



Tony Messenger

Topics

Best Selling and Award Winning Authors, Criminal Justice, Environment and Sustainability, Journalism

Travels From

Missouri

Bio

Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Tony Messenger is the metro columnist for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and author of *Profit and Punishment: How America Criminalizes the Poor in the name of Poverty*, his first book. In 2019, Messenger won the Pulitzer Prize for commentary for his series of columns on debtors' prisons in Missouri. In 2016, Messenger was awarded a Missouri Honor Medal, the highest award bestowed by the University of Missouri's School of Journalism. That same year he won a National Headliner for editorial writing. In 2015, Messenger was a Pulitzer finalist for his series of editorials on Ferguson, and won the Sigma Delta Chi award for best editorials of the year, given by the Society of Professional Journalists. Messenger is an accomplished public speaker, having given keynote addresses to national journalism organizations, criminal justice nonprofits and institutions of higher learning, mostly focusing on his work in criminal justice reform, poverty and race, and his long career as a journalist, which began at a small weekly newspaper in Colorado. Messenger lives in Wildwood, Missouri, with his wife and two children. He has four grown children and eight grandchildren.

SPEECHES

Profit and Punishment: How America Criminalizes the Poor in the Name of Poverty The courts use fines and fees and other costs to unfairly punish poor people, including locking them away in debtors' prisons. This talk is based on Pulitzer Prize winning columns and *Profit and Punishment*.

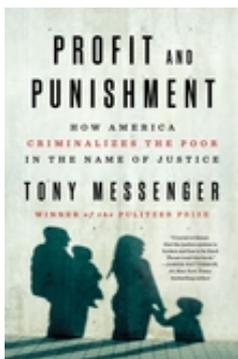
The Road to a Pulitzer This journalism-related talk is based on Tony's Pulitzer prize winning work.

The Broken State of American Politics (and what can be done to fix it) Based on Tony's years as political reporter and columnist, with Missouri serving as a backdrop to the division that has become so prevalent nationally. This talk focus on three topics: Taking money out of politics; redistricting reform; and ending term limits (a state-level problem).

Ferguson is Everywhere This talk focuses on how Aug. 9, 2014 forever changed Tony's focus as a journalist; Tony became committed to helping other white people like himself understand the deep racial divides in this country.

Give the Rivers Room to Roam The story of how decades of failed river policy in America is finally drawing the attention it needs in the age of climate change. Based on Tony's several years of reporting about the broken policies surrounding the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers.

BOOKS



HARDCOVER

[PROFIT AND PUNISHMENT](#) How America Criminalizes the Poor in the Name of Justice

St. Martin's Press

In a feat of exceptional reporting, *Profit and Punishment* reveals a familiar reality to the nation's

poor, anchored by the stories of three single mothers living in poverty, one in Oklahoma, one in Missouri, and one in South Carolina, who are abused by a judicial system more focused on debt collection than public safety.

REVIEWS: "Tony delivered the 2021 keynote address for the Oklahoma City University School of Law Center for Criminal Justice, 2nd Annual Criminal Justice Reform Seminar. Tony's speech, which displayed his journalistic expertise and dedicated research in the area of how our legal system impacts the poor, was both riveting and a challenging thought stream for the audience. Tony does an excellent job of describing for an audience how criminal defendants become trapped in a legacy of debt that follows them until death and he tells the real story of the price of punishment. As more and more court systems begin to fund their agencies off the backs of criminal defendants, we must find a way to stop the imposition of fines, fees and costs which are unrelated to a defendant's punishment. Tony begins this journey with his discussion of how the poor become financially trapped in the criminal justice system."

- Loretta F. Radford, Legal Director, Center for Criminal Justice, Oklahoma City University School of Law

"Tony Messenger was our 2021 opening speaker for the National Society of Newspaper Columnists. Humanity and eloquence shone through his plainly told but mesmerizing stories. His Pulitzer Prize winning columns exposed the draconian system of debtors prisons in Missouri and led to statewide reform. His talk garnered all positive feedback, and generated the most attention. Tony Messenger does not disappoint."

- Suzette Martinez Standring, Director Emeritus, The National Society of Newspaper Columnists

"I had the great fortune to attend a conference last fall at which award-winning and prize-winning columnist Tony Messenger spoke. His keynote presentation was brilliant. He opened my eyes to one of the serious systemic failures of the criminal justice system, namely the fines and the fees charged to low-income persons as they enter the system, thereby forcing them to remain incarcerated way beyond any reasonable length of time, given the relative severity of their crimes. During his presentation, Tony shared with us several heart-wrenching stories that demonstrated the inhumanity of the criminal justice system rules and regulations and that, in effect, unjustly targeted low-income persons because of their inability to pay the fines and fees. This was a truly brilliant presentation and one which the whole audience appreciated immensely."

- Don Burnes, PhD Founder and Senior Adviser Burnes Institute of Poverty Research

"Tony came to Milwaukee in October 2019 and gave a fantastic talk about his investigation into the criminalization of poverty in Missouri and how it relates to what we see happening in Wisconsin. Armed with specific stories from his reporting work, he described the struggles of those caught in a spiral of justice-system debt. Tony was a powerful speaker – the event was a success, furthering our mission of educating the public about areas of the justice system that are so often overlooked."

- Margo Kirchner, General Counsel, Wisconsin Justice Initiative