

# The Wolfe Institute

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*The Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities,  
presents*

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## Kalief Browder and the Challenges of Criminal Justice Reform



*photo credit Zach Gross*

Kalief Browder was arrested at age 16 for the alleged theft of a backpack and held for three years on Rikers Island, while he protested his innocence. During his time there he was abused by guards and inmates, spent 2 years in solitary confinement, and repeatedly attempted suicide. After years of delays, the Bronx DA's office finally dropped all charges and released him. Tragically, Kalief was so shaken by the trauma of those years that he committed suicide at age 22. His incarceration and death were chronicled in two feature articles in *The New Yorker* that lay out the multiple ways the criminal justice system failed Kalief and many other young people in New York City and across the country. President Obama referred to Kalief's death in his message banning solitary confinement for juveniles in federal prisons.

**Venida Browder** is the mother of Kalief Browder. She has become a major advocate for reforms to the bail system and the end of New York's policy of treating 16 and 17 year olds as adults in the criminal justice system. She recently supported calls for closing down Rikers Island all-together.

**Paul Prestia** is the Browder family lawyer. He has become a leading civil rights and criminal justice reform advocate in New York City and has been interviewed on MSNBC, CNN, and Huff Post Live. His cases and legal commentary have been covered in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *New York Daily News*, and *New York Post*.

**Naomi Murakawa** is associate professor of African American studies at Princeton University. She studies the reproduction of racial inequality in 20th and 21st century American politics, with specialization in crime policy and the carceral state. She is the author of *The First Civil Right: How Liberals Built Prison America* (Oxford University Press, 2014), that describes the challenges of creating criminal justice reforms that successfully address the depths of racial injustice in the US.

**Alex S. Vitale** (moderator) is associate professor of sociology at Brooklyn College. He writes about police reform and the need for systematic reductions in the role of police in society. He is the author of the forthcoming book, *The Limits of Policing* (Verso 2017). His essays have appeared in *The Nation*, *Vice News*, *The New York Daily News*, and *The New York Times*.

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**Monday, March 21, 2016**  
**2:15 to 3:30 p.m.**  
**Woody Tanger Auditorium**  
**Brooklyn College Library**

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