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SPEAKERS

Jenn Tostlebe, Michael Radelet, Jose Sanchez

Jose Sanchez 00:14
Hi, everyone! Welcome to The Criminology Academy, where we are criminally academic. I'm Jose Sanchez

Jenn Tostlebe 00:20

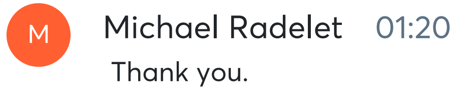
and I'm Jenn Tostlebe.

Jose Sanchez 00:21
In this episode we'll be speaking with Professor Michael Radelet about his career development, as well as his groundbreaking work on the death penalty.

Jenn Tostlebe 00:29

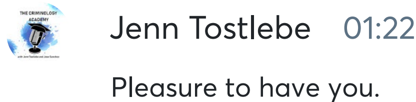
Michael L. Radelet is Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Colorado-Boulder. He completed his Ph.D. at Purdue in 1977 and post-doctoral training (in Psychiatry) at the University of Wisconsin Medical School, and then spent 22 years at the University of Florida before moving to Boulder in 2001. From 1996-2001 he served as Chair, Department of Sociology, University of Florida, and from 2004-2009 was the Chair of the Sociology

Department in Boulder. He has written or edited eight books and some 100 scholarly papers focusing on such problems as erroneous convictions, racial bias, and ethical issues faced by health care personnel who are involved in capital cases and executions. Thank you so much for joining us, Mike.



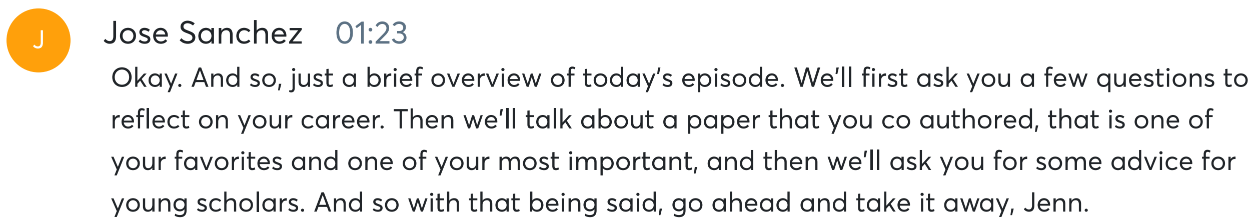
Michael Radelet 01:20

Thank you.



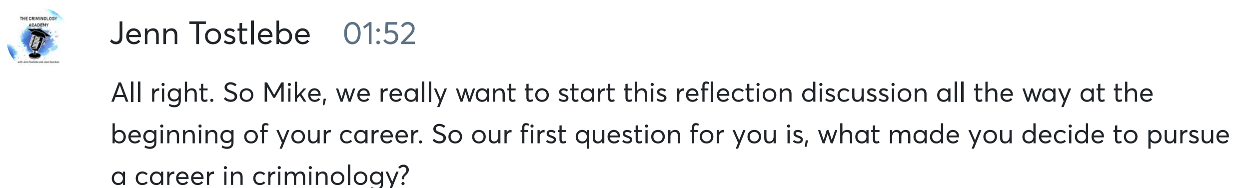
Jenn Tostlebe 01:22

Pleasure to have you.



Jose Sanchez 01:23

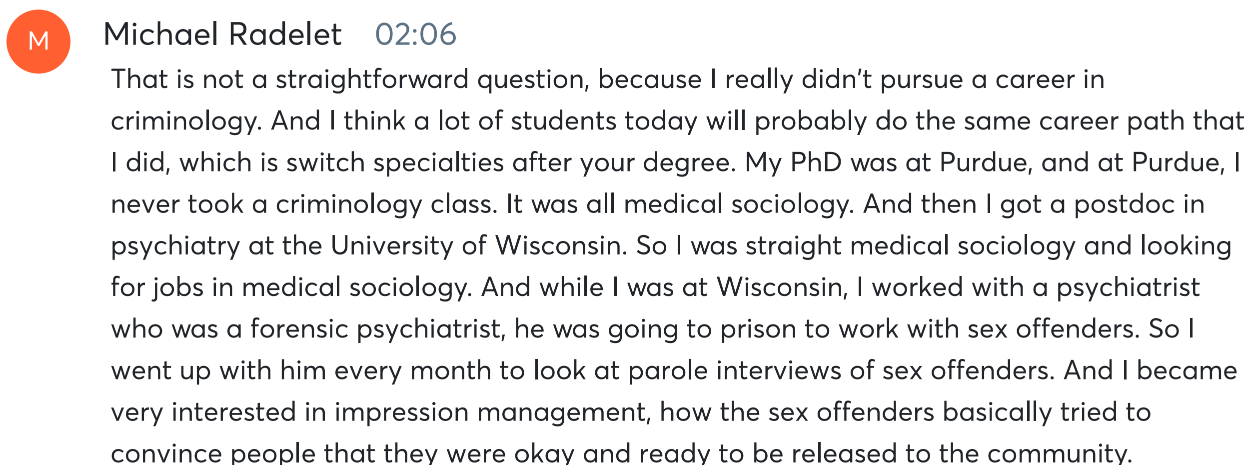
Okay. And so, just a brief overview of today's episode. We'll first ask you a few questions to reflect on your career. Then we'll talk about a paper that you co authored, that is one of your favorites and one of your most important, and then we'll ask you for some advice for young scholars. And so with that being said, go ahead and take it away, Jenn.



Jenn Tostlebe 01:52

All right. So Mike, we really want to start this reflection discussion all the way at the beginning of your career. So our first question for you is, what made you decide to pursue a career in criminology?

Michael Radelet 02:06



That is not a straightforward question, because I really didn't pursue a career in criminology. And I think a lot of students today will probably do the same career path that I did, which is switch specialties after your degree. My PhD was at Purdue, and at Purdue, I never took a criminology class. It was all medical sociology. And then I got a postdoc in psychiatry at the University of Wisconsin. So I was straight medical sociology and looking for jobs in medical sociology. And while I was at Wisconsin, I worked with a psychiatrist who was a forensic psychiatrist, he was going to prison to work with sex offenders. So I went up with him every month to look at parole interviews of sex offenders. And I became very interested in impression management, how the sex offenders basically tried to convince people that they were okay and ready to be released to the community.

Michael Radelet 03:03

But then after two years of that, I went to the University of Florida as a medical sociologist. So I have to say, I always resisted criminology, because my father was a professor of criminal justice at Michigan State. And that's where I was raised; that's my undergraduate degree. His area was police community relations, which of course, is very timely today. But I resisted it because I didn't want to do exactly what he was doing. And then I got to Florida, and I think it was the first weekend. Actually, I accepted the job at Florida, May 25, 1979, which as we record this today is what 89, 1999, 2019, 23-22 years ago today [actually, 42 years ago], Florida executed a guy and I was still in Wisconsin, and I thought, oh my god, the state I'm going to move to just killed somebody, you know, it was the first non-consensual execution of the modern era. And one of my mentors at the University Wisconsin was a criminologist named Marshall Clinard (1911-2010). And he encouraged me to get involved in death penalty stuff when I got down to Florida, which I did the first weekend I was there. So I was riding my bike around campus, reading the bulletin boards, trying to figure out what's going on in Gainesville. And there was a meeting of a group called Students Against the Death Penalty. And I said, Oh, well, you know, check that out. And there was a woman there who had just received a letter from a death row inmate, and one of his friends was looking for a pen pal. So I thought, well, you know, I can write letters. So I did that. And one thing led to the other within a couple months, I was visiting him. Through that I got to know a lot of people on death row, and later, they're lawyers and families.

Jenn Tostlebe 04:44

So yeah, the windy path to where you are now.

Michael Radelet 04:47

Yeah, I mean, the point is, you know, in one sense, I was very lucky, the right place at the right time. I hate to say that because people were getting killed, but that was the hot issue of the day. And there's other hot issues that are comparable for students, criminology and criminal justice students, today. So I got really I got in on the ground floor. My first work was on race. And even though I didn't know anything about criminology or anything about the death penalty, I could do black-white, yes or no. You know, do a chi square. Yeah. And that paper got accepted in American Sociological Review. So you're an expert? *laughter*

Jose Sanchez 05:25

Cool.

Jose Sanchez 05:26

Yeah. So you are best known for your work on capital punishment and the death penalty. And you sort of touched on it a little bit about the encouragement you received to sort of pursue that work. But what about the death penalty really pushed you into advocacy and research on the death penalty?

Michael Radelet 05:46

That's an easy question. It was the people who I got to know. Just like in gang research, the more gang members you get to know, the more interested to become in their lives and how our lives for most of us are quite different than theirs. And I met, you know, a number of death row inmates. I don't know, over the years, I've met several 100. But in the visiting park, at the prison, at least in Florida, they had 30 tables with four stools around them. And you could visit either on Saturday or Sunday for six hours. And to break the tedium, you could walk around and visit with other people. Later, they stopped allowing that. When you get in there, you had to sit there on a stool, which was, for some elderly visitors was really hard. But in any event, I got to know a lot of these people and their families, got to know more about their background, and began to understand how different lives lead to different outcomes. And I didn't find horrible bad people, I found people who had made bad decisions and ended up on death row. Many of those people are now dead.

Jenn Tostlebe 06:55

Right. So clearly, you are an opponent of the death penalty. Have you always been a critic or an opponent of the death penalty?

Michael Radelet 07:04

When I first started, that was in the days sociologists were supposed to be "value free." You weren't supposed to have any values. I mean, my God, I don't know how anybody believe that. And the second thing we were supposed to be neutral. You know, can you give me three reasons to oppose it, three reasons for it. So I did that in the classroom. In 1983, the first guy I visited killed himself. And then I started visiting a second guy, he was executed in 1985. But I was only 35 miles from the prisons, and getting to know lawyers. And lawyers often were in court, right before an execution. And they needed somebody who, you know, could go in and help the family and be with the inmate and stuff like that.

Michael Radelet 07:46

So in 1984, I was asked to be with a guy named David Washington (https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/executions/execution-database/22/david-washington), who was executed in July of 1984. And I went in the last night for the final visits. The visits were between eight o'clock and midnight, and I was there with his lawyer, and his two daughters and his wife. And at midnight, the wife and the daughters were allowed to go behind glass for a contact visit. As a legal visitor, I could have contact visits up until the last week. And those rules vary. In Texas, if you're sentenced to death, you can never touch anybody, again, ever. You can't even hug your mother goodbye. But in any event, in Florida, the paralegals on the case could have contact visits up to the last week. And then that last hour between midnight and one was meant for the family members. So the lawyer and I waited for the daughters and the mom to or the daughters and their mother to have their contact visit. We walked out of the prison and the daughters are screaming and yelling. I think one is nine. The other was 12. You know, "please don't kill my daddy," in the middle of the night in this old prison that echoed and the doors were clanging and it was really bizarre. And I just said to myself, I can't believe that this is happening. And I think most people who are sane would not believe that it's happening in 1984, which I thought was a modern era, modern day.

Michael Radelet 09:13

But anyhow, I later wrote, in 1983, I'd written a paper on families of death row inmates. Basically an ethnography of the visiting park at the prison. So again I was single, often families would stay with me in my home in Gainesville, guys on death row, their families might stay with me or at least I'd meet them at the prison and show them the ropes. A lot of those families thought their their kid was going to be executed next week. You know, they didn't have any information. So anyhow, that's when I decided this value neutrality stuff is just BS. And you got to take a stand and you got to speak out.

Jenn Tostlebe 09:50

You really must have gotten to know the family members very well. If they were staying at your home and you were visiting with them. I mean, I can see how that would kind of shatter this idea of neutrality and value free?

Michael Radelet 10:03

Yes, I left Florida in 2001. And by that time I had gone through last visits with 50 people. And I did a hospice training so that I could help the inmates. And you know, it wasn't

really helping legally. But I could carry messages back and forth, or teach the family really sometimes the inmate, what was going on. The inmates are in better position than the family in terms of knowing what's going on, because they learn from other inmates. But the families don't know anything at all. They don't have any network or any community. And you know, some of them were, some of the cases were many of the cases were unknown. Some of the cases were famous. I worked for 10 years on Ted Bundy's case, that was a little bit weird, a little bit different.

M

Michael Radelet 10:45

But anyhow, you get to know the families. And I last wrote about that last year, I'm actually going to write a paper this summer, the feminization of death row, talking about the disproportionate impact of the death penalty on women. Because the family member of the inmate is usually the mom, or the wife, or a daughter, the the fathers are many times long gone. It's the mother who has that, who bears the brunt, is the inmates number one supporter. And, you know, for all of us when we're dead, we're dead. But the mother and the family members live with the memory. What did I do wrong? What could I have done differently? And then the horror of seeing their loved one executed. And occasionally I get emails from children of death row inmates who have been executed. Sometimes from long ago, I got one in the spring from the daughter of a guy who was executed in 1987. And she had no idea what had happened. After the execution, she went back to Miami with her mom and her sister, and mom beat the kids up so they were removed to foster care. And the daughter ended up going to nursing school. And she ended up a survivor and really thrived. But she had no idea about her dad. And her dad, her dad kind of like hated white people, which I got, he and I got along really well. But in any event, his last wish was to have his ashes sprinkled in Africa. So in 1987, I took his ashes to Dakar in Senegal and sprinkled them in the ocean so that the family in Miami when they looked at the ocean, they would could think of the world's biggest tombstone. And I bought necklaces and bracelets and a bunch of pictures for the kids, which I sent down to Miami, but the kid never got. Luckily, I'm quite anal, and it took me two minutes to find those pictures. And I made copies. I'd written like a three or four page thing about sprinkling the ashes, and was able to send her a copy. So the point of all that I rambled on it.

M

Michael Radelet 12:51

But the point of all that is that the death penalty punishes I believe the family member, family members, just as much if not more than the inmate himself because the inmate is dead. We can fear our deaths, we can think about our death, but we don't look back on our death. And the family members look back.

Jenn Tostlebe 13:10

I mean, it's different. But I've read about that kind of situation with even just people in prison and the families having to go and do the visitation and what's left and the burden that is put on them with their person in prison.

Michael Radelet 13:25

Exactly. Yeah. But as they say, death is different.

Jenn Tostlebe 13:28

Yeah, it definitely is.

Michael Radelet 13:29

Because the families not only go through that visit, actually, in some ways, the death penalty pulls the families together, death row inmates get a, well only about 20% of death row inmates get any visits. But that's higher than the visiting pattern among the general population. So it pulls the family together, they try their best to give the inmate support. It's also people who are disproportionately incredibly poor. They don't have much, but they've got each other. And moms are moms, dads are dads and you know, our parents love us like nobody else and they'll stick with us. I suppose even if we end up doing horrible crimes.

Jose Sanchez 14:04

So when exactly was it that you became cognizant of the death penalty and maybe started thinking, this is probably something that we shouldn't be doing? Was it when you got to Florida or like when you started college or? Well, before that time?

Michael Radelet 14:21

I think well before. My father, my whole family is very involved in in civil rights activities. And everybody my family, we've got eight kids, all very opposed to the death penalty. And I was raised Catholic. So you know, we sit in the class, there's a dead guy up on the cross in the front of the room. What's going on here. I used to pray to be executed because we learned that all the people who got eaten by lions in the Coliseum would go straight to heaven. *laughter* I was always curious about it, but again, never had that realistic view of it until I accepted the job at Florida, I was still in Wisconsin and they killed

somebody. I thought what is going on here?

Jenn Tostlebe 15:01

And then, just your interactions with the people on death row and the families seem to be like the major driving force behind that.

Michael Radelet 15:09

Yeah, they were my real teachers in many ways. They got me interested in reading more and more about it. Of course, in those days, there wasn't much to read. But yeah, I think at one point, I read everything in the English language on the death penalty. It's kind of bizarre.

Jenn Tostlebe 15:25

Yeah. I think about trying to do that now as like, in my area of interest. That seems very difficult to do.

Michael Radelet 15:32

Exactly.

Jenn Tostlebe 15:35

Alright, so we know that you've been at the forefront of crafting a bill to ban Colorado's death penalty, which did occur in 2020. And so can you kind of talk about the experience of crafting this bill and the people that you were working with, and then also the challenges associated with crafting that bill?

Michael Radelet 15:58

Sure. So I got involved in Colorado death penalty stuff while I was still in Florida. So I came out here in the 1990s, really beginning in the 1980s, to testify as an expert witness in death penalty cases. And I got to know some Colorado attorneys who are still among my best friends. And I remember, one night, we were down at the Boulderado drinking beer of course, and one of the attorneys said, Oh, you should get a job at the University of Colorado. And I thought, yeah, fat chance. That's never going to happen. But then

Colorado, was looking for a full professor with administrative experiences as a department chair, and they promised me that I would never have to be department chair. Surprise, surprise. But in any event, knowing those attorneys, I got to know the cases, and I got to know some community activists who were involved in death penalty work.

M Michael Radelet 15:59

So through that, I got to know a lot about Colorado's death penalty. And Colorado has always had a very strong citizens group opposed to the death penalty, with good leadership and hardcore activists. So I got to know a lot of them. Of course, when it came out, there was a group called Coloradans Against, Coloradans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, great leadership, great donations from the community. And because of that, they could always have a presence. And through that group, there were some state legislators who I knew were opposed to the death penalty.

M Michael Radelet 17:27

And then, right after I moved here, in 2001, the daughter of a sociology professor in our department was murdered. That's not really discussed very openly, but in any event, and I'd known this person, before I had applied for the job. When I got out here, he asked me to go with him to the trial, his wife could not go because she was a potential witness. So anyhow, he and I went and went to the trial, it lasted two weeks in Brighton and the guy was convicted, it wasn't a death penalty case. But the guy was convicted of first degree murder. So he's sentenced to life imprisonment.

M Michael Radelet 18:07

But through that experience, my friend invited me to a Denver group called Parents of Murdered Children (https://pomc.org/), to speak about my buddies on death row. I was a little bit nervous. But in any event, I went down there, there were 50 people there who had lost a loved one to homicide. And they were invited to go around the room, not only to talk about the murder of their loved one, but also that night to talk about the death penalty. And a lot of people you know, liked it. A lot of people said, some people opposed it because race, some people opposed it for moral reasons.

M Michael Radelet 18:40

And then one guy stood up and he said, My son was murdered and it was never solved. And I think, you know, I know that the death penalty costs a ton of money. And it's not that I don't like the death penalty. But I think we have other priorities. If you want to help

families of homicide victims, we should be helping solve the unsolved murder cases. And the man mentioned that he was trying to form a group, there were only about 25 people in it at that time, of families of homicide victims of murders that were not solved. And he said, I'd like to find, you know, get more information. But you know, I don't, I'm doing this myself. I don't, we don't have any money and stuff like that. And after that meeting, I invited him up to Boulder to speak to my class, to speak about homicide victimization. And in that class, just the criminology class, we met over here at Helms, and there are 100 people in the class. He said the same thing. I'd like to document more of these unsolved homicides. But you know, I can't do it all myself. And I said, I stood up and I said, Well, Howard, this is the University of Colorado. We don't pay students, they pay us. They sign up for an independent study and do all the work. Yeah. So out of that class 10 students ended up signing up for class and Howard, who lived up near Red Rocks, came down every week and we did a class. I think we might have still been on quarters. But this is about 2002. And the students went out and documented unsolved homicides. We divided the state up, and each student took a bunch of police departments. They just wanted to get names, dates, places, information about any unsolved homicide. And unsolved homicides, there's no statute of limitations, so it goes back to, you know, Timbuktu - 1816 [inaudible - could be 1860] in Colorado. So the students, you know, were really doing great work. That organization is still around today. It's really not very active. But they've documented about 1500 unsolved homicides in Colorado, www.unresolvedhomicides.org. And I worked very closely with them for 10 years or so. I actually became president of the board of directors for a while. We did a lot of student volunteer work, we got grants, we had annual meetings, we would have 200 family members who would come and the cops would come and we would set the cops up with families from their jurisdiction. So it was very effective in learning what the families go through.

M

Michael Radelet 21:12

So it's not, the death penalty is not always you know, do you want these guys dead? I think a lot of those families, if they could get their mitts on the guy who killed their daughter, they would, you know, like to see the guy dead. But everybody realized that it was more important to solve the cases. So anyhow, in 2009, we ran a bill in the Colorado legislature to abolish the death penalty, and use the cost savings to hire more, to form more cold case squads so they can solve. Right now in the United States. 40% of homicides aren't solved. 40%. If you have an unsolved homicide from two years ago, and you call the cops, they're not going to call back, you know, they're dealing with last week's homicide, right? So...

Jenn Tostlebe 21:53

And not to interrupt, but homicides are like, the most solved type of crime. Correct? Or is that not right?

Michael Radelet 22:00

I don't know about that. I think auto theft is. Because auto theft, everybody reports it and you've got something to go on. But I'm not sure on that. But homicides, yeah, I mean, you do what you can do. Yeah. And sometimes there's no information at all. It's a drive by shooting, people think that there's DNA in every homicide. There's DNA in maybe 20% of the cases. If it's a drive by shooting, gang shooting, you know, there's no DNA or they get DNA, and they can't trace it. So anyhow, so that was another learning experience. To me, people say we need the death penalty to help families of homicide victims, but the people saying that are people who've never listened to families of homicide victims. So they became an important anti-death penalty group. And to our surprise, we, I think they passed in the House, failed in the Senate by one vote. You know, so it came really, really close.

Jenn Tostlebe 22:51

But how disappointing.

Michael Radelet 22:52

Yeah, but then, you know, for the next several years, virtually every year somebody would run the bill, then we started to do more research because it's a research driven activity. So I did some research on the history of the death penalty in Colorado, later wrote a book on that. And then I just collected data on every case since 1972 where they sought the death penalty in Colorado. And so we could chart it, chart what's happening, who gets it. And also, the history was quite interesting to. We documented some executions that nobody had documented before. In doing that history, I befriended a guy in Connecticut who was raised in Colorado, and this guy worked with people with developmental disabilities. And he found a poem about an execution, unnamed. It was about the night before an execution where a kid with developmental disabilities was executed. And he wrote to me, this was before email, wrote to me and asked if I could track the poem, which I did. It turn out to be a Colorado case of a guy named Joe Arridy, executed in 1939. And this guy in Connecticut wrote a book about the case. And it was a false confession case. A guy with an IQ estimated to be 39. Another person confessed to the crime and they found that other guy with a murder weapon. Joe had been, he was from Pueblo but he was, he lived

at the Colorado Home for Mental Defectives, if you can believe that's the name of a place in Grand Junction, and hopped the freight train. They arrested him in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The sheriff up there had heard about a murder in Pueblo, and knew that that was Joe's hometown, even though he wasn't in Pueblo at the time. So anyhow, this guy in Connecticut wrote a book and he basically was adopted by the Colorado Springs chapter of ARC. It used to be called the Association of Retarded Citizens, but it's still called the ARC. And they did a lot of education about the case. A lawyer came forward and read about about the book. Read about the case. And present, and did a lot of more research on it, presented it to Governor Bill Ritter, who his last days in office provided a posthumous pardon to Joe Arridy (https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/news/colorado-governor-grants-unconditional-pardon-based-on-innocence-to-inmate-who-was-executed). So it was it's really quite a case. So in that came out of our work on the history of the death penalty in Colorado. And later, I think in 2017, I published a book on it, and then gave 30 copies to state legislators in 2020. So you know, sociologists can make a difference and sociological research can really make a difference.

Jenn Tostlebe 25:35

Definitely.

Jose Sanchez 25:36

Yeah. So throughout your career, you've given testimony in front of legislators at courts. Can you tell us a little bit about your experiences doing that?

Jenn Tostlebe 25:47

Like, is it terrifying the first time you do that?

Michael Radelet 25:51

It's a terrifying every time. *laughter* And if you're not terrified, you shouldn't be in the business. And every time I've ever testified, I walk out, saying, Oh, I wish I would have said, X, Y, and Z. I've testified in maybe 75 cases, and in state legislatures in six or eight states. And yeah, every one is a little bit different, of course. And the thing I try to remember when I testify is that I know more about the death penalty than everybody else in this room put together, including the judge. And just try to relax and tell the truth and be straightforward. And try to use a little bit of humor here in there if you have time available. And in those cases, it's a little bit different in legislative bodies than it is before a jury, but

usually, for a jury. It's the best lawyers who get expert witnesses, lousy attorneys don't even call an expert. And sometimes it's hard to get it, hard to get an expert, I got an email last night from somebody in Texas looking for an expert who can testify about race. So I gave him a couple of names. It's really just educating, educating the jury. And if prosecutors start giving you crap, you have to concede the limits of research. No research is perfect. So, you know, one question you get, are you accusing the prosecutor of being a bigot? You know, intentional racism versus subconscious racism, unintentional racism. So you go through all that. And, you know, the data quite clearly show on race that the odds of a being sentenced to death for those who killed blacks are about four times less than those who kill whites. There are a huge rates of victim disparity that leads to overall given homicide, more whites are executed than blacks. But that disappears, immediately when you look at the race of the victim. So I think it's an extension of the classroom, you just do your best to educate people. Oftentimes, the more people know about the death penalty, the more likely they are to vote for life, or be opposed to the death penalty. So I was doing a bunch of cases on lingering doubt, after we started the innocence research. So you're going into the penalty phase, the jury has already convicted the guy. But are we going and say, Well, okay, he's guilty beyond reasonable doubt, but that's not to say that he's absolutely certainly guilty. There's possibility of error. And then finally, in the mid 80s, the California Supreme Court said Mike Radelet cannot testify anymore about lingering doubt. And anyhow, so you litigate those issues, but the best attorneys use experts. So it's a good way to learn more about the death penalty.

J

Jose Sanchez 28:38

I think I have a new career goal, now. I want a state to say you're no longer allowed to testify.

M

Michael Radelet 28:44

Exactly. *laughter* Now, it's really important to recognize the contributions of criminologists have made to the overall trend to abolish the death penalty in the United States. Right now executions are at a 30-40 year low. We've only had two under state authority this year (2021), so far. Three under federal authority. When Trump left he, he executed bunches of people in last year, last two years of his reign. But in any event, the number of executions has gone way down, the number of death sentences has gone way down, more and more states are abolishing the death penalty. Not only, Colorado abolish last year (2020), this year, Virginia abolished and since 1970, Virginia, ranked number two in the United States in the number of executions and executed 113 people behind only Texas. Texas has now got 570. Anyhow, Virginia abolished. So there's this long term trend towards the abolition of the death penalty. And I think that trend, that a lot of the power--

people don't recognize this--but I think it's come from criminological and sociological work. Part of it is complete destruction of the deterrence argument, which was the number one pro-death penalty argument in the 70s and 80s. Another one is religious arguments that, you know, I remember when I was young, having formal debates with priests, where the priests would say, you know, thou shalt kill. But that's totally disappeared, in part because Dead Man Walking (by Helen Prejean), which was the most important death penalty book of our generation. And people were saying, if we don't kill them, they're going to kill again. And they would make that argument without any data. And, you know, risk to prison guards or prison visitors if they're sentenced to life. So all those become empirical questions. And, again, the more people know about it, the more likely they are to stand opposed the death penalty, and criminological research has had a major and continues to have a major impact on the public debate on the death penalty.

Jenn Tostlebe 30:48

So then has, has there been empirical research done on like, if someone kills someone, they're not super likely to kill again, are they?

Michael Radelet 30:58

Not at all.

Jenn Tostlebe 30:58

Okay.

Michael Radelet 30:59

Unless you're absolutely crazy, in which case they shouldn't be sentenced to death. But yeah, the best study on that was done by two criminologists at Sam Houston State University, and they looked at everybody who's on death row at the time of Furman (https://www.oyez.org/cases/1971/69-5030). Furman was the 1972 case that abolished the death penalty. And the research was done in 1989. And the question is how many killed again? And I think they found, let's see, they did, there were 560 people on death row at the time of Furman, they tracked down 530 of them, something like that. And they found that 60 killed again, with four of them, four or five had been released from death row because they were innocent. So the odds of repeat homicide in prison, or, in those days, if you were released from prison, they didn't have life without parole in those days, are about the same as being sentenced to death and found to be innocent. So it's kind of a

wash. The innocence argument is another one. In 1979, when I got in the business, nobody was saying innocent people were sentenced to death. I mean, people thought, you know, we're real modern. And yeah, in the past, you know, there were people who were executed and probably innocent, you know, blah, blah, blah. But today, we don't make those mistakes anymore. And so we kind of took care of that argument.

Jenn Tostlebe 32:14

Yep. Which we'll talk about in a little bit. But Alright, so our last question on this kind of career reflection section, has to do with how many people you've talked to who have been on death row? So I think it's over 100. At this point that you've spoken with?

Michael Radelet 32:31

Who have been or are on death row? Probably, I don't know. 300, maybe.

Jenn Tostlebe 32:35

Oh, okay. So even more than what I had?

Michael Radelet 32:37

Yeah.

Jenn Tostlebe 32:37

What is it like to talk to people and build relationships with people on death row?

Michael Radelet 32:43

It's actually quite easy. And I've had students write to death row inmates for many, many years. It's hard to sustain it. But it's easy to start writing, writing and to have those inmates as your teacher. You know, that first letter is generally pretty bland. If I were to write somebody today, I would, if the person was in Colorado, I'd say oh, what do you think about the Colorado Rockies this year? They really suck. What do you think, you know, politics? Very easy to talk about that. Any current event. You know, what do you think about the guy? The big news now this week is the Belarusian government hijacked a plane the other day and took a dissident off it. What do you think? So you know, current

events. Or how do you spend your time? What are your favorite TV shows? So you start going into it. And then the person will write back. Many people on death row are starved for outside companionship. And they they write back and then they introduce their own themes of interest. And it's really easy to carry on. I mean, right now I write to probably half dozen current and former death row inmates, and they don't get to listen to podcasts so I'll admit it here: I write one letter, and I change Dear Bob to Dear Jim. And then I, you know, put in a unique paragraph. But mostly, it's the same thing. And I've got my schedule book. I write them every three weeks, religiously. So it's quite easy to do that. And again, I've learned more from death row inmates and their families, than you learn from textbooks about the death penalty, or at least different things. You learn different things from those people.

Jenn Tostlebe 34:17

Right. So I feel like I would just be sad if I didn't ask a question on this. You mentioned it earlier that you have spoken with Ted Bundy in the past, and that it was different than maybe some other people that you've talked with. And I think you were a paralegal assistant for him for 10 years? What was it like talking to someone who was, you know, a well known serial killer at the time? Well, maybe not at the time, but now. Like, was it weird kind of building a relationship and interacting with him? Or was it really similar to other people you've talked to on death row?

Michael Radelet 34:53

I think it was similar to other people. I mean, Ted Bundy was a law student. So he was very smart. So he educated me in a way that other inmates couldn't about what life on death row was like. And he knew the other inmates, so he would teach me about what they're struggling with and going through. His wife, he was sentenced to death in 1978, so we arrived in Florida pretty much the same time, and his wife had gotten a job at the University of Florida. She knew him before he was arrested, and came down for the Chi Omega trial, which was in Miami. And Ted acted as his own attorney and put her on the stand and said, Do you take me to be your lawfully wedded husband and you know, whatever. But one of these days I'm going to write a paper about death row girlfriends. I couldn't do it in Florida, because I'd get rushed out of town. Anyhow, she was, she was what I call a non-nut, you know, very, very competent, sane person. She just died a couple years ago. And so I got to know her and Ted at the same time in the visiting park. You know, Bundy at the time, always maintained and maintained his innocence. Up until the last year or so of his life. In 1987, his wife's mother was injured in a car wreck in Seattle. And I brought her, she had a son by the first first marriage, and she and Ted had a baby in prison. So I brought the three of them down to Orlando, they went to Seattle, never to

return to Florida, because by that time, Ted was confessing, trying to get a volunteer lawyer to take his case. And he did get a volunteer lawyer, a really good one. A guy named Jim Coleman [James Earl Coleman Jr.], who's still a law professor at Duke. Jim did the Duke lacrosse case, a very esteemed faculty member out there. You know, he did what he could do. There was also another lawyer who kind of fell in love with him, which is another story. I still feel bound by confidentiality that can't really tell the story. But anyhow, yeah, I mean, so when I look back at Ted, I've got a bunch of stuff in my office, I just looked at it today. The reason why is because in two weeks, we have free recycling. And I've got to recycle, I've got a couple feet of Ted Bundy papers that I need to get rid of. But I'll show you some of the letters that Ted had written. I've also got a bunch of, Ted saved for me, letters that people had written to him over the course of a year. So I've got, you know, 18 inches of letters, letters to Ted. Those I can't archive though, because they have real names and real addresses. So anyhow, I'm probably going to throw them all out or probably shred them all. But anyhow.

J

Jose Sanchez 37:32

So interesting. But we should probably start getting into your paper that you co authored with Hugo Adam Bedau. It's called "Miscarriages of justice in potentially capital cases." The paper was published in 1987 in the Stanford Law Review. And the primary goal of the article was to highlight miscarriages of justice for capital or potentially capital cases in the US in the 20th century, a time before DNA exonerations. To do this, a catalogue of cases with grave errors was created by Hugo and Mike. The paper was born out of a project that had been started 25 years prior. There were a total of 350 erroneous sentences and 139 of them were death sentences. So our first question for you, Mike, is why was or is creating a catalogue of cases of miscarriages of justice when it comes to these capital cases or potentially capital cases important to do?

M

Michael Radelet 38:43

Okay, so the story on that paper is that the catalog was actually started by a guy on death row in Florida, a guy named Bob Sullivan. He was executed in November of 1983 and knew that I was getting interested in death penalty work. And he said, You know, I've collected eight or 10 stories, you know, you should you should publish this. My co-author Hugo Adam Bedau was at Tufts University, and really the top death penalty scholar in the country in the 20th century. He was a philosopher, and a brilliant, brilliant guy, talk about learning from other people. He had this huge library, which I inherited, but in any event, could really teach me the ropes and he had published stuff on erroneous executions going back to 1962. And Bob Sullivan had said that Hugo and I ought to do something similar. So I got to know Bob, he sent me his stuff. And I'd met Hugo, Hugo came down to Florida

one time to give a talk. And that's when we met. That was in 1981. He and I hit it off. So I suggested that he and I, co-author in an update to earlier work that he had done. And Hugo said, Great. I thought it was going to be a summer project. But the goal was simply to document 20th century cases where people who were sentenced to death for homicide or just convicted of a homicide later turned out to be innocent, or sentenced to death for rape. Rape in those days was a capital offense. So this is not only days, in the days before DNA. DNA first arrived about 1990 or 1991. But was also the days before any sociologist had access to LexisNexis or Google law or Westlaw or any of that kind of stuff. So I just read everything I could get my hands on, on the death penalty to find relevant cases, spread the word around the country to death penalty attorneys and scholars, that I was looking for cases. So people would send stuff to me, then I go down to the law library, and just look through the indices for the law journals, or for the published reports of appellate cases and see what I could find. And then order. When I got the dates, I could order on microfilm articles about the case. All that stuff is now archived at the State University of New York in Albany. They have the national death penalty archives, and I'm sending, I've got another huge database with everybody sentenced to death in Florida, like 1200 cases. And literally that stuff is in boxes right now in Tallahassee. And as soon as we sign the formal agreement with Albany, it's all going to Albany. And I've sent, I've sent other stuff to them. And interesting enough for criminologists, when I sent it to Albany, the archivist said, you got to get it appraised. I said, are you kidding me? This is just research material, who cares? He said, no, no, no, get it appraised it'll cost a couple 100 bucks, but you know, whatever. So I said, Okay, so we hired an appraiser. And he appraised it at $50,000, an incredible tax write off. The most money I've ever made on any research project, ever. You know, very rarely have ever been paid to do anything and definitely work, you don't do it to get rich. But anyhow, so those archives are up there, and they're not sealed so that people can get to them right away. So we documented all these cases. And that was the first time that I ever word processed anything. I did it, the way that in those days word processed on paper, it was printed out at night on 14 inch wide computer paper, overnight at the mainframe computer center at the University of Florida. And to edit it, I won't go into edit, but you have to do a Command C slash Mike slash Michael change Mike Michael on every line.

Jenn Tostlebe 42:36

Wow.

Michael Radelet 42:36

Yeah. So I mean, it's very time consuming. So we worked on that until we presented at the meetings of, I think the American Society of Criminology (ASC) in 1985. And also by that

time, you know, a number of organizations knew what we were doing, and especially the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), and they did a press release on it, when it was presented at the ASC meetings. And it got picked up by I think every paper in the country. A big article in The New York Times, front page headlines in Florida, I had no idea what to think about all that or how to handle it, and we hadn't even submitted it for publication. So we decided that no criminology or sociology journal would publish it because it was so long. So we said, let's do a law review. And again, being naive, who said, Well, what the hell? Let's send it to Stanford Law , it's the best law review in the country. And law reviews have multiple submission. So before we send it to Stanford, we debated is it worth $10 postage to send it out there. But anyhow, we sent it and lo and behold, it was accepted.

M

Michael Radelet 43:37

And then that paper immediately caught the attention of the Attorney General Edwin Meese (https://www.justice.gov/ag/bio/meese-edwin-iii) who's real conservative Reaganite in those days, and he got two people in the Justice Department who were getting paid to do the work. And they were both lawyers, both very good lawyers, both now friends of mine, but arch conservatives, and they critiqued the paper. One now is still a member of the Michigan Supreme Court, and the other is a renowned professor at the University of Utah. I think they might still be both pro death penalty, but I'm not sure about that. But they're involved in other conservative causes. So they critiqued the paper. And basically, they said they looked at we had 23 cases that we thought there was a probable erroneous execution, just said probably. Most of the cases we had in our inventory, it was states admission of error. But the state had never admitted executing an innocent person. And they looked at 10 of those cases and said, Oh, they really were guilty, you know, Bedau and Radelet are not even lawyers. True! *laughter* [They also said] we didn't really know what we're talking about. That was probably true, too. But they said, the argument essentially, is everything we do causes innocent people to die. We play golf, you know, once in a while somebody gets clumped on the head by a golf ball. Or if you drive a car, you know, there's accidents, but the net benefit outweighs that liability, and they argued the benefit came in deterrence. So they rested the argument that even if, once in a while, an innocent person gets killed, then the net benefit of the death penalty outweighs that liability. And of course, that deterrence argument now is gone. But so anyhow, we went back and forth. And it just gave us more and more attention. And then other scholars followed it up, have been following up ever since.

M

Michael Radelet 45:18

But, and of course, in 1990-1991, depending upon how you measure this, was the first DNA exoneration. Bedau and I felt that we were the first people exonerated, because all the

stuff we were talking about, you know, witnesses lie, cops cheat, you know, and there's all sorts of perjury, sometimes guilty people confess, you know, all that has now been proven beyond any doubt by DNA. So anyhow, then with the emergence of the Innocence Projects, one of which is here at the University of Colorado, you know, more and more people are getting exonerated. And today, as we speak, in May of 2021, there have been 185 people released from death rows around the United States since 1972 because of innocence. And that list started with a long footnote that we hadn't that Stanford Law Review paper in 1985. I updated the list until the late 90s. But now it's updated by the Death Penalty Information Center. So it really, you know, again, just the right place at the right time. And it wasn't a particularly sophisticated sociological analysis, it's just writing 150 word vignette on each of the cases and then looking for patterns. But it just had a huge, and continues to have a huge impact today. Everybody concedes, even if you're pro-death penalty, that once in a while innocent people are executed. And you have several in Colorado who regularly came to my classes to speak. And you know, they just told quite a story.

Jenn Tostlebe 46:54

Yeah, it's a cool paper. I mean, you go through so many different things. You look at so many different aspects, you know, types of the evidence of innocence, like what is what was used? What was used to identify the error, regional variations, racial and ethnic variation. It's really cool.

Michael Radelet 47:14

Yeah, thank you. It was a fun paper to work on. And right after it was published. When I was in Florida, I taught halftime in the medical school. So I taught a course on first year for first year students on human development. Second year course on medical ethics. When that paper was published, I said, screw it, I don't like medical students. Death Row inmates are quite a lot more interesting. So I stopped teaching in the medical school and began to teach full time in sociology and once a while in law school.

Jose Sanchez 47:42

So in your catalog, you include what you call, "potentially capital cases." And so these are cases where the death penalty could have been on the table versus just it resulting in a death sentence. Why was it important to go beyond just death sentences and include these potentially capital cases?

Michael Radelet 48:06

That's a good question. We did it basically for sample size and also to preserve the historical record, because there are all sorts of people who were prosecuted for federal for capital offense. But were able to get it down, the jury came back with life sentence, something like that. Also, people who were really lucky in the sense that the very gruesome murder committed in a state that abolished the death penalty, or right after a state had abolish the death penalty. So we just basically wanted to preserve the historical record, and look at the patterns of what causes, what was the cause of error, and also how the error was discovered. And so those patterns were similar both for capital and non-capital offenses. So we decided to go with the broader definition of anybody erroneously convicted for a homicide. And again, our criterion for inclusion was the state had to admit error.

Jenn Tostlebe 49:01

So when you were looking at, like, these erroneous convictions, you included or saw that there were some that included cases that involved witnesses giving despositions or were testifying against the defendant, and there were errors in those testimonies. You mention requiring two independent witnesses may have detrimental effects. And so what can be done to address the issues surrounding witness testimonies?

Michael Radelet 49:32

Well, there will always be witness error. And in capital cases, in most, the number one cause of erroneous convictions in the United States writ large is erroneous eyewitness identification. In a homicide case, the best eyewitness is dead. So that's not, it's the second most common error. The most common error is perjury by a prosecution witness and their perjury could be by the true culprit, it could be by a cop. There's a lot of pressure on cops to solve the crime, so they might say that, you know, so and so confessed and they didn't really do it. We're finding that more and more with, you know, relatively common cases these days with cops lying about what, what a suspect did before the suspect got beat up or killed or arrested. And now that everybody has a cell phone, you can show Yeah, that's wrong, and so most cops are completely honest, no problems at all. But some cops lie. Prosecutors sometimes lie about evidence so that they hide exculpatory evidence. So you know, all that goes on. But there always be erroneous eyewitness identification. I don't think it will ever be perfect. I've suggested, I began in 1998, to do the Mike Radelet babysitter test.

Jenn Tostlebe 50:46

Laughter What is this?

Michael Radelet 50:47

Well, you get to name stuff after yourself after a while. I said that before anybody is sentenced to death on the word of one witness, the prosecutor has to hire the witness to babysit her kids one night, and if you can't trust him to be a babysitter, you can't, you shouldn't trust them to be the difference between life and death or conviction and non conviction. There are so many cases. There's a guy who lives here in Denver, he spent 28 years in prison, 19 on death row. And it was discovered perjured prosecution witness evidence. His wife now runs the Colorado Innocence Project at the law school. But, you know, he was just incredibly lucky to get out to and that's another story. But in any event, yeah, you know, there's there's always people lying. And they lie not only in capital cases, but other cases as well. And there's a lot of pressure on the cops to solve crime, so that cops are more likely to push the truth. Prosecutors more likely to turn the other way when they know that somebody is lying. So and there are a lot of witnesses who know, there are a lot of people in jails who know that the pressure is on the cops, so they can do you know, the jailhouse snitch saying that I heard the guy confess. So, it's really quite a problem. I think unsubstantiated eyewitness identification isn't worth a pitcher of warm spit, as they say. You've got to have it backed up by other people. Or other evidence.

Jose Sanchez 52:26

Okay. So our last question for you about your paper, you concluded that out of the 350 cases, identified as capital cases or potentially capital cases, 43% of the defendants were known to be Black. This indicates that the risk of a miscarriage of justice falls disproportionately on Blacks when compared to their representation in the general population. And you have done a bit of work on race and ethnicity and the death penalty. What is the evidence or is there evidence of racism in capital cases? And I know you touched on this a little bit earlier. But if you could tell us a little bit more about it.

Michael Radelet 53:09

Sure. I actually testified in a case in Florida in 1983. I was going to testify about race. And I had my little Chi squares on that 14-inch wide computer paper. And they wouldn't let me testify. I went to the courtroom, at was the beginning of the penalty phase, a judge comes out and says hi, jury, I'm judge Smith, Judge Jones can't continue, don't worry about why. So it turns out that after the penalty phase, Judge Jones had referred to the defendant by

the N word. In a very overt, anyhow, they said I couldn't testify, because you needed evidence of intentional racial bias. Later, that guy got a new trial on unrelated issue, and the Florida Supreme Court actually wrote about it. And they said, Hey, Judge Jones, you know, use the N word here. You know, what's going on? They wrote it at the end of the decision, they granted the guy a new trial based on other stuff. But they said oh, by the way, you know, they said, judges must present the aura of neutrality to the public. You know, they didn't care the guy was a bigot. They just said, you know, the appearance is what counts. And I think this is a quote, we write about this to warn other judges and public officials that their words both on and off the bench, may be used as evidence of bias. So the judge, the original judge was never reprimanded. Anyhow, the defendants name is Tony Peek, Anthony Peek, people can look it up. 1985 decision by the Florida Supreme Court set it back for a third trial. And at the third trial, he was acquitted. So the race mixes in with acquittal.

M

Michael Radelet 54:52

So there's bunches of stories about overt racism, but even more about statistical bias. You know, jurors tend to be predominantly white, prosecutors and political animals, they go after the cases that show up on the front page of the newspaper. And when poor people, people of color get murdered, they tend not to get the same publicity that other cases get. So there's a whole host of factors, I think most of it is unintentional. But in 1987, the US Supreme Court said, you had to have evidence of intentional racial bias. And that put those of us who do statistical studies basically out of business. And it wasn't until, I mentioned that I'm doing a grant in California. Last year, the California legislature passed a Racial Justice Act. And they explicitly said statistical patterns of racial bias, do count. And inmates can use that to challenge their convictions under the 8th and 14th amendment. So there might be a new day about this coming. There are a number of studies that are going now in California.

M

Michael Radelet 55:59

I had done a study in 2006, of the only statewide study of race and death sentencing in California, and so we're going to update it. But you know, what the most difficult problem is in California on these studies? A lesson for young sociologists: is to measure race. You know, thank God, we're getting more diverse. But also,

Jenn Tostlebe 56:19

It's more tricky.

Michael Radelet 56:20

The world was easier when it was Black, white, yes or no? Now we have Black, white, you know, in California, of course, a lot of Hispanic, Native American, others, Asian, so we've got to control for all that kind of stuff. So we can we, sometimes we do white, other, you know, something like that. But you know, what do you do with somebody whose mom is African American, and dad is Asian? So, anyhow, so that gets pretty complex. There's ways to do it right. So we're going to do it. We're getting data on our new study, we've got death sentencing data from an outfit called the California Appellate Project. And right now we're getting original data from the California Department of Vital Statistics. So we'll see how that goes. That issue goes on and on and on. I mean, people. And when you meet people on death row, you know, a lot of them are not the sharpest pencil in the box. And that intersects with social class. But anyhow, so those racial disparities. And what else in the United States is equal? You know, people have this little myth that, you know, people know that we have inequalities in housing or inequalities in education. The only thing people think are equal or equitable is death penalty. Give me a break. So that issue will rise again.

Jenn Tostlebe 57:38

Yeah. All right. Well, for the last 10 or so minutes, we are going to ask questions, kind of looking forward both in the death penalty and your career, and then some advice questions.

Jenn Tostlebe 57:50

So first, the big question. Do you believe that the end of the death penalty is in sight?

Michael Radelet 57:57

Yes, I do. It's going to be slow. Three years ago, or four or five years ago, I would have said, I would have been much more optimistic. But after Trump stole the election from Hillary Clinton, the Supreme Court is terrible. And Trump got three nominees to the Supreme Court, all of whom loved the death penalty, you know, mom, dad, apple pie and killing people. So it's going to be very difficult to get a majority of the Supreme Court to throw it out. That said, states, the battlegrounds have moved to the states. So we've got as I said, Virginia abolish this year, Colorado last year. Virginia is a real surprise. It's a Confederate state, the first Confederate State to abolish the death penalty. And it's a state that, you know, really used the death penalty a lot. But there are other states where there's optimism to abolish it. Ten states have abolished the death penalty this century. So the

trend is definitely away from the death penalty. We could make further advances in some states that rarely use the death penalty. States like Montana, though I testified earlier this year in the Senate Judiciary Committee in Montana, and it was was like talking to a wall. But they started out with an anti Vax bill, and I had to listen to all that. Nevada is a real possibility. And even Arizona, we'll see how it goes in Arizona. Demographics are changing in Texas. You never know how that's gonna work out.

J

Jose Sanchez 59:23

Has California abolished it? Cuz last time I...

M

Michael Radelet 59:26

In California they've got a moratorium. It's very complicated. Thegovernor there can commute only about half the sentences. Most states governors can commute them all. But in California, if the offender, if the defendant has a prior for one of six or eight felonies, then the governor needs the permission of the state Supreme Court. So governor Newsom has not commuted any death sentences but he's an ardent abolitionist. Earlier this year, there was, they had a statewide meeting of a group called Death Penalty Focus, which is the largest death penalty group in the state. Governor Newsom started out with a five minute talk on why he hated the death penalty. So he also ordered a moratorium. And went, he didn't go personally, but he ordered the dismantling of the gas chamber in the gurney at San Quentin. So as long as governor Newsom is around, there'll be no executions in California. And pretty clearly, any of his successors unless they get some weirdo. I mean, they have a recall election going on this fall. So you never know.

J

Jose Sanchez 1:00:34

Yeah, I mean, I haven't kept up with it too much since I left, three years ago. But I know they like have it, or I knew they had it. They just never used it. I think the last people they executed was in 2006. And before that, I want to say it was Stanley Tookie Williams.

M

Michael Radelet 1:00:50

Yeah. They only had 10 executions in the modern era.

J

Jose Sanchez 1:00:53

Yeah. So yeah, they've always sort of had it but never used it. And so I know, we always have like the discussion of, well why not just get rid of it?

Michael Radelet 1:01:03

Well, California has the largest death row in the country. There's 725 people on death row. It's one out of every one out of every 3.7 death row inmates in the United States is on death row in California. But they're in absolutely no danger of getting executed, at least for the foreseeable future.

Jose Sanchez 1:01:23

I think the average, at least last time I checked, it was like 30 some years before someone got executed in California.

Michael Radelet 1:01:30

Yeah. And that's true in a number of other states as well. It's not uncommon to see people on death row for 30 to 35 years. One guy, I'm writing to actually a couple guys I'm writing to in Florida have been on death row for 30 years. I don't know how they can still, how they can still function.

Jenn Tostlebe 1:01:48

That's gonna be really hard time too.

Jose Sanchez 1:01:54

So Mike, what would you consider the greatest success of your career?

Jenn Tostlebe 1:02:01

Hard hitting question.

Michael Radelet 1:02:04

Well, when I look back on it, I think the administrative work I did. I was department chair for 10 years, which, by the way, is a job that does make you pro death penalty because there are a lot of students and faculty you want to just kill. "You! Out of the gene pool!" But you know, in both departments, I was able, with the faculty to make to really change those departments and do a number of good things, and no grievances, and no lawsuits and things like that. So that's, that's a survival thing. So I think it's department building. It was

really different place here in, when I was chair from 2003 to 2009. We had a bunch of retirements, so we're able to replace those people with new faculty. So when I look back, I think those are, I'm most proud of that.

M Michael Radelet 1:02:53
And then, you know, having a little bit of an impact, on death penalty stuff or at least being part of a community that had an impact. I mean, nobody does this stuff alone. It's always done, you know, with graduate students, with a community, a community of activists, community of lawyers, in the case of the death penalty. So yeah, I've been able to say that I was lucky, in the right place at the right time. And, you know, met some really good people, some of whom haven't been executed, met some good people both in and out of prison.

Jenn Tostlebe 1:03:23
And then what advice would you give to a newly hired Assistant Professor Michael Radelet?

M Michael Radelet 1:03:29
Yeah. What advice? I think the advice that I would give, is to go with your heart. And I think a lot of graduate students get funded in areas that they're not exactly secure with. And so as an assistant professor, you got to use those skills to publish papers. But you also need to recognize that you're free to change and go with opportunity and go with the flow.

M Michael Radelet 1:03:33
The second thing is learn from the people. You know, basically, in my experience, I learned, as I said, an awful lot from the families of death row inmates, from the death row inmates themselves, from the lawyers, you know, get out of the university. And that's true, no matter what your issue is. Book learning is important and data are important. But you know, if you're going to do study, you know, we have studies you're going on about birth control and reduced births to teenage mothers, you got to talk with the moms, and you got to learn from them and from the dads and from the people in the clinic. And part of that is just hanging out.

M

Michael Radelet 1:04:25

So I think that's the best piece of advice as assistant professors, I think people already know, you got to stay out of the fights. University politics can be very complicated. And to an assistant professor, things might appear to be different than they actually are because there's such things as confidentiality. We've had here at the University of Colorado, several faculty issues that remain confidential and a matter of fact, just the other day, I got notice from university attorneys that we no longer have to hold the documents in a case of an instructor in our department who was dismissed or who's contract wasn't renewed. And he sent a letter intending to sue and he got a lawyer, but had absolutely no case. But in a case like that, it's not public. It's really not public. And we've had personnel cases in the last five years in the department that I don't know, I don't know what's going on. And my ear is pretty close to the ground. So I'm quite proud of my colleagues for keeping their mouths shut. And with, so assistant professors, you've just got to do your work, and you got to get tenure. And then you can, then you have a lot more freedom to do what you want to do.

J

Jose Sanchez 1:05:32

So Mike, what do you think of the current state of criminology and criminal justice? And where would you like to see this field going in the future?

M

Michael Radelet 1:05:41

Well, I'm more involved in European criminology and criminal justice, I do a lot of work in Europe, worldwide stuff. And there, it's, I think, a lot more, a lot more practical, everyday problems than in the United States. Although there are exceptions, the gang research that people are doing here at the University of Colorado is very pragmatic, and has all sorts of policy recommendations. So I think, you know, I'm not a critic of the way the criminology is going in the United States. I am a critic of people who don't do research unless they can profit by it. And I've certainly over years known criminologist who's number one goal in life is to get money to go to the mall. But you know, different people have different goals. I think, here at the University of Colorado, we're lucky because the faculty are pretty involved in the issues that they are studying. So those are good role models. But other places, that's that's not been true. So you know, the criminology, you gotta pick the issue, figure out what's going to be the hot issue, not only today, but five years down the pike, and figure out how to make your sociology or your criminology relevant, how it can be used, talk to lawyers who are involved, and you ask them, what kind of research would be useful?

Jenn Tostlebe 1:06:56

Well, that is all we have for you. Do you have any final thoughts or any words of wisdom that you'd like to share?

Michael Radelet 1:07:04

Not really, I made a comment before we started recording. Sometimes it goes like this, it was one of my father's favorite expressions. He did a lot of civil rights work back in the 50s. He worked actually with Jackie Robinson, doing traveling around the country doing speeches on race issues. And one of his favorite expressions was quite simple. If you wait to do something until you know what you're doing, you'll never do anything. In other words, just a drop down and figure it out and learn while you're doing it. And another one was, sometimes you just have to start sailing and see what you hit. He called it the politically incorrect Christopher Columbus method, you just start sailing and see what you hit. And I think there's a lot of truth to that. Yeah. And I think the third thing is, you know, if you don't like something, you should do something about it, stand up and talk about it. So I think those are good mottos for everybody. People succeed in this business not because of brains, it's not always the smartest people who have the most publications, it's more I think, a matter of persistence. And, you know, figuring out the business of criminology is different than the scholarship of criminology, how the outfit wins. So going to ASC or ACJS and hanging out in the hallways and learning that way is very, very good stuff to do.

Jose Sanchez 1:08:30

Alright, well, thank you very much, Mike, we really appreciate you sitting down and talking to us today. Is there anything you would like to plug anything that we should be on the lookout for coming in the future?

Michael Radelet 1:08:42

Oh, boy, I mean, so much of what I do is related to judicial appointments. So I've been lucky enough to teach in the law school here and learn from those students, and teach combination courses with sociology graduate students and law students. And the law students might not know what a chi square is and the sociology students don't know what the 8th and 14th amendment are. And so we learn from each other. And I think we're gonna see more and more interdisciplinary work, where progress is made, not by criminologists per se, but by an interdisciplinary group of criminologists, criminal justice professionals, and by lawyers.

Jose Sanchez 1:09:21

And where can where can people find you? Are you on Twitter by any chance?

Michael Radelet 1:09:25

No. I don't eat anchovies and I don't do Twitter. And I don't do Facebook.

Jenn Tostlebe 1:09:32

So probably email?

Michael Radelet 1:09:33

Yeah, email, and my name is easy to spell. Or maybe not easy to spell, but easy to find. R a d e l e t. And if you google me, I'm sure find out and you know, people Colorado will know where I'm at. I won't be able to disappear.

Jenn Tostlebe 1:09:51

All right. Well, thank you so much for your time.

Michael Radelet 1:09:53

Well, thank you for what you're doing. It's really important work.

Jose Sanchez 1:09:56

Thank you.

Jose Sanchez 1:09:58

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