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**A YEAR IN REVIEW**

**texas after violence project**

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**Texas After Violence Project** is a community-based archive and documentary project cultivating deeper understandings of the impacts of state-sanctioned violence on individuals, families, and communities. Our mission is to conduct responsible, inclusive, and ethical research, and to build an archive of stories and other materials that shift narrative power to marginalized and oppressed communities and promote restorative and transformative justice.

Over the course of 2020, Texas After Violence Project grew, and evolved, to meet the needs of our community. At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, we recognized that the prison industrial complex would fail to protect the people living under its control, and that the violence of its neglect and indifference would lead to incalculable suffering and death. Meanwhile, as Black Lives Matter uprisings spread in towns and cities across the US this summer in response to the rampant police killings of Black and brown people, we knew the importance of documenting stories of protest and resistance, in order to create an irrefutable record of police brutality and political negligence. From our digital collection, Sheltering Justice, to our collaborations with organizations like WITNESS and Mourning Our Losses, TAVP has joined an informal network of organizations around the country, all striving to meet this moment with resources, support, and space for reflection as well as rage, for collective grief as well as community care.

We believe our work has never been more important than it is now, as more and more people begin to take a stand against the violence that threads throughout our society. As this movement against state violence grows, it's critical it is shaped and informed by those who are most impacted by the failures of the current system. The work of Texas After Violence Project helps make that possible by creating space for people to tell their personal stories, as they want them to be told.



# 2020 PARTNERSHIPS

Last year, we worked with **Documenting the Now** to bring their Community-Based Digital Archives Workshop for Activists to Austin, and this year, Gabriel Solis participated in a virtual discussion organized by DocNow called "Documenting Protests, Protecting Activists." The event attracted more than a thousand attendees on Zoom and was live streamed on YouTube. Through DocNow's new network, **Archivists Supporting Activists**, TAVP is participating in regular discussions about the intersection of archival work and activism. The network connects activists looking to create an archive of their movement with archivists ready and willing to help.

We collaborated with **WITNESS** to create two new resources for activists, organizers, community organizers and others to ethically and safely record materials and footage (e.g. video footage of police violence). The first resource is a simple decision tree to help determine whether you are fully prepared to collect and archive sensitive protest materials. The second is a guide to conducting interviews with victims and survivors of state violence with care, and offers tips to ensure that an interviewer's approach and conduct before, during, and after filming the interview, whether in person or remote, respects the dignity and human rights of the interviewee.

We continue to work with partners in mental health as part of our Access to Treatment Project. This year, we established a collaboration with the **National Child Traumatic Stress Network** to create resources for mental health clinicians. We are also working with the counseling program at **St. Edward's University** to help train counseling students to offer free mental health services to the loved ones of people sentenced to death and executed. Both collaborations will continue in 2021.

In April, TAVP worked with a group of activists, advocates, and educators to start Mourning Our Losses, a collectively-run, crowd-sourced memorial to honor the lives of people who died in prisons, jails, and immigration detention facilities in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. In October, we partnered with Mourning Our Losses to hold a virtual vigil for the COVID-19 Week of Mourning.

In partnership with Densho, the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), and Interference Archive, we received an implementation grant from National Historical Publications and Records Commission to build on the work of the **Community Archives Collaborative**, a peer network that allows community-based archives to collaborate, share skills, trainings, and best practices, leverage pooled resources, and provide peer-to-peer mentoring in order to support long-term sustainability and growth.

TAVP and **SAADA** also received a planning grant from the Institute for Library and Museum Services to explore methods, processes, and models for community-based archives to develop accessible educational materials based on our archival collections, and create learning opportunities using online educational resources for our communities, target audiences, and the general public.

One of our longest running partnerships, with the **Inside Books Project Archive**, has grown in new ways this year as we collaborated on our project, Sheltering Justice. With help from the IBP Archive, we were able to include submissions from people who are currently incarcerated during the pandemic in our digital collection. These submissions include artwork, poetry, written testimony, and other descriptions of life in Texas prisons during the Covid-19 pandemic.

# SHELTERING JUSTICE

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

In May, as we prepared to launch **Sheltering Justice**, we wrote:

We recognize that as we continue to shelter in our homes to help contain the spread of the coronavirus, we also feel an overwhelming sense that we must also shelter our values and visions of justice in response to the spread of tragedy and injustice that — even in our isolation — surrounds us everywhere. We recognize that, to shelter justice, we must follow in the traditions of past movements that emerged from crisis and listen deeply to the voices of those who are directly and disproportionately impacted for understanding, guidance, and lessons as we move into the future together.

STORIES FROM THE INTERSECTION  
OF COVID-19 AND MASS  
INCARCERATION

# THE LANDSCAPE OF MASS INCARCERATION IN THE ERA OF COVID-19: HOW THE PANDEMIC EXPOSED PRE- EXISTING CONDITIONS IN TEXAS' CARCERAL SYSTEM

In March, as it became clear to us that state officials were refusing to recognize the impending spread of the coronavirus through jails, detention centers, and prisons as an urgent public health crisis, we started to develop Sheltering Justice, a documentation and archival initiative to responsibly and ethically document, preserve, and share the stories of people who are directly and disproportionately impacted by the intersection of COVID-19 and mass incarceration.

We closely followed reporting by journalists like the Marshall Project's Keri Blakinger and the Texas Observer's Michael Barajas. We put together a dedicated team of researchers, experienced interviewers, and advisors, and identified several areas of investigation, including barriers faced by prisoners to accessing adequate healthcare and infection prevention measures; loved ones' interactions with prison administrators and government officials trying to get information; loved ones' participation in advocacy, activism, or organizing for decarceration; and challenges for formerly incarcerated people to maintain health, livelihoods, community, and recovery in the midst of a raging pandemic.

We also identified three main goals for Sheltering Justice. First, to create an accessible and irrefutable public record (and a broader cultural and historical record) of the real-life impacts of the collision of the COVID-19 pandemic and mass incarceration. Second, to make stories and other materials widely accessible so that they can be used as impactful resources by activists, organizers, and prisoners' loved ones fighting for the urgent release of people from jails, prisons, and detention centers, as well as for health, wellness, and well-being post-release. Third, to continue to shift narrative power to (and by extension, to build power within) communities that are directly and disproportionately impacted by this crisis in order to challenge dominant narratives about the pandemic and mass incarceration.

## REFLECTIONS FROM INTERVIEWERS

Over the course of 2020, we have interviewed the loved ones of currently incarcerated people; people who have been released from confinement as a result of the pandemic; and activists, advocates, and organizers fighting for the urgent release of prisoners. Each contributor and storyteller in this collection has found themselves caught in a global pandemic in the most incarcerated country in the world. These stories give texture to the reality of mass incarceration. They share, expand, animate, and complicate conceptions like criminal, retribution, and punishment. And in doing so, they also safeguard the public record to accurately reflect the real-life complexity of the carceral state, honor constituencies whose lives have been defined by state-sanctioned systems of human caging, and function as a tool for political change.

EACH CONTRIBUTOR AND STORYTELLER  
IN THIS COLLECTION HAS FOUND  
THEMSELVES CAUGHT IN A GLOBAL  
PANDEMIC IN THE MOST INCARCERATED  
COUNTRY IN THE WORLD.

For all of us, this time has been exemplified by a looming uncertainty, but for advocates, people with loved ones currently incarcerated, and those who are recently released, the uncertainty manifests differently. And perhaps its greatest distinction: it could *still* be prevented.

The interviews in the Sheltering Justice Collection point to common themes, many of which typified the tragedy of mass incarceration even before the tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic, including: little access to healthcare and mental healthcare, solitary confinement and isolation, poor (to no) quality of food, a lack of communication and institutional transparency, as well as disturbing widespread corruption, retaliation, and brutality.

Seven interviewees described, in depth, the lack of proper COVID prevention measures. They mentioned their incarcerated loved ones' inability to social distance, to disinfect their belongings, their cells, and themselves, as well as the inability to wear masks (at first) and to quarantine safely from guards. Many units placed individuals who tested positive with others who had tested negative. One interviewee explained how the prison where her husband is incarcerated used an “isolation unit” which had no air conditioning (although other sections throughout the rest of the facility were air-conditioned), and that healthcare for people in the isolation unit consisted of an occasional dose of Tylenol and a meager Johnny Sack, with asymptomatic individuals taking care of others suffering from COVID symptoms. There was little to no professional medical attention. Another interviewee explained how one group was used as a “cleaning unit” by force – leaving many of those incarcerated weighing the threat of retaliation against a greater risk of exposure to the virus.

## C O M M O N   T H E M E S

From both our interviews and submitted testimonies, Sheltering Justice has identified common themes, defining the experience of mass incarceration during the coronavirus pandemic.

Little Access & Lack of Healthcare

Delayed and Monitored Communication

Lack of Institutional Transparency

Solitary Confinement & Isolation

Poor (to no) Quality of Food

Disturbing Widespread Corruption

Retaliation

Brutality

Poor Living Conditions



Communication between family members and their loved ones behind bars deteriorated at the beginning of the pandemic. Nearly all facilities went into lockdown, preventing any communication from the inside with the outside – leaving many families to fear the worst. When we began Sheltering Justice, some interviewees had not spoken to their loved ones for weeks at a time. Over time, phone-call privileges returned, and at least allowed loved ones to hear each other’s voice. The mail system has continued to operate, but still functions at a notable delay. Most interviewees felt that the silence and delay of communications has given TDCJ enough time to shift their narrative of the pandemic around a strategy of containment and control – but this strategy is also largely maintained by the massive efforts to monitor all communications within the prison walls to the outside. Our most recent interview, a follow-up with an activist whose husband is currently incarcerated, explained how closely her phone calls with her husband are surveilled. Staff and COs have even gone so far as to warn her husband about what he can, and cannot, share with his wife over the phone before facing retaliation.

This time has galvanized those with loved ones on the inside. Whether through Facebook groups or socially-distanced rallies, many interviewees deepened – or transformed – their activism. Some, who never would have identified as an activist before, led new initiatives to bring attention to conditions of confinement and collaborated with other longstanding efforts to push back against the inadequate support, information, and communication of the state. With a renewed public interest in criminal justice reform, the pandemic has presented an “opportunity,” to use the words of one interviewee, an opportunity with new urgency.

## SHELTERING JUSTICE PROJECT TEAM

Murphy Anne Carter  
Maggie Luna  
Gabriel Solis  
Bryn Starbird  
aems emswiler


Celeste Henery  
Julia Montiel  
Jane Field  
Amy Ruiz  
Kiana Sambursky-Early

# TESTIMONY FROM A PANDEMIC

EXCERPTS AND QUOTES FROM  
INTERVIEWS & LETTERS

To explore the full archive, please visit  
<https://shelteringjustice.texasafterviolence.org>





It's a really heartbreaking situation. It really is, because I don't know how to tell people anymore. It's to that point, where you can feel like you can talk and talk and tell everyone, scream at the top of your lungs, "This is what needs to happen."

CASEY PHILLIPS

I see this moving in a direction that seizes on this shared sense of health inequity to expand a shared sense of integrity and humanity and compassion . . . that's what I want to see. and I want to see things like people saying no one needs to go to prison for life. No one deserves to be executed. I don't know that we will ever achieve that but that's what I like to think we're always shooting for.

DAVID JOHNSON

We do have an opportunity here, and I think this opportunity was there before – but it wasn't with the urgency [there is] now.

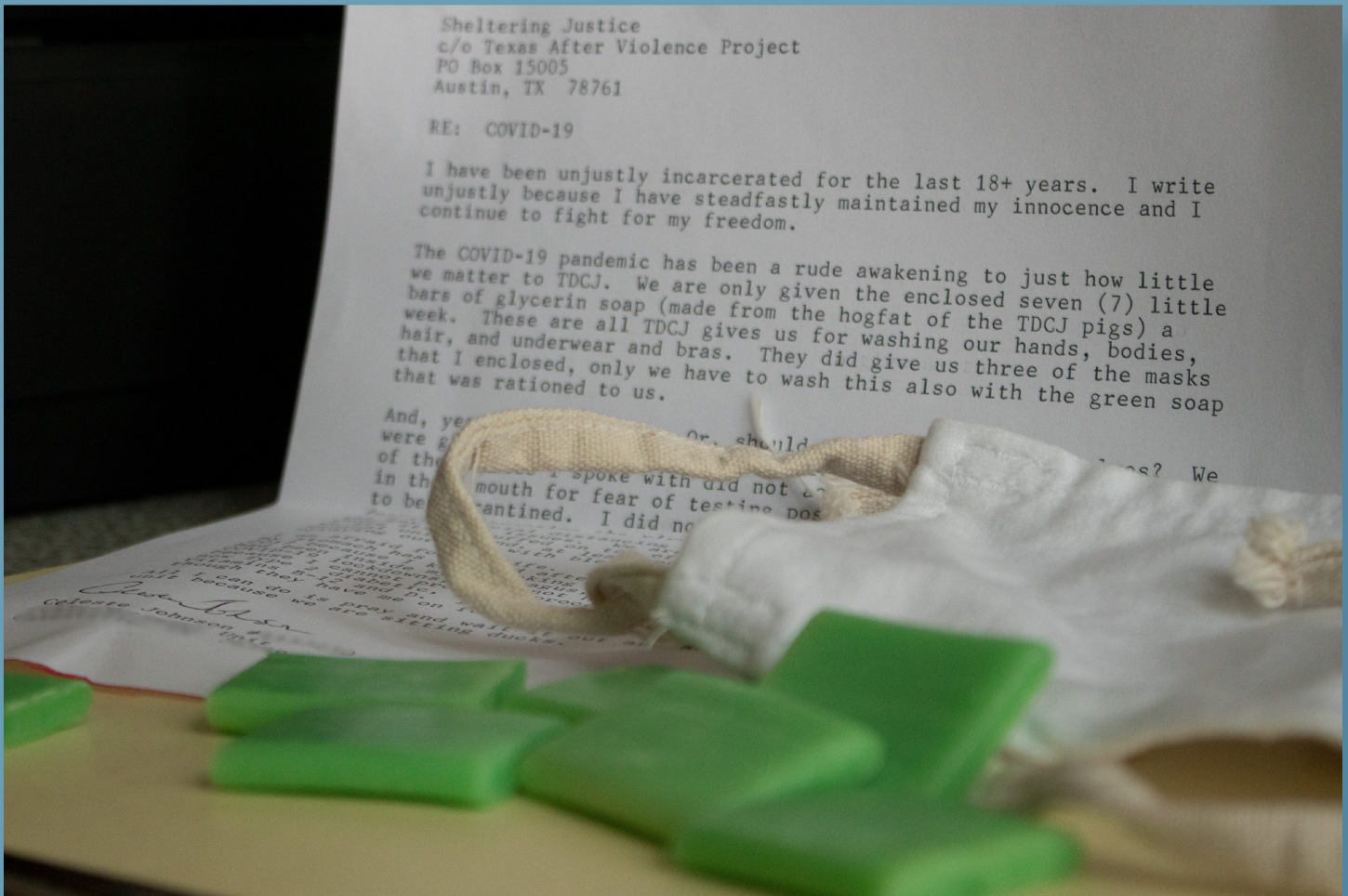
JORGE  
ANTONIO RENAUD





Art by Roberto Vasquez, Jr. for the Inside Books Archive Collection.





"The Bare Minimum," includes soap and mask sent to us by Celeste Johnson. In her accompanying letter (pictured) Celeste wrote to us:

"The COVID-19 pandemic has been a rude awakening to just how little we matter to TDCJ. We are only given the enclosed seven (7) little bars of glycerin soap (made from the hogfat of the TDCJ pigs) a week. These are all TDCJ gives us for washing our hands, bodies, hair, and underwear and bras. They did give us three of the masks that I enclosed, only we have to wash this also with the green soap that was rationed to us."

To: Texas After Violence Project  
C/O IBP Archive  
PO BOX 41476  
Austin, TX 78704

7-02-20

Hello! Enclosed is a piece of my "memory art," along with my form/submission required for inclusion in the archive.

"7-02-20

Hello! Enclosed is a piece of my "memory art," along with my form/submission required for inclusion in the archive." From the introduction to "Innocence Lost," by Guillermo Garza, aka Memo.

ON 6-18-20 A COMMISSARY OFFICER WAS TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID19 AND WE HAVE OFFICIALLY BEEN ON LOCKDOWN FOR 42 DAYS NOW

"ON 6-18-20 A COMMISSARY OFFICER WAS TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID19 AND WE HAVE OFFICIALLY BEEN ON LOCKDOWN FOR 42 DAYS NOW," from "Helpless During a Pandemic," by Thomas Castillo


at the Plane State unit I was send to work at the kitchen and my first reaction was to that of horror the condition of the place, holes in the walls, more that 5 inmates working the same area, no PPE (no gloves, sleeves, boots aprons etc.). The first

". . .at the Plane State unit I was send to work at the kitchen and my first reaction was that of horror the condition of the place, holes in the walls, more that 5 inmates working the same area, no PPE, (no gloves, sleeves, boots, aprons etc)." From "Kitchen, or Hell?" by Daniela Salazar.

Called in to work at 5 a.m on a Saturday. I thought that it was a mistake but it turned out not to be. We had been tasked with making mask for the inmate population. All of a sudden things got real. Guards started coming to work wearing mask and soon after that so were we.

"Called in to work at 5 a.m. on a Saturday. I thought that it was a mistake but it turned out not to be. We had been tasked with making masks for the inmate population. All of a sudden things got real. Guards started coming to work wearing masks and soon after so were we. From "Our Pandemic," by Craig A. Sorrell.





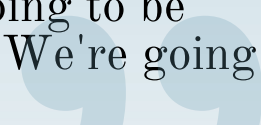
It's about everybody. You don't want just to fight for you, just the one person that matters to you. 'Cause that's what's wrong with the system is that everybody is only worried about themselves, you know. They're not worried about the whole community.

LAUREN BYRD-MORENO

One of the most beautiful things I've seen is the groundswell of people, who are curious as to what's going on . . . There's a groundswell of people coming out who want change.

MAGGIE LUNA

I believe in my heart that as long as we don't give up we will not fail. We will succeed. This is going to be for people whose heart is truly, truly for it, and we're going to make it happen . . . I just feel it in my bones. I feel it in my soul. This is going to be different. This change is going to happen from this. We're going to see something happen.



LOVINAH IGBANI

# LOOKING AHEAD TO 2021

## NEW DIGITAL REPOSITORY

We're building a new digital repository that will allow users to engage with our archival collection without leaving our website. We'll be able to include other types of digital objects alongside our oral history videos, such as digitized letters, photographs, artwork, etc.

## CONTINUING SHELTERING JUSTICE

We'll begin interviewing advocates, activists, medical responders, & journalists, while centering those who have experienced incarceration during the pandemic & their loved ones. We'll build partner collections with groups like Mourning Our Losses & ATX Anarchist Black Cross.

## LOOKOUT FM RADIO EPISODES

Our Sheltering Justice project will be featured in two episodes of the DUBLAB LookoutFM radio program on archival collections. These episodes are already in production and will air in early 2021.

## WORKING GROUP ON ETHICS AND ARCHIVING

We are building a working group to discuss ethical questions around sensitive archival materials in our collection. This group will meet monthly to think through difficult ethical questions related to publicly sharing these materials online and in exhibitions.

## DOCNOW'S RAPID RESPONSE TEAM

We'll be project partner in DocNow's Rapid Response Documentation Program, which will focus on conducting and archiving oral histories across the US related to police violence. The program will be developed as a model that can be replicated by other organizations.

## POET-IN- RESIDENCE & ART ENDEAVORS

Jorge Antonio Renaud will be joining us as our inaugural Poet-in-Residence. Jorge is a longtime friend of the project as well as an activist deeply committed to abolition. We'll continue to work with our artists Mark Menjivar and Hollis Hammond, while building relationships with writers, designers, and other creators.

# THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HAVE GIVEN TIME, LABOR, STORIES, ART & ADVICE TO THIS PROJECT IN 2020

Samson Billiot  
Jack S. Warren III  
Larry Anthony Harris  
AG  
C. W. Fleming  
Lauren Byrd-Moreno  
Natalie Porteous  
Kirsten Ricketts  
Celeste Henery  
Susana Venegas  
Daniela Salazar  
Bryant Christopher Watts  
Jane Field  
Guillermo Garza (Memo)  
Julia Montiel  
Kimberly Judd  
David Johnson  
Roberto Vasquez Jr.  
L. Walker  
Mark Menjivar  
aems emswiler  
Lovinah Igbani  
Gaudalupe Padilla

T. Bruffett  
Sean Oliver  
Jason Wayne McBride  
Casey Phillips  
Murphy Anne Carter  
Raymon Pierce  
Jorge Antonio Renaud  
Brian J. Marsh  
Roberto Hernandez  
Gabriel Solis  
William Rex Beckham (Skittles)  
Andrea McCutcheon  
Devin Simmons  
Lori Mellinger  
Susannah Sheffer  
Margarita Luna  
Maurice Chammah  
Linda Loudon  
Sten Elysium  
Craig A. Sorrell  
Steven Keith Green  
Kiana Sambursky-Early  
Nicolas Balli

Paco Pineda  
Nichia  
Noor ZK  
Amy Ruiz  
Savannah Eldridge  
Micaela Rodriguez  
Lawrence Woodson Short  
Pariah  
Celeste Johnson  
Michael J. Carson  
Thomas Castillo  
Albert James Haduot  
Bryn Starbird  
Brian G. Oatman  
Hollis Hammond  
Juan Manual Harrizon Garcia Jr.  
William James Allen (Ghost)  
Rhiannon  
Monique Joseph  
Kambri Crews  
Jennifer Toon  
Roger Uvalle  
Carl Lee Anderson



Judith Filler  
FOUNDATION



[www.texasafterviolence.org](http://www.texasafterviolence.org)

MAY 2021 BRING WITH IT ALL THAT'S  
TRANSFORMATIVE & RESTORATIVE

texas  
after  
violence  
project