

Our Journalism Sparks Change

The Marshall Project seeks to make an impact with its journalism, rendering the criminal justice system more fair, effective, transparent and humane. We look for instances where our stories have generated a change in the position or behavior of policymakers, advocates, or other media. Here are some of the clearest examples from the past few months:

THE PRICE OF INNOCENCE In April, our reporter Joe Neff brought us the moving story of Henry McCollum and Leon Brown, two intellectually disabled brothers who spent 30 years on death row in North Carolina for a murder they didn't commit. Upon their release, the compensation they received for their wrongful confinement was promptly siphoned off by the very people charged with their care. Particularly troubling was the behavior of Florida lawyer Patrick Megaro, who pocketed a third of each brother's reparations, approved high-interest loans, and signed off on questionable payments to putative advocates. After we co-published the story with The New York Times, Megaro was removed from the case, and a prominent Washington law firm stepped in to repre-



Attica Correctional Facility. CHANG W. LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

sent McCollum and Brown for free. The North Carolina State Bar also opened an investigation into Megaro. Neff followed up with a story in the New York Daily News about Megaro's co-counsel, Scott Brettschneider, who is now under federal indictment for filing false papers for a client.

EYES ON ATTICA In 2015, our story of brutal abuse by correctional officers at New York's notorious Attica prison landed on the front page of The New York Times. The next day, the three guards at the center of the story pleaded guilty to misconduct; the U.S. Department of Justice quickly launched an investigation; and prison officials began installing 1,875 cameras and nearly 1,000 microphones around the facility. This April, we published a feature by John

J. Lennon, a contributing writer to The Marshall Project who has been incarcerated at Attica (he's now at Sing Sing), about the effect our story has had there. Violent incidents at the prison dropped by nearly 80%, as guards now face an "unprecedented level of transparency and accountability," Lennon writes.

SAFER We've previously highlighted a joint investigation with USA Today Network in Tennessee about the state's 150-year-old "safekeeper" law, which allows county jails to ship people awaiting trial to state solitary confinement if a judge deems the local facility "insufficient" to handle their medical problems, mental illness, or behavioral issues. Now the governor has signed a law prohibiting jail officials from warehousing →



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→ teenagers in adult prison facilities, and making other changes to the “safekeeper” program. Tennessee prison officials have also promised to stop automatically sending detainees to solitary and to review their cases regularly to determine if they can be sent back home. “We don’t always think that the media are the most helpful folks in the world,” Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam said a few days after the story was published, “but there are times — a lot of times — when an issue comes up that you don’t know about. One of those was this.”

PROVING CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship is often discussed as a black-and-white issue: you either have it or you don’t. But as Christie Thompson

reported in May, it can be a lot more complicated. Part of our Case in Point series, a biweekly collaboration with WNYC’s “The Takeaway,” Thompson profiled Manuel Herrera, who’s being held in federal detention and facing possible deportation. Herrera was brought to the United States by his parents in 1976 when he was three months old and insists he’s a citizen — he just hasn’t been able to access his records. After reading our story, Anna Edwards — a New York-based attorney who helps people apply for dual citizenship — tracked down Herrera’s grandfather’s naturalization record in the National Archives. It was from 1954, early enough for Herrera’s father to have derived citizenship and to have passed it on to his son. The record also provides other clues about the family’s history that may help Herrera fight his case.

COMPASSION-LESS

The federal Bureau of Prisons has the power to grant “compassionate release,” a provision for inmates who are sick or old, but it almost never does. Only 6 percent have been approved in the past four years, or 312 people out of more than 5,000 applicants. In a deep dive co-published with The New York Times in March, Christie Thompson put a human face to new federal data, profiling many families whose loved ones have died in prison after their hearings were delayed or denied, often over the express advice of doctors and prison wardens. Human Rights Watch and Families Against Mandatory Minimum have now started using our story to push for the passage of the The GRACE Act (Granting Release and Compassion Effectively), a bill that would streamline the BOP’s process of review for compassionate release requests.



Anna Flagg on PBS NewsHour, April 1, 2018

more people, we also showcase our reporters on broadcast media to engage audiences of millions.

PBS NewsHour has hosted two of our reporters in recent months: contributing writer Julia Preston discussed the Trump Administration’s unwillingness to grant asylum to women fleeing domestic violence, while data reporter Anna Flagg explained her analysis of crime and immigration data, showing that crime has gone down in places where immigration has gone up. Our reporter Nicole Lewis appeared on **MSNBC** to discuss the case of Bernard Noble, who was released from prison in April after serving seven years for possessing two joints. Lewis’ story on recent changes in state prison populations was cited by **The Big 870** and **KEEL**, talk radio stations in Louisi-

ana where incarceration rates are declining faster than anywhere in the country. In April, our reporter Joe Neff worked with NBC-affiliate **WRAL** in Raleigh, North Carolina, to adapt his story on the wrongfully imprisoned brothers who were fleeced of their compensation money. **NewsChannel 5** in Nashville, Tenn., hosted an in-depth roundtable on our “safekeeper” reporting. Meanwhile, Tom Robbins talked about his critical look at Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance on **Spectrum News NY1**. Christie Thompson appeared on **WNPR**’s Colin McEnroe Show to discuss her groundbreaking reporting on compassionate release. And John J. Lennon, one of our incarcerated contributing writers, spoke with **WNYC**’s All Things Considered about his story on improving conditions at Attica.

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EXPANDING OUR REACH

The Marshall Project is always striving to expand the audience of people who care about the state of criminal justice. In addition to the partnerships that help our journalism reach