

# THE GATE

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Cover Photography, Jason Smith



Photography by Molly Morrow '24

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## INTERVIEW SECTION

# ENGAGED ALIENATION: DR. RUSSELL MOORE ON CHRISTIANITY AND AMERICAN POLITICS

By Tyler Ashman '25

Admittedly, it was strange to see Dr. Russell Moore on the University of Chicago's campus.

At a time when "evangelical" is a dirty, politicized word in liberal America, Dr. Moore is a Bible-believing, socially conservative, evangelical Christian, born so far south that his Mississippi hometown is on the Gulf of Mexico. For eight years, he helmed the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the Southern Baptist Convention's policy arm in Washington, D.C., where he affirmed a pro-life, pro-traditional marriage, and pro-religious liberty agenda - a far cry from the general political consensus at UChicago.

Nonetheless, Moore has become an outspoken critic of some startling trends in American evangelicalism over the past several years. He has challenged the opposition to racial justice in the church. He advocates for immigration reform. He has sought justice for sexual abuse survivors in the church. His antipathy towards Christian nationalism has put him at odds with some portions of the religious right - including many in his own denomination.

Then, mere months after his break from the Southern Baptist Convention, Dr. Moore found himself at UChicago's Institute of Politics in the fall of 2021, teaching both religious and atheist students about basic issues in American evangelicalism. Through these talks and his new role as Director of the Public Theology Project at Christianity Today, Moore juggles multifaceted objectives: he critiques the ills of the modern religious right, informs non-believers how to better engage with religious communities, advances the Christian gospel, and encourages both believers and non-believers alike to pursue a holistic, pluralist politics.

I sat down with Dr. Moore in hopes of better understanding his aspirations for faith and public life, and he offered thoughts on the state of the church, tools for those inside and outside of evangelicalism to better engage with each other, and an optimistic vision for improved Christian political engagement.

This interview has been condensed and lightly edited for clarity.

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Tyler Ashman: In many of your recent interviews, you've been asked to evaluate the negative sides of evangelicalism in the public square: Christian nationalism, resistance to racial justice, sexual abuse in the church, et cetera. But I'd love to begin on a lighter note. In your view, what should Christian engagement in the political sphere look like?

Russell Moore: There's a long Christian tradition of a kind of "engaged alienation" - of people who are not defined by ideologies or by the cultures around them. They, as the New Testament puts it, are "seeking a different city." Yet, out of love of neighbor, they remain engaged in their communities, which also has a long Biblical tradition.

One of the reasons that people see mostly the bad news when it comes to evangelical Christianity is because controversy is what is reported. Most of the people doing the writing are concerned with politics - which is perfectly legitimate - but that means you're not addressing the people who are gathered together, loving each other, spreading the gospel in local churches.

I was just talking to a liberal Muslim friend this morning who said to a group of people, "If a natural disaster hits you, the people who are going to show up first to your door will be the Southern Baptists. Not the Red Cross." And that's true. That's a part of it that people don't see.

Ashman: There are some Christians who think that this political ethic must be fundamentally progressive, and others who think it should be conservative. Do you think that the progressive-conservative axis matters in this conversation, or is "engaged alienation" beyond political binaries?

Moore: Well, it's usually an artificial division. What counts as conservative and what counts as progressive changes, not only from historical epic to historical epic, but sometimes from personality to personality.

Ultimately, being a Christian is following Jesus: someone who is neither identifying with the Sadducees nor the Pharisees, neither with the Zealots nor the Roman collaborators, but someone who has an entirely different mission. That sometimes intersects with various other people. So, if what's driving us is an ideology, that means that we're always going to fit into a predictable pattern and change with where those ideologies are going. But if we have consciences that are shaped and formed by the gospel, we're going to often be in a situation where we don't fit into the usual categories.

Ashman: Recently, you've taken a new step in your career where you're doing some of this work as the Director of the Public Theology Project at Christianity Today. What is public theology? Who is its intended audience? Why does it matter?

Moore: It is an application of theology to life, which means that it's a two-way conversation: addressing the outside world on what Christianity is and how Christianity speaks to various issues, and then speaking to those inside the church about how to engage with outsiders. How to have consciences that are shaped and formed, and then also how to engage with people who don't agree

- which every person has to do.

Ashman: I've been focusing on mostly intra-Christian discussions thus far, but we both know that these conversations are often overheard by the general public. You've talked a lot about a broad cultural illiteracy on evangelicalism, and religion writ large, in the United States. In an interview with David French after the 2020 election, you said, "There's a sense in the outside world that evangelicalism is primarily a political reality. It drives me crazy when I'm talking to journalists who think that evangelicals are like cicadas who go into dormancy between Iowa Caucuses."

Obviously, that's not the case. So, are there ways that non-Christians can improve their engagement with Christian communities, and particularly conservative evangelical communities, even if they don't understand their internal logics?

Moore: Yes. The ideological and cultural sorting of America results in populations who don't even know the people they're opposing. So, when I'm speaking to people inside the church, I'm often asking them to understand the best arguments of the people who are opposing them. That's the way to actually speak to those people, rather than to speak about them to one's own tribe. When I'm talking to those on the outside, I usually say, "It's okay for you to disagree with evangelical Christianity, but you need to know what you're opposing."

I think that a biblical illiteracy within the church leads to a cultural Christianity that's ideologically defined. Biblical illiteracy in the outside world often means a caricature of, and condescension to, people who are motivated by religion. In order to accurately even describe them, you have to spend some time saying, "How do they see the world?"

What I often say to people inside the church - and it applies to those on the outside - is to say, "No one sees himself or herself sitting in a lair like a supervillain. Everyone sees himself or herself as the protagonist in the narrative. What you have to know is why. What's the story that that person is telling himself or herself? You have to understand that before you can speak to that person. Otherwise, when you're speaking to someone in terms of a caricature, that person knows, "You don't even know who I am, so why should I take seriously what you're saying?"

Ashman: Are there norms of political engagement that non-Christians can demand of evangelicals in the public sphere?

Moore: Secular America should expect an evangelical Christianity that understands the pluralistic nature of American society and is not lamenting the loss of a Christian America. In an evangelical understanding of what it means to be a Christian - a new birth - there never was a Christian America. At best, we have a pre-Christian America.

And the outside world should expect that we would live up to our own beliefs. For all the rhetoric about evangelicals imposing their beliefs upon others, that almost never happens. What we do see, though, is evangelicals who are compromising their own convictions for some political reality

or the other.

Even when the outside world disagrees with evangelical Christians, they ought to disagree with us because we hold to gospel conviction and love of neighbor, not because we're Machiavellian political actors.

Ashman: To pivot to something that's a little more relevant for myself personally: you recently wrote a book called *The Courage to Stand*, where you talk about what it looks like to honor God faithfully in this culture. Some people saw that as an allegory for your response to the Trump presidency, but you've been adamant to say that it came from an investigation into college campus ministries.

As someone who's been very involved in college ministry myself, where we were really wrestling with questions of race, gender, politics, and being faithful to Christ through those conversations, I'm interested to hear how younger Christians can help renegotiate a better public theology of these issues.

Moore: I often quote Wendell Berry these days, who, in speaking to an entirely different issue, said that there are no large-scale solutions to these large-scale problems. He was talking about environmental issues particularly, but I think it applies here as well. Berry said, "What we need is not a large-scale solution, but many small solutions."

I think the answer is not winning a battle for the soul of evangelical America. The answer would be a Christian loving Christ, being shaped and formed by the church, and giving his or her life in service to Christ. That's often going to be lonely at first, but that's the way God builds community. The irony is similar to the one who would save his life and thus lose it. The one who longs for community sometimes must lose it in the short run, in order to have it in the long run.

Moore: I think that the way to move forward will sound like a Sunday school answer, but it's because Sunday school was right. What's important is being shaped by the biblical storyline and by giving oneself over to the ordinary means of grace. The ordinary aspects of discipleship. That's what really changes things.

Ashman: One last question for you. For those people who are interested in learning more, there is no shortage of people, think tanks, and organizations who are addressing them right now. Are there any people you think are talking about these issues in a really good way?

Moore: Oh, I think there are a lot of people who are talking about it in a really good way! I think that the work of Tim Keller is really important right now. The work of an older missiologist by the name of Leslie Newbigin is amazingly relevant to the present moment. And, outside of the church, I give away copies of Jonathan Haidt's *The Righteous Mind* almost every week, because I think his analysis of the way people operate out of intuition is accurate. If people understood the central point he is making, we would be able to have more genuine conversations and better disagreements.

UNITED STATES SECTION

# VIRGINIA GUBERNATORIAL RACE INVOKES 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

By Elisabeth Snyder '25 and Max Broening '25

Even though Joe Biden and Donald Trump are not on the ballot this November, they might as well be. Virginia's gubernatorial election, the first competitive statewide race since 2020, will likely serve as an endorsement or indictment of the Biden administration and as a bellwether for the upcoming midterm elections. Joe Biden won Virginia by ten points in 2020, solidifying Virginia's status as a "blue" state. However, polling in the Commonwealth's gubernatorial race is calling that confidence into question.

Because Virginia is one of only two states with gubernatorial elections this year, all eyes are on Virginia voters as they elect the Commonwealth's 74th governor on November 2.



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One year after President Joe Biden decisively defeated former president Donald Trump in Virginia, polls show that former Virginia governor Terry McAuliffe (D) and former Carlyle Group executive Glenn Youngkin (R) are virtually tied in the race to determine who will be Virginia's next governor. The final pre-election Monmouth University poll recorded 46 percent support each among registered voters, closer than anticipated given that McAuliffe maintained a 5-point lead in September and August polls and Democrats have won every statewide race for more than a decade. According to FiveThirtyEight's poll aggregate, McAuliffe leads by an average of 2.3 percent, a significant drop in support after he was favored to win by eight percent in early August.

McAuliffe served as Virginia's 72nd governor from 2013-2017, but Virginia's rule against consecutive terms prevented him from running again. He is the insider in the race, whereas Youngkin presents himself as a political outsider in his bid for governor, having never held elected office.

As governor, McAuliffe created over 200,000 jobs, cut unemployment from 5.7 to 3.3 percent with unemployment decreases in all cities and counties across the Commonwealth, raised personal income by 14%, and wrote the bid that led Amazon to build their second headquarters ("HQ2") in Arlington, Virginia, though the company didn't reach that decision until after his term ended. Under the leadership of Governor Ralph Northam (D), Virginia has been ranked as the #1 state for business for two consecutive years. Northam also passed Medicaid expansion in Virginia, after McAuliffe failed in one of the major priorities of his first term: convincing the Republican-controlled legislature to vote to expand Medicaid.

Until September 2020, Youngkin served as the co-CEO of the global private equity firm the Carlyle Group after playing a number of significant management roles since joining the company in 1995. His management experience extended to leading the Carlyle buyout teams in some of the world's leading markets, including the US and the UK. Youngkin was later named co-chief operating officer in 2014, and ultimately, co-chief executive officer of Carlyle in 2018. However, his record has come under scrutiny for Carlyle's recommendations to move jobs overseas, increase rent for seniors on fixed incomes, and cut corners on healthcare treatment for kids and nursing home residents, including some in Virginia. Youngkin's campaign has denied that he was involved in those decisions. Youngkin has won support for his pro-business rhetoric and policy proposals among voters in rural areas, winning in western Virginia with 66 percent to McAuliffe's 27 percent.

Youngkin and McAuliffe both have a history supporting economic development, but elsewhere their policy proposals diverge. McAuliffe supports vaccine mandates by employers; Youngkin does not. McAuliffe argues that progressive social pol-

icies, like encoding Roe v. Wade in the Virginia Constitution to preserve access to abortion and vaccination mandates, will attract skilled workers and boost Virginia's economy, in accordance with Biden's Build Back Better plan. At a debate last month, when Youngkin was asked whether a hospital could require a nurse treating immunocompromised cancer patients to get vaccinated, he said no. Youngkin argues that vaccine mandates could inhibit economic development by discouraging employees from staying in the workforce, citing the fact that Virginia ranks 44th in the nation in job recovery. Youngkin is not actually anti-vaccine, however - he has urged Virginians to choose vaccination. Whether a vaccine-focused narrative will help or hinder either campaign, however, is up in the air: while most Virginians support vaccination mandates for workers and teachers, this support is concentrated in metropolitan areas across the state.

Similar to Biden in the 2020 race, McAuliffe has painted himself as an experienced governor prepared to lead Virginia's COVID-19 recovery, whereas Youngkin did not release his first official policy proposal until the summer, and sourced many of his economic proposals from Trump economic advisor Stephen Moore. McAuliffe has released more than 130 pages of detailed policy proposals since his campaign launch in December 2020, totaling 20 plans for COVID-19 economic recovery, a record \$2 billion investment in education, and affordable healthcare.

In Youngkin's Day One plan, he outlines plans to build at least 20 new charter schools across the Commonwealth, expanding school choice statewide. Youngkin's education agenda also included banning critical race theory in public schools; in early October, he criticized McAuliffe for his statement that "I don't think parents should be telling schools what they should teach" following tensions over critical race theory, treatment of transgender students, and school mask mandates that arose in Loudoun County. In contrast, McAuliffe opposes creating more charter schools, of which there are seven currently in the state. His stance against charter schools is longstanding: as governor in 2016, McAuliffe vetoed three school choice bills that would have facilitated transfers for students in poorly-performing schools, set up education funds for parents of disabled students, and established a statewide virtual school. Instead, public education is a priority of McAuliffe's - he has promised to invest a record \$2 billion in education, raise teacher pay above the national average for the first time in Virginia history, expand pre-K to all 3- and 4-year-olds in need, and implement cost-effective post-secondary education opportunities in high-demand fields like computer science. Despite claiming public education to be a priority, however, McAuliffe has sent four of his five children to private school.

Youngkin has also floated the idea of eliminating Virginia's income tax, a policy that would eliminate 72 percent of Virginia's general fund

budget with drastic cuts to education and public safety. McAuliffe has not discussed his tax plan at length, but both Youngkin and McAuliffe are in favor of eliminating the grocery tax. Neither has plans to supplement lost income from the grocery tax. Youngkin also plans to suspend increases to the gas tax and double the standard deduction for income tax.

This is the first competitive statewide race since the 2020 presidential election, which makes it a litmus test for the 2022 midterms. Though Virginia has been a solidly blue state for the past decade, polls are slipping nationwide. A McAuliffe victory would signal continued support for the Democrats' national agenda, whereas his loss could mean sweeping Republican victories in the 2022 midterms.

Hoping to energize voters, McAuliffe has framed the race as a referendum on Donald Trump. Youngkin has been endorsed by Trump three times since the end of the Republican primary in May and embraced Trump's focus on election integrity, promising an "election integrity task force" and saying during the initial stages of the campaign that election integrity was one of the most pressing issues Virginia faces. He has advocated for reinstating restrictive voter ID laws "making it easy to vote and harder to cheat."

At a recent rally for Youngkin, which he did not attend, attendees said the Pledge of Allegiance to a flag hung at a Capitol insurrection rally on January 6. Youngkin later released a statement calling the rally "weird and wrong." The statement also thanked the event organizer, a former Trump campaign manager, for supporting his campaign.


Youngkin's campaign has wavered on whether to capitalize on Youngkin's ties to Trump. In July, Youngkin's campaign released an advertisement connecting McAuliffe to Trump, arguing that McAuliffe "spends all his time attacking Donald Trump, but here's the truth...McAuliffe did anything to get Trump's money," referring to a \$25,000 donation McAuliffe received from Trump in 2009.

As Election Day draws closer, Democrats are betting on support from national political figures to pull McAuliffe and local candidates through in Virginia. In the lead-up to Election Day, McAuliffe has campaigned with President Biden, Dr. Jill Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, former president Barack Obama, Georgia voting rights leader Stacey Abrams, and the Dave Matthews Band. Youngkin has campaigned with former UN Ambassador and Governor of South Carolina Nikki Haley, former Vice President Mike Pence, former President Donald Trump, and Steve Bannon.

McAuliffe is looking to extend Democrats' winning streak, but Biden's national popularity is plummeting after failures with inflation and the Afghanistan withdrawal. In this critical race, an indicator for the 2022 midterms, all eyes are on Virginia—and this referendum on Trump and Biden.

## CHICAGO SECTION

## CHICAGO POLICE

A line of Chicago Police officers in uniform standing in front of a building with "CHICAGO POLICE" signage at night. The officers are wearing dark blue uniforms with "CHICAGO POLICE" patches on their sleeves. The building behind them has a textured, light-colored facade with the words "CHICAGO POLICE" in large, illuminated, white letters. The scene is lit by streetlights, creating a high-contrast, somewhat somber atmosphere.

## THE CONTINUED CALL FOR POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

By Molly Morrow '24

Chad Williams, former civilian commanding officer of the Chicago Police Department's (CPD) audit division resigned this past August over the department's failure to work towards reform. In his email of resignation to Mayor Lightfoot, Williams stated, "Unfortunately, my disappointment with the inability of this department's top leadership to even feign interest in pursuing reform in a meaningful manner has made it impossible for me to remain involved." Williams's resignation reignites the conversation surrounding CPD's controversial reputation, a topic recently in the spotlight in July 2021 when Gov. Pritzker's criminal justice reform bill went into effect, increasing training hours and gearing up for statewide body camera use by 2025, offering a new vision for police accountability in the future. However, reformers outside the department, and some like Chad Williams who have worked within it, believe that reform remains stagnant.

### CPD: A History of Misconduct

Williams joined CPD in 2018 and oversaw the audit division, which is responsible for evaluating its procedures and conduct. The year before, Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan filed a lawsuit against the City of Chicago regarding Chicago's repeated instances of police conduct. As a result, the Attorney General Office and the City of Chicago worked together to put CPD under a consent decree which took effect in 2019. The 2019 consent decree is an order by the federal government for CPD to reform its training procedures, use of force, crisis responses, etc. It creates a specific timeline for reform and serves as an "enforceable plan," ensuring the guidelines stipulated by the federal government are followed and the required reforms are implemented within the established time frame. As such, Williams spent his time with CPD addressing their controversial reputation.

In spite of his work, CPD reports of misconduct and excessive violence persisted throughout his tenure and continue to make headlines today. Thirteen year-old Adam Toledo's death by police fire in Chicago's Little Village on Mar. 29 sparked major outrage and protests across the city, as bodycam videos showed what appeared to be an unarmed Toledo chased down and fatally shot. Public criticism was outspoken, calling for disciplinary action for the officer, Eric Stillman, who has been placed on administrative duty as the incident is deliberated on, but has not been charged with or punished for Toledo's death.

Misconduct and controversy pervade not just CPD's rank-and-file, but its leadership as well. John Catanzara, Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) Lodge 7 President, has incited backlash several times in recent years, most recently his comments sympathizing with the January 6th Capitol insurrection. These comments, much like his 2017 Facebook post expressing support for then-President Trump while in uniform, went largely unpunished with only a reprimand, and Catanzara only recently retired as an officer on Nov. 16, though he retains his role as FOP President, a three-year term ending in 2023.

A 2020 audit of the force suggests that these cases are not outliers, but symptoms of a larger culture of uncorrected misconduct. Conducted by Chad Williams just months after Adam Toledo's death, the audit found that 6,153 CPD officers, or about 47 percent of the department, had received one or more complaint investigations, about 20 percent of which were sustained.

Despite controversy after controversy, CPD has largely failed to take responsibility for the issues its police force has accrued, issuing reprimands but rarely enforcing stricter punishments for officers that ignore department procedures or use excessive violence. Williams's resigna-

tion reflects a sense of disillusionment among reformers at CPD's repeated failures to address these issues in a meaningful way. In his August 2021 email to Mayor Lightfoot, Williams remarked that the reforms made have been merely a superficial, 'check the boxes' plan aimed at minimizing negative media coverage on CPD, rather than addressing the more pervasive problems within the department.

### Creating Meaningful Reform in CPD

Currently, there are a few measures in place in the city of Chicago to monitor police misconduct. The Independent Police Review Authority (IPRA) was formed in 2007 as a reorganization of the Office of Professional Standards, an entity created in 1974 intended to investigate police brutality, which in reality worked directly with CPD and had little effect on exposing and reducing police violence. The IPRA works independently from CPD to review allegations of police misconduct. Another organization, Chicago's Civilian Office of Police Accountability, which was created in 2016, conducts investigations on instances of police misconduct, releasing body cam and video footage of police violence, and works with Chicago's government in creating policies that prevent further police violence.

Despite these protocols, activists and many civilians within CPD believe there is still significant work to be done. In "Re-imagine Chicago," a WBEZ interview from June 28 with Sasha-Ann Simons, a journalist and host of the WBEZ Chicago talk show *Reset*, Williams describes the reform process as an "ongoing conversation." He recommends that "even when things are going really well, we have to make sure that everyone involved, the community, the department, all of the nonprofits" are involved in creating change. In the same "Re-imagine Chicago" interview, Deborah Witzburg, former Chicago deputy inspector general for public safety, echoed Williams' sentiments, speaking on the necessity of both bottom-up and top-down changes that engage citizens to address the failings of CPD leadership and officers alike.

Witzburg offers three suggestions for improving police responses and accountability. First, she recommends reevaluating what should be handled by CPD and what should be outsourced to other groups. Second, she emphasizes the importance of improved training and supervision, such as educating officers in mental health and domestic violence de-escalation strategies. Finally, she suggests that there be a government entity familiar with the workings of Chicago overseeing CPD behavior. These steps, Witzburg believes, are practical measures with the potential to greatly improve CPD's working

procedures, create a system of accountability for officers, and foster trust between police and the communities they serve.

### 'Culture Eats Policy for Breakfast' and Other Obstacles to Reform

These suggestions from figures like Williams and Witzburg offer practical reforms to increase police accountability. However, in light of Williams's resignation, there are clearly deep-seated problems within the department that are preventing these reforms from taking hold. In Williams's "Re-imagine Chicago" interview, he discusses both these difficulties and potential strategies for overcoming them based on his experience in the audit division.

According to Williams, effective reforms are not just changes in the rules, but processes that require significant time, effort, and resources in order to be implemented. This also requires increased communication and training between the city government and CPD, and between CPD leadership and individual officers, so that the entire police force understands the changes being implemented. For behavior and accountability to change, the rank-and-file of CPD must be made aware of the standards to which they are being held.

Williams also describes an inherent struggle in changing protocol or enacting reforms in "an organization that is as old and entrenched in its culture as the Chicago Police Department." At CPD, there is pressure to not "step in the wrong spot or do anything that would negatively affect those above you." Witzburg echoes these sentiments, saying that reforms recommended by her office are largely ignored by CPD, creating significant stagnation in the reform process. Evoking the adage 'culture eats policy for breakfast,' she says that "a problematic institutional culture will never be overcome, even by good policy-making." Without a culture open to reform, reform will never take hold.

The Fraternal Order of Police poses an added obstacle to necessary cultural change. In an article from the National Lawyers Guild, Illinois Attorney Elizabeth J. Andonova argues that the FOP "makes a significant effort to shape narratives of police misconduct incidents to protect officers." She alleges that these rhetorical techniques have kept many officers from facing disciplinary action for misconduct, exemplifying yet another cultural roadblock to instituting meaningful reforms.

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## CHICAGO SECTION

Confronting apathy and disillusionment within the force, even separate from entrenched institutions like the FOP, is of paramount importance. As Witzburg remarks, “policing in Chicago is not a good system with a couple of bad people in it; it is a bad system with a lot of really good people in it.” Given this belief that the police system is historically flawed, it is not difficult to see how many CPD officers, as well as city officials, become frustrated with the current state of the department and its hesitation in enacting reform. In 2021, CPD is set to lose over one thousand officers to resignation or retirement, the highest figure since 2018. While this may simply be turnover, many officers, like Williams, appear to be disillusioned with the current state of CPD and its unwillingness towards change.

### Overcoming Problematic Police Culture Nationwide

The future of CPD reform is uncertain, but an issue of paramount importance: Witzburg terms the recent CPD controversies a “crisis in transparent and accountable policing.” Citizen support for police reform is widespread. A 2020 Gallup poll found that 58 percent of Americans believed police departments nationwide were in need of major reform, 36 percent believed they were in need of minor changes, and only 6 percent believed no change was necessary. Accountable policing, in CPD and nationwide, is an issue that involves not only law enforcement bodies, but the communities they serve, who are largely pro-reform.

CPD’s entrenched culture appears to be the greatest roadblock in the reforms for which citizens are advocating. To begin these reforms, CPD may benefit from looking at national suggestions for improving a problematic police culture.

Ferguson, Missouri, where today’s Black Lives Matter movement took form, offers one suggestion: eliminating incentives for officers to charge citizens. In an investigation following Michael Brown’s death, the Justice Department

found that Ferguson officers were “encouraged to ticket as many people as possible with the explicit goal of raising as much revenue as possible from fines and fees.” This led to the department targeting vulnerable groups, Black residents, the LGBTQ community, etc. Similar protocols involving explicit quotas to increase revenue also exist in places like New York City. Disincentivizing arrests and tickets may serve as one reform to the problematic culture in many police departments, including CPD.

Minneapolis, Minnesota, the site of George Floyd’s death, suggests two other potential reforms: increased training in de-escalation strategies and limitation of the power of the Fraternal Order of Police. Despite policies requiring officers to stop use of excessive force by other officers, Derek Chauvin was not stopped by the officers with him. A 2016 Police Executive Research Forum survey found that police officers spend a combined 107 hours on self-defense and gun training, and only eight hours on de-escalation tactics and crisis response strategies. Though de-escalation training is required in Minnesota, further redistribution of training hours may have prevented such an outcome. The benefits of redistributing training hours can be seen in places like Louisville, Kentucky, where a study found that officers completing de-escalation training received fewer citizen complaints and 28 percent less incidents of excessive police force. Limiting police union power is another possible solution. The Minneapolis union president Bob Kroll publicly discredited outcry over Floyd’s death, defending the officers involved and belittling the efforts of protestors. Minimizing the power the FOP has in the proceedings of police departments across the country, including CPD, has the potential to counteract some of the problematic institutional hesitation to reform.

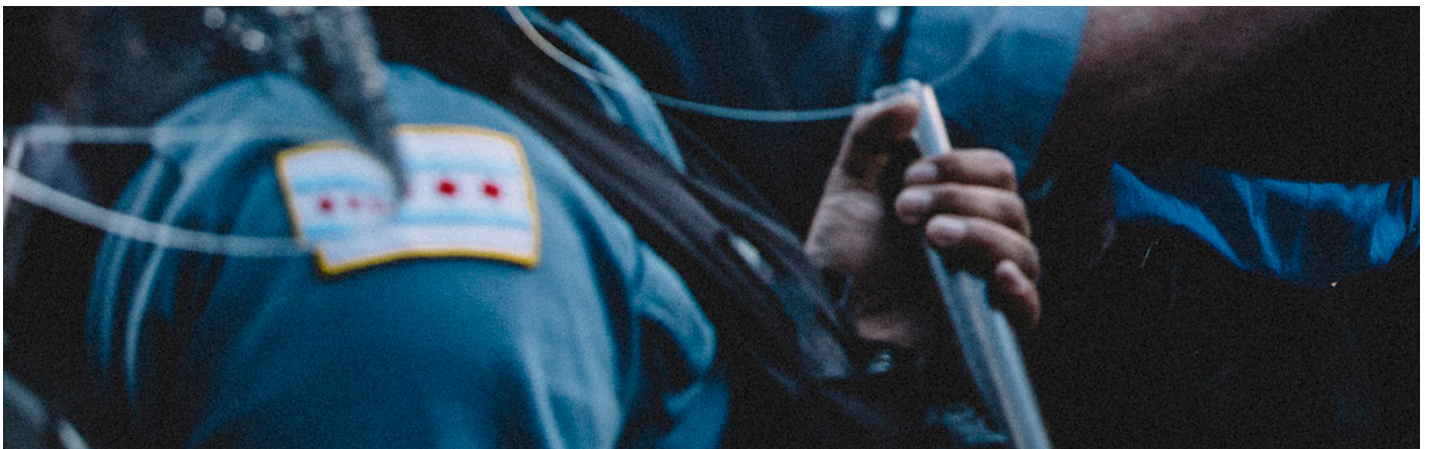
One national example of promising police reform efforts which CPD may look to is that of Camden, New Jersey. Camden is famous for eradicating its existing police force and rebuilding an entirely new one, overhauling its prior

practices and instituting a number of progressive reforms. The new Camden police force’s practices center on training that discourages escalation whenever possible and requires that officers step in when they see instances of excessive force. In a move that created significant backlash, the reforms also ended officers’ existing union contracts, addressing the cultural issues brought on by the FOP. These changes came largely as a result of activists’ efforts, who put pressure on government officials to institute these policies. As New Jersey Governor Chris Christie said, in response to how to address this violent and problematic police culture, “the most effective way to do that was to start over.” These efforts were successful in reducing crime as well as the rate of police brutality.

A look at these American cities demonstrate the necessary changes to police department procedures to combat a long-standing culture of corruption and misconduct. Stories of police brutality in Ferguson and Minneapolis point to procedural changes which would require greater accountability, in order to combat police culture. Furthermore, an example like that of Camden, New Jersey, demonstrates that even those reforms may not be enough, and that major overhaul of the department may be necessary to eradicate the problematic ideologies that pervade CPD.

Chad Williams’s resignation is likely only the beginning in terms of public outcries for reform or total upheaval. Looking to national examples of police reform, the Chicago government and CPD leadership are tasked with policy-making that will address not only police brutality, but also its institutional and cultural roots, to begin seeing meaningful change.

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## OPINION SECTION

# WHY MONOPOLIES RULE THE INTERNET AND HOW WE CAN STOP THEM

By Zander Arnao '23

Monopolies rule the internet. Alphabet owns search; Amazon runs e-commerce; Apple has the hardware; Meta controls social networking; and Microsoft dominates business software. The mantra of modern industry is monopoly, and the internet is one of its victims. Since the beginning of the millennium, the technology sector has concentrated rapidly. After decades of optimism about innovation and the internet, concentration has ushered in an age of backlash and skepticism. Technology companies have enclosed what was once an open, de-centralized system within a number of differentiated platforms, silos which entrench their dominance and lessen the vitality of social discourse. The remaining monopolies possess exceptional power to govern vast digital communities with little accountability.

The communications system has long been essential to American democracy. The dominance of Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Meta, and Microsoft subvert what can and should be a profoundly democratizing force. Because these monopolies deter competition, digital services are reduced in quality and created less often. Platforms like Uber and the Amazon marketplace get away with abusive working conditions and massive violations of privacy. In addition, geographic inequities become entrenched as few communities share in the wealth of the digital economy. These structures particularly exclude people of color who are denied employment, business ownership, and representation in the media. Giant corporations extract preferential tax breaks, and their lobbying captures regulatory and legislative bodies. This situation represents an incredible subversion of our democracy. Competition must be restored and a more dynamic and decentralized internet created.

Public policy should effect these changes. The root of concentration is market failure. As a result, the tech monopolies have considerable profit margins and gargantuan market share. This bounty normally draws competitors, yet the lack of new business is evident. Something about digital markets, then, distorts the process of competition. It is widely accepted that tech companies engage in anti-competitive business practices, but more subtly, there exist natural barriers to entry that deter competitors. Where normal market processes fail, government must intervene. Policymakers must use the tools at their disposal, ranging from traditional antitrust to targeted regulation, to create competition. For this to be possible, we need a shared knowledge of why digital markets are uncompetitive and what solutions are on the table.

### Barriers to Competition

Unsurprisingly, the economics of digital markets are novel and complicated. In a comprehensive report, UChicago's Stigler Center at the Booth School of Business concluded that the tech sector "exhibit[s] several economic features that...push these markets towards monopolization by a single company". The first of these features is anti-competitive business practices. Since the emergence of the mainstream internet, large platforms have ruthlessly snuffed out their competition. When upstarts have risen to threaten their dominance, they have aggressively acquired these competitors, often shelving their products or integrating them as additional features in their suite of services. Such was the fate of Instagram, which threatened Meta's hold on social media. In the rare cases in which a startup could not be bought, the internet monopolists employed anti-competitive tactics to kill their opponents through wars of attrition. For example, Amazon slew

the e-commerce company Quisdi through artificially lowered pricing.

Meta and Amazon, along with the rest of big tech, also benefit from extreme economies of scale. This occurs because digital technologies often involve large upfront costs, but after these initial investments, the costs of serving additional customers are close to zero. As a result, there are few natural limits to exponential growth. Digital platforms are able to balloon in size and quickly improve their services using the huge reserves of data they collect from their massive user bases. Smaller companies lack equal access to this data, so they face substantial barriers to competition.

Economies of scope have similar effects because big data doesn't follow the law of diminishing returns. Instead, the value of data grows as the breadth and depth of the information it contains increases. Digital advertising is worth more when informed by a wide array of knowledge attributes about very large groups. When Alphabet knows your age and income, it doesn't get less value—as diminishing returns would predict—from knowing that you searched for a wedding service. In fact, it learns more from this additional piece of information, which is an example of why data often gets more valuable as it gets bigger. This tendency creates an incentive for tech companies to expand into as many markets as possible where they can collect and synthesize data about people from many sources. Google and Amazon, for instance, use data from their smart speakers to enhance their services in other markets like targeted advertising, which makes it difficult for smaller firms to compete with them. This is an example of how economies of scope create barriers to entry for smaller firms; they can't compete in one market because large platforms like Amazon leverage data from many others.



## OPINION SECTION

Network effects are the fourth anti-competitive attribute. This refers to the tendency of consumers to benefit as the number of users grows for a given service. Intuitively, you are more likely to use Facebook instead of a competitor if most of your friends and family are part of the Facebook network. While this added value doesn't grow indefinitely, it poses a substantial barrier for digital businesses—such as social media companies and online marketplaces like Uber—that rely on aggregating users. Even though you might prefer a smaller ride-sharing platform, the fact that most drivers use Uber as a default makes it extraordinarily difficult for other firms to survive. Similarly, drivers will continue to use Uber despite increasingly poor treatment because all of their customers use its service. When new competitors enter the market, they face a “chicken and egg” problem: to compete with Uber, they need drivers, but to get drivers, they need customers. In this way, network effects lock in existing platforms and are a tremendous barrier to competition in the digital markets that exhibit them.

Because of these four economic attributes—exclusionary business practices, economies of scale and scope, and network effects—most markets in the tech sector aren't very competitive. Instead, they are dominated by a single company that extracts high profits and market value. A small number of competitors are able to survive by differentiating their service from the dominant player. For instance, Twitter and TikTok have roughly 78 and 74 million monthly active users, respectively, in the United States (compared with Facebook's 302 million) by offering a different kind of content. You can use Pinterest to find gifts and recipes even while checking Facebook for updates from your friends. By removing barriers to competition with smart regulation, policymakers can clear the way for more and higher quality digital services.

### Focus on Competition

These days, regulating the tech sector is a hot topic, and many ideas—some better than others—are in the conversation. For instance, recent years have seen many calls to break up big tech into smaller companies, but unlike the slew of 20th-century break ups, there's no obvious or easy way for platforms to be separated. Standard Oil and AT&T were broken up by geography, but it makes little sense to create a separate mini Facebook for, say, Florida and California. More importantly, breaking up the large tech companies won't address the fundamental economic factors which underpin their dominance. The mini Facebooks would still be able to employ anti-competitive tactics and ex-

ploit the barriers created by large economies of scale and scope as well as network effects.

Reforming Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act—which shields tech companies from most legal liabilities for content posted by their users—won't address these issues either. In fact, this would probably make them worse. Bigger companies would find it easier to weather the costs of compliance and legal liabilities than their smaller competitors. While there may be compelling reasons to reduce liability protection for digital companies, reforming Section 230 is inherently anti-competitive. Hoping to take advantage of this fact, Meta recently launched an advertising campaign calling for changes to the act. Break-up and expanded legal liabilities won't solve the most fundamental problem of big tech: it's big.

Competition policy for the tech sector must directly address the economic problems that reduce competition. When markets are competitive, companies work hard to keep customers from switching to competing services. Imagine if you could choose from ten or eleven social media networks instead of three or four. The alternatives to Facebook that currently exist compete by providing different kinds of content (Twitter, Pinterest, and TikTok) and protecting privacy (Snapchat). Even with these differences, mainstream networks are hopelessly generic. They build features for very large groups without much specialization and dedicate insufficient resources to research and development. If Facebook and these smaller players had a greatly reduced share of the market, consumers could choose from a wide variety of social networks. Competition recently gave us the novel music videos of TikTok. As new companies arise, they would similarly develop new forms of community, social interaction, and entertainment to power their networks, and existing social media platforms would be forced to improve and diversify their offerings to compete. The internet would once again become centered around people since more options would mean we could hold companies more accountable for their decisions. Thus, the primary aim of tech regulation should be promoting competition.

### Creating Competitive Markets

Luckily, there are plenty of ideas out there about how to foster competition in digital markets. The first is the most obvious: update American antitrust laws. The last meaningful change to regulation of communications markets was the Telecommunications Act of 1996. More than 25 years later, technology has evolved profoundly, and antitrust has yet to catch up. In this regulatory vacuum, tech companies have systematically bought and snuffed

out potential competitors. The regulator primarily responsible for overseeing mergers—the Federal Trade Commission (FTC)—waved through Meta's acquisition of Instagram in 2012 without an investigation, and it did the same for Amazon's acquisition of Whole Foods five years later.

The recent scrutiny of acquisitions by the FTC is a good step forward, but it matters little when judges evaluate mergers using antitrust precedents poorly suited to the information economy. Unlike the industries of old, most tech companies do not charge money for their products, and they compete in markets with fuzzy boundaries. As a result, the standard tests for market monopolization are rapidly becoming toothless. How could the FTC have stopped Amazon, an e-commerce company, from acquiring Whole Foods, a grocer, on the grounds of reducing competition? Traditional antitrust mistakenly views these companies as existing in separate markets. The law needs to catch up with the times, so Congress should empower the FTC or a new regulatory authority with expanded resources and expertise to police the business practices of tech companies.

To address the remaining barriers to competition—massive economies of scale and scope as well as network effects—Congress has an array of policies to consider. First, lawmakers could require platforms to share proprietary data with competitors and empower users with the ability to control the usage and storage of their personal data. If Alphabet can out-compete other search engines for advertising dollars by augmenting its service with smartspeaker data, then policymakers should extend the same level of access to other search engines. Admittedly, this “data pooling” is a somewhat radical step, but it would make competition in digital markets more about the merits of the product than having “better” data. Why should Alphabet hold an 88% share in online search without necessarily having a better search engine?

Another policy that would work along the same lines is data portability. When you choose to leave a streaming service like, say, Spotify, you can't take your data with you. Even though you no longer use its services, Spotify restricts your ability to transfer all the data it has about you: your playlists, liked songs, search history, music preferences, and more. This inflexibility makes it difficult for you to switch to other services because you have to spend a lot of time re-creating it on another streaming platform. The law could require Spotify to make your information “portable” between services and give you the ability to easily delete it, should you want to.

**D**ata portability would require Spotify to let you take your playlists with you to other services. You would no longer be locked into using the service because you've spent years listening to music there. Making data portable would empower users and make the market more competitive by reducing the cost of switching between services.

The last policy idea Congress could consider is mandatory interoperability. Computer systems are interoperable when they can easily exchange information and render it useful for end-users. Social media networks are a great example of systems that aren't interoperable. You can't see Twitter posts on your Facebook account, and it's always really annoying when Android users can't join the group chats you make on iMessage. The only reason social media sites can't process posts or messages from other platforms is that tech companies have chosen not to let them. Network effects explain why. Meta can't monopolize the attention of users in its network when you can see Facebook content on TikTok or other smaller competitors. For that reason, they restrict the flow of content, messages, and other information with other platforms. Regulators could require social media and other tech businesses to interoperate, and in doing so they would make it easier for new companies to compete with big tech companies by sharing in the value of their networks. One of the primary reasons Meta can get away with its monopoly is that it has exclusive control over the connections between its billions of users. If some other company could make it possible to see Facebook content while using its service, it wouldn't matter as much that your friends are all on that particular platform. The network would be shared, and more social media companies could exist as a result. This is the pro-competition rationale for mandatory interoperability.

The common thread uniting these pro-competition policies is that they lubricate the flow of information between digital services. Pooling would equip new search engines or social networks with the big data necessary to draw advertisers, and portability would strengthen the link between users and their data as they move between services. Mandating interoperability would establish rules for the continuous sharing of information and other useful data between platforms. All of these steps would reduce the ability of technology companies to create competitive barriers by monopolizing highly valuable sources of data like user search history or content posted to the Facebook network. As a result, these policies would ease the entry of new companies into highly concentrated digital markets and therefore lessen the dominance of Alpha-

bet, Amazon, Apple, Meta, and Microsoft. We would see greater diversity and innovation—a more open internet.

#### A More Open Internet

The curse of bigness is that the monopoly power possessed by technology companies shields them from the consequences their decisions have on the rest of us. Many commentators have criticized Meta for its ethos of "move fast and break things," but these criticisms miss the more fundamental problem that Meta and the rest of big tech can break things without facing any repercussions. Policies that can rewrite the rules of competition, such as updating antitrust laws, requiring data pooling and portability, and mandating interoperability, are a much-needed remedy for monopolistic concentration. Greater competition is not a panacea, but it does strike at the core of the problem. While much good furnished by the internet is plainly non-commercial, the structures which have closed it are profoundly economic.

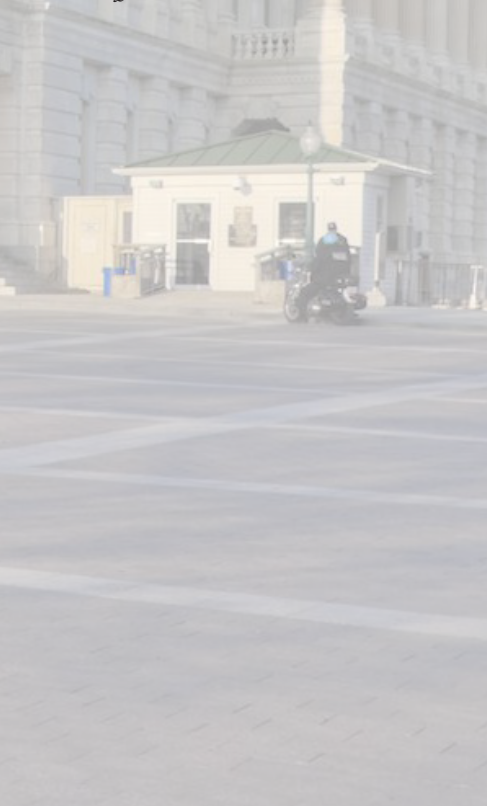
While a more open internet would enrich the entertainment, community, and democracy of digital life, pro-competition policy is not without its downsides. A greater flow of information between platforms would necessarily trade off with privacy and security. One possible form of mandatory interoperability would be a requirement that platforms maintain open Application Programming Interfaces (or APIs, for short). Opening APIs would allow a third-party company to, for instance, aggregate all of your direct messages and texts into one interface or mashup social media feeds so you could see tweets and tiktoks on the same app. These trivial examples demonstrate the innovation that interoperability would allow. However, several open APIs were also why Cambridge Analytica was able to collect the personal data of 50 million Facebook users. A more complex information ecosystem simply entails more vectors of danger, so risks to privacy and security like the case of Cambridge Analytica will require a great deal of care during the implementation of any pro-competition policy.

But these problems are far outweighed by the fruits of competition and decentralization. Can you imagine an internet where most parts of it are not associated with one or two big names? A crucial reason why Facebook violated the privacy of 50 million users is that the platform is so big! When people can easily buy things from six or seven e-commerce platforms, or query eight or nine search engines, they see more diversity and better service. Competition breeds innovation. When companies have to win the patronage of their customers, they invest more in research and development, create novel products and ser-

vices, and glean better insights from the data they collect. Now, because monopolies dominate most digital markets, disruptive firms struggle to find funding, and overall investment is lower and directed toward refining existing technologies. New forms of entertainment and community have failed to emerge due to the dominance of Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Meta, and Microsoft. If the federal government were to require more sharing of information, the internet would be a richer and healthier place.

It is time to move fast and fix things. While risks do exist, the status quo is broken; monopolies rule the internet. Technology isn't inevitably good for democracy, and the current concentration attests to this fact. The internet is a powerful force, and used for pro-social ends, it would help revitalize American social discourse. A more open internet would relieve numerous social harms, from geographic inequity and violations of privacy to abusive working conditions and capture of government. Policymakers must strive to make the web work for democracy, and the best tools at their disposal involve promoting competition. People should rule the internet, not monopolies, and policy can make that a reality. Democracy would be better for it.

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## UNIVERSITY SECTION

# DISINFO, DIALOGUE, AND THE CHICAGO PRINCIPLES

By Teddy Foley '24

The most viewed video on Youtube from the last year involving a UChicago student is a Fox & Friends interview which racked up over 3.5 million views in the last four months. The subject of the interview is Evita Duffy, one of the founders of the Chicago Thinker, a conservative student publication on this campus. This video is by no means an outlier, as Thinker representatives have appeared on cable news dozens of times in the last year, not to mention their numerous appearances on conservative podcast and radio shows such as the Ben Shapiro Show, the Brian Nichols Show, and the Larry Elder Show, among others.

The Chicago Thinker was formally launched in October 2020 and has since found frequent success promoting conservative content and airing grievances with UChicago administrative policy through social media and cable news. Throughout the 2021–22 academic year so far, odds were that if you heard a UChicago student on the news, it was a member of The Thinker cohort. Compared to other student publications and political organizations, The Thinker has experienced remarkable growth and mainstream news coverage, part of which must be credited to the hard work and social media savvy of its members. However, it is evident that the right-wing news media's enormous appetite for conservative college students has also contributed to their rise in the mainstream.

The articles and interviews in The Thinker often begin with a ritualistic appropriation of the foundational liberties our university defends, as if The Thinker, and only The Thinker, still upholds the Chicago Principles. The Thinker uses the UChicago name as both a badge of honor and a symbol of the encroaching “woke

mob.” The storied legacy of our university as a bastion of free expression provides immediate validation in conservative circles, yet the university's student body and faculty members are primarily Democratic, a nearly universal fact of any highly educated subset of urban America. In the tension between these two realities, those representing The Thinker conjure up a tragic tale of the once free university, a true marketplace of ideas, which has barred its gates and retreated to an elite ivory tower.

After the release of the Chicago Principles in 2014, UChicago gained a reputation for its stand on free expression which we all benefit from as students. The Thinker is well aware of this reputation and uses it to appeal to those on the right. Consider this tweet by Thinker staff writer and social media manager Chris Phillips: “[Senator Ted Cruz], at Yale, left-wing activists refuse to respectfully debate non-wokeists. at UChicago, we value free discourse! that's why [Daniel Schmidt] and i confronted [Anne Applebaum] and [Brian Stelter] with hard-hitting questions. we'd love to have you!”

However, when speaking to Tucker Carlson, Chris said, “There's a lot of social pressure to conform to the leftist narrative—to conform to the radical agenda at college campuses, just working for the Chicago Thinker really is kind of inviting you to be ‘canceled’ in a sense.” But if, as he said, “at UChicago, we value free discourse,” why would he get canceled? It seems, according to these statements, that most of our university has turned away from free discourse except the members of The Thinker, who have co-opted the fundamental principles of the university and now consider themselves black sheep in an increasingly liberal herd.

In that light, we should ask, what are the Chicago Principles, anyway? At the heart of

this three-page statement issued by university officials in 2014 is a strong commitment to free expression:

“In a word, the University's fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. It is for the individual members of the University community, not for the University as an institution, to make those judgments for themselves, and to act on those judgments not by seeking to suppress speech, but by openly and vigorously contesting the ideas that they oppose.”

These are lofty and noble ideals, and UChicago students should be concerned when their peers call them out for not living up to the fundamental principles of free expression upon which our university was built. Too often when students discuss their stance on politics and campus issues, they do so without the openness and vigor demanded by the Chicago Principles. A lack of tolerance and passion for the free exchange of ideas leaves the door open for publications like The Thinker to gain a near-monopoly on speech and representation in the media. To their credit, they are not afraid to loudly and passionately state their point of view, which they demonstrated in early April 2022.

At the recent Disinformation Conference hosted by The Atlantic and the UChicago Institute of Politics (IOP), members of The Thinker leveraged pointed questions to create viral sound-bites and videos that quickly gained traction among right-wing social media and news circles. Their clips from the conference have been shared by Ben Shapiro, Newsmax, Fox News, and others.





## UNIVERSITY SECTION

During the controversy, The Thinker's social media following exploded by an order of magnitude, with their Twitter followers jumping from around 4k pre-conference to over 35k at the time of writing. For context, the IOP boasts only 15k Twitter followers, and The Maroon has just 7.5k. The Thinker called their participation in the event a "Media Regime Takedown," but what stands out about the viral video clips from the Disinformation Conference is the banality of the whole affair. The questions asked by members of The Thinker, while clearly designed to expose supposed flaws in the panelists' arguments, were not entirely unreasonable and were generally asked in a respectful manner. The two clips that have garnered the most attention both boil down to a straightforward exchange about whether left-wing media coverage of the Hunter Biden laptop incident and other recent stories were biased. Anne Applebaum of The Atlantic said she did not find the laptop scandal "interesting," and Brian Stelter, a CNN anchor, quipped that the student asking the question was "describing a different channel from the one I watch." Stelter said that the question spoke to the failure of journalism "to show our work" and also spoke more in depth with the student questioner after the panel concluded. All in all, the questions were not the disruptive sort that some on the left—both on and off campus—claimed them to be, and the answers certainly did not represent the dismantling of the mainstream media.

Very little of the drama surrounding the conference seems even to have happened at the conference itself. Instead, much of it took place in the volatile online miasma of Twitter. Journalists on the right and center-right became embroiled in arguments about the imaginary scandal. Meanwhile, most of the panelists who were asked questions attempted to ignore the chaos unfolding on their Twitter

feeds while the conservative wing of Twitter reveled in the supposed humiliation of their pompous political rivals. However, echoes of the social media buzz did ultimately infiltrate the conference, with Jeffrey Goldberg, the editor-in-chief of The Atlantic remarking that "[o]ne darkly humorous but inevitable measurement of our success is that our disinformation conference has been the subject of disinformation campaigns on social media already." His reaction to the overreaction of the internet only produced more fodder for the Twitter feedback loop.

Those paying careful attention to The Thinker's rhetoric may have picked up on the irony that the very students who accused CNN, The Atlantic, and other news organizations of gatekeeping a fake news media hegemony appeared just days later on the most-watched cable news network in the United States. On Fox & Friends, Thinker cofounder Evita Duffy recently said of mainstream media and big tech that "they're interested in taking back power ... and shutting people down by taking algorithmic control over social media platforms." It is difficult for the students of The Thinker to maintain their status as victims of the mainstream media given that they are the only students at our university with seemingly unfettered access to cable news. The Maroon has not been making waves for appearing on MSNBC recently (or any mainstream news organization for that matter). For better or for worse, The Thinker controls a considerable portion of the narrative around students at our school.

Given the amount of airtime this relatively small political group on campus has received, it is fair to consider how UChicago students should feel about this tiny subset of the student body receiving a disproportionate amount of media coverage.

According to their mission statement,

"[t]he Chicago Thinker challenges the mob's crusade against free speech by publishing thoughtful conservative and libertarian commentary, in addition to fact-driven reporting." It is clear that whatever the "mob's crusade" is, it has not yet compelled UChicago students other than those at The Thinker to voice their opinions loudly and think strategically about using modern media to make their message heard. Students who feel the urge to play the role of armchair critic next time The Thinker appears on cable television or drops a particularly controversial article should stand up and play a more active role in the campus- and nation-wide discussion of political issues instead. If you don't like the fact that The Thinker is representing this university, redouble your commitment to working on what you care about. Not solely for the sake of presenting a balanced image of our university and its students to the media, but also to have a meaningful impact on society throughout your lifetime. There is enormous value in exercising your right to free speech beyond Twitter clicks.

Give The Thinker the debate it so desperately begs for. Despite what they claim in their mission statement, members of The Thinker seem a lot more interested in producing content for outside media sources than in stimulating real debate within the UChicago student body. A strong counterbalance and political dialogue on campus would force their hand, revealing whether they consider their peers, faculty, and university to be worthy partners in discourse or simply props in a one-sided love affair with conservative media. The Chicago Principles belong to us all.

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RECIPIENT OF THE DAVID AXELROD REPORTING GRANT

# “NOT A SINGLE DISPENSARY”:

THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM IN ILLINOIS’S WAR ON DRUGS

By Alina Kim '22

**C**HICAGO, Illinois - On a sunny mid-August afternoon, Equity and Transformation (EAT) founder Richard Wallace leans back in his car seat and shrugs at the results of Illinois’s cannabis dispensary lottery.

The Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation had announced the results of the Social Equity Justice Involved Lottery on August 5, which granted cannabis dispensary licenses to 55 lucky Social Equity Applicants. The conditional licenses, in theory, were an effort to encourage inclusivity in the predominantly white-owned cannabis industry, promising greater accessibility to minority-owned businesses. On August 19, another Illinois lottery granted 75 more licenses to businesses from underrepresented neighborhoods. It was meant to be celebratory, a win for Black- and Brown-owned shops.

Wallace, however, was rather unimpressed.

“I didn’t have a reaction,” he admits. “No amount of licenses is going to complete our struggle for drug war reparations. It’s currently not getting better for survivors of the War on

Drugs because of dispensary licenses.”

A formerly incarcerated person himself, Wallace finds the state’s efforts to further diversity in the cannabis industry too shallow. For Wallace and other Chicago community leaders, news that solely focuses on progressive steps in the cannabis industry largely avoids the history of a particular violence inflicted on Chicago’s Black community: the War on Drugs.

The War primarily works within the system of incarceration and police surveillance. In Illinois, two-thirds of the 35,000 prisoners released annually come from the same seven zip codes in the South and West Sides of Chicago. According to a 2008 study, of the drug offenders returning to their Chicago homes, 92% were Black. The residents of these South Side and West Side neighborhoods, too, report lower rates of trust toward the Chicago Police Department than their Northern counterparts. In a December 2021 survey, the numbers were 52-54 (meaning, 5.2 to 5.4 out of 10), compared to 63-64 (6.3 to 6.4 out of 10), respectively.

Fifty years since its conception, the War on Drugs has been widely regarded as a failure by

83% of Americans, with 65% of them calling for an end to the policy. Some estimate that the crackdown has cost United States taxpayers over \$1 trillion. In 2015 alone, the federal government spent more than \$3.3 billion to incarcerate people on drug charges, for which US prisons now hold up to 500,000 incarcerated people at any given time. Black and Brown communities often have no space to grieve as they continue to face racially motivated drug crackdowns. 2020 brought these attitudes into the national spotlight: an unconscious Breonna Taylor was murdered during a drug raid and post-mortem accusations asserted that THC, not Derek Chauvin, killed George Floyd.

“We are haunted by the trope of the drug addict,” Wallace observes. “It works in the process of criminalizing the [Black person] so well that it dehumanizes us, no matter the circumstance. It’s worked that way for forty, fifty years now. I’m not fighting for social equity because I want people to use drugs all the time. No, we are in this because we have said for decades that we want the government to stop arresting and locking up our people.”

Cracking down

Fifty years ago last summer, President Richard Nixon declared a War on Drugs. Seeking reelection amidst the political controversies of the Vietnam War, Nixon moved to criminalize heroin and marijuana to create scapegoats out of “hippies” and Black people. According to former Nixon domestic policy chief John Ehrlichman, the War on Drugs was a political assault that would “disrupt those communities... arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news.”

While Ehrlichman’s comment, published in *HARPER* twenty two years after the interview, has been contested by his children, the War on Drugs indeed disrupted major cities, separating families, taking students out of schools, and locking desperate fathers behind bars. In the 1970s, New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller faced two crises in New York City: a rampant heroin crisis and a homicide rate four times higher than it is in the city today. Initially a champion of job training, housing assistance, and drug rehabilitation, Rockefeller infamously turned to embrace a zero-tolerance policy in 1973, when he enacted what would become one of the blueprints for the modern system of mass incarceration: the Rockefeller Drug Laws. These laws mandated sentences from 15 years up to life in prison for the possession of any narcotic, including heroin and cocaine; life sentences for people who committed a violent crime under the influence of illegal narcotics; and adult sentencing for teenage dealers. In other words, drug dealers, drug addicts, and casual recreational users all deserved maximum punishment.

Rockefeller defended his about-face to harsh punitive measures, promising the public that his drug laws were a last resort decision to battle addiction in New York.

“This is a time for brutal honesty regarding narcotics addiction,” the governor pleaded with the public. “In this State [of New York], we have tried every possible approach to stop addiction and save the addict through education and treatment—that we could rid society of this disease and dramatically reduce mugging on the streets and robbing in the homes.” He used Black vernacular to appeal to his constituents of color: “Let’s be frank—let’s ‘tell it like it is.’ The crime, the muggings, the robberies, the murders associated with addiction continue to spread a reign of terror. Whole neighborhoods have been as effectively destroyed by addicts as by an invading army.”

The Rockefeller Drug Laws inspired an influx of mass incarceration beyond New York, and Chicago took one of the most severe approaches. Abolitionists Ruthie Gilmore and Mariame Kaba identify the carceral system as

a structure of racial capitalism, which displaces people deemed an unwanted “surplus” to society, while legal scholar Michelle Alexander marks this removal of people from society as the “new Jim Crow.” Between the years 1980 and 2000, Illinois built one additional new prison annually in its rural communities. Experiencing an “exceptionally aggressive” incarceration boom, Illinois doubled its prison population from the 1970s to the 1980s, then more than doubled it again by the closing of the twentieth century. The incarceration of “surplus” people led to more than 40,000 arrests and 3,000 convictions in Illinois for cannabis possession in 2012.

More recently, as reported by the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), the possession of a controlled substance, or the manufacture and delivery of controlled substances can qualify as anything from a misdemeanor to a Class 1 felony, depending on the type of drug (e.g. synthetic opiates, opium, anabolic steroids, marijuana) and quantity involved. In 2020, Illinois was identified by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) as one of the states with the highest racial disparities in marijuana possession arrest rates, with Black people 7.5 times more likely to be arrested than their white counterparts in 2018. In Cook County alone, \$78 million was spent in 2011 to arrest and prosecute people for marijuana charges. Totalling over 33,000 arrests in 2010, Cook County led the nation in most marijuana arrests of any county, with Kings County (NY), the Bronx, and Los Angeles trailing behind.

#### **The human cost: Chicago’s West Side**

These statistics tell only half the story of the War on Drugs as it cracked down on Illinois. To Wallace, politics is far more personal. He recalls former Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s reform proposal in 2012, which gave the police the option to issue possession tickets instead of outright arresting people in possession of marijuana.

“We are not talking about decriminalization,” Emanuel had reminded Chicago aldermen. “We are talking about holding people accountable.”

Wallace and his organization Equity and Transformation (EAT) focus their efforts on West Garfield Park, one of the Chicago neighborhoods most directly targeted by the 2012 marijuana reform. While the overall rate of cannabis possession arrests has declined since, East and West Garfield Park actually experienced an increase in police surveillance and possession arrests immediately following the reform. Officers, some of whom are temporarily assigned or new, feel pressure to subdue prevalent gang violence and danger-

ous drug trafficking rings. In that process, as Alderman Walter Burnett, Jr. told *The Chicago Reader*, they end up overdoing their duty, stopping “the guy who’s walking to the store for some soda pop, or a lady who turns out to be a nurse.”

Wallace described everyday people being jailed for minor cannabis offenses. Yet, the physical removal of people from their homes goes deeper than jail time: some people vanish from the streets for longer, not seen again until years later.

For Chicago, these disappearances total up to around seven thousand people in one interrogation facility alone. A *Guardian* investigation in 2015 revealed that an interrogation facility in Homan Square held more than 7,000 people in an interrogation warehouse between 2004 and 2015—6,000 of the detainees were Black, and only 0.94% of them were allowed to have attorneys present. Drug possession charges were eventually brought in around 5,100 of the arrests. Notoriously, the detained people were hidden from Chicago Police Department booking databases, and some were mentally and physically tortured into giving false confessions.

“The average per capita income in West Garfield Park is around \$11,730 a year,” Wallace explained. “Our folks are barely making it on rent alone. Match that with the average person in the Near West Side who wants to get cannabis from downtown. If you live in West Garfield Park, making \$11,000 to take care of your family, how can you defend spending \$60 on one gram of weed at a dispensary when those \$60 can get you groceries for one more week, one more dinner at your table, right? It’s impossible to choose the weed. These folks are forced to engage in street economies, too, when times get more desperate. The police surveillance and possession arrests are misled responses to poverty. It completely misses the point. We don’t need incarceration to eradicate street dealers, but compensation and programs for survivors of the War on Drugs.”

West Garfield has had its share of violence in the War on Drugs—so much, in fact, that the media dubbed it and its surrounding area “Heroin Highway.” Its unfortunate reputation derives from locals—and nearby suburbanites—driving or walking up to illegal drug markets. The Eisenhower Expressway and the Green and Blue Lines provide easy access, and people who lack other employment opportunities have turned to the drug trade as a desperate, but potent, source of income. In 2019, 35 people were charged with heroin and fentanyl trafficking, with one customer of the trade suffering from what would become a fatal overdose in May 2018.

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Violence Interrupters executive director Tio Hardiman grew up in West Side Chicago's the Henry Horner Homes, nineteen 10-story buildings that were managed by the Chicago Housing Authority until the demolition of the last standing mid-rise building in 2008. There were little efforts by the state to assist the Henry Horner residents—the area did not even have a grocery store when Hardiman resided there—who often became victims of stigmatization, viewed as welfare queens, unruly teen gang members, and predatory drug-addicted monsters by outsiders. His peace initiative, Violence Interrupters, works to prevent gang violence in underserved communities, including West Garfield Park and Englewood, by referring high-risk youth to employment, mental health, and educational services.

"A lot of the youth in the West Side need help, not stigma," Hardiman emphasizes. "Escalating drug and gun violence is often fueled by cultural conditioning. These young men are scared and want to protect their families. Sometimes, in the neighborhood, it means resorting to fighting to live another day. It's tribalism, and I see it as a public health problem. That's why it is important to keep the youth engaged, to give them resources to stay away from violence. If they do choose violence, we have to be there not to see them as criminals who slipped through the cracks of society, but to give them a safety net before it's too late."

In the zip code 60624, which includes West Garfield Park, there were 52 recorded opioid-related deaths in 2017, the highest number in the state. For the community, which also had the highest homicide rate and lowest life expectancy (68 years) of Chicago's neighborhoods in 2014, these tragedies reflected the damage unleashed by Illinois's decades-old fight with the War on Drugs. For many, the drug trade was not a choice. It was a matter of survival—one that could rake in over \$10,000 a day, in a community where the median annual household income is just barely over \$24,000.

Hardiman stresses time and time again that while the open-air drug trade indeed haunts Chicago, most Chicagoans are not involved with trafficking. Even so, he notices a blatant tendency to associate the Black identity with a racist caricature of the addicted, destructive neighbor, even as Illinois profits from a lucrative recreational drug industry.

"Big time businessmen were the first in line to secure recreational marijuana licens-

es in Illinois. That's what happened in Chicago. Today, not a single damn dispensary is African American owned in Chicago. Our community began to raise our voices. We organized press conferences, we speak out every chance we have to ask that we are part of the equation for marijuana justice. Most of us want to see violence in the Near West Side reduced, gone, even."

#### The promise of reparations

Wallace also places hopes in restorative, community-led efforts to dismantle the carceral system and bring resources back to high-risk neighborhoods like West Garfield Park. EAT's pilot program, the Chicago Future Fund, advocates for the diversion of police funding directly into underserved neighborhoods like West Garfield Park. EAT has partnered with the public charity Fund for Guaranteed Income (F4GI) for funding.

"This is a reparations campaign for survivors of the Drug War," Wallace explains. "We focus on successful re-entry for those who were harmed by state crackdowns. We use [the UN's] definition of reparations, which has five components: restoration of human rights, harm compensation, rehab, public acknowledgment [and satisfaction], and a promise of non-repetition. I see compensation and guaranteeing of non-repetition currently missing in our reparations process [in Chicago]. I researched studies that talk about the positive impact of guaranteed income in targeted communities."

The Chicago Future Fund provides \$500 a month to 30 formerly incarcerated people residing in the neighborhood for a year and six months. No work requirements or restrictions on purchases are instated. The disbursement began in November 2021, and will end in May 2023. EAT plans to provide research and feedback in mid-2024 about the financial compensation program.

"There is a great and terrible myth that when people receive free cash, they won't get a job because of a guaranteed cash flow. But this also misses the point! People can use \$500 to address their immediate needs: baby diapers, veggies on the kitchen table, internet and water bills. Now, people can go out and apply for full-time employment without the burden of the debt they previously had just to survive."

When asked about the guarantee of non-repetition, Wallace remains critical of police over-surveillance. "We saw in 2020 that cannabis arrests still happen all the time, taking away precious time for when people could be late for work, about to pick

up their kids from school, right? It disrupts everyday life. It could endanger someone's eligibility for employment. It could get someone fired. A guarantee of non-repetition is exactly what seeks to fight this disruption: crisis removal. What is the point of acknowledging the harm done by the War on Drugs if Illinois doesn't solve this disruption?"

#### Expungement: a first step

An extreme case of disproportionate violence against Illinois residents of color, Homan Square nevertheless points to the large numbers of people who faced the carceral system for drug charges. In an effort to clean criminal records, Governor J.B. Pritzker expunged over 500,000 marijuana non-felony minor arrest records in January 2021, a move made four years ahead of the promised deadline in the Cannabis Regulation and Tax Act, the law that effectively legalized marijuana in the State of Illinois.

At the forefront of marijuana legalization on the House floor, State Representative Kelly Cassidy (D-14) sees the record expungements as a small but important step toward finding justice for those who remain incarcerated as the cannabis industry booms in Illinois. In early 2021, State Representative Mary Flowers also introduced a bill that would automatically expunge all criminal records for people convicted for the possession or delivery of cannabis.

Cassidy tells *The Gate*, "The tactics used by the War on Drugs have destroyed communities. Chicago especially felt that. We need to ensure that folks of underrepresented backgrounds truly have access to working in the [cannabis] industry. We're talking businessmen making millions from dispensaries with literal metric tons of this product that we have historically taken lives over. Expungement is the start of this stuff, and going deeper in this process is critical."

Rep. Cassidy also acknowledges that the current work, while progressive, is certainly not enough. Around 600,000 people eligible for automatic expungement could still wait another four years to see their records wiped clean. The state-funded initiative New Leaf Illinois consists of 20 nonprofit organizations that provide legal aid for people who are still in line to clear their cannabis records. Whereas minor offenses are automatically cleared, a pardon from Pritzker or a filed motion in court is needed otherwise. Anyone, whether it be a person with questions about recreational consumption to legal questions about future employment, can come to New Leaf Illinois for aid.

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“The reparations progress goes beyond cannabis,” Rep. Cassidy says.

“If you go back to the original bill for [Illinois’s cannabis] legalization, there is zero mention of race. Not a single mention of race on that bill. That’s where our fight for social equity comes in. I believe moving forward, after the cannabis licenses, we need to see drug possession through a public health approach, not through the criminalization of certain people. We do need to decriminalize low level possession of any drug. We get folks access to treatment and courts. We get folks access to addiction evaluation. New Leaf [Illinois] is a step toward changing that framework from crime to public health.”

For Garien Gatewood, Director of Illinois Justice Project (ILJP), the problem is a catch-and-release arrest justice system. Though the state government is working to streamline the expungement process, minor drug offenses continue to land people in jail for weeks before a quick dismissal in preliminary court hearings. Often, these cases involve less than one gram of marijuana, cocaine, or heroin.

“[The ILJP] had a lot of conversations with the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC),” Gatewood tells *The Gate*. “It’s traumatizing to spend a night in a cell. Even just one night can cost someone access to the economy they once had.”

In particular, Gatewood places hopes in the Restore, Reinvest, Renew (R3) program, a state-funded service that receives 25 percent of marijuana excise taxes after expungement and administration fees are covered. The resulting funds, which come from recreational cannabis sales (which topped \$1 billion in 2021), are funneled to local governments, businesses, and nonprofit organizations dedicated to serving communities harmed by violence, mass incarceration, and economic inequity.

“The ILJP partnered with the Safer Foundation to provide housing for people in Cook County. At no cost, people from high-risk areas can have a home, phone, whatever is needed. Similar to that, the City of Chicago is using R3 to partner with local organizations and get more committed to re-entry for incarcerated people. Is the system perfect? Absolutely not. We need to re-evaluate more what it means to get folks out of waiting and give them support. But it’s a start.”

### Cannabis licenses stall

In addition to freeing the incarcerated and healing communities historically wrecked by violence, politicians and organizers have also worked to allow underrepresented groups to enter the cannabis industry. While a Black-owned dispensary still does not officially exist

in Chicago, the cannabis license lotteries of the summer of 2021 hoped to amend the gap.

However, the lottery has generated its own controversies. Former state Senator Ricky Hendon’s company, Westside Visionaries LLC, won a license, but immediately planned to sell his license to multi-state pot firms and investment companies. Loretta and Priscilla Foster partnered with cannabis company Dispensary 33 to plan the opening of a dispensary in Wickler Park, until the small company—in fact, Chicago’s only indie dispensary shop—was bought by Florida-based corporation Ayr Wellness for \$55 million. To complicate matters, the distribution of the conditional licenses were put on hold for every lottery winner in September 2021 after applicants from earlier lotteries complained that a clerical error had eliminated them from consideration.

### Perspectives on the way forward

With the license process on pause, organizers and community leaders have turned their attention elsewhere. For Reverend Al Sharp, the founder of Clergy for a New Drug Policy, the priority is to help people already affected by the criminalization of cannabis or at risk of facing criminal charges. His present focus is on de-felonization, which would shift the response to drug offenses from criminal to civil charges. Sharp also hopes that the legal system moves to protect, not surveil and dehumanize, families impacted by the War on Drugs.

“Decriminalization means that [a person] will not be exposed to the criminal justice system in response to drug use,” he explains to *The Gate*. “Maybe that person will still face a fine, but they will not face adjudication. Legalization, there is no penalty, but there’s still regulations over consumption to manage how much is being sold and used.”

“De-felonization is one step short of decriminalization. Right now, the felony is like a social death sentence. You legally are not going to be able to get public support housing. You’re going to jail. You won’t land a job. But decriminalization will see a shift from criminal sanction to civil sanction. A civil sanction is like a parking ticket. We don’t have to see felonization. Decriminalization will be... the death [of] felonization, and it will tell the government that you don’t arrest people. You help them.”

He recalls success abroad and in other states, in which alternate experiments to harsh prohibition and punishment have been effective.

“Take Portugal. They decriminalized all drugs in 2001, and the cops relay non-trafficers to lawyers, doctors, and social workers. Crime didn’t go up, arrests went down.

Overdoses decreased significantly. This model works, and I think we should adopt it. Vancouver also has safe consumption sites. They’re in Europe, Australia, too. Oregon also decriminalized all drug possession this year, and I believe that’s what the other states should follow. I don’t encourage the use of hard drugs, but that doesn’t mean those people deserve to die when there are safer, kinder ways to help them.”

Hardiman and Gatewood continuously emphasize the need to create safe spaces for children directly impacted by mass incarceration and illegal drug trades.

Hardiman finds a solution through what he labels Black unity. “There’s a need to organize Black people like never before. The police have not been trained to stop violence. They get involved once someone ‘crosses a line.’ But even then, we see that the hundreds of homicides in 2021 often result in the deaths of young Black men. When I say Black unity, I’m talking about enlisting the support of family members, of neighbors, to protect the youth from violence, to keep them away from it, before they turn to it. If one kid can have the backbone of brothers and sisters, nobody goes to church funerals, nobody goes to the cemetery.”

Gatewood stresses that Illinois’s current system over-relies on the measurement of recidivism, stanching the progress of prevention and re-entry for at-risk youth and their families. “When people measure reentry solely on recidivism, it’s nonsense. The Illinois Justice Project has worked with the Department of Juvenile Justice to help high-risk youth. In conjunction with the healthcare system, we’re working with a lot of stakeholders around the county on a deferred prosecution pilot for high-risk youth. We’re working in conjunction with the Cook County State Attorney’s Office and Cook County Public Defender’s Office and the Juvenile Justice Collaborative... to focus on the needs of these kids. We want to challenge folks to think outside of the box and sit down and see what their needs are, as opposed to punishing people for addiction. Illinois’s work [on cannabis legalization] might have been monumental, but we still have a long way to go.”

The shift in framework realistically will not take place overnight in Chicago, much less the United States. Yet, the impossibility of instant attainability need not discourage those who seek institutional and cultural change away from the stigmatization of substance use to effective rehabilitation and recovery.

“Toss our reentry framework that only looks at a tendency to reoffend,” Gatewood urges. “Then, and solely then, can Illinois go forward and push for true equity.”



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