James Forman Jr. is one of the nation’s leading authorities on race, education, and the criminal justice system, and a tireless advocate for young people who others have written off.

Forman attended Yale Law School, and after he graduated, worked as a law clerk for Judge William Norris of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals and Justice Sandra Day O’Connor of the U.S. Supreme Court. After clerking, he took a job at the Public Defender Service in Washington, D.C., where for six years he represented juveniles and adults in felony and misdemeanor cases.

Forman loved being a public defender, but he quickly became frustrated with the lack of education and job training opportunities for his clients. So in 1997, along with David Domenici, he started the Maya Angelou Public Charter School, an alternative school for dropouts and youth who had previously been arrested. The Maya Angelou school has been open for almost twenty years, and in that time has helped hundreds of vulnerable young people find a second chance, begin to believe in themselves, graduate, get jobs, and attend college.

At Yale Law School, where has taught since 2011, Forman teaches Constitutional Law and a course called Race, Class, and Punishment. Last year he took his teaching behind prison walls, offering a seminar called Inside-Out Prison Exchange: Issues in Criminal Justice, which brought together, in the same classroom, 10 Yale Law students and 10 men incarcerated in a CT prison.

Forman’s first book [Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America](https://www.jamesformanjr.com/) is a *Washington Post* bestseller and a *New York Times* Editor’s Choice. It has been called “superb and shattering” in the *New York Times*, “eloquent” and “sobering” in the *London Review of Books*, and “moving, nuanced, and candid” in the *New York Review of Books*. On Twitter, *New York Times* book reviewer Jennifer Senior called *Locking Up Our Own* “the best book I’ve read this year.”