

Eduardo Gonzalez  
Brooklyn, NY  
LD 178

My name is Eduardo González.

I am the director for Truth-Seeking at Think Peace Learning and Support Hub, an organization dedicated to the concept of "transitional justice", that is, the concept that societal reconciliation after serious, structural injustice requires recognizing the victims' rights to truth, justice and reparation.

My relationship with Maine runs for over a decade, as I supported the process of creation and work of the Maine-Wabanaki State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Over 2022, my organization, together with other groups hosted two remote courses on transitional justice for about 40 participants. The first was directed at persons interested in truth and reconciliation commissions in different states; the second was focused on Maine.

In both courses, Leo Hylton, a person in the system of corrections in Maine, played an important role, first supporting the implementation of the course and later helping to conceptualize it and co-lead it. You can find the materials of the course, showing Leo's hard work in a Google Drive.

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1IshW24bfJr\\_yBSnZ5fwHjHA0tgvneG3w](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1IshW24bfJr_yBSnZ5fwHjHA0tgvneG3w)

The courses on transitional justice were our first professional interaction with our colleague Leo Hylton, who came to us to help us coordinate the logistics of a purely remote event. He demonstrated enormous ability, work ethic, and he was a joy to work with. It was impossible to run the course as usual, as a merely academic enterprise, and it became really a space of support and, as we would discover, healing.

Leo is incarcerated in Maine, serving a long sentence. He, however, was the serendipitous object of multiple acts of kindness once in prison, which helped him to overcome times of rage and confusion, and recenter himself in spirituality and healing. It is simply impossible to work with him, at distance, in the Spartan environment that the Zoom camera reveals and not feel humbled by the complexity of the human experience.

Given the success of the spring Transitional Justice Course, we contacted participants who came from Maine, who were enthusiastic about the idea of another, Maine-specific course in the fall. We immediately asked Leo to help us organize it, in a capacity significantly more complex than the logistical support he had so far provided. In the months it took us to organize the second edition, using a few resources that were left free after the first course, we discovered the grace of opportunity. From what was foreseen as one course, this year we organized two. From a general perspective on the nation, we were able to focus on the realities and challenges of one specific state, from the blissful ignorance of persons who walk free in life, we came in contact with incarcerated people, four of whom participated actively in the fall course.

The fall course has resulted in alliances with local organizations and the commitment of the participants to use the concepts they learned to support a truth-seeking process in Maine. Moreover, the participants decided, in the phase of course design, to include the perspective of incarcerated persons and explore the subject of penal reform as an indispensable element of racial justice and healing in the US.

It is certainly different to participate in a course where the gallery of zoom participants went beyond the collection of middle class interiors we became so used to seeing during the pandemic. Now, our gallery included four men whose background were the granite bricks of a cell. It helped us break down our own brick cells of prejudice, fear, racism and ignorance. It enriched in a practical sense, more than we could envision conceptually, our understanding of what transitional justice can achieve. In the 6 weeks we shared, the questions, the discussion, the grounding exercises were deeply transformative, because we knew that we shared a tortured

humanity with those who our society treats as unredeemable.

In this year, we plan to reconvene the group of organizers of the fall Maine course to explore forms to apply the model to continue the initiatives in the state and also, perhaps, transfer an invitation to participate to other states. At any rate, this was a practical experience in which we challenged retributive justice models with a healing dimension.