The Democrats on criminal justice
2020: The Democrats on Criminal Justice

Can We Fix Mass Incarceration Without Including Violent Offenders?

Working Their Way Home From Prison

My Dog Didn't Forget Me When I Went to Prison

Should Prisoners Be Allowed to Have Facebook Pages?

Making the Case Against Banishing Sex Offenders

I Host a Popular Podcast. I’m Also in Prison.

They Got Their Voting Rights Back, But Will They Go to the Polls?

(SURVEY) Tell us about your political views!
Wow, this is already the final News Inside of 2019! Once again, I appreciate all your letters of encouragement and your participation in the call for essays.

In this issue, you will find our “2020: Democrats on Criminal Justice” guide. It is my hope that you will take note of the candidates’ plans for criminal justice. Remember, the president only has the power to make policy affecting federal prisoners, but he or she can be very influential in the direction of state laws. On page 10, you will find “Can We Fix Mass Incarceration Without Including Violent Offenders?,” in which reporter Jamiles Lartey unpacks some of the issues that are important to so-called “violent offenders”—an often left-out class who make up 55 percent of state prisoners.

When I was in state prison, it was important for me to be aware of presidential, gubernatorial, judicial and district attorney elections. I came up at a time when we were referred to as “super predators.” For us, it meant that the political temperature on criminal justice issues, from the highest office to the lowest, affected our chances at trial, parole and whether we were offered meaningful programs.

Notwithstanding that impact, there were many people in prison who believed it was useless to vote. Those thoughts are echoed in “They Got Their Voting Rights Back, But Will They Go to the Polls?” on page 24. Still, I’ve always thought that it was up to me to be an active participant in changing my situation. I would say, I’d rather try and fail than fail to try. Who knows? I may win.

As a free man, I was able to vote for the first time in 2018. It meant that I was also civically free and able to participate in the election of government officials whose views came closest to what I thought was best for my friends, family, community and me.

Voting rights for the formerly incarcerated is a hot topic across the country. And many states have made it easier for people to vote after prison. Because of that, The Marshall Project and Slate Magazine want to know your views on various political matters, including what your vote would be. Please fill out the survey on page 29. You will be weighing in along with incarcerated people across the country. The findings will be in three publications, including Issue 4 of News Inside.

To round out this issue, you’ll also find the article “Working Their Way Home From Prison,” which covers young men in a California prison camp on their journeys to freedom. You’ll also find the story of Rahsaan Thomas, who—while in prison—has become the host of the popular podcast Ear Hustle, and more.

As usual, I try to bring you the best news you can use to stay informed, clear your head and move toward where you want to be. All I ask is that you give yourselves a chance by reading it through.

Lawrence Bartley

Lawrence Bartley is the Director of News Inside. He served a 27 years-to-life sentence and was released on parole in May 2018.

Letters to the Director

These stories give me the empowerment and encouragement to realize that I can start over.

Anthony Otis
Virginia

I’m writing to you because I read your newspaper, “News Inside”... I can relate to those stories. I’m young 24 years serving 25 to life. I’ve been down since 2015 currently working on my appeal & reading those stories gives me hope so thank you. If you can I would like to subscribe to that “News Inside” as well. Please & thank you, God bless.

Ricardo Delgado
New York

Please add me to your mailing list. I can only receive emails via JPay, so it is not free. I will need to receive your newsletter via US Mail.

Micah Holman
Missouri

I am a prisoner that got sentenced to life without parole at the age of 18 and now I’m 36. I would like to know what is going on. I would like to respectfully request to be put on your mailing list for your free newsletter “News Inside.”

William C. Watson
Oregon
The Democrats on Criminal Justice
The Marshall Project compiled the criminal justice positions of the Democratic candidates. Here’s where they stand.

By Katie Park and Jamiles Larcey

How would you reform the bail system?

Nearly all the Democratic candidates favor limiting or eliminating money bail, but the president has little power to influence the practice directly, because bail is set locally. While the federal judicial system has all but abandoned bail, most states allow cash bail as the primary instrument of pretrial release for criminal defendants.

The president has the bully pulpit and could issue statements, convene White House events or assemble a task force to issue a report on the use of money bail. Otherwise, a president would be mostly limited to working with Congress to pass legislation like Bernie Sanders’ proposed “No Money Bail Act of 2018,” which would offer grants to states to adopt alternatives. The federal government could also withhold funding from states that continue to use cash bail systems. Sanders introduced the “No Money Bail Act of 2018” in the Senate—legislation that would have withheld funding for cash bail and provided funding for states to pursue alternatives.

Julián Castro
“Pretrial detention should always be the very last resort,” Castro wrote in a policy proposal. “Following the example of multiple states and local jurisdictions, I will pass legislation eliminating cash bail and support compensation for individuals who are detained pretrial but are later released or acquitted.”

Tom Steyer
The billionaire Californian railed aggressively for reforms in his home state and recently, in a tweet, called cash bail an “injustice perpetuated by greed and motivated by oppression.”

Elizabeth Warren
Warren supports ending cash bail, arguing, “We should allow people to return to their jobs and families while they wait for trial, reserving preventive detention only for those cases that pose a true flight or safety risk.” The Massachusetts senator does not say in her criminal justice platform how she would achieve this goal.

Tulsi Gabbard
At a forum in New Hampshire Gabbard said, “We need to get rid of the cash bail system that is disproportionately impacting people of color and people living in poverty all across this country.”

Andrew Yang
Yang shares most of his fellow candidates’ reservations about cash bail but stops short of advocating an end to it. "We should be much more judicious in the use of cash bail, only employing it when necessary," a statement on Yang's website said.

Michael Bloomberg
Bloomberg supports reform efforts that aim to reduce or eliminate cash bail, "but only for non-violent offenders."
How would you use your clemency powers as president?

Clemency, which includes reversing criminal convictions (pards) and shortening sentences (commutations), is the president's most direct means to reduce incarceration. It requires no approval from Congress, and a president could release the roughly 216,000 federal prisoners on day one. Thus, some experts say clemency plans are a good barometer for the candidates' true commitment to criminal justice reform.

Historically, presidents have used clemency in limited and sometimes self-serving ways. President Obama broadened this somewhat, offering clemency at a record-setting pace to nonviolent drug offenders, but still barely made a dent in the prison population.

Several candidates propose reforming the capricious nature of clemency through a bipartisan commission that would take the screening process away from the Department of Justice. Clemency powers are limited to federal prisoners, but a president could set a strong example for the states.

**Andrew Yang**
Yang said that he would “pardon everyone who’s in jail for a low-level, nonviolent marijuana offense, and I would high five them on their way out of jail.” However, clemency recipients would first be evaluated to determine if they might pose a public safety risk.

**Julián Castro**
Castro has said he would “establish an independent commission to review the cases” of some 17,000 non-violent offenders, “and make continuing recommendations to the President on clemency.” He called such a use of clemency powers “the single biggest step we can take to immediately reduce the unacceptable size of our prison population.”

**Bernie Sanders**
The senator said he would “revitalize the executive clemency process by creating an independent clemency board removed from the Department of Justice and placed in [the] White House.”

**Elizabeth Warren**
Senator Warren said that she would “use the pardon and clemency powers broadly to right systemic injustices,” with a clemency board making recommendations directly to the White House on “broad classes of potentially deserving individuals,” such as people jailed under outdated or discriminatory drug laws.

**Joe Biden**
Biden has highlighted that the use of clemency while he was vice president was greater than the prior 10 administrations and vowed to continue in that spirit. He’s promised to “broadly use his clemency power for certain non-violent and drug crimes.”

**Tulsi Gabbard**
Gabbard has not publicly commented on the question of clemency.

**Michael Bloomberg**
Bloomberg has not publicly commented on the question of clemency.

**Pete Buttigieg**
The South Bend, Indiana, mayor said his administration would “commute the sentences of people who are incarcerated in the federal system beyond what justice warrants.” Buttigieg has pledged an “independent clemency commission.”

**Amy Klobuchar**
In a CNN op-ed, Klobuchar said she would create a “diverse, bipartisan clemency advisory board,” including advocates for victims and for sentencing reform. She would also create a criminal justice advisor separate from the Justice Department.

**Tom Steyer**
The California businessman said as president he would “exercise his clemency powers where appropriate.”
Should people in prison have the right to vote while they are incarcerated?

No candidates have outlined in detail how they would restore voting rights for current inmates and the formerly incarcerated. Pete Buttigieg has come the closest by proposing that felon enfranchisement be part of a “21st Century Voting Rights Act.” Many in the field have expressed support for the “For The People Act,” which passed in the House but not the Senate and would restore voting access to all those who have been convicted of a crime but are not currently in prison for a felony. The legislation would not change state laws, however, so states would be able to prevent those same citizens from voting in state and local elections.

A president could advocate for re-enfranchisement and commission studies or task forces to make recommendations to states. The president could also push Congress to use the budget to reward states for restoring voting rights to prisoners and the formerly incarcerated or to withhold funds from jurisdictions that continue the practice.

**YES**

Bernie Sanders
Sanders is an outlier, arguing that all incarcerated people should be eligible to vote. He calls it a “slippery slope” to try and distinguish among types of convictions regarding voting rights. “You’re paying a price, you committed a crime, you’re in jail. That’s bad. But you’re still living in American society, and you have a right to vote,” Sanders said. His state—Vermont—and Maine are the only ones where everyone in prison can vote.

**ONLY NONVIOLENT OFFENDERS**

Cory Booker
Booker has said he believes people in prison for “serious felonies” should “surrender their right to vote,” but that those convicted of nonviolent drug offenses should be granted the franchise. Booker is a co-sponsor of the pending “For the People Act,” which would guarantee the right of convicted people to vote in federal elections after their release.

**NO, ONLY ONCE THEY HAVE LEFT PRISON**

Joe Biden
The former vice president said his administration would “incentivize states to automatically restore voting rights for individuals convicted of felonies once they have served their sentences.”

Pete Buttigieg
"Part of the punishment when you're convicted of a crime and you're incarcerated is you lose certain rights, you lose your freedom," said Buttigieg at a town hall. The South Bend mayor supports the full, immediate and free restoration of rights after prisoners are released.

Amy Klobuchar
The Minnesota senator told HuffPost that she supports “what they did in Florida, which is when [people] get out they get to vote.” Klobuchar is a co-sponsor of the “For the People Act.”

**POSITION UNCLEAR**

Michael Bloomberg
Bloomberg has not publicly commented on the voting rights for people while they incarcerated.

Julían Castro
Castro has said that he thinks prisoners ought to have the right to vote, since they’re counted in the census, but he made a broad exception for “people who are violent felons.” His campaign told The Washington Post he supports the restoration of rights for the formerly incarcerated.

Andrew Yang
Yang has said he believes that “committing a crime should not mean you are a noncitizen and cannot vote.” His sole exception is for those convicted of murder. “The threshold I have come up with is that if you have deprived someone else of their right to vote, then you should not have the right to vote,” Yang said during an INSIDER town hall.

Tom Steyer
Steyer “supports restoring voting rights to former convicts” and believes “if you’ve done your time you should be able to vote.”

Elizabeth Warren
Warren said she supports a constitutional right to vote but is "not there yet" on giving the vote to prisoners, according to the Associated Press. She has said that there should be “more conversation” on the question.

Tulsi Gabbard
Gabbard told MSNBC that she opposed restoring voting rights to current inmates in part because she thought there would be a potential for corrections officers to exert influence over prisoners’ voting decisions. A Gabbard staffer told HuffPost that this includes those who are on parole.
Should marijuana be legalized nationwide?

More than half the U.S. population now lives in states where possession of marijuana has been decriminalized, meaning people won’t face criminal prosecution for simple possession of the drug. In addition, more than a quarter of Americans live in states where there is a legal recreational cannabis industry. The federal government does not strictly have the power to “legalize” cannabis, which is still subject to state criminal laws. But Congress and to a lesser degree the president can nudge states towards legalization by making it a condition for getting some federal funding.

A new president could move to downgrade cannabis’s designation as a Schedule One controlled substance, even without Congress. That would probably need to start with a Department of Justice request for a review of the scientific literature on the drug, involving agencies like Health and Human Services, the Food and Drug Administration and the Drug Enforcement Agency. A congressional bill, like the recently proposed MORE Act, could accomplish the feat much faster.

The attorney general could effectively decriminalize cannabis at a federal level by simply directing U.S. attorneys not to pursue some cases, as former Attorney General Eric Holder did in 2013 after some states passed legalization referendums. The DEA and FBI, at the president’s direction, could choose not to conduct cannabis-related investigations or arrests.

Cory Booker
Booker has pushed for marijuana legalization in the Senate since 2017. Most recently, he introduced a bill to legalize marijuana, expunge marijuana convictions and create a fund for communities most affected by the War on Drugs.

Pete Buttigieg
Buttigieg’s criminal justice plan calls for legalizing marijuana on a federal level and expunging past convictions.

Julián Castro
Castro tweeted in April, “Legalize it. Then expunge the records of folks who are in prison for marijuana use.”

Amy Klobuchar
Although Klobuchar told The Washington Post she supports legalizing marijuana, she also said states should “determine the best approach to marijuana within their borders.” She’s the only sitting senator among the Democratic candidates who has not signed on to Booker’s 2019 bill for federal legalization.

Tulsi Gabbard
"As president I’ll end the failed war on drugs, legalize marijuana, end cash bail, and ban private prisons and bring about real criminal justice reform," the Hawaii congresswoman said on Facebook in July.

Bernie Sanders
Sanders called for federal legalization of marijuana in his 2016 campaign for the Democratic nomination. In August, he told Newsweek that he would legalize marijuana by executive order. He also calls for the expungement of prior marijuana convictions.

Tom Steyer
Steyer told The Marshall Project he supports legalization.

Elizabeth Warren
Warren’s criminal justice plan calls for legalizing marijuana and expunging prior convictions. She co-sponsored Booker’s 2019 bill to legalize marijuana federally.

Andrew Yang
Yang supports legalizing marijuana at the federal level and expunging convictions for both marijuana use and possession.

Joe Biden
Biden is the lone Democratic candidate who has not spoken in support of legal marijuana. He has called for decriminalizing marijuana and expunging prior records for possession of the drug, though in one debate he said that marijuana possession should be charged as a misdemeanor.

Michael Bloomberg
Bloomberg has not publicly commented on the national legalization of marijuana.
Should sentencing include mandatory minimums?

When he signed the 2018 First Step Act, Donald Trump made marginal reductions to federal mandatory minimums; a new president could become a vocal supporter of legislation to pare back draconian federal sentencing even further. Some advocates are pushing for “Second Look” legislation to give all prisoners the right to have their sentencing re-evaluated after a number of years, no matter their crime. Cory Booker introduced a Senate version of this legislation earlier this year.

Most immediately, a new administration could, through its attorney general, reverse the 2017 Jeff Sessions memo that requires federal prosecutors to seek the most severe possible penalties. By contrast, under President Barack Obama, Attorney General Eric Holder ordered federal prosecutors in 2013 to exercise restraint in charging to limit the number of people facing harsh mandatory minimum sentences.

Outside of the federal criminal justice system, which accounts for about 10 percent of the nation’s incarcerated population, the president has far less authority. The most detailed plan for reducing the use of mandatory minimums in states comes from Joe Biden, who has proposed a $20 billion grant program for states to pursue progressive reforms, contingent on the relief of their own mandatory minimum statutes.

Joe Biden

Biden champions the swift passage of the “SAFE Justice Act,” which would pare back federal mandatory minimums. He is also proposing a federal grant program that would only be available to states that eliminate mandatory minimums for nonviolent crimes.

Cory Booker

Booker has proposed ending “harsh mandatory minimums for nonviolent drug offenses.” In the Senate, Booker introduced “Second Look” legislation, which would allow anyone who has served at least 10 years in federal prison to request resentencing. That bill would also grant inmates 50 or older the “presumption of release” if they petition.

Amyn Klochbar

Klochbar, a former district attorney, has proposed “giving prosecutors and judges more discretion in sentencing,” but has not specified how much. She has also championed her support as a senator for the First Step Act, which allows judges to impose sentences below mandatory minimums—but only for certain nonviolent, low-level drug offenders who cooperate with the government.

Tulsi Gabbard

At a forum in New Hampshire, Gabbard said, “The next step towards [criminal justice reform] is sentencing reform” and committed to reducing mass incarceration by 50 percent, but has not outlined a policy proposal. In 2015, Gabbard supported the Sentencing Reform Act, which “reduces certain mandatory minimums for drug offenders and allows judges greater discretion in determining appropriate sentences.”

Elizabeth Warren

Warren says Congress should “reduce or eliminate” mandatory minimums. Warren, like several of the candidates, also said she would assemble a federal clemency board that would, among other things, recommend release for inmates serving time on “mandatory minimums that should be abolished.”

Andrew Yang

Yang has described mandatory minimums as a “misguided policy decision” and said as president his administration would “review the current mandatory minimum laws to bring them in line with what data shows us is effective.” He does advocate mandatory minimums for white-collar crimes.

Tom Steyer

Steyer’s campaign told The Marshall Project that he “wants to end mandatory minimum sentences, but does not support weaker penalties for criminals who have been convicted of sexual or violent offenses.”

Bernie Sanders

Sanders pledges in his criminal justice platform to end mandatory sentencing minimums, along with truth-in-sentencing laws, which specify that a minimum percentage of an inmate’s sentence must be served before they become eligible for early release. Sanders has also offered support for eliminating three-strikes laws, which impose mandatory life sentences on certain repeat offenders, and for “Second Look” legislation, which allows prisoners to petition federal courts for a review of lengthy sentences. Sanders’ plan does not outline a way to get states to reduce the use of mandatory minimums or related statutes.
Do you support ending the federal use of private prisons?

Every Democratic candidate has expressed at least moral opposition to private prisons, if not a clear policy goal for their abolition.

Administratively, the president wields a fair amount of power on this issue. Private companies only hold 8 percent of people incarcerated in the U.S., but have 15 percent of federal prisoners and more than 70 percent of immigration detainees. An incoming president could direct the Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security not to contract with private detention companies. The Obama administration did this (to limited effect) in 2016 for federal prisons, and a DHS advisory council recommended to do the same for immigration detention later that year. The election of Donald Trump rapidly reversed that momentum, in a massive financial boon for the industry.

As a practical matter though, phasing out private prisons is a lot harder than writing a memo to cabinet secretaries, if it isn’t accompanied by an aggressive plan for decarceration. The private prison industry began in the early 1980s amid a rapid rise in incarceration, because the government didn’t have enough space in public facilities. That remains the case, and experts say a multi-billion dollar government buy-out of private facilities is highly improbable. This is especially true for immigration detention, where the industry makes up most of the government’s capacity (local jails handle almost all of the rest).

Banning or abolishing private prisons doesn’t fully remove the profit motive from the business of incarceration, which most candidates have described as morally wrong. Weeding private companies out from contracts in prison healthcare, food, transportation, financial services, messaging, phone and video calls would be substantially more difficult. Private corrections companies are also diversifying with investments in reentry, electronic monitoring and drug treatment programs.

Joe Biden
Biden said he would restore a 2016 Obama policy, since rescinded by Trump, aimed at phasing out the federal use of private prisons. Biden would also “make eliminating private prisons and all other methods of profiteering off of incarceration” a requirement for receiving funds from a proposed grant program for state and local jurisdictions.

Elizabeth Warren
Senator Warren has argued there is “no place in America for profiting off putting more people behind bars or in detention.” She plans to end all federal contracts with private detention providers and said she would “extend these bans to states and localities by conditioning their receipt of federal public safety funding on their use of public facilities.”

Tulsi Gabbard
Gabbard proposed banning private prisons long before she announced her presidential run. In 2016, she authored a petition calling on Congress to end their use nationwide, and describing the facilities as “monuments to hypocrisy” in a 2017 tweet.

Bernie Sanders
The senator said “we must end the practice of corporations profiting off the suffering of incarcerated people and their families” and pledged to “ban” private prisons.

Tom Steyer
Steyer said he would eliminate private prisons, an industry his hedge fund poured tens of millions into in 2005. He has since said he “deeply regret[s]” that investment and personally ordered that the stake be sold.

Andrew Yang
Yang said that as president he would “end the use of for-profit, private prisons” for federal prisoners.

Cory Booker
Booker has long been a vocal critic of private prisons, but has not expressed a policy goal as a presidential candidate. He did sharply criticize the Trump administration’s decision to undo an Obama directive reducing their use, calling it “a major setback to restoring justice to our criminal justice system.”

Michael Bloomberg
Bloomberg has not publicly commented on the federal use of private prisons.
Can We Fix Mass Incarceration Without Including Violent Offenders?

Half of America’s prisoners are in for violent crimes, but reforms often leave them behind.

By Jamiles Lartey

Alice Johnson and Walter Johnson are not related, but do have a few things in common besides a surname. In 1996, both were separately convicted on drug-related charges and sent to federal prison. Both are black, and were sucked into the criminal justice system at the height of the nation’s racially discriminatory and punitive response to crime and drug waves that crested in the early 1990s. Over more than two decades in prison, both embraced rehabilitation programs, maintained good discipline, and came to view themselves as utterly reformed.

That’s about where the comparison begins to trail off, though—at least according to most of the ongoing discourse on crime and redemption. Alice Johnson was a first-time offender, convicted of nonviolent drug trafficking crimes. Last year, the Tennessee grandmother became a cause célèbre when Kim Kardashian West successfully lobbied President Donald Trump for her release. In his State of the Union address this year, Trump said Johnson’s case “underscores the unfairness and disparities that can exist in criminal sentencing, and the need to remedy this total injustice.”

Walter Johnson is, by contrast, a stick-up legend and perhaps “Brooklyn’s most storied hustler,” as author Ethan Brown describes him in the book “Snitch.” His substantial criminal career included the armed robbery of some 300 worshippers at a Jehovah’s Witness hall in East New York in 1982, when he was 19. In 1996, Johnson became the first New Yorker put away on federal “three strikes” laws meant to stop habitual offenders. Historically, that’s been enough difference to completely dictate the way politicians talk, or don’t, about people like the two Johnsons, and whether or not they are entitled to a second chance at life on the outside. In the 2020 Democratic primary, things are messier. While relief for “non-violent” offenders remains a staple of talking points and campaign platforms, several candidates are also beginning to wrestle publicly with the question of what to do about violent offenders, amid a party-wide progressive swing on criminal justice policy.

These conversations have yet to produce comprehensive proposals aimed specifically at violent offenders, who make up roughly half the nation’s prison population. But advocates say reversing mass incarceration is impossible without including them, and the idea should not scare politicians or the public. They point to growing research that indicates most people “age out” of violent crime after their 20s and 30s, and to the fact that many states classify as violent some drug crimes and other offenses most Americans do not consider violent.

When talking about criminal justice reforms on the campaign trail, Democratic candidates have frequently singled out non-violent offenders for relief. Joe Biden’s platform, for example, says we need to “eliminate overly harsh sentencing for non-violent crime.”

Primary newcomer Mike Bloomberg said his administration would support efforts to “reduce or eliminate cash bail for non-violent offenders.”

But what to do about violent offenders is becoming part of the discussion, albeit a small part. Take California Senator Kamala Harris, who before dropping out of the race said her administration would study “how best to hold individuals convicted of violent offenses accountable.” Her proposals noted that long sentences are not proven to be particularly effective.

The ACLU’s smart justice campaign asked candidates whether or not they would commit to working towards a 50 percent reduction in incarceration, and almost all have agreed to the target number. “We can do it more than that,” Biden said in July. Doing so, as a simple matter of mathematics, would involve releasing people convicted of violent crimes.

Incarcerated people like Walter Johnson see that as hopeful, and say that people convicted of violent offenses are too part of the tragedy and illogic of mass incarceration. “When they only elaborate on non-violent criminals it hurts me deeply because the majority of the people in politics are trying to play it safe instead of going into the marrow of the issue,” Johnson said in an email conversation from the federal corrections facility in Otisville, New York.

Based on his criminal record alone, Walter Johnson would not be a politician’s idea of a poster child for release. After the Kingdom Hall robbery, which sent him to prison for a few years, Johnson went in again for another armed robbery, according to his attorney. In 1993, Johnson was the rare case of a black man who avoided conviction in a shootout that left an undercover cop injured, after he claimed self defense. In 1994 he even became a character in hip-hop infamy as one of the rumored assailants who robbed and shot Tupac Shakur in New York, a crime for which Johnson was never charged, and has consistently denied. Two years later he was convicted of what became his third strike: a 1985 armed robbery of a Brooklyn drug dealer.

But judged by his time in prison, the picture shifts. Johnson graduated from, and now teaches, a victims’ impact class at Otisville, instructing other incarcerated men on the trauma their behavior has caused. He’s earned well over 100 program certificates on topics ranging...
from work skills to conflict resolution. He keeps them all in a dense packet along with letters of commendation and support from inside the prison’s walls, like a 2010 letter from Warden J.M. Killian praising him for “modeling exceptional behavior” and “outstanding responsibility.” He’s finished reentry programming too, even though his life sentence means he may never put any of it to use. Johnson would seem to fit the mold of what rehabilitation looks like. Now in his mid-50s, statistics suggests he has also all but aged out of crime.

“The same exact guy who picked up a gun and committed a horrendous act could recognize their wrong and begin to reinvent themselves,” Johnson said. “Many of us who have committed violent crimes have evolved; we are no longer the mistakes we made.”

None of that counts for much though, when so much of the conversation about who gets out of prison revolves around how the law categorized a person’s original crime.

A distinction from the start

The violent/non-violent dichotomy reflects language that’s been baked into criminal justice reform since it began creeping into the political mainstream in the late 2000s. When President Barack Obama embraced justice reform during his second term, nearly all of his energy was focused on the politically safe group of “nonviolent drug offenders,” and such language was mirrored throughout the 2018 bipartisan First Step Act signed by Trump.

All of that is consistent with the findings in a 2018 report from the nonprofit advocacy group Opportunity Agenda, which analyzed more than 50 surveys and polls from 2014-16 about public opinion on criminal justice policy. The analysis found that a majority of Americans think it’s “important for the country to reduce its prison populations”; but also that “frequent labeling of crimes as ‘violent’ or ‘nonviolent’ in the public discourse may have created an unhelpful dichotomy in the minds of most Americans.”

Lucy Odigie-Turley, one of the researchers who worked on the report, said that so far, the Democratic candidates’ messaging “appears to be in line with public opinion trends,” adding:

“Candidates seem heavily focused on short-term goals and are simply going with what is safe to say.”

Some candidates have started to shift the conversation. At a justice town hall in October, Cory Booker said of the violent/non violent separation: “we need to challenge that [distinction] publicly.” He noted for one, that the “violent” label has become “warped” from what the general public assumes it means, a point Elizabeth Warren echoed at another criminal justice forum last month. For example, in states like North Carolina and Minnesota drug crimes can be categorized as violent based on the quantity involved or location where they are committed. Warren said she “started out where everybody did, [saying] ‘let’s talk about the non-violent offenders,’” but was startled to learn that “things that never would have crossed my mind as a violent offense get put on the violent side of the dividing line.”

Booker also added a broader point, that “saying ‘violent offenders’ and making these distinctions means that you don’t think someone is worthy of redemption.”

Whether such realizations will lead to efforts that free large number of people guilty of violent offenses remains to be seen. Harris, for example, has proposed a commission to study the issue, but no specific measures. Booker, in his criminal justice platform, pledges to free large numbers of people, but only those convicted of “nonviolent drug offenses,” and to remove mandatory minimum sentences for that same group moving forward.

Udi Ofer, director of the ACLU’s smart justice campaign, said that while the embrace of the violent/non-violent distinction is “frustrating,” it’s worth taking note of some of the things candidates are avoiding saying too.

“Even though the candidates are not stressing proactively the fact that they’re going to take on violent offenses, they’re also not including carve outs in a lot of their messaging that I think in the past they would have,” Ofer said, such as clear exceptions for violent offenders. He pointed to support for “second look legislation” by a number of candidates, including Booker, who introduced a Senate version of the law this summer. Such a bill would allow anyone in federal prison for at least 10 years to ask a judge to take a “second look” at their sentence for possible sentence reduction or release.

Ofer also points to candidates who have indicated support for ending mandatory minimums, “and not saying only for nonviolent offenses,” which is true of roughly half the Democratic contenders. “I think the silence in those moments is actually a positive,” Ofer said. Indeed, some advocates of ending mass incarceration are hoping candidates will, at the very least, do just that: propose reforms that simply make no distinction between violent and non-violent crimes.

As for Walter Johnson, he maintains his innocence on the charge that put him away, the 1985 armed robbery. His claim is supported by accounts documented by Brown in “Snitch” of another Brooklyn hustler having claimed responsibility. Still, Johnson says he has arrived at a place of deep contrition for the many other crimes he admits he committed as a stick-up man.

“I did a lot of bad things to people that I would never imagine doing now,” Johnson said. “I’ve been reinventing myself within the federal system for years now, and I’m finally feeling proud of the human being I’m becoming... I beg those who are favoring the non-violent over the violent offender to please look a little deeper and recognize the fact that we are all human beings capable of evolution.”

Working Their Way Home from Prison

Brian L. Frank photographs young men in a California prison camp and on their journeys to freedom.

Photographs by Brian L. Frank
Text by Jaeh Lee

When young men arrive at Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp—California’s first and only remaining...
rehabilitative prison camp for offenders sentenced as teens—they first notice the trees. Pine Grove sits in a small valley just above the snow line in the western Sierra Nevadas, between a casino and the mountains. The second thing they notice is that there is no barbed wire surrounding the property.

Photographer Brian L. Frank, a 2017 Catchlight Foundation fellow, spent a year working with The Marshall Project to examine alternatives to traditional incarceration. One piece of that work, shown here, focuses on the young men incarcerated at Pine Grove, also known as “fire camp.” Frank documented the men, who range in age from 18 to 24, as they learned to fight fires and perform other wilderness jobs, such as clearing brush and streams. He followed the prisoners as they attended school and, eventually, were released back to their communities.

Those young men included Marcus Tapia, Kermit Moore and Kain Castro, who each came to Pine Grove in 2016. Tapia and Moore grew up in Los Angeles and were raised primarily by their grandparents. Tapia was imprisoned for armed robbery and gun possession; Moore for attempted murder. Castro grew up in Salinas, where he lived with his mother, brother and sister. In his teens, Castro was arrested and sent to prison for assault. All three were incarcerated in state prisons for juveniles before earning their places at Pine Grove with good behavior and by taking classes and programs.

“Everything was good about it except the time, you know?” Tapia says of Pine Grove. “Because time kills you.” For Moore, the camp felt like a “neutral zone”—for once, his gang or race didn’t seem to matter.

There are two ways to leave Pine Grove: get paroled or get kicked out and serve the rest of your time back in prison. Tapia and Moore took the latter route—Tapia for getting into a fight with another ward, Moore for talking back to a captain. After more than a year at the camp, they each were transferred to a juvenile prison in Ventura County. Tapia was released in February 2018, two months before his 21st birthday. Moore, now 21, was paroled over the same year’s summer.

Castro was considered a model ward at Pine Grove and was released in October 2017 at age 18. Coming home felt like a test, he says, “like everyone’s looking at you.” A few days before he arrived home, his older brother violated parole and was sent back to prison. Eight months later, Castro was arrested for missing a probation appointment. Not long after he went back to jail in Monterey County, he got into a fight and was charged with assault with a street gang enhancement. He was sentenced to eight years and went to North Kern State Prison in September.
Tapia speaks with family back home in Los Angeles. "There were a lot of trees—pine trees—I'd only seen in the movies. I was looking at so much freedom. I did not see one fence around that camp, and it was a good feeling. But even though it was a good feeling, you still get lonely. You still feel institutionalized," Tapia said.

Small items from home, like rosary beads, are allowed at the camp.

Marcus Tapia learned to adapt to prison during his time at a higher-security facility. "I'll tell you this: Every day I woke up and realized where I was, and I used to get mad at myself. I put a mask on me. I hid my emotions. I learned how to smile and just shake it off. I used to be like, 'It's one day closer to home,'" he said. Soon after his arrival at Pine Grove, he was sent by guards to collect the American flag at the end of the day.
The young men at Pine Grove, ranging from 18 to 24 years old, line up before they set out for a day of road work.

Remote and surrounded by thick forest, Pine Grove doesn’t have any walls.

1. Pine Grove prisoners come out of their barracks after a day of working in the field to attend school at the camp.
2. Waiting for a head count, which occurs every hour.
3. Tapia, at his small apartment in East Los Angeles, after his release from prison.

An altar for Tapia’s best friend, “Yayo,” who was killed in 2018. “Yayo and I did our time together. From day one, we clicked. He was a really good listener. When I was having a bad day, he would notice it and say, ‘Talk to me, my boy.’ He was out eight months before I got out. I got a phone call from one of my friends. I remember him saying, ‘Yayo’s gone. He’s dead. He got killed. They killed him.’ And my heart stopped,” Tapia said.
During his incarceration at Pine Grove, Kermit Moore clears debris from a creek bed as part of the “rehabilitation through labor” practiced at the camp. “Being up there on that mountain, seeing the stars—I just liked being in the wild. But people don’t know how it feels to be gone. Just snatched away,” Moore said.

Moore rose at 4 a.m. to see if he could get a job for a day on a road crew. He wanted to make some money after losing his new job at UPS after being accused of stealing an iPhone. “I just want to be independent. I don’t want to use nothing. I don’t want to be on the county or SSI. I want to be able to supply for myself,” Moore said.

Moore visits family in South Central Los Angeles after his release from prison. “Your family is all you have in this world. Nobody wants to be alone. Nobody wants to be by themselves, because that’s the worst feeling ever, when you feel like you’ve hit rock bottom,” said Moore.
Upon returning to camp after a day of work, the men are strip-searched for contraband. “My whole life—jail. I know a little bit. I’m a little street smart, a little book smart. But I really don’t know nothing, because I ain’t lived,” Moore said.
Excited for his release, Kain Castro brushes his teeth on his last day at Pine Grove. Castro had been a prisoner since he was 14 years old and earned his release from Pine Grove at age 18. Castro faces the daunting challenge of being placed on a lifetime gang registry upon his release, plus five years of strict probation, with any number of probation violations being enough to send him back to prison.

Soon after coming home, Castro visits the gravesites of friends who died while he was away.
My Dog Didn't Forget Me When I Went to Prison

Charlotte was there for the worst moments of my life. And she was there as I picked up the pieces.

By Keri Blakinger

Back before I went to prison, I had a dog. Her name was Charlotte. She was a black lab/greyhound mix, with white around her nose. Getting her was one of the few things I do not regret from my years of drug use.

I brought her home in 2007, just a few days after I’d jumped off a bridge in Ithaca, New York, in a very earnest suicide attempt. It was a 98-foot fall, police later told me. But I hit a mossy flat rock and slid, fracturing a number of vertebrae and ending up in the ICU.

Afterward, the person I was dating made probably the only good suggestion they ever made the entire time we knew each other and pushed me to get a dog, hoping that with an animal to care for I wouldn’t try to kill myself again.

I resisted. I understood the logic, but it still seemed like a bad idea. I was a broke drug addict, and a dog was both an expense and a responsibility. But I was lonely, and clearly in a bad place. I needed something. A cat seemed more doable, I thought.

And so, just four or five days out of the hospital and still wearing back and neck braces, I found myself standing in line at a Walmart checkout, when I noticed the woman next to me had a box of kitty litter.

I asked if she happened to have an extra cat.

She did not. But, she said, her friend had a dog that was about to go to the pound if they couldn’t find a new home by the end of the weekend.

When I picked Charlotte up two days later, she was in rough shape—just like me. She wasn’t quite 2, and her previous owners had found her a little over a year earlier, abandoned in a farmer’s field, making herself a bed in corn. They’d taken her in, but they already had four other dogs who bullied her and stole her food.

By the time I got Charlotte—after the couple who owned her split up—her ribs stuck out and she jumped at everything. As soon as I brought her in the house, she saw my housemate’s cat and immediately peed all over the floor in abject terror.

She got healthier, but it took me quite a few years to follow suit. She spent a lot of time trying to steal people’s weed and walking to crackhouses with me. She was there through the worst of my addiction and saw it all—raids, robberies, tears, drunken fights. At times, just knowing that she depended on me kept me from making even more destructive decisions than I already did.

But then I got arrested in late 2010, picked up while walking down the street with a large stash of drugs. In a rare occurrence, Charlotte wasn’t with me; she was in my apartment. And I had no idea what would happen to her. I’d heard that the cops searched my place—which made sense, since I’d just been arrested with six ounces of heroin.

Eventually, a friend on the outside checked for me. After the police search, he said, it appeared that someone had broken in and ransacked the apartment. This kind of thing happens: When people read in the news that someone got arrested and is in jail, they break in and steal stuff because they know no one’s home. Most of my belongings were taken. They even took my dirty underwear. And worst of all, my dog was missing—just vanished. She wasn’t at my place or at any of the animal shelters.

Charlotte had been a huge support for me through some rough times, and I had no idea what happened to her. And whatever it was, I knew it was my fault.

A week or two after my arrest, I found out where she was. Just before the thieves broke in, the apartment property manager had given her to a family. They were complete strangers, with two daughters and a nice home in an upscale neighborhood called Cayuga Heights. And they were a little apprehensive about taking in a drug dealer’s dog.

But they were animal-lovers, and they had a dog of their own—Bailey. Another black lab mix, she looked like she could have been Charlotte’s twin.

Bailey and Charlotte became besties, and my dog started a happy dog life without me. Doing my time day by day, I only heard about it second-hand.

Initially, the family had intended to keep her for a few days until long-term arrangements could be made. But then they fell in love with her and decided they’d keep her until I got out. At that point, we didn’t know how long that would be.

In the meantime, I missed having a life filled with fur. I felt like I’d abandoned her, and it seemed like one of the most tangible immediate harms I’d done in my addiction—though of course it was really only one of many.

I did just under two years, and when I got out—in the fall of 2012—the family was still in love with her, and they’d decided to adopt her and keep her forever.
Finally. Fresh out of prison, I felt like I had so little to offer in life. But I had my dog, and it seemed like the first thing I’d done right in a long time.

2012—the first place I went was to see Charlotte.

She had no idea who I was. Over the next few weeks, I came to the family’s house to visit her, watching her play all the new games she’d learned to play with Bailey. The family and I took her on walks, showing me all her new favorite spots. And I hoped eventually she’d remember me and stop treating me like a stranger.

It felt like it took forever, but I could see in her eyes the moment she figured it out. I took her on a walk past the place we lived when I got arrested, and it clicked. She stopped trying to pull away from me. She responded when I called her.

Finally. Fresh out of prison, I felt like I had so little to offer in life. But I had my dog, and it seemed like the first thing I’d done right in a long time.

I had my dog, and it seemed like the first thing I’d done right in a long time.

Charlotte died just over two years ago. She’d been there when I got back into college, barked at my parole officer and seen me successfully finish parole. She’d moved with me when I got hired as a reporter at the New York Daily News, and again when I went to work at the Houston Chronicle. She’d seen the worst moments of my life—and she had been there as I picked up the pieces. She died two months after we moved to Texas, at age 11.

The things that help with successful reentry can be so random. There’s privilege and opportunity—and there’s also dumb luck. It was such chance that, through my dog, I was able to meet people who would believe in me and help me get my life together at a time when most people would not.

And, yeah, my dog helped me get my life together, too. Miss her every day. Heckin’ good dog.

Keri Blakinger, 34, is a criminal justice reporter for the Houston Chronicle. She has not gotten another dog.

This time around, she went for a cat.

Should Prisoners Be Allowed to Have Facebook Pages?

A new policy in Texas limits inmates’ access to social media, creating a First Amendment conundrum.

By Maurice Chammah

In 1974, Elmer Wayne Henley Jr. received six life sentences for helping Dean Corll, a Texas candy company owner, abduct, rape and murder at least 28 boys and young men. Over the next four decades, the family members of the victims kept in touch, trading notes when Henley was up for parole. In 2011, they discovered that someone had set up a Facebook page for Henley and was helping him sell art he’d made in prison.

“All these people who were his friends on Facebook were just followers of serial killers — people who like serial killers,” says Cyndi Yates, the sister of one of Henley’s victims. “I wanted it off of there.”

Texas officials asked Facebook to take the page down, and the company complied. But this past February, a page for Henley reappeared — and was again taken down. In the last few years, multiple family members of victims have asked the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to get Facebook to remove pages made by third parties for prisoners, according to Andy Kahan, a crime victim advocate for the City of Houston. “There’s a concern about continuing to give individuals who have done terrible things infamy and immortality and a platform to pontificate,” he says.

On April 1, 2016, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice announced a broad new policy: men and women in Texas prisons can no longer maintain a social media profile through a third party “for the purposes of soliciting, updating, or engaging others.” The policy applies only to what is defined as “social media accounts,” including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

Department spokesman Jason Clark says prison officials need proof that the inmate was actively involved in creating the social media profile, and if that proof exists, inmates are given low-level punishments: commissary revoked, or recreation time withheld.

The department’s leaders said no specific case spurred the decision and that the policy simply strengthens their ability to ask Facebook to take down such profiles. “It gives Facebook cover to remove the pages,” Kahan says. Several activists, however, argue that the ban might imperil their efforts to call attention to legal injustices, and even legitimate claims of innocence.

Texas is the latest state and the largest prison system to craft policies to
They need to know that people are thinking about them, “ she says of her husband and other prisoners. “I tell him, ‘You got this many likes in this amount of time.’ It’s so important to him.”

Making the Case Against Banishing Sex Offenders

Legislators won’t touch the subject, but courts are proving more sympathetic.

By Maurice Chammah

Mary Sue Molnar estimates that she gets at least five calls a week from Texans on the sex offender registry who can’t find a place to live. Numerous towns around the state have passed ordinances prohibiting those on the list from residing within a certain distance — anywhere from 500 to 3,500 feet — of a school, park, daycare facility or playground. In some towns, that’s almost everywhere.
"We've got people living in extend- 
ed-stay motels," says Molnar, who runs 
the sex-offender-rights group Texas 
Voices for Reason and Justice. "We're 
in a crisis mode."

Molnar and her allies have consid-
ered lobbying the Legislature to ban 
these ordinances, but they've found 
lawmakers unreceptive in the past to 
any bill perceived to benefit sex offend-
ers. So she decided to go to court.

Molnar enlisted a small army of 
parents and siblings of sex offenders 
to compile a list of towns with such 
ordinances, and assembled research 
showing that the rules can actually 
make the public less safe. She enlisted 
Denton lawyer Richard Gladden. He 
was already representing Taylor Rice, 
who as a 20 year-old had sex with 
a 14 year-old he met online and now, 
after his conviction for sexual assault, 
was legally barred from living with his 
parents because their house was too 
close to a high school's baseball field. 
Gladden had found a 2007 opinion by 
then-attorney general (now governor) 
Greg Abbott saying that towns with 
fewer than 5,000 residents — which fall 
into a particular legal category in Texas 
— are not authorized by the state to 
enact such restrictions on their own.

Gladden sent letters threatening 
lawsuits to 46 city councils. Within 
two months, half of them had repealed 
their ordinances. Gladden and Molnar 
are currently suing 11 of the remaining 
towns.

Restrictions on where registered 
sex offenders can work, live, and visit 
vary widely from state to state and city 
to city. Over the last few years, Molnar 
and her counterparts in other states 
have come to the same conclusion: 
Politicians aren't going to help them. 
"Who wants to risk being called 
a pedophile-lover?" says Robin van 
der Wall, a North Carolina registrant 
on the board of the national group 
Reform Sex Offender Laws.

So the activists have taken the 
routefavored by other politically un-
popular groups and turned to the legal 
system, where they are more likely to 
encounter judges insulated from elec-
toral concerns. Their legal claims vary, 
but in numerous cases, reformers have 
argued that these restrictions associ-
ated with registration add up to 
a sort of second sentence, and 

that they are defined in a vague way 
that makes them difficult to abide by. 
In some cases, the plaintiffs have 
argued that individual towns have 
enacted restrictions above and beyond 
what states allow them to impose. 

Their legal strategies are proving 
effective. In August 2016, the 6th U.S. 
Circuit Court of Appeals invalidated a 
Michigan law that retroactively applied 
various restrictions to people convicted 
before the laws were passed. Judge Al-
ice Batchelder wrote that the law "has 
much in common with banishment and 
public shaming." Since 2014, state and 
federal judges have struck down laws 
restricting where sex offenders can live 
in California, New York and Massachu-
setts. In addition to the Texas lawsuits, 
there are ongoing legal battles over 
registries and restrictions associated 
with them in Illinois, Wisconsin, Louis-
iana, Alabama, Colorado, Nevada and 
Idaho, among other states.

The lawyers involved have a "loose 
network of communication," says Janice 
Bellucci, an attorney working for the 
Alliance for Constitutional Sex Offense 
Laws, a California group that is suing 
a number of small towns. Van der Wall, 
in North Carolina, says the trend boils 
down to "an old trick of lawyers: if 
something works somewhere else, it 
may work for you."

A related crop of lawsuits can be 
traced to a 2003 U.S. Supreme Court 
decision, Smith v. Doe, which upheld 
Alaska's sex offender registry and 
concluded that registration does not 
amount to punishment. Writing for the 
majority and citing earlier opinions, 
Justice Anthony Kennedy noted that 
such laws were crucial because "the 
risk of recidivism posed by sex offend-
ers is 'frightening and high."

"A lot of states have treated Smith 
v. Doe as a blank check," says Miriam 
Aukerman, an ACLU attorney who suc-
cessfully challenged Michigan's laws. 

Kennedy's "frightening and high" 
line was based on a 1988 Department 
of Justice guide for treating sex of-
fenders, which cited an unfounded 
conjecture in the magazine Psychology 
Today. Further studies have shown the 
ineffectiveness of residency restric-
tions. In 2003, the Minnesota Depart-
ment of Corrections collected data on 

nearly 100 sex offenders who had been 
released from prison and concluded, 
"There is no evidence in Minnesota 
that residential proximity to schools 
or parks affects reoffense." As many 
as 90 percent of child victims know 
their rapists, but residency restrictions 
are meant to stop sexual assaults by 
strangers, a much rarer scenario.

The California Sex Offender Manage-
ment Board, a state agency, concluded 
in 2008 that restrictions had led more 
sex offenders to become homeless, and 
in turn more likely to reoffend.

Some of these studies have been 
cited in decisions siding with regist-
trants against states and cities. J.J. 
Prescott, a University of Michigan law 
professor, suspects that years of news 
stories about the difficulties of living 

on the sex offender registry have had 
an effect. "Judges read the papers," 
he says. "They see the same stuff on 
the internet that we see. As the lack of 
social science supporting these laws 
becomes increasingly conspicuous, 
I believe they've become more likely 
to take the constitutional objections 
seriously."

Plenty of judges have come to 
the opposite conclusion, ruling that 
various restrictions do not constitute 
"punishment" (and therefore do not 
violate the Constitution's ban on adding 
punishments long after conviction). In 
September 2016, California's 9th Circuit 
Court of Appeals upheld a lower court 
ruling in favor of Arizona's sex offender
I Host a Popular Podcast. I’m Also in Prison.

“I’m hungry to make meaning out of destruction.”

By Rahsaan Thomas

The sun shines brightly through the gated windows so I grab a pair of Sony headphones and the Tascam (a portable audio recorder) and leave the office with my co-worker, John “Yahya” Johnson, an intellectual Muslim brother out of Oakland. Curious as to how many people behind bars have seen the romance movie “The Notebook,” we venture outside to the yard to find out. I walk up to the first guy I see, someone waiting on the sidelines to play basketball.

“Hey man, can I interview you about the classic romance movie called ‘The Notebook’?”

“I’ve never seen ‘The Notebook.’”

“So what’s the best romance movie you have seen?”

“Baby Boy.”

I laugh because Baby Boy, an urban tale about a childish young man who needs to grow up in order to raise his son alongside the mother, is not what I would consider a classic romance movie.

Then I remove a release form (to have the man I’d just interviewed sign) from a green binder with an Ear Hustle logo stuck on the cover.

Ear Hustle is the award-winning podcast about life inside prison—specifically my prison, San Quentin—that has around 30 million downloads in total. It’s the brainchild of Nigel Poor, a professor who taught for years at San Quentin, Earlonne Woods, a man who was serving a life sentence for attempted robbery under California’s three-strikes law, and Antwan “Banks” Williams. The original plan was to circulate the show only inside the prison, but then they got permission to enter a Radiotopia “Podquest” contest.

No one at San Quentin knew how to do a podcast, but they entered anyway—and won. In 2017, Ear Hustle launched to critical acclaim with “Cellies,” featured on the Today Show, tallying nearly 2 million downloads.

As a reporter for the San Quentin News, I covered the rapid rise of the podcast as it defied the gravity of being produced inside a prison. From right next door, I cheered at the accomplishment of something that no incarcerated people had ever been able to do so effectively: reach millions of people.

But in 2018, Gov. Jerry Brown commuted Earlonne’s sentence, and he became a free man; his job as co-producer and co-host was suddenly available. Eager to learn how to tell more effective stories, I jumped at the chance to apply. That meant getting grilled by Nigel, while Earlonne warned me that I probably should just settle for being a producer. It would be hard to follow a guy with a perfect radio voice, I knew.

But Earlonne surprised me a few weeks later, saying, “It’s you, dog. You gonna be the new co-host.”

I felt proud to be chosen, of course, but even more scared about following his act. Earlonne’s charisma and rapport with Nigel are a huge part of the podcast’s success. Plus he’s a three-striker, which gets him a measure of sympathy, whereas I’m convicted of murder. Would the world accept me becoming the voice of Ear Hustle?

A few nervous month later, it was decided that Earlonne would actually continue with the show by producing and co-hosting certain stories that covered the other side of incarceration: what it’s like to be on parole.

On the yard, Yahya and I continued to ask people about “The Notebook” for an episode about “dating while on parole” called, “I Want the Fairy Tale.” We interviewed about eight more guys at random. A few declined to speak on the record, but most hold Ear Hustle in high regard and were eager for a chance to shine. After finding out that the majority of men at San Quentin won’t admit to being chick-flick fans, we headed back to the media center.

There, Nigel sat at an iMac computer editing audio using ProTools software. Across the small space, Antwan worked with Pat...
Mesiti-Miller, an audio engineer, on sound-designing.

Nigel and Pat are our supervisors, but it feels like the only difference between us is that they get to leave the prison and go home at the end of the workday. Otherwise we are colleagues. I weigh in on stories and how far we can go without losing the respect of the incarcerated people who trust us. (We often have to advise the men not to give us too much information about themselves, for their own privacy and security in here, no matter how many downloads they think their most dramatic story will get.)

I’ve heard it said that there can be no communication until we sit together as equals. Working for Ear Hustle feels like that. In most prisons I’ve been to, it didn’t feel like I could work with society to accomplish anything. Like so many in lockup, I felt alienated from you. But now I feel like a productive member of both the inside and outside community.

Besides working with my colleagues, I also interact with Lieutenant Robinson, the public information officer here. He’s the type of prison official who supports positive endeavors and empowers us to carry them out. It’s his signature on a memo of permission that allows me to walk the yard conducting interviews. For the first time in my life, I enjoy talking with a correctional officer—it’s actually fun to hear him clown around when he records the approvals for a story.

At the end of the workday, the Lt. came to weigh in on our “Inside Music” episode. A microphone attached to what looks like a robotic arm extends to each side of our “Inside Music” episode. A micro-story will get.)

I’ve heard it said that there can be no communication until we sit together as equals. Working for Ear Hustle feels like that. In most prisons I’ve been to, it didn’t feel like I could work with society to accomplish anything. Like so many in lockup, I felt alienated from you. But now I feel like a productive member of both the inside and outside community.

Besides working with my colleagues, I also interact with Lieutenant Robinson, the public information officer here. He’s the type of prison official who supports positive endeavors and empowers us to carry them out. It’s his signature on a memo of permission that allows me to walk the yard conducting interviews. For the first time in my life, I enjoy talking with a correctional officer—it’s actually fun to hear him clown around when he records the approvals that we play during each episode.

Today the Lt. came to weigh in on our “Inside Music” episode. A microphone attached to what looks like a robotic arm extends to each side of a small table. ProTools is set to record.

“I went back and forth” on approving this one, the Lt. said into the mic, “because I know there’s a genre you guys missed. There is no country music in this episode. But, begrudgingly, I am Lt. Sam Robinson at San Quentin State Prison, the public information officer who approves this episode.”

Producing a podcast from prison isn’t all green lights, though. The “Inside Music” episode went up behind schedule because it had to be further cleared by the administration before it could be released, and that happened a day late. They check for “security and safety” concerns.

It can be frustrating, but then I remember: There’s probably no other prison in the world where a man convicted of murder would be allowed to use his time so productively doing something he loves—bringing joy, understanding, and entertainment to the public about the human nature of people behind bars. Because of how much harm I caused many families, it doesn’t feel like I deserve to be co-host of anything. At the same time, I’m hungry to make meaning out of destruction.

With each episode, I wonder if some listener will actually object to me co-hosting.

At the end of the day, I return to a cell that I share with another incarcerated person. I grab my shower stuff and troop back down five flights of stairs to the shower that’s down there. It’s full. A line of 12 men stand under a small pipe with nozzles streaming water, each just two feet apart.

I wait on the side until a shower becomes available and wash myself there, in front of everyone.

About 20 minutes later, I’m back in my cell as a correctional officer locks the door for the night. I’m in prison.

But before walking away, he hesitates, shuffles through some envelopes and says, “Thomas.”

“You got some letters.”

He hands three through the side of the gate. I quickly scan the return addresses. One is from someone I don’t recognize.

I open it and commence reading. It starts with “I heard you on Ear Hustle.”

I grin.

Rahsaan Thomas, 49, a New York native, is a contributing writer for The Marshall Project and a co-producer and co-host of Ear Hustle. He is incarcerated at San Quentin State Prison, where he’s the chairman of the Northern California Society of Professional Journalists - San Quentin Satellite Chapter and a contributing writer for the San Quentin News and Wall City magazine. He is serving a 55-to-life sentence for second-degree murder, with a 35-year enhancement for using a firearm.

They Got Their Voting Rights Back, But Will They Go to the Polls?

Thousands of Louisianians on probation and parole face numerous obstacles to casting a ballot, including the idea that their votes don’t matter.

By Nicole Lewis

Most Sundays, Clint Williams attends service at one of the biggest churches in New Orleans. In the pews he sometimes finds himself sitting shoulder to shoulder with the city’s black elected officials. Over the years many have asked for his support.

“Politicians ask me: ‘Are you voting for me?’ And I’d just say, ‘yeah, I am working on it,’” Williams said.

But Williams, 58, has never voted. He’s been on parole for the past 30 years, which, until March, made him ineligible to choose who will represent him in public office. If not for the law change, Williams would have lost the right to vote until he was nearly 80 years old. His parole ends in 2040.

Williams and nearly 37,000 Louisianians who have recently had their voting rights restored by the state legislature are joining a potential wave of new voters from across the country.

Last year, Florida elected to restore voting rights to nearly 1.5 million people with felony convictions. And, as of July 1, nearly 77,000 formerly incarcerated people in Nevada will be able to vote in the next election.

The influx of new voters could shape upcoming elections in these states as well as the presidential race in 2020. Florida and Nevada, both increasingly purple swing states, are important prizes to secure an Electoral College victory. While little is known about the political leanings of the formerly incarcerated, many political
observers assume they would vote for Democrats. For one, black adults are four times more likely to be barred from voting because of felony disenfranchisement laws, according to the Sentencing Project. And black voters have consistently favored Democrats.

But these assumptions could be overblown. The formerly incarcerated must overcome daunting hurdles, both personal and administrative, in order to vote. In Florida, for example, the legislature required the newly-eligible voters to pay outstanding fines and fees before registering, which critics say is akin to a poll tax. In Louisiana, many of these potential voters are consumed by the struggle to rebuild their own lives after prison. They must also combat the apathy born of their ordeals: In interviews, several formerly incarcerated people said they were not sure that elected officials can make a difference in their lives.

While the voter registration deadline in Louisiana loomed for the gubernatorial primary this past October, community organizers worked overtime to reach as many newly eligible voters as possible. Under the new law, people on parole and people who have been on supervision for five years after being released from prison are able to get their voting rights restored. But the state will not automatically inform people who are affected. So the organizers have run ads on social media, put up posters in probation and parole offices, knocked on doors in minority neighborhoods and appeared on local news stations. They’ve even held an eight-city bus tour, with the help of the nonprofit Black Voters Matter Fund, to raise awareness about the change in the law. But turnout was low: Only a handful of people showed up to register.

Checo Yancy, 73, director of voter education with VOTE, the community organization spearheading the voter registration effort, says Louisiana’s secretary of state could be doing much more to inform the new voters and to make the registration process less cumbersome. But for now, voter registration requires two steps. First, the newly enfranchised must pick up a letter of eligibility from their probation or parole officer. Then they must take the letter to the registrar’s office, along with valid ID. A spokesperson for Secretary of State Kyle Ardoin did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Still, Yancy is undeterred. He once faced a life sentence for kidnapping and other charges before receiving a sentence commutation from the governor in 1995. Ultimately, he spent 20 years in the Louisiana State Penitentiary where he got his start as a political organizer working to improve prison conditions. And he was instrumental in getting the voting law passed last year. In October, he will cast a ballot for the first time in nearly 40 years, and he is optimistic that many of the 37,000 newly eligible voters will head to the voting booth, too.

“We have come from out of prison to do all this, and we are doing it,” he said.

The Marshall Project spoke with several formerly incarcerated people in Louisiana about how they feel about having the right to vote again and whether they plan to exercise it.

Lionel Dugas, of New Iberia, Louisiana, didn't realize that for the past three years he's been eligible to vote since he is not on parole.

**Lionel Paul Dugas, 45, New Iberia**

Prison has cost Lionel Dugas more than he can count. His job working on an oil rig was the first thing to go. After a few years in prison, his teeth began falling out. Often, he says, the prison medical staff only gave him aspirin to dull the pain radiating through his jaw.

Then, after years of physical labor and limited medical care, the feeling in his hands began to fade.

“State prisons will eat you inside out,” he said. “When I say I came out with nothing, I mean I really didn’t have nothing.”

Dugas spent eight years in prison for theft and forgery. In the three years since he has been back home, he’s struggled to rebuild the life he once had. Many formerly incarcerated people say the first few years after prison are the hardest. Landlords are reluctant to rent to them, and job options are often limited. Many struggle to meet their most basic needs.

To get by, Dugas works odd jobs as a painter and a carpenter. From the work he’s able to cobbled together, he makes about $1,000 a month. After he pays rent, there’s little left for anything else. To make matters worse, Dugas’s driver’s license was suspended for failing to pay outstanding child support. Without a car, he says, it’s hard to get to work. Without work, it’s hard to pay off his debts.

“I struggle so much,” he said.

So on a blistering Monday in July, Dugas came to a rally at Philadelphia Christian Church in Lafayette looking for a fresh start. He’d been attending the church’s programming for newly released prisoners and heard about a rally to register formerly incarcerated people to vote. Dugas didn’t realize that for the past three years he’s been eligible to vote since he is not on parole.

He thought a felony conviction barred him indefinitely. Organizers are using the law change as an opportunity to get people like Dugas to the polls.

Dugas admits he doesn’t know enough about politics to understand the differences between Democrats, Republicans or independents. He isn’t sure who he will vote for in the upcoming election, but he wants the nominees to understand the challenges he has faced as a result of his incarceration.

Voting won’t restore the feeling in his hands, pay his debts or get him back on the road. The benefits are mostly spiritual, he says. Registering to vote has given him a sense that he is welcomed back in society.

“These doors are starting to open for me, and it’s scary
Charles Blue, 42, Shreveport

For the past several months, Charles Blue has been working to register formerly incarcerated people to vote. Voting has always been important to him, and the five years he spent in prison for theft intensified his longing.

“When something is taken away from you, you regret the fact that you want to use it but you can’t,” he said. “So when it’s restored, it’s very important.”

But when he shows up to soup kitchens and churches trying to help people get their rights back, he is often met with indifference.

“You are trying to connect with people who at so many points don’t see the value,” he said. “They are more concerned with finding a job and trying to find a place to stay.”

He tries to cut through their resignation by drawing a direct line between their lives and the decisions that are made in Washington and in Baton Rouge, the state capital.

“All this boils down to one thing,” he said. “At that poll, in that voting booth, at that machine when you push that button. That representative that you are sending up to the state capital or to Washington, D.C., needs to represent your voice.”

It’s even more important for people with a criminal record to vote, he says. For years, Louisiana held the dubious distinction of being America’s mass incarceration capital. The state is working to roll back many of the practices that have filled up its prisons. But harsh sentences have already devastated the black community, Blue says. Over the years, he has watched many members of his community go to prison for years because of minor crimes. Under its habitual offender law, the state imposed tough sentences for repeat offenses.

“A lot of people didn’t understand what they were going to do with it until it actually affected them,” he said, arguing why voters could make their opposition to such tough-on-crime laws known at the ballot box.

These experiences have instilled in him a sense of pragmatism about politics. More than party affiliation, he says, he’ll base his vote on what would help him and his community thrive. He challenges the notion that the wave of potential new voters will automatically support Democrats.

“I want sustainable housing and better education,” he said. “If a Republican candidate is not saying the right things, but he is doing the right things and is putting forth a plan to help us get to a better point in life, then I can support him.”

Detric Linner, 41, Shreveport

In his teens, Detric Linner was in and out of jail. By the time President Barack Obama took office in 2009, Linner was 30 and serving a 25-year prison sentence for selling drugs.

At the time, many black Americans hoped that the nation’s first black president would put their issues at the center of the national political agenda. But in hindsight, Linner says he felt overlooked.

“Obama did nothing for me,” he said.

While he points out that Obama did make some positive changes, he says the former president did not go far enough to make criminal justice a priority.

“He’s a black man, and he was there for eight years,” he said. “He knew black people were the most highly incarcerated race in America. I feel like this should have been one of the issues he was attacking first before anything.”

Like many formerly incarcerated people, Linner’s entanglement with the criminal justice system has shaped his politics. Voting wasn’t a priority during the chaotic years before he went to prison. And he could not vote while incarcerated. Now, as he considers voting for the first time, he’s inclined to defer to a higher power.

“I feel like politicians all have their own personal agendas they are trying to push,” he said. “I know it’s important to vote for somebody. But, I just leave it in God’s hand.”

Outside of the probation and parole office in Shreveport, Linner said he has more pressing issues to address. He will be on parole until 2033, and will be required to check in with his parole officer once a month. To stay out of prison, he must comply with a long list of rules.

“Right now, I am just trying to be obedient to the laws so I can stay free,” he said. “They say if you do good for a couple years then they’ll let you off early.”

Patrice Sparks, 36, Shreveport

Two weeks after Patrice Sparks returned home from a brief stint in jail, she got a letter in the mail saying her voting rights...
were being terminated. Sparks was sentenced to two years’ probation after shooting a gun at an ex-boyfriend she says was trying to kill her.

Sparks has been a registered Democrat for as long as she can remember. She even voted for Obama twice. She knew that probation would mean check-ins with an officer, drug tests and curfews, but she says no one told her that it also meant losing the right to participate in elections.

When the law changed in March, making Sparks eligible to vote while still on probation, she says she never received a letter informing her that her rights had been restored. Sparks says her probation officer has never mentioned voting. The only indication something had changed was a poster in the lobby that reads: “Don’t assume you can’t vote because you are formerly incarcerated.”

“Nobody explained anything to us,” she said. “We just got to read the sign and figure it out ourselves.”

But Sparks got lucky. A group of volunteers planned to register new voters at the probation and parole office in Shreveport on the same day Sparks needed to check in. Once she finished meeting with her officer, Sparks stopped by the volunteers’ table to fill out the voter registration paperwork.

For weeks, Sparks held onto the application before dropping it off. She knew she needed to take the papers to the registrar’s office, but the requirements of her probation filled up her schedule.

Sparks was assigned a new probation officer with roughly seven months left on her sentence. The officer asked her to take a drug test, and Sparks turned up positive for marijuana. Sparks says she had already quit smoking and suspects the marijuana was slowly fading from her system. Now she has to report to drug class five days a week in addition to working full time.

“This class is interfering with my life,” she said. “There are other things I wanted to do, like going back to school.”

Clint Williams, 58, New Orleans

In October, Clint Williams plans to enter the voting booth for the first time. Now, when members of his church ask for his vote, he will finally be able to tell them yes.

Many at his church don’t know about his past or even that he’s on parole. He isn’t keen on talking about the mistakes he made over 30 years ago. Williams says he went through a wild phase after losing his parents at a young age. His mom died when he was in fourth grade. A few years later, his father died, too. Without his parents around, Williams says he clung to other directionless teenagers. As a teenager, he went to prison for 10 years after a robbery turned fatal—the man they tied up suffocated and died.

His wild days have been behind him for years, he says. His check-ins with his parole officer have decreased to once every six months.

“He pretty much knows those days are gone,” Williams said of his parole officer. “He works with me. He’ll come on my job, and people just think he is one of my clients.”

Williams doesn’t see the parole requirements as a burden. He has his freedom. He owns two small businesses. In the summer he runs a snowball stand, and he works year round as a carpenter. He sings in a men’s choir. The only nuisance, he says, is the $64 fine he must pay to probation and parole each month. The challenge of spending decades under surveillance is mostly mental, he says.

“There is nothing you can really do,” he said. “You have two options: You can be on parole or be locked up.”

Williams has made his choice, and by many measures he is living a normal life. He credits his faith for helping him weather the tough times. The men in his choir serve as a guide for the kind of life he wants to live.

“There are senators and lawyers and doctors and everyday men,” he said. “People who have been incarcerated and people who have not. I don’t want to mess up.”

Until March, the only thing missing was the ability to vote.

His work and faith have brought him into close contact with several elected officials in New Orleans. Over the years, he has been to city hall countless times to get permits and to register his businesses. Voting isn’t just political, he says, it’s personal, too.

“The mayor of New Orleans just took a picture with me at a snowball fest,” he said. “I know these people, and I support them, and I want my voice to matter.”
“When something is taken away from you, you regret the fact that you want to use it but you can't. So when it's restored, it's very important... All this boils down to one thing.

At that poll, in that voting booth, at that machine when you push that button. That representative that you are sending up to the state capital or to Washington, D.C., needs to represent your voice.”

Charles Blue, 42, Shreveport
Hello!

The Marshall Project and Slate are conducting a survey to understand the political opinions of prisoners in the United States. Your participation is voluntary. The results will be shared in an upcoming edition of News Inside.

At the end of the survey, you have the option of indicating if you are open to being contacted by a reporter from Slate or The Marshall Project. We will not use your name or any identifying details in our story without your permission.

Please use a pen to complete the survey and clearly mark your answer. Once you’ve completed the survey, please mail it back to us using the envelope provided.

If you’d like to share more information about your political views, please do so on a separate sheet of paper. Please skip any questions you can’t answer. Thank you for participating!

1. How often do you discuss politics with family, friends or others who are incarcerated?
   - □ Very frequently
   - □ Frequently
   - □ Occasionally
   - □ Rarely
   - □ Never

2. How do you primarily get your news?
   - □ Newspapers
   - □ Local radio
   - □ National Public Radio
   - □ Local TV news
   - □ Cable news
   - □ Word of mouth
   - □ Do not read/watch/listen to news
   - □ Do not have access to news

3. Please name your go-to news source:

   __________________________________________

   __________________________________________

   eg: NBC, NPR, The New York Times

4. Have you ever voted before?
   - □ Yes
   - □ No

5. In general, do you think things in our country are headed in the right direction or do you feel things are headed down the wrong track?
   - □ Right direction
   - □ Wrong track
   - □ In between
   - □ No opinion

6. How often do you feel that elected officials are acting in your interest?
   - □ Always
   - □ Very often
   - □ Sometimes
   - □ Rarely
   - □ Never
   - □ Don’t know / No opinion

7. Which party do you think is more committed to criminal justice reform?
   - □ Democrats
   - □ Republicans
   - □ They’re equally committed
   - □ Neither is committed
   - □ Don’t know / No opinion

8. Please indicate how you feel about these policies:
   a. Banning assault weapons
      - □ Strongly support
      - □ Support
      - □ Undecided
      - □ Oppose
      - □ Strongly oppose
   b. Legalizing marijuana
      - □ Strongly support
      - □ Support
      - □ Undecided
      - □ Oppose
      - □ Strongly oppose
   c. Tightening border security
      - □ Strongly support
      - □ Support
      - □ Undecided
      - □ Oppose
      - □ Strongly oppose
   d. Raising the minimum wage to $15/hour
      - □ Strongly support
      - □ Support
      - □ Undecided
      - □ Oppose
      - □ Strongly oppose

9. What do you think is the most important problem facing the country today?

   __________________________________________

   __________________________________________

   __________________________________________

Check here if you’d like to be contacted by a reporter from Slate / The Marshall Project
10. How much does your race affect your political views?
☐ A great deal
☐ Somewhat
☐ Not at all
☐ Not sure

Please explain:

11. Should people who are currently incarcerated be allowed to vote, no matter their crime?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Don’t know / No opinion

12. What impact has incarceration had on your motivation to vote?
☐ Increased my motivation to vote
☐ Slightly increased my motivation to vote
☐ No impact
☐ Slightly decreased my motivation to vote
☐ Decreased my motivation to vote

13. Have your political views changed since being incarcerated?
☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, please explain:

14. Please pick the top three most important criminal justice issues for the next president:
☐ Eliminating mandatory minimum sentences
☐ Reducing racial bias in the criminal justice system
☐ Abolishing the death penalty
☐ Lowering incarceration rates in rural communities
☐ Improving prison conditions
☐ Restoring voting rights to people with felony convictions
☐ Reducing the prison population
☐ Ending the “War on Drugs”
☐ Ending the use of private prisons
☐ Lowering sentences for people convicted of violent crimes
☐ Raising wages of incarcerated workers

15. If the election for president were being held today, would you vote for:
☐ Amy Klobuchar
☐ Andrew Yang
☐ Bernie Sanders
☐ Cory Booker
☐ Donald Trump
☐ Elizabeth Warren
☐ Joe Biden
☐ Julián Castro
☐ Michael Bloomberg
☐ Pete Buttigieg
☐ Tom Steyer
☐ Don’t know / Would not vote

16. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president?
☐ Approve
☐ Disapprove
☐ No opinion

17. Which party do you most identify with?
☐ The Republican party
☐ The Democratic party
☐ Independent
☐ Other: _______________________

18. How long have you been in this jail or prison?
☐ Less than 1 year
☐ 1 to 5 years
☐ 6 to 10 years
☐ 11 to 15 years
☐ 16 to 20 years
☐ 21 years or more

19. How long is your sentence?
☐ Less than 1 year
☐ 1 to 5 years
☐ 6 to 10 years
☐ 11 to 15 years
☐ 16 to 20 years
☐ 21 years or more

20. Do you identify as:
☐ Hispanic or Latino/a
☐ Not Hispanic or Latino/a

21. Please check all that apply.
Do you identify as:
☐ Native American
☐ Asian
☐ Black or African American
☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
☐ White
☐ Other: _______________________

22. How old are you?
☐ Under 18
☐ 18 - 25
☐ 26 - 35
☐ 36 - 45
☐ 46 - 55
☐ 56 - 65
☐ 66+

23. Do you identify as a:
☐ Man
☐ Woman
☐ Prefer not to say
☐ ___________

What is the highest educational level you’ve completed?
☐ Some high school
☐ High school or GED program
☐ Trade/technical/vocational training
☐ Associate degree program
☐ Bachelor’s degree program
☐ Master’s degree program
☐ Doctorate degree program
☐ Professional degree (JD, MD, etc.)
Thinking Inside the Box

Give these questions a try after you've read the stories in this issue. We'll include the answers in the next issue.

1. After Keri’s release, where did her dog Charlotte first recognize her?
2. In 2013, Alabama lawmakers decided that helping an inmate post on social media should result in a $____ fine?
3. Since 2014, state and federal judges have struck down laws restricting where sex offenders can live in California, New York and what other state?
4. In 2017, how many downloads did "Ear Hustle" nearly tally?
5. There are two ways to leave Pine Grove Youth Conservation Camp. What are they?
6. Roughly how many people who were either on probation or under supervision after their release have had their voting rights restored in Louisiana?
7. How would Sen. Elizabeth Warren reform the bail system?
8. Violent felony offenders make up roughly ______ of the nation’s incarcerated population.

Last Issue's Answers

1. Some prisoners in Mississippi, Alaska and Alabama can vote while incarcerated, depending on their convictions. ("In Just Two States, All Prisoners Can Vote. Here’s Why Few Do.")
2. Public Policy. ("Building Toward a Future.")
3. The Pendleton Correctional Facility parole hearing room. ("I'm in Prison—And on HBO")
4. To falsely testify against his co-defendant. ("I Wish I'd Plead Guilty to Murder")
5. Limited License Legal Technician. ("Can’t Afford a Lawyer?")
6. Burglary. ("When 'Violent Offenders' Commit Nonviolent Crimes")
7. The “GRACE” Act. ("Okay, What’s the Second Step?")
8. Impulse control and substance dependence. ("A Dangerous Brain")
9. The split was fairly even. ("What I Learned When I Googled My Students’ Crimes")
10. His office will for the first time consider supporting parole for individuals who were convicted at trial and were age 23 or younger and sentenced to lengthy prison terms. ("Took a Plea? Brooklyn’s District Attorney Will Support Your Parole")

If you’ve enjoyed this edition of News Inside and would like your loved ones to read our work, please share the following link to sign up for a free subscription to The Marshall Project:

https://www.themarshallproject.org/subscribe
is a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization that seeks to create and sustain a sense of national urgency about the U.S. criminal justice system. We achieve this through award-winning journalism, partnerships with other news outlets and public forums. In all of our work we strive to educate and enlarge the audience of people who care about the state of criminal justice.

Contributing Writers

JOHN J. LENNON Sing Sing Correctional Facility, Ossining, N.Y.
ARTHUR LONGWORTH Monroe Correctional Complex, Monroe, Wash.
JERRY METCALF Thumb Correctional Facility, Lapeer, Mich.
JULIA PRESTON
TOM ROBBINS
ANAT RUBIN
RAHSAAN THOMAS San Quentin State Prison, San Quentin, Calif.
GEORGE T. WILKERSON Central Prison, Raleigh, N.C.

The stories in this issue were originally co-published with:

California Sunday Magazine
CatchLight
Daily Advertiser in Lafayette
Houston Chronicle
Mother Jones
The Texas Observer
Vice

Contact

Lawrence Bartley
The Marshall Project
156 West 56th Street, Suite 701
New York, NY 10019
212-803-5200
lbartley@themarshallproject.org