

**Injustice Anywhere:
An Introduction to the Innocence Network Conference Scholarship Panel Articles**

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“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Letter from the Birmingham Jail

Martin Luther King Jr.’s words continue to resonate today. The particular injustice brought to bear by the wrongful conviction of a factually innocent person serves to illuminate the broader injustices of the criminal legal system writ large. This issue features a series of articles accepted as part of the Innocence Scholarship Panel session scheduled for the annual Innocence Network Conference in Chicago, Illinois in March 2020. While the conference was ultimately cancelled due to public health concerns connected to the Covid-19 pandemic, some of the authors were able to present their papers remotely in April. The full collection of accepted papers appears below. The Innocence Network is an affiliation of organizations dedicated to remedying individual instances of wrongful conviction of the innocent, while working to address the systemic causes and supporting the exonerated after they are freed. Each year, the Innocence Network Conference provides an opportunity for an international gathering of several hundred attorneys, legal scholars, social scientists, journalists, exonerees, and their families and supporters. The Innocence Scholarship Panel is a regular feature of the conference, creating a venue for legal and social science scholars to showcase their research on emerging wrongful conviction topics. This field of scholarship plays a critical role in chronicling and framing the direction of the Innocence Movement, and in recent years, has developed synergies with broader themes of racial justice.

This year, a series of high-profile incidents involving police violence against Black men in the United States, including the killing of George Floyd – along with the disparate effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on communities of color – have brought renewed attention to the deep-seeded injustices inherent in the American criminal punishment system. Incarcerated populations have been exposed to Covid-19 at far higher rates than the general public, and have seen their already limited access to the outside world diminish, with family and attorney visits severely curtailed in many jurisdictions. Further, those fighting wrongful convictions from behind bars face a heightened risk of Covid-19-related illness or death before they can fully litigate their innocence claims. The combined impact of a global health pandemic and sustained civil unrest in response to racial injustices in policing has led to public discourse that is more readily focused on mass incarceration and the pervasive racial disparities involved in policing, prosecution, and sentencing practices. In this moment, the work of wrongful conviction legal scholars and social scientists takes on a special importance. Indeed, highlighting the profound failures underlying wrongful convictions of factually innocent people serves to illustrate the deeper flaws in the criminal

punishment system. In this way, as criminal justice reform gains a wider and more receptive audience among the general public, a sharpened understanding of the underlying causes of wrongful conviction – along with their devastating and wide-reaching effects – becomes even more critical.

The selected authors from the 2020 Scholarship Panel have conducted research and written pieces that address compelling and timely issues that hold particular relevance given the current political, legal, and social climate in the United States and around the world. Collectively, the authors examine the injustices that both cause and flow from wrongful convictions. These interesting and provocative pieces address the role of racial bias in medical diagnosis of child abuse, consider to what degree exonerations have historically led to the prosecution of the true perpetrator, examine the challenges of re-entry following exoneration, and explore how “justice safety centers” could be developed to prevent wrongful convictions from occurring in the first place.

Understanding how and why wrongful convictions happen—and responding to their broad-reaching effects on exonerees, their families and communities, and society as a whole—has always been important. But in the current climate of heightened public awareness of mass incarceration and structural racism, these articles provide invaluable contributions to the discussion about the future of criminal justice reform.