

# Report on EJI Activity

2025







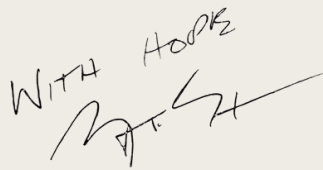
Human Pictures/EJI

# Thank You

The last year has been challenging and unnerving. We have witnessed a rise in the politics of fear and anger, leading many to tolerate and accept things that should never be tolerated. The United States Supreme Court has signaled an unprecedented retreat from gains made during the civil rights movement and efforts to protect the most vulnerable in our jails and prisons. There has been a sharp increase in the number of executions in the United States. An assault on museums, cultural institutions, and schools is taking place that threatens to undermine honest teaching about America's history of racial injustice. We have also seen the most significant cut to federal spending in decades to help the poor, the elderly, and those facing hunger.

The work of EJI has never been more critical. Despite these challenging times, you will read in this report news of extraordinary progress and positive developments that we are proud to share. We remain steadfast in our commitment to stand with the condemned, the wrongly convicted, and the unfairly sentenced. We are deepening our commitment to provide services to the poor who face food insecurity and inadequate health care. We are expanding our public education work and strengthening the vital work of the Legacy Sites. And we are committed to inspiring young people to believe in a better future.

Everything we do is an extension of your commitment and belief in a healthier nation and a more just world. Your contributions and support have enabled and empowered us to continue fighting. On behalf of everyone at EJI, and the thousands of people we assist, represent, and try to uplift, we say thank you.



With Hope,

Bryan Stevenson, Executive Director



# **Challenging the Death Penalty and Excessive Punishment**

Over the decades, EJI has represented hundreds of people sentenced to death in Alabama, and we have witnessed a system that is flawed, unreliable, biased against the poor, and discriminatory.

On the heels of playing an active role in advocating for the commutation of people on the federal death row at the end of 2024, which secured relief for 37 of the 40 people sentenced to death, we won rulings from the Alabama Supreme Court in 2025 that resulted in new trials for people on death row after their convictions were illegally obtained, including capital cases from Lamar County and Shelby County.

This year, our legal staff also prepared an extensive report in opposition to a request by Alabama officials to the Department of Justice to expedite death penalty appeals. We documented decades of error-prone prosecutions and inadequate state funding and legal assistance provided to the poor who face the death penalty in Alabama.

Alabama is the only state in the country that does not guarantee legal representation to people on death row throughout their entire appeals process.



Bryan Stevenson spoke to multiple national media outlets in support of the commutation of 37 of 40 people on the federal death row.





EJI Staff Attorneys Sophia Henager and Sofia McDonald at EJI's Legacy Plaza. *Shyann Cooley/EJI*

Alabama has repeatedly been cited as one of the worst states in the country in the provision of counsel to individuals facing the death penalty.

In 2012, the Supreme Court recognized that, “[n]early alone among the States, Alabama does not guarantee representation to indigent capital defendants in postconviction proceedings,” and noted that counsel in capital cases in Alabama are “undercompensated” and that the State had exceedingly “low eligibility requirements” for lawyers in capital cases.

Former presidents of the Alabama Bar and former Alabama appellate judges have acknowledged that “Alabama’s capital punishment system is deeply flawed,” and that “[a]mong many dire shortcomings...are its failure to adequately provide competent counsel for indigent defendants charged with capital offenses.”

Leaders in the legal field, such as the former director of the American Bar Association, have referred to Alabama’s capital punishment system as “one of the worst in the country.”



EJI Senior Attorneys Charlotte Morrison, Angie Setzer, and Sia Sanneh. *Shyann Cooley/EJI*





Bob Self/The Times Union



Alabama has the highest rate of death sentencing in the country, and the largest death row per capita, yet its failure to adequately compensate lawyers makes it exceedingly difficult to find attorneys to represent people facing execution.

EJI tries to fill this gap, and in 2025 we provided legal services to dozens of people condemned on Alabama's death row.

We also provided expert assistance in a major challenge to the death penalty in North Carolina, which resulted in a court finding that the conviction and death sentence of Hasson Bacote were imposed in a racially biased manner. The ruling may pave the way for others who received death sentences as a result of racial bias to successfully challenge their death sentences.

We continue to advocate on behalf of dozens of people around the country who were condemned to die in prison as children following our landmark win in the U.S. Supreme Court in Miller v. Alabama.

This year, we won relief for several clients and helped multiple people who had served decades in prison navigate release and freedom. In November, our work was celebrated by the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth, where scores of people who had been condemned to die in prison gathered and expressed their gratitude.





# Combating Poverty in America



# Anti-Hunger Program Serves Families Across Alabama

More than 47 million people, including 13.8 million children, in the U.S. experience food insecurity, and rates of food insecurity are even higher among Black households, single-parent households, the elderly, and households in the South. In Alabama, nearly one in five adults and one in four children face food insecurity.

This year, Congress enacted the most severe cuts to food assistance, Medicaid, and aid in U.S. history. These cuts greatly exacerbated an already growing need in communities across the country and in Alabama, a need which our staff has worked tirelessly to meet.

**In operation since 2022, our Anti-Hunger Program has served nearly 7,200 families throughout Alabama and, most recently, we launched a mobile grocery truck that travels the state selling fruits, vegetables, meats, and other staple items at drastically reduced prices.**



The grocery truck continued to serve families and communities in dozens of counties in Alabama this year, including Autauga, Bibb, Bullock, Chambers, Dallas, Fayette, Hale, Jefferson, Lee, Lowndes, Macon, Madison, Marengo, Monroe, Montgomery, Perry, Talladega, Tallapoosa, Tuscaloosa, Washington, and Wilcox.

Program participants receive \$415 per month via prepaid credit card to help with the costs of food and other essential grocery items like diapers. The mobile grocery truck is available to participants and anyone else struggling with food insecurity who wishes to buy essential food items at discounted prices using their own funds.

**“When a person is drowning, they are looking for help. Someone to throw them a life jacket and pull them up, up above the rising waters. Perhaps pull them to shore...You have given my family the opportunity to be on the shore and for a moment enjoy the sun and the calmness,” one Baldwin County participant shared.**



EJL staff Sihle Mzongwana, Derick McClendon, Sakwana Dickens, Anthony Ray Hinton, Jennifer Taylor, Sebastian Jones, Amadou Male, and James Truett serve those in need with our mobile grocery project.





# Expanding EJI Health Services

There is severely inadequate access to health care in Alabama prisons, and many people re-entering society suffer from undiagnosed illnesses that compromise their health and successful re-entry.

EJI Health, our health program running since 2023, provides free health care to any person released from jail or prison, as well as other vulnerable people in Alabama. All services and treatment are provided at no cost.

We have continued to expand our services in the last year, allowing us to support more people who are uninsured, recovering from years of incarceration, or otherwise burdened by poverty. And with recent Medicaid cuts projected to leave millions uninsured, we are committed to continuing to meet this growing need for health care.

Our team was recently joined by a staff psychologist, another general medicine physician, an ophthalmologist, and a physician with expert experience in dealing with substance use and addiction.

On an ongoing basis, our clinic provides screenings for hepatitis C, a viral infection that disproportionately impacts people in jails and prisons and that can lead to liver failure and cancer if left untreated. More than 50 of our patients with hepatitis C have completed treatment. Our care team also offers a smoking cessation program to help patients quit tobacco and nicotine.

Throughout the year, our mobile clinic continued to travel to underserved areas across the state to provide health assistance to those in need. We also now offer a monthly Women's Health Day to screen patients for cervical and breast cancer and provide other women's health services.

Mr. Leonard Pettiway, a 67-year-old Montgomery native who recently left prison, is a patient at EJI Health. He described the care he received while incarcerated as one-size-fits-all, often leaving him without a cure. "When I was in prison, I got no help," Mr. Pettiway said. "This place, it's a lifesaver."



Mickey Welsh/Montgomery Advertiser



# Supporting Clients with Re-Entry Services

More than half a million people are released from prison every year in the United States. They receive virtually no support for the inherent challenges that come with re-entering society. Stringent parole conditions and a lack of resources have created a high recidivism rate among people on parole, who face exploitative fees charged by private companies and who are threatened with being incarcerated again if they cannot afford to pay.

Through our re-entry program, which is in its 18th year of operation, we aided scores

of people in the last year. EJI provides housing assistance, transportation, counseling, aid with fines and fees, and life-saving support for people coming out of jails and prisons who are often alone and in crisis. Our efforts to combat poverty are critical features of our re-entry services.

This re-entry support is particularly important for our clients who were incarcerated when they were children and have limited experience and life skills outside of prison.



Joshua Lott/The Marshall Project



*Stephen Gabris*

# **The Legacy Sites**

Since we opened the first Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in 2018, the Legacy Sites have attracted more than two million visitors to Montgomery, with over half a million this year alone. The footprint of the Legacy Sites is ever-expanding.

In 2024, we opened Freedom Monument Sculpture Park, a 17-acre site overlooking the Alabama River that honors the lives and memories of the 10 million Black people who were enslaved in America. Their courage and resilience are celebrated at this space with breathtaking art and original artifacts. This year, we added new content, artworks, and narratives to our newest Legacy Site.

We commissioned a sculpture by the acclaimed artist Charles Gaines, *Hanging Tree*, which premiered in September 2025 and is now on view at Freedom Monument Sculpture Park. Mr. Gaines said that

visiting the Legacy Sites provided some answers to his lifelong questions about racial injustice. "Coming to this place was the first real, palpable expression of answers to all these questions I had my whole life. And not only that, those answers were triumphant."

We have prepared a new book, *Legacy Sites: A History of Racial Injustice*, with the renowned art publishing house Monacelli that will be released in February 2026. The 280-page book narrates and details the power of the Legacy Sites with curated images and visuals. The book is available now for pre-order. We hope this book will serve as an inspiration for those who have yet to visit the Legacy Sites and as a meaningful memento for those who have.







*Human Pictures/EJI*



*We Am Very Cold by Kwame Akoto-Bamfo. Stephen Gabris*





Human Pictures/EJI



Human Pictures/EJI

# Montgomery Square



15 of the leaders of the Montgomery Bus Boycott who were arrested in 1956. *Human Pictures/EJI*

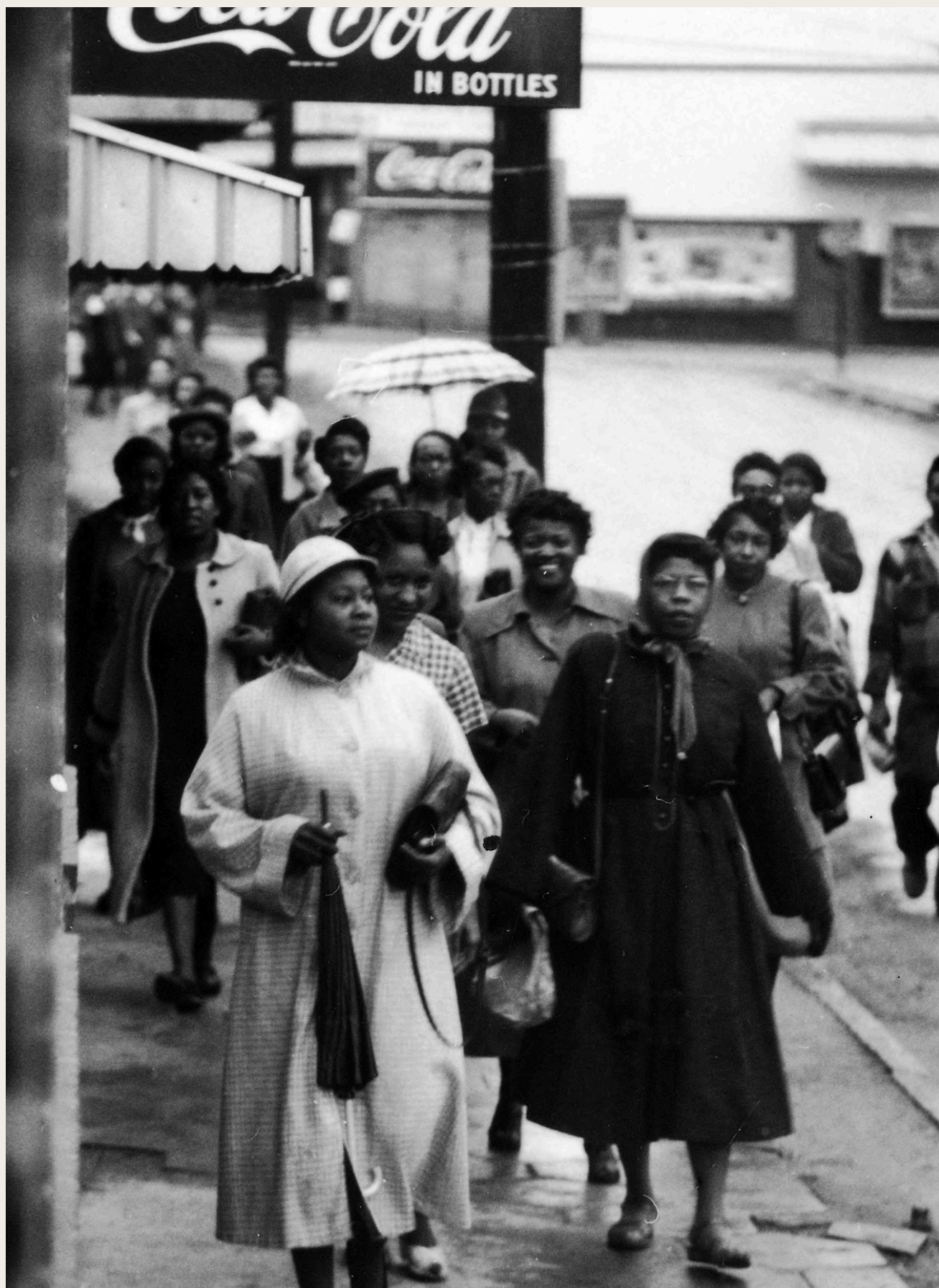
In October, we opened Elevation, a research center, convening space, art gallery, and theater with overnight accommodations. Designed to complement the Legacy Sites, Elevation has welcomed hundreds of visitors and visiting groups in just a couple of months. AYA Soulful Dining is generating lots of buzz, and we are delighted that Elevation was just awarded four stars and a Diamond rating from AAA, one of only two properties to receive such a designation in Alabama in 2025.

In February 2026, we will open Montgomery Square, which will feature sculpture, narrative history, original film content, and a deep exploration of the

Montgomery decade between 1955 and 1965 that changed the world. The site, which sits adjacent to Elevation and up the street from the National Memorial, will educate visitors about unsung and less familiar figures who were central to the civil rights movement in America.

The Montgomery Memory Project, which we launched this year to document first-person accounts of the civil rights era from local legends who experienced it, will supplement the content at Montgomery Square.





Nearly 50,000 Black people in Montgomery stayed off buses for 381 days starting in December 1955.  
*Don Cravens/The LIFE Images Collection via Getty Images*

# Critical Acclaim for the Legacy Sites

In 2025, the Legacy Sites were featured as top destinations in the U.S. by *The New York Times*, *U.S. News*, *Lonely Planet*, and travel publication *AFAR*.

**"Freedom Monument Sculpture Park is redefining the way we experience history."  
— *Alabama News Center***

**"Each [Legacy Site] is powerful on its own; taken together, they represent arguably the nation's most immersive and affecting reckoning with its racist history." — *Garden & Gun***

**"EJI has created a place where art is a portal through which visitors can see, contemplate and begin to understand the history of Black trauma in the United States." — *Miami Herald***

**"More than just a place to stay, the Elevation Hotel is a thoughtful extension of the Legacy Sites, and a place to recharge and reflect." — *Southern Living***

**"In 2018, the Equal Justice Initiative opened The National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum. In the following year, the economic impact of overall tourism in the city broke \$1 billion for the first time." — *Montgomery Advertiser***

**"The space [Freedom Monument Sculpture Park] is extraordinarily effective."  
— *W Magazine***





Descendants of Enslaved People in the U.S. find their family names at the National Monument to Freedom at the Legacy Sites.  
Human Pictures/EJI





Bryan Stevenson speaks with Sarah Lewis and Sherrilyn Ifill at Vision and Justice 2025. *Kisha Bari*



Sia Sanneh gives a public presentation to a community group.

# Public Education



This year, we continued our work to change the narrative about race in America. We launched a new partnership with [USA Today](#) to dramatically expand the reach of our animated video series about our nation's history of racial injustice. We are thrilled that our special series of [investigative articles](#) and [short films](#) about the history of racial injustice was published in USA Today's network which reaches over 129 million readers a month.

Since its first publication in 2013, millions of people have used our award-winning wall calendar and our [A History of Racial Injustice website](#) to expand their knowledge and understanding of American history. Tens of thousands are currently signed up for daily emails with content from the calendar. If you are interested in receiving our daily calendar email, sign up [here](#).

Our public education work, which helps people grapple with the legacy of slavery, lynching, and racial segregation, included hundreds of presentations by EJI staff at schools, organizational meetings, conventions, and programs.

On Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Juneteenth, we continued to provide free access to the Legacy Sites and welcome visitors for days of meaningful learning and reflection. On Juneteenth, we also invited the community to a free concert by the Jason Max Ferdinand Singers, who gave an uplifting and inspiring performance at the Peace and Justice Memorial Center.



# Supporting Young Scholars

This year, we continued to support young scholars in partnership with Montgomery Public Schools. We awarded 37 Legacy Scholarships to graduating seniors across all eight MPS public high schools. Winners received \$10,000 each to support and affirm them for their hard work. We have now awarded 90 scholarships of \$10,000 each to graduating seniors.

We continued to teach supplemental courses to high school students who visit our Legacy Sites and offer our highly popular course for MPS staff and teachers.

We launched a new program for elementary students, donating more than 11,000 books to provide every first and second grader in Montgomery's public elementary schools with two books of their own.

We continued to provide Legacy Scholar grants, which give students at Title I public

schools the opportunity to visit the Legacy Sites. The student bodies of the awarded schools were, on average, 77% Black, with 79% of students receiving free or reduced lunch. Since the program started four years ago, 9,150 students and 1,100 chaperones from 11 states and the District of Columbia have visited the Legacy Sites. The majority come from schools in the Deep South, such as Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi, and include those facing restrictions on the honest teaching of history.

**"Our scholars do not simply attend—they return with a sense of purpose. They use what they learn to educate their families, peers, and the community." – Columbia High School in Decatur, GA**



2025 Legacy Scholarship Recipients at EJI's Legacy Hall.



# 2025 Legacy Scholars



# EJI Provides Two Free Books for Every First and Second Grader in Montgomery's Public Schools







Mickey Welsh/Montgomery Advertiser



Mickey Welsh/Montgomery Advertiser





Kenyatta Crisp/Signal Cleveland

# Community Remembrance Project



In 2025, as part of our Community Remembrance Project, communities across the country continued their efforts to install historical markers that memorialize documented victims of racial violence, including for Wes Johnson in Henry County, Alabama, John Jordan in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, and George Tompkins in Marion County, Indiana.

When the marker for Wes Johnson was unveiled at a dedication ceremony in Henry County in November, descendant James Johnson acknowledged that there is sadness about what happened to Wes Johnson but urged that “we should not treat this as a sad occasion.” The dedication of the marker, he said, also brings “a great deal of gladness and

happiness and joy that it got completed. You know, that in itself is enough to just be thankful for.”

The number of communities engaging in memorialization and remembrance projects continues to grow. We are now working with over 250 communities throughout the country, and in the past two years alone we have supported coalitions in efforts to install more than 20 historical markers.

As communities install historical markers, we continue to grow our duplicate marker exhibit at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice to honor the efforts of these coalitions and communities.



Peace and Justice Center Memorial to Lynching Victims. Human Pictures/EJI

# Art and Justice



Andi Rice / EJI



As part of our Art and Justice programming, we have brought many celebrated artists and creatives to the Legacy Sites. These performances and events have enhanced our work for justice, creating a new soundtrack for truth-telling.

In 2025, we were thrilled to welcome world-renowned gospel musicians Donald Lawrence and Yolanda Adams for a concert to kick off our two-day Juneteenth celebration. On Juneteenth, the Jason Max Ferdinand Singers gave a free midday

concert to a packed auditorium, treating Legacy Sites visitors to beloved spirituals and a moving performance. That evening, and to end our two-day celebration with an exclamation mark, we hosted jazz luminary Cécile McLorin Salvant and Grammy Award-winner Terence Blanchard for a sold-out concert.






Yo-Yo Ma performs at EJI's Peace and Justice Memorial Center in October 2025.







eji presents  
**Art and Justice**

# **Branford Marsalis and Yo-Yo Ma**

A Concert at the Legacy Sites

In October, we celebrated the opening of Elevation with a transformative musical event featuring acclaimed jazz and classical saxophonist and visionary composer Branford Marsalis and world-renowned cellist and United Nations Messenger of Peace Yo-Yo Ma. A sold-out crowd packed our Peace and Justice Memorial Center in downtown Montgomery to hear two of the world's greatest musicians perform—for the first time—three new compositions written specifically for the occasion by Branford Marsalis.

Hundreds of thousands of people around the world have now experienced our Juneteenth and October performances as well through our online video [playlist](#) we launched this year.





# Thank You

This year, our executive director, Bryan Stevenson, was awarded the Thomas Jefferson Foundation Medal in Citizen Leadership and was honored at the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth's Freedom Celebration. He was also named a James Parks Morton Interfaith Award Honoree and was the recipient of the Catchers in the Rye Humanitarian Award from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the Wiley A. Branton Award from the Washington Lawyers' Committee.

EJI continues to receive four out of four stars from [Charity Navigator](#). We are proud to consistently devote over 95% of our financial support to program and core activities. Click [here](#) for financial data.

We are grateful to you for your contributions, for joining us in Montgomery to visit the Legacy Sites, and for [sharing](#) our work with your family and community. With your support, we will continue the work to end mass incarceration, excessive punishment, and racial injustice in America.



Equal Justice Initiative  
122 Commerce Street  
Montgomery, AL 36104

[eji.org](http://eji.org)

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