Cyntoia Brown-Long
Author, Speaker, and Advocate for Criminal Justice Reform

2019 Celebrate Diversity Banquet Speaker

Cyntoia had a difficult start to life. She was born to an alcoholic, teenage mother who was also a victim of sex trafficking. Cyntoia experienced a sense of isolation, low self-esteem, and alienation that drove her straight into the hands of a predator. Cyntoia became a victim of sex trafficking and at the age of 16 was arrested for killing a man who had solicited her for sex. She was tried as an adult and was sentenced to life in prison without chance of parole for 51 years. In prison, Cyntoia’s life took a dramatic turn when the prison education principal took her under her wing and introduced her to a spiritual path. She encouraged her to build a positive life in prison and to resist the negative influences that lead to despair.

Her journey was a roller coaster ride that included a documentary about her life, a profound encounter with God, an unlikely romance, and, eventually, a commuted sentence by Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam. She received an unprecedented national and international outpouring of support from social media advocates, pastors, and celebrities and was released from prison in Nashville, TN on August 7, 2019.

Her memoir, Free Cyntoia: My Search for Redemption in the American Prison System (Atria Books, October, 2019), written while in prison, documents her early years and the 15 years she was incarcerated, and takes readers on a coming-of-age spiritual journey. Set against the shocking backdrop of a life behind bars and the injustice of sentencing sex-trafficked juveniles as adults, Cyntoia struggled to overcome a legacy of family addiction and a lifetime of being ostracized and abandoned by society. Of her time in prison, Cyntoia says, “I was just a teenager when I was sent to live behind a razor wire fence. My entire coming of age was within the walls of the Tennessee Prison for Women.” Cyntoia hopes that her story will not only inspire others but also shine a light on the injustice that people still face on a daily basis, especially the injustice to women and children in American prisons. She is available to speak to a wide variety of organizations.
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• Includes premium seating, admittance into the VIP Reception and photo with Cyntoia Brown-Long

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