

Pilot: From County Jail To White House Staff (AJ II & Rashan Prailow) *Previously Recorded on Thursday, July 20, 2017*

Intro Song: 'To The Max'- Drake

0:07 AJ: Welcome, this is AJ II and you're listening to *Max Out Time*, where we take the issues and that 'real' and like my homie Asahd says, 'turn up to the max'. On this pilot episode of *Max Out Time*, a podcast launched with Patreon dot-com, we will maximize the discourse and further the most timely conversations within today's hot topics: sports, culture, race, politics, you name it. But here on *Max Out Time* we got a little twist with it. Every episode im going to be featuring a distinguished guest who can help us spark these conversations, so you don't want to miss any of these discussions. Without further ado, I want to take it to my man Rashan Prailow an up and coming brother from Camden, New Jersey, who went from college dropout to an Ivy League degree and former White House staff within the Obama administration. Now he's a distinguished keynote speaker and speaks all across the country, but i'm going to let him tell his story because it's an incredible journey. You don't want to miss this.

1:11 Rashan: Thanks for having me AJ, uh feels good to be on.

1:14 AJ: You know what, let the people know a little bit about your journey man.

1:17 Rashan: As you stated in the intro, I'm from Camden, New Jersey, was born and raised there, uhh one of the poorest cities in the country. Grew up in a single parent home, my father was in and out of prison my entire life, and for me it was always a situation where i felt like my destiny was going to lead me to a prison cell. Um I had a love for football and sports and you know I played organized football from nine-years-old all the way until high school graduation. But as I got older living in a crime infested area with poverty all around us, you know, I began to get involved in things that I really shouldn't have been doing. And uhh as I got into high school man I really just started going off the wrong track you know um really doing things that I shouldn't have been doing. Was never really in school, was never present, missing days, always having to attend summer school just to be able to proceed to the next grade. And when I was in high school, I graduated 2007, there was this uhh policy that former President George Bush uh put in place called 'no child left behind.' So I technically wasn't supposed to graduate high school. I graduated with a 1.1 GPA and 97 unexcused absences and latenesses.

2:23 AJ: Hold on, 97?

2:24 Rashan: Yeah, yeah, yeah this is documented stuff man.

2:25 AJ: How many days in the year is it man?

2:28 Rashan: Yeah, this is statistics man um, I wasn't there man at this at that point in my life man I was all the way in left field. You know I was I was in the streets heavy and um hanging around certain people and doing things that I I shouldn't have been doing. But the unfortunate part is that in my mind I rationalized that that was all that I had. That that was the life for me. I didn't see too many people doing things like going to school and becoming lawyers and businessmen, and the folks that I did know who went to school they weren't living like I wanted to live.

2:56 AJ: Right.

2:57 Rashan: You know so for me you know I felt trapped.

2:59 AJ: So what is that life

2:59 Rashan: Yeah I felt—

2:59 AJ: You wanted that life though?

3:00 Rashan: Not even the life—I felt I just wanted more. I wanted freedom, and I grew up in a society where I always felt marginalized or looked down upon so for me anything that could provide freedom or make me feel like I was in control was something that I wanted. So I wasn't even really about pursuing a life, it was about pursuing my my my my manhood. And how do you become a man? You know and how do you you know grow into this manhood space by not relying on somebody else. You know what I mean? So that was my mindset uhhh and yeah man it's been crazy so I graduated high school like I said with a 1.1 GPA, 97 unexcused absences and latenesses.

3:38 AJ: I'm surprised they let you out. I mean they they (inaudible)—

3:40 Rashan: No, no child left behind man. No child left behind was the policy.

3:43 AJ: OK, ok Camden was looking out. For sure.

3:45 Rashan: Ah uh I don't know if they was looking out or they was just trying to get me out man (inaudible)—

3:49 AJ: Ohhh ok.

3:50 Rashan: You know umm I sat I had uh a sit down with my guidance counselor—

3:53 AJ: What we going to do with Rashan? Hey man put him in the real world man. Let's go.

3:57 Rashan: Yeah yeah which was a which was a bad idea um because you know as as I graduated high school June 18, 2007, I remember receiving my diploma and I didn't know what was next man. Like I didn't expect to be 28-years-old. You know I'm 28 years old today. I didn't know what life was, right, outside of this small you know bubble I was living in. And I registered for community college, right after high school graduation with the the assumption that I was going to try to get my life together because I knew they they gave me a chance and allowed me to graduate. I was the first to graduate for my family. Uhh—

4:29 AJ: Congratulations.

4:30 Rashan: You know, so I wanted to make my mother proud um and I went to community college but I dropped out. You know money started getting a little better. I had cars I I wanted that freedom again. I wanted to do different things uh but that was probably the worst decision I made, and the best decision ahh when I look back on it in hindsight. I was arrested for five felony offenses six months after I dropped out of community college and that was the turning point in my life.

4:53 AJ: Right.

4:53 Rashan: Because I seen everything up to that point from murder to being involved in different things and and you know just a bunch of craziness, right? But that experience really really was the turning point because when I was in the County Jail I never I'll never forget this man I was in a cell with a dude who was my father's childhood friend.

5:13 AJ: Oh no.

5:13 Rashan: He was in his forties, i'm 20 years old, and he like yo man how did you you know get in here man you got potential he like you could do something man and we talking back and forth and I'm i'm listening to him but im not believing him. But the the thing that stood out from our conversation was the fact of me going out in the world and breaking this generational curse man of mass incarceration and making making something of myself and giving back

5:35 AJ: And wow, the the through that story you you made a complete 180.

5:40 Rashan: Yeah.

5:41 AJ: So tell us about going from that prison cell and to making it to University of Pennsylvania and and graduating um at 28-years-old.

5:49 Rashan: A complete 360. I wouldn't even uhh say a 180. It started from that moment. You know I I started digging deeper. Uh when I was in the County Jail I would look around and I seen all people that looked just like me, and they were comfortable and that bothered me. It wasn't the fact that you know it was uh a scary experience or any of that. But the fact that you have a subset of young and old men in this confinement and they're comfortable with this, not being in the real world and taking care of their responsibilities and almost, you know, normalizing this whole prison industrial system. It didn't sit right with me. I knew it was something else for me out there, and when I left I made it in my made it up in my mind that I was going to do something man and I I started linking with people uh met a mentor, a historian, and he started you know really pushing me toward education because I still wasn't sure about it. I started reading. I read my first book at 22-years-old. It was W.E.B. Dubois' uh *The Souls of Black Folk* first book I ever read in my life I was 22, right? So I started—

6:50 AJ: Make sure everyone out there goes and gets that book.

6:53 Rashan: Yeah, yeah, yeah definitely um it was a life-changer but after that I began to develop this passion for reading, right? Trying to open my world up and I would go on Youtube and look at Malcolm X and and the Martin Luther King's and really studied these dudes. And the next book I read was Martin Luther King book on leadership. First book I ever outlined, front-to-back, 23 pages. Uh then i just started, you know, developing my skills, and I went to school. I said man i'm a try to change my life around this was the this was the only path I had. I felt like. It was that or the streets—

7:18 AJ: Which school did you start out? You didn't go right into UPenn did you?

7:21 Rashan: Nooo. I went right back to the community college the same one that dropped out of previously. Went back, had to take remedial courses. Started from the bottom, uh worked my way up.

7:29 AJ: Oh yeah. For sure.

7:30 Rashan: Graduated with a 3.9 man. I was focused uh and at that point the world opened up. I had options man I could have went to any school I wanted to. I got accepted to over 12 schools.

7:38 AJ: What else did you uhh consider?

7:40 Rashan: I got accepted to uh Lebow College of Business at Drexel, uh Fox School of Business at Temple, Rutgers Business School st- uh Rutgers State University of New Jersey um I got accepted to Seton Hall, Morehouse, NJIT, which is also in New Jersey, Rowan University—

7:57 AJ: Mhmm

7:57 Rashan: Also got accepted to... can't think back that far that was the top schools. I can't think back that far but—

8:03 AJ: So im hearing a lot of business names but then you started to work a little bit in business and politics and in finance and doing a lot of everything. How how did you get from UPenn to, you know, the Obama's started calling and you was in the White House administration.

8:17 Rashan: Yeah that was crazy man, so going going back to that I got accepted to about 12 schools. I decided to go to the University of Pennsylvania because it was Ivy League. And that I feel like destiny man lead me there. Everything I believe happened for a reason and I actually went to Penn by a mistake. That wasn't my my last two choices was Rutgers or Drexel. About two months before I was graduating from community college I ran into a recruiter from the University of Penn and she pitched me. She sold me on the school, and she told me like hey man you come here your resume going go to the top of the pile for every employer.

8:46 AJ: She's right.

8:47 Rashan: And I was like I'm a i'm a take this serious i'm a consider this. I still didn't think I could get in. I had a few interviews after I applied, i got accepted man and my world changed. I went into the University at 24-years-old too let's keep that in mind—

8:58 AJ: Mhm.

8:59 Rashan: For people who think it's too late and have these non-traditional paths. I was

already an adult. I went there um and hit the ground running man I had to really humble myself.

9:06 AJ: How hard academically did that push you?

9:08 Rashan: Extremely hard. Man I i've never been pushed or stretched intellectually like that in my life. My first year at Penn I had like a 2.8. Slept 5 hours a night man. Grinding, seven days a week and then I'd be able I was able to really develop and learn the system and you know build my social skills and get around people who could help me. And after that I started building my confidence. When I seen other people were willing to pour into me. Um and I turnt it up. I turnt it up. My second year I boost my GPA to like a 3.2, had the opportunity to intern at the White House man for the Obama's and that was crazy. That was craz—

9:41 AJ: Right so so moving fast forward you know you do speaking engagements on higher education and using it as a tool for success and you really preach that and use that in your message. Instead of solely, you know, kids in the black community playing sports, you know, where where was this belief that that 'ball is life' where is that perpetuated from and how can we combat that in the schools (inaudible)—

10:04 Rashan: That's a good question. I grew up under that same thought process that 'ball is life.' I played football like I said. I had NFL dreams uh that weren't a reality for me because I'm only 5'5 150 (pounds) um—

10:17 AJ: Hey somebody makes it work, you know. We got Sproles and all them. You know?

10:20 Rashan: Yeah yeah, yeah, yeah, but yeah man. Um how do we combat that? Man it's challenging. Um I think media plays a role in that. Um a lot of kids in the inner-city don't see nobody successful outside of the sports and entertainment world. Like I didn't, right? Like you hardly see these people. Um secondly, it's economics, you know most people in the inner-city are poor, and we know at least from what's shown on TV that sports and entertainment can drastically change your life economically, right? You can become wealthy or rich or however you want to describe it. So how do you combat that man it we have to bring awareness to all of the successful people in the country who aren't in sports and entertainment for instance Robert F. Smith. Probably like 90% of our community don't know who he is. He's the wealthiest African American man in this country, right? He's a private equity guy went to college, went to Wall Street, you know, started his own business. Things like that that we need to really push into the youth. Linda Hill another great woman who's um a distinguished professor at Harvard—Business School. She's been there 20-plus years. Carla harris been at morgan stanley, you know, for about 20 years since the 80s. I mean there's so many people doing crazy things that we don't really recognize or put a uh bullseye on.

11:31 AJ: I would definitely agree with that I I feel like the mainstream media needs to push more of the the black one-percenters, who aren't athletes who don't play football or basketball or rap a note at all or a lyric. You know what i'm saying? I think they need to push that and they need to have that commercial that comes out again the NCAA they did you know only one percent of our athletes actually go pro because it's true. Two percent of D1 ballers reach the pros whereas, you know, 99 percent of them go to college and and want to play so that they can get to the pros. It's tragic. You know it's a trying time for African Americans in this country and it always has been for this mindset that 'ball is life.' You know I had it of course and I had dreams. But you know everyone's not going to make it. And and most of us aren't going to make it. So have you been preaching, you know, or downplaying this trying to go to the league mindset in any of your speeches?

12:23 Rashan: No and yes. I don't downplay it because i know that some people have realistic dreams to make it to the NFL and some people are going to make it. So I'm really really careful how I frame my conversations around sports and entertainment when I'm speaking to the youth in the in the inner-city. What I do I try to present myself as an image or as a role model of what they can do outside of those spaces. You know? I'm pretty successful, you know, I make sure that i'm looking good, that i'm appealing, that I still can relate to the culture, and I try to highlight all of the stuff that I do. You know I have some crazy experiences, you know um, and I think that it's important to let people know that you have multiple ways to make an impact or be successful or chase that life that you you willing to have that you wish to have—

13:07 AJ: Well look let me let me first put something straight not condemning student-athletes at all you know going after their dreams I was just one a a few months ago and and I love the journey and I love the process. And if you got dreams by all means go after them, follow them. I'm just stating a couple of the facts. You know what I'm saying? You know one to two percent are going to go to the league um the young brothers who play D1 ball. You know and I used to be one of them so. You know I'm just trying to set things straight because obviously I love sports. That's all I do is talk about sports. We 'bout to talk about sports. So (clears throat) as a segway. You know what I'm saying? Give us some of your top moments. Your highlights I I you you know what I'm saying? Just show the people what you used to do back in Camden.

13:51 Rashan: Yeah man Im I'm a die-hard football fan. Uhh been following the sport for as long as I can remember. I'm a I'm a cowboy fan—

13:59 AJ: Can't say cowboys around here too loud. You know what I'm saying? Whooo. Hey, hey we might have to cut that one out.

14:04 Rashan: Yeah man.

14:05 AJ: You know what I'm saying. This is this is raw this is unedited but we might have to just come on we might have to put it—

14:11 Rashan: It's America's team man.

14:12 AJ: (sings) Haillll to the Redskins. You know what i'm saying, we hailing over here.

14:18 Rashan: Yeah man um I like i said i played from nine-years-old all the way until high school graduation. I was always a really good player in Little League I was really good um before my size mattered, right? I was one of the top players in the city in Little League um and that's when I first started getting recognition and I knew that I had a gift. You know, I got older played in middle school still was pretty good but when I got into high school the ball game changed. I went from being a running back in Little League you know to being one of the top players to being an average player and have to work my way up in high school. You know I was one of the smallest guys but my freshman year—

14:52 AJ: Mhm.

14:53 Rashan: I moved transitioned to the defensive side of the ball. Played safety and corner Um was really aggressive.

14:58 AJ: Get scrappy with it.

14:59 Rashan: Yeah I had I had the opportunity to uh play Varsity special teams as a freshman. I was about 125 pounds. Like 5'4 at the time, but they loved me to death. Uh they had a lot of faith in me. My Sophomore year I was lifting a little bit I got a little bigger um I was able to start two games, but I still wasn't ready physically. I was a little, you know, depressed during that time in my life you know this was when the streets first started really coming into effect. It was like man am i really going to pursue this football thing or you know am I going do something else. And I didnt know what that something else was. So you know I started messing up really bad academically. My sophomore year I had summer school, but that year I also went hard in the weight room. I started lifting really trying to build my body up physically because mentally and athletically I had the skillset I just didn't have the physical frame to really compete. My junior year I earned a starting role the second game of the season. And this was when I was about to quit football because I wasn't starting as a junior as most people know as a athlete if you ain't starting as a upper class men something wrong, right? So it's like man something wrong im not

starting im, you know, my pride messing with me. So we went through the whole training camp with me being second string. And someone got hurt our second game. One of the corners got hurt. He came out. My first play of the game I caught a pick; They didn't take me out. I caught another pick in the third quarter the same—

16:13 AJ: Housed it?

16:14 Rashan: Game. No, I didn't. I didn't take it to the house that game.

16:16 AJ: Aw you should've housed it.

16:17 Rashan: Caught two picks. Caught two picks. That game changed my football career and it also changed my life because that that good spirit came back. You know and that's when I kind of started trying detract from everything. Um I made all-conference you know in Olympic conference in South Jersey that year as a corner. I made the paper twice. Um you know for my athletic ability and success. And it was cool man so throughout my life I've always had these high, you know, moments when I always dedicated myself to something you know what I I mean? I always been able to get rewarded. So I always had faith in something right but just being in an environment I didn't know what it was. I couldn't find that niche. Um so I I I would say my football career was pretty successful for my size and it also paved the way for a lot that I do now. My work ethic. My discipline. Et cetera et cetera.

16:59 AJ: So so tell us a little bit more about South Jersey. People don't you know might not know where Camden is and its proximity to Philly. Because I know it's a very close to Philly. Um so tell us a little bit bit about you know South Jersey, Philly um and and what it's like there.

17:15 Rashan: Alright in short um Camden, New Jersey, is about five minutes from Philly right across the delaware river. We actually have a bridge, the Benjamin Franklin, bridge that connect us and we have a train that that departs back and forth uh to take you from Jersey to Philly or Camden to Philly, Philly to Camden. Uh Camden is a small city about 70,000 people really really small city. Condensed poverty. We don't have a downtown. We don't have any outlets. I mean it's rough. You know, Philly was our downtown. Right? We would go over to Philly to get some experiences. Um we were the murder capital many times when i was growing up. Um like I said we were one of the poorest in country within one of the richest states in the country though so right think about that dynamic. And uh South Jersey in general is an interesting place because five of the most dangerous cities in the country are located in southern New Jersey. You have Trenton, Camden, Vineland, Atlantic City, and Bridgeton. So South Jersey is a very very interesting place. There's a lot of poverty and a lot of crime in that little bubble down there.

18:14 AJ: Speaking of crime and you know what i'm saying different uh situations and scenarios you know there's a criminal in the news right now a uh a a he's definitely a criminal. He's a convicted felon his name is Michael Vick. He actually played for a team in Philly. The Philadelphia Eagles. Um but he's a criminal now for more ways than one because he had the audacity to tell colin kaepernick that he needs to change his image and cut his hair. Now, Vick went to prison and needed a second chance and needed redemption. He he needed a redemption song, so he he sort of, you know, cut the corn rolls off, didn't wear as many loud gold chains and everything. And he cleaned up so that he could get back into the league. But Colin Kaepernick is not a criminal, he was forcibly removed from the league (not because of him breaking the law) and Michael Vick is comparing him to a criminal or a thug who needs to change their image to get redemption. And in the black community we are sitting here standing like why you tap dancing man? What's going on? Like for real. And I really wanted to ask you because you know you've gone through a couple things and a couple scenarios that where you had to get a redemption song almost and you had to do a couple things, so does he have any point you know in in in by your estimation?

19:44 Rahan: No. he, michael vick doesn't have any point at all that was some super bad advice I don't know what made him say that. Um but I did hear him earlier before he made that statement say that he thought Kaepernick was out of the league due to his performance or his play whatever. Um but yeah I mean him cutting his hair to play football makes no sense. You know uh and speaking on my story of redemption, when you're placed in a uh the criminal space it is necessary that you clean up your image in certain environments. You know like for me in particular I never wore suits before I never did certain things but that wasn't because I was just necessarily trying to change my image, I was trying to go somewhere else professionally and personally. Right so cleaning up your image should not affect your job I still have a I'm growing a beard right now, right? I'm a professional. You know um I'm still the same person, right? Like you clean up yourself image wise to you know get in certain spaces but that shouldn't also deny you certain access you know that makes no sense. Like cutting your hair to get on a field. That there's no correlation there. That's crazy.

20:47 AJ: Yeah well Michael Vick you know he made this statement and he proposed this advice on uh Jason Whitlock's show *Speak For Yourself* on FS1. So right now i'm telling Michael Vick you better keep speaking for yourself because you ain't speaking for a damn soul. Not nobody else, especially in our community because that's outrageous man. You supposed to be looking out. He's a black quarterback. You were the first one to to really do it. And now you're telling the the next man to change your image because he's took a kneel for the national anthem? He didn't fight dogs. He's not out here raping people. He didn't do nothing wrong, man let that man be and he's not a kid. He's talking about man Colin is a good kid. No he's not a kid he's a grown man and he's doing things that you never even dreamed of, especially off of the field. So speak for yourself. You, Jason Whitlock, all y'all speak for yourself. I mean that was just

ridiculous and I wanted to get your take on that. Um but there's there's also a number of other issues today with our with our athletes, our professional athletes, our young brothers. Ezekiel Elliott is always in the news. He remains under investigation by the NFL for domestic violence. He just got a 100 MPH speeding ticket. He was in a bar fight a couple weeks ago. He also pulled down a woman's shirt in public on St. Patrick's Day. The man just needs guidance. He needs help. And then we got my man OJ. OJ did it. And he just got parole after having to serve a 33-year sentence down to nine years. He's getting paroled in three months, so I mean yeah he getting out but still all these crimes with our young brothers. Both of them played running back, I must say. And and they're both just legendary stars in the NFL and in college football especially. Um but how can we just start to mold some of these some of these guys, who are in the NFL and who have all of this money, and make them use it for good and do things for good because we have no positive role models out there anymore. We got OJ and we got Ezekiel Elliott. Like what can we do?

23:03 Rashan: Yeah man that that that's tough umm speaking on Ezekiel Elliott I think we all have to remember he's about like 22-years-old, 21-years-old and a lot of these young guys they get thrown into the spotlight where the world is a their fingertips and A lot of these millionaires everybody's you know praising them all day so a lot of the things he's getting into... I can't speak on the domestic violence. I'm a leave that totally alone because I don't condone that. But as far as him getting speeding tickets you know, maybe going into a store to buy weed and some of these other things that I've heard I mean that's normal 21-year-old stuff like i have speeding tickets—

23:40 AJ: But he ain't normal—

23:41 Rashan: Yeah, right.

23:42 AJ: He plays for the Dallas Cowboys. He has a star on the side of his helmet. He played at Ohio State University and won a national championship at 20-years-old. He is he is not no kid no more. He's been in the limelight, in the media for years. He needs to know how to really take care of himself and carry himself. There's no I don't think there is an excuse. But I mean you can speak to kind of more of the issues better than I can and and what we need to do to combat all of this.

24:10 Rashan: Yeah that that's true. That's true, I agree with you. Um I I do believe him being an NFL player he should be held to a higher standard. You know socially um he should also be held to a higher standard as a role model. He has to really, in my opinion, accept his gift as being one of the best football players in the world. And really try to be an exemplary citizen for other young black men who don't have the privilege that he has. That's what bothers me more than anything is the fact that when he does something

wrong he's the he's one of us. He's the face of most of young black men. It kind of casts a bad spell on everybody and is unfair. Um but again I think that he's young. But I think with some guidance and some maturity you know those things that will take care of themselves overtime and—

24:57 AJ: Yeah you know I mean—

24:58 Rashan: That's my hope. That's my hope.

24:59 AJ: I tell I tell my boys this all the time man. Stay out of trouble. You know what I'm saying? If you want to do something if you want to party or whatever. You know just chill on the couch. Call a couple friends over a couple shorties, you know, call them through and and just have a block party or or watch the movie or the game or the fight or whatever. And just call them over to your place you know what i'm saying? Have a barbecue as my man go-go legend uh Chuck Brown says. You know just just chill out with it. You know what i'm saying? It's the summertime and we don't need to have a headline after headline after headline of young brothers in the media, especially the people who are supposed to be role models, getting in trouble and setting bad examples for our youth. We don't need it anymore. Just stop it. And right now I want us to maximize that conversation, but keep the conversation going because we're just about out of time and I want to give a couple special shout outs to my man uh DJ roadrunner K.C. Malone, John Sadler at Dreams 2 Reality Studios out here in Alexandria, Virginia. And I also want to give a special shoutout to Mark Sugg and Joan Woods for the support and of course my guest Rashan Prailow for giving us these words of encouragement and and definitely your positive light on on life. Everything was just so inspiring. Do you have any last words, Rashan?

26:17 Rashan: AJ, thank you for having me man. Shoutout to *Max Out Time*. I want to give a shout out to my city, Camden, New Jersey, and also for every everyone listening you can find me on Instagram at rashanp r-a-s-h-a-n-p. You can find me on Facebook at Rashan Prailow r-a-s-h-a-n p-r-a-i-l-o-w and contact me via gmail at p-r-a-i-l-o-w-r@gmail dot-com For keynote speech bookings, I speak primarily to at-risk youth and potential first generation college students. That's my passion, and I'm looking forward to changing the world.

26:54 AJ: Thank you, Rashan. As always, *Max Out Time* episodes will be featured on my Patreon website, so please become a patron today at w-w-w-dot patreon dot-com slash arthurjonesii, so that'd be arthur jones II you just put two i's on the end of there and that's also my social media so subscribe and tune in to all the episodes whenever you want to on my Patreon website. AJ Out.

27:20 Outro Music: 'To The Max'- Drake

27:45 —End—

Max Out Time W/ AJ II