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Ben Crump Champions the Wrongfully Convicted in New TV Show

The civil rights lawyer is known nationally for representing families of unarmed black people killed by police, like Michael Brown and Stephon Clark. In his newest role, he's the host of "Evidence of Innocence."

By **Angela Morris** | June 11, 2018

Civil rights lawyer Ben Crump is well-known nationally for representing families of unarmed black people killed by police, like Michael Brown and Stephon Clark, in wrongful death and police brutality cases.



Ben Crump.

In his latest role, he's the host of "[Evidence of Innocence](https://tvone.tv/blog/evidence-of-innocence/)

(<https://tvone.tv/blog/evidence-of-innocence/>)," a new show on TV One about wrongful convictions with episodes running on Mondays in June.

Crump, president and founder of Ben Crump Law in Tallahassee and Los Angeles, narrates the stories and interviews the four wrongfully convicted African-Americans who are featured in the show. As the survivors—and the defense lawyers and investigators who won their clients' freedom—sit under studio lights telling their stories, actors and actresses re-enact the drama, with intense music in the background.

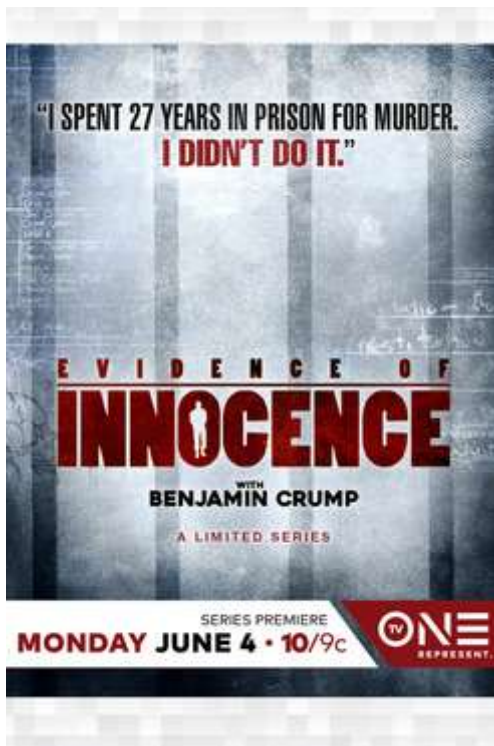
We caught up with Crump, a former National Bar Association president, to ask about his role in the show, how it's affected him personally and the larger impact he hopes to see from it. Here are his answers, edited for clarity and brevity.

What's the story about how you became the host for "Evidence of Innocence"?

I would do these high-profile issues and cases, and I would go on different media—one, "The Steve Harvey Morning Show." Rushion McDonald, the producer, and Steve [Harvey] would always encourage me, saying people want to hear and learn about these matters from you, and you really should consider doing more, whether television or radio, to let people in society—especially communities of color—know about constitutional rights and due process of the law and equal justice initiatives.

You became nationally known during your representation of the families of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, and I'm curious to know how those experiences came into play during your participation in this show?

The crux of the matter is equal justice, so it's about due process of the law and constitutional rights—basic fairness that everybody as American citizens will be given. When you think about Trayvon Martin or Michael Brown, any of these people we've seen killed in extraordinary ways, oftentimes, unfortunately, no one is held accountable. It seems that from many people from the minority perspective there was



not a fair administration of justice. When I'm hosting this show, "Evidence of Innocence," what I'm trying to do is be able to have an impact on the larger society.

What message do you hope that viewers will glean from the show?

One thing we are trying to do with the show is affect the hearts and minds of prospective future jurors who will be sitting in court passing judgment. The message is simple: Don't take what the police and prosecutors say, their narrative, as the gospel and disbelieve the poor people of color. You see in this show there are a lot of

nefarious things being done by government officials who are convicting and incarcerating many people who are innocent—especially people of color.

What's similar and different when you compare this experience to your day job being a civil rights lawyer?

Thurgood Marshall was my personal hero, and I try to pattern my career after the trail he blazed in many ways. He would take cases that did not just impact the individual but would have larger societal implications. I find myself not taking on a case, per se, in my mind but taking on a cause that would impact the larger society. When I think about the similarities or how daunting it is to take on these causes for what the Bible referred to as "the least of these," I often think about what this show is about and taking on the Goliath and fighting for the Davids—all these battles that people don't expect you to win yet you fight them anyway.

What did you take away from brushing up against the lawyers and firms that have fought for justice for wrongfully convicted people?

I think it's the noblest thing, not just in our profession, but one of the noblest things in society. There is a special place in heaven for these individuals who in many instances didn't have anything to gain personally from sacrificing their time and resources for these individuals who they believed were wrongfully convicted. They did it because it was the right thing to do and they understood it was a higher calling. Not only is this an inspirational show about the wrongfully incarcerated, inspired to keep fighting, but what caused these lawyers to keep fighting.

What feedback are you getting about the show from your fellow colleagues of the National Bar Association, where you used to be the president?

I have a lot of people calling saying, "I'm inspired." I'm most proud that it's black, white, Hispanic lawyers across the country. A lot of them say, "I'm going to try to do a case for innocence." That was some of the best things conveyed to me.

What about you? Will you do any pro bono innocence work because of the show?

I'm doing five of them as we speak. The show inspired me. I started working on doing this show and learning a lot more about the challenges—the technical legal maneuvers you have to do to challenge the state's alleged evidence.

If you got any advice from your show-business friends, who was it and what did he or she say?

I got some good advice from Steve Harvey, who said, "Don't ever change you, Ben Crump, because the reason why you are where you're at now is because people believe in your passion. You are an honest, humble, country lawyer, and that's what we love, so whether you do these TV shows or not, don't ever change who you are."

Angela Morris is a freelance journalist. Follow her on Twitter at @AMorrisReports

