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SEARCH



## Kids Shouldn't Face Dying in Prison

**Jason Baldwin**

*Freed after 18 years in prison as member of "West Memphis 3"*

I grew up in prison.

In 1994, I was sentenced to juvenile life without parole for a crime I did not commit. Had my life not changed last year, I would have died there.

I lived for 18 years with people who committed serious crimes as kids. I lived with them when Bill Clinton gave his first State of the Union address. When DVDs came out. When the planes hit the Twin Towers. When Barack Obama was elected.

I lived with them 10 months ago.

In 1994, there were kids serving life without parole that I thought deserved it. They were convicted of murders and showed no remorse. Why shouldn't they die in prison?

But then, like kids do, they changed.

It sounds so obvious to say that you aren't the same person you were when you were a kid, but I saw people in prison who were punished forever as if they'd never be more than the worst thing they had done as a kid -- as if, no matter what, they'd never change or be worthy of the chance to prove they might deserve release.

That's why I was thrilled to see that the Supreme Court this week recognized yet again that kids are different when it ruled in *Jackson v. Hobbs* and *Miller v. Alabama* that it's cruel and unusual punishment to impose an automatic sentence of life without parole on a child. Now a judge or jury can look at the kids they're sentencing rather than disregarding any factors that might have led them to commit a serious crime. It means we're one step closer to no longer being the only country in the world that sentences children to die in prison.

I don't want my country to tell any child that he or she is irredeemable. The Supreme Court's ruling gives me hope that one day soon we will join the rest of the world in never telling children that they deserve to die in prison.

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*Jason Baldwin, one of three men known as the West Memphis 3, was sentenced to juvenile life without parole in 1994 for a crime he did not commit. He was incarcerated alongside Kuntrell Jackson, the petitioner in *Jackson v. Hobbs*. Since his release in August 2011, Jason has traveled across the country raising awareness about extreme sentencing for youth.*