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Newsroom: Justin Bonus '11 in the New Yorker 7/8/2016

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The New Yorker

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Newsroom

July 8, 2016

Justin Bonus '11 in the New Yorker

How Justin Bonus '11 helped renowned "jailhouse lawyer" Derrick Hamilton reverse a murder conviction, and rescue an innocent man from a life sentence.

From The New Yorker: ["The Jailhouse Lawyer Derrick Hamilton's Role in the Reversal of a Murder Conviction"](#) by Jennifer Gonnerman



Derrick Hamilton never went to law school, but prisoners across New York State have heard about his formidable legal skills, which he acquired while he was wrongly imprisoned for murder for more than two decades, reading law books and fighting to get himself and other inmates set free.

[...] last year when Hamilton went to visit a client at Shawangunk prison, in upstate New York. In the visiting room, a man Hamilton had never met before — Wayne Martin, then in his fifth year of a life sentence for a double homicide — approached him and said, “Derrick, listen, I’ve got a good case.”

At the time, Hamilton was mentoring **a young lawyer named Justin Bonus, who had graduated from the Roger Williams University School of Law, in 2011**. Bonus had heard about Hamilton’s reputation as a jailhouse lawyer and tracked down Hamilton after his release from prison. “I’m almost in law school again—that’s how I feel,” **Bonus, who is thirty-six, told me**. “He’s as good as a professor. Better, probably, because he’s more practical.” Hamilton directed **Bonus** to take a close look at Martin’s case. [...]

With Hamilton advising him, **Bonus scrutinized Martin’s case** file and visited him at Shawangunk, and he discovered a number of details that he thought raised serious doubts about Martin’s conviction. With guidance from Hamilton and Hamilton’s boss, a criminal-defense attorney named Scott Brettschneider,

Bonus began working on a post-conviction motion that he planned to file on Martin's behalf in state court. Hamilton advised **Bonus** to file a notice in federal court, too, stating that he was representing Martin; **Bonus** did this on June 4th, and also sent a letter to the District Attorney's office asking for more time to prepare his motion. What happened next surprised **Bonus**, Hamilton, and Brettschneider. **Bonus** got a message from Mark Hale, the head of the D.A.'s Conviction Review Unit, asking him to come into the office—and to bring Martin's case file, which **Bonus** had obtained from Martin's former attorney. [