

Hello, The New Republic.

I'm a writer, researcher, and lover of stories and justice and peace. I have written about the arts and sciences for leading organizations such as the Blue Man Group, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, NASA, Ohio University, the University of Cincinnati, several state Departments of Education, and the United States Department of Education. I received my Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin. Read more about my work in my newsletter — [The Wide-Awakeness Project](#) and/or [selected publications](#).

Convict Leasing Today: On History Repeating Itself

I taught a writing class in a federal prison in South Florida for two years from 2018 to 2020. That class gave me a front row seat to our common humanity, a fact which is commonly ignored or conveniently forgotten when talking about incarcerated people. I currently live across the street from a historically designated renovated brick factory in Atlanta. The original owner of the brick factory, B. Mifflin Hood, was a leader in the fight against the practice of convict leasing in Georgia in the early 1900's.

Building on Douglas Blackmon's Pulitzer Prize winning work, *Slavery by Another Name*, in which he describes the historical precedent of using incarcerated people as a labor force "where people were worked to death and buried in unmarked graves" — even after slavery "ended" — I will explore the relationship between the convict free labor movement of the 1900's (the State of Georgia outlawed the convict lease system in 1908) and the current United States Federal budget highlighting the explosion of funding for prison privatization, which includes earmarks for prison labor.

I propose a 2,000-word story that will analyze the current prison labor struggle with an interest in offering a path forward based on past legal, political, and social progress. I will interview individuals involved in the current prison labor conversation — including policy makers and activists, historians familiar with the convict leasing system, and legal scholars who can help me understand how we got where we are today and where we go from here.