implementing a new and improved sexual assault response policy, with thanks to interim DA Loftus and Chief Scott for forwarding this initiative over the last two months.

5. Today, we will stop filing cases that arise from illegal searches following a minor traffic violation. For decades, people have decried the perils of “driving while black.” Black drivers in San Francisco are stopped five times more than their population would explain, and then searched three times more often than white drivers despite these searches being less likely to yield results. Finally, we act. Stop and frisk – whether done while walking down the street or while driving -- is a civil rights violation.

6. Today, we create a diversion program for primary caregiver parents under a new law authored by the Bay Area’s own Senator Nancy Skinner. Children should not grow up the way Lorenzo did.

These reforms are what we can implement immediately.

Here are a few of my priorities for the months and years ahead:

7. Auto burglaries. Unprecedented extreme wealth inequality in our city has contributed to an epidemic of car break-ins. The cost of repairing a single broken window can destabilize an entire



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working family and few victims ever see a penny in restitution. To address this property crime crisis, we will be rolling out a three-pronged response: First, in partnership with SF Safe, we will be piloting an initiative to detect and map the flow of stolen goods from car break-ins. Second, we will prevent auto-burglaries through a public awareness and education campaign. Third, in partnership with Supervisor Dean Preston, we will be sponsoring legislation to better meet the needs of victims.

8. Immigration. We will launch an immigration unit -- one that builds trust between our immigrant communities and the justice system. When we fail to consider immigration consequences for those we prosecute, there is no equal justice. When immigrants are fearful of deportation, of illegal acts by ICE, and refuse to cooperate with law enforcement, we are all less safe.

9. Victim's rights. Our work will yield the most comprehensive restorative justice program in the country. Restorative justice saves lives. I know this because it saved mine. Victim services, especially for limited English speakers and marginalized communities, is a critical and under-resourced part of the criminal justice system. Every victim of every crime will have a right to participate, dramatically expanding the options of those harmed by crime to heal while also holding those who caused the harm accountable.

And we are just getting started.

But I want to be clear -- this vision, these ideas -- they are not novel. We did not win because we pioneered this vision. We won because we amplified the voices that for decades have resisted mass incarceration. Finally, our city, and so much of our country is ready to leave the racist, inhumane, ineffective "tough on crime" policies in the past.

We must work together. We will partner with the police, the sheriff, the highway patrol, the department of public health, and with all of the agencies and community groups that share a commitment to making this city safer and more just. Our perspectives and experiences are different. There will be disagreements, but our cooperation and shared goals will prove resilient. All of us on this stage, all of us in city government, all of us in this room -- we will go further together.

Criminal justice reform does not stand on its own. It does not begin and end with police, prisons, and prosecutors. It is deeply intertwined with human rights, with civil rights, with health care justice, housing justice, with education justice, with climate justice. To treat the root causes of crime,-- to be radical -- we must restore victims of crime, we must ensure that everyone has access to basic social rights.



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This movement. This movement for civil rights, for human rights is often remembered for the big things -- the Supreme Court cases, the record-breaking demonstrations, the actions of extraordinary leaders. It may be remembered for the big things, but it is defined by the little things. It's the compassion and care demonstrated by a friend supporting a victim of crime. It's the volunteer that teaches creative writing at San Quentin. It's the person who exhibits compassion towards our un-housed neighbors. It's the elementary school class that walks in a climate justice march through the streets of the Mission.

The movement is remembered for its successes, but it is defined by the relentless effort of individuals, of so many individuals, to demonstrate compassion and empathy and courage in their everyday lives.

Our victory is not the end of the road. We have won an opportunity and we still need you because the road ahead is unpaved. Adversity is inevitable and we must learn from it. Our successes will be many, but most will be quiet. A young woman achieves sobriety. A man in crisis is arrested, but treated with clinics, instead of cages. A child remains united with her family. A crime is prevented. These successes will not be televised, but they are transformative. We envision a new, more humane, more effective path, and we must pave it together.