

The Justice Archives

A Projective History
of Free Write and
The Carceral State

The *Onion* recently published an article with the headline: "Tips for Staying Civil While Debating Child Prisons." The lead photo is a child surrounded by chain link fence, inside a newly-erected immigration detention facility, watching television as a guard looks on. The internment of immigrant children in America is currently one of the "hottest" news topics as I write this on Wednesday, July 3, 2019. As it should be. Especially on the heavily left-leaning algorithm of my social media feeds. Which is exactly why the sardonic *Onion* headline hit so hard.

Incarcerating, locking-up, detaining (name it what you will) children in America is nothing new. It's been a specific practice in this country for 120 years, with the first court dedicated to juveniles right here in Chicago.

Free Write Arts & Literacy has been working within these systems and with criminalized youth since 2000, providing arts and literacy education, technical skill acquisition, and employment opportunities to the youth who enter our classroom and community spaces. In this time, we have also worked to instigate thought, conversation, and action around the fact of youth incarceration. This happens largely through the publication and exhibition of student work, as well as public-facing programming. It's from these efforts that the need for the Justice Archives arose, first in 2016.

We realized, after years of watching audiences engage with our students' work with a wealth of sympathy, but a lack of personal agency or ownership, that the general public is unequipped to have thoughtful conversations, let alone heated or civil debates about our (as in, *it's all of ours*) youth incarceration practices. Understandably, it is difficult to find access points to meaningful discussion or action around incarcerating youth, without adequate context and information.

So, as is intrinsic to Free Write's pedagogy, we responded to a need with a tool, which you now hold in your hands.

The Justice Archives traces and connects histories as a jumping off point to project forward: laying the groundwork and building a case for a future world without prisons.

That is how we Envision Justice. We invite you to join us.

Chelsea Ross,
Free Write Arts & Literacy
Curatorial Director

THE JUSTICE ARCHIVES:
A PROJECTIVE HISTORY OF FREE WRITE
AND THE CARCERAL STATE

1999

Legal/Litigation

"Jimmy Doe v. Cook County" - The American Civil Liberties Union files a federal lawsuit against Cook County alleging the government agency was not providing adequate safety and care for the youth in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (CCJTDC), resulting in eight years of federal oversight. Nearly 700 young people ages 10-17 are detained at CCJTDC while they await adjudication. CCJTDC is the largest and most populous juvenile detention facility in the world.

2000

Free Write

[Free Write Arts & Literacy](#), then called Thread of Development, begins as a literacy tutoring project in partnership with Nancy B. Jefferson School within CCTJDC. Ryan Keesling, Daphne Whittington, Tara Betts, Avery R. Young, and others are among the first teaching artists and tutors to engage young people while they are detained at CCTJDC, then known as the Audy Home.

Policy/Legislation

Governor George Ryan suspends all executions in Illinois, citing, "... grave concerns about our state's shameful record of convicting innocent people and putting them on death row."

2001

Community Organizing

With the support of the Oakland-based W. Haywood Burns Institute, over 50 youth programs from across the United States join together to form the Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY), with the purpose of "protecting and improving the lives of youth of color, poor children, and their communities by ensuring fairness and equity throughout all public and private youth-serving institutions."

Free Write

Free Write publishes the first anthology of student writing titled *But Not Yet Resting*.

Policy/Legislation

President Bush signs the Patriot Act, effectively changing terrorism laws to include "domestic terrorism," which allows for gang members to be defined as domestic terrorists and gangs as terrorist organizations. The Patriot Act was passed nearly unanimously by the Senate 98-1, and 357-66 in the House, with the support of members from across the political spectrum.

Community Organizing

Youth concerned with zero-tolerance policies in schools and over-policing in public spaces organize in Chicago. They use Know Your Rights workshops as a way to inform, organize, and mobilize young people for social change.

The Community Justice Initiative (CJI) grew out of citywide Know Your Rights Street Law workshops led by First Defense Legal Aid, the Children & Family Justice Center, Southwest Youth Collaborative, Alternatives Inc., Kuumba Lynx, Youth Struggling for Survival, and many other youth-centered collectives. The coalition outlined a four-part strategy to end the criminalization of youth: Restorative Justice, Youth Organizing, Advocacy, and Strategic Communications. Hundreds of youth-led workshops were conducted all over Chicago. Much of the outreach combined Street Law workshops with other arts and cultural activities at Chicago public schools. Youth organizers developed a public policy platform, held a summit at Northwestern Law School, and a citywide youth summit at University of Illinois at Chicago.

Legal/Litigation

The Chicago Tribune uncovers evidence about how police put together their 1992 case against 17-year-old Daniel Taylor, who had falsely confessed to a double homicide in Uptown. Despite police records supporting his claim that he was in police custody at the time of the crime, Taylor was convicted of the murders and sentenced to life in prison without parole. He would later be exonerated after being incarcerated for 20 years.

Free Write

Poet and educator Tara Betts teaches *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, *Push* by Sapphire, and *Always Running* by Luis Rodriguez to Free Write students inside CCTJDC. She writes the introduction to Free Write's first anthology of student writing entitled *But Not Yet Resting*.

Policy/Legislation

The Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) of 1974 is reauthorized, standardizing and systematizing more than 56 different juvenile justice systems in the United States. JJDPA makes federal funds available to states that seek to address over-incarceration and its root causes, including Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders (DSO); Adult Jail and Lock-Up Removal (Jail Removal); Sight and Sound Separation; and Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC).

The Homeland Security Grant Program results in tens of millions of dollars invested in military-grade equipment for the Chicago Police Department.

Community Organizing

Over 100 youth groups participate in gatherings convened by the W. Haywood Burns Institute's Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY), beginning a series of regional conferences across the United States in an effort to build personal relationships among the members of local youth groups whose work is focused on ending the "rail to jail."

2003

Young Women's Empowerment Project is founded in Chicago as a radical feminist, harm reduction-based collective of women and girls involved in the sex trade and street economy.

Statistics

First Defense Legal Aid and [Project NIA](#) report that 27,821 youth under the age of 16 are arrested in Chicago.

Free Write

Free Write publishes the second anthology of student writing and art, *Walk Like You Know*.

Community Organizing

[Community Justice for Youth Institute \(CJYI\)](#) incorporates in Illinois. Initially named Community Panels for Youth (CPY). Created by attorneys Cheryl Graves and Ora Schub in 1997, CJYI serves as the first juvenile court diversion program based on restorative justice in Chicago. CPY was piloted on Chicago's west side and then expanded into eight Chicago communities. 85% of participating youth did not recidivate.

Legal/Litigation

Governor George Ryan commutes all death sentences and pardons Aaron Patterson, Madison Hobley, Leroy Orange, and Stanley Howard having determined that their confessions were obtained under torture on the orders of [Chicago Police Department Commander Jon Burge](#).

Free Write

Free Write students and staff member Ryan Keesling build a computer together in the classroom, primarily to record students as they practice their reading fluency. It soon grows into a digital audio workstation and launches the music technology program that will go on to make space for students to produce thousands of recorded songs, poems, music compositions, and narrative pieces.

Policy/Legislation

Chicago curfew laws start 30 minutes earlier than Illinois laws. Critics question constitutionality of prohibiting youth to participate in activities that are protected by their First Amendment rights.

National Endowment for the Arts and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention publish *Arts Programs for Juvenile Offenders in Detention and Corrections: A Guide to Promising Practices* by Hillman, Grady, et al.

Community Organizing

Following the failure of local government officials to hold Chicago Police Department Commander Jon Burge and others accountable for police torture and provide reparations to the survivors, [Black People Against Police Torture \(BPAPT\)](#) organize a coalition of lawyers, activists, and organizations to take the cases to the International Human Rights Arena.

2005

Statistics

28,132 youth under 16 years of age are arrested in Chicago.

Free Write

Thread of Development becomes Free Write Jail Arts. Free Write publishes a third anthology of student writing and art entitled *Means of Survival*.

Poet, visual artist, and educator [Krista Franklin](#) writes *It Do What It Do (Me & Homer Talk Poetry)* about her experience teaching poetry and collage-making with Free Write in the CCJTDC. Her piece was later published by Haymarket Books in the 2018 anthology *The Long Term: Resisting Life Sentences Working Toward Freedom*.

Policy/Legislation

Illinois Public Act 94-0574 ends the transfer of 15- and 16-year-olds to adult prison for drug offenses committed within 1,000 feet of a school or public housing.

First Defense Legal Aid and Project Nia report that 27,821 youth under the age of 16 are arrested in Chicago.

Community Organizing

CJNY continues to host Regional Conferences across the United States in the effort to build personal relationships and develop aligned strategies to end racial disparities and stop the "rail to jail."

2006

Statistics

28,751 youth under 16 years of age are arrested in Chicago.

Free Write

Free Write publishes the fourth anthology of student writing and art, *Time to Go*. In it, Free Write student Levelle N. writes, "JTDC is not a place 2 be, it's like fire in the community."

Community Organizing

The Board of Chicago Public Schools eliminates "zero-tolerance" language and policies from the Student Code of Conduct as a result of years of organizing work led by young people, families and community groups.

Legal/Litigation

Public Act 94-0696 designates the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ) as an independent department as of July 1, 2006. Previously, the Illinois Department of Corrections managed Illinois' juvenile facilities.

Former Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge is convicted in federal court for perjury and obstruction of justice based on the fact that he lied under oath in a civil case when he denied he and others committed acts of torture.

The Cook County Courts release the Jon Burge Report, detailing the systematic torture that took place over the course of two decades.

In reference to the Jon Burge torture case, the United Nations Committee Against Torture finds that the U.S. government had violated the torture convention and called on them to "bring the perpetrators to justice."

Statistics

26,345 youth under the age of 16 are arrested in Chicago.

According to Cook County data, there were 494 violent incidents logged at Nancy B. Jefferson school inside the CCJTDC between April and June 2006. Several were assaults on teachers during school hours.

2007

Policy/Legislation

Chicago renames the former Office of Professional Standards the new Independent Police Review Authority, creating a new signed affidavit requirement for all citizen complaints.

Community Organizing

Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) forms a youth organizing alliance for education and racial justice led by students of color from Communities United, Southwest Organizing Project, Westside Health Authority, and Blocks Together.

Youth organizers from the south side of Chicago, later known as Generation Y of Southwest Youth Collaborative, Fearless Leading by the Youth (FLY) and Arab American Action Network launch the Audy

Home Campaign to close the CCJTDC. Free Write student writing and art detailing the conditions of detention provides content for workshops and contributes to the forming of the Audy Home Campaign.

Artists, writers, and activists collaborate with former and current Tamms prisoners and their families to launch Tamms Year Ten, a grassroots campaign to reform or close Tamms supermax prison--a prison in southern Illinois that housed more than 200 people in solitary confinement.

Legal/Litigation

The CPD's notorious Special Operations Section is dissolved after at least eight Special Operations Section officers are indicted and found guilty of stealing more than half a million dollars from citizens.

2008

Free Write

After a brawl injured 16 youth and 10 staff, school inside the CCJTDC as well as Free Write programming is suspended indefinitely for the 450 detained young people. The Cook County Board of Commissioners is stripped of its supervisory role by a federal court. The newly appointed transitional administrator, Earl Dunlap, says "The school will remain closed until it's safe to return." The school remains closed for 9 months.

Community Organizing

Rates of suspension for Chicago Public Schools nearly doubled since

2003. The High HOPES Campaign (Healing Over the Punishment of Expulsions and Suspensions) forms, led by youth from Blocks Together, Enlace, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, Community Renewal Society, ONE Chicago, Center of Change (Southwest Youth Collaborative), Trinity United Church of Christ, and many others. They demand that CPS reduce suspensions by 40 percent.

Youth organizers from Generation Y launch the "Live in Peace" Campaign, stopping CPD from arming every squad car with M4 semi-automatic assault rifles, and demanding instead for investments in mental health, youth jobs, and education.

The Justice Arts Coalition builds upon the Prison Arts Coalition, established in 2008 by a group of veteran teaching artists, to serve as a network for those working at the intersection of the arts and justice.

Legal/Litigation

Former Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge is indicted in federal court for perjury and obstruction of justice based on the fact that he lied under oath in a civil case when he denied that he and others committed acts of torture.

Statistics

In the United States, just over two million youth under the age of 18 are arrested. Of these two million, nearly 95 percent are accused of nonviolent crimes.

Free Write

Free Write collaborates with the Chicago Community Trust to create the Arts Infusion Initiative, a city-wide movement to provide arts education to youth in detention and other under-resourced neighborhoods. Free Write holds its first public [exhibition](#) of student work at Chicago Art Department.

Free Write students record themselves performing their poetry and compete, in absentia, in [Louder Than A Bomb](#) youth poetry slam, the largest youth poetry festival in the world.

Policy/Legislation

Chicago City Council adopts the Convention on the Rights of the Child, stating: "IT IS FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Mayor and members of the City Council of Chicago will advance policies and practices that are in harmony with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in all city agencies and organizations that address issues directly affecting the City's children."

Community Organizing

The [Young Women's Empowerment Project](#) releases a report in September of 2009 called *Girls Do What They Have to Do to Survive: Illuminating Methods Used by Girls in the Sex Trade and Street Economy to Fight Back and Heal*. This research is unique because it is the only known study that was developed and conducted by girls and transgender youth, ages 12-23, who are involved in the sex trade and street economy. It's also the only

2010

known report that focuses on the resilience and resistance of girls involved in the sex trade and street economy.

Statistics

31,224 youth under the age of 17 years old are arrested in Chicago.

Policy/Legislation

Public Act 95-1031 increases the juvenile court age to 18 for juveniles charged with a misdemeanor.

Public Act 95-1050 removes Redeploy Illinois' "pilot status" and permits the state to offer the program beyond the pilot counties. The program is designed to decrease juvenile incarceration through the creation of evidence-based community programs that maintains public safety and promotes positive outcomes for youth.

Community Organizing

Damian Turner, a co-founder of FLY and a youth organizer with the Audy Home Campaign is shot on August 15, 2010, four blocks away from the University of Chicago Medical Center, which did not have a trauma center to serve the primarily black neighborhoods surrounding it. Damian dies en route to the nearest trauma center located at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in downtown Chicago. His death highlights the urgent need for a Level 1 Trauma Center on Chicago's South Side.

Community Justice for Youth Institute (CJYI) hosts a Restorative Justice delegation to South Africa for youth, community organizers, restorative justice practitioners, and members of law enforcement. The delegation, including Free Write associate director Mathilda de Dios, learned about community mediation, decriminalization, and reconciliation efforts after the abolition of Apartheid.

Legal/Litigation

June 28 - Former Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge is convicted for perjury and obstruction of justice based on the fact that he lied under oath in a civil case when he denied he and others committed acts of torture. In January of 2011, he is sentenced to four and a half years in federal prison. He released from prison in 2014.

Statistics

27,563 youth under 17 years of age are arrested in Chicago.

2011

Free Write

Free Write and [Circles & Ciphers](#) collaborate on music and poetry recording sessions, creating the *10 Street Law Commandments* for First Defense Legal Aid. The [Know Your Rights Project](#) at the Children and Family Justice Center at Northwestern University School of Law creates a promotional video using the track to conduct Street Law trainings for over 5,000 young people in Chicago.

Unfinished Business-Juvenile Justice exhibition opens at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum. Free Write teaching artist Elgin Bokari Smith creates content in partnership with detained youth culminating in the *Youth Stories* 'zine featured in this exhibit.

Policy/Legislation

The Chicago City Council approves, without debate, a more strict citywide curfew for children 12 years of age or younger. The previous curfew law only applied to youth ages 12 to 16. Three offenses within a one-year period will be subjected to a \$1,500 fine in addition to community service.

Governor Pat Quinn abolishes the death penalty in Illinois after a 10 year moratorium on executions. Quinn, who claimed to have studied all aspects of Illinois' death penalty, said that it was impossible to find a system "that is free of all mistakes, free of all discrimination with respect to race or economic circumstance or geography."

Community Organizing

"Twenty African-American men remain in prison as a result of convictions based in whole or in part upon their coerced confessions. The vast majority of torture survivors have received no financial compensation or psychological counseling for their suffering."
-Chicago Torture Justice Memorials

Members of Project NIA and the Chicago Prison Industrial Complex Teaching Collective begin a grassroots community

organization in Chicago that aims to end youth incarceration called *Chain Reaction: Alternatives to Calling Police*. Chain Reaction is a participatory research and popular education project with the goal of supporting conversations about alternatives to calling police on young people.

Young people and community members host a restorative justice town hall with invited guests Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and Commissioner Jesus "Chuy" Garcia to present the design of community-based [Restorative Justice Hubs](#) and gain support for RJ Hubs as alternatives to youth incarceration. This meeting marks the beginning of Cook County's investment into alternatives to incarceration via the Restorative Justice Hubs.

Statistics

The US Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention reports 1.47 million arrests of young people under the of age 18.

Policy/Legislation

Illinois passes the Illinois Street Gang Rico Act, giving prosecutors the power to get convictions and greater jail time for "gang activity".

Miller v. Alabama decision rules that mandatory life without parole sentences for juveniles constitute cruel and unusual punishment. But it does not specify whether Miller should be applied retroactively, leaving each state to make

2012

its own decisions. Fifteen states eliminate juvenile life without parole. Nationally, more than 2,000 people, sometimes known as juvenile lifers, are still serving life without parole for crimes committed as juveniles.

Public Act 97-0362 establishes the "least restrictive alternative" standard. It states that a child cannot be committed to IDJJ unless "commitment to the Department of Juvenile Justice is the least restrictive alternative based on evidence that efforts were made to locate less restrictive alternatives to secure confinement and the reasons why efforts were unsuccessful in locating a less restrictive alternative to secure confinement."

Community Organizing

Rekia Boyd is murdered by Chicago Police Officer Dante Servin. [Black Lives Matter](#) organizes efforts to demand the firing of Servin.

Youth organizers from the Audy Home Campaign dress in prison uniforms and visit County Commissioners to demand reinvestment in alternatives to youth detention centers.

The Cook County Juvenile Justice Taskforce releases *Community Justice Vision Paper: Recommendations for Community-Based, Trauma-Informed, Restorative Solutions to Youth Crime and Conflict* which identifies community-based, trauma-informed, restorative solutions to youth crime in Cook County.

CJNY continues to host Regional Conferences across the United States in the effort to build personal relationships and develop aligned strategies to end racial disparities and stop the "rail to jail" and youth incarceration.

Legal/Litigation

A class action lawsuit, MH v. Monreal, is filed on behalf of all juvenile parolees who face parole revocation proceedings. Plaintiffs challenge the practices and procedures of the Illinois Prisoner Review Board with respect to the handling of parole revocation proceedings.

In the federal civil rights case of Obrycka v. Abbate, a jury finds that the Chicago Police Department has a "widespread code of silence" to protect officers against claims of wrongdoing.

A class action lawsuit, RJ v. Bishop, is filed on behalf of nearly 1,000 youth incarcerated in IDJJ prisons. Plaintiffs challenge deficiencies in conditions, services, and treatment throughout IDJJ.

Statistics

22,877 youth under 17 years of age are arrested in Chicago.

Illinois taxpayers pay an average of \$86,861 per year for each youth incarcerated in state prisons according to a Illinois Department of Human Services report. Taxpayers pay \$219,000 per year for each youth confined to the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center.

Free Write

Free Write releases a sixth anthology of student writing and art, *Big Dreams I'm Chasing*, and hosts a public exhibition at Chicago Art Department celebrating its release.

Free Write collaborates with Project NIA to host *A World Without Prisons* at the Bridgeport Art Center. The exhibition challenges artists and community members to envision a future without prisons.

Policy/Legislation

The Reparations Ordinance is introduced by Aldermen Proco Joe Moreno (1st Ward) and Howard Brookins (21st Ward) in an effort to bring resources and reparations to victims of Chicago police torture.

The Illinois Supreme Court holds that the Juvenile Court Act does not allow commitment of a minor to IDJJ for a status offense such as underage drinking. The opinion concludes by noting "the statutory policy of promoting the development and implementation of community-based programs to prevent delinquent behavior."

Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice Murphysboro youth prison closes on January 4.

Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice Joliet youth prison closes on February 22.

Community Organizing

As a result of efforts by activists, artists, and the families of prisoners, Tamms "supermax" prison closes after 15 years of operation, during which hundreds of men were held in solitary confinement indefinitely.

The Audy Home Campaign meets with Cook County Commissioners Bridget Gainer and Jesus "Chuy" Garcia to discuss a shared vision for restorative justice alternatives to juvenile detention and to find funding for these priorities in 2014.

Statistics

21,496 youth age 17 and under are arrested in Chicago.

Bureau of Justice Statistics publishes a report on sexual victimization in juvenile facilities showing high rates of sexual assaults in Illinois youth prisons.

Daniel Taylor is exonerated after being incarcerated for 20 years for a double homicide. Daniel was in police custody at the time of the murders, and had falsely confessed while being interrogated by the Chicago Police Department.

Free Write

Associate Director Mathilda de Dios introduces the idea of a "Justice Literacy" program. Justice Literacy helps detained students demystify the justice system, connect it to larger socio-economic issues, and build academic,

2014

professional, and self-advocacy skills so that they may more quickly move through and away from the experience of incarceration.

Free Write features student writing and art at *Reconnecting the Pathways* conference in Springfield, IL. Free Write designed creative and reflective space for the lawmakers, educators, organizers, and juvenile justice stakeholders in attendance from across the state.

Free Write hosts poet Randall Horton, poet and musician Jamila Woods, poet and essayist Reginald Dwayne Betts, poet Willie Perdomo, and musicians Bop Alloy as part of the Library Literary Arts Series inside the CCJTDC.

Free Write partners with Project NIA to host a screening of *15 to Life: Kenneth's Story*, a film and discussion about extreme sentencing of youth without the possibility of parole.

In preparation for the next anthology of student writing and art, Free Write creative writing students respond to work by acclaimed artists Greg Pardlo, Yusef Komunyakaa, Kerry James Marshall, Patrick Rosal, Roger Bonair-Agard, Aracelis Garmay, Countee Cullen, Tim Seibles, Devin Allen, Willie Perdomo, Reginald Dwayne Betts, and many others.

Policy/Legislation

Public Act 98-0061 extends juvenile court jurisdiction to include 17-year-olds charged with felonies. Prior to this legislation, 17 year-olds were charged as adult and held at the Cook County Jail.

Community Organizing

On October 20th, Laquan McDonald is fatally shot 16 times by Chicago Police officer Jason Van Dyke. The shooting leads to months of protests and political upheaval, and prompts a federal investigation of the Chicago Police Department, which concludes that officers routinely violated the civil rights of "minorities." The video of the shooting is released 13 months later, revealing a cover-up of the incident by the office of States Attorney Anita Alvarez, and the office of Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

In response to police violence against Chicago's youth, marked by the killing of Dominique Franklin Jr. (known as Damo) by the Chicago Police Department, We Charge Genocide forms and submits a *Police Violence Against Chicago's Youth of Color* report to the United Nations Committee Against Torture. The report reveals that police officers regularly engage in torture. Specifically, the Chicago Police Department is in violation of Articles 2, 10, 11, 12, 13 & 14 of the Convention of Torture, through the cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment of youth of color in Chicago.

The Right on Justice (RoJ) Alliance, an alliance of over 20 community organizing, faith-based,

2015

policy and legal groups, universities, and Restorative Justice practitioners from across Chicago and its surrounding communities, is launched to improve community capacity to halt the school-to-prison pipeline and mass incarceration through community organizing and restorative justice.

Statistics

17,783 youth aged 17 and under are arrested in Chicago.

Free Write

At the suggestion of its students in the CCJTDC, and to reflect a broader scope of work, Free Write Jail Arts changes its name to Free Write Arts & Literacy.

Free Write presents a fifteen year retrospective of student writing and art, entitled *The Work: Fifteen Years of Free Write Through Icons, Imagery and Poetry*, curated by Chelsea Ross at Chicago Art Department.

Policy/Legislation

Public Act 98-0060 creates Redeploy Illinois in Cook County, an initiative to decrease juvenile incarceration through the creation of evidence-based community programs that maintain public safety and promote positive outcomes for youth.

The Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center transitions to the control of the Office of the Chief Judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County Court.

On May 6, 2015, Chicago City Council approves reparations of \$5.5 million to victims of the Jon Burge torture cases, after spending \$100 million in previous legal settlements. As a result of decades of organizing and resistance, the City of Chicago agrees "to acknowledge the City's responsibility for gross human rights violations and to commit significant resources to begin to help repair the harms inflicted on the torture survivors, their families and the communities they come from." The ordinance goes on to require Chicago Public School students grades eight to 10 to learn the history of police torture under former commander Jon Burge and the struggle for reparations. Activist and educator Mariame Kaba tells journalist Natalie Y. Moore, "I consider the reparations ordinance to be an abolitionist document. It's an expansive way of demanding a form of justice, and it had specific requests and demands that were non-carceral demands that tend to the needs of survivors."

Community Organizing

After months of community pressure and hours before the video of Laquan McDonald's murder is released to the public, Jason Van Dyke is taken into police custody. Video from the police dashcam shows Laquan McDonald walking away from police at the time of the shooting, contradicting several police officer's account of the murder. Community members outcry the inconsistencies and criticize the timeline of Laquan's murder, the lack of action by States Attorney Anita Alvarez,

under the guidance of Mayor Rahm Emmanuel's office. The Chicago Tribune publishes a more personalized article about "The complicated, short life of Laquan McDonald".

Statistics

The U.S. saw a record number of exonerations in 2015, with nearly 40 percent of the cases involving individuals who were exonerated in homicides.

2016

Free Write

Free Write becomes an independent 501(c)3 organization after 15 years under the fiscal agency of National Louis University and Chicago Lights.

Free Write opens its eighth major exhibition, *Mitigating Evidence* curated by Chelsea Ross at Chicago Art Department, and releases its seventh anthology of student writing and art, entitled Evidence. The first version of the Justice Archives is presented alongside student artwork and publications. An excerpt from the anthology preface states, "The idea is to honor the rhythm of the work, their visions, their (re)visions; to convey the sadness and to resist the ways in which the youth are rendered invisible. These young people are vast. They are eager to tell you the entire truth; the one that informs the larger experience of their childhoods, and the one that informs their time locked up. It is imperative to our growth as a community, and our survival, that we listen to these stories and

contemplate, as a result, our own. The evidence that is uncovered in our own stories and theirs will astound you."

Policy/Legislation

Public Act 99-0268 provides that children can no longer be committed to IDJJ for misdemeanors, limits aftercare terms to the length of adult parole terms, and has other provisions that will help "right-size" the IDJJ population.

Public Act 99-0258 eliminates automatic transfer to adult court for children ages 15 and under and expands the discretion of juvenile court judges to make transfer decisions for 16- and 17-year-olds except for those charged with first-degree murder, aggravated criminal sexual assault, and aggravated battery with a firearm.

The US Department of Education announces the Second Chance Pell Pilot program, a new pilot program to offer Pell Grants for postsecondary education to incarcerated people. This program reverses the 1994 Crime Bill Act that restricted the education funding to incarcerated people and effectively defunded some 700 higher education programs in U.S. prisons.

As a result of years of work from youth organizers of the VOYCE campaign, Senate Bill 100 requires all Illinois schools to exhaust all other means of intervention before expelling students or suspending them for more than three days and

eliminates automatic "zero tolerance" suspensions and expulsions. Fines and fees for misbehavior are prohibited and schools are required to provide parents with information about why certain disciplinary measures are being used. Students returning from suspension will be allowed to make up the school work they missed, and students suspended for more than four days will be offered access to support services, like academic counseling and mental health professionals.

After years of work by activists and legal advocates, the Illinois Department of Corrections officials announce the closure of Stateville Correctional Center's F House, known as the "Roundhouse." Built in 1922, the Roundhouse was set apart by its central watchtower encircled by multiple floors of prison cells. The panopticon design created a cagelike and chaotic environment.

IDJJ notifies The Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability of its intent to close IYC Kewanee. Control of IYC Kewanee is transferred to Illinois Department of Corrections and is slated to become an adult prison.

Legal/Litigation

Formerly detained youth file a class action lawsuit against Fox Network for the filming of the TV show *Empire* in the CCJTDC. The lawsuit cites a breach of fiduciary duty and that it violated the children's rights under the U.S. Constitution and state law by keeping CCJTDC

youth locked in their living units and denying them access to programming.

Illinois Justice Department files a brief citing pre-trial bail practices violate an individual's equal protection under the 14th Amendment violation. This catalyzes organizing efforts to end money bond.

Community Organizing

Mental Health Movement Trauma Center campaign, founded after the death of organizer Damian Turner a co-founder of FLY and a youth organizer with the Audy Home Campaign is shot on August 15, 2010, four blocks away from the University of Chicago Medical Center, which did not have a trauma center to serve the primarily black neighborhoods, succeeds in establishing a Level 1 Trauma Center at University of Chicago.

2017

Free Write

Free Write staff and Alumni are invited to attend Create Justice, a national convening at Carnegie Hall in New York of arts organizations that engage incarcerated youth. They design curricula, policy, and build community with other national youth and adult leaders.

Policy/Legislation

Public Act 99-0628 provides that IDJJ rather than the Prison Review Board shall decide the date of release on aftercare for youth committed to IDJJ, except youth committed for first

degree murder.
It also provides that IDJJ shall be responsible for all persons under 18, instead of under 17 as it was previously, when sentenced to imprisonment and committed to IDJJ.

Texas enacts the Sandra Bland Act, which requires training in de-escalation techniques for all police officers, sets up protections in custody for people with mental health and substance abuse issues, and requires that independent law enforcement agencies investigate jail deaths.

Community Organizing

#NoCopAcademy campaign, an effort supported by over 85 community organizations across Chicago, launches to stop Mayor Rahm Emanuel from spending \$95 million to build a new training center for Chicago Police and first responders, demanding investment in communities rather than police training grounds.

In the wake of Donald Trump's attack on sanctuary cities, Black, Latinx, and migrant organizations come together to push Chicago to stand in defiance of the President, defend the constitution, and promote policies that offer safety to all residents. The group, led by Black Youth Project, Mijente, and Organized Communities Against Deportation, proposes concrete, proactive steps that reduce the arrests and policing that endanger communities and place immigrant in Chicagoans in deportation proceedings. Those steps include: The decriminalization and alternative processing

of crimes of survival, DUIs disproportionately policed in Black and Latinx neighborhoods, incidents at schools, drug related offenses, and more; Elimination of the flawed gang database, Reallocation of city resources from law enforcement to community institutions that provide long-term safety such as schools, clinics, and hospitals; Amendments to the Welcoming City ordinance to prevent collusion with federal deportation agents. Additional supporting organizations include: Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America, Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Chicago, National Immigrant Justice Center.

Legal/Litigation

Following the Laquan McDonald shooting, Illinois State Attorney General Lisa Madigan requests that the US Department of Justice conducts a civil rights investigation into the Chicago Police Department. The report is released in January 2017, announcing an agreement with the city to work on improvements under court supervision. It strongly criticizes the CPD for a culture of excessive violence, especially against minority suspects and communities, and states insufficient and poor training, and lack of Departmental oversight.

2018

Free Write

The Peoples' Education Movement centers Free Write student voices in their book chapter entitled "Schooling and the Prison Industrial Complex" in the new book *The*

*Long Term, Resisting Life
Sentences Working Toward
Freedom.*

Free Write students and family participate in the Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY) delegation at the Formerly Incarcerated and Convicted Peoples and Families Movement (FICPFM) conference in Florida. Free Write Alumni provide critical advice to conference attendees by insisting that they actively listen to the reflections of and solutions by formerly incarcerated teens.

As part of the Envisioning Justice initiative, Free Write is paired with writer Sasha Tycko and photographer Chelsea Ross at Sixty Inches from Center, a non-profit online arts publication and archiving initiative that supports and promotes art and writing that thrives primarily outside of mainstream historical narratives. Together they document the organization's history and work, resulting in the publication in several articles and features.

Policy/Legislation

Congress reauthorizes the 1974 Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act, which updates the 2002 version that shifts focus to disproportionate minority contact, instead of a more narrow definition of disproportionate minority confinement. This shift shows how policymakers are beginning to understand that criminalization begins in the community, not just after a person is locked up.

2019

Legal/Litigation

Jason Van Dyke, the Chicago police officer who killed 17-year-old, Laquan McDonald, is found guilty of second-degree murder and 16 counts of aggravated battery (one for each shot fired). Van Dyke is found not guilty of official misconduct.

Free Write

Free Write opens its ninth major exhibition, *In Conversation*. The exhibition, curated by Chelsea Ross with assistance from Omar Dyette and held at Chicago Art Department, presents original work by two dozen contemporary artists created in response to Free Write student visual artwork, poetry, audio recordings, and animations. A combined *In Conversation* catalogue and eighth anthology of student visual artwork and poetry is published, with written contributions by Maria Gaspar, Patrick Rosal, Greg Pardlo, Randall Horton, Roger Bonair-Agard, Ryan Keesling, Mathilda de Dios, and Chelsea Ross. Free Write presents this timeline, entitled *The Justice Archives*, alongside a selection of student work in the Envisioning Justice group exhibition presented by Illinois Humanities. The timeline and exhibition makes a case for abolition and invites the community to imagine a world without prisons.

The National Endowment for the Arts provides Free Write a grant to support art-making with detained and incarcerated youth.

Titus Kaphar and Reginald Dwayne Betts present *The Redaction* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City to address legal strategies, artwork, and narratives pertaining the carceral system and history in the United States. "Throughout their careers, visual artist and filmmaker Titus Kaphar and memoirist, poet, and attorney Reginald Dwayne Betts have used their varied mediums to confront the abuses of the criminal justice system. *The Redaction* presents more than 30 new prints and a series of public programs that examine the issue of money bail, the condition of the state and federal court system by which those arrested, but unable to afford bail, remain incarcerated even though they have been neither tried nor convicted." -MoMA

Free Write staff and alumni travel to California to participate in the Western Regional gathering of the Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY). There they connect with other youth leaders from around the country to envision a world where child well-being is at the core of decision-making across social and political sectors.

As a result of the Envisioning Justice exhibit, Free Write alumni and staff are invited to bring the Justice Archives training to students at Depaul's Community Service Center and Mikva Challenge's Juvenile Justice Council. Over 50 students and staff engage in a comparative analysis of the Justice Archives and CJNY's Youth in the Justice System. The curriculum covers pivotal historical periods where community organizing and activism transformed the people, practices, and policies regarding the incarceration of young people in the United States.

Free Write's "The Artist will Be Present" exhibition opens at Fourth Presbyterian Church. The exhibition serves as a backdrop for visitors from South Dakota, California, Tennessee, and other CJNY-affiliated spaces. Free Write hosts youth organizers from MILPA in California to discuss the impact of racial disparities in the Latinx community, centering the voices of criminalized youth in the Chicago area. Through interviews and relationship-building, and with the support of CJNY, Free Write alumni continue to form relationships and encourage dialog between formerly incarcerated youth on a national level.

Policy/Legislation

The Consent Decree between the Chicago Police Department and Illinois Attorney General is approved by the Court on January 31, 2019. The complaint alleged that CPD violates the Constitution, and state and federal laws, by engaging in

a pattern of using excessive force, including deadly force, in a manner that disproportionately harms Chicago's African American and Latino residents. The Complaint sought to address allegations that CPD engages in a pattern and practice of civil rights violations and unconstitutional policing. The City has denied the claims in the Complaint.

Judge Vincent Gaughan sentences the Chicago police officer Jason Van Dyke to just under seven years in prison for the murder of 17 year old Laquan McDonald.

Illinois Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton creates the Justice, Equity, and Opportunity (JEO) initiative to examine the root causes and consequences of education, poverty, and sentencing.

Illinois passes House Bill 2444, Children's Best Interest Act, giving judges tools to consider children at the time of parents' sentencing, and House Bill 2649, which creates policies for children from arrest through return of parents.

City of Chicago Office of the Inspector General releases a review of the Chicago Gang Database and finds that CPD officers entered occupations for individuals or gang arrest cards that included 'Scumbag, Bum, Criminal, Black, Dork,' etc. Such entries demonstrate CPD's lack of controls around its data entry practices and how lack of controls can be employed to demean and dehumanize members of the public.

Community Organizing

[Mariame Kaba](#) writes "A Love Letter to #NoCopAcademy". She writes, "#NoCopAcademy is an abolitionist organizing campaign and through your work, you've helped others understand what it means when we say that abolition is a practical organizing strategy. You told a story about policing as an inherently violent and death-making institution that WILL NOT be "reformed" by training cops "better" or in fancier digs."

The Regional Gang Information Database (RGID) was created in 2005 and has been hosted by the Cook County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) since 2013. Concerned that the Sheriff's office was concealing in its rush to remove the RGID from public scrutiny, #EraseTheDatabase campaign calls on the Cook County Board to ensure that abolition of the database takes place in a responsible, publicly accountable, and permanent manner.

A January 2019 lawsuit is part of the #CloseTheWorkhouse campaign in St. Louis, with the ultimate goal of impacting policy change that will reduce the jail's population enough that it can be closed permanently. "We are attacking the City of St Louis' illegal procedures used to jail more than 1,000 people solely because of their inability to make a cash payment to purchase their freedom," said Thomas Harvey, Senior Attorney and Justice Project Program Director for Advancement

Project National Office.
"About 95 percent of people locked in the city of St. Louis' cages are held there because of cash bail. There are eight times as many Black detainees as White detainees in the jail, even though the Black population makes up only 47 percent of the City of St. Louis."

Seven inmates receive bachelor degrees through a free program at Statesville Prison offered by Northeastern Illinois University's University Without Walls program and Prison + Neighborhood Arts & Education Project. Special guests at the graduation ceremony included current Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton and Chance the Rapper.

Legal/Litigation

Free Write's former student, facing a 31 year sentence, loses his appeal in Judge Vincent Gaughan's court, the same judge that sentenced Jason Van Dyke to just under seven years for killing Laquan McDonald. This student's arrest came mere months prior to the 2015 legislation changing the criteria for juveniles being automatically charged as adults. With this appeal, Judge Gaughan had discretion to apply the new laws and drop the case to a juvenile case, significantly reducing the long sentence. Judge Gaughan, unlike many other judges at the time who heard similar appeals and used their discretion to drop the adult charges to juvenile charges, denied the appeal.

2020

One month later, the Illinois Supreme Court decides in a unanimous and landmark rule that a 41-year sentence for a juvenile offender constitutes the equivalent of a life term. This supreme court decision triggers sentencing protections for juvenile offenders who are sentenced to more than 40 years in prison.

Free Write

Free Write marks 20 years of working with incarcerated and criminalized youth and young adults, as well as working alongside activists, organizers, and policy-makers to demand divestment from systems of violence while building a case for a world without prisons.

Within the context of the global COVID-19 Pandemic, Free Write develops interactive, broadcast-quality, online delivery methods for arts programming with incarcerated youth at the CCJTDC and the Illinois Youth Prisons.

Free Write partners with the Access To Justice Initiative to train and employ program alumni as Community Navigators, which positions them as experts in conversations around youth incarceration. Community Navigators educate peers, mental health workers, teachers, detention center staff, lawmakers, and other stakeholders on the conditions that give rise to juvenile incarceration. They speak to the myriad ways we can divest from systems of violence and invest in healthy communities.

Community Organizing

The murders by police of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade, and the murder of Ahmaud Arbery by white supremacists catalyze massive protests and demonstrations in all 50 states and around the world demanding justice and an end to police brutality against Black and Brown people and white supremacy everywhere. The idea of defunding/abolishing the police and prisons, and reallocating resources to communities and community care enters the mainstream, picks up momentum across social media platforms, and becomes a central demand of organizers and uprisings.

Legal/Litigation

Minneapolis City Council moves to defund and disband its municipal police department and reallocate funds for community-led alternatives.

FUTURE

Community Organizing - Defund, Disarm, Disband, Abolish

Following the 2020 uprisings and sustained pressure by communities, national and local policies shift toward defunding police and prisons, disarming and disbanding municipal police forces and private security, closing jails and prisons, and ultimately abolishing police, prisons, and the carceral state. Police are removed from schools, and funding is reallocated for teachers, social workers, counselors, nurses, supplies, and learning resources. Zero-tolerance policies are repealed. The disproportionate funding for policing and prisons is reallocated to education, mental health care, housing, and other basic needs. Harm repair and public safety practices such as [Restorative Justice](#), [Transformative Justice](#), [Community Accountability](#) take root and replace systems of criminalization and incarceration.

Resources

[Critical Resistance
Abolition of Policing
Workshop](#)

[Isn't That Public Safety?
Imagining Posters](#)

[Building a Police-Free
Future FAQ](#)

[8 Steps To Abolition](#)

A world without prisons

The Justice Archives is a living document compiled by Free Write Arts & Literacy. It is composed of first hand accounts, excerpts from published writings, legislation, and collective knowledge shared by community members. Citations are included in the full version of The Justice Archives, but have been omitted here for brevity. Hyperlinks have been and will continue to be added to this version.

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From 2000 to 2019,
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Misty de Berry
Patrick Rosal
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Roger Bonair-Agard
Ryan Keesling
Sam Trump
Substantial
Tara Betts
Theaster Gates
Tim Nickless
Toni Assante Lightfoot
Turtel Onli
Willie Perdomo

and many more.

Additional Resources

Support Free Write as we deepen, expand, build curricula around, and engage community with this and future iterations of the Justice Archives. Make a donation at freewritechicago.org/contribute

For more information about the issues discussed in the Justice Archives, visit freewritechicago.org/bibliography

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