

# Criminal Justice and Mass Incarceration



centerforconstitutionalrights  
*on the front lines for social justice*

# The Center for Constitutional Rights

The Center for Constitutional Rights is dedicated to advancing and protecting the rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Founded in 1966 by attorneys who represented civil rights movements in the South, CCR is a non-profit legal and educational organization committed to the creative use of law as a positive force for social change.

Formed in order to work hand in hand with people's movements, CCR has lent its expertise and support to a wide range of movements for social justice. We strive to complete the unfinished civil rights movement through targeting modern-day manifestations of racial and economic repression, ending discrimination that is based on gender or sexuality and struggling against government abuse of power.

For decades, CCR has pushed U.S. courts to recognize international human rights and humanitarian protections – and we have had groundbreaking victories that established the principle of universal jurisdiction in this country and extended human rights standards to abuses committed by corporations and other non-government groups.

The Center for Constitutional Rights was the first organization to fight for the rights of the men held at Guantánamo Bay and has been at the forefront of the battles to end the use of offshore prisons; to end the practice of “extraordinary rendition” and torture; and to restore the fundamental right of *habeas corpus* and due process under the law.



## Mass Incarceration

CCR uses litigation proactively to empower poor communities and communities of color and to guarantee the rights of those with the fewest protections and least access to legal resources.

Since our inception, we have been at the forefront of criminal justice issues such as mass incarceration, jail expansion, and challenging unjust detentions. In a country that puts more people in jail than any other country in the world, we are fighting the mass incarceration of millions in our nation's prison system, as well as challenging practices such as racial profiling, immigrant detention, and discriminatory laws that lead to a disproportionate number of people of color behind bars.



## Fighting Police Misconduct

The Center for Constitutional Rights is a leader in the movement to fight police misconduct. We have achieved important victories in combating systematic racial profiling by the New York City Police Department, including a class action lawsuit that forced the notorious NYPD Street Crime Unit to disband and established ongoing court supervision of the department. We work closely with community groups and activists around the country to keep a spotlight on the issue of police violence and the targeting of youth, people of color and other minority communities.



## Prisoners' Rights

CCR is working to increase access to justice for prisoners and to fight inhuman conditions in our nation's prisons and immigrant detention centers. Our Ohio 'supermax' case won an important victory ruling that prisoners cannot be held indefinitely in solitary confinement without due process. We also work to combat corporate complicity in the exploitation of prisoners and their families, and are successfully challenging contracts between telephone companies and prisons that charge exploitative rates for collect calls from prisoners.

## Jailhouse Lawyer's Handbook

CCR distributes the *Jailhouse Lawyer's Handbook: How to Bring a Federal Lawsuit to Challenge Violations of your Rights in Prison*, to inmates across the country. Coauthored by CCR and the National Lawyers Guild, the handbook is a free resource for prisoners and their family members who wish to learn about legal options for challenging mistreatment in prison. The handbook is also available for download from: [www.ccrjustice.org](http://www.ccrjustice.org)

# Landmark Cases

## **Joanne Little Case (1975)**

Assisted in the defense of Joanne Little, a prisoner who had killed her white jailer after he had tried to rape her, by documenting overwhelming racial prejudice on the part of the jury in her case. Ultimately, Little was acquitted.

## **Monell v. Department of Social Services (1978)**

The Supreme Court decision in this case was the breakthrough that forced local government accountability for unconstitutional acts for the first time and created the right to obtain damages from municipalities in such cases. Originating as a successful challenge to forced maternity leave policies, Monell claims are now most often used to challenge patterns of police misconduct.

## **Soto v. Romero-Barcelo (1983)**

Brought suit to uncover FBI involvement in the killing of young pro-independence activists at Cerro Maravilla, Puerto Rico. Led to substantial awards to plaintiffs, televised Puerto Rican Senate hearings and several convictions of police officers for obstruction of justice and perjury.

## **Haitian Centers Council Inc. v. Sale (1993)**

Secured an order in federal court that closed detention camp at Guantánamo Bay for HIV-positive Haitian refugees.

## **StreetWatch v. National Railroad Passenger Corporation (1995)**

Won an injunction in federal court preventing Amtrak police from evicting or arresting those they suspected of being homeless where no criminal behavior was suspected.

## **Reno v. American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (1999)**

Challenged selective enforcement of immigration laws in defense of Palestinian activists singled out for deportation because of their political beliefs.

## **Kiareldeen v. Reno (2001)**

Challenged the use of secret evidence in deportation trials.

## **Daniels v. City of New York (2003)**

Challenged racial profiling, forced the notorious NYPD Street Crime Unit to disband and established ongoing monitoring of police by CCR and the courts.

## **Wilkinson v. Austin (2004)**

Ruled that prisoners cannot be placed or indefinitely detained in solitary confinement without due process at a maximum security prison in Ohio.

## **In the Matters of Hamide and Shehadeh (2007)**

Ended 20-year-long deportation proceedings against members of the "LA8", political activists who were lawfully engaged in protected First Amendment advocacy on behalf of Palestinians.

## **NY Campaign for Telephone Justice (2007)**

Successfully campaigned to end the illegal and exploitative collect call rates charged to prisoners and their families in New York State prisons.

[www.CCRjustice.org](http://www.CCRjustice.org)

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