

# KSC — Research Revival Fund Application

Describe your project in one sentence, in your own language.

This case study of B. Mifflin Hood will explore the historical, political, and cultural implications convict leasing.

Describe your project in one sentence, for those who don't share your expertise, cultural background, or interests.

This project will investigate convict leasing and discuss its relationship to prison labor today through the story of B. Mifflin Hood.

What research are you reviving?

I am building upon the extensive research on the 19th and 20th century South (including post-Reconstruction, Progressivism, and the Civil Rights Movement), the legal journey from the 13th Amendment to today, and the relationship between slavery, convict leasing, and prison labor. The work will introduce B. Mifflin Hood (which can be understood as a case study of the complexity and possibility of social progress) to a wider audience.

What is your resurrection plan?

“Artists and scientists are activists. They look at the world as changeable and they look upon themselves as instruments for change. They understand that the slice of world they occupy is only a fragment but that the fragment is intrinsically connected to the whole. They know that action matters.” — Anne Bogart, *What’s the Story: Essays About Art, Theater and Storytelling*

I am at a full-circle moment. My academic training and professional experience have utilized research to connect the fragment to the whole. In writing articles and reports, white papers and essays, theses and books, I have connected the fragment to the whole. In writing newsletters and travel writing, policy briefs and curricula, podcast scripts and ghostwritten pieces, I have connected the fragment to the whole.

## **Methods**

I will employ a breadth of research methods to write a case study of B. Mifflin Hood. My path will be interdisciplinary, careful, and comprehensive. It will discuss convict leasing’s relationship to prison labor. It will analyze today’s prison labor situation and offer a way forward

based on past legal, political, and social progress beginning with/through Hood's example. It will offer a story of history's relevance to our current circumstance, the importance of leadership toward social justice, and a reminder of humanity and moral clarity during difficult times.

Data collection will be thoughtful, focused, and rigorous. Primary source materials — databases, newspaper articles, speeches, letters, legal rulings, and policy statements — will be consulted. Interviews will be conducted with journalists, historians, policy makers, legal scholars, and leaders in the prison labor conversation. Sources from across media — documentaries, podcasts, and other video sources — will be considered.

I will utilize a grounded theory approach to data analysis. Grounded theory is an inductive research method. A grounded theory — which will emerge from resurrected research — will result from a cyclical process of data collection and analysis. Grounded theory can help us understand history's lessons, connect past and present, and guide future decisions. In a grounded theory process, primary sources, field notes, interview transcripts, and media are systematically coded, analyzed, and reported.

Getting lost in the weeds is easy when discussing data analysis. After many years of trial and error, I use an open coding process. Data analysis begins with identifying analytic files. From analytic files, coding begins — identifying patterns, themes, and categories. Understanding emerges. Codes fluidly and structurally guide the analysis. Data collection and analysis will yield an actionable grounded theory that responds to the question, "In what ways can the lessons of past social justice progress inform and guide our response to current social justice challenges?"

## **Case Study**

Having utilized qualitatively-focused research methodologies to examine the education of children with disabilities, high school classrooms, arts organizations, local public health agencies, and more, I am prepared to pursue a case study of B. Mifflin Hood. My writer's toolbox includes extensive experience conducting interviews and field work, interdisciplinary understanding of subject matter and content, and fierce curiosity.

## **Collaborators**

I will consult a breadth of experts. Specific collaborations will be identified, built, and sustained. Collaboration will be central to mapping the research terrain, gathering information, and sense making. Collaborators will be engaged in an iterative, dialogic, and informative way. Collaboration will be related to member checking in which participants provide feedback throughout the research. Collaborators will be central to building a grounded theory that allows us to acknowledge the pain of our history and build a better future.

**Can you share a brief history of this idea? What is your research that most people overlook or dismiss? What do others tend to miss or get wrong about this idea?**

Knowledge of B. Mifflin Hood, convict leasing, and the current prison labor situation lives siloed in academic, political, and legal spaces. Most people do not know the convict leasing story. They believe the rhetorical and constitutional end of slavery ended slavery. They struggle to connect our common humanity to a humanity that includes people who are or have been incarcerated. They do not understand the ecosystem — the depth and scope — of public funding of private prisons, and the implication of that relationship.

**Why is this the right time to revive this research topic?**

This research must be revived now to connect our historical journey with our current situation. As public funding of private prisons within the United States increases at alarming rates, this research must be revived now to highlight an element of the otherwise (perhaps intentionally) too-big-to-understand reality and its outcomes. This research must be revived now to provide a window into the larger forces at play — and the cruelty involved — in the prison labor system. This research must be revived now to examine prison labor through a historical, political, and cultural lens.

**If applicable, is anyone else working on this idea, and how are you approaching it differently?**

My initial investigation revealed several experts working on issues related to my central research question — In what ways do the lessons of past social justice progress inform and guide our response to current social justice challenges? The work of Professor Douglas A. Blackmon, Professor Andrea Armstrong, and Professor Adam Rothman informs my research.

**What does success look like for this project? How should your idea find its way back into circulation?**

Potential success for this project would be establishing a record of past social progress and documenting the current prison labor situation. Potential success would be building a pattern of transparency around prison labor practices in the United States. Potential success would be proposing an infrastructure to address issues in United States prisons, of which prison labor is one.

This story will find its way back to circulation through intentional communication. A key element of resurrecting this research will be continuing to develop relationships, sharing information, and allowing the work to emerge from the process. A well-developed case study will incorporate what is learned in the process to effectively tell the B. Mifflin Hood story.

Publication across a variety of contexts and platforms will be critical to responding to the central question — In what ways can the lessons of past social justice progress inform and guide our response to current social justice challenges?

## Why are you a good person to pursue this? Domain knowledge and work?

I am an experienced applied researcher and freelance writer. I possess the technical skill, creative capacity, and philosophical perspective to successfully pursue this work. My inquiry began while teaching writing in a South Florida federal prison for several years in a classroom near the prison's workshop. My experience — that extends across academia, policy-making, and the arts and culture — has relied upon communicating complex information with depth and clarity. I am including my resume to detail my qualifications — <https://www.katiesteadly.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/CV-STEEDLYCURLING2026.pdf>.

## Have you made progress so far? Please describe what you've accomplished and how long you've worked on this idea.

My progress has focused on information gathering. I have generated an extensive bibliography and reviewed the relevant literature, beginning with the significant resources of the Library of Congress. That has allowed me to distill an informed research question, construct a viable methodological approach, and begin the research process.

## Name a thinker or experimentalist you admire. What is their unique methodology or perspective that inspires you?

Wide-awakeness is not my idea. Philosophers, scholars, and artists have been exploring it for generations. I was so hungry to understand it, I focused on it during my Ph.D. and founded The Wide-Awakeness Project — <https://substack.com/@katiesteadlycurling> — committed to living it. The work of Maxine Greene introduced me to wide-awakeness. Greene asserts that imagination makes empathy possible. That is the point of the Wide-Awakeness Project.

## Anything else you want to add?

My personal connection to the story stems from teaching a writing class for several years in a men's federal prison in South Florida. That class gave me experience “inside the fence” — an experience that informed my perspective of the United States criminal justice system. That class changed my understanding of liberty, compassion, and justice. That class gave me a front row seat to our common humanity, a fact which is commonly ignored and/or weaponized when talking about people who are or have been incarcerated.