

A Message from the *Theory in Action* Book Review Editor

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Of all the various problems plaguing the criminal justice system, the wrongful conviction of factually innocent people ranks at the very top of the list. In the United States, as in other countries throughout the world, defendants may be convicted of crimes committed by someone else (a “wrong-person” case). Or, alternatively, defendants may be convicted for a crime that was not actually committed (a “no-crime” case). Both types of cases are a miscarriage of justice and are highlighted in Justin Brooks’ latest book, *You Might Go to Prison, Even Though You’re Innocent*. Justin Brooks, an attorney, law professor, and Founding Director of the California Innocence Project has spent decades helping wrongfully convicted individuals gain their freedom. This issue of *Theory in Action* is special because three burgeoning scholars, all of whom are criminal justice practitioners, have read and reviewed Professor Brooks’ latest book. All three scholars have unique insights and analyze the book page

¹ **Robert M. Worley**, Ph.D. is a Professor of Criminal Justice at Lamar University. He has published extensively in the areas of institutional corrections and correctional officer stress and job burnout. Robert has also published research studies which examine relations between correctional officers and inmates. He has served as an expert witness and was successful in helping plaintiffs win more than \$2.5 million dollars. Most recently, Robert and his colleagues have conducted research related to the behaviors and offending patterns of female sex offender. Robert is also planning a new research project with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. In 2019, Robert was the first recipient of the ACJS Historical Mini-Grant and was awarded \$5,000. He used this funding to produce a documentary titled, “Editorial Excellence” where he and his wife Vidisha interviewed numerous ACJS members about the history of the organization’s journals (documentary available on YouTube). In addition to this, Robert also served as the Editor of *ACJS Today* for six years and was the Editor of *ACJS Now* for three years. Robert also served as Treasurer for the Southwestern Association of Criminal Justice. He has been quoted in *Reuters*, the *New York Times*, the *Dallas Morning News*, the *Marshall Project*, and the *Houston Chronicle*, among others.

by page as they cite scholarly journal articles to support their observations. These three book review essays collectively comprise a symposium—where scholars come together and discuss a significant academic work. Normally at academic conferences, this would be referred to as an “Author Meets Critics Session”—only in this case, the author will not be responding to the reviewers and the authors are not overly critical of this work—because it is quite good.

As Justin Brooks illustrates throughout his book, wrongful convictions may reflect, at least in part, systemic racism in society. African Americans constitute roughly 13% of the population yet they represent almost 50% of exonerations in the United States (Norris, Bonventre, and Acker, 2018). This may be due to factors, such as mistaken identification in cross-racial crimes or the fact that these actors may have less of an ability to launch an aggressive criminal defense. Regardless of whether or not someone is a liberal or a conservative, everyone should be able to get on board with legislation that curtails wrongful convictions. After all, as stated by the late C. Ronald Huff, when innocents are convicted, the guilty go free (Huff, 2002). Nobody wins when a person is wrongfully convicted. And, while only the most serious cases of wrongful convictions, such as murder or rape, tend to be discussed, there is evidence that misdemeanor defendants may also be victims of wrongful convictions (Acker, Redlich, Bonventre, and Norris, 2016). We all know that public defense attorneys have high caseloads and may encourage their clients to plead guilty. Oftentimes, their clients may be poor and have significant mental health and substance abuse issues which further compounds this problem.

It is my sincere hope that you enjoy perusing through the pages of this book review symposium—which I believe is the first one to be featured in *Theory in Action*—at least in the past several years. Each scholar has a unique approach to interpreting the material and each of the three review essays are distinct and have their own voice. Even though *You Might Go to Prison, Even Though You're Innocent* has an April 2023 publication date and is fairly new, it is likely to be regarded as a classic. Justin Brooks provides real-life examples that simply captivate the reader. This may be one of the most honest and important books you read in the 2020s. For this reason, I believe this book is worthy of a symposium, and I hope you feel the same way. The book review essays were all written with a lot of heart by three of my best graduate students at Lamar University. Without any further ado, please enjoy the symposium.

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