

EXODUS

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IPNO Wins Freedom of Four Men

Since the spring of 2022, IPNO has won the freedom of four men: Barney Holt, Larry Hall, Cedric Dent and Sullivan Walter.

Together, these four men spent over 89 years in prison between them.

Cedric Dent and Sullivan Walter were both exonerated in August from Orleans Parish. Mr. Dent spent 24 years, 10 months and 7 days in prison before he was exonerated on August 8, 2022. Mr. Walter spent 36 years, 1 month and 30 days in prison before he was exonerated on August 25, 2022.

Barney Holt and Larry Hall were freed through IPNO's Unjust Punishment Project in unrelated cases on July 7, 2022. Mr. Holt was incarcerated for 12 years, 5 months and 5 days before his release and Mr. Hall was incarcerated for 15 years, 10 months and 7 days.

(story continues on page 3)

Mission

IPNO frees innocent people sentenced to life in prison and those serving unjust sentences. We recognize the root causes of wrongful convictions and unjust sentences as systemic racism and inequities. We work to expose and address these root causes by sharing our clients' stories in court, the legislature, the community and the media. We support our clients living well and fully in the world after their release.

As of October 2022, IPNO has freed or exonerated 42 innocent people and freed 12 unjustly sentenced people.

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This newsletter reports on IPNO's activities in and out of court so that our supporters and members of the public may understand what we do. Any information about an open case that is contained in this newsletter is also contained in the public court record of the case.

Sullivan Walter was just 17 years old in 1986 when he was wrongly convicted of a rape he did not commit. He is the longest-serving wrongfully convicted juvenile in Louisiana.

Mr. Walter was mistakenly misidentified as the perpetrator of a home invasion and rape. The victim identified Mr. Walter as the rapist six weeks after the crime, despite the fact that the room was badly lit and her attacker had worn a hat and face covering. Serological testing conducted in the 1980s on seminal fluids recovered from the victim showed that Mr. Walter was not the perpetrator, but the jury that convicted Mr. Walter did not learn of this and it was never fully presented to a court due to his attorney's ineffectiveness. The police analyst who examined the seminal fluid in this case distorted the facts to fit Mr. Walter, and his attorney did not challenge him. It was IPNO's investigation that showed the serological evidence excluded Mr. Walter.

Mr. Walter was exonerated on August 25, 2022, at 53 years old. Walking out of prison into the arms of his family, Mr. Walter said "I can finally breathe." Even though his youth was unjustly taken from him, he is resolved to rebuild his life.

On August 8, 2022, **Cedric Dent** walked out of prison and embraced his mother. For the first time in 23 years, mother and son held onto each other without the watchful gaze of prison guards. Mr. Dent was 23 years old when he was wrongly convicted and imprisoned for a murder he did not commit. His uncle, Elvis Brooks, was also wrongly incarcerated for 42 years, until Mr. Brooks was freed by IPNO in 2019 and exonerated in 2022.

In 1997, a man was shot in the back of the head and killed as he walked through a dark lot in the St. Thomas Housing Projects with his cousin. A few days later, the lead detective heard rumors that Cedric Dent might have been involved in the crime. He put a picture of Mr. Dent in a photo array and showed it to the eyewitness, the victim's cousin, even though Mr. Dent did not match the description of the shooter provided by the eyewitness.

At trial, the State presented the testimony from the eyewitness to identify Mr. Dent as the shooter. Mr. Dent's lawyer did not offer any proof of his alibi. Mr. Dent was at the movie *Hoodlum* at a theater in Marrero on the night of the shooting. Mr. Dent was convicted of second degree murder, even though two jurors voted not guilty.

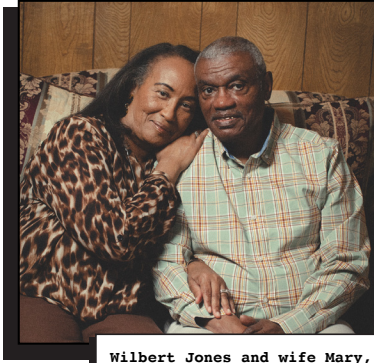
IPNO found that the State had suppressed key evidence, including police notes that revealed another eyewitness who saw the shooter and described him in a way that did not match Mr. Dent. The suppressed documents also show how the State's sole eyewitness's initial description did not match Mr. Dent. He never mentioned Mr. Dent's prominent gold teeth and in fact gave six different versions of what he saw.

Mr. Dent was exonerated on August 8, 2022, at 47 years old.

IPNO's Unjust Punishment Project freed Barney Holt and Larry Hall on July 7, 2022 in separate cases.

Larry Hall was sentenced to 60 years in prison for drug distribution. He was never found with any drugs or money, but a jury believed that he told a drug dealer to sell cocaine to undercover police and he was convicted as a principal to the crime. On July 7, 2022, at 60 years old, he was re-sentenced and released. Since his release, he's connected with his family, and has been working in the Shreveport, Louisiana area.

Barney Holt was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole for possession of methamphetamine. Having long struggled with addiction, he had only ever been convicted of drug crimes, but the law at the time allowed the judge to impose a life sentence nonetheless. Mr. Holt served more than 12 years of his life sentence in prison. On July 7, 2022, at 61 years old, he was re-sentenced and released. He is reunited with his family, and has been enjoying traveling to see friends and family and working since his release.



Wilbert Jones and wife Mary, courtesy of Camille Lenain

Progress on Compensation Cases

On August 24, the Louisiana First Circuit Court of Appeal found that our client Wilbert Jones was entitled to compensation as a result of his 45 years of wrongful imprisonment. In a published court opinion, the court found it was “highly probable” that Mr. Jones was innocent and the crime was actually committed by a serial rapist identified during IPNO’s investigation. Despite this finding, the Attorney General’s Office has asked the Louisiana Supreme Court to undo this decision and deny Mr. Jones

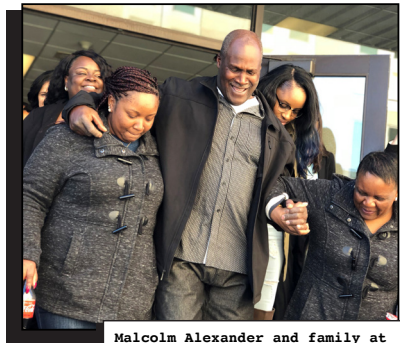
any compensation. Further, current Louisiana law means that at best Mr. Jones can be compensated for ten of his 45 years of wrongful imprisonment.

In addition to Mr. Jones’ case, on September 8, 2022, IPNO was in the Louisiana Fifth Circuit Court of Appeal arguing for compensation for Malcolm Alexander. . Mr. Alexander’s case is scheduled to be reargued on December 14, 2022 before a five judge panel of the same court.

Pursuing Forensic Testing

IPNO is working to secure forensic testing around the state. In Bossier Parish, IPNO and the LSU Wrongful Conviction Clinic are litigating for access to DNA testing for a man who has served over thirty years in prison. In Lafayette Parish, IPNO just secured access to a fingerprint comparison using a cutting edge database for a man who has served over forty years in prison. And, in another case in Tangipahoa Parish, IPNO is litigating for access to fingerprint evidence for someone who has served over twenty years in prison. Each of these

three men has consistently maintained their innocence. Each was convicted based on questionable evidence despite any physical evidence inculcating them. Now, forensic testing may prove their innocence. These forensic tests are possible due to two different Department of Justice grants that IPNO secured to support this work.



Malcolm Alexander and family at his exoneration, January 2018

Cheri Hayden’s Fight Continues

Earlier this year, IPNO asked an appellate court to vacate Cheri Hayden’s conviction. This filing follows a hearing at which IPNO presented evidence of three different confessions by the actual perpetrator. Evidence that Ms. Hayden’s original lawyer could have presented if he had investigated his innocent client’s defense instead of, as he conceded at the hearing, hoping possible witnesses would take it upon themselves to call his office. Despite this, the district court ruled against Ms. Hayden.

James Skinner Gets Hearing

This summer, the district court in Livingston Parish held a hearing to review the favorable evidence withheld from James Skinner at his 2005 trial for second-degree murder. IPNO has been litigating for five years to secure this hearing, despite the U.S. Supreme Court already having found that much of the same evidence was unlawfully withheld from one of Mr. Skinner's co-defendants.

UPP Prevails Over State Objections

In July 2021, IPNO filed a post-conviction petition for Shannon Ferguson, who is serving a 60-year sentence for possession of 0.03 grams of cocaine – a speck. IPNO's Unjust Punishment Project argued that Mr. Ferguson had been denied adequate counsel at sentencing and on appeal. Mr. Ferguson asked for a lawyer to represent him at sentencing but was not given one. Because he was forced to represent himself at sentencing he did not present relevant evidence in his defense, make objections or file motions that might have allowed his sentence to be reviewed later. His appellate lawyer did not spot these issues and did not argue in his appeal that he should be entitled to a new sentence because he was denied counsel. The District Attorney in St. Mary Parish opposed IPNO's petition, raising procedural objections to try to prevent Mr. Ferguson from having his claims heard in court. On August 8, 2022, Judge Suzanne deMahy overruled the State's objections and ordered that Mr. Ferguson be allowed to proceed to an evidentiary hearing. The State is appealing her ruling and Mr. Ferguson will have to wait in prison until an appeals court weighs in before the hearing can happen.

IN MEMORIAM

Royal Clark



Royal Clark hugs his son at his exoneration while his mother looks on

IPNO is saddened by the passing of our former client, Royal Clark, who died on June 18, 2022. He was 44 years old. Mr. Clark was exonerated three years ago in 2019 after 17 years of wrongful incarceration for an armed robbery in Jefferson Parish that he did not commit.

Mr. Clark's transition back home after prison – like with so many of our clients – was challenging. Incarceration robs individuals of their dignity, families, livelihoods, and their dreams. Rebuilding one's life after wrongful conviction is incredibly difficult and requires consistent and continuous support from loved ones. Despite the challenges he faced, Mr. Clark was a dreamer and a fighter. We will remember him always as we work to support our clients, incarcerated and freed. His family is in our hearts and minds.

REFLECTION FROM IPNO'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE SUMMER INTERN FROM ACTL

In summer 2022, IPNO was honored to partner with the Louisiana Committee of the American College of Trial Lawyers (ACTL), who funded an Access to Justice summer intern from Southern University Law Center (SULC) to work at IPNO. Below is intern Jusdan Meyer's reflection on his experience at IPNO. We look forward to working with our Summer 2023 ACTL Access to Justice intern from SULC.

Participating in the American College of Trial Lawyers clerkship was a fantastic and formative experience for me. At the beginning of my clerkship with IPNO, I felt unprepared and trepidatious at the thought of performing tasks that I had no experience performing. While I had been taught the fundamental of legal writing during my 1L year, I had yet to apply my knowledge in a setting where my work would impact real people. Despite my inexperience in the law, I experienced exponential growth due to the mentorship that I received from the attorneys at Innocence Project New Orleans. I found myself growing increasingly more confident as I completed important tasks and performed vital legal research for the attorneys at IPNO.

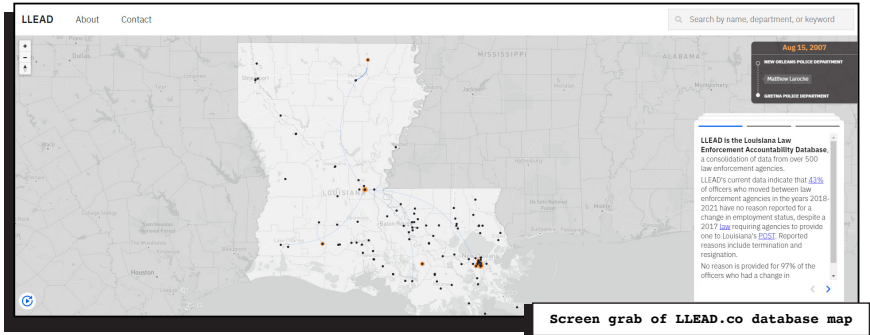
In addition to the growth that I experienced, the actual work that I participated in at IPNO offered me the opportunity to gain new insights into our criminal justice system and the law. After spending my young working life holding retail and management positions at different companies, it was empowering to know that the work I was doing with IPNO actually mattered and was of great benefit to individuals who unjustly had their lives destroyed.

Overall, this clerkship offered me the opportunity to grow in my professional mindset. I feel far more confident in my abilities now after having had the opportunity to use what I had learned in a professional setting. I feel far more prepared to practice law and I believe that the ACTL clerkship has set me on the right path towards success.

UPP Push for Implementation of Parole Law for Lifers

In 2017, the Louisiana Legislature passed a major package of sentencing reforms which reduced the sentencing ranges on many crimes and for people convicted as "habitual offenders." Those laws, however, were not made retroactive and so while people arrested after 2017 got the benefit of them, hundreds of people remained incarcerated with sentences that would no longer be legal. Recognizing this unfairness, the Legislature passed a provision in 2021 that granted early parole eligibility to people serving life sentences—especially for non-violent crimes—from before 2017 that they could not have received after 2017. This law, Act 122 of 2021, had the full support of the Louisiana District Attorneys Association. However, even though it became the law in August 2021, the Department of Corrections (DOC) struggled to implement it because of certain complexities in how the law was written. Nearly a year after the law was enacted, people who were entitled to parole hearings were not receiving them. IPNO's Unjust Punishment Project (UPP) leveraged relationships with the senior legal team at DOC, pushed for a plan to implement the law, and eventually organized a training of DOC staff to explain Act 122 and provide tools for application. Since then, eligible incarcerated people have had their parole hearings scheduled. UPP plans to represent some of those people long overdue for release at their upcoming parole hearings.

LLEAD – Louisiana Law Enforcement Accountability Database – Launches!



IPNO launched LLEAD – the Louisiana Law Enforcement Accountability Database, on Wrongful Conviction Day – October 2nd, 2022. The database is open to the public, and free to use.

The police misconduct that led to the wrongful convictions of many IPNO clients is not unique to their cases. IPNO has discovered repeated instances of misconduct or malfeasance after auditing our cases and has worked to expose, case by case, the harms caused by these officers. Often, the agencies they work for fail to institute changes to prevent and correct such abuses. Auditing individual cases involving officers with patterns of misconduct remains a goal, but systematically identifying these officers is impossible without comprehensive public law enforcement data.

IPNO began exploring how to systematically collect publicly available law enforcement data in 2018. We soon found that, if LLEAD was going to be both effective and useful, the data would need to be both broad - spanning all agencies in the state; and deep - including as many data types and documents as possible. For LLEAD to stay current, data collection would entail identifying all relevant data sources and periodically requesting updated information from each of them. To maintain LLEAD as a dynamic online tool, we are constantly collecting and updating the data and aim to present data from each law enforcement agency in every Louisiana parish. LLEAD, the first law enforcement database of its kind, now serves as a tool for everyone who might need this data.

Beyond IPNO's uses for LLEAD, community members now have ready access to information about who is policing our communities. Law offices and investigators can use LLEAD to build cases and prepare for trials. Law enforcement can review officer histories for hiring purposes and compare resources and trends – like officer migration and staff size – by city, parish, or internally. Journalists and researchers now have access to these aggregated public data that can contribute to investigative journalism, impact studies, and policy papers. Surely we have not imagined all of the potential uses for LLEAD, but IPNO believes that increasing law enforcement transparency will serve to increase accountability and public safety.

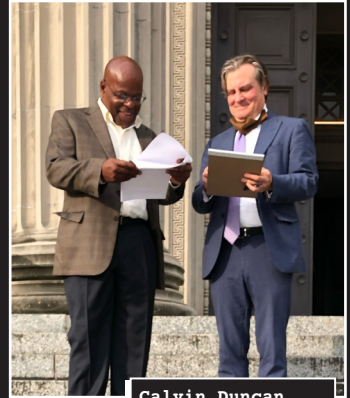
Check out LLEAD.co - from your desktop, tablet, or mobile device - you can see and explore the results of our ongoing efforts.

Calvin Duncan, Elvis Brooks & George Toca are Exonerated at Long Last

On January 7, 2011, Calvin Duncan was freed after he accepted a plea offer from the Orleans Parish District Attorney Leon Cannizzaro that guaranteed his immediate freedom in exchange for withdrawing his postconviction application supporting his innocence. At that point, Mr. Duncan had been imprisoned for 28 years, 5 months and 2 days. He did not want to spend another single day and night at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, so he pled to a crime he did not commit to secure his immediate release. On January 29, 2015, George Toca did the same. Thirty years, 9 months and 3 days. On October 16, 2019, Elvis Brooks did so as well. Forty-two years, 2 months and 27 days.

They all were relieved to be free but came home with guilty pleas to crimes they did not commit. Mr. Duncan, Mr. Brooks and Mr. Toca all tried to rebuild their lives as best as they could even as their wrongful felony convictions closed some doors and kept opportunities at bay. But this past year, everything changed. Working with the administration of the Orleans Parish District Attorney Jason Williams, Mr. Duncan, Mr. Brooks and Mr. Toca were finally able to revisit their wrongful pleas in the interest of justice and vacate them.

With the help of pro bono counsels, on August 3, 2021, Mr. Duncan's plea was vacated and he was exonerated. To his great relief, he was finally cleared of the murder he did not commit. On April 5, 2022, Mr. Brooks' plea was vacated and he, too, was at last exonerated of the robbery-murder of which he is factually innocent. Finally, on September 13, 2022, Mr. Toca's plea was vacated and he was exonerated of the murder of his best friend that he did not commit. IPNO staff was in court to celebrate these momentous occasions with them. Each of them had waited too long for their names to finally be cleared. We congratulate Mr. Duncan, Mr. Brooks and Mr. Toca for their long-awaited exonerations. IPNO thanks the pro bono representation of Steven Schulman of Akin Gump, Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP on behalf of Mr. Duncan, Harry Daniels of Daniels & Washington LLC on behalf of Mr. Brooks, and Adam Hays and Kristen Burge of MG+M Law Firm on behalf of Mr. Toca.



Calvin Duncan



George Toca & IPNO Staff



Elvis Brooks & IPNO Attorney, Charell Arnold

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

HARRY DANIELS

Harry Daniels, III represented former IPNO client Elvis Brooks pro bono (more details on page 8). We sat down with Mr. Daniels to learn more about him and why it was important to him to help Mr. Brooks.



Attorney Harry Daniels, III

Attorney Harry Daniels, III, a native of New Iberia, Louisiana, is a partner of Daniels & Washington, L.L.C. He graduated from New Iberia Senior High School in 1998, attended the University of Louisiana at Lafayette where he received a Bachelor's of Science in Business Administration in 2004 and earned his Juris Doctor from Southern University Law Center in 2007. He was awarded the 2007 Criminal Law Clinic Award.

"Being a trial lawyer means dedicating oneself to standing up for the rights of people, never selling out, and caring about truth and justice. My clients are family to me. I give them my all." Attorney Harry L. Daniels, III

Tell us about your work.

My firm focuses on criminal defense and personal injury, but I primarily focus on criminal defense. I have been practicing law for 15 years. In law school, I thought I would specialize in corporate law since I had a business background. While clerking for defense attorney Jim Boren in law school, I worked on a few post-conviction cases and fell in love with criminal defense work.

What made you fall in love with criminal defense work?

Growing up in Iberia Parish, Louisiana, I had a lot of family members in jail. My uncle was wrongfully convicted in 1965 for being a principal to a rape. The fight for civil rights was just beginning and my uncle was with several other Black teens at a festival in my hometown. It was during segregation, so there was a white fair and a Black fair, and they went to the white fair because the rides were better. They charged him as a principal and he was convicted of a capital offense. When the death penalty for rape got outlawed in the U.S., he was resentenced and he came home after 25 years. Seeing my grandmother go through that and knowing that my uncle got this egregious sentence just for being at the wrong place at the wrong time shifted my perspective. Seeing how injustice affects people led me to take up criminal defense, and once I started, I fell in love with it. Sometimes God gives you a gift and you have to accept the gift, even if it changes your plans.

Can you tell us about representing our former client Elvis Brooks?

I really wanted to help Elvis Brooks because he has been dealing with this since before I was born. It was an honor to represent him. Elvis just really wanted to clear his name from this crime he did not commit. A white victim and a young Black male suspect, and even with all the alibi witnesses that could place Elvis elsewhere, the prosecutors were set on putting somebody in jail.

Is there anything else you'd like to say?

IPNO's work is really important. There are a lot of other Elvis Brooks out there – whether it's a wrongful conviction or being sentenced to an unjust sentence as a habitual offender. There are Elvis Brooks in other states as well. Without IPNO's work on his case, he would have died in jail.

SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT

IPNO COMMUNITY ADVOCATES

When IPNO created a Young Professionals Committee (YPC) in 2015, the mission was simple: to gather a group of volunteers dedicated to grassroots fundraising and awareness. As the group evolved, the YPC felt that a name change was in order to better capture its mission and membership.

In 2022, the Young Professionals Committee became IPNO's Community Advocates (ICA). ICA is comprised of passionate local leaders devoting time and energy to furthering IPNO's critical work.

ICA members meet monthly to plan events, brainstorm ideas, and spread awareness. You may find them tabling at an event, volunteering at the gala, or sharing recent news on social media. Interested in getting involved? Reach out to Megan McNeill, the ICA's chair!

The ICA is comprised of:

Megan McNeill (Chair)

Megan joined ICA in 2019. She is a copywriter and brand strategist with The Vault Collective, and can often be found with her nose in a book, discovering new restaurants, or walking her rescue pup Ellie. She loves seeing the impact that IPNO's work has had on the community and is inspired by its clients, team, and volunteers.

Maggie Bondi

Maggie is the Director of Events for New Orleans-based hospitality group LeBLANC + SMITH, where she often uses her expertise to raise awareness for causes close to her heart. She joined ICA in 2019, moved by an inherent drive for equity, equality, and justice. When she's not working or volunteering, Maggie enjoys hiking and kayaking, collecting vintage cookbooks, and spending time with her beloved canine companion, Duckie.

Cynthia Browne

Cynthia is a founding member of ICA and has been advocating for IPNO since 2015. She is a Legal Administrative Specialist at the U.S. District Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Louisiana. Cynthia is a long-standing member of two dance troops: Les ReBelles NOLA and The Companionettes. In her free time, she enjoys traveling, checking out the latest places to eat, and loves all things France, even naming her cat Toulouse.

Erika Leone

Erika joined ICA in 2020 after a development and communications internship at IPNO. On top of being the Group Sales Manager at the Fair Grounds New Orleans, she's also training for her first marathon and loves hanging with her pugs Luigi and Geordi. Erika is drawn to IPNO's mission of challenging a cruel and unjust criminal justice system.

Meghan Matt

Meghan has been with ICA since she completed a law clerk internship at IPNO in 2019. Meghan passed the Louisiana Bar exam in 2021, and fights for justice every

day as a staff attorney at Orleans Public Defenders. She is a mom of four incredible humans, four dogs, a cat, and an obscene amount of house plants. When she's not working, she enjoys exploring with her kids, discovering new restaurants with her husband, lifting heavy weights, and watching terrible movies.

Brittany Polk

Brittany joined ICA in 2018. She is a photographer, native New Orleanian, and spoken word artist. Brittany is drawn to IPNO's mission of freeing wrongly convicted people because "it could have easily been me sitting behind bars for something I did not do. It is important to fight against injustices because if we do not, are we really living? This land does not have a history of being fair or kind, but we are all holding pens, where we can write (right) the wrongs done to each other."

Polly Sawabini

Polly joined ICA in 2019 after meeting IPNO staff who were tabling at John Fluevog Shoes. She works at trepwise, which supports nonprofits and growing businesses in planning their future and expanding their impact. Polly deeply loves New Orleans, community care, birthdays, most people, and all dogs, including her own, GhostHoney. She is proud of IPNO's work, the people they've helped, and the truths they've exposed.

EVENTS

What we've been up to since spring and what we're doing this fall!

THANK YOU FOR CELEBRATING 21 YEARS OF IPNO!

Thanks to everyone who joined us for IPNO's 21st Anniversary Celebrations, especially to our generous sponsors and volunteers who made the celebrations possible. It was a memorable night of celebrating the freedom of our clients, reunification of their families while supporting IPNO's work. IPNO is grateful for this annual gathering of supporters, friends, allies and community members and leaders.

JUSTICE JAM IN LAFAYETTE

A massive thank you to everyone who came out in May to Justice Jam in Lafayette, Louisiana. It was an incredible evening with tasty food by La Pizzeria Lafayette, music by Louis Michot, Corey Ledet and Leyla McCalla, and a silent auction with a custom piece by artist Francis Pavy. IPNO's former clients Jerome Morgan, Donald Degruy, and Jarvis Ballard shared their stories and why they support IPNO's work. Many thanks for a great evening and à bientôt, Lafayette!



Artist Becky Gottsegen with IPNO client, Jarvis Ballard at Justice Jam in Lafayette

CHRISTMAS WITHOUT TEARS

Please join IPNO and our friends Judith Owen and Harry Shearer for their annual holiday spectacular, Christmas Without Tears on December 20, 2022. Featuring a star-studded cast, Christmas Without Tears is fun, fabulous, and sure to make you laugh. Ticket sales will benefit IPNO, so get them while you can! Available at tinyurl.com/xmaswithouttears.

HARRY SHEARER & JUDITH OWEN'S CHRISTMAS WITHOUT TEARS

★ FEATURING A CAVALCADE OF STARS ★

ORPHEUM THEATRE

DECEMBER 20, 2022 AT 8PM



★ ★ ★ ★ ★ BENEFITING ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
INNOCENCE PROJECT NEW ORLEANS

IPNotes



IPNO summer interns and law clerks at The Legacy Museum and Memorial in Montgomery

IPNO welcomes three new people to our team: Mōni Sakamoto-Talavera as our new investigative fellow; Leora Greene as our new program assistant; and Sandra Levick as our new senior staff attorney. through Avodah. Welcome to IPNO!

IPNO summer interns and law clerks visited The Legacy Museum and Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, in August. Read a summer intern's reflection on page 14.

IPNO was honored to join the National

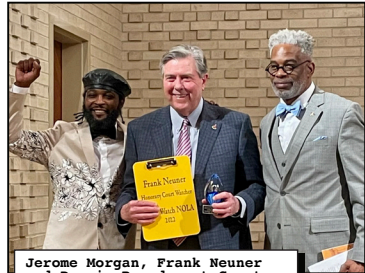
Civil Rights Conference held in Baton Rouge on Juneteenth to discuss racial inequities of Louisiana's criminal legal system and its connections to slavery and oppression of Black Louisianans. Panelists included IPNO's Supervising Attorney Kirschelle McGowan, Director of Vera New Orleans Will Snowden, and IPNO board member and exoneree Robert Jones. John Collins, former IPNO staff attorney, now at southern University Law Center, moderated the conversation.

IPNO Executive Director Jee Park was joined by IPNO Board Chair Frank Neuner, and IPNO clients Jerome Morgan and Sullivan Walter at a community event and discussion on September 27, 2022, in Lafayette, Louisiana organized by Phyllis Coleman Mouton of Women of Wonder and State Senator Gerald Boudreaux. The event was sponsored by the Lafayette Chapter of NAACP, the Greater Southwest Louisiana Black Chamber of Commerce, 100 Black Men of Greater Lafayette, Lead Louisiana, Black Folks Talking, and National Organization of Black Law Enforcement.

IPNO congratulates our Board Chair Frank Neuner for receiving Court Watch NOLA's 2022 Lynne & Jerome Goldman Criminal Justice Reform Award on October 13, 2022.



IPNO Clients at The Moth Storytelling Workshop



Jerome Morgan, Frank Neuner and Darrin Browder at Court Watch

On October 12th, The Moth generously donated a storytelling workshop for IPNO's clients to help them tell their stories. Thank you to The Moth, and thank you to our clients for their bravery and generosity in telling their stories.

IPNO Executive Director Jee Park and IPNO board member and exoneree Robert Jones spoke at the International Academy of Trial Lawyers Mid-Year Meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana on October 14, 2022. They spoke about the American criminal legal system and the work of IPNO.

REFLECTION FROM IPNO'S SUMMER 2022 INTERN

IPNO welcomed seven interns for the summer of 2022. Below is a reflection from intern Sophia Downs, a rising senior at Harvard University, on her visit to the Legacy Museum & Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama.

Welcome to the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama! There's an intense heat outside; you're grateful to enter the cool museum. You enter in unsure but excited anticipation of what's to come. Then, immediately upon walking into the first exhibit, you are engulfed by waves. You begin to learn the terrible, true tale of the transatlantic slave trade. Moving forward, you see sculpted heads rising from a representative sea floor. Waves crash over them too, cutting them off at the neck. You find yourself submerged in grief, shock, and horror. It only continues as you read and learn more and more. The ground, made to be a sea floor, is bumpy beneath your feet. Yet, you continue to walk forward.

Keep walking. Eventually, you'll find yourself confronted with rows and rows of dirt in jars. The dirt, taken from lynching sites, bear the names of the victims. You'll look at the names, as I did. I noticed one victim shared my father's name, another my brother's, another my best friend's. The person killed may have been a father too. And a brother. And a friend. Some jars lack names and instead number the unknown: "Unknown #6" or "Unknown #11." I turn the corner and see jars simply labeled "Unknown." At what point did we stop counting the loss of life?

While doing groundwork for the Unjust Punishment Project, I again saw familiar names and thought of familiar faces. I spent hours recording the prior convictions of these incarcerated persons. At first, I was awash in numbers. Then, after translating those numbers to the offense they represent, I stared at the past misdeeds of nearly 800 individuals. I read appeals that detail specifics of each case. Again and again, judgments state that society is better off with a particular individual permanently removed from its midst. Condemned as career criminals, hundreds are sent to prison. Out of sight, out of mind.

The Unjust Punishment Project does not let them slip away, but instead seeks to hike the cracked and crumbling New Orleans sidewalks to bring those sentenced excessively home. At Innocence Project New Orleans, a person is seen as whole, not just a snapshot from one moment in time. Those who work at IPNO recognize the humanity in others and learn the forces and factors and families and fears that make up each person. They believe that "each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done," as Bryan Stevenson teaches.

It's not easy to seek justice for those robbed of it, but it's worth it. To restore dignity where dignity has been muddled, to build hope where hope was shattered, to free those who have been imprisoned, every effort is worth it. So what do we do when immersed in grief, rage, and injustice? There is nothing to do but pursue justice, one step at a time. Keep walking forward, especially when the ground beneath your feet is bumpy.

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Jee Park

(she/her)

Executive Director

Alex Cahill

(she/her)

Investigative Fellow

Leora Greene

(she/her)

Program Assistant

Kirschelle McGowan

(she/her)

*Wrongful Conviction Clinic
Supervising Attorney*

Meredith Angelson

(she/her)

Director of Special Projects

Gwen Dilworth

(she/her)

*Program Coordinator,
Unjust Punishment Project*

Caitlin Newswanger

(she/her)

Staff Attorney

Virginia White

(she/her)

Client Services Specialist

Huy Dao

(he/him)

Case Manager

Libra LaGrone Pealer

(she/her)

Director of Development

Charell Arnold

(she/her)

Case Development Supervisor

Richard Davis

(he/him)

Legal Director

Ceisha James-Hayes

(she/her)

Operations Manager

Jack Largess

(he/him)

Staff Investigator

Zac Crawford

(he/him)

Staff Attorney

Kiah Howard

(she/her)

Senior Investigator

Cat Forrester

(she/her)

*Director of Operations
& Communications*

Ayyub Ibrahim

(he/him)

Research Associate

Sandra Levick

(she/her)

Senior Staff Attorney

Móni Sakamoto-Talavera

(she/her)

Investigative Fellow



IPNO'S
21st Anniversary

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