

My name is Bryan Barnhill. I think that in life you actually can have it all... not all at once, but eventually, all in time. I was born in the City of Detroit and I grew up near the city airport and I was a privileged guy living in a bad neighborhood. The privilege that I had was the fact that I was raised in a household with both my parents. I was driving in the car with my mother, driving down Gratiot Avenue and we crossed 8 Mile Road. So you may know of 8 mile through the Eminem movie, but we know it as the street that divides Detroit from the suburbs as we crossed 8 mile, I started to take in a set of observations that made me realize for the first time that the world did not look like my block. I no longer saw a preponderance of abandoned buildings, broken concrete, overgrown grass and trash, and the people increasingly stopped looking like me. So at that young age, again, about 5 or 6. First question that came to mind was, why? Why is it that people who live in such close proximity can have such vastly different qualities of life? More than that... why is it that I'm living like this? My family? My community? And these questions about social disparity, inequality really started to inform my intellectual pursuits, but also just my worldview. Because on one hand, I felt obligated to achieve my neighborhood's mantra of success, which is 'make it out'. But on the other hand, when I... my culture as an African American is about uplifting your community, I wanted to do something about it. My service was needed and I felt like a lot of other folks who had benefited from growing up in Detroit with all the richness of culture and institutions who had an opportunity to go away, have an obligation to come back. And I felt like I needed to come back during that time after a tremendous period of decline. And it's such, an amazing time to be here, witnessing all of it. And it's almost poetic because the city's motto is 'Speramus meliora; resurget cineribus', which translates to 'We hope for better days. It shall rise from the ashes'.