

texas
after
violence

A YEAR IN REVIEW

2021

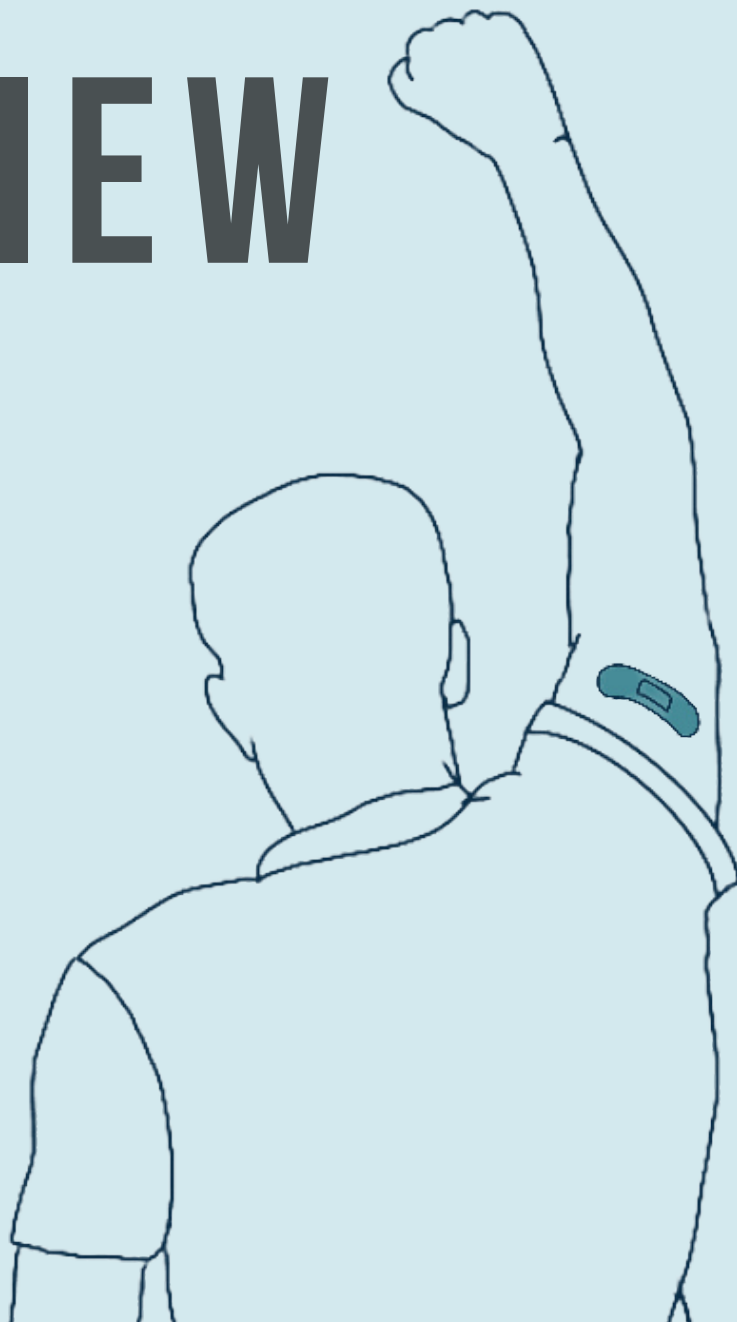


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01

“That a map does not exist is our surest sign of strength.”

JARRETT DRAKE

INTRODUCTION

For the Texas After Violence Project team, 2021 started at home. We have become comfortable with working together via Slack, conducting interviews via Zoom, connecting with our narrators and storytellers in a new way, with encounters mediated through screens but often just as powerful as our in-person experiences. As summer came, as more and more people received life-saving vaccinations, we began occasionally meeting up at coffee shops and conducting in-person interviews again, while still offering the option of virtual interviews.

In many ways, 2021 has been a year of growth, exploration, and examination. As the rates of Covid infections ebbed and flowed and our communities creaked open only to pull back into shelter as the Delta variant surged, TAVP evaluated our practices and priorities with new insights into our values, our mission, and the needs of our community of those directly impacted by state violence. We began setting aside time to think deeply about how we understand our work, our scope, and our purpose. We brought more directly impacted people into our work at every opportunity as advisors and decision makers.

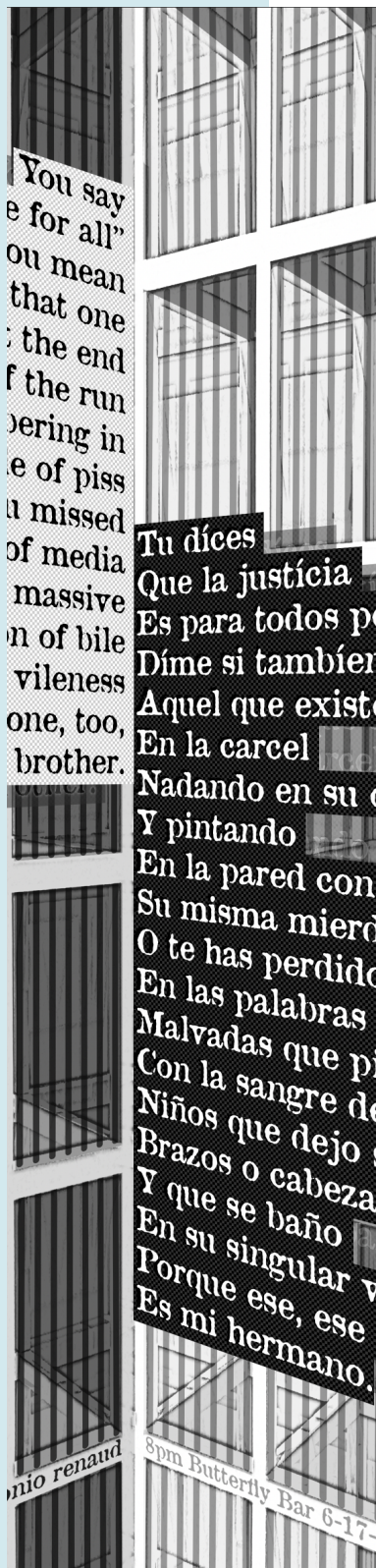
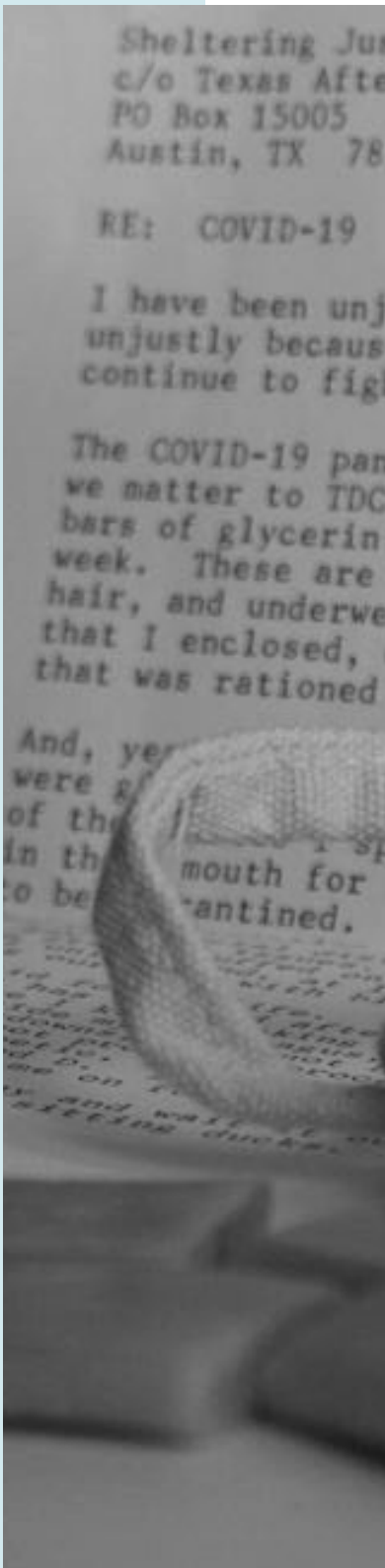


Illustration by Hollis Hammonds

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This year, we challenged ourselves to think expansively about how we understand state violence and its impacts. The pandemic has highlighted the ways that decisions made by government officials have an outsized impact on our ability to live safely. In May, for example, Prop B passed in Austin, banning camping within city limits and immediately putting many unhoused members of our community at risk. We were asked--along with other grantees of the City of Austin's Equity Office--to reimagine public safety and interviewed people who'd been impacted by police violence. The questions "what is state violence?" and "what is justice?" and "what is liberation?" simmered in the background of every conversation.

These are questions we posed to our new Visions After Violence Fellows, brought to our community advisory council, our board of directors, our community advisors, and to our colleagues and collaborators. Ultimately, we view them as questions that are not for us to answer, but for us to keep asking. As you read through our end of year report, we invite you to consider your own answers and understandings.

We are very proud of what we have been able to accomplish in 2021, and we look forward to coming back together again after the new year to pick up where we left off. Stay tuned, be safe, and stay in touch.

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2021 GOALS

This year we set out to continue documenting stories from the intersection of COVID-19 and mass incarceration through our project, while also focusing on documentation around concepts of public safety in the city of Austin. We sought to expand beyond original boundaries for Sheltering Justice to recognize all the ways in which public safety has unraveled for those most vulnerable and most directly affected by mass incarceration. We aimed to make those connections clear and to capture the stories that highlighted the complexity of carceral systems. We continued accepting materials from individuals currently incarcerated across Texas. We increased leadership opportunities from individuals who are directly impacted to be decision-makers at every step of the process. We continued to nurture ongoing conversations around abolition, liberatory memory work, visions of justice, and other constant themes in our work, by sharing important writing on our Medium blog, holding virtual and in-person events, and creating space to grow alongside our community.

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MEET OUR COMMUNITY ADVISORS

THIS YEAR WE WELCOMED TWO NEW TEAM MEMBERS: JENNIFER TOON AND DR. SUSANNAH BANNON



JENNIFER TOON

In October, Jennifer Toon and Dr. Susannah Bannon joined TAVP as our first-ever community advisors. Jennifer and Susie share their expertise as people who've personally experienced incarceration to help shape our day-to-day work and vision. Susie is a formerly incarcerated advocate, teacher, and researcher. Jennifer is a formerly incarcerated activist and writer with a passion for criminal justice reform.



DR. SUSANNAH BANNON

Our Community Advisors take part in our weekly team meetings, offer both practical and philosophical insight about our projects and programs, and suggest areas and issues where we can expand our advocacy. As Susie put it, “community advisors are the safeguards against tendencies to assume what incarcerated or formerly incarcerated people need. There is something about the trauma of imprisonment that is very difficult to articulate to those who have never endured it, no matter how close they might have been to the system through a loved one.”

05**COMMUNITY CO-DESIGN****IN 2021, WE EXPLORED CO-DESIGNING LEARNING RESOURCES WITH OUR COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL**

With funding from the Institute for Library and m April through July of this year, our newly formed Community Advisory Council participated in four co-design sessions facilitated by And Also Too, a design justice studio. The conversations during these sessions were focused on how TAVP could utilize our collections to educate community members (including but not limited to activists, advocates, and archivists) about state violence. While our focus was on e-learning, much of the discussion centered around ways of merging online and offline learning to build solidarity, share skills for liberatory memory work, and foster connection between community members inside and outside sites of confinement.

WHAT'S TO COME

We are currently working with an instructional design consultant who is building a hybrid lesson plan to teach zine-making using materials from our digital archive, the After Violence Archive. This workshop will also be available offline in a form that can be mailed directly to our incarcerated community members, as well as in an online or in-person workshop format.

And of course, our Community Advisory Council will continue to meet quarterly to advise TAVP on all aspects of our work, expanding beyond their initial focus on learning resources.

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2021 INTERVIEWS

SHELTERING JUSTICE, REIMAGINING PUBLIC SAFETY, AND OTHER LESSONS OF 2021

“To me, violence is whenever you are withholding something that people need to survive, or whenever you are deliberately causing physical or emotional harm to a person, to a living thing.”

MARINA ROBERTS,
INTERVIEWED JUNE 23, 2021

In 2021, TAVP logged over 20 hours of interview footage with interviewees whose experiences with state-sanctioned violence animate, complicate, and give texture to the reality of the carceral state. Our conversations point to a number of developments in activism that range from “common sense” reforms, like installing HVAC units in prisons, to abolitionist and restorative justice-based frameworks, including demands that survivors of crime serve as decision makers in what “justice” really looks like. Our interviews contain vital information about forms of retaliation and risk that exist beyond prison walls for family members on the outside, about the lack of communication and transparency between administrators and employees of “correctional facilities.”

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Narrators also describe the need for healthcare infrastructure that simply does not exist for some of the most vulnerable individuals dealing with chronic illnesses, and mental health issues, as a result of their incarceration. The words of our narrators deal with the realities behind being unhoused, the need for survivors to be centered in conversations around justice, and organizing in the midst of mounting economic pressures.

“First of all, a lot of the people inside take psychotropic medications or various medications that are heat sensitive. And so what happens with those medications is they don't allow the body to sweat properly. So the incarcerated individual has a choice: either I don't take these medications and I suffer from the condition that I have or I take these medications and maybe what happens is my body isn't allowed to sweat so I go into heat stroke more easily. Which means now I'm more vulnerable to things like cardiac arrest and a heart attack or stroke and I die.”

AMITE DOMINICK,
INTERVIEWED JUNE 1, 2021

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THEMES

criminalization of
individuals who are
unhoused

alienation and
abandonment of victims
and survivors of policy
brutality and sexual
assault

lack of decision-
making power by those
directly impacted by
government policies

non-existence of police
accountability

REIMAGINING PUBLIC SAFETY

A LOCALLY-FOCUSED INTERVIEW PROJECT EXPLORING DEFINITIONS OF SAFETY

This year TAVP's oral history efforts also centered on reimagining public safety in Austin, Texas as a part of a grant from the City of Austin Equity Office. TAVP conducted thirteen in-depth interviews with local criminal justice reform activists and advocates and people with lived experience of homelessness, police brutality, and incarceration.

Each interview engaged in the multilayered experience of violence at individual and systemic levels, and offered us a space to ask those with the keenest understanding and insight: What does justice look like to you?

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MINUTES OF
INTERVIEW
FOOTAGE

“When you think about things like the slow impact of long-term economic pressures, the increased cost of living, the fact that my neighbors are slowly disappearing—I experience a loss of culture and a sense of cultural erasure. It’s harder to think of that as violence directly. I think we don’t always identify it as violence for that reason. We think maybe it’s tough, brutal, but this is just the game of capitalism, and this ultra-commodified society that we’re all stuck in.

”

JOÃO PAULO CONNOLLY,
INTERVIEWED JUNE 11, 2021



illustration by Hollis Hammonds

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HOUSELESSNESS IN AUSTIN

IN MAY, AFTER THE PASSAGE OF PROP B REINSTATED A BAN ON PUBLIC CAMPING IN AUSTIN, WE INTERVIEWED ADVOCATE ALVIN SANDERSON ABOUT THE VIOLENCE OF BANS AGAINST PUBLIC CAMPING.

"They told me to hide, Get out of sight, so I did and they [the police] gave me a ticket and a week later, they came back and they gave me another ticket. And I said, Where do you expect me to go? He said, Hide, hide out of sight. That's when I went to the third tunnel, underneath Barton Springs Road. That was the wrong decision right there, but I didn't want to get another ticket, so I had to move. I didn't take my tent, and I left it there."

•••

"When I was in Bouldin Creek, in the tunnel, a wall of water came down to their and caught me off the pass. I stood up and everything I own washed away. And I thought I was going to die. I was chest high in water and it was rising up. It was really getting high, a tremendous amount of water all the way—water from Ben White, all the way down to Lamar, in the side street, empty and to Bouldin Creek. and so when it rains, dangerous flood comes there and I was asleep about 9:30 and at about 1:15, water was hitting my back, I stood up, everything washed away. It took me an hour to get out of that creek. And when I did, I could hear the roar of the water coming down that creek, just that fast."

ALVIN SANDERSON
INTERVIEWED MAY 7, 2021

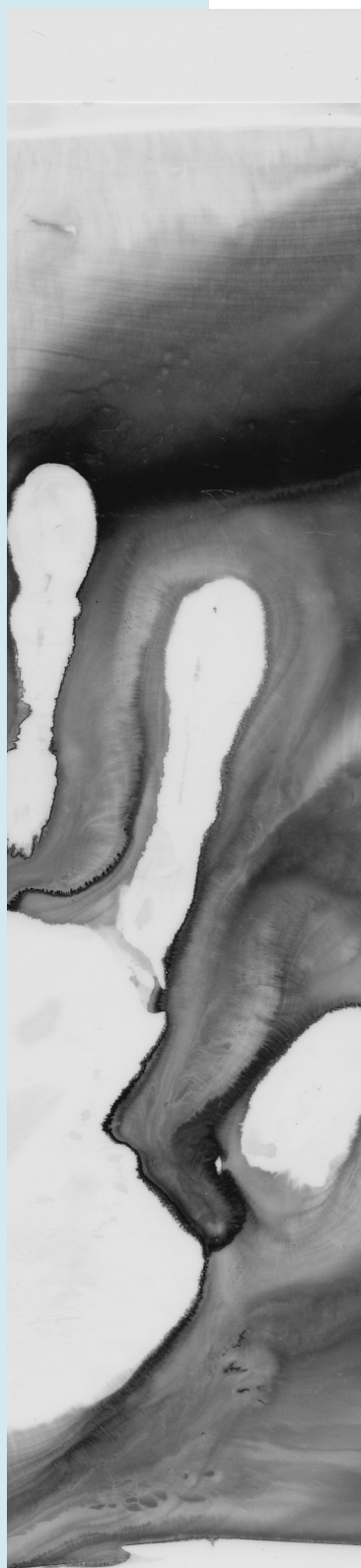


illustration by Hollis Hammonds

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INTRODUCING AVA

THE AFTER VIOLENCE ARCHIVE IS OUR NEW DIGITAL REPOSITORY

With support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, TAVP built the After Violence Archive (AVA), a digital archival repository that houses TAVP's extensive archival collection, as well as materials from partner collections.

AVA was created with Mukurtu, a content management system designed with indigenous communities "to manage, share, and exchange their cultural heritage in ethically minded ways." In AVA, we have control over how our collections are presented, who receives access to each item, and how each item links with other items and stories in our collections. Mukurtu is designed to be community first, which means we have been able to build a site to suit our needs and the needs of our partner collections and users beyond academics and researchers.

LOOKING AHEAD

We will continue to add digital materials to AVA, including collections from our partner archives like the Inside Books Project Archive (an organization that sends free books to incarcerated people), Forced Trajectory Project (a multimedia project focused on police violence), and Mourning Our Losses (a crowd-sourced memorial to honor the lives of people who died from Covid-19 while incarcerated in the US). In coming years, we will expand our partnerships with similar organizations hoping to share or establish archival collections.

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ACCESS TO TREATMENT

IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT
OPTIONS FOR FAMILY MEMBERS OF INDIVIDUALS
SENTENCED TO DEATH OR EXECUTED

"Who do you talk to? Who do you go to? Because a lot of people that have loved ones on death row, they don't have the finances to seek therapy or to see someone on a regular basis, and it's like, okay, do I pay to go to a psychiatrist, or do I send my family member on death row money to eat?"

THE MOTHER OF SOMEONE ON DEATH ROW,
FROM OUR 2019 REPORT, *NOBODY TO TALK TO*

It's been two years since the publication of TAVP's report *Nobody to Talk to: Barriers to Treatment for Family Members of Individuals Who Have Been Sentenced to Death or Executed*. Since then, our goal has been to make it possible for family members to have somebody to talk to – a trained therapist who will be safe and welcoming for those who have a relative on death row or a relative who has already been executed.

One big part of what we heard from family members of those sentenced to death or

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executed is that it's hard to imagine going to a counselor who isn't familiar with the death penalty or with what it's like for family members. As a way of addressing that, we have partnered with the Austin YWCA to offer training to any of their therapists who are interested, and we're just now expanding this to mental health professionals from other agencies around the state as well.

We just released a resource ["Children Who Are Impacted by a Family Member's Death Sentence or Execution: Information for Mental Health Professionals,"](#) now available at the [National Child Traumatic Stress Network \(NCTSN\) site](#). To our knowledge, this marks the first time that a site with such reach and visibility within the field of trauma studies has recognized this category of children and families who experience trauma.



A graphic with a child looking into the distance reads, "Over 1500 people have been executed since 1976 & over 2500 people live on death row today. How many traumatized children and siblings might that mean?"

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VISIONS AFTER VIOLENCE

A NEW FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM FROM TEXAS AFTER VIOLENCE

With support from the Institute for Museum and Library Services and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation we have created a new fellowship program for people who are directly impacted by state violence to advance TAVP's community-based documentation and archival work. Over a nine month period, Visions After Violence Fellows will develop oral history projects consisting of 5-10 interviews, and work with TAVP to share these interviews broadly.

2022 Visions After Violence Fellows have been selected, and we met together in early December for a two-day workshop to get to know each other, as well as to investigate memory work and how it fits into the bigger picture of justice. We spoke about what an interview could be like and our experiences with interviewing or being interviewed. We set goals and worked as a community to acknowledge the experiences that brought us to our personal vision after violence and to document our own hopes for what such a vision could be.

STAY TUNED

We are excited to be formally introduce the 2022 Visions After Violence Fellows and their incredible projects in January. [Learn more about the VAV fellowships or check for updates by visiting our website.](#)

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“Narrative is the
heart
of advocacy”


JENNIFER TOON

ADVOCACY

BUILDING A BRIDGE BETWEEN DOCUMENTATION WORK AND ADVOCACY

As we've evolved as an organization, we've thought carefully about how advocacy can complement the documentation work that we do. As Community Advisor Jennifer Toon so eloquently put it during our [Sheltering Justice in 2021 Panel](#), “the heart of advocacy is narrative.” This year, much of our advocacy involved supporting the work of our [collaborators](#), including [Texas Prisons Community Advocates](#), who are working hard to get lawmakers to end inhumane conditions in Texas prisons, and [Mourning Our Losses](#), who called on states and municipalities to prioritize vaccines for incarcerated people and to reduce the number of people incarcerated in order to slow the spread of COVID. We also supported efforts to abolish the death penalty, life without parole, and prison slavery, and joined the [Austin Is Safer When Coalition](#) in order to call for the decriminalization of homelessness and alternatives to policing at the municipal level.

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“By entertaining, as I did, the question of “what will we do in the case of some really awful thing” we are seduced into searching for a map instead of following the direction. The direction is freedom, and any map that purports to point us there isn’t worth the paper it’s printed on.”

JARRETT DRAKE

THE HOME FIRE

TAVP continues to harness our ongoing creative momentum and offer abolitionist imaginations a safe home with our digital publication, [The Home Fire](#). As a place for written reflections, The Home Fire captures the same interdisciplinary approaches of our artists and writers in residence program – but for memory workers and abolitionists across the country. TAVP’s The Home Fire will serve as a chronicle to collaborate, synthesize, and burn bright the actions and imaginations of those leading the thought and practices behind memory work and transformative justice.

“The rage and pain of incarceration has left its residue within me. I have no idea where it lives, but those remnants of violence and dehumanization seen and felt and sensed through 27 years in prison are in my body. Each night they bubble through my dreams. I nourish them. I hold them close. It is only through them that I find the strength to bear witness, to add my story to the narratives that will ultimately be used to eradicate the very cages I once lived in.”

JORGE ANTONIO RENAUD,
NOURISHING MY NIGHTMARES



Illustration by Hollis Hammonds

UNMUTE YOURSELF

A POETRY READING WITH WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE JORGE ANTONIO RENAUD

In July, we took advantage of decreasing rates of Covid infections and held our first in-person event since 2019: a poetry reading by our 2021 writer-in-residence, Jorge Antonio Renaud. Jorge is an activist, advocate, poet and writer, and a beloved member of the Texas After Violence community. His poems delve into abolition, concepts of criminality, forgiveness and punishment. Poet Juania Sueños opened the event with her own poetry, and the event also included a conversation about abolition between Jorge and activist Darwin Hamilton. [A recording of the event is available online.](#)



VIRTUAL BELONGING

ASSESSING THE AFFECTIVE IMPACT OF DIGITAL RECORDS CREATION IN COMMUNITY ARCHIVES

With funding from the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS), TAVP is partnering with the South Asian American Digital Archive and the UCLA Community Archives Lab for a three-year research project to explore the affective impact of digital technologies on the creation of records documenting minoritized communities by community-based archives.

The project will address many of the emerging needs of archives, especially the growing recognition of the need to mitigate potential harms for record creators and users, and the growing dependence on digital technologies across the archives, museum, and LIS fields in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic

At every step, this project is designed to center the experiences and needs of record creators and community members in developing new archival practices. Among other things, Virtual Belonging will result in new oral history and digital memory projects, as well as resources and trainings for other community-based archives and practitioners interested in best practices and strategies for mitigating harm for record creators.

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SNAPSHOTS FROM 2021

A NEW WEBSITE FOR TAVP

This spring, we revamped our website, making it easier to navigate for those hoping to learn more about our work. We added a section to highlight our writings and reflections—often shared via Medium—and a Knowledge Center where you'll find online training, reports, and other important resources.

COLLABORATIONS WITH OUR ARTISTS-IN-RESIDENCE

Our artists-in-residence have long been an important part of our work. In 2021, Mark Menjivar had [two exhibits exploring materials from TAVP's collections](#). Hollis Hammonds created a poster in collaboration with 2021 writer-in-residence Jorge Antonio Renaud to celebrate our in-person poetry reading.

CREATING A PODCAST WITH DUBLAB

In January we released [our first podcast episode](#) about Sheltering Justice, created in collaboration with Dublab and LookoutFM. The episode features stories from narrators we interviewed about the pandemic and incarceration in 2020. There will be more episodes to come, so stay tuned.

COMMUNITY ARCHIVES COLLABORATIVE

The Community Archives Collaborative is a network for knowledge sharing and mutual support among small, community-based archives like ours. The founding members of the CAC (Densho, SAADA, and the Interference Archive, and TAVP), spoke at the 2021 Society of American Archivists Archives and Records conference. In November, the CAC formally kicked off with an interactive workshop about community engagement for community based archives. In 2022, we'll launch more resources for community-based archives and continue to build the CAC network with support from the NHPRC.

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PRESENTATIONS

This year we presented about our work frequently to audiences around the country. Gabriel Solís participated in a roundtable discussion at the Oral History Association annual conference, "Guantànamo: Seeing into the Dark Archive and Why It Matters," and also spoke about our work at the Digital Library Federation and the Archival Imaginaries Symposium. TAVP also contributed to the work of other abolitionist organizations, collaborating on the Laundromat Project's convening, "Abolitionist Storywork: Weaving Collective Narratives of Freedom."

WORKSHOPS

Access to Treatment Initiative Coordinator Susannah Sheffer has led multiple trainings for clinicians on working with family members of people sentenced to death or executed, and TAVP has presented regularly on various aspects of our methods and practices. This included a workshop for the Oral History Association on trauma-informed interviewing, and participating in the Austin History Center and Asian American Resource Center's series, *Stories from the South: Archiving Family History*.

VIRTUAL EVENTS

We held several virtual events throughout 2021, including a poetry reading from *Break and Enter* with Susannah Sheffer and a book reading from *Let the Lord Sort Them* with Maurice Chammah. We hosted a panel featuring narrators from 2021 interviews, called "Sheltering Justice in 2021: A Conversation with Activists and Advocates about COVID in confinement, reimagining public safety, and transformative justice."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TAVP TEAM MEMBERS

Gabriel Solis, Executive Director
Jane Field, Community Archives Director
Murphy Anne Carter, Program Coordinator
Susannah Sheffer, Access to Treatment Coordinator
Amy Kamp, Communications Specialist
Jennifer Toon, Community Advisor
Dr. Susannah Bannon, Ph.D., Community Advisor
Brooke Jones, 2021 Intern
Karen Cheng, 2021 Intern

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Ayshea Khan

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