The Work of the New Orleans DA's Civil Rights Division: Giving Second Chances to Reformed Men and Women Makes Us a Better Community

By Bidish Samra, J.D.

As a lawyer working in the Orleans Parish District Attorney's Civil Rights Division, I have the unique opportunity to revisit old cases with extreme sentences and advocate on the State's behalf for reduced sentences where those outcomes are appropriate. New Orleans is the mass incarceration capital of the planet, and our decades-long attachment to locking people up for the rest of their lives means that there is no shortage of work. One of the biggest lessons I have learned about second-look work is that focusing on the narrow question of whether someone may commit another crime can cause us to miss the bigger point: formerly incarcerated people make life-changing contributions to society.

It was not clear then that Buff would ever obtain freedom; after all, he was sentenced to die in prison. However, after it became clear that the victim’s father, Mr. Bill Lacey, wanted an opportunity to sit with Buff, and Buff expressed a desire to make amends, Kelly Orians and I coordinated an in-person dialogue that the District Attorney’s Office was unable to resist. Mr. Lacey forgave Buff for the crime, and Buff pledged he would continue to work every day to make the world a better place.

St. Charles Center for Faith In Action Heart of Reconciliation Conference
November 17th-18th
7100 St. Charles Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70115

This powerful gathering will bring together community members, those touched by the criminal justice system, trauma-informed experts, spiritual leaders, and change agents to deepen the understanding of the power of reconciliation, identify tools for reconciliation, and build action plans to heal. Register here.

As our number of enrolled students continues to rise, we need to make sure that each and every one has access to an exceptional educational experience. We can’t do it without your help. Sign up to receive our future emails.

Upcoming Events

Human Rights and Women's Rights in Afghanistan
October 28th, 12:30-1:30pm
Loyola University New Orleans, Marquette Hall 315

The featured speaker is Professor Nagina Khalili who was the first female prosecutor in Ghor Province, where she served under the first female attorney general, prosecuting cases of violence against women. Professor Khalili received her law degree in Afghanistan and served as a law professor there before the Taliban takeover, which forced her to flee her homeland last summer.

Follow us on social media!