

Impact Report

The Marshall Project
FALL 2019



The Marshall Project tracks the impact of our journalism on lawmakers, advocates and other media. Some recent examples:

GANGS IN CHARGE Four gang-related homicides have wracked Mississippi's Wilkinson prison in the last two years. The facility is dramatically understaffed, with more than a third of guard positions vacant and a turnover rate close to 90 percent. In an internal audit obtained by The Marshall Project, the warden made the stunning admission that he was using gangs to run the prison. Our story was published in partnership with USA Today, the Jackson Clarion-Ledger and the Mississippi Center for Investigative Reporting. It contributed to a statement by the ACLU of Mississippi, the MacArthur Justice Center, the Mississippi Center for Justice and the Southern Poverty Law Center, arguing that Mississippi must pay competitive wages to prison guards to combat staff shortages. The Jackson Clarion-Ledger, Mississippi's largest daily, has run several follow-up pieces.

COMPENSATING VICTIMS Louisiana used to be one of several states that denied financial assistance to crime victims if they had a criminal record themselves. Then, The Marshall Project published a major investigation, in print and on radio, into the practice in seven states around the country, Louisiana included. In June, lawmakers in Baton Rouge unanimously voted to prohibit the state's Crime Victims Reparations Board from denying applications for financial assistance because of a victim's criminal history. Our story had revealed that close to 80% of people turned down for victim compensation in Louisiana were black victims of crime or their families.

MIGRATION MYTHS In an investigation co-published with The New York Times last year, our senior data reporter Anna Flagg found no evidence that immigration increases crime. Some readers took issue, arguing that undocumented immigrants are driving up crime rates in the United States. Flagg debunked that assumption by analyzing data sets on 180 different metropolitan

areas, using new data on undocumented populations from the Pew Research Center. Whether the number of undocumented people in those cities rose or fell from 2007 to 2016, local crime rates continued to decline at similar rates across the country. Her work prompted an editorial from The Washington Post upbraiding the Trump administration for its relentless criminalization of immigrants and along with her previous story, has been cited everywhere from "Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj" to the PBS NewsHour.

FRESH DISCOVERIES In a previous edition of this Impact Report, we explained how The Marshall Project's 2018 story on "discovery"—the evidence backing up criminal charges—had helped induce New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo to change his position on when and how defense lawyers get to see that evidence. In April, the change in his position led to a change in law. New York State overhauled its pretrial discovery rules for the first time in 40 years, requiring prosecutors to turn over evidence before a plea decision.

Violent crime and undocumented immigration: no sign of a link





Susan Chira joined The Marshall Project as our Editor-in-Chief in April 2019. Previously, she worked for The New York Times from 1981 to 2019 in a variety of senior capacities, including posts as foreign editor, Sunday Review editor, and deputy executive editor. Here, she describes how she thinks about impact.

“What produces impact? The answer is deceptively simple: great journalism. Journalism that brings home—with clear, compelling, rigorously reported and invitingly told stories—what goes wrong in our criminal justice and immigration systems.

Yet producing great journalism is not simple at all. It takes reporters who will not give up when they encounter dead ends and resistance. It takes editors who will listen, coach, and help keep a laser focus on why the story is being written and how best to tell it. It takes data reporters to unearth and sift through statistics in a field that keeps incomplete records at best. It takes videographers and photographers to help capture the sights and sounds that make it impossible to turn away. It takes incarcerated writers who bring us inside prisons and jails to understand how they live, and what it takes to survive. One of my first initiatives has been

to expand our reporting capacity in the high-incarceration states of the South. We believe this reporting will not only shine a light on how justice is dispensed at the crucial state and local level—it will also deliver another form of impact—supporting local newsrooms and local accountability at a time when news organizations in communities across the region are in financial peril.

Impact is also what happens after great journalism gets published. We are constantly thinking about which media partners will maximize the impact and reach of our work, connecting it to audiences that range from experts in the field to Americans who may not yet realize the full impact of mass incarceration. We reach them through our partnerships with more than 140 news organizations, our newsletters and vigorous presence on social media, and our expert journalists’ appearances on broadcast media and live events.”

NARRATIVE IMPACT

Many criminal justice experts agree that to have an impact on the system, we need to “change the narrative.” But what does that mean? Seeking answers, we launched a yearlong speaker series in Washington, D.C. called What’s The Story? Criminal Justice and Narrative Change. We hosted prominent Americans from the worlds of business, entertainment, literature, religion, and media, among others, talking about how they create—and disrupt—narratives in their own fields.



From left to right: Sherrilyn Ifill, David Simon, Tayari Jones and Ken Frazier.

Some of our speakers included:

- Weldon Angelos
- Congressman Doug Collins
- Ken Frazier
- dream hampton
- Sherrilyn Ifill
- Tayari Jones
- Piper Kerman
- Jeff Korzenik
- Celinda Lake
- Grover Norquist
- Rashad Robinson
- Yusef Salaam
- Rev. Gabriel Salguero
- David Simon
- Norris West
- Michael K. Williams