

JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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JSRI

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2026 Guest Editor: Professor Christian Bolden, Ph.D.

JustSouth Editor: Scotty Wolfe, B.S.

JSRI News

JustSouth Monthly Podcast: The Trail They Blazed – Student Reflections on the Importance of Civil Rights. In Spring 2026, JSRI presented The Trail They Blazed exhibit in the Monroe Library in collaboration with the Historic New Orleans Collection. Several students had the opportunity to participate in this exhibit as tour guides across the various displays. Loyola students Cortlyn Burke, Andrea Landry, Jordana Montegut, and Amiyuh Tobias were some of them, and in this episode of JustSouth Monthly, they spoke with podcast host and fellow tour guide, Si Starks, about their reflections on the importance of civil rights. [Listen here!](#)

Upcoming Events

In the Community

HOPE Fest. Join the Neighborhood Star Foundation in their Helping Others Prosper Eternally Festival to celebrate

Reflections After Five Years With the Jesuit Social Research Institute

By Bidsh Sarma, J.D.

“Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve; to give, and not to count the cost, to fight, and not to heed the wounds, to toil, and not to seek for rest, to labor, and not to ask for reward, except that of knowing that we are doing your will.”

– A prayer attributed to St. Ignatius

The Jesuit Social Research Institute has let me call it home for more than five years now, and Annie Phoenix, our Executive Director, has asked me to share some reflections on that time as it draws to a close. At the end of the month, I’ll transition to a new office, not too far from my current one—down the hall, on the other side of the same floor of Loyola’s Law Clinic building on the Broadway campus. While I’m certainly excited about my new role launching a [criminal appeals clinic](#) at the law school, there is no doubt I will miss being a day-to-day part of JSRI.

The first several years I was affiliated with JSRI, I had the professional privilege of working in the Civil Rights Division at the Orleans Parish District Attorney’s office. It was an opportunity of a lifetime. I wrote about that work in two previous editions of our *JustSouth Monthly* publication: [The Work of the New Orleans DA’s Civil Rights Division: Giving Second Chances to Reformed Men and Women Makes Us a Better Community](#) and [A Second Look, A Second Chance](#). Loyola also blessed me with the opportunity to share an extraordinary aspect of the job during the 2023 annual Lenten Series, [where I presented](#) “Reconciliation and the Adversarial Criminal Legal System.” *JESUITS* magazine shared an essay I wrote to an international audience in its 2025 edition, [“Hope Rekindled: Redressing mass incarceration in Louisiana.”](#) The Civil Rights Division was also the subject of an excellent set of two articles, [“Inside the division: how a small team of US prosecutors fight decades of shocking injustice”](#) and [“Life in prison for stealing \\$20: how the Division is taking apart brutal criminal sentences.”](#) and a [four-episode podcast series](#) published by *The Guardian*.

I wrapped up my work with the DA’s office in August 2024 after three-and-a-half years. I will always reflect on my time there as one where I gave without counting the cost, fought without heeding the wounds, and toiled without seeking rest or reward. To me, it was a special chance to do something our city—and our country—desperately needed. The privilege of that service propelled me in a way I hope to carry forward.

These past two years, I have been more heavily involved on campus with JSRI. For those of you who have been paying attention, it will come as no surprise to hear that this is a group of tremendous leaders and contributors who are making an indelible impact at the university, across the city, and throughout the state and the nation.

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opportunity. There will be food vendors, employment opportunities, family activities, and a back to school supply giveaway! **This Sunday, August 2nd, 3–7:00 P.M.** at the **Rosenwald Recreational Center at 1120 South Broad St.** Admission is free for the whole family! [See the flyer here.](#)

Opportunities

VOTE is hiring an Archives Project Manager. Join New Orleans' VOTE team to lead a first-of-its-kind project preserving the history of VOTE and the Angola Special Civics Project, helping tell the story of one of the nation's most influential criminal justice reform movements that began on the inside. **Rolling deadline; priority given to applications in by July 31st.** [See more about this part-time September 2026-2027 job here.](#)

What We're Reading

"100% of girls who turned to criminalized survival behaviors had been victimized first." Read Loyola Criminology & Justice professor Andrea Hagan's article in The Lens, [Girls usually enter the criminal justice system after abuse.](#)



Patrick Govan, Bidish Sarma, & Calvin Duncan working with Loyola Law School students.

Who better underscores this point than Calvin Duncan? At JSRI, I have been as lucky as one could be because I have shared an office with this living legend while we worked together on the [Light of Justice program](#). He has been a legend in my eyes for more than 15 years, ever since I first met him and learned about his story, soon after he was released from prison in 2011. Today, his legacy is growing beyond my comprehension. The [publication of his memoir, *The Jailhouse Lawyer*](#), last year was a [remarkable achievement](#). But, Calvin never stops when you may expect him to catch his breath—his whole life he has kept giving, kept fighting, and kept toiling. The day after he [launched his book at a special event with Baldwin Books at Dillard University](#), he began a political campaign for the ages.

By the end of his run to be the clerk of the Criminal District Court, he had [become one of the most popular and important political figures](#) in the New Orleans landscape. [His backstory](#), his perseverance, and his unexpected and [emphatic electoral victory gave us hope](#). Then, [the state government's dark decision to deprive him of the office](#), and the local government's strong (but late) and [ultimately unsuccessful effort](#) to protect the city's voters later on to create a [troubling and powerful story](#) that distills the stakes of our nation's current struggle for democracy, [racial equality](#), [voting rights](#), and justice reform. It is understatement to say that he has inspired others and will be a light to formerly incarcerated people who wish to hold positions of power in government. Calvin has also revealed the current reality of our politics more poignantly than anyone else could have.

Calvin's presence at JSRI alone is enough to light up the campus, but the talent on the roster is deep and wide. [Ronnie Moore, a civil rights hero](#), was JSRI's inaugural Fr. Twomey Legacy Scholar. His sustained engagement with [Loyola students](#) and local high school students over the past several years has been a spiritual and energetic boon. Earlier this year, Dr. Ronnie [inspired us at the Monroe Library's opening of "The Trail They Blazed,"](#) an exhibition of The Historic New Orleans Collection that documented the experiences of Louisiana's Civil Rights Movement heroes. Each time I saw Dr. Ronnie in the office, he took a few minutes to challenge me to slow down and listen to God to help me figure out the next step in our nation's struggle for justice.



JSRI staff, Loyola luminaries, friends, and family celebrate with Calvin Duncan after he received an honorary law degree from Loyola University College of Law and gave the commencement address at the graduation ceremony in May, 2025. From left to right: Annie Phoenix, Ayana Carter, Calvin Duncan, Dean Madeleine Landrieu, Marcus Kondkar, Bidish Sarma, Sophie Cull, and Patrick Govan.

You can never have too many civil rights heroes on one campus. Bill Quigley, a nationally renowned public interest and human rights lawyer, [became the next Fr. Twomey Legacy Scholar](#). Bill offers enormous support and wisdom to the JSRI staff, and does so with humility and good humor. His [efforts to elevate the voices of the poor and disenfranchised continue unabated](#). Last year, he coordinated our [year-long effort to reflect upon Hurricane Katrina](#) after 20 years for the *JustSouth Monthly*. Like Calvin and Dr. Ronnie, Bill gives without counting the cost. His longtime service to Loyola has made him a well-loved figure on campus. What has struck me most about Bill is his ability and commitment to listen. Nobody does it better.

I cannot praise enough everyone I have been able to work with at JSRI. The consistent and tireless work that Dr. Stephanie Gaskill and Kelsey McLaughlin pour into the [prison education program at Rayburn Correctional Center](#) makes it run seamlessly. Kiana Calloway brings enthusiasm and authenticity to our advocacy work, and he has opened the eyes of so many students and community members to the injustices of our criminal legal system. Scotty Wolffe keeps everything running smoothly at the office and at all of our many events, and they make JSRI a fun and energizing place to be. Patrick Govan reminds me every day how valuable it is for our society to give people once incarcerated a second chance. Over this past year, Beau Guedry, SJ has taught our Loyola students in New Orleans and at Rayburn with a spirit of compassion and love.

Steering this ship is Dr. Annie Phoenix, who has tapped into all of our gifts and always helps us find our highest purposes. I also want to express my gratitude to Professor Marcus Kondkar, a colleague, former member of the JSRI Advisory Board, and a dear friend, who helped put me on this path. There is always a lot happening at Loyola, but I encourage you to always keep an eye on JSRI—wherever they are is a good place to be.

It is no secret that our world is in flux, that powerful forces are pulling us in opposing directions. The most valuable thing I have learned over these past five years is that there is tremendous value in surrounding yourself with

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you can. Listening and practicing patience while you listen are prerequisites to serving God. When we do finally hear, then we can serve fully, without the need for any reward other than being unburdened by the knowledge that what we are doing is precisely what we should be doing.

Bidish Sarma will join the law clinic faculty after previously serving as a fellow with JSRI. Before coming to Loyola, he was an Assistant District Attorney in the Civil Rights Division of the Orleans Parish District Attorney's office. In Louisiana, he has provided pro bono representation to individuals serving life sentences in their commutation proceedings and post-conviction litigation. He also supported the development and launch of The Visiting Room Project. He began his legal career in 2008 at the Capital Appeals Project in New Orleans, where he represented individuals sentenced to death on their appeals. He served as a clinical teaching fellow at the Berkeley Law Death Penalty Clinic from 2012 through 2015, and has also taught as an adjunct professor at Tulane Law School and the Loyola University New Orleans College of Law.

Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans.

Please send feedback to jsri@loyno.edu.

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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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