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Prison Law Writing Contest

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THE YALE LAW JOURNAL

EDITORS' NOTE

Prison Law Writing Contest

People who are incarcerated offer a unique perspective on the law. Having broken it, they now live in an environment pervaded by it. But only rarely, if ever, do scholars, lawyers, and policymakers hear directly from them about it.

This year, the *Journal* sponsored a Prison Law Writing Contest to recognize authentic and unheard voices on legal issues. We invited currently and recently imprisoned people to submit short essays in response to one of several questions. We offered a modest cash prize to the top three winners, with the hope of publishing a few essays if they made valuable contributions.

We received about 1,500 responses from people all across the United States—men and women, adults and juveniles, former petty offenders and current death-row inmates. Their work addressed a wide range of subjects, but some themes emerged. Prison is boring, but also dangerous and unpredictable. Prison is rich with regulation, governed by unique codes and procedures whose complexity and pervasiveness may enable official discretion as much as they constrain it. Prison is distant from the outside world, often hidden from the view of the courts and the public; it operates according to its own logic that may be difficult to understand. And, perhaps most of all, people in prison badly want to be heard.

The three Essays that follow were the top prizewinners in our contest, chosen after careful consideration by a committee of *Yale Law Journal* editors. We also recognized two other pieces with an honorable mention, as well as eighteen finalists. We endorse these Essays as we endorse everything we choose to publish: not because we necessarily agree with their conclusions, or because we have any particular feelings about their authors, but because they powerfully express important claims about relevant topics.

We found that the men and women who wrote to us had valuable insights to share. For over a century, the *Journal* has had the privilege of publishing argument and analysis that have shaped the course of the law. We aim to honor that tradition by giving these authors, too, the chance to make lasting contributions to the law's written record.



PRISON LAW WRITING CONTEST CONTENTS

- 2084 The Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) and the
Importance of Litigation in Its Enforcement:
Holding Guards who Rape Accountable
Elizabeth A. Reid
- 2098 The Meaning of Imprisonment
Ernie Drain
- 2100 Solano Justice
Aaron Lowers