CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Annual Report 2015
Our criminal justice system is broken. It is plagued by race and class disparities at every stage from arrest to incarceration. Prisons are overcrowded and make little effort at rehabilitation. Jails have become dumping grounds for addicts and the mentally ill. In too many communities, people fear the police rather than turn to them for protection.

The U.S. incarcerates more people than any other major country despite the fact that violent crime is near 40-year lows.

2,200,000 people are behind bars in the United States. Another 4,700,000 are on probation or parole, which limits their ability to find work or housing, and to vote.

6,000,000 are blocked from voting. 1,500,000 in Florida alone.

90 percent of criminal defendants qualify as indigent. 5 out of 6 people awaiting trial can't post bail.

Roughly 80,000 are kept in solitary confinement in a 6'x8' cell for 23 hours a day. Some are held there for years.

If you’ve opened our annual report, you probably don’t need persuading that the American criminal justice system is in crisis. The statistics tell the story. Even in the bitterly divided world of American politics, both liberals and conservatives have vowed their commitment to reform. Achieving it will require hard work: from advocates, criminal justice experts, law enforcement, the judiciary, and yes, good and skillful politicians.

It will also take great journalism. No social problem has ever been solved without shining a light into some dark corners. That’s what The Marshall Project was born to do. In just two years, we’ve published approximately 650 criminal justice stories and worked with a diverse range of media partners. We’ve had an amazing launch. In our first year, President Barack Obama granted us an exclusive interview. By 18 months, we’d won our first Pulitzer. We’ve prompted federal investigations, informed a Supreme Court opinion, helped improve police training, and gotten cameras installed in a prison where abuse was rampant. Along the way, we’ve told fresh and important stories and given voice to Americans who were not being heard in our national conversation.

We both come to this issue with hopeful hearts. Neil, a former reporter and hedge fund manager, launched The Marshall Project based on his belief that the criminal justice system is a national disgrace and high-quality journalism could help elevate the issue. Carroll, once a foreign correspondent for Newsweek, spent nearly two decades at Human Rights Watch before feeling impelled to focus on America’s biggest human rights problem: criminal justice. We’re proud to work with one of the country’s preeminent journalists, our Editor-in-Chief Bill Keller, in leading The Marshall Project.

Our aim is to create and sustain a sense of urgency about criminal justice. We hope you will find a way to help.

Neil Barsky
Founder and chairman of the board

Carroll Bogert
President
The Marshall Project is a nonprofit newsroom devoted to covering criminal justice. Investigative reporting is the core of what we do. Our reporters dive into stories that other media have missed or misunderstood. We often spend months interviewing sources, digging through documents, filing Freedom of Information Act requests, and visiting jails, prisons, courtrooms, and police stations around the United States.

We keep a close eye on breaking criminal justice news, looking for opportunities to provide context or analysis. Since our launch in November 2014, we have published a steady stream of stories, including profiles, interviews, commentaries, and first-person narratives.

Our journalism has had impact around the country.

About
Q&A with the Editor


Leaving The New York Times after 30 years must’ve been a big adjustment.... The biggest change was going from a newsroom of 1,300 journalists, with about 1.5 million paying subscribers — numbers that open doors and assure attention — to, in the beginning, some empty desks, a few generous backers, and a mission.

What’s the thing you’re proudest of so far? The Pulitzer was a great boost, and the interview with Obama was a proud moment for a young startup, but my favorite things about this job are, first, watching our passionate and relentless team of journalists and, second, the way we have used partnerships to amplify our voice.

In a system as rife with problems as criminal justice, what’s the role media can play? The media has too often been part of the problem, ratcheting up fear, covering the failures of the system and examine possible solutions. This gives ammunition to policymakers, advocates and others pressing for reforms.

Do you think nonprofit journalism is the wave of the future? I think it’s one wave, especially when it comes to the deep, watchdog reporting that — because it takes patience and money — is withering at all but the best for-profit news organizations.

Politicians have to have well-formed ideas on our economy, schools, foreign policy, how to fight crime even — but not, until recently, criminal justice. Why do you think it took so long for criminal justice to get the attention it deserves? While crime rates were high, in the 1980’s and 1990’s, politicians were afraid to touch the issue. But now we have a whole generation that has grown up with declining crime, and it’s become a little less risky to point out that the system costs billions of dollars, alienates whole communities, and doesn’t make us safer.

Where do you get your story ideas? Most of our story ideas flow up from the reporters, who keep in touch with policymakers, practitioners, advocates and other sources. We have a large network of experts, in and out of government, who provide data and other evidence. And then we go — to the streets, to the courts, to the prisons.

What is one thing you’d like to see more of? I’d like to see more intensive reporting on solutions. What really works in community policing, say, or in preparing the incarcerated for life after prison.
An Unbelievable Story of Rape tells the story of a young woman who reported being raped at knife-point in her apartment, only to be disbelieved by police as the perpetrator went on to assault other women.

Years later, two relentless female detectives in Colorado arrested a man suspected of raping several women and revealed that the original victim, whom we called “Marie,” had been telling the truth all along.

Marie had never agreed to be interviewed. Other stories had reported what happened, but not what went wrong in the initial investigation. We strove to find out why Marie had not been believed, why one police department had failed where another succeeded, and what were the consequences for her and other rape victims.

Here’s how we reported An Unbelievable Story of Rape.

August 2014 – May 2015
We send Marie emails, meet her attorney, and speak to him dozens of times to gain Marie’s trust.

We file public records requests with three police departments, two prosecutors’ offices, and review court records in Seattle.

August 2015
We learn ProPublica is investigating the story from Colorado. Rather than compete, we decide to team up.

September & October 2015
We interview Marie’s two foster moms, her boyfriend, and members of the Kirkland Police Department around Seattle.

We go to Colorado to interview the two female detectives responsible for finding Marc O’Leary, the man who raped Marie and at least four other women.

November 2015
The lead detective in Marie’s case finally agrees to speak with us. We interview him days before publication.

The 12,000-word story goes through six editors, which proves critical to the story’s success.

December 2015
We travel to This American Life’s offices to review the script with Ira Glass and record narration. All told, the script goes through 15 re-writes.

February 2016
An Unbelievable Story of Rape wins the Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting, and seven other awards.

April 2016
Today
An Unbelievable Story of Rape is used in police academies, emergency rooms, and universities to train police and first responders on how to deal with rape victims.

When Detective Stacy Galbraith and Sgt. Edna Hendershot figured out that a serial rapist was at work, they joined with other Colorado detectives to hunt him down. “Two heads, three heads, four heads, sometimes are better than one, right?” Hendershot said.
Our regular features have earned a loyal audience.

**Opening Statement**
We curate the country’s best criminal justice news. Each morning, we publish a roundup of the day’s most important criminal justice information from a wide variety of sources. Our Opening Statement has a loyal following of 23,500 subscribers, including many leading advocates and policymakers.

**Life Inside**
We seldom hear from this country’s 2.2 million incarcerated men and women, nor from those who work on the frontlines of criminal justice. Our Life Inside series, published each week with Vice, is written by those in prison, police officers, lawyers, doctors and victims. We’ve heard what it’s like to be gay in prison, how to invest in the stock market while behind bars, and from a juror with second thoughts about a death penalty verdict. Their narratives have reached millions.

**Case in Point**
This biweekly column by Andrew Cohen, broadcast in partnership with NPR’s The Takeaway, explores cases that shed light on the criminal justice system. Whether it’s a judge deciding not to rule on a case for five years, or the story of an intellectually disabled man held in isolation for three decades, these stories reveal the absurd, and often cruel, machinations of our system of crime and punishment.

The Marshall Project’s goal is to build the audience of people in this country who care about criminal justice reform. In just two years, we have reached millions of readers. Here are some of our best-read investigations.

- **An Unbelievable Story of Rape** by T. Christian Miller and Ken Armstrong, published with ProPublica and broadcast on This American Life, reached 1.5 million readers and was downloaded 2.4 million times.
- **Life Without Parole** by Beth Schwartzapfel, published with the Washington Post, reached roughly 200,000 readers online and 700,000 people in the print edition.
- **The Prosecutor and the Snitch** by Maurice Possley, published in collaboration with the Washington Post, reached 2 million readers.
- **Attica’s Ghosts** by Tom Robbins, published with The New York Times, reached 355,000 digital readers and 1.1 million print subscribers.
- **Solitary to the Streets** by Christie Thompson reached 13 million listeners on NPR’s Morning Edition and All Things Considered, and another 80,000 readers online.
- **Bill Keller’s interview with The Wire creator David Simon** on Baltimore’s anguish reached half a million readers.

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**Some of Our Media Partners**
- The New York Times
- Washington Post
- The Texas Tribune
- PBS’s Frontline
- The Times-Picayune
- San Francisco Chronicle
- NPR Investigations
- This American Life
- All Things Considered
- Ebony
- Vice
- Slate
- The New Yorker
- The Guardian
- Latino USA
- Essence
- Wired
- Mother Jones
- NBCBLK
- Mic.com
- Refinery 29
- WBLK
- Prison Legal News
- WBEZ
- Houston Chronicle
- AL.com

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What They’re Saying on Social Media

- “I’m for criminal justice reform, which is why I’m excited about The Marshall Project. Read their work.”
  - Cory Booker

- “Follow The Marshall Project for news of (in)justice in America @marshallproj
  - Michelle Alexander

- “A really fine work of journalism, illuminating about rape and how it’s treated.”
  - Nicholas Kristof

- “A Brutal Beating Wakes Attica’s Ghosts, via @nytimes... brutal is an understatement.”
  - Martina Navratilova

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**Readership Stats**
Each month, more than 400,000 people visit themarshallproject.org.

- **Twitter** 35,000+
- **Facebook** 40,000+
- **Subscribers** 26,000+

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Here is a breakdown of The Marshall Project’s revenue and expenses. While we began building our newsroom in early 2014, we did not publish our first story until that November. As a result, 2015 was our first full year as an operational newsroom. Our detailed financial statements are available on our website.

We are most grateful to those who helped us launch The Marshall Project and continue to support us in our early years. This list covers $5,000+ donors from our founding through the end of 2015.

**Founding Donors**
- Neil Barsky and Joan S. Davidson Foundation
- Laura and John Arnold Foundation
- The Atlantic Philanthropies
- Timothy and Michele Barakett Foundation
- Charles K. Edmondson, Jr. Foundation
- Ford Foundation
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- The Jacob and Valeria Langeloth Foundation
- The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
- Open Society Foundations

**Foundation Supporters**
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- Silverleaf Foundation
- Solomon Family Foundation
- The Statue Foundation

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- McComb Family Foundation
- Ken Miller and Lybess Sweezy
- Jonathan Moses
- Craig Neenenberg and Phoebe Taubman
- The John and Wendy Neu Family Foundation
- Alice and Ben Reiter Charitable Fund
The Marshall Project is named after Thurgood Marshall, a true American hero and the founder of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. His work as a lawyer there, including the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, laid the groundwork for the civil rights movement. As the first African-American justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, he argued for a living, breathing Constitution that would protect freedom and equality for all. Since his death in 1993, no other justice has ascended to the Supreme Court with experience as a defense lawyer.

“If Marshall were alive, I have no doubt that he would place criminal justice reform high among the urgent priorities of today’s civil rights movement, and that his would be a powerful voice for change. It is for these reasons that I chose to name The Marshall Project in his honor.” — Neil Barsky, founder of The Marshall Project
The Marshall Project 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.