

Justice Reform Blueprint Authored By More Than Two Dozen Leaders Distributed to All Fifty Governors

Columbia University's Square One Project Sends "Parsimony and Other Radical Ideas About Justice" to Urge Efforts to Reimagine Justice in the United States

NOT FOR RELEASE – New York, NY – Columbia University's Square One Project mailed copies of *Parsimony And Other Radical Ideas About Justice*, a new book about reimagining justice in the United States, to all 50 governors and the Mayor of the District of Columbia. It contains essays by more than two dozen of the nation's leading justice experts, advocates and researchers, laying out a pathway for foundational change.

The essays in the book examine a range of innovative approaches for improving safety and justice in our communities. They include ending the use of policing as a catch-all solution, taking on systemic racism that undermines justice, ending the overreliance on prisons and jails, investing more resources in neighborhoods, and enhancing the role of government in justice.

Among the contributing authors are Tracey Meares of Yale Law School; Nneka Jones Napia, a clinical psychologist and former warden of the Cook County Jail; former federal judge and Harvard Law School Professor Nancy Gertner; the Reverend Vivian Nixon, Writer in Residence at Square One; Pulitzer prize-winning author Matthew Desmond; and Square One Project co-founders Jeremy Travis of Arnold Ventures and Bruce Western of Columbia University. The full list of contributors is [here](#).

The books were sent with a letter from Square One Project Executive Director Katharine Huffman, who co-authored an essay about the role of governing in creating and sustaining justice.

"Never before have our governors been presented with such a wide range of innovative ideas for reimagining justice from the ground up," said Huffman. "Even if each governor implemented just a few of the concepts explored here, it would go a long way to making our states safer and more just."

"Parsimony" in the context of justice means that "the state should exercise only the most limited intrusion into a person's liberty to achieve a broader goal," according to Travis. This values-based approach to justice policy and practice can bring people together across race, geography, socioeconomic status, and even political ideology.

"The fact is that we can have both safety and justice for all. They actually go together," Huffman wrote in the letter. "But to do so we need to make dramatic change. We need to reimagine justice in America."

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TEXT OF LETTER TO GOVERNORS FOLLOWS

April 2023

Dear Governor,

The American people are reading headlines and watching TV news stories that, on a daily basis, seem to include both horrific acts of police brutality and serious crime on our streets. Polls show deep concern about both. Still, many Americans have bought into a defeatist proposition offered by some politicians: If we want safety for our families, our only option is a “tough on crime, lock ‘em up” approach.

This is a false choice that serves no one well. It may make for cynically effective soundbites, but it drapes a tattered veil over a failed approach to justice that is doing little to make life safer in our neighborhoods or better for people who are incarcerated.

The fact is that we can have both safety and justice for all. They actually go together. But to do so we need to make dramatic change. We need to reimagine justice in America.

And there is hope. The broken status quo is motivating hundreds of cities, towns, and states to enact new laws and policies that can ensure both justice and safety. It’s happening in Detroit, Oklahoma, Connecticut, Austin, North Carolina, California, and all over. Conservatives and progressives alike are leading the way.

We hope you, too, will embark on a reimagined approach to justice in your state.

In support of that hope, I’m very pleased to share with you a new book, *Parsimony and Other Radical Ideas About Justice*, authored by more than two dozen of the leading and most intrepid advocates, experts, and thinkers in justice and social policy today. All are participants in The Square One Project at the Columbia University Justice Lab.

“Parsimony” is the notion that, when it comes to justice, “the state should exercise only the most limited intrusion into a person’s liberty to achieve a broader goal.” This values-based approach to justice policy and practice can bring people together across race, geography, socioeconomic status, and even political ideology.

Essays in the book examine new ways to approach safety in our cities far beyond policing, the way racism affects justice, ending the overreliance on prisons and jails and investing in communities, and the role of government in justice.

In its totality, the book creates a blueprint of broad principles and practical solutions for administering justice fairly in the United States. It will prompt thought, offer new ideas, and perhaps open up space for finding common ground. That’s why we’re sending copies of *Parsimony* to all 50 U.S. governors and the mayor of the District of Columbia.

You may not agree with every essay in the book but you will find them all insightful and thought-provoking. And we hope you'll find that at least a few can help improve justice and safety in your state.

Please take the time to read the book and share it with your top advisors, your cabinet, and your state's voters and community members. We stand ready to work with you to reimagine justice in your state.

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