

Newsletter

JULY 2023

City Promises To Finally Build Chicago Torture Justice Memorial

This article was originally published in Block Club Chicago on June 20, 2023. Written by Mack Liederman.



CHICAGO — The city says it will finally build a long-promised memorial for survivors of police torture. Mayor Brandon Johnson announced on Juneteenth the city will use a \$6.8 million grant from the Mellon Foundation to build eight public monuments intended to “memorialize events, people and groups that historically have been excluded or underrepresented,” according to a news release.



The Chicago Torture Justice Memorial — to be located on the city’s South Side — will honor survivors of torture carried out by former Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge and his “Midnight Crew.” The city paid a first-of-its-kind \$5.5 million reparations package to Burge survivors in 2015, but has since delayed its promise to allocate funds for the memorial, despite continued organizing around the cause by survivors and community members.

The new funding is the largest award yet from the Mellon Foundation’s Monuments Project, \$250 million in private donations to “reimagine and rebuild commemorative spaces and transform the way history is told in the United States,” according to the news release.



The final selection of new Chicago monuments comes after an August 2022 report by the Chicago Monuments Project Advisory Committee, a collaboration between city agencies to recruit artists for “a larger reckoning with monuments that symbolize outdated values,” according to the news release.

A press conference with the Chicago Torture Justice Memorials, survivors, and Mayor Brandon Johnson on June 19, 2023 to announce the funding of the memorial.

“Chicago’s monuments and memorials are more than just public art — they speak directly to the values, history and vision of our great city,” Johnson said in a statement. “I’m grateful for the Mellon Foundation’s support of the Chicago Monuments Project and the creation of cultural works around labor, civil rights, racial justice and other areas that represent our diversity, honor our history and tell our story.”

The monuments are at various stages of planning and development, according to the news release. The list of upcoming monuments is below:

- **Chicago Torture Justice Memorial**, by artist Patricia Nguyen and architectural designer John Lee
- **George Washington Monument Intervention**, a new public art project by renowned Chicago artist Amanda Williams
- **A Long Walk Home (ALWH)**, “#SayHerName: The Rekia Boyd Monument Project”
- **Mother Jones**, in partnership with the Mother Jones Heritage Project (MJHP), a commission to honor Mother Jones’s important contributions to labor history
- **Mahalia Jackson monument**, by artist Gerald Griffin, spearheaded by the Greater Chatham Initiative (GCI)
- **Pilsen Latina Histories**, by lead artist Diana Solis, scholars from the University of Illinois, Pilsen Arts & Community House staff, and additional artists and community groups in Pilsen
- **Chicago Race Riots of 1919 Commemoration Project**, designed and produced in partnership with youth artists at Firebird Community Arts’ Project FIRE
- **Early Chicago**, a series of monuments that explore the settling of Chicago, including those to Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable and Kitiyawa, and projects which amplify Native American stories

The city’s monument commission was created in 2020 after a clash between police and protesters at Grant Park’s Christopher Columbus statue, which was ultimately removed.

On "Independence"

We know "independence" in the U.S. was and is narrowly defined, often excluding Black people and erasing Indigenous people from the land and this nation's history. We are reminded everyday how the violence of white supremacy persists today - through policing, mass incarceration, community divestment, and policies of displacement. Rather than celebrating a false notion of "independence," the Center honors and uplifts the freedom fighters, abolitionists, and survivors who continue to name and lead these struggles as we work toward a future of radical transformation and liberation.

“

There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour.

Frederick Douglass, *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*

“

I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy - a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages.

Frederick Douglass, *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*

Send love to a Mother of the Movement

After celebrating the anniversaries of the Reparations Ordinance and the Center in May, we are reminded of the many Mothers of the Movement whose vision, leadership, and strength are at the heart of our work and continue to guide our community.

We hope you will help us honor them with messages of love, support, and solidarity! We are collecting messages here at the Center and will mail them to the Mamas. If you've already written a note: thank you! If you haven't, here is **how to write your note**:

Write and send a note to us and let us know who your love note is for. You are welcome to send more than one message, or to share your message with more than one of our moms!

That's it – we'll take care of the rest! Thank you for helping us shower these mamas with some of the love they continue to show us and our movement every day.

Mamas (and Papa)

- **Christina Borizov**, Mother of survivor Johnny Borizov
- **Denice Bronis**, Mother of survivor Matthew Echevarria
- **Rosemary Cade**, Mother of survivor Antonio Porte
- **Bertha Escamilla**, Mother of survivor Nick Escamilla
- **Esther Hernandez**, Mother of survivors Juan and Rosendo Hernandez
- **Dorothy Holmes**, Mother of Ronald "RonnieMan" Johnson, who was killed by Chicago Police
- **Mary L Johnson**, Mother of survivor Michael Johnson
- **Anthanette Marshbanks**, Mother of Archie Lee Chambers Jr., who was killed by Calumet City Police
- **Papa Frank Ornelas**, Father of survivor Robert Ornelas
- **Regina Russell**, Mother of survivor Tamon Russell
- **Armanda Shackelford**, Mother of survivor Gerald Reed
- **Denise Spencer**, Mother of survivor Michael Carter
- **April Ward**, Mother of survivor Mickiael Ward
- **Arewa Karen Winters**, Aunt of Pierre Loury, who was killed by Chicago Police

Please mail notes to:

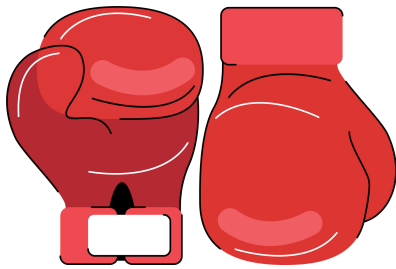
Chicago Torture Justice Center
6337 S. Woodlawn Ave
Chicago IL 60637

What's Happening at the Center

FREE Yoga & Boxing at CTJC

Since March 2023, we've held trauma-informed yoga sessions at the Center twice a month. Now in addition to yoga, we are offering Boxing as Healing, which is led by Gregory Banks and Carl Williams. Through these somatic practices, we hope to provide a space of healing and a safe place for our community move their bodies.

We offer these sessions to our survivor and system-impacted community, and we welcome you to invite your loved ones to join us if they are interested! Sessions are every Thursday from 4:30-6pm. No experience is necessary, and there is no cost to attend. Yoga is held on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the month, and boxing is on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of the month. We hope to see you or your loved ones at the Center!



Schedule thru August

6/29	BOXING AS HEALING
7/6	TRAUMA-INFORMED YOGA
7/13	BOXING AS HEALING
7/20	TRAUMA-INFORMED YOGA
7/27	BOXING AS HEALING
8/3	TRAUMA-INFORMED YOGA
8/10	BOXING AS HEALING
8/17	TRAUMA-INFORMED YOGA
8/24	BOXING AS HEALING
8/31	TRAUMA-INFORMED YOGA

Inviting Your Reflections on Black August

Black August commemorates the movement for Black liberation that happened in California prisons in the 1970s. While in prison, George Jackson read and discussed political theory with his fellow inmates. Since his death, Jackson's writing in the form of letters has been published for others to learn from, and has served as an inspiration for organizers and freedom fighters across the globe. In August, we would like to publish your thoughts and reflections on Black August. What does liberation mean to you? What does it look like?

ARE YOU INSIDE AN ILLINOIS PRISON? WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

WBEZ Chicago & Illinois Public Radio present **Prisoncast!**, a live radio broadcast serving people in Illinois prisons & their loved ones outside. Listen **Sunday, Sept. 17th from 2 to 4pm** on your local public radio station or your tablet's FM app! It's an afternoon of songs, sounds and dedications to share with folks outside – even when you're apart. It also includes news & information **specifically for people in Illinois prisons, your families and outside connections.**

And we want your requests to drive our show! Write your answers to the survey below and mail them to:
Alex Keefe, c/o WBEZ, 848 E. Grand Ave., Chicago, IL. 60611-3509.

*****Must be received no later than Aug. 4! We'll play as many requests as possible but will not get to them all.*****

1. Tell us your name, nickname (if applicable), pronouns and whether we have permission to say your name on the air.
2. *Prisoncast!* seeks to serve you & your loved ones outside with accurate news & practical information. Is there a question you have for our journalists, an issue we can explore or explain, or a topic you think we should discuss?
3. What is a sound from outside prison walls you'd like us to record and broadcast? Why do you want to hear that sound? (Previous examples: Lake Michigan waves, a basketball game, a roller coaster, rain on a tin roof.) *If the sound occurs at a specific location or requires us to be in contact with someone, please provide details.*
4. Is there a song you'd like us to play during the show? Why do you want to hear it? Feel free to include a short dedication.
5. What's something you want people on the outside to know about you or your life on the inside?
6. How did you get this survey and learn about *Prisoncast!*?
7. Do you have a special recipe you'd like to share that uses food available from commissary? Don't forget to give us the ingredients & step-by-step instructions. Tell us what it tastes like and why you like it!
8. WBEZ & Illinois Public Radio are planning a **Prisoncast! holiday special to air Dec. 17, 2023** on public radio stations across the state. What was your favorite holiday tradition or activity with LOs outside prison? We may record some to air on the show. *If the sound occurs at a specific location or requires us to be in contact with someone, please provide details.*

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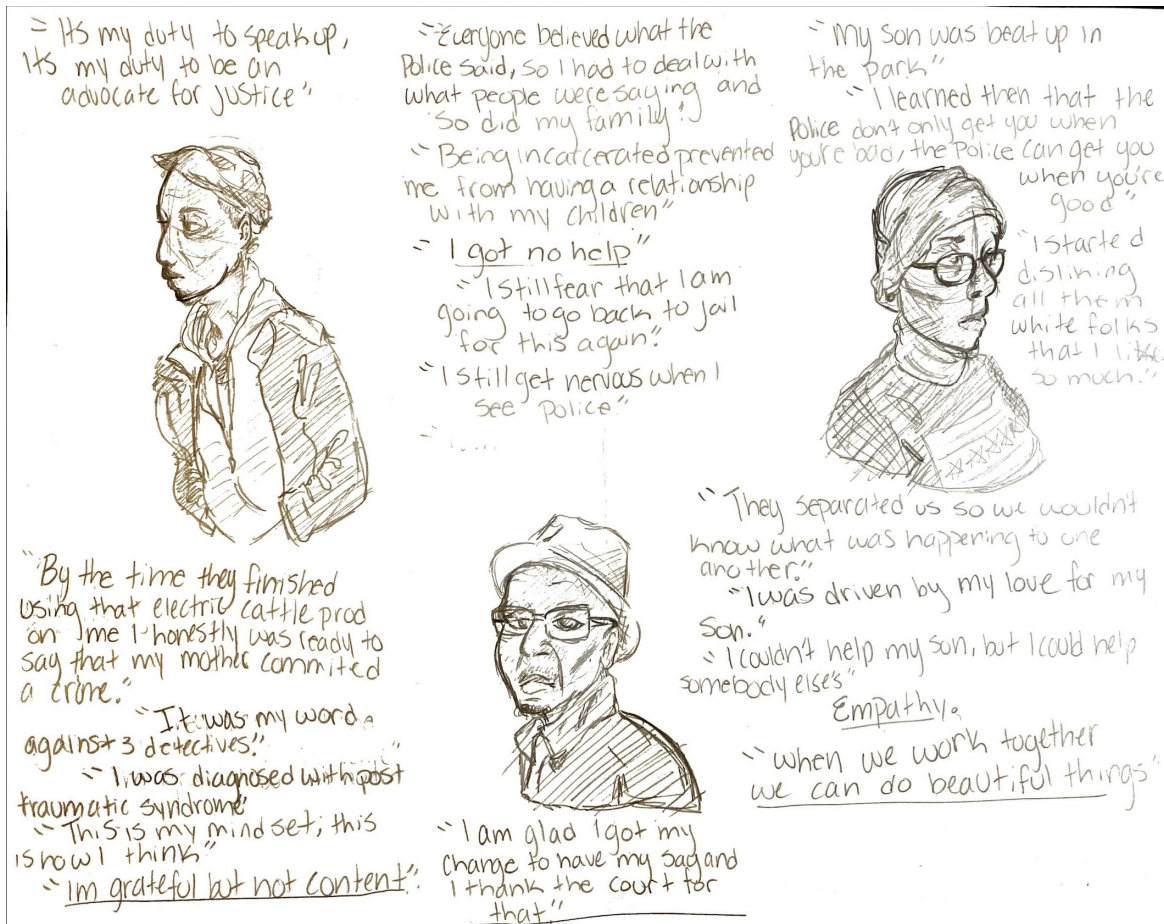
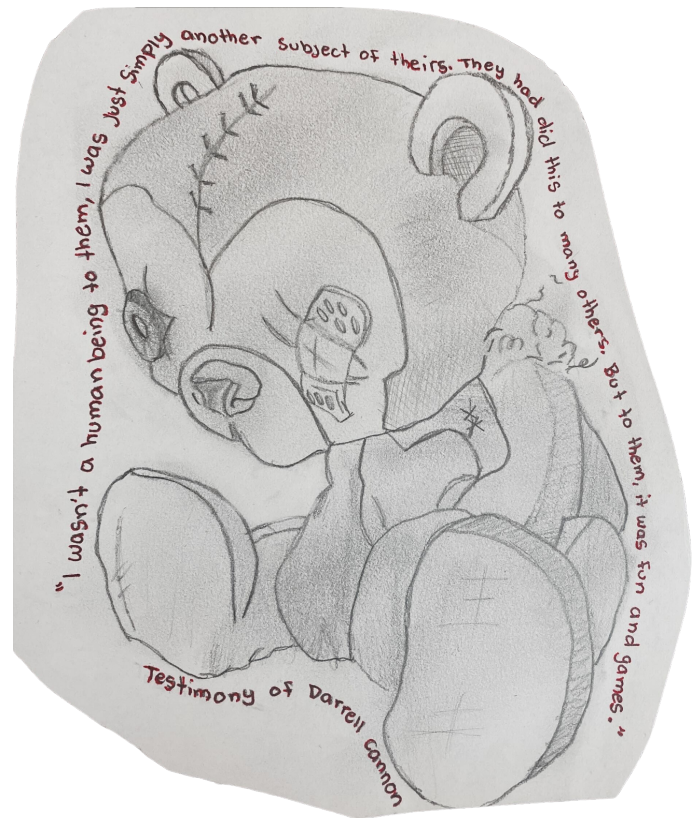
Your LOs outside can also make requests & record dedications that we'll play on the radio! Leave a message at 312-893-2931 or send a voice memo to prisoncast@wbez.org. Also, email to find out more about WBEZ's September event in Chicago for families & children of people in Illinois prisons!

Student responses to the Reparations Won Curriculum



Chicago Public Schools teachers and students recently sent us some amazing artwork that was inspired by the Reparations Won curriculum. Reparations Won teaches 8th and 10th grade CPS students the history of racism, corruption and torture within the Chicago Police Department, and the survivor-led movement for reparations that followed. We're incredibly grateful to these educators for approaching the curriculum with care, intention, and honesty, and for giving students the room to process this history.

It's so encouraging to receive reflections from young people in Chicago, and to see a new generation thinking critically about systems of harm and thoughtfully about creating a new future.



S.U.R.V.I.V.O.R.S

survivors .

you don't bleed the way they do

struggle ? wasn't even the main intention for them

it was worse , more than a fickle mistake

they had to plead cases , break tension.. head racing ..

not a clue in the world where they would go or show

no sight of light or freedom at dusk

no source of love or no voice to speak choice

behind bars , in court , regaining years of what was lost

Darrell Cannon , Mark Clements, David Bates, Anthony Holmes , Aaron Patterson, Madison

Hobley, Stanley Howard, Leonard Kidd, Derrick King, Ronald Kitchen, Reginald Mahaffey, Jerry

Mahaffey, Andrew Maxwell, Stanley Wrice, Alnoraindus Burton, L.C. Riley.. more to go on for

who were tormented for years after years

too much pride in their tormentors and not enough sympathy for them to live

they seen color as sin .. a mistake from within

their beautiful black faces once again became an unstable oasis-

Jon Burge Maltreated innocent skin & turned it into perished black innocence

what does color have to do with crime and not diligence ?

what does black mean to the white community?

what path does it bring you down to hear something beautiful?

not black i see , black always been discrete and described as useless

piece by piece they matched the puzzle & marked it as trouble

point guns to their head , tased and abused their bodies

suffocated , burned ,falsely accused ... what does one's misery do for another one's pleasure ?

mothers out worrying about if they'll see their kids again..

tortured by a hypocrite, also a disgraceful dimwit

what you don't see , is what you seek to hear

Racism at its finest and they still don't even want to help you here

how you bleed blue and protect but can't help what's out for the next ..

first we're insane to the membrane , then we get more shame for not being obtained in jail , in

misery , in agony, in pain .. suffering ..

blue don't bleed for red and it surely doesn't bleed for black & brown

their skin was detailed with present beauty for sure while they say ours is meant for being

spread on the floor

our precious non-ignorant color debates

with the color that marks ours

carves their hate into our society , our people , our culture ..

and yet still plead they protect us

those names that were called ..? did you hear them?

when they screamed and preached their purity

did you stop to believe maybe brown is pure ?

and white is the black in us ?

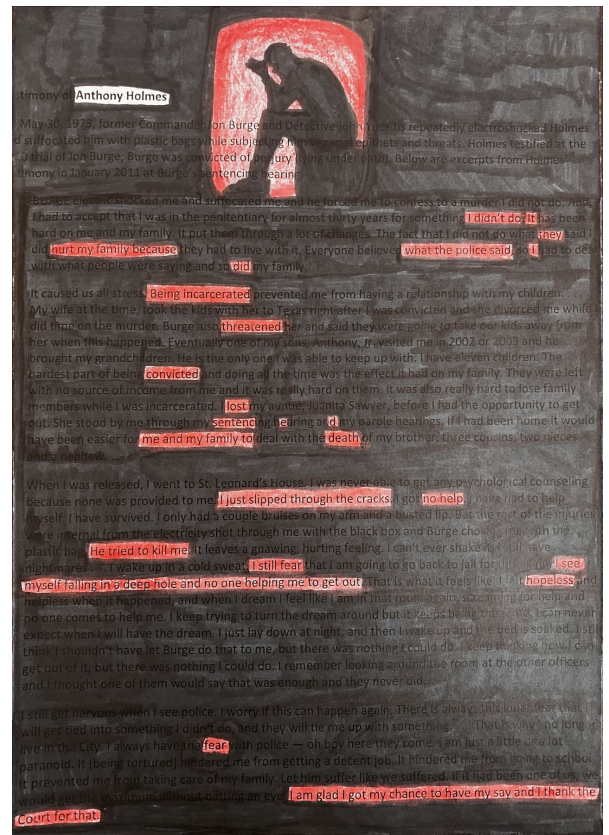
our soul music will continue to play

by the dusk it brings astray

they say we are strange but this all just a time game

my black, my blood , my history , my hood ..

An Honorary to those who were tortured , you deserve better. No Story Left Untouched. My poem speaks truth and how i feel about the situation. Poetry speaks in many different ways even if you don't understand it . It speaks emotion and clarity even when you're unsure. This is a cry for Justice.. They still deserve it .



|| They Were Denied ||

Torture is **Illegal**, That we know
 Yet it happened,
 More than a **hundred** or so
 Chicago police officers, Under command,
Tortured people
 A **systematic** pattern in the land

Torture causes **pain**, Thats for sure,
 It **violates** human rights that we abhor
 Ordinary citizens,
Shocked, Burned, Beaten, and Tied,
 They were **denied**
 Their **Basic Civil Rights**

Burge and his officers committed **crimes**,
 Yet **no** government attention
 Was brought to **sight**

Failed protection
 American Dream that was **out of reach**
Violation of Rights
 Were the fight Black Neighborhoods **sought out**
To Make Right

Practicing Abundance

As we continue on in this movement together for our collective liberation, we seek to create space for joy and abundance.

We hope this offering helps you feel space for joy and abundance when you need it.



The myth of scarcity amidst global wealth-extraction has been strategically used to divide oppressed peoples and pit us against ourselves—from the Plymouth Rock to the plantation to the Chicago city budget. Living in a hyper-competitive, capitalistic, and oppressive society that has always disproportionately harmed Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples, we are conditioned to forget our worth and feed into the vicious circle of acquiring more.



What would be different if we could feel in the deepest recesses of our beings that we are enough, we have enough, and we have the vast stores of strengths in our bodies and our lineages to move us towards the liberatory world we are fighting for? What if, instead of resources spent on death-making tools, systems, and structures, our resources fueled things that are life-affirming—and each other?



By “tapping into the natural abundance that exists within and between us, and between our species and this planet,” as adrienne maree brown invites, we can access authentic pleasure.

From a place of abundance, our work is to end the extraction of resources that serve and protect the few, and to instead sow, harvest, and distribute in ways that allow for the thriving of our communities and our land. May we ground ourselves in the abundance of enough, to support the flourishing of all life on this planet.

REFLECT:

Find a quiet comfortable spot, and say, “we are enough” to yourself 5-10 times. Allow yourself to really ‘feel’ the words and take it in.

Spend some time writing your reflection: What comes up for you in this space of abundance? What shifts in your vision or strategy?

CONNECT:

Think about a resource or skill you have that you can share with someone. Maybe you like to bake, maybe you love making playlists, or working in the garden.

Whatever it is, make something you can share with someone in your life and offer it to them.

CREATE:

Create something—a poem, a song, a drawing, painting, a doodle—that represents what abundance “looks” like to you.