

**THE CENTER ON  
RACE  
INEQUALITY  
& THE LAW**  
NYU SCHOOL OF LAW



# 2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT

# TABLE OF CONTENTS / THE CENTER ON RACE, INEQUALITY, AND THE LAW

<b>1. LETTER FROM THE FACULTY DIRECTOR.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. ABOUT THE CENTER ON RACE, INEQUALITY, AND THE LAW.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.1. STAFF (2023-2024)</b>	
<b>2.2. WHAT IS THE CENTER ON RACE, INEQUALITY, AND THE LAW?</b>	
<b>2.3. HOW WE WORK</b>	
<b>2.4. THEMATIC PRIORITIES IN 2023-2024</b>	
<b>3. RACE AND THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3.1. PAROLE JUSTICE</b>	
<b>3.2. ADVOCACY WORK</b>	
3.2.1. State Courts	
3.2.2. CARE Coalition	
3.2.3. Vote NYC Jails	
3.2.4. 13th Forward	
<b>3.3. PUBLIC DEFENSE REFORM</b>	
3.3.1. Litigation	
<b>3.4. PUBLICATIONS</b>	
<b>3.5. PUBLIC EDUCATION</b>	
3.5.1. Public Conversations	
3.5.2. In the Media	
<b>3.6. AMICUS BRIEFS</b>	
3.6.1. <i>Betschart v. Oregon</i>	
3.6.2. <i>Commonwealth v. Derek Lee</i>	
3.6.3. <i>Grants Pass v. Johnson</i>	
3.6.4. <i>People v. Estwick &amp; People v. Wright</i>	
<b>4. RACE AND TECHNOLOGY.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>4.1. TECHNOLOGY AND RACIAL JUSTICE COLLABORATIVE</b>	
4.1.1. TRJC Quarterly Newsletter	
4.1.2. Community Engagement Platform and Legislative Bill Tracker	
4.1.3. Strategic Communications and Messaging Training	
<b>4.2. PUBLIC EDUCATION</b>	
4.2.1. Public Conversations	
<b>5. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>5.1. The Initiative on Community Power</b>	
<b>5.2. Stop Cop City</b>	
<b>5.3. Public Education</b>	
<b>5.4. Amicus Briefs</b>	
5.4.1. <i>Juliana v. United States</i>	
<b>6. RACE AND LEGAL EDUCATION.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>6.1. Race and Law Center Network</b>	
<b>6.2. Legal Pedagogy Working Group</b>	
<b>6.3. Publications</b>	
6.3.1. Character and Fitness in America's Neo-Redemptive Era	
<b>6.4. Student Opportunities</b>	
6.4.1. Fellowships, Internships, and Research Opportunities	
<b>7. NYU INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS.....</b>	<b>23</b>

## ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

### LETTER FROM THE FACULTY DIRECTOR

December 2024

At the inaugural event establishing the Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law in February of 2017, the Center’s founding Faculty Director, Professor Anthony Thompson, took stock of the state of race and inequality in America: *We face this painful reality that we are headed down a perilous path. The toxic rhetoric over the last year has surfaced attitudes that we thought were confined to our history. We’re experiencing a steady and dangerous marginalization of immigrants, people of color, and the poor. We’re witnessing an uptick in hate crimes and hate speech. We’re seeing government officials issuing policies propelled by the twin forces of arrogance and ignorance. And we . . . simply can’t stand still and hope things will go well. We must take action individually and collectively to change the entire [course] of a nation. We’re here to redirect a base, and insensitive, and destructive public conversation. We’re here to reorient a country that seems to have lost its way. To paraphrase Dr. King’s Letter From A Birmingham Jail, we’re here because injustice is here. We have work to do.*



**VINCENT SOUTHERLAND**  
Faculty Director

Professor Thompson’s words from nearly eight years ago—at the outset of what was then a new presidential administration—resonate today as we prepare for the road ahead. His call to action is a reminder of the persistent and ongoing struggle for racial justice that guides and drives all of the Center’s work. As our 2023-2024 Annual Report<sup>1</sup> makes clear, we have remained unwavering and steadfast in our commitment to upending racial inequality and to building a more just future for all. Over the last year we have fought back against pernicious racial narratives; challenged the racial animus that infects the criminal legal system; resisted the harms that flow from the intersection of race, inequality, and technology; and worked to advance social and economic justice. We have done so by using every tool at our disposal, from research, litigation, and advocacy to education and community organizing. Our work has fostered partnerships across the social justice landscape and created opportunities to build transformative power. We have cultivated conversations to infuse legal pedagogy with a commitment to racial justice. Our advocacy in the criminal system has curtailed harmful policies and practices, and led to the release of three individuals from prison following decades of incarceration. We remain inspired by the communities and clients we serve, drawing on their expertise and insights to understand that racial justice demands vigilance, resilience, and a spiritual orientation grounded in hope.

We are able to do all of this because of those who comprise the Center’s staff. Our tremendous Executive Director, Jason Williamson, has continued to propel the Center forward, exercising incredible leadership to broaden our reach and deepen our impact across all sectors of our work. Layla Al joined us this year as our Operations Coordinator. She has been excellent and indispensable in supporting the Center’s operations, ensuring that we are able to do the work we do every day. Our staff attorney, Tasleemah “Tolu” Lawal, has been absolutely critical to every facet of the Center’s work, deploying a keen legal acumen and a robust racial justice lens. Djuna Schamus joined us this Fall as a Legal Fellow. Djuna served as a summer legal intern with the Center while she was a student at NYU Law 2023, and has already made outstanding contributions to the Center. Andrew Friedman, the founding Director of the Initiative for Community Power, has provided

<sup>1</sup> This Annual Report covers the Center’s activities from September 2023 through September 2024. Last year’s Annual Report can be found [here](#).

invaluable training and education on power building, community organizing, and social justice, all in service of the Initiative's mission to create a more equitable, democratic, and racially just society. Justine Olderman joined us this year as a Distinguished Scholar in Residence, after serving as the Executive Director of The Bronx Defenders since 2018. She has made crucial substantive contributions to the Center's, enhancing our capacity to advance racial justice and providing critical strategic insights drawn from her experience and expertise.

The work detailed in this year's Annual Report could not have happened without Center staff who have transitioned out of their roles to take on new challenges. Ted Jack, our former Legal Fellow, was essential to the Center's work in every way. Carolyn Schachtel, our former Operations Coordinator, provided invaluable logistical support to the Center. Terrance Pitts, our former Senior Research & Advocacy Fellow, built our new Technology and Racial Justice Collaborative. The Collaborative, which you can read about in our report, is an initiative designed to advance racial justice and disrupt the threats posed by algorithmic bias and mass surveillance, and will be critical to the Center's work at the intersection of race and technology. Nina Loshkajian, who joined us in November 2024, will pick up the work that Terrance began, bringing to bear key insights and practical experience to ensure that communities and advocates are equipped with the knowledge and resources they need to confront harmful technologies in the criminal system.

Beyond our staff, the Center continues to benefit from the support and collaboration of partners across NYU and beyond. We are indebted to our colleagues across NYU Law for all that they do on a daily basis to support the Center. The vital support of the law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, and specifically Brad Karp, Valerie Radwaner, Danyale Price, and Nadia Jones, has ensured that we have an annual cohort of law student fellows to contribute to the Center's work and mission. Our 2023-2024 fellows, Zoe Chang, Maryum Elnasseh, Jennifer Fu, Fatoumata (Fatou) Kaba, Coleman Powell, and Soreti Teshome were instrumental to our research, advocacy, and public education efforts. Our 2024-2025 fellows, Sunzida Ahmed, Ernesto Casillas, Caitlyn Fernandes, Mugdha Gurram, Mahalia Mathelier, and Makena Mugambi, have been as vital as their predecessors. Other partners such as the Meltzer Center on Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging; the Zimroth Center on the Administration of Criminal Law; the Birnbaum Women's Leadership Center; the Bernstein Institute for Human Rights the Guarini Center on Environmental Energy, and Land Use Law; the Law Alumni of Color Association; the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research, and a host of student organizations, law journals, and racial justice and civil rights organizations have, year after year, been absolutely essential to our work. Racial justice centers at law schools nationwide have remained invaluable partners and supporters as the challenges of injustice continue to rise and expand.

We have much in store for the year ahead. The Center is partnering with the Guarini Center to jointly launch the Environmental Justice Laboratory (EJL). The EJL, supported by a gift from attorneys Marie Napoli LLM '01 and Paul Napoli, will join the fight against longstanding environmental racism and help build a just, decarbonized future. I expect this effort, alongside the Technology and Racial Justice Collaborative, will provide new opportunities for advocacy, research, and power building in keeping with the Center's mission, expanding our reach to further the cause of racial justice.

None of what the Center does would be possible without your support—I thank you for it. The Center's work will be that much more critical as the future unfolds and brings with it new challenges to confront and overcome. As Professor Thompson reminds us, we are here because injustice is here. I am confident that we can navigate the perilous path that we face, beating back the forces of racial inequality to create the world that we all deserve. Let's get to work.

Sincerely,



Vincent M. Southerland

# 2. ABOUT THE CENTER ON RACE, INEQUALITY, AND THE LAW

## 2.1. STAFF, 2023-2024

**Faculty Director**  
Vincent M. Southerland

**Executive Director**  
Jason D. Williamson

**Director of the Initiative for Community Power**  
Andrew Friedman

**Distinguished Scholar in Residence**  
Justine Olderman

**Senior Research & Advocacy Fellow**  
Terrance Pitts

**Practitioner in Residence**  
Lorén Cox

**Legal Fellows**  
Tolu Lawal & Ted Jack

**Operations Coordinator**  
Carolyn Schachtel

**2023–2024 Paul Weiss Fellows**  
Zoe Chang ('25)  
Maryum Elnasseh ('25)  
Jennifer Fu ('25)  
Fatou Kaba ('25)  
Coleman Powell ('25)  
Soreti Teshome ('25)



---

## 2.2. WHAT IS THE CENTER ON RACE, INEQUALITY, AND THE LAW?

Four centuries of racism and systemic discrimination have left an indelible mark on the architecture of American society. The legacy of slavery and Jim Crow remains with us, as racism continues to shape the way policies are developed and applied at all levels of government, and in the private sector. Indeed, the racism that permeates our present-day legal system has deep roots. It infiltrates our laws, institutions, and systems, resulting in enduring racial inequities throughout every domain and institution in this country—from the criminal legal system to housing, infrastructure development, technology, education, and the environment.

In this context, the Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law at New York University School of Law was created to confront the laws, policies, and practices that lead to the oppression and marginalization of people of color. By documenting the history of racism in America; elevating the stories of those affected by race-based inequality; supporting community-based efforts to fight back against discriminatory policies and practices; challenging unjust government action through litigation; representing individuals seeking release from incarceration; and rigorously applying a racial lens to analyze unremitting disparities across multiple sectors of our society, we identify actionable, forward-looking solutions to address the injustices caused by structural racism.

The Center envisions a world in which laws, policies, and legal practices are applied fairly and equitably to all people. This will be achieved as:

- Communities of color transform racial narratives and are active contributors in the movement toward racial justice in the legal system;
- Understanding the law through the lens of race and inequality becomes a fundamental component of legal education in the United States;

- Legal practitioners, policymakers, teachers, advocates, and the public are catalyzed to combat institutional racism and work to create a fair and just legal system; and
- Unjust laws, policies, and practices are challenged, reformed, or abolished as a result of legal action, advocacy, organizing, public education, research, and/or training.

---

## 2.3. HOW WE WORK

The Center works in four key ways:

### *Driving the narrative*

The Center leverages its expertise to produce content that addresses the historical, empirical, and pervasive character of racial bias in the legal system. We conduct research on the nuances that drive racial disparities in the law—from in-depth historical reporting, to rigorous legal examinations, to complex data analysis. We publish original materials and promote the work of others in the field to enrich the discourse and present actionable solutions for system actors and policymakers to draw upon. We provide space for people and communities of color to tell their stories of oppression and resistance at the intersection of race and the law.

### *Challenging current policy and practice through research, litigation, and advocacy*

We challenge institutions and systems that perpetuate racial injustice by taking legal action. As a key part of our strategy, we use our expertise, research, and advocacy to support legal actions that provide individual redress and build momentum for scalable reform.

### *Providing education and training*

We provide education and training to actors at all levels—from law students to practicing attorneys to the general public—on the history of racism and its impact on the contemporary legal system. We infuse law school curricula with principles of racial justice and work to ensure that legal education is informed by an understanding of the history of race and

white supremacy in America, as well as the voices of impacted people and communities. We work with a robust network of partners in universities across the country, to share lessons learned, collaborate on curriculum development, and host joint meetings.

### *Convening*

We convene community and civic leaders, advocates, practicing attorneys, academics, formerly incarcerated people and their families, and the broader public to facilitate productive discourse about racial disparities in the law. We host roundtable discussions and community conversations to gather input and explore solutions that will reduce racial disparities and improve just outcomes for all. We invite experts to speak about their emerging research and host a variety of public events, such as film screenings and moderated conversations centered on urgent issues of racial justice.

---

## **2.4. THEMATIC PRIORITIES IN 2023-2024**

The Center's thematic priorities fall within the following areas:

- Criminal Legal System
- Technology
- Social and Economic Justice
- Legal Education



## 3. RACE AND THE CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM

The Center’s work at the intersection of race and the criminal legal system focuses on addressing the racially-biased exercise of discretion in the system and confronting the taint of racial inequality that drives injustice and unfairness at every stage of the criminal process. Our work includes advocacy to advance parole justice, both on an individual level and more broadly, and to push back against the harmful use of technology in the criminal legal system; litigation to challenge the denial of competent counsel for indigent people accused of crimes across the country; and public education through workshops, symposia, panels, speaking engagements, trainings, and other events to bring attention to the inequality that continues to permeate the system.

---

### 3.1. PAROLE JUSTICE

The parole system provides a particularly stubborn example of the ways in which discretion invites biased decision-making and drives mass incarceration. As a member of the Steering Committee for the [People’s Campaign for Parole Justice](#) (PCPJ), the Center works to significantly reduce the number of people in prisons across the state of New York by advocating for legislation and policy changes that prioritize the release of aging prisoners and make the parole hearing

process fairer and more humane. The Center’s Executive Director, Jason Williamson, also serves on the PCPJ Commissioner Subcommittee, which focuses on identifying and advocating on behalf of candidates to fill vacant seats on the Parole Board. In particular, the Subcommittee works to encourage the governor to appoint more underrepresented community members and formerly incarcerated individuals to serve on the Board going forward. The Center’s Staff Attorney Tolu Lawal also serves on both the Fundraising and the Culture and Values Subcommittees. The Fundraising Subcommittee is responsible for managing and planning the finances of the campaign, while the Culture and Values Subcommittee focuses on building generative and restorative practices that provide the campaign with tools to navigate complex organizational and interpersonal dynamics within the coalition and, ultimately, foster strong internal systems to support the work.

The Center also works to diagnose and address the causes of racial disparities in parole hearing releases through rigorous data analysis and research. By unpacking the root causes of disparate outcomes that result from the current process, we aim to develop viable solutions that address racial disparities in the decision-making process and, ultimately, reduce the prison population in New York State and beyond.





*Pete Martin, Judicial Accountability Project Director at the Center for Community Alternatives, spoke at a rally for the Court New York Deserves Campaign in May of 2024.*

Over the last year, the Center continued its work in the parole justice space, partnering with local organizations, such as the [Release Aging People in Parole \(RAPP\) Campaign](#), and a host of organizations working in coalition through PCPJ to advance reforms throughout New York. Policy proposals that the Center supported include an expansion of parole eligibility for elderly incarcerated individuals (the Elder Parole bill) and a reworking of parole release standards to better account for the growth that a person may have undergone while incarcerated (the Fair and Timely Parole bill). The Center pushed forward our legislative priorities at the New York State Capitol over the 2024 legislative session, supporting numerous PCPJ advocacy efforts to engage parole system actors and policymakers.

In partnership with the Parole Preparation Project, the Center also continued to expand the scope of our parole hearing preparation services.

Additional parole-centered work included:

- The Center was a key force behind planning and executing Advocacy Days at the New York State capital in Albany to push for the passage of the Elder Parole and Fair & Timely Bills throughout the 2023-2024 cycle. With the help of the Center’s strategic visioning, and the provision of resources and materials, PCPJ was able to transport hundreds of people to Albany this year to support the call from formerly incarcerated New Yorkers, family members, and community organizations to create meaningful parole opportunities to bring our elders (and all others languishing in prison) home.

- In 2023, the Center designed and created the “Portraits of Community Safety” booklet for the campaign, honoring formerly-incarcerated community members and their indelible contributions to keeping communities safe. These booklets were distributed during advocacy events and gatherings throughout the year. In 2024, the Center released a second volume of the booklet, including the family members of loved ones who are currently incarcerated, reminding us all that the fight continues.
- In 2023-2024, the Center represented four clients in preparation for their determinations for parole release. We were fortunate to play a role in bringing three of them home to their families and communities. We subsequently provided legal reentry support for an additional six months.

## 3.2 ADVOCACY WORK

### 3.2.1. State Courts

This year, the Center continued to be heavily involved in state and nationwide efforts to organize around and counter efforts by the right wing to capture the federal judiciary. Following the Center’s involvement in the Court New York Deserves Campaign, the Center created organizing partnerships with the People’s Parity Project and the Center for Community Alternatives to further seed and build advocacy efforts at the state court level. This has included hosting periodic coalition meetings and supporting opportunities to strengthen strategic organizing.

In August 2024, the Center co-hosted the second annual State Courts Organizing Network Convening, which pulled together over 70 people from organizations from across the country focused on progressive state court advocacy to share strategies and best practices.

### 3.2.2. CARE Coalition

The Center joined the CARE Coalition, a coalition of organizations led by New Hour for Women and Children campaigning to pass the Compassion and Reproductive Equity (CARE) Act, a bill to ensure that incarcerated pregnant people, mothers, and babies receive adequate pre-, post-, and perinatal care while inside New York State prisons and jails; and to ultimately fight for the dignity and rights of all pregnant and birthing people behind bars.

### 3.2.3. Vote NYC Jails

The Center has joined the Vote in NYC Jails Coalition in demanding that the New York City Board of Elections (BOE) and New York City Department of Correction (DOC) invest in and commit to making sure that all people incarcerated in NYC jails have their ballots cast and counted. The Coalition—which worked tirelessly to support voters incarcerated on Rikers Island this year—is made up of the Legal Aid Society, LatinoJustice, the League of Women Voters, and a number of other organizations committed to ensuring that folks in NYC jails are enfranchised.

### 3.2.4. 13th Forward

The Center is a member of 13th Forward, a legislative coalition of advocates, grassroots organizations, and impacted people working to end exploitation and brutality within our prison labor system through the passage of the No Slavery in NY Act and the Fairness and Opportunity for Incarcerated Workers Act.

---

## 3.3. PUBLIC DEFENSE REFORM

While prosecutors and judges may wield the most power within the criminal legal system, the Center believes that the role of public defenders is too often overlooked, despite the outsized impact they can have on the criminal process. Indeed, the vast majority of people accused of crimes across the country cannot afford to hire a private attorney and, as a result, must rely on public defenders to represent their interests and shepherd them through what is often a harrowing and stressful experience. And yet, public defense systems throughout the United States are routinely underfunded and under-resourced, often leaving poor—and disproportionately Black and Latinx—people to fend for themselves, without the legal representation to which they are entitled under the Constitution. The Center seeks to reverse this longstanding trend by working with impacted people, communities, and system stakeholders in specific jurisdictions to address the issue through public education efforts, policy advocacy, and litigation.

### 3.3.1 Litigation

#### ***Hannah, et al. v. State of Oregon***

In May 2022, the Center joined the Oregon Justice Resource Center and the law firm of Levi Merrithew Horst PC, in filing a class action lawsuit challenging the state's failure to provide counsel to hundreds of indigent criminal defendants across Oregon. Due to the state's ongoing shortage of defense attorneys tasked with representing poor people accused of crimes, many accused have been left without access to a lawyer for months at a time—often while sitting in pretrial detention. To make matters worse, Black and brown people caught up in the criminal system have been disproportionately impacted by the public defense crisis, just as they are by every other failing of the criminal legal system. As such, the Center filed suit on behalf of four named plaintiffs, representing the class of indigent accused who awaited counsel and alleged state constitutional violations of both their right to counsel and their right to equal protection under the law. Within days of filing

the civil case, the named plaintiffs were provided with attorneys in their individual criminal cases. The original lawsuit was later voluntarily dismissed and re-filed with a new set of plaintiffs. The case is currently on appeal.

### ***Thomas v. Evers***

In September 2022, the Center joined Winston & Strawn LLP, the Wisconsin Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, and the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers to file a class action lawsuit against state officials in Wisconsin for their consistent failure to provide lawyers to the criminally accused within a reasonable time after initial appearances have occurred. Wisconsin's ongoing crises around attorney shortages, inadequate budget allocation, attorney pay, attorney attrition, and various other issues have all contributed to this current constitutional emergency where hundreds, if not thousands, of people languish in legal limbo (and sometimes in jail) without legal representation. The Center filed suit on behalf of eighteen named plaintiffs, representing people accused of crimes from across the state who had not been assigned counsel within 14 days of their initial appearance. The case is currently pending.

---

## **3.4. PUBLICATIONS**

### **Excessive Sentencers: Using Appellate Decisions to Enhance Judicial Transparency**

On March 26, 2024, Scrutinize and the Center published a landmark report that revealed patterns of repeated excessive sentencing by New York judges. The report, [\*Excessive Sentencers: Using Appellate Decisions to Enhance Judicial Transparency\*](#) pioneers the analysis of appellate opinions to quantify individual trial court judges' decisions and impacts. This methodology transforms complex judicial texts into accessible data, producing meaningful and actionable metrics for policymakers and the public.

---

## **3.5 PUBLIC EDUCATION**

### ***3.5.1. Public Conversations***

#### **Stephen Bright and James Kwak Book Talk: Fear of Too Much Justice**

On October 10, 2023, the Center hosted a book talk with the authors of *Fear of Too Much Justice*, legendary defense attorney Stephen Bright and legal scholar James Kwak. The book examines how the U.S. criminal legal system often perpetuates systemic racism and white supremacy, particularly in the American South. Through stories of marginalized communities, Bright and Kwak provided a compelling overview of the criminal legal system's failures, engaging attendees in a broad and inspiring discussion on justice and equality.

#### **Healing and the Law**

Co-hosted by the Center on Violence and Recovery and the Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law on November 21, 2023, this virtual event invited participants to explore how the structure and fixtures of the legal system impact and, at times, hinders healing from harm. Using a peacemaking circle format, restorative justice and legal practitioners led a half-day discussion inviting participants to reflect on their own experiences where the law fell short of supporting their own healing, reflecting on the impact that system involvement can have on emotional and social well-being, and envisioning new legal frameworks to support a more just and compassionate world.

#### **Inside Knowledge Book Talk**

The Center co-sponsored a discussion on January 22, 2024, featuring Doran Larson, author of "Inside Knowledge: Incarcerated People on the Failures of the American Prison." The event, moderated by Elizabeth Alexander, President of the Mellon Foundation, delved into firsthand accounts from incarcerated individuals, highlighting systemic issues within the U.S. prison system. The conversation emphasized the importance of incorporating these perspectives into criminal justice reform efforts.



*Chesa Boudin and Tiffany Cabán discuss their experiences in public service with Center Faculty Director, Vincent Southerland.*

### **Kenneth Thompson Lecture**

The fifth annual Kenneth P. Thompson '92 Lecture, held on March 14, 2024, featured a discussion with former public defenders Chesa Boudin and Tiffany Cabán, moderated by the Center's Faculty Director Vincent Southerland. Boudin and Cabán shared insights on how progressive prosecutors can drive meaningful reforms in the criminal justice system, including reducing incarceration and addressing community safety. This lecture series, co-hosted with the Peter L. Zimroth Center on the Administration of Criminal Law, honors former Brooklyn District Attorney Kenneth Thompson's legacy of advocacy and reform within the prosecution function.

### **Meet the Authors: Reformation, Abolition, and Innovation — Four Recent Books on Civil Justice**

On April 4, 2024, authors Renee Knake Jefferson, Sateesh Nori, Jane Spinak, and Ray Brescia discussed their recent works addressing civil justice challenges in the U.S., focusing on access to justice, racial and economic equity, and civil rights. Their insights ranged from reformist to abolitionist approaches, each contributing unique perspectives on improving civil justice systems.

### **Love & Liberation: In Conversation with Mike and Debbie Davis**

This public conversation, held on April 3, 2024, with former political prisoners and lifelong activists Mike and Debbie Davis provided a unique perspective on resilience and racial justice advocacy. Both shared their journey as members of the MOVE organization, sentenced to 100 years in 1978 after a series of violent

clashes with the notoriously racist Philadelphia Police Department of the '70s and '80s, and their ongoing individual fight for freedom under parole constraints. The event emphasized the intersection of personal strength and systemic oppression, aligning with CRIL's commitment to justice, equity, and providing space for impacted people to tell their stories.

### 3.5.2. *In the Media*

#### **Study Shines Light on Excessive NY Prison Sentences**

Executive Director Jason Williamson discussed the serious harms that excessive sentencing imposes on both individuals and communities in an article titled "[Study Shines Light On Excessive NY Prison Sentences,](#)" published in *Law 360*.

#### **Wausau Daily Herald piece on WI litigation**

*The Wausau Daily Herald* published an article about the Center's lawsuit in Wisconsin. In the article titled "[Judge orders state to produce data on indigent defendants in Wisconsin as lawyers seek class-action lawsuit,](#)" Executive Director Jason Williamson described systematic problems within the state's public defense system.

#### **Collaborative Research on Excessive Sentencing Highlighted in New York Law Journal**

The New York Law Journal [featured](#) the Center's collaborative report on excessive sentencing, published in collaboration with judicial accountability nonprofit Scrutinize. The article spotlighted findings on excessive sentencing practices by more than 140 New York trial judges, with over 1,200 years reduced on appeal for sentences deemed excessive. This joint research calls for increased transparency in judicial sentencing data to identify and address patterns of punitive sentencing. The feature underscores the importance of collaborative efforts in promoting judicial accountability and systemic reform.

#### **Pod for the Cause: The State of Black Lives**

[This episode](#) featured Monifa Bandele, Tierra Bradford, and Center Executive Director Jason Williamson discussing the evolution of the Movement for Black Lives over the past decade. The conversation, held in February 2024, highlighted the shift from protest mobilization to policy reform and envisioning alternatives to policing and incarceration. The panelists explored the significance of the Vision for Black Lives platform, which reimagines community safety and justice beyond punitive systems. They emphasized the importance of community-led approaches, intersectional strategies, and civic engagement, such as the work of Black Voters Matter, to drive transformative change. Reflecting on tactics like litigation and public education, the speakers underscored the need for narratives that counter dominant "law and order" rhetoric and advance a vision of safety grounded in democratic governance and the leadership of impacted communities.

---

## 3.6 AMICUS BRIEFS

### 3.6.1. *Betschart v. Oregon*

In January 2024, the Center co-authored an amicus brief in *Betschart*, filed in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, addressing Oregon's failure to provide timely legal representation to indigent defendants, which resulted in prolonged pretrial detention, an inability to mount a viable defense, and a lack of representation during critical stages of their cases. The brief emphasized that such delays violate the Sixth Amendment right to counsel and disproportionately affect marginalized communities.

### 3.6.2. *Commonwealth v. Derek Lee*

In the spring of 2024, POWER Interfaith, represented by the Center, filed an amicus brief in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court challenging the state's mandatory life-without-

parole sentences for felony murder convictions, including for defendants who did not kill or intend to kill. The brief argues that automatic life sentences without the possibility of parole are excessively punitive, disregarding the capacity for rehabilitation and the broader social costs associated with disproportionate punishment. The brief emphasizes that these sentences disproportionately affect marginalized communities, reinforcing cycles of inequality and harm.

### 3.6.3. *Grants Pass v. Johnson*

In April 2024, the Center joined over 200 other local, state, regional, and national organizations in submitting an amicus brief in *Grants Pass*, a United States Supreme Court case challenging an Oregon ordinance that criminalizes homelessness in the state. Among other things, amici argue that enforcement of the ordinance in question will have a disproportionate impact on marginalized and homeless youth, including youth of color.

### 3.6.4. *Wells v. State of Texas*

In the spring of 2024, after the appellant's claims were rejected by a federal district court, the Center submitted an amicus brief in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, in partnership with the Fred T. Korematsu Center for Law and Equality, in support of a petition for a writ of habeas corpus filed by Mr. Amos Wells, who was sentenced to death after his own trial attorney argued to jurors

that, as a Black man, Mr. Wells was predisposed to violence. Citing the sordid history of eugenics and the now-discredited pseudoscientific theories that helped to fuel racist policies and practices in this country, as well as the U.S. Supreme Court's 2017 decision in *Buck v. Davis*, amici urged the court to reject these dangerous arguments on their face and grant Mr. Wells the opportunity to be judged and sentenced on the basis of his individual circumstances.

### 3.7.5. *People v. Estwick & People v. Wright*

In February 2024, the Center and the New York Civil Liberties Union co-authored two amicus briefs in the New York State Court of Appeals addressing the persistence of racial bias in the jury selection process. In *People v. Estwick* and *People v. Wright*, amici argued that New York should adopt an objective standard when evaluating peremptory strike challenges in the jury selection process. Amici presented evidence that the current subjective framework for analyzing peremptory challenges—as established in *Batson v. Kentucky*—has failed to meaningfully address persistent issues of systemic racism and implicit bias in the jury selection process. Amici posited that by implementing an objective inquiry, New York courts could lessen the impact of implicit bias, prevent attorneys from masking racially motivated juror strikes with facially neutral explanations, and allow for more meaningful review of *Batson* violations by appellate courts.



## 4. RACE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Center engages in advocacy, research, and public education to mitigate the harm of algorithmic tools in criminal and civil domains. The Center's work in this area seeks to apply a racial justice lens to the development, design, implementation, and oversight of technological tools that analyze datasets to identify patterns that are used to inform forecasts about people or places. The Center is a member of several coalitions in this space and has participated in a host of public-facing events to advance racial justice in this area.

### 4.1. TECHNOLOGY AND RACIAL JUSTICE COLLABORATIVE (TRJC)

Across the country, the proliferation and use of emergent technology, surveillance tools, artificial intelligence, and risk assessment instruments deployed in the criminal legal system have harmful and racially disparate impacts in communities of color. In many ways, the age of mass incarceration has begun to morph into the age of surveillance and criminalization. While the racially disparate impact of some of these tools, like facial recognition technology, is becoming more widely known, much of the new technology lacks data about its efficacy and transparency about the technology used to develop them.

Given the host of civil liberties, civil rights, privacy, and racial justice concerns posed by biometric and predictive technologies in the criminal legal system, in 2023 the Center sought to better understand how a diverse group of researchers and advocates are addressing the challenges these advanced technologies pose. To do so, we spoke with researchers and advocates across the country to identify the specific challenges they are facing in their work and the resources and learning opportunities they need to strengthen their collective impact.

In the summer of 2024, after nearly two years of intensive research and development, the Center officially launched the Collaborative.

#### 4.1.1. TRJC Quarterly Newsletter

The TRJC launched a quarterly newsletter in July 2024 providing a host of resources including legislative updates, feature articles, updates about events, training opportunities, campaigns, and publications from our partners.

#### 4.1.2. Community Engagement Platform and Legislative Bill Tracker

In August 2024, the TRJC launched an online community platform to advance our collective vision to foster a collaborative community

working together to create a world beyond incarceration, surveillance, and state violence. We hope our community hub will be a space to build connections and access resources.

We are making immediately available on the platform TRJC’s legislative bill tracker, a project we’ve worked with partners over the past three years to develop. The tracker includes over 2,000 state and federal bills focused on law enforcement technology, data privacy, and surveillance.

#### *4.1.3. Strategic Communications and Messaging Training*

At the Center, we recognize that the challenges we and our partners grapple with don’t exist in isolation. The forces supporting policies that drive racial inequity often make use of deep societal narratives to justify broken approaches that disproportionately impact communities of color. It is critical that we are able to counter these narratives.

With this in mind, in 2024, we partnered with Fenton Communications, a social change communication agency, to invite a group of partner organizations to participate in a series of programs designed to help organizations advance their work by understanding and overcoming the deep narratives used to oppose sensible controls on law enforcement, surveillance and prosecution.

The trainings will cover various topics—including how narratives work, identifying common deep narratives concerning the aforementioned issues, tactics that can be used to counter these existing narratives and longer-term strategies for promoting narrative change—to help you develop thoughtful, mission-driven and effective communication strategies, all with an eye on AI-driven technologies deployed by law enforcement.

This program was designed to give our partners the tools needed to successfully reach key audiences—such as impacted communities, policymakers and donors—and make significant strides toward strategic and policy goals.

---

## **4.2. PUBLIC EDUCATION**

### *4.2.1. Public Conversations*

#### **Race, Tech & Justice Salon: How Can Artificial Intelligence Be Used for Good in the Criminal Legal System?**

On September 13, 2023, the Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law at NYU School of Law hosted a virtual event entitled “Race, Tech & Justice Salon: How Can Artificial Intelligence Be Used for Good in the Criminal Legal System?” Led by the Center’s Senior Research and Advocacy Fellow Terrance Pitts, this discussion brought together legal scholars, policy advocates, and computer scientists to explore innovative applications of AI aimed at promoting justice within the criminal legal system. The panelists examined how machine learning can be utilized to analyze parole hearing transcripts, identify systemic biases, and advocate for policy reforms that enhance fairness and equity. Featured speakers included Kristen Bell, Assistant Professor at the University of Oregon School of Law; Keith Wattley, Founder and Executive Director of UnCommon Law; Jake Searcy, Assistant Research Professor of Data Science at the University of Oregon, and AJ Alvero, Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Florida.





## 5. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Race shapes the social and economic well being of communities in countless ways. Among other things, the racial composition of a community impacts the quality of education that children receive, access to safe and affordable housing, the level of pollution and other environmental hazards to which people are exposed. People of color are often disadvantaged by racial dynamics and public policies that have created hostile environments around them and perpetuated the legacy of slavery and white supremacy in this country. The Center works to challenge racial inequality and advance distributive justice and equal opportunity in housing, education, transportation, and various sectors of civil life to ensure that all people can enjoy just and equitable living conditions in their communities. The Center advances its work in this space through a dynamic, multifaceted approach to advocacy and public education.

### 5.1. THE INITIATIVE ON COMMUNITY POWER

The Initiative for Community Power (“The Initiative”), housed within the Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law, combines scholarship, field-building, experiential education, convenings, and field placements to study and challenge inequality and anti-democracy. The Initiative works closely with non-profit, academic, and government partners to reimagine the parameters of the possible, and to transform its vision of dynamic democracy, rooted in racial and economic justice, into reality. Combining the weight and assets of a global academic institution with deep community partnerships and decades of high-impact community organizing and power-building work, the Initiative catalyzes analysis, innovation, and project work to create a more equitable, democratic, and racially just society.



*Andrew Friedman serves as the Executive Director of the Initiative for Community Power.*

The Initiative’s work includes partnering with the public sector and power-building organizations to confront endemic inequality of political voice, engagement and power; funding, placing, and helping to supervise and support student fellows to work in organizations and on academic projects supporting democracy and challenging inequality; developing course offerings such as seminars and clinics focused on inequality and on recent anti-democratic trends, in the US and abroad; hosting domestic and international scholars, elected

officials, organizers, activists, organizational leaders, and others with expertise on issues and disciplines related to inequality, racial justice, political economy, policy, power, and social change as a resource for faculty, students, and the broader advocacy, governance, social justice, and policy fields; convening meetings and partnerships with key organizational leaders and leaders at other schools of law and public affairs; providing student fellows, as well as other interested students and faculty, with training on key equality and democracy issues, the ideological underpinnings of these issues, and on crucial organizing, policy and governance approaches to advancing equity and strengthening democratic engagement; promoting faculty and student partnerships with pro-democracy and social and racial justice organizations to help conduct and publish research necessary to advance their work; hosting Organizers-In-Residence Fellowships at NYU for social change leaders and organizers to engage in reflection, writing, study, and exchanges with the community that emerges from the Initiative;

and creating a fund which would give small grants to promising student-led projects related to equity, justice and democratic engagement.

This year, the Initiative collaborated with NYU Law centers and social justice organizations to organize a range of convenings, student events, and film screenings. That included organizing and hosting the Dismantling Racial Capitalism series; hosting a convening on Law and Power Building; and working with The Action Lab and the Law and Political Economy Project at Yale to organize and support a Law and Political Economy New York City chapter.

As part of the “[Dismantling Racial Capitalism](#)” series, in December 2023, the ICP co-hosted a series of discussions aimed to demonstrate how injustice follows from imperatives of capitalism and racial systems; highlight efforts and successful campaigns in dynamic campaign work, with international examples; and identify footholds to subvert and invert logic.



*ICP’s Dismantling Racial Capitalism series hosted Arun Kundani, author of “What is Anti-racism? And Why It Means Anti-capitalism.”*



*Audience listens to a roundtable discussion with Professor Ruth Wilson Gilmore.*

Arun Kundani, author of “What is Anti-Racism? And Why It Means Anti-Capitalism,” visited for a discussion illuminating intrinsically linked structures of power and potential paths towards change. In conversation with Nikhil Singh and Tejasvi Nagaraja, the three delved into the complexities of anti-racism and its intrinsic link to anti-capitalism, leaving attendees with a reinforced urgency to strategize for actionable solutions against inequality and exploitation.

Olúfémí Táíwò joined the ICP to explore the mechanisms and impacts of racial capitalism, drawing from Táíwò’s works “Elite Capture” and “Reconsidering Reparations.” The conversation illuminated the intricacies of systemic inequality and exploitation and brought together a

diverse group of academics, organizers, policy-makers, and activists. We also strategized about actionable solutions and opened new cross-sectoral space for dialogue and learning dialogue for change.

To kick off the Fall 2024 series, the Initiative hosted the renowned Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Professor of Earth & Environmental Sciences, American Studies, and Africana Studies at the City University of New York Graduate Center, for a lively discussion with Laura Lui from The New School and Angelis Solis from The Action Lab. The three speakers explored the systemic issues of racial capitalism and the transformative power of abolitionist movements.



*ICP’s Dismantling Racial Capitalism series hosted Olúfémí Táíwò, author of “Elite Capture and Reconsidering Reparations.”*

---

## 5.2. STOP COP CITY

On June 5, 2023, the City Council of Atlanta, Georgia, voted to approve \$67 million in public funding for the construction of a militarized police training center commonly known as “Cop City,” ignoring years of vocal opposition from Atlantans across age, race, class, and neighborhood. On June 8, the Center published an [open letter](#) on behalf of academics across the country condemning the construction of Cop City, the destruction of the 85 acres of forested land upon which it will sit, and the state repression of activists protesting its development. The Center also joined the [Vote to Stop Cop City Coalition](#), a collection of individuals and organizations calling for a referendum that puts the question of Cop City to Atlanta voters. Despite the Coalition successfully collecting over 116,000 petition signatures—more than double the legal requirement—the City of Atlanta continues to fight the referendum process.

Furthermore, the State of Georgia has remained committed to prosecuting those involved in the protest movement, indicting 61 people on disproportionate charges related to their alleged involvement in the Stop Cop City effort. The Center has steadfastly opposed the state’s excessively punitive response to activists’ decision to protest the construction of a facility that promises to cause further harm to already-marginalized and oppressed communities.

### **NYU Law Environmental Justice Laboratory**

Over the course of the 2023-2024 program year, the Center worked in partnership with the Guarini Center on Environmental, Energy, and Land Use Law, to develop plans to jointly launch and direct the NYU Law Environmental Justice Laboratory (EJL). The EJL will work with partners, including impacted communities and existing grassroots organizations to address long standing environmental racism, in order to advance a just, decarbonized future. Using policy advocacy, litigation, and research, the EJL will provide law students with an opportunity to make substantive contributions to the movement for environmental justice. The EJL will also work to develop a critical mass of practitioners, academics,

and clinicians dedicated to addressing the environmental challenges that burden communities at the intersection of race and inequality. Slated to officially launch in early 2025, generous support from attorneys Marie Napoli LLM ‘01 and Paul Napoli provided for the establishment of the EJL.

---

## 5.3. PUBLIC EDUCATION

### *5.3.1. Public Conversations*

#### **Equal Justice Under Law: The Supreme Court and the Fight for Civil Rights**

In partnership with the Meltzer Center for Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging, the Center co-sponsored a virtual discussion on September 12, 2023, featuring Janai Nelson, President and Director-Counsel of the Legal Defense Fund, and Professor Kenji Yoshino. The conversation addressed the Supreme Court’s recent decisions affecting civil rights, including the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and the end of affirmative action in higher education. The event also explored strategies to advance diversity, inclusion, and belonging in the context of the current legal landscape.

#### **Suddenly Silent: Strategies to Speak Up and Stand Out**

This interactive workshop, organized by the Birnbaum Women’s Leadership Center and co-sponsored by the Meltzer Center for Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging, as well as the Center, was designed to help NYU Law students enhance their classroom engagement. Led by experts in law and leadership, the October 18, 2023 session incorporated improv-based exercises to build confidence in public speaking, listening, and active participation, supporting a diverse and inclusive learning environment.

#### **Book Talk: “Say Anarcha” by J.C. Hallman**

The Center co-sponsored a virtual discussion on November 2, 2023, featuring J.C. Hallman, author of “Say Anarcha: A Young Woman, a Devious Surgeon, and the Harrowing Birth of Modern

Women’s Health.” The event, moderated by Professor Kim Mutcherson, explored the historical exploitation of Black women in medical research and its enduring impact on racial disparities in healthcare.

### **ELJ x CRIL Fireside Chat: Movement Lawyering & Environmental Justice**

Co-hosted by the Environmental Law Journal and the Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law, this virtual event, held on November 10, 2023, featured Professor Camila Bustos, Assistant Professor of Law at Pace Law School, who shared insights on movement lawyering within the environmental justice space. In the conversation, Professor Bustos explored the unique role of movement lawyers in climate advocacy, discussing the relationship between environmental justice and broader social justice frameworks.

### **28th Annual Derrick Bell Lecture: “Race and Legal Hypocrisy”**

NYU School of Law and the Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law hosted the 28th annual Derrick Bell Lecture on Race in American Society on November 14, 2023, featuring Mehrsa Baradaran, Professor of Law at University of California-Irvine. In her powerful and timely lecture, entitled “Race and Legal Hypocrisy,” Professor Baradaran drew on her family’s experience of repression in Iran in the 1980’s to explore the gulf between law and justice. She provided insights about the need to close that gap—between the letter of the law and the sense of justice that law is supposed to promote—as a means to ensure the law’s legitimacy and maintain our democracy.

### **Dismantling Racial Capitalism Series: In Conversation with Olufemi Taiwo & Sumitra Rajkumar**

On December 4, 2023, the Center, in collaboration with the Initiative for Community Power, the Action Lab, and the Urban Democracy Lab at NYU Gallatin, co-sponsored a riveting conversation between CUNY Professor John



*Mehrsa Baradaran '05, a professor at University of California, Irvine School of Law and an expert on banking law and racial wealth disparities, delivered the 28th annual Derrick Bell Lecture on Race in American Society.*

Whitlow and Georgetown Philosophy Professor Olufemi Taiwo focused on the topic of racial capitalism, its history and underpinnings, and strategies for understanding and dismantling the current racial capitalism regime.

### **Equity Roundtable Series**

In partnership with the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research, NYU’s Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law, and other NYU entities, Council Member Nantasha Williams convened a series of invite-only roundtable discussions aimed at addressing equity issues in education, mental health, and the justice system in New York City. Each roundtable brought together experts, policymakers, and advocates to generate actionable policy recommendations for city leaders. On January 26, 2024, Jason Williamson, Executive Director of the Center, moderated the criminal justice reform

roundtable, focusing on equity within the current parole system and pretrial detention regime.

### **Dismantling Racial Capitalism Series: Race, Class, and Gender in Rio de Janeiro**

On March 14, 2024, the Center co-sponsored a discussion featuring Dani Balbi, the first transgender legislator in Rio de Janeiro's State Assembly, and scholar Denise Ferreira da Silva. The event explored the intersections of race, class, and gender in Brazil, highlighting the challenges and strategies for dismantling racial capitalism.

### **The Equity Front Line: Where the Movement Goes From Here**

As part of its commitment to advancing social and institutional equity, the Center co-sponsored The Equity Front Line: Where the Movement Goes From Here on October 3, 2023, in partnership with NYU's McSilver Institute. This event featured a conversation with Ifeoma Ike, Dr. Lisa Coleman, and Professor Deborah Archer on the ongoing challenges and future direction of equity efforts within institutions and broader society, particularly in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to eliminate race-conscious admissions programs at colleges and universities across the country. The speakers explored the strategies and frameworks necessary to sustain progress in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, offering insights on overcoming structural barriers and promoting systemic change across sectors.

### **BWLC Symposium: Reconstructing the Reconstruction Amendments**

The Birnbaum Women's Leadership Center (BWLC), in partnership with the Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law and the Meltzer Center for Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging, hosted its annual symposium on February 2, 2024, celebrating the scholarship of Peggy Cooper Davis. The event, titled "Reconstructing the Reconstruction Amendments," featured leading legal scholars and advocates, including Professor Melissa Murray, Professor Deborah Archer,

and civil rights lawyer and activist Maya Wiley, among others. Discussions centered on the Roberts Court's impact on the Reconstruction Amendments, examining how recent decisions have weakened these foundational laws by disregarding their historical context. Panelists explored strategies to counter these shifts and preserve the Amendments' intended protections.

### **Our Toxic Food System: Perspectives on Pesticides and Pathways to Change**

On February 28, 2024, the Center co-sponsored the NYU Environmental Law Journal's symposium on pesticides and environmental justice in the U.S. food system. The event featured discussions on pesticide regulation, health impacts, and pathways toward equity in agricultural practices, highlighting how these issues intersect with environmental justice.

---

## **5.4. AMICUS BRIEFS**

### *5.4.1. Juliana v. United States*

In support of the plaintiffs in *Juliana v. United States*, the Center, along with other racial and environmental justice organizations across the country, filed an amicus brief advocating for a rehearing en banc in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The brief argues that climate change not only endangers the environment but also violates constitutional rights, particularly for marginalized communities who disproportionately bear the brunt of climate-related harm. The Center's brief highlights the judiciary's essential role in protecting constitutional rights and using broad remedial schemes to hold the government accountable for policies that infringe upon those rights. It calls for judicial intervention to address systemic harms, asserting that vulnerable communities are entitled to protections against environmental degradation and its ensuing impacts on health, safety, and well-being.



## 6. RACE AND LEGAL EDUCATION

### 6.1. RACE AND LAW CENTER NETWORK

The Race and Law Center Network (RLCN) is a coalition of law school-based centers and institutes focused on racial justice, which aims to enhance collaboration and amplify the impact of its members. As the Executive Director of the Center, Jason Williamson serves on the Network's steering committee and plays an active role in the Network's efforts to foster cross-institutional collaboration and advance the cause of racial justice through a combination of legal scholarship, policy advocacy, and organizing.

In October 2024, the RLCN held a convening at Duke Law School that brought together scholars, advocates, and practitioners to discuss effective strategies for incorporating racial justice into their work. Jason Williamson represented the Center at the convening, leading and actively participating in discussions on how law school centers can leverage their resources and expertise to support racial justice advocacy in a number of different contexts. The convening underscored the Center's role in shaping national conversations around how best to pursue racial equity in this current political moment.

### 6.2. LEGAL PEDAGOGY WORKING GROUP

The Legal Pedagogy Working Group is a collaborative between the Center, The Bernstein Institute at NYU Law, and the Center for Institutional and Social Change in Columbia University School of Law that seeks to critically analyze the traditional pedagogical framework that scaffolds the legal profession and encourage a legal profession that is responsive, accountable, and steered by those who have been marginalized by the law. This collaboration culminated in a February 2024 event, "Race, Legal Education, and Community Power," where the Center hosted a half-day event that invited the public to participate in analyzing the ways the law has failed us and the possibilities to structure the law for our futures.

#### 6.2.1. *Race, Legal Education, and Community Power*

On February 22, 2024, the Center co-sponsored a panel discussion titled "Race, Legal Education, and Community Power" at NYU Law. The event brought together community advocates and legal practitioners to collectively reimagine a community-centered legal system. Speakers included activists from Release Aging People in Prison and the Parole Preparation Project.

---

## 6.3. PUBLICATIONS

### 6.3.1. *Character and Fitness in America's Neo-Redemptive Era*

In her co-authored article, "[Character and Fitness in America's Neo-Redemptive Era](#)," published in the Spring 2024 issue of the CUNY Law Review, Center Staff Attorney Tolu Lawal critically examines the Character and Fitness component of the attorney admissions process—a requisite for legal licensure. She argues that this process, which purportedly assesses an applicant's moral character, lacks empirical validity in predicting ethical behavior. Instead, Lawal contends that it functions as a gatekeeping mechanism, perpetuating racial and socioeconomic disparities within the legal profession. The article calls for a reevaluation of this practice to foster a more inclusive and equitable legal system.

---

## 6.4. STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES

### 6.4.1. *Fellowships, Internships, and Research Opportunities*

The Center [continued to engage students](#) at NYU School of Law through its term-time fellowship program, as well as volunteer opportunities. In 2023-2024, the Center hosted six [Paul Weiss Student Fellows](#) during the academic year; one Senior Fellow; two legal fellows; and a cadre of volunteers. Student fellows were involved in all facets of the Center's work, providing valuable research on race and inequality, strengthening the Center's social media presence, providing direct support to incarcerated clients, and more. Volunteer opportunities and support positions were made available on an ongoing basis for undergraduate and graduate students who wish to deepen their understanding of the intersection of race, inequality, and the law and contribute to the Center's work in the world.

## PAUL WEISS STUDENT FELLOWS (2023-2024)



Zoe Chang ('25)



Coleman Powell ('25)



Fatoumata (Fatou) Kaba ('25)



Soreti Teshome ('25)



Jennifer Fu ('25)



Maryum Elnasseh ('25)





# 7. NYU INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Throughout the year, the Center continued to work closely with the law school's student affinity groups, faculty, and staff to provide training, guidance and thought partnership on issues of race and inequality. As part of these efforts, the Center continued its annual training with the Lawyering faculty to equip them with approaches and techniques to manage conversations about race and differences in the classroom.

As a member of the [NYU Alliance for Public Interest Technology](#), the Center maintained a partnership with a dynamic and multidisciplinary group of NYU faculty to support the responsible, ethical, and racially equitable use of technology. Through the [Blueprints for Progressive Change](#) in Juvenile Justice initiative, the Center collaborated with NYU faculty to support progressive reform of the criminal legal system's treatment of children. In addition, the Center is part of the university-wide Environmental & Racial Justice Network, in order to strengthen its ties with others in the NYU community focused on environmental justice.

Finally, the Center partnered with a wide array of NYU-based organizations, such as the [Center for Human Rights and Global Justice](#), the Meltzer Center on Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging, and the [Center on the Administration of Criminal Law](#) to host events, engage in advocacy, and confront racial injustice.

By working with the [NYU Review of Law & Social Change](#), and the [NYU Environmental Law Journal](#) to organize public conversations, the Center also strengthened its relationship with the law school's student body.

---

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to the the Wellspring Philanthropic Fund for its ongoing and generous support of all of the Center's work; the MacArthur Foundation for its sustained support of our work at the intersection of race and technology; the law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison for its continued support of our student fellows; and NYU School of Law, as well as our individual supporters, volunteers, and donors, each of whom make the Center's work possible.

Layout: Kathryn Bowser Graphic Design

---

## ARTIST STATEMENTS AND BIOS

### ALVIN SMITH



#### Artist Statement

I'm a visual artist who is primarily drawn to painting works that matter. A lot of my work depicts socially charged images which are important not only to myself, but to the masses. Art is the loudest part of my voice, and I am compelled to use it.

I'm currently using acrylic and water soluble oils to create these storytelling works. I learned through years of trial and error that using these mediums while layering in watercolor techniques works the best for me. As a child of seven or eight years of age, art was the happy place that I regularly retreated to. It was my Momma that inspired me from the start. She drew images of powerful women in order to cope with her own circumstances. Whether that was fighting with dad, or difficulties at making ends meet, she would draw. When she finished I would grab what she'd drawn and stare in amazement. I can see her influence on my own style with how the clothes have movement with the characters in my works. While I am not shackled to any particular kind of depiction, I do have a certain love for displaying the urban community experience.

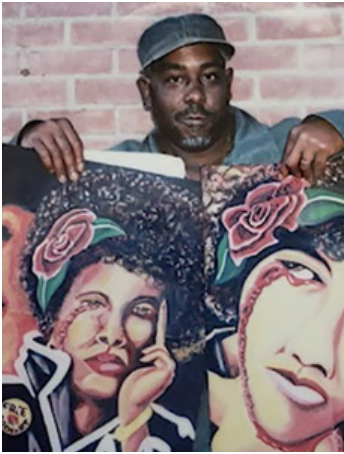
As an example of this experience, I've embarked on a journey through a series of socially charged paintings I call "Underprivileged Oasis." In each installment, the oasis is represented by the neighborhood liquor store. With an honest, and sometimes ugly look at the things that tend to occur there. On display are truths that many know of, but few shine light on. These works beg the question, why have these stores become gathering places for urban communities?

#### Artist Bio

Alvin Lavon Smith Jr. is an incarcerated artist in Michigan's Department of Corrections. He was born in Laurel, Mississippi, and grew up in Ypsilanti, Michigan. He is a long time participant in the University of Michigan's Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) and one of only fifteen American incarcerated artists to be invited to participate in We Bear Exhibition, Coventry England (February 2022).

Alvin's art and illustrations have been published by College Inside Newsletter and Zócalo Public Square, and are featured in several books including: "Incarceration and The Law: Cases and Materials, Tenth Edition" and "Making Art in Prison: Survival and Resistance", by Janie Paul. His paintings has been included in several exhibitions including: Work Assignments: Forced Prison Labor in the Land of the Free, several Bay Area locations (2023 & 2024); a solo show Underprivileged Oasis, MUSE SE, Grand Rapids (2024); Paperchained International, Boom Gate Gallery, Australia (2024); and the upcoming exhibition Painting Ourself s Into Society, Berkeley Art Center (September 21st 2024 - January 12th, 2025). His work is cataloged in the Kruizenga Art Museum.

## COREY DEVON ARTHUR



### Artist Statement

The world as it was shown to me has never been enough. This has always frustrated me. One day while I was in kindergarten, I picked up a broken, dirty, black crayon and began to redraw the world the way I saw and felt it in my heart.

I chose the broken, dirty, black crayon, because it reminded me of how I saw myself. I chose it because it looked like me. It was the one that nobody wanted to use.

Since then I have learned to use every conceivable tool that makes and holds a mark. Growing up in the hood, I never saw anything as trash. Broken things and other folks' garbage was my treasure. Later, upon incarceration, I found a way to sketch despite the scarcity of art supplies. I found my voice while locked in solitary confinement using a three-inch rubber pen and scraps of paper, if I was blessed.

My influences were graffiti artists I saw in Brooklyn throwing up their pieces on the trains and walls. These are my folks, the bottom people. Down here we make our heroes. I was immediately drawn to the prospect of marking something that would show the world what beauty could come from a dirty broken black crayon. I remember the first time I wrote my name on the wall of the boys' bathroom in kindergarten. I saw more of my authentic self in my five-year-old scrawl than I had ever seen of myself depicted anywhere on earth.

Recently I created a collection of five paintings titled "Blood In Eye," inspired by the late Comrade George L. Jackson's book *Blood In My Eye*. Since age 13, I evolved from a criminal, to an animalized prisoner, to a revolutionary, and now into a feminist. I noticed the ledge where they assassinated George. It stopped

the movement. His legacy compelled me to take the evolutionary next step.

As an artist, this was the ideal opportunity to use my talents to study our bloodline of resistance. I painted Lolita Lebron, Kathy Boudine, Angela Davis, and Assata Shakur with blood in their eyes. I also put a red rose in their hair. The system said they were broken; I saw them as beautiful. They fought for me. Now it's my turn to keep it lit, and pay my respects to them. The world didn't give them enough respect. So I created a way to use my art to throw it up for my sheroes.

### Artist Bio

Corey Devon Arthur is an incarcerated writer and artist from Brooklyn, New York. He makes art as an intimate way to heal and offer hope of a reimagined future, where we strive to resist first with love, and then with all else we are made of. Corey hopes to create art until every corner of the earth and the people who inhabit it have been touched by his work.

Corey has participated in several exhibitions including: *Capitalizing On Justice*, New York (2019);

*Return to Sender: Prison as Censorship*, EFA Gallery NY, (2023); a solo art show, *She Told Me Save The Flower*, My Gallery Brooklyn, New York (2023) with a follow up display at the Brooklyn Public Library (2024); *Work Assignments: Forced Prison Labor in the Land of the Free*, several Bay Area locations (2023 & 2024); *Paperchained International*, Boom Gate Gallery, Australia (2024) and the upcoming exhibition *Painting Ourselves Into Society*, Berkeley Art Center (September 21st 2024 - January 12th, 2025).

His collection of "Quaker Paintings" are exhibited in Quaker meeting houses across the U.S. Corey collaborated with Brooklyn W.A.Y. to create numerous feminist and pro-social inspired art including his *Save The Flower Registry*, with its first successful mission, *We Freed the Flowers* (Mother's Day 2024). His writing and art have been published in venues including: the *Marshall Project*; *Writing Class Radio*; *Mangoprism* (2022); *Study and Struggle Blog*; *NYU Center for Law, Equality, and Justice Annual Report* (2023); and *Intra Magazine Time Capsule* edition cover (2023).

**THE CENTER ON**

**RACE**

**INEQUALITY**

**& THE LAW**

**NYU SCHOOL OF LAW**