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Piper Kerman

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Vernon L. Pack Distinguished Lecture Series

The Vernon L. Pack Distinguished Lecture and Scholar in Residence program was established in 2002 through a generous gift from alumnus Vernon L. Pack, a 1950 graduate of the University. A distinguished lecturer visits campus to address important current issues that will allow the Otterbein community to reflect on ethical, spiritual and social issues. In alternate years, an esteemed scholar is invited to campus to reside for up to one academic year in order to provide an educational enrichment experience for Otterbein students.

2018 Vernon L. Pack Distinguished Lecture: Piper Kerman

Piper Kerman's bestselling memoir, *Orange is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*, chronicles what the author calls her "crucible experience"—the 13 months she spent in the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury, Connecticut. A brief involvement with the drug trade when she was in her early twenties sent Kerman to prison ten years later on money laundering charges. In her compelling, moving, and often hilarious book, she explores the experience of incarceration and the intersection of her life with the lives of the women she met while in prison: their friendships and families, mental illnesses and substance abuse issues, cliques and codes of behavior. What has stuck with her the most from her experience, Kerman says, is the power of women's communities, "the incredible ability of women to step up for each other, and to be resilient and to share their resiliency with other people." The book also raises provocative questions about the state of criminal justice in America, and how incarceration affects individuals and communities throughout the nation.

Kerman's memoir was adapted into a critically acclaimed Netflix series of the same name by Jenji Kohan. The Emmy and Peabody Award-winning show has been called "the best TV show about prison ever made" by *The Washington Post*, and was lauded by *Time*'s TV critic James Poniewozik for "the stunningly matter-of-fact way it uses the prison to create one of TV's most racially and sexually diverse—and as important, complex—dramas [and] contrasts the power and class dynamics inside the prison with those outside the prison."

Since her release, Kerman has worked tirelessly to promote the cause of prison and criminal justice reform. She works with nonprofits, philanthropies, and other organizations working in the public interest and serves on the board of directors of the Women's Prison Association and the advisory boards of InsideOUT Writers and JustLeadershipUSA. She has been called as a witness by the US Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Human Rights to testify on solitary confinement and women prisoners, and by the US Senate Governmental Affairs and Homeland Security Committee to testify about the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

Kerman has spoken at the White House on re-entry and employment as a Champion of Change, as well as the importance of the arts in prisons and the unique challenges faced by women in the criminal justice system. In 2014 she was awarded the Justice Trailblazer Award from John Jay College's Center on Media, Crime & Justice and the Constitutional Commentary Award from the Constitution Project. The Equal Justice Initiative recognized her as a Champion of Justice in 2015.

Kerman is a frequent invited speaker to students of law, criminology, gender and women's studies, sociology, and creative writing, as well as groups including the International Association of Women Judges, the American Correctional Association's Disproportionate Minority Confinement Task Force, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Criminal Justice Association, federal probation officers, public defenders, justice reform advocates and volunteers, and formerly and currently incarcerated people.

Kerman is a graduate of Smith College. For the last several years, she has taught writing to incarcerated men and women in Ohio. She lives in Columbus with her family. For more information on Piper Kerman, please visit piperkerman.com.