



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Press Contact: Katryce Lassle [klassle@ucpress.edu](mailto:klassle@ucpress.edu)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# YOU MIGHT GO TO PRISON, EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE INNOCENT

by Justin Brooks

**Surviving prison as an innocent person is a surreal nightmare no one wants to think about. But it can happen to you.**

Justin Brooks has spent his career freeing innocent people from prison. With *You Might Go to Prison, Even Though You're Innocent*, he offers up-close accounts of the cases he has fought, embedding them within a larger landscape of innocence claims and robust research on what we know about the causes of wrongful convictions.

Putting readers at the defense table, this book forces us to consider how any of us might be swept up in the system, whether we hired a bad lawyer, bear a slight resemblance to someone else in the world, or are not good with awkward silence. The stories of Brooks's cases and clients paint the picture of a broken justice system, one where innocence is no protection from incarceration or even the death penalty. Simultaneously relatable and disturbing, *You Might Go to Prison, Even Though You're Innocent* is essential reading for anyone who wants to better understand how injustice is served by our system.

**Justin Brooks** is a criminal defense lawyer, law professor, and the Founding Director of the California Innocence Project, where he has spent decades freeing innocent people from prison. He is the author of the only legal casebook devoted to the topic of wrongful convictions and was portrayed by Academy Award–nominated actor Greg Kinnear in the feature film *Brian Banks*.

**Publication Date: April 2023 (North America) | May 2023 (World)**

232 pp., 10 b/w illustrations

ISBN: 9780520386839

Katryce Lassle, Senior Publicist | (510) 883-8321 | Fax: (510) 836-8910 | Email: [klassle@ucpress.edu](mailto:klassle@ucpress.edu)

1111 Franklin St. | Oakland, California 94607

Hardcover \$29.95 | £25.00

## **Author Q&A with Justin Brooks**

### **Who should read *You Might Go to Prison, Even Though You're Innocent*?**

Everyone who cares about our criminal legal system and wrongful convictions should read this book. Sadly, most people don't truly come to understand this topic until they, or someone they know, suffers the fate of being innocent in prison. Whether you are new to the byzantine and imperfect nature of our criminal legal system, or a veteran of many battles within it, this book will give you a different perspective through stories, cases, and research.

### **What inspired you to write this book? How did your idea for *You Might Go to Prison, Even Though You're Innocent* take shape?**

Thirty-two years of working in the criminal legal system, and every single one of the more than three dozen innocent people I've had the pleasure of walking out of prison, inspired me to write this book. *You Might Go to Prison, Even Though You're Innocent* took shape from my cases, hundreds of lectures, dozens of media interviews, and non-stop talking about this subject for decades.

### **Can you say a bit about the structure of the book and why you chose to structure it as you did?**

I've written law books and law review articles on this topic throughout my career. I wanted *You Might Go to Prison, Even Though You're Innocent* to be different. I wanted this to be a book anyone could read and learn from. So, I thought about the ten most common themes I've come across in my work with people who've been wrongfully convicted, and structured the book around them. I used my cases, and others, to illustrate each theme and wrote the book in a way that it could be used in a criminal justice class, but also could be a beach read.

For example, the chapter on false confessions is entitled, "You Get Confused When You are Tired and Hungry and People Yell at You." In that chapter, I explore the tactics and procedures that lead to false confessions, but as the title of the chapter illustrates, there are basic human reasons why people sometimes falsely confess. In the chapter on false identifications entitled "You (sort of) Look Like Other People in the World," I discuss the frailties of human memory that lead to misidentifications, as well as ways we can improve identification procedures.

**What was the hardest thing about writing *You Might Go to Prison, Even Though You're Innocent*? The easiest?**

The hardest thing about writing this book was dealing with the issue of race and the powerful impact it has on wrongful convictions. With issues like bad lawyering, bad science, and inadequate investigations, it's easy to draw the line between the cause and effect of a wrongful conviction. Racial inequity permeates the system and yet it is more difficult to reveal in simple terms. It requires a thirty-thousand-foot view and statistics that are impossible to ignore. I lay out a significant amount of evidence to this end in the book.

The easiest part of the book was telling the stories of my cases. Those stories are embedded so strongly in my head that they poured out faster than I could write. Giving a voice to the injustices my clients have suffered propelled me throughout the writing process. Not a day goes by that I don't think about my clients who are putting their lives back together after suffering wrongful incarcerations—like Mike Hanline, who spent 36 years in prison and now must face the challenges of a new world. And I'm constantly thinking about my innocent clients who are still behind bars and fighting for their freedom.

**What can readers around the world/outside of the United States learn from your book?**

Wrongful convictions are not just a problem in the United States; they are a global problem. I have worked internationally throughout my career, and I use many cases from different countries to illustrate points in the book. Although there are different procedures around the world, every criminal legal system is composed of human lawyers, human police, human judges, human defendants, and human witnesses. Humans are flawed, and thus so are our criminal legal systems.

**What do you hope all readers will take away from *You Might Go to Prison, Even Though You're Innocent*?**

I hope that every reader will come to recognize that anyone—truly anyone—can be wrongfully convicted and there is a great deal of work to be done to improve the criminal legal system. That recognition is the first step to reform.

The criminal legal system is ours, collectively. It purports to protect and serve us. And when it makes mistakes, there is a responsibility to remedy those mistakes. It is unlikely we will ever have an error-free criminal legal system, but it can be improved. We must start by freeing innocent people from prison and then make the changes that are necessary to decrease the number of future wrongful convictions.

## **Praise for *You Might Go to Prison, Even Though You're Innocent***

"The truest true crime you'll ever read, and when it's not scaring you, it will make your blood boil."

—**BookTrib**

"Justin Brooks exposes the deep flaws in our legal system that have unjustly led so many into prison and onto death row. How can we trust such a system to take away the lives of our citizens? We cannot."

—**Sister Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking***

"If you thought it couldn't happen to you, think again. *You Might Go to Prison, Even Though You're Innocent* is a fascinating and chilling account of innocent people wrongly imprisoned, written by an attorney who has dedicated his life to freeing the wrongly accused. Brooks's new book takes you to the front lines of this battle, where he makes clear with case after compelling case that our justice system has a long way to go before it can be a *just* system."

—**Edward Humes, journalist and author of *Burned: A Story of Murder and the Crime That Wasn't***

"If you've never imagined that you could be imprisoned for a crime you didn't commit—I sure didn't—Brooks is here to reveal the truth. But more important, he draws upon his decades of experience fighting these nightmarish injustices to reveal what we can do to spare innocent lives in the future."

—**Amanda Knox, author of *Waiting to Be Heard***

"This compelling and engaging book shows how it really could happen to you: you could be convicted of a crime you did not commit. Brooks describes how an early case of an innocent woman who pleaded guilty and was sentenced to death transformed his career. Having since founded the California Innocence Project, and worked on scores of innocence cases, Brooks describes powerful accounts of how race, class, bad lawyering, and even outright lies contribute to wrongful convictions."

—**Brandon L. Garrett, author of *Autopsy of a Crime Lab***

"Brooks has written an absorbing, smart, and important book that covers the landscape of wrongful convictions in the American criminal justice system and the path forward to preventing them. *You Might Go to Prison, Even Though You're Innocent* is a narrative work of social science and policy translation at its best, a compelling, pragmatic, and invaluable journey to better understanding and rectifying the law's ultimate nightmare—convicting the innocent. This book will be of interest to anyone who is concerned with the fairness of our trial procedures and the reliability of the evidence that is used to secure plea bargains and convictions in criminal cases. It should be required reading for all prosecutors and judges, not to mention police as well as criminal defense attorneys."

—**Richard A. Leo, author of *Police Interrogation and American Justice***

"Brooks has been on the front lines of the fight to free the innocent from prison for decades. His compelling book shows how easy it is for innocent people to go to prison and how hard it is to free them. *You Might Go to Prison, Even Though You're Innocent* should be required reading for every law enforcement officer and every prosecutor in the United States and around the world."

—**Jeremy DeConcini, former Special Agent, US Department of Homeland Security**

"Brooks's trek from San Diego to Sacramento is symbolic of his dedication to his clients, his commitment to freeing the wrongly convicted, and his optimism despite overwhelming obstacles in the journey for justice. His book is a litany of examples of how our criminal justice system makes wrongful convictions so easy and setting them aside so difficult. Brooks stands with those warriors who persist in the fight for justice no matter how long the effort or how many defeats along the way. They battle not only for all those wrongfully convicted but for all of us who need protectors of our rights and freedom. Every law student dreams of freeing an innocent person; Brooks lives that dream."

—**Lee Sarokin, former US Circuit Judge of the US Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit**

"*You Might Go to Prison, Even Though You're Innocent* is the kind of book that robs you of your peace. It unpacks—tale after heartbreaking tale—how 'court guilt' can blow the doors off judicial safeguards and overwhelm innocence with ease. Long before your jaws re hinge, the truth hits: guilt often comes down to gamesmanship, we live a hairsbreadth from the unthinkable, you might go to prison even if you haven't done a thing."

—**Catherine Pugh, Attorney, formerly with the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, Special Litigation Section**