CONTENTS

IN EVERY ISSUE
02  Noted
03  Debrief
    Verifying and protecting your data, creating sustainable catalysts, and student notes.
24  In Review
    Highlights and selected achievements of 2018.

PROFILES
06  Better, Smarter Rebuilding
    Taking a holistic approach to handling disaster relief and rebuilding.
07  After Marriage Equality
    Passing marriage equality didn’t solve every problem of the LGBTQ community, so what comes next?
22  Science of Violence Prevention
    Celebrating 10 years of making communities safer with the National Network for Safe Communities.

FEATURES
08  Legacy of Violence
    A look back at the destructive outcomes of U.S. intervention in Central and South America.
14  How to Create a Fairer Justice Process
    Research informs efforts to administer justice more equitably.
18  Policies for Change
    John Jay’s research centers take a data-driven approach to enhancing the health of New York communities.
John Jay researchers can even be found mucking around in the subterranean spheres of New York City. Dr. Marta Concheiro-Guisan and Dr. Shu-Yuan Cheng, of the Department of Sciences, have formed a team to test wastewater for residues of illicit drugs throughout the city. Their new study, which collected wastewater from six treatment plants in NYC—in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx—intends to provide city officials with a large-scale snapshot of New Yorkers’ drug use. In the future, the team says it’s possible to explore concentrations of other substances, like antidepressants or hormones, that will tell the city more about community health.
Welcome to the 2019 issue of Impact! This has been another great year for our scholars, as they set new milestones for scholarly works produced and reached new heights in competitive grants secured. And while a number of things have gotten easier now that we’ve produced the second issue of this magazine, one thing that remains difficult is choosing from all the possible great stories at the College to select the few that we can cover in these pages.

In this issue, we explore several important social justice issues; first among these, the legacy of violence in Central and South America. From the invasion of Panama, to dictatorships in Chile, Brazil and elsewhere—John Jay scholars are helping us to understand the entangled history of U.S. interventions in the region. Closer to home, several of our Research Centers are providing empirical evidence that is guiding policy toward making New York safer—whether alternatives to incarceration or community-based solutions to violence, this work has a direct impact on the city that surrounds us. And in our third feature, we look at how college scholars are contributing to a more just justice system by weighing in on issues such as eyewitness memory, expert testimony and questioning of child witnesses.

We have much to celebrate in this issue, like the 10th anniversary of our National Network for Safe Communities. And so much to be proud of, like the light our scholars are shining on issues of prejudice and racism, and the work our students are doing in the sciences, social sciences, and other fields. My special thanks to all those who contributed to this second edition of John Jay College’s research magazine. We hope you enjoy it, and learn as much as we have from these stories.

—ANTHONY CARPI

President
Karol V. Mason

Provost
Yi Li

Vice President for Public Affairs and Strategic Initiatives
Laura Gins

Dean of Research
Anthony Carpi

Chief Communications Officer
Rama Sudhakar

Director of Research Operations
Daniel Stageman

Research Communications Manager
Rachel Friedman

Research Operations Assistant
Beth Fera

Contributing Writers
Sam Anderson
Michael Friedrich

Photography
Arpi Pap, Pap Studio

Design
2COMMUNIQUÉ

Contact us with any thoughts, questions or other feedback at oar@jjay.cuny.edu.
Believe Your Eyes

Shweta Jain’s new project helps you to believe what you see online

These days, image and video manipulation is widespread, and not always easy to spot. Dr. Shweta Jain, an associate professor in computer science, has come up with a timely answer to this problem: eWitness, an app that relies on blockchain technology to authenticate original content. The app, which can work as a stand-alone application or be built into other platforms, works not by encryption but by embedding a “hash” into the image or video that is recorded on a blockchain ledger. The image, no matter whom you share it with, retains that proof of authenticity and can therefore be verified by anyone with the app.

Dr. Jain began work on eWitness in 2016, the same year she came to John Jay. The app was “a project conceived before its time,” as the harmful potential of “deepfakes,” or synthesized human images and videos altered using machine learning, really only started becoming clear in 2017. Deepfakes’ many sinister applications mean there are multiple areas where eWitness can make a difference, but they all have one thing in common: user-generated content that is subject to the risk of forgery.

While the pilot launch in May 2019 focused mainly on journalists and the media, Jain has already received inquiries from insurance companies and real estate agencies. She believes the most popular use could be in law enforcement, to verify images from body cams, surveillance and crime scene photographs. She has even identified one arena where eWitness could be an everyday hero: verifying the profile pictures of potential matches on online dating apps! Jain predicts that eventually eWitness will serve as the industry standard for authenticating still and video images online.

Jain, whose background is in computer networks and security, has received tons of support for her idea. Following a quarter-million-dollar grant in 2017 from the National Science Foundation, the eWitness team was accepted into the 2019 Combine Cohort at NYC Media Lab, a start-up accelerator for projects run by entrepreneurial university professors. That means that Jain is not only the Principal Investigator (PI) of her research project, but also a CEO/CTO-to-be vetting multiple investment offers.

Photo: Courtesy of Shweta Jain

Shweta Jain and the eWitness team presented the app at Demo Day at the NYC Media Lab.
NEW TECHNOLOGIES
Challenges and opportunities

SAFEGUARDING PATIENT DATA
As we pour more of our personal data into networked devices, protecting our information from threats or loss becomes increasingly important. Dr. Alex Alexandrou, a former healthcare IT professional turned John Jay assistant professor, is working on tackling the risks in industries where privacy is a premium.

Now that mobile device use in hospitals is widespread, the risks to patient data are many: phishing, lax security and even theft of the portable devices. But doctors and nurses’ priorities are different from administrators’: practitioners are looking for efficiency and effectiveness in treating patients, while administrators are just as concerned with ensuring that the patient data they are charged with protecting isn’t lost. Dr. Alexandrou’s theoretical and practical model, developed during fieldwork done at three New York hospitals, examines the trade-offs that healthcare practitioners balance in their daily work and gives solutions for how to meet their needs while encouraging adherence to safety standards.

“If the device and security controls are easy to use,” he says definitively, “people will use it and pay attention. But if it’s not, or doesn’t access information right away, people will give up.”

Alexandrou concluded that hospital-provided devices are much safer for patient data than the devices that doctors or nurses bring from home. He also emphasized that specialized training for different types of users is key for security adherence; doctors have different concerns and habits than nurses.

With a long history of professional experience working in hospitals on these issues, Alexandrou has been thinking about healthcare technology and security since long before he wrote his dissertation on the topic, or followed up with this study, published in early 2019. And he doesn’t see the challenges as unique to hospitals. Alexandrou thinks the key issue is the same everywhere: humans are the weakest link, whether in the hospital or the university. His model is a step toward protecting sensitive data.

BETTER BUILDING BLOCKS
Silicones are the building blocks to some of the most important objects in our everyday lives: the heat-resistant polymers are used in sealants, adhesives, lubricants, medicines, cooking utensils and insulation. Currently, silicones are made using platinum, which is expensive, rare and environmentally damaging to mine. With support from a grant from the National Science Foundation, Dr. Guoqi Zhang is trying to replace platinum in the process, developing new catalysts based on Earth-abundant, sustainable materials for the synthesis of silicones.

In collaboration with John Jay’s Program for Research Initiatives in Science and Math (PRISM), Dr. Zhang has developed new families of catalysts using metals like manganese, vanadium and aluminum. These inexpensive metals aren’t typically used to make catalysts because they are usually unreactive and unstable, but Zhang’s lab is attaching groups of organic materials to the metals to enhance reactivity. Zhang’s research on synthesizing organic and inorganic materials, which merges chemistry, forensic science and toxicology, has also created catalysts for other types of processes, including creating effective anticancer agents. By actively using undergraduate students in his research, he is providing hands-on training for the next generation of our scientific workforce.
Ph.D. candidate in criminal justice Jennifer Peirce is focusing her dissertation work on a unique process of prison reform in the Dominican Republic, where the government has converted about half its prisons to a “new model” prioritizing human rights and rehabilitation. During six months of fieldwork in an environment with very little preexisting research on its prisons, Jennifer found that changes to material conditions and access to education were most important to people from lower socioeconomic strata. She also found that the formalization of rigid routines between staff and incarcerated people has mixed consequences for their well-being. She is currently working with the Dominican government to find ways to integrate incarcerated people’s insights on their own lived experiences and the lessons she has learned into developing policy to guide the continuing prison conversion.

When she saw violent videos depicting police brutality on social media, Ayanna Miller-Smith (’19) was torn between wanting to share and wanting to spare the people following her accounts. Her emotional reaction to these widely shared videos made her want to understand and quantify the traumatic effects of viewing content that is so bound up with the ongoing mistreatment of black communities and black individuals in the United States.

Ayanna’s research project, entitled “Maybe I’ve Seen Too Much: Examining the Impact of Vicariously Experiencing Police Brutality on Social Media,” found that at least 63 percent of her participants experienced some form of trauma as a result of seeing police brutality on social media. As she heads to graduate study at Northeastern University, Ayanna hopes to continue pursuing a research agenda that examines how the presence of trauma as a result of police violence, and resultant reduction in trust levels, impacts community policing efforts in black communities.

Victoria Fix (’19) wants to understand how social benefit corporations—companies that are legally bound to make social change through their business practices—are making the United States a more environmentally friendly country, and why some states are welcoming them in while others are not. Her research suggested that states with stronger environmental regulations and increasing unemployment rates from 2001–2010 may be more likely to adopt corporate social benefit policy. Victoria believes that states are trying to address social welfare by embracing more socially conscious businesses. New York was among the first states to open up to these companies, in 2012. As a student researcher, Victoria feels John Jay College is a unique place for students driven, as she is, to complete their own projects. She calls her mentor, Dr. Heath Brown of the political science department, her “best advocate,” and said the school’s research resources are “empowering students to feel like they can pursue their own research.” So far, Victoria has been encouraged to take her research public; she has presented the project at the CUNY Tech Meetup City Tech event, a CUNY community event sponsored by Microsoft Cities to let attendees connect to gain insights about New York City’s technology and innovation culture.

Marienela Heredia (’19) has always been captivated by science. Growing up, frequent microbial infections made her curious about how such tiny organisms could make her feel so sick. Participating in John Jay’s Program for Research Initiatives in Science and Math (PRISM) set Marienela on a professional path. As a PRISM student, she joined Dr. Jason Rauceo’s lab and studied a human fungal pathogen, Candida albicans, that affects more than 60,000 people annually in the United States.

Her research focused on how this fungus is able to adapt to harsh environments and stressors within the human body, like high salt concentrations or acidic pH levels. The lab worked on trying to characterize a protein in C. albicans, called Slp2p, that might be responsible for its astonishing adaptability. And they think they’ve located it, in the mitochondria of C. albicans cells! They’re now trying to figure out how it works, which is the next step in learning about its role in this important fungus’s ability to hang around and make us sick.

For her exceptional work in Dr. Rauceo’s lab and accomplishments as a maturing scientist, Marienela was honored at this year’s PRISM Undergraduate Research Symposium as the 2019 Outstanding Undergraduate Researcher. She is headed to the University of Wisconsin to pursue her Ph.D. in the fall.
IMPACT

BUILDING TOWARD RESILIENCE

Denise Thompson wants to improve disaster response

BY: SAM ANDERSON

Hurricane Maria crashed into existence in fall 2017, devastating a number of Caribbean islands, but none more so than Dominica. On the island, 90 percent of the homes were destroyed and 65 people killed. It was total and complete devastation, necessitating extensive rebuilding. But according to Dr. Denise Thompson, it’s not just about rebuilding—it’s about rebuilding better. “Disaster resilience is a new buzzword,” said the assistant professor of public management. “It means getting these countries not only where they were when the disaster struck, but to be even better off than they were before.”

In Dominica, that means doing much more than simply repairing damaged infrastructure. It involves a complex evaluation of how different sectors interact, such as education, economics, governance and technology. “There is a systematic and structural approach to doing this,” Thompson explained. “The best way is to look at each sector and examine the intersections between them. But there’s a cascading effect if something is done. We don’t know how one action will affect other sectors.”

Discovering those interactions is a big part of Thompson’s work. When done right, disaster resilience allows countries to repair damage and begin new projects not in a piecemeal way, but with a systematic approach that takes into account the interdependencies among different systems. Taking the education sector as an example, a resilient approach would be investing in new schools that meet storm-resistant building standards, as schools often serve as emergency shelters during disasters. But it may also mean investing in new technology for those schools that improves students’ ability to learn. Improvements in education can have a ripple effect across an entire country; governance and policy sectors benefit from a generation of well-educated students who become next year’s politicians. Improved education can also increase a country’s GDP, leaving more resources to spare for humanitarian aid during disasters.

The interactions among these systems are what Thompson studies before presenting her findings at conferences and to regional government agencies in the countries where she works. Her findings influence policy decisions and therefore have a direct impact on the lives of people affected by disasters like Hurricane Maria. For this work, she was recently awarded the Jeremy Collymore Award for Research in Humanitarian Response and Disaster Risk Management, along with a $5,000 grant to continue her research on strengthening supply chains in the Caribbean. And it’s not only hurricane victims that are affected by Thompson’s work—she has also helped improve protections and work conditions for the emergency workers who respond to those disasters.

Thompson is originally from Jamaica, which has strongly influenced her interest in the region. “There is not a lot of [disaster resilience] literature on poor countries. Most of the literature has been focused on developed western countries like the United States, or Europe,” she said. “The Caribbean is the second-most disaster-prone area in the world (after South-east Asia). So many disasters take place in this region, but the literature doesn’t reflect that.”

Thompson hopes that through her work, she can increase the attention paid to the parts of the world that need disaster resilience the most. And this does not just include the Caribbean—for example, in Kenya she is studying resilience in the context of droughts, flooding, urban terrorism, and relevant policies.

“It’s not just for research’s sake—it has a purpose,” Thompson said. “I research first, then I influence policy.”

Thompson’s book arguing for the contextualization of and increased funding for disaster response in those areas, *Disaster Risk Governance: Four Cases from Developing Countries*, is forthcoming this summer.
WHAT COMES AFTER ‘EQUALITY’?

Michael Yarbrough is looking to the future of global LGBTQ communities

BY: SAM ANDERSON

The 2015 legalization of gay marriage in the United States signaled a shift in the way people view queer relationships. While homophobia and opposition to same-sex marriage remain, there is a clear trend towards a wider acceptance of LGBTQ identity. But according to Assistant Political Science Professor Dr. Michael Yarbrough, same-sex marriage, while an important victory, is still a far cry from solving the major issues faced by the queer community.

Yarbrough organized a 2016 conference at John Jay, “After Marriage Equality,” which included 175 speakers and 450 attendees. “We wanted to ask: what’s coming next for the movement?” Yarbrough said. The event brought together scholars and activists to critique the emphasis on marriage as the main issue in the fight for equality for queer people, and to use those critiques to chart a path forward.

“The most important thing that came out of the project is that marriage is extremely limited,” Yarbrough explained. “The people who benefit the most from marriage rights are often queer people who were formerly more advantaged, like wealthier white people. The issues facing queer people of color, working-class people and immigrants remain, and in some cases are even worse.”

One core principle that was advocated for at the conference was the idea that focusing on the most marginalized members of the community first will benefit everyone. “We should have a trickle-up vision of social justice that starts with the most oppressed,” said Yarbrough. “If we have a world where a black lesbian mother can keep her kids, then a white middle-class lesbian mother can keep hers.”

Yarbrough hopes the ideas discussed at the conference will help set the agenda for the future of LGBTQ equality. He has since published a series of edited volumes also titled After Marriage Equality, tackling issues and questions raised there. And in April, Yarbrough was awarded the 2019 Law and Society Association article prize for a piece he wrote about his research in South Africa, another major focus of his scholarly work.

South Africa is located in a part of the world often stereotyped as vehemently homophobic, but its post-apartheid constitution actually prohibited all discrimination based on sexual orientation in 1994. It was the first such constitutional protection in the world. Same-sex marriage has also been a part of certain indigenous African cultures for generations.

Yarbrough’s interest in these issues was sparked during a 2001 trip to South Africa. He became fascinated by how laws were re-shaping queer relationships differently at the urban level and in rural villages, and eventually began work on his dissertation interviewing people in Johannesburg and in a Zulu village called Maqongqo.

“What I’m trying to push against is the idea that cities are getting better, but the rural countryside is terrible,” Yarbrough said. “The countryside is less unrelentingly homophobic, and I would argue that these images and stereotypes get in the way of progress.”

Yarbrough explained that gender roles are also changing, with more South African women advocating for what they call a “50-50 marriage,” where both partners have equal decision-making power.

“One of most powerful things law can do is change what people feel entitled to. In South Africa, we see that very clearly among LGBTQ people, who are taking their new consciousness of themselves as rights-bearing people into their families and their communities, and demanding more. That’s really powerful.”
Central and South America in the Wake of U.S. Interference

Legacy of Violence
In American politics, issues like immigration and the refugee crisis generate national headlines on a daily basis. But to understand the complex dynamics of immigration, it’s essential to look backward into history, where a legacy of colonialism continues to define the relationship between the United States and the nations of South and Central America.

For more than 50 years, the United States engaged in a variety of political and military interventions in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Panama, Brazil, Chile, and other countries in the southern hemisphere. While each intervention was unique in the kind of damage it wrought on the local population, many have resulted over the long term in the systematic destabilization of government coupled with a legacy of violence and military dictatorship that has variously affected the lives of South and Central Americans for decades.

To uncover the causes and effects of such wide-reaching devastation is no easy task, but several professors and students at John Jay have made this research their life’s work. Among them are José Luis Morín, Claudia Calirman, Pamela Ruiz and Marcia Esparza.
Suing for Justice
This past December, John Jay’s Latin American Studies Department Chair José Luis Morín found himself in Panama City meeting with individuals affected by the 1989 United States invasion of Panama, when the U.S. government sent troops to force out President Manuel Noriega. Morín sought out individuals who suffered direct damages during the invasion, on whose behalf he had filed a lawsuit against the U.S. seeking reparations. Morín had been in the thick of the 1989 invasion; visions of bombed out apartment buildings and mass graves, the result of indiscriminate bombing of civilian neighborhoods by U.S. troops, are not easily forgotten.

“It was literally a war zone,” he recalled. “The smell of death was in the air. The U.S. military was everywhere and people were being arrested at the drop of a phone call.”

The lawsuit Morín filed describes the atrocities committed against the 315 plaintiffs on an individual basis: a 69-year-old woman killed by U.S. military fire while being driven to the hospital in a Red Cross vehicle; a university student who went missing one afternoon and whose body was later discovered in a mass grave; and a woman killed at home by missiles fired from a U.S. helicopter. Her husband, a Mr. Salas, was among the lead petitioners in Morín’s lawsuit. He would go on to document his wife’s death, alongside many other horrific accounts, in their efforts to find justice for the invasion’s victims.

“My recent visits were to go into those communities in Panama and speak to the individuals and families who were part of the case, and explain what this petition says and how important it is. But you can’t have a conversation about compensation until you first have a decision that the U.S. indisputably violated human rights.”

That decision has finally been made. According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which issued a decision in December 2018, the U.S. government is solely responsible for the deaths of Panamanian civilians during the 1989 invasion, and it is responsible for compensating the victims for those damages.

“What makes this particularly relevant, and so critical to the work we do in this department, is having our students learn about the history of Latin America and how the U.S. played such an integral role in how these countries developed. It’s important to understand that link,” said Morín.

Art Under Fire
The U.S. has justified interventions by the fight against the spread of communism. But “democratic” U.S.-backed leaders have more often than not turned out to be authoritarian dictators with little regard for democratic institutions. This was the case in Brazil, where a right-wing authoritarian government ruled from 1964 to 1985.

Dictators across the globe share many qualities in common, chief among them the suppression of creative expression viewed as subversive to government rule. Brazilian artists were frequently persecuted by the Federative Republic of Brazil, but despite this, a thriving art scene persevered, ultimately transforming into the pulsing heartbeat of a radical resistance movement.

Claudia Calirman, associate professor of art and music, is an expert on Brazilian art under military regimes. According to her research, much of this art was expressed in mediums specifically designed to thwart detection. These
forms included body art or what was called “ready mades,” where artists took everyday objects, like bank notes or Coca-Cola bottles, and modified them with subversive or critical messages that would then be circulated to the public while keeping the artist’s identity secret.

“People say there was a void at that time, and nothing was produced,” said Calirman. “But that’s not true. Artists were still working and creating such interesting art, and that’s what my first book, *Brazilian Art Under Dictatorship*, uncovered.”

Antonio Manuel is one of the artists Calirman documents in her book. In the 1970s, he wanted to show his own body as a living exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro. But the museum refused to give him a space. So, he took off his clothes and marched naked up to the third floor of the museum, where he caused outrage among the curators.

“Nudity was extremely prohibited by the morals of the church and the state,” Calirman explained, “so he went against the authoritarian order and the rules of the institution. The museum was closed and Manuel had to hide away for a few weeks. He was prohibited from going back to the premises for two years. It was a very daring act at the height of an authoritarian regime, so he became a symbol of that period.”

Calirman’s latest work and forthcoming book deal with feminism in the Brazilian art scene and how the term itself was not used during the 60s and 70s, despite its popularity in the U.S. Even though art was being created during that time period that could be termed “feminist,” it wasn’t until later that Brazilian women began to identify with the feminist movement.

“For the left, some issues related to feminism were personal and not collective. And for the conservative right, they were not interested at all in women’s liberation. So there was no support in place for that kind of discourse,” Calirman said. But she noted that that is changing significantly today, as Brazilian women begin to articulate a feminist vision of the future.

In addition to the book that Calirman is writing on this subject, she is also producing a Spring 2020 exhibit at John Jay’s Shiva Gallery that deals with the current censorship of art in Brazil. She previously curated *Basta! Art and Violence in Latin America*, which was on display at the Shiva Gallery in 2016.

**Uncovering Violence**

Further north, the link between U.S. intervention and the destabilization of democracy is also expressed in the explosion of gang violence. The notoriously violent MS-13 gang has become the centerpiece of the Trump administration’s culture wars against the Latinx community, but despite frequent media coverage, there is much that remains misunderstood. Doctoral candidate and Fulbright scholar Pamela Ruiz spent the last two years studying the evolution of MS-13 and Barrio-18 in the Northern Triangle of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

Part of Ruiz’s work is to classify certain gangs in order to create a system of targeted enforcement. For example, there are primarily urban gangs like MS-13 that are distinct from narco-trafficking groups like the Sinaloa Cartel, typically located in rural areas and near borders. It’s important to distinguish between these groups because the more specifically a criminal group is defined, the easier it is for law enforcement to access funding to combat that group’s activities.
In Guatemala, for example, a government task force on extortion discovered that only 10 to 20 percent of extortions were actually committed by gang members. The rest were committed by non-gang-affiliated people impersonating gang members. “It completely changes the narrative of whether these problems are caused by gangs,” said Ruiz.

For her dissertation, Ruiz mapped out the locations where crimes associated with gang members occurred. “The perception is that all this violence is attributed to gangs,” she explained, “but when you go into a country and interview people, you discover that it’s different groups contributing to violence in different areas.”

Because Ruiz’s research is quantitative, it’s filling an important gap in the region. “One of the biggest critiques that people working in this field have is the lack of quantitative statistical data,” she said. “If you have reliable data to work with, you can refine your policies or create new policies that are closely targeting what you want to reduce whether it’s violence, immigration or corruption.”

**Documenting Dictatorship**

Dr. Marcia Esparza, an associate professor of sociology and expert on genocide, state crimes and human rights violations, would argue that remembering past atrocities and commemorating the victims of dictatorial governance in the southern hemisphere is equally important as addressing present violence and corruption. Much of Esparza’s work has focused on the impact of these crimes in Guatemala, Chile and elsewhere. She argues that without an understanding of history, progress remains elusive.

“If we don’t look at the long-term footprints of militarization on the local level, we cannot talk about democracy or democratic institutions,” she said.

Following a genocide in Guatemala in which 200,000 civilians—many of whom were indigenous Maya people—were killed, tortured or disappeared, Esparza traveled to the country to conduct interviews with survivors as part of a United Nations commission. She has conducted similar research in Chile and Spain, which inspired her to found the Historical Memory Project.

“It’s part of my commitment—ethical and moral—to the victims,” she said. “I was struck by all the horrors that people went through. When I returned to New York and joined John Jay almost 20 years ago, I realized there was not much discussion about the genocide of these indigenous people.”

The Historical Memory Project draws on primary sources like photographs, letters and other historical documents to memorialize the victims of genocide and violence. The archive encompasses 10 collections of materials like digital prints, posters, books, audio and other materials that highlight both horror and hope, both abuses and resistance. “We don’t only want to focus on massacres and genocides—we also want to show the resistance, because people didn’t just sit idle while violence was happening,” Esparza said.

Often, it is Esparza’s students who dig through the archives to put together exhibitions. She explained that many students at John Jay have a Latinx background, but they are not always aware of the history of violence suffered in some of their ancestors’ home countries.

“Our students are often second-generation immigrants whose parents came here because of this violence,” she said. “We’re trying to transmit this memory to the diaspora, so they can keep it alive.”

This shared history of interventionist foreign policy and authoritarian rule has created a spider’s web of mutual entanglements that persist to the present day. “The most obvious factor is the role of the United States,” said Esparza. “There’s a long-term history of U.S. invasion and intervention in Latin America and a lot of the methods used to suppress political opposition were the same—torture, disappearances, propaganda—so you start to see patterns.”

With dedicated work by historians, legal scholars and researchers on the ground charting the causes and effects of this interventionism, we are brought one step closer to justice for the victims of past genocides and peace for generations to come. JJ
New research could lead to more just legal outcomes

AUTHOR: MICHAEL FRIEDRICH

RESEARCHERS: GLORIA BROWNE-MARSHALL, KELLY McWILLIAMS, DERYN STRANGE, MARGARET BULL KOVERA, AÍDA MARTÍNEZ-GÓMEZ
As our nation reevaluates its criminal-justice system, basic questions of fairness have become a preoccupation for those in government, law enforcement and activist circles. This is especially true in the courtroom. “Justice; when it comes to the court, is basically due process,” said Gloria Browne-Marshall, a professor of constitutional law at John Jay College. The administration of justice, she said, is “supposed to be done as equally under the law as possible.”

Striving for equal courtroom justice is especially important as America addresses its high rates of imprisonment and the racial and economic disparities they reflect. “We have mass incarceration that’s unfortunately disproportionately shouldered by people of color,” Browne-Marshall said. “So people are looking at the outcome and saying there’s something wrong.”

But how do we change the system? Behind the scenes, researchers in psychology have been working on methods to promote courtroom practices that are fairer and more impartial. When courtroom participants—including attorneys, judges and juries—have a better understanding of the research on human psychology, it can help avoid errors and lead to more just outcomes. Today, a host of scholars at John Jay College are leading the charge to de

One process ripe for improvement is taking testimony from child victims. “Adults asking kids questions has all these complex layers,” said Dr. Kelly McWilliams, a professor of psychology. McWilliams and her team study the ways children use and understand language, and experience memory, in courtroom settings. Not only must a child apprehend the concepts of an adult’s question, they must also recall the memory and repeat it accurately, she explained. Meanwhile, an adult must take care not to introduce false memories.

Research shows that children’s memories are more limited than those of adults. But gaining helpful testimony from children is more about the questions you ask than about their abilities. “They are able, if they’re asked the right way, to remember accurately certain things that have happened to them,” McWilliams said. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development has created a gold-standard set of recommendations for asking children questions in forensic and courtroom settings. These include asking open-ended questions, avoiding closed-ended questions, and using “cued invitations,” or general prompts designed to gather only the information a child provides directly.

McWilliams’s research has built on the NICHD recommendations. She is testing new modes of questioning to gather details that children might not share in response to open-ended questions—information that can be necessary for charging or establishing a child’s credibility as a witness, like how many times an assault took place, where it happened, and what acts were perpetrated. Her team now delivers trainings across the country for representatives of the child advocacy system, as well as associations of family court judges.

These evidence-informed questioning practices foster better courtroom outcomes. “This type of research really speaks to the fairness of the process for victims and for witnesses, as well as for defendants,” said McWilliams. “These are practices that take into account what kids are capable of doing and what we should and shouldn’t be asking them to do as witnesses.” The result is more accurate and equal justice for both the victims and the accused.

TRAUMA RESPONSE

Children, of course, aren’t the only ones prone to unreliable memory in the courtroom. Adults also demonstrate shaky recollections in their testimony, especially when recounting traumatic experiences. “The most important finding really is that memory is malleable and reconstructive, rather than an exact replica of any given event,” said Dr. Deryn Strange, a researcher in psychology. Memories of an event like a crime can change with time and with the introduction of new information. Often, a victim will experience intrusive thoughts about the incident, including things they wish they did differently and “catastrophizing,” said Strange. Those thoughts can be incorporated into memories, even if they didn’t happen.

This process can cause problems in a legal proceeding. “Whenever somebody’s memory is on trial—be it a victim’s memory, a defendant’s memory, a witness’s memory—the jury, the lawyer, the judges all need to understand the power and the limitations of how our memories work,” said Strange. Absent that understanding, courtroom participants make mis-
takes, which can lead to wrongful convictions if an eyewitness makes errors, or wrongful acquittals if a victim’s memory is inconsistent and the jury doubts their testimony.

Like McWilliams, Strange has devoted her work not only to research on memory but also to educating courtroom officials on the vagaries of memory and the importance of taking that into account during legal decision-making. She not only serves as an expert witness, she also leads tutorials for groups of attorneys and judges, giving them practical examples and explaining the research findings.

In Strange’s view, the system will not produce fair outcomes if participants are unclear about how memory works, or if their decisions are based on whims or misunderstandings. “If you have juries using [inaccurate] expectations about the way memory would work,” she explained, “then those decisions may very well be unjust.”

**WEIRD SCIENCE**

Courtroom participants like attorneys, judges, and jurors can also use help determining which pieces of scientific evidence are credible. For two decades, Dr. Margaret Bull Kovera, a social psychologist by training, has conducted research on this issue.

“There is some clinically based work admitted into the courtroom that has not been particularly well documented,” said Kovera. Evidence like repressed memories and bite analysis—even things that capture the popular imagination, like fingerprint evidence—lack a solid basis in science. Often, though, they make their way into evidence, with expert witnesses for the prosecution confidently expounding upon them. Judges don’t know enough not to admit them; defense attorneys aren’t familiar enough with the science to challenge them; in turn, juries consider them in their decision-making. The result? “They make decisions that are really not borne out by the evidence, if one were evaluating the evidence properly,” she said.

Kovera has conducted research on a set of safeguards that may contribute to better decisions. The most promising method is simply to highlight flaws in the evidence during cross examination. That’s something defense attorneys can be trained to do. Opposing experts can also help provide a balanced perspective on questionable evidence—although that method can render jurors more skeptical of research altogether, warns Kovera.

These are important considerations in fostering greater neutrality in decision-making and less bias. “In that way, I am working to make procedures more fair and help people make better decisions,” said Kovera, “and improve the quality of evidence.”

Some promising solutions exist. According to Martínez-Gómez, incarcerated people are better able to navigate admission forms, requests and services when a prison provides printed, video and audio materials translated for different populations. Yet the method she advocates most strongly is nonprofessional interpreting services—that is, translation provided by incarcerated peers. Martínez-Gómez’s research has shown that this method holds great promise. She pointed to one exemplary person she studied, who found tremendous benefit in the program: “This not only contributed to overcoming the language barrier in the prison, but also contributed to his specific rehabilitation goals and potential job opportunities once he finishes his sentence.”

In the end, creating a fairer system means using empirical evidence to apply justice accurately and equally in the courtroom and beyond—and to avoid administering justice in arbitrary, capricious, or discriminatory ways. After all, disparities thrive in the areas where memory is unclear, language is murky and the empirical basis for evidence is tenuous.

It’s true that such research won’t solve every inequality, particularly racial inequality. Browne-Marshall explained that larger shifts will need to occur in the appellate court system to change the law of the land on larger questions of misconduct. In the meantime, though, small changes can move the needle on basic fairness. “There is a direct correlation between these studies and the ability to create a better process.”

**“Whenever somebody’s memory is on trial, the jury, the lawyer, the judges all need to understand the power and limitations of how our memories work.”** —DERYN STRANGE

---

**OPEN TO INTERPRETATION**

What happens in cases where a defendant is convicted and incarcerated? Fairness across the criminal-justice system includes grappling with questions like language-access policy in prison. Many incarcerated people don’t speak the official language of the institution in which they’re being held, said Dr. Aída Martínez-Gómez, a professor of legal translation and interpreting who studies these issues internationally. The level of access to prison interpreters varies widely from country to country.

Denying incarcerated people language-access services has dire consequences. “There is a question of inequality,” said Martínez-Gómez. Her research shows that incarcerated people who suffer language barriers face roadblocks to accessing a range of important services, from educational programs to counseling, to medical and mental health treatment. “The people that are treating them might not be diagnosing them correctly, or they may not understand the treatment plan for the medication they have to take,” she said, for example.

According to Martínez-Gómez, incarcerated people are better able to navigate admission forms, requests and services when a prison provides printed, video and audio materials translated for different populations. Yet the method she advocates most strongly is nonprofessional interpreting services—that is, translation provided by incarcerated peers. Martínez-Gómez’s research has shown that this method holds great promise. She pointed to one exemplary person she studied, who found tremendous benefit in the program: “This not only contributed to overcoming the language barrier in the prison, but also contributed to his specific rehabilitation goals and potential job opportunities once he finishes his sentence.”

In the end, creating a fairer system means using empirical evidence to apply justice accurately and equally in the courtroom and beyond—and to avoid administering justice in arbitrary, capricious, or discriminatory ways. After all, disparities thrive in the areas where memory is unclear, language is murky and the empirical basis for evidence is tenuous.

It’s true that such research won’t solve every inequality, particularly racial inequality. Browne-Marshall explained that larger shifts will need to occur in the appellate court system to change the law of the land on larger questions of misconduct. In the meantime, though, small changes can move the needle on basic fairness. “There is a direct correlation between these studies and the ability to create a better process.”

---

**OPEN TO INTERPRETATION**

What happens in cases where a defendant is convicted and incarcerated? Fairness across the criminal-justice system includes grappling with questions like language-access policy in prison. Many incarcerated people don’t speak the official language of the institution in which they’re being held, said Dr. Aída Martínez-Gómez, a professor of legal translation and interpreting who studies these issues internationally. The level of access to prison interpreters varies widely from country to country.

Denying incarcerated people language-access services has dire consequences. “There is a question of inequality,” said Martínez-Gómez. Her research shows that incarcerated people who suffer language barriers face roadblocks to accessing a range of important services, from educational programs to counseling, to medical and mental health treatment. “The people that are treating them might not be diagnosing them correctly, or they may not understand the treatment plan for the medication they have to take,” she said, for example.

Some promising solutions exist. According to Martínez-Gómez, incarcerated people are better able to navigate admission forms, requests and services when a prison provides printed, video and audio materials translated for different populations. Yet the method she advocates most strongly is nonprofessional interpreting services—that is, translation provided by incarcerated peers. Martínez-Gómez’s research has shown that this method holds great promise. She pointed to one exemplary person she studied, who...
How evidence-based approaches to justice are improving the well-being of New York’s communities

POLICIES FOR CHANGE

AUTHOR: MICHAEL FRIEDRICH

CENTERS: PRISONER REENTRY INSTITUTE, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION CENTER, FROM PUNISHMENT TO PUBLIC HEALTH, DATA COLLABORATIVE FOR JUSTICE
When Ann Jacobs learned that formerly incarcerated people were being excluded from public housing, she decided that the Prisoner Reentry Institute, the organization she directs, should get involved. “Housing is foundational,” said Jacobs. “Unless people are successfully housed, they’re not able to do the other things that they want to do in reentry, like get and keep a job, go to school, or reunify with their families.”

PRI convened a work group of local stakeholders to advocate for changes to the exclusion policy. The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), which administers public housing, has a long-standing policy of seeking to evict or exclude residents who are arrested. Residents could apply to have an exclusion lifted, but the application was confusing and they often didn’t know it existed. Together, PRI and the work group, now led by PRI’s Director of Public Policy Alison Wilkey, helped NYCHA create a clearer application to lift permanent exclusions, helped draft new guidelines about limiting the use of exclusions, and made sure tenants are informed of the policy. As a result, the number of people excluded declined by more than 50 percent from 2016 to 2018.

PRI is just one of the research centers at John Jay College driving real-world policy reform that makes New York’s communities stronger and more just. Policymakers are eager for new solutions that will better the system, but they don’t arise from nowhere. John Jay’s research centers provide evidence-based partnerships and guidance that city officials and state legislators need to create better policy.

EASING REENTRY
Since 2005, PRI has been dedicated to helping people live successfully in their communities after contact with the criminal justice system. “When people come out of incarceration, they basically need to construct a whole life for themselves,” said Jacobs. The center engages in a combination of public advocacy, direct service and collaborative partnerships to promote a range of reentry practices, with a focus on creating pathways from justice involvement to education and career advancement.

In addition to its work with NYCHA, PRI advocates for higher education in prison—priming what they like to call the prison-to-college pipeline. One tool they recently produced to influence policy in that area is a report that maps the landscape of higher education in New York State prisons. Surveying 15 college programs across 26 facilities, PRI found that only 3 percent of the 47,500 people in New York State prisons were participating in higher education programs, despite recently expanded funding.

The idea of the report, said Jacobs, is to provide a reference point for policymakers so PRI can promote the expansion of education programs that contribute to the growth and well-being of returning citizens.

INTERRUPTING CRIME
At the Research and Evaluation Center, a team of researchers is evaluating New York City-based programs and policies. One high-profile project has been their work measuring the impact of Cure Violence, a public health approach to violence reduction. The program relies on neighborhood-based workers, often with a history of justice involvement, to develop relationships with the people most likely to be involved in violence, mediate and offer supportive services. It explicitly avoids using state authority and the threat of punishment.

“The ideal Cure Violence worker is someone who is old enough to know better, who has been down the road of gang involvement, maybe did some time in prison,” said Dr. Jeff Butts, director of REC. “Now they’re home and wanting to work with younger people in the neighborhood to keep them from following the same path.” Often, said Butts, they have information about potential violence much earlier than authorities, and can help reinforce community norms against violence.

“Politically, it’s a difficult program to operate,” said Butts, since city officials are often wary of the neighborhood workers’ criminal histories. But REC’s research makes a strong case for its effectiveness in the South Bronx and Brooklyn. When weighed against comparison sites in other neighborhoods, Cure Violence areas see greater violence reductions.
LESS PUNISHMENT, LESS CRIME

Violence isn’t the only kind of crime that can be reduced with less punitive solutions. With his research project From Punishment to Public Health (P2PH), Director Jeff Coots is driving an agenda to increase the use of public health interventions across the system. Their work involves getting people from different sectors—government, law enforcement, community leaders, social workers—in the same room to talk about the problems they face. “Punishment alone is not getting us the public safety outcomes we want,” said Coots. “How do we identify public-health-style solutions that can respond where punishment does not, and isolation will not?”

P2PH holds that alternatives to incarceration can not only reduce the use of prison and jail terms but also offer rehabilitative services to people in need. Among the center’s signature initiatives is a pilot project to use pre-arrest diversion for minor offenses committed by the homeless, especially those arrested for seeking shelter in New York City subway trains and stations overnight. Many of those cases were previously decided at arraignment, denying arrestees the chance to connect with services. The pilot has made diversion the “new normal”, reducing the number of people arrested and increasing the number connected with services like transitional housing and health treatment.

In general, Coots said, policymakers are more open now to health interventions in place of criminal justice solutions. “I think even just in the last 10 years a lot of people are saying we need to shrink the criminal justice system, we need to have fewer people in prison, we don’t want the jail to be the biggest mental health provider in our community,” he said.

JUSTICE BY THE NUMBERS

Data Collaborative for Justice is similarly invested in documenting the scale of the criminal justice footprint and considering solutions to reduce it. Founded in 2013 by Dr. Preeti Chauhan and former John Jay College President Jeremy Travis as the Misdemeanor Justice Project, DCJ began by producing reports on New York City’s misdemeanor arrests and summonses and their impact on communities. Today, DCJ has expanded its scope beyond misdemeanors to explore other high-contact points in the system, including pretrial detention and incarceration in New York City jails. “Policy neutrality is an important part of DCJ’s mission and outlook,” said Project Director Dr. Kerry Mulligan. “That has allowed us to be a trusted broker with a diverse set of data partners.” In other words, DCJ does not make policy recommendations. Instead, they work closely with city and state agencies to gather an array of data and help make sense of it for policymakers, who can then make evidence-informed decisions.

A major project for the center has been to produce an evaluation of the landmark Criminal Justice Reform Act, passed by the New York City Council in 2016 to “create more proportional penalties for certain low-level, nonviolent offenses.” The CJRA has been important in drawing down enforcement on five high-volume offenses—public consumption of alcohol, public urination, violation of park rules, littering and noise violations—that made up half of all offenses in the city. In the past, these resulted in bench warrants and often, if the offender didn’t appear in court, arrests.

With support from the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, DCJ is measuring the impact of the legislation, and it appears to be achieving its aims. “Things are working as we would expect,” said Mulligan. “The vast majority of summonses for these behaviors—like 90 percent—are now issued as civil rather than criminal summonses, and we see an associated decline in criminal warrants.”

This legislation has a positive impact on New York City communities and saves resources. It has the potential to push policy changes in other areas by informing conversations with lawmakers about whether similar shifts could help with other offenses. Mulligan believes such changes could further improve the city’s justice process. “We know that even very minor contact with the criminal justice system—a custodial arrest—can have significant impact on people’s lives,” said Mulligan. “So getting it right from the onset is important work.”

Throughout John Jay College, some researchers are building the evidence base, while other centers are rolling up their sleeves to help cities implement and evaluate solutions on the ground. In each case, the vital goal is making communities safer.

Butts, like many of the centers’ directors, believes that good policy will result from measuring the effects of practices that go beyond law enforcement alone. “Unless we can build stronger neighborhood organizations and bring resources into the community that help reduce crime and violence, policymakers will see policing as the only solution to crime,” he said. “You have to put that evidence in front of them on a regular basis in order to get the political culture to start to shift.”

PHOTO: AMBER GRAY, COURTESY OF THE PRISONER REENTRY INSTITUTE

JJAY.CUNY.EDU/RESEARCH
FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION, A NEW SCIENCE EMERGES

At its ten-year mark, the National Network for Safe Communities reflects on how a growing police-community partnership uses proven strategies to stop violence

BY: MICHAEL FRIEDRICH

When it comes to addressing urban violence, 10 years has made a world of difference.

The National Network for Safe Communities was launched at John Jay College in 2009 with a mission to help cities reduce violence, minimize the use of arrest and incarceration, and build trust between law enforcement and communities of color. Begun as an action-research organization, the NNSC boasted a pair of promising interventions recognizing that serious crime is driven by a very small number of high-risk groups and people, and that a partnership of law enforcement, community members and service providers can identify those groups and people, keep them from hurting others, support them, and keep them safe—all with far less use of enforcement. A cohort of practitioners across the country had been putting them into practice, but many in the field remained skeptical about how effective these partnerships could be.

Today, the NNSC stands at the leading edge of a widely accepted science of violence prevention. “The approaches we’ve developed, and the empirical and policy analysis that they’re built on, have become mainstream,” said criminologist David Kennedy, who co-founded the organization with former John Jay College President Jeremy Travis. Research from the Campbell Collaboration and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine now shows “focused deterrence,” the formal strategy behind the NNSC’s approach, is the most effective method of reducing violent crime. Major cities including New York, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles and Oakland are implementing that approach with help from NNSC advisors.

In recent years, the NNSC has also worked to develop a process of reconciliation between police and minority communities. Forming police-community partnerships is central to the success of violence interventions. But, in the communities most beset by violence, that’s easier said than done. Often, distrust of police has been calcified by histories that date back to slave-catching and take shape today in tactics that lock up young men of color while failing to make neighborhoods safer.
“We cannot have effective public safety, or effective relationships between police and communities, without attending to the very real history of oppression and harm that the law has been responsible for in this country,” said Kennedy. Drawing from international transitional-justice commissions, like the ones in post-apartheid South Africa, the NNSC’s reconciliation process asks that police acknowledge the harm they’ve done, listen to community narratives, conduct a historical fact-finding process and then change their policies based on what they learn.

The NNSC first tested the process on a citywide scale through the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice, a project begun in 2015 under the Department of Justice to implement reconciliation—alongside methods for police departments to improve procedural justice and reduce implicit bias—in six pilot cities. That project concluded this year, and the Urban Institute will soon release a comprehensive study measuring its impact. According to Kennedy, the findings show that police experienced “meaningful shifts in belief and attitude and behavior,” while community members saw “real increases in their confidence in and feelings of legitimacy toward the police.”

The National Initiative was a step in a longer process, one Kennedy hopes will form a model for public safety partnerships between police and communities. “The National Initiative is coming to an end, but our work on reconciliation is not,” said Kennedy. The NNSC recently launched a project to carry that work forward by engaging other cities in large-scale reconciliation processes.

Ten years on, the NNSC’s mission remains steady. “Our fundamental commitment is to public safety,” said Kennedy, “and we’re really committed to the most vulnerable people in the most vulnerable settings.” This summer, the organization’s national conference will be an opportunity to reflect on these advances in the field of violence prevention alongside its growing network.

“Tremendous progress has been made,” said Kennedy. “We’re now posted for a new phase and a new standard of theory and practice, and I think it’s tremendously encouraging.”
$33M+
GRANT AND CONTRACT AWARDS TO FACULTY AND RESEARCH CENTERS

2.3
PEER-REVIEWED WORKS PER CAPITA, HIGHEST AMONG CUNY SENIOR COLLEGES FOR 2ND YEAR

1,450+
HOURS OF ARCHIVED BOOK TALKS AND OTHER OAR CONTENT VIEWED ON YOUTUBE

160K+
FACULTY AND RESEARCH ORGANIZATION TWITTER FOLLOWERS

$1M+
INTERNAL RESEARCH AWARDS, TRAVEL SUPPORT AND INDIRECT RECOVERIES REINVESTED IN FACULTY

100+
FACULTY PODCASTS ACROSS AT LEAST 7 JOHN JAY-PRODUCED SERIES

500+
PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLES PUBLISHED BY FACULTY

IMPACT
WHAT DID THE BUTLER DO?

The guilty butler, the devious housemaid, the greedy cook—servants in literature have typically been reduced to stereotypes, used as plot devices, or even written out of the story altogether. But throughout history and around the world, domestic service is a vital industry that not only employs thousands but also makes the creation of great literature and other art possible, by taking care of the dirty work.

Dr. María Julia Rossi, an assistant professor of modern languages and literature, has long been interested in the role servants play in literature and in the rare works that depart from the norm, acknowledging the agency and personhood of domestic workers. Her forthcoming monograph tackles the question of how to counter our socially determined reading protocols and divorce ourselves from the point of view of the master in order to understand the motives and needs of servant characters in Latin American literature. She also co-edited a 2018 collection of essays, *Los de abajo. Tres siglos de sirvientes en el arte y la literatura de América Latina*, that explores the socio-historical context behind the representation of service in Latin America. From servants’ invisibility and lack of agency to the idea of the importance of the body and manual labor, the authors tackle visual arts, cinema and literature from the 19th to the 21st century.

Rossi emphasizes in all her work how servants are more than the hands that carry out their masters’ wishes. To see them clearly where they live in the margins, we need to learn to read literature in a new way.
RACISM AS “AMERICANA”

When people think about The Saturday Evening Post, they usually picture the magazine’s folksy, nostalgic covers, especially those created by its iconic illustrator, Norman Rockwell. But George Horace Lorimer, the magazine’s editor, was a proponent of anti-immigrant xenophobia and anti-black stereotyping and under his leadership The Saturday Evening Post—America’s largest circulating magazine in the early 20th century—was a major vehicle of racial and ethnic intolerance. Dr. Adam McKible, in his forthcoming book *Jim Crow Modernism, The Saturday Evening Post and the Harlem Renaissance*, will examine the magazine’s portrayal of African Americans and help readers better understand the constructions of blackness that dominated American print culture, especially during the 1920s.