

# JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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NEW ORLEANS

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# JSRI

JESUIT SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE  
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS

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## Upcoming Events

### With JSRI:

**Immigration on Film: Guest Speaker Series.** Join JSRI Affiliate Fellow, Dr. Pablo Zavala's Immigration on Film class speaker series of local organizations and experts share the work they do and the challenges they face doing work with and for immigrants. **Fridays at 11:30–12:20 P.M. in Bobet 332.** 1/30: Immigration Services and Legal Advocacy. 2/6: Project Ishmael. 2/13: Southeast Dignity Not Detention.

### On Campus:

**'The Trail They Blazed' & 'Leading Toward Justice: Loyola, New Orleans, and the Struggle for Civil Rights' are on display on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd floors of the Monroe Library.** Through archival photographs and oral history excerpts, these exhibits immerse viewers in the daily realities and extraordinary courage of the era. They also explore the history of the civil rights movement on our own campus—highlighting student activism, faculty leadership, and key moments in Loyola's pursuit of racial justice. **Together, these**

## Research, Humanity, and New Possibilities Beyond the Carceral Space

By Dr. Christian L. Bolden

*"The real name of adoration ... is research."* – Pierre Teilhard de Chardin  
SJ/ Thomas M. King

I heard this quote as I sat in a large circle at a writer's retreat over the holidays, shared in a reflection read by my colleague, Tom Ryan. The quote struck me with resonant clarity. Rarely have I been so affected by a phrase, and hearing it brought back a cascade of feelings surrounding my current endeavor of academic study.

**I've spent the past five years learning about the individuals who have spent their lives incarcerated at Louisiana State Penitentiary (Angola) and Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women, most of whom were condemned to death by incarceration.** I met with 92 newly freed people and listened to their stories of tragedy, horror, and suffering. I heard tales of regret, resolve, and forgiveness. And although these stories were heart-wrenching, people also shared their experience of healing and the incredible power of human resilience that ended with redemption, joy, and triumph. I was simultaneously overcome with awe and crushed by the weight of the responsibility I now have as a vessel for those stories. I learned of unfathomable injustices that cost a person more than 50 years of incarceration, yet they were filled with the joy of being free rather than bitterness from being wronged, and I learned of seemingly unforgivable acts of violence that were nevertheless forgiven by those surviving the harm.

I spoke to a man who was incarcerated at the age of 10 and spent the next 45 years of his life in prison. He was a boy when he was incarcerated. He was 55 years old when he was released. His stories of surviving Angola have haunted my thoughts ever since. He had only been free four months when I interviewed him and he died a few months later.

**I was the only person he's ever told his story to.** I feel the weight of making sure other people know his story. I feel overcome with the responsibility of ensuring other people know all of their stories.

I interviewed wave after wave of new demographic groups. First, youth that were sentenced to life without parole (LWOP), then adults sentenced to LWOP, then people given de facto life sentences (a number of years beyond a reasonable end of life) and so on. In qualitative research, we usually aim for what is called "saturation," which is reaching the point when you are not learning anything new.

How could saturation ever be reached with something like this? For the baseline experience of incarceration, sure, I reached saturation long ago. **So why did I keep going?** Why did I put myself through the exhaustion, sleepless nights, haunting images, and frustrated despair over injustice

two installations connect statewide civil rights history with the university's lived story. See the [flyer](#) here.

**Her Education, Her Power: Feminist Friday with Stephanie Sinclair & The Women's Resource Center.** Sinclair is the founder & president of Too Young To Wed, which portrays the lives of vulnerable girls affected by practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation. Food will be provided! Friday January 30th at 1:30–2:30 P.M. in Marquette 315 (WRC Living Room). [Flyer](#) here.

**Louisiana Pardon & Parole Board Hearing.** This hearing on campus is a unique opportunity to see real cases be heard and learn from the people that decide who gets to be free. Wednesday February 4th 9 AM–12 PM in Uptown Hall Multipurpose Room. [Flyer](#) here.

**Black Studies is screening 'How to Build a Library' on February 10th at 6:45 P.M. in Bobet 332.** The film follows the efforts of two Kenyan women to decolonize and refurbish 3 public libraries in Nairobi, Kenya. The first 15 attendees will be given a free piece of Kenyan literature! See the [flyer](#) here.

**Walking with the Migrant: Jubilee, Justice, and Hope Lectures.** Join Loyola Institute for Ministry's free online lecture series. Thursday February 12th at 7:00 P.M. with Jacqueline Hidalgo about "Stranger and Sojourner: Scripture's Migration Narratives." See [information about other dates, registration, and recordings here](#).

### In the Community:

**Dismantling (US)AID: A Canary in the Coal Mine.** Join the St. Charles Center for Faith + Action as Retired Senior Foreign Service Officer of

that would never be reconciled? Why do I still do this work? **Because each person's story is worth hearing and worth telling.**



*Dr. Bolden in the Louisiana Parole Project conference room.*

**We can learn so much from incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people.** The men and women I interviewed were written off as “monsters” or the “worst of the worst.” I did not see those things. I saw people laying bare their truths, regrets, sorrow, and hope. I saw *humanity*.

Being with them in those spaces, there was a connection—a molecular handshake<sup>1</sup> between strangers that encapsulated a lifetime of experiences. I have an even greater appreciation for what my friend and colleague Marcus Kondkar must have felt interviewing people serving life without parole for [The Visiting Room Project](#), especially since at that time, hope had not yet been realized on the legal front.

Thomas King explains that for Chardin, “mysticism lay in the very act of discovery that created a new truth,” (2005, p.29). **A new realm of possibilities occurred after the Miller v Alabama 2012 and Montgomery v Louisiana 2016 rulings that deemed sentencing kids to mandatory life without parole was unconstitutional.** Part of my research is examining one of those manifested possibilities, which is the [Louisiana Parole Project \(LPP\)](#), founded by Andrew Hundley, the first person to be freed in Louisiana after the Montgomery ruling.

LPP is a reentry organization dedicated to helping people who were incarcerated for 20 or more years, with the majority of its staff also having served long sentences in prison. Within 8 years of existence, LPP had served over 669 clients with an astoundingly low recidivism rate of 3% (general recidivism is comparatively 60-70%). LPP's tremendous success in using the peer-mentor reentry model challenges the longstanding practice of preventing people marked by the criminal legal system from interacting with one another. Instead, they have shown that those with lived experience in these systems may have actionable solutions with better outcomes when allowed to collaborate as experts on the subject (see Bolden et al, 2025).

USAID, Alyssa Wilson Leggoe, shares the impact of ending aid for our international neighbors, and why we should care. Alyssa, a native New Orleanian, served in Russia, Mozambique, Haiti, and Senegal. **Wednesday, January 28th at 5:30 P.M. at 7100 St. Charles Ave.** See the [flyer](#) & [post](#) here.

**Unión Migrante Immigration Court Watch.** Unión Migrante is a democratic organization of immigrants, for immigrants. They are dedicated to fighting for immigration reform, providing training and offering advocacy to support immigrants in emergencies. **As the threat of racist state violence against immigrant communities continues, Unión Migrante rises to meet it—and they want you to join!** See the [post here](#).

### Career Opportunities:

Want to make a real impact and help create the change you want to see in the world?

**Consider applying to become a Jesuit Volunteer** — it's an experience that can truly shape the rest of your life. **View this Jesuit Social Justice Fellowship opportunity on [Handshake](#) or on the [Jesuit Volunteer Corps website](#).** Applications due February 6th.

**Feed the Second Line** is committed to building a resilient and sustainable future by strengthening the safety net, preserving culture through paid opportunities, and creating supportive pathways for all generations to uplift the ones who make our city special. **View the Communications and Program Specialist opportunity on [Handshake](#) and on the [Serve Louisiana website](#).** Applications due February 8th.

**Promise of Justice Initiative** stands at the forefront of the fight for the dignity, freedom,



*Louisiana Parole Project staff watching Dr. Bolden giving the keynote address on mass incarceration to a symposium of reform prosecutors at Loyola Law School.*

**People who were once condemned to live and die in obscurity are now paving incredible new paths that improve society for everyone.** This occurred in Louisiana, which has the second highest per capita imprisonment rate *in the entire world*, in a country that historically holds *millions* of people in carceral settings. Very few of those human stories are ever told.

In 2026, I will be unpacking and sharing the stories I've been entrusted with and engaging the difficult questions of what it means to return to society after being incarcerated for 20, 30, 40, or 50 years. **I ask you to [share](#) your scholarly, creative, artistic, or contemplative work regarding carceral issues in the *JustSouth* e-newsletter as well.** I look forward to learning from you.

<sup>1</sup> Thank you, Dr. Allyn Schoeffler for this delightful new concept.

Bolden, C. L., Roberts, J., Thomas, E., & Castle, S. (2025). "Walk Right up to the Sun, Hand in Hand: The Power of Peer Mentorship in Facilitating the Successful Reentry of Former Lifers," in the ASC Division of Corrections and Sentencing: Handbook on Lived Experience in the Justice System, edited by Dum, C., Fader, J., LeBel, T., and Wright, K. New York: Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781003615620-35

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and autonomy of those targeted  
and touched by the criminal  
legal system and mass  
incarceration. PJI's approach  
includes collective action,  
legislative advocacy, civil and  
criminal litigation, and reframing  
narrative discourse. [View the  
Narrative Storytelling:  
Research & Interviewing  
Internship](#) opportunity  
on [Handshake](#). Applications  
due February 25th.

*Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans. Please send  
feedback to [jsri@loyno.edu](mailto:jsri@loyno.edu).*

## LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS

As our prison education program continues to grow, 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. [Give today!](#)

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