

# CECE MCDONALD

b. May 26, 1989, Chicago, Illinois

## TRANSGENDER ACTIVIST

*“I felt like they wanted me to hate myself as a trans woman.”*

CeCe McDonald is a transgender prison-reform activist. While on her way to the grocery store with friends, she encountered a drunken group outside of a bar. Seeing McDonald and her friends, the group began taunting them with racial, homophobic and transphobic slurs. After taking a stance that their hate speech would not be tolerated, McDonald was assaulted with a shattered drinking glass across the face. The attack perforated her cheek and lacerated her salivary gland.

McDonald defended herself against a second assailant with fabric shears, the only weapon she had. The assailant died.

McDonald was arrested and imprisoned. After two months in prison, she finally received care for her wounds.

Experiencing the inhumane treatment of prisoners firsthand, McDonald began speaking out against the criminal justice system. “Prisons aren’t safe for anyone, and that’s the key issue,” she said. For McDonald, the issue of safety included her status as a transgender female in a men’s prison. Transgender prisoners were assigned to prisons based on their sex at birth rather than their gender identity. The penal system frequently placed them in solitary confinement—a psychologically debilitating isolation—purportedly for the safety of the individual. The experience served to strengthen McDonald’s character and establish her resolve to become a transgender leader. “Free CeCe,” a documentary about her experiences, focused on the issue of violence against trans women of color.

**While incarcerated for killing an assailant in self-defense, McDonald suffered inhumane treatment that impelled her to become a prison-reform activist.**



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