

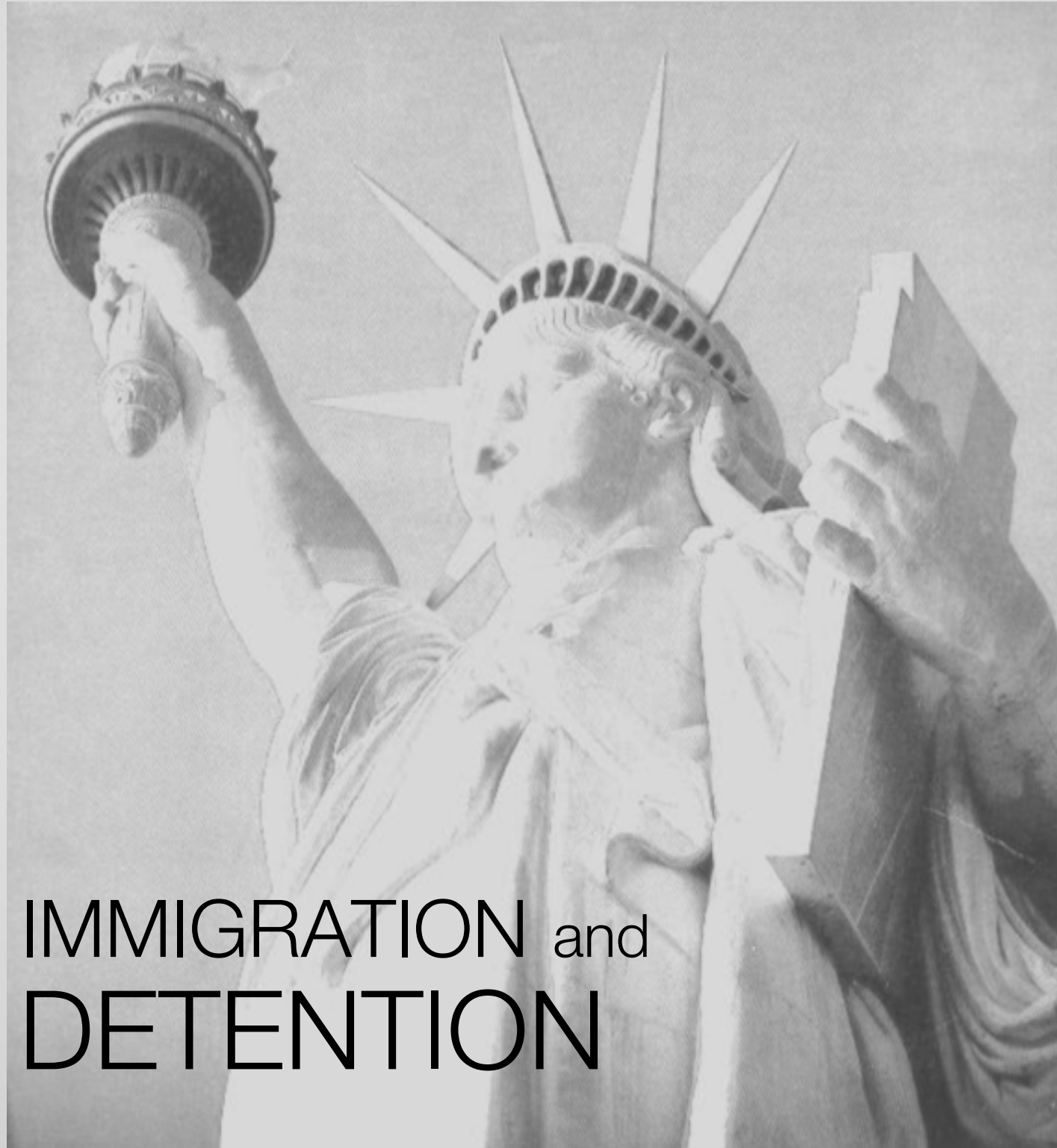
"The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons." –Dostoevski

# Fortune*News*

Summer 2008

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## IMMIGRATION and DETENTION

Published by The Fortune Society

## FROM THE EDITOR

I was born in Roosevelt Hospital, in New York City. Since then, I have enjoyed the privileges not only of U.S. citizenship, but of having an ethnic background that has not in my lifetime been the target of widespread fear-mongering in the country I claim as home. My grandparents on my mother's side – German Jews – were not as lucky. Thankfully, though, they were able to flee Nazi Germany before it was too late, eventually settling across the ocean in this country and learning to call it home.

Also thankfully, this country has not devolved into a state capable of overseeing the horrors of a Holocaust. But history is not a footnote – the lessons we learn from it should help us prevent the repetition of its mistakes.

The Statue of Liberty that adorns the cover of this issue represents the ideals and dreams that have drawn so many waves of immigrants to this country, but the significant damage to this country's international reputation due to its increasingly punitive and restrictive treatment of immigrants – especially nonwhite ones – is a testament to how far lawmakers and the justice system here have strayed from those ideals in recent years. I hope that you will find the articles in this issue an informative reflection on the issue of immigration's intersection with the justice system, and also hope that you will enjoy the other articles and usual features within these pages.

On a lighter note – but nevertheless an important one – The Fortune Society became an “immigrant” of sorts itself this year, as we have moved across the river from our longtime Manhattan home to a new location in Queens, NY as of April 2008. As you might have noticed, Fortune has been undergoing significant structural and infrastructural changes in the past few years, including providing services to an increasing number of clients. The new space will allow Fortune's staff to accommodate more people, provide our full range of services under one roof, be closer to the drop-off point for people released from Rikers Island jails, and allow us to more effectively reach people with criminal records in Queens and connect them with needed services.

The new address of the main offices of The Fortune Society and *Fortune News* is:

29-76 Northern Blvd.  
Long Island City, NY 11101

While the move is very important to all Fortune's staff – we have to get off at a new subway stop, for one thing – the move should be noted by anyone who is planning on sending any material to *Fortune News*, including submissions, essays, letters, and anything else. We'll be reminding readers throughout this issue of the new address. For a limited time following our move we will have mail sent to us at the old address forwarded to the new one, but please take note of the change and send any mail to the new address.

Welcome to the Summer 2008 issue of *Fortune News*. I hope you find it as informative as I have.

Seth Hartig  
Co-Editor-in-Chief



Fortune News is a publication of The Fortune Society, an organization whose mission is to support successful re-entry from prison and promote alternatives to incarceration, thus strengthening the fabric of our communities. We do this by: BELIEVING in the power of individuals to change, BUILDING LIVES through service programs shaped by the needs and experience of our clients, and CHANGING MINDS through education and advocacy that work to rectify unjust and brutal criminal justice policies.

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# IMMIGRATION AND DETENTION

- 2 From the Editor
- 4 From the CEO
- 5 Letters to the Editor
- 7 Around the Nation



- 8 U.S. Immigration: A Legacy of Discrimination  
*by Heather Rose*
- 9 Derrick's View  
*by Derrick Corley*
- 10 Detention, Diversity and Family Values After 9/11  
*by Adem Carroll*
- 12 Immigration Reform: A Different Name, But the Same Political Game!  
*by John Perry*
- 14 Life Facing Death: An Interview with Philip Andrew Stroud  
*by Stephan P. Smith*
- 16 Eye on Fortune
- 18 Ex Libris: Fortune Media Reviews

## FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



We have not printed an edition of the *Fortune News* in nearly one year and have heard from many of you asking us whether we will be continuing future editions. The answer is a resounding YES!

There were many factors that have caused this disruption. Primary was Fortune's move to our new Queens Plaza (Long Island City) service center that became fully operational on March 7, 2008. As the Fortune Society enters its 40th year of service, rising real estate costs in Manhattan required us to look elsewhere for office space. Ever committed to maintaining our vision of providing critical services that allow men and women to rejoin their families and become productive members of their communities, we moved our headquarters and many of our services to Queens. Located near a major public transportation hub within walking distance of seven subway lines easily accessible to our clients, the new center occupies a total of 65,000 square feet on two floors. We are thrilled with our new office, which houses the bulk of our nationally-recognized re-entry services and enables our clients to benefit from a 'one-stop-shop' continuity of service with crisis services available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

This *Fortune News* Immigration and Detention issue is dedicated to those who have come generations ago and those who have just arrived to America, working together to forge a place we can all call home. Most of us are immigrants or the children of immigrants. We live in a country of immigrants, coming from different places to settle, attempting to make a better life for our families and ourselves. Problems concerning immigration are as numerous as they are complex. Indeed, the complexity of the problems affects all aspects of immigration control, including immigration law, asylum hearings, border patrol, detention and parole.

Since our founding, the United States has received immigrants from around the world who have sought opportunity and safe haven in a new land. The labor, values, and beliefs of immigrants from throughout the world have transformed the United States from a loose group of colonies into one of the leading democracies in the world today. From its beginning to the present, the United States remains a nation of immigrants grounded in the firm belief that newcomers offer new energy, hope and cultural diversity.

At the turn of the 20th century, America faced a profound crisis of identity. Streams of Europeans who didn't look, sound, or behave like Americans crowded into chaotic city neighborhoods and took on low-paying, often dangerous jobs. A growing clamor of anti-immigrant voices accused foreigners of lowering wages, threatening the social order, and undermining the country's racial standards. As the country shifted from a manufacturing to a predominantly service-based economy, the working class was undermined, roads out of poverty diminished and inequality increased. The subsequent story of European assimilation offers a message of hope and caution for contemporary times. It's too soon to tell whether newer immigrant groups will make a similar journey from the margins to the center of American society.

Given the formidable obstacles to upward mobility, there's something special about a person who's willing to put up with everything you have to put up with to be an immigrant. The question remains: has this country's capacity to absorb the most vulnerable foreigners diminished during the past 50 years, or are we simply witnessing the pains of transition to a new stage of American diversity? For many, the future will largely depend on immigration policies that address the hard realities at the bottom rungs of the economy.

This issue of *Fortune News* focuses on those harsh realities that have raised the stakes for an immigrant's journey through America today, with special challenges for those in detention or enmeshed in the criminal justice system. We hope you enjoy this issue and rest assured that you will be hearing from us on more topics in future editions of *Fortune News*.

JoAnne Page, Esq.  
President/CEO



### OUR LAST ISSUE

Dear Editor:

I just finished reading your latest offering of *Fortune News*, "Giving Back." I felt compelled to reach out to you in praise of the truly good work The Fortune Society is doing for those of us who are incarcerated. Everyone who reads your magazine and the entire "thug" community really enjoys every issue that you put out because it's for us and about the real issues that we deal with each and every day. Please believe it: when you live in the grimy and gritty world of prison life, it creates hope for all when you can have a moment or two of real joy inside these walls of pain.

Although I am serving a natural life sentence, I'm a reformed thug who helps people in many legal issues that come from being locked up; I make it my obligation to attempt to guide people in the mundane day to day issues of what I call OZ in Real Life.

Darrell Sharpe  
Shirley, MA

Dear Editor:

In the Summer 2006 issue, there was an article entitled "Sail to Serenity: The Birth of a Prison Hospice," by Bertrum "Herky" Burkett. I found the article extremely interesting, and it was gratifying to hear of the progression by the "brothers" there at ISP. You see, I spent my first 12 years incarcerated amongst the population there in Ft. Madison.

Hearing about the positive accomplishments of my

friends there gives me good feelings. Trying to get news of what's going on in an institution once you leave it is quite difficult, if not down right impossible. *Fortune News* took care of the dilemma quite handily.

The hospice program there is conducted by people serving a lot of time together. On the other hand, reading about the loss of a past friend there exposes the flip-side of that informational coin, as it were. The loss of friends is felt in the collective gut of all of us who serve time together. Fortunately, the hospice program now established at Ft. Madison came along just in time to render comfort and familiarity to one of our own in his time of need.

I commend the brothers there on their achievements! And give recognition to the brother lost.

Edward Rone  
Clarina, IA

Dear Editor:

I received the Summer 2006 edition of *Fortune News* just as we here at Central State Prison in Macon, Georgia, held our first "Food and Goods Drive" to help out a local charity. I wanted to share the news of our success and hope you can include the news in a future edition of *Fortune News* so as to encourage other prisoners to find ways to give back to their community. The food drive was organized by the New Beginners Lifers' Group to benefit Joy House.

Our mission is to demonstrate that anyone can change their life for the better by acknowledging errors in thinking and lifestyle, choosing to correct personal errors so as to become better citizens. The men of the Lifers' Group chose Joy House as the recipient of a donation of non-perishable commissary

# Letters to the Editor

items, valued in excess of \$400.00, in a show of support for an organization that works to prevent the children of today from becoming the prisoners of tomorrow.

Shawn Guess  
Macon, GA

### GATE MONEY

Dear Editor:

I have received a few issues of *Fortune News* and enjoy reading it. Most of the letters and articles strike a chord since I can relate to them. I just received the Summer 2006 issue and saw an article I thought I'd respond to - "Gate Money" by Derrick Corley.

Here in Oklahoma, prisoners are given \$50 upon release. The catch is, any money that they have on their canteen account is credited toward that \$50. If a man has \$49.99 in his account, the state adds the penny to make it \$50.

Oklahoma also has a forced savings program - 20% of your prison wages. Most men get from \$9 to \$16 a month "gang pay," depending on their classification level. This is paid to any inmate working in a prison job such as orderly, yard crew, tutor, library, kitchen, etc. There is also a prison industry program called Oklahoma Correctional Industries (OCI) which has something like 900 to 1,000 inmates working in 18 factories located throughout the state. The average pay is \$0.45 an hour and a work day is 7 hours. I am fortunate enough to be one of these, and have been since 1995. This money is placed in a non-interest-bearing account.

Derrick is correct, it generates a sense of pride for most of us to work at something that is constructive and

have that sense of accomplishment.

Thomas Anderson  
Lexington, OK

Dear Editor:

I just finished reading Derrick Corley's article "Gate Money" and I have to say that I agree that \$40 is not a whole lot of money to start your life on. Here in Washington State we have 10% deducted from all incoming money that is held in a savings account for your release. The money is held in a trust fund by DOC to collect interest. That interest, however, goes to the state, not the inmate. Most people will only see \$40 of this money anyway. If you owe an institution debt (like hygiene or postage), that is taken out of your saving when you are released. If you still owe a financial obligation (court fines/fees or restitution), that will also be deducted. State law here says that everyone getting released has to have \$40 cash but anything above this you're lucky to get. I've heard stories about people not getting all \$40, too. One guy told me that last time he was released he didn't check the envelope until after he was outside the gate and he had only \$10. Most people I've talked to who have been released before said they've never seen any of this savings account money other than on their account statement we get every month. We lose a total of 55% of our incoming money to DOC. If you owe any institution debts that goes up to 75%, and if you still owe any prior court fines or any traffic tickets they'll take anything over \$10.

Al Falley  
Walla Walla, WA

## HARSH REALITIES

Dear Editor:

This is my first time reading *Fortune News* and I'm very impressed with what has been said.

I've been locked up for the past 18 years and I've seen the changes behind these walls. When I walked in this prison, there were GED, college, vocational training, and cognitive thinking programs. Club activities motivated inmates to change their past behavior. Even the alcohol and drug treatment was strong.

Nowadays there is nothing to speak of, outside of the oldest and longest running AA Group in the USA. There are a few attempts at programs, but nothing like years ago.

The times have changed to "lock them up and keep them away." I don't blame society for that, but I'm a big advocate for prison reform, for each of us taking responsibility for our own choices we make in life, good or bad.

Believe me, when I walked into this prison, with the behavior and beliefs that governed my life, I would have put myself in prison. I was not fit to walk the streets. I became an angry, bitter person who used people to feed my needs for alcohol and drugs.

I know without programs I would not have become a loving father, husband, care giver, and sponsor. Without any hope for change, what goals are set or what dreams are felt in the heart? I owe my life to the programs that were here in the past and it saddens my heart to see that others will not have the same opportunity that helped me become what I am today.

Changing the minds of citizens to become sympathetic

to those that bring harm into their lives is a challenge indeed, but with hope and faith one can change.

**David Robidoux**  
*Salem, OR*

Dear Editor:

I'm presently locked in my cell, along with several hundred other inmates, for a crime committed by two inmates back in July. Those two inmates attacked and killed a correctional officer. The general population is being punished for this crime.

In a prison with over 1,000 inmates, the prison has been on lock-down since July. Several hundred inmates have been transferred to other prisons and the remainders, who the system can't seem to find room for, languish in their cells. We have been deprived of any exercise, legal services, library services and hot meals, and showers are only given every 5th day or so. Visits were restored on a bizarre schedule. We are locked in our cells 24/7 with no outside activity.

The system has decided to change this prison into a minimum security prison, due to this incident. Thus, they have transferred people and brought in minimum security inmates to take over all the jobs within the prison. Thus, we also lost our jobs. These jobs were the only financial support a lot of inmates depended on for basic needs. While we, those inmates who were here when the incident occurred, are locked down, the minimum security inmates are free to have recreational activities. Thus, one part of the prison is on lock-down, while the other half is not. All this is because of the attack on the officer, which no one had any part in but the two inmates who attacked the

officer.

The system is designed to dehumanize the inmate. Rehabilitation has taken a "back-burner." This treatment is designed to break one's spirit and nothing else. In the end, it will change nothing unless and until rehabilitation is put in the forefront of the system's design.

**Paul Inskip**  
*Jessup, MD*

Dear Editor:

I found the last issue's article "Contraband," written by Patricia Prewitt and the winner of the PEN Prison Writing Program's 2006 Essay competition, quite interesting. I can really relate to her essay. I've been incarcerated since July 2004 and have 11 months to go now. We women struggle with the contraband thing. Everything that we have also gets charged and then turned to contraband. The guards seem to love to nit-pick about little things. It sure makes me mad. But what can we do about it? If it's not one thing, it's another. I enjoyed several of the stories in the article.

I admit that prison has changed me in a positive way, though. Everything happens for a reason!

**Sarah Robinson**  
*Pierre, SD*

## Send Your Letter To:

Fortune News  
Attn: Letters to the Editor  
29-76 Northern Blvd.  
Long Island City, NY 11101  
Letters should include the writer's full name and address. They may be edited for the purposes of clarity and space.

## IMMIGRATION

Dear Editor,

I was so glad to read that the upcoming issue will focus on immigration. Immigration is an issue that concerns us all: every major country in the world has immigrants from time to time in greater or lesser numbers. No one person stays in one place forever; we must move for our health, if for nothing else.

How we accept newcomers to an area defines who we are, and speaks to our ability to act in a civil manner towards others.

Our prison systems should not be so burdensome that they trivialize incarceration. Keeping people in prisons should not be a business, and should not be treated as a business.

Prison could be a place for many people to get help from lawyers who work with immigration issues. Hopefully, those lawyers could help those inmates who need more information on their status or path to citizenship.

**Harold Williams**  
*Martinsville, VA*

## Immigrants' Families Ask Schumer to Oppose Deportation of Parents

Protesters lined outside of Senator Charles Schumer's Midtown office Saturday, to encourage him to introduce the Child Citizen Protection Act to the Senate - a bill that has already gained support in the House. The measure would allow judges to take into account the best interest of children who are U.S. citizens if their immigrant parents face deportation.

Many of the protesters came from families split apart by deportations. Betsy DeWitt, a rally organizer, is raising three sons alone, after her husband was deported to Italy - a country he had not set foot in for forty years. "They should have considered our family before he was deported," said DeWitt.

The City Council passed a resolution last month in support of the bill.

"We just can't keep ripping families apart in the name of homeland security. That does not make any sense," said Democratic Queens Councilman John Liu to the assembled crowd.

Six U.S.-born children attended a rally with their mother - to say how their father was deported to Senegal last summer, and that their mother could soon suffer the same fate.

"It's been really hard for my mom to take care of me and my siblings," said one of the children.

Rally organizers told the attendants to pick up their phones in the middle of the event to call Senator Schumer's office to send the message that they want the bill introduced now. "We cannot keep on waiting, our families are being torn apart," said rally organizer Juan Carlos Ruiz. "Our communities are being terrorized. So we want Schumer to hear that message."

"It's important that they understand that families should be kept together," said Dewitt.

**Source:** NY1 News, April 27, 2008

## Immigration Woes

Immigrant advocates and religious workers are asking that arrested immigrants have more access to spiritual counseling. Undocumented immigrants are often held behind bars for weeks before their cases go before a judge. Detainees are experiencing depression, anxiety and uncertainty about the fate of family members, advocates said at a press conference last week.

Advocates seek state legislation that would grant clergy greater access to immigrant inmates in Illinois. They want religious workers to be free to pay unsolicited visits to immigrants, which local jails do not support.

On another front, agricultural groups are growing increasingly concerned about the availability of labor for various farm jobs. States like California depend on immigrant labor to harvest their crops, as do other states in the Southwest, Midwest and even the Northeast. In New York, apple growers and onion farms are among those who use migrant workers. In addition, dairy farms have used Hispanic workers in year-round jobs.



That is why the New York Farm Bureau has designated immigration reform as a high-priority legislative issue. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., is reported to be writing legislation that would help undocumented immigrants employed on farms to continue working for five years. Congress needs to produce a comprehensive immigration bill, and soon.

**Source:** Watertown (NY) Press, March 31, 2008

## Better Health Care Sought for Detained Immigrants

The head of a Congressional subcommittee looking into complaints of inadequate medical care in immigration detention announced on Tuesday that she had introduced legislation to set mandatory standards for care and to require that all deaths be reported to the Justice Department and Congress.

Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren's legislation would require the federal government to establish mandatory standards for medical and mental health care, replacing the voluntary standards that apply now in the network of more than 300 publicly and privately run jails where the government holds people while it decides whether to deport them.

The bill would also require the secretary of the Homeland Security Department to report all deaths in immigration detention within 48 hours to the Justice Department's inspector general as well as its own. Immigration officials would be required to submit a detailed report on such deaths to Congress every year.

"We are not talking about Cadillac health care here," Ms. Lofgren said, "but the government is obligated to provide basic care. Many of those in immigration custody are there for minor violations, many for administrative and paperwork-related mistakes. Their detention should not be a death sentence."

Officials of the immigration agency, known as ICE, said they would not comment on Ms. Lofgren's proposal because they did not discuss pending legislation.

But officials said that while the number of immigrants detained had increased by 34 percent from 2004 through last year, the numbers of deaths in its detention centers had declined each year.

According to figures the agency provided on Tuesday, from January 2004 until last Friday it recorded 71 deaths of immigrants in its custody, including 5 since the list was released to The Times, 4 of them this year. Ms. Nantel did not provide details of those cases.

In the 2004 fiscal year, according to the figures, the agency detained 231,804 immigrants, and about one out of every 9,200 died. In fiscal 2007, when the agency detained a total of 311,213 immigrants, roughly one out of every 28,000 died. Immigration officials said the agency spent \$91.6 million last year on health care for its detention centers, an 82 percent increase since 2004.

Ms. Lofgren said the agency's count of deaths could understate the problem, because detainees who were denied critical treatment could die after they were released or deported.

**Source:** NY Times, May 07, 2008

# U.S. Immigration: A Legacy of Discrimination

BY HEATHER ROSE

Over the last several years, American citizens have been showered with numerous acts and policies related to the issue of immigration, most noticeably after the attacks on September 11th 2001. While questions of immigration seem endless, and controversy over the issue builds on both sides, most Americans cannot deny the immigrant heritage that not only founded this nation but is responsible for its success. Recognizing the significance of America's immigrant background, politicians frequently speak about the need for America's doors to remain open to immigration. In 2001, President George W. Bush stated:

[C]itizenship is not limited by birth or background. America at its best is a welcoming society. We welcome not only immigrants themselves, but the many gifts they bring and the values they live by. Hundreds of thousands of immigrants take the oath of citizenship every year. Each has come not only to take, but to give. They come asking for a chance to work hard, support families, and to rise in the world. And, together, they make our nation more, not less, American. Immigration is not a problem to be solved, it is a sign of a confident and successful nation.

Yet despite our President's reassurance, it seems that immigration actually has become a problem to be solved. In fact, Bush made "the immigration crisis" a top priority for his second term. Not only has new policy managed to discriminate against immigrants and deprive them of their human rights, it has also criminalized them.

As America continues to top the world in incarceration rates (with 2.2 million people imprisoned in 2005), it is not surprising that the so-called

"war on terror," "war on drugs" and now the newest policies aimed at the "immigration crisis," are actually functioning to criminalize more immigrants and people in low-income communities under the guise of protecting American safety and freedom.

The growing concern with immigration emerged from the perception that immigrants are directly related to crime and the demoralization of American culture. Associating immigrants with crime and terror has allowed for a series of policies that encourages racism and discrimination, promotes inequity, stratifies society, and violates human rights and international law. Over the last 30 years, both immigration and incarceration have increased, with the ratios of incarceration still drastically disproportionate by race. Some argue that this coincidence reflects a serious relationship between immigrants and crime. But with crime decreasing despite the increasing incarceration rates, immigrant crime rates proving lower than rates of American citizens, and second-generation Americans formulating the racially disproportionate dominant population in prisons, this argument doesn't hold.

Since America first opened its doors to mass immigration in 1892, immigration policy and stigma have functioned to disadvantage immigrants, their descendants, and their associated communities. This legacy continues today, breeding new policies that are interlocked with the war on drugs, the war on terror, and the systemic racism that still dominates American politics and law. Over the past two decades, the following laws

have been passed to infringe on the rights of immigrants and people in low-income communities:

- In the **Anti-Drug Abuse Act** (1988) the term "aggravated felony" appeared for the first time, creating a new type of crime for which immigrants could be automatically deported;
- The **Immigration Act** (1990) limited the relief available for aliens convicted of these aggravated felonies;
- The **Immigration and Nationality Technical Correction Act** (1994) expanded the term "aggravated felony" to include petty crimes such as theft and fraud;
- The **Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act** (1996) broadened the term to practically include any crime in the eligibility criteria for deportation and mandated sentences, and eliminated relief eligibility for persons convicted.

More recently, the **Patriot Act** of 2001, the **2001 U.S. Rendition Program**, and numerous immigration reform policies have managed to give the US government more freedom to use immigrant status to discriminate against a population that, in addition to being centralized in urban low-income areas, is predominantly nonwhite. And, although these acts may seem to only impact immigrants, they also indirectly affect US citizens: by criminalizing immigrants, these policies also criminalize anyone who provides them with aid, shelter or support.

As a result, America's prison system has become even more massive. The federal prison population grew by 2.3% in just 6 months in

2005, the majority (54%) of those incarcerated for non-violent and petty crimes, especially drug offenses and more recently crimes associated with immigration. If immigrants are so profoundly tied to our nation's historic success and are a driving force behind our nation's thriving economy and the cultural variety that America currently boasts, why are they so readily denied acceptance and rights in our country?

The history of US discrimination against immigrants has proven characteristic of a US culture and policy-making that is still supported by our political leaders. The relationship between immigration and institutionalized racism reveals itself blatantly through this nation's booming prison industry. The newest acts and policies have made it all the more easy for our government to effectively discriminate against people of color by simply making it a matter of American safety and well-being. While the prison industry reflects the intensity and reality of this issue, this issue is also intimately related to social problems within our society, as well as the numerous conflicts that we have created overseas. When will we question the validity of these actions? How much longer will we condone policies that allow corrupted leadership to violate the rights of immigrants and US citizens in our country and even people abroad?

**HEATHER ROSE is a Fortune Society teacher. She completed her Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and Africana Studies from NYU in May.**

# Derrick's View

Let me introduce you to Joey, a twenty-two year old Hispanic man who is a member of a street gang that isn't very powerful in the New York State prison system. Unfortunately for him, a chief rival gang is. Facts being what they are, you would think it would be in Joey's best interests to hide his gang affiliation, but he is unable to do so. His body is literally covered with gang sign tattoos—even his neck and hands—which lets everyone know just who and what he is, especially his enemies.

Unable to hide his gang affiliation and knowing he could get seriously hurt or murdered in prison because of it, Joey decided to break away from the gang he belonged to, letting the rival gang members he encounters

know that he is out. Unfortunately, this hasn't worked out very well; at last count he had been cut seven times. Shortly before the last time, someone dropped a note to the prison administration, informing them that Joey would be seriously hurt if he was released into general population. In desperation, he attempted to sign into protective custody but was denied protection and put into general population. He was cut almost immediately and then placed in protective custody, after being stitched up.

Understandably, having to be on constant alert for assault is quite stressful and it has taken a toll on his mental health, resulting in the need for medication and counseling services from the mental health unit. Joey has shared his frustrations with me, but I could give him no better advice than to remain in protective custody while incarcerated and to check into the possibility of getting his gang tattoos removed. Considering the threat they posed to his safety and life, we thought that he could make a case to get this done while still incarcerated.

Joey, however, could not believe the state would go to the expense involved in tattoo removal. He feared that he was just going to be put back into general population, in one prison



Illustration by Germain Santana

## Frankly Speaking

BY DERRICK CORLEY

or another, and go through life getting cut and/or stabbed. I realized just how desperate and confused he really was when he told prison staff, "I can't go through this anymore; I'll kill myself and just get it all over with." I watched him closely after that.

Having worked extensively with mentally ill prisoners, I took what he said seriously. Several months before, I had to grab another prisoner and restrain him from jumping off the top tier with a sheet tied around his neck. I saw the same hopelessness in Joey that day. When he went out to recreation by himself the next week, I got suspicious when things were too quiet in the yard. Then I looked out the window to see what he was doing and I saw him trying to hang himself from the basketball rim in the yard. I immediately alerted the guards, who got to him in time to save him.

For lunch that day we had hotdogs, and the guard I had alerted to the suicide attempt put three extra franks in my tray. When the incident was happening, I didn't think about getting a reward, but afterwards I felt that I was due some kind of write up for "commendable" behavior, since DOCS has a little-used mechanism for that. It never happened. Had I done anything that could, even remotely, be construed as "misbehavior," you can believe DOCS personnel would have wasted no time in writing me up for that. It appears that all Joey's life

was worth was three frankfurters—which I didn't even want or eat.

I learned a lot that day. **1)** Gang involvement is not a good idea because sooner or later it will lead you to a bad place in your life, **2)** prison is a bad place, where bad things happen to those that end up there, and **3)** a prisoner's life isn't worth much to other prisoners, to society, or the system they are imprisoned within.

Sadly, Joey's story speaks of a system that would rather punish than reward commendable behavior, rather warehouse its charges than rehabilitate them. It speaks of a system that is not only indifferent to the needs of those it incarcerates, but indifferent to the needs of society. A prisoner is punished by being in prison, but society is then punished by the grossly ineffective job the prison system does towards rehabilitating those incarcerated. Both the prisoner and society benefit from rehabilitation.

Getting tough on crime does not mean longer prison sentences, it means doing something to break the cycle of crime: overhauling the prison system or gearing it to rehabilitate. Only then will a prisoner's life be worth more than three franks to those keeping him or her imprisoned.

**DERRICK CORLEY is a New York State prisoner. His column, "Derrick's View," appears regularly in Fortune News.**

# Detention, Diversity and Family Values After 9/11

BY ADEM CARROLL

You may call some of them “illegals” but they are your neighbors. They cook your food, they build your homes. They are like you. They are like you, except they have very few rights. Men and families targeted since 9/11. Over a million deported. Some are deported back to poverty, some to imprisonment and torture. Many leave behind children, broken families and communities. Do we really feel safer? The family values crowd likes to think so. But working after 9/11 as a community advocate, I witnessed hundreds of families torn apart one by one and communities living in fear — fear manufactured and manipulated by the government to weaken and divide affected and marginalized Americans.

In the first two months after 9/11 over 1,200 Muslim truck drivers, storeowners, gas station attendants and newspaper sellers were rounded up, investigated, brutalized, and then warehoused for months in isolation even after being cleared by the FBI. Still others were swept up in raids and fishing expeditions in Arab and South Asian communities. Later, in 2003, the Special Registrations of Muslim immigrants put almost 14,000 men and teenagers into deportation proceedings. Tens of thousands fled to Canada, especially mixed-status families fearing the incarceration of a loved one. It is true that many, many more Mexicans and Haitians have been deported in the last decade. However, the severity of the crackdown on Mus-

lim immigrants has been remarkable. In many jails they have been classified as a dangerous category, like gang members, and are automatically put into administrative segregation. “The approach is basically to target the Muslim and Arab community with a kind of zero-tolerance immigration policy. No other community in the U.S. is treated to zero-tolerance enforcement,” says David Cole, a Georgetown University law professor.

Immigration law can also be manipulated in the name of national security. Former criminal convictions and even misdemeanors are used to render some deportable. And in that context, there is very little humanitarian discretion available. District Directors frequently refuse to grant bail to immigrants with dying or severely sick family members. Immigrants with HIV are put into deportation proceedings that will lead to premature death.

For example, Andrea Mortlock was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in 1988. Many years ago she served a year for selling a controlled substance. She has had no contact with the criminal justice system since then. In 1995, her failure to attend an immigration hearing led to the issuance of a deportation order in absentia. She was held in immigration detention for almost three years before a federal judge ordered her release in 2003. Earlier this year, she was hospitalized with pneumonia and now suffers from extreme wasting syndrome and neuropathy. Nevertheless, Mortlock was

unexpectedly taken into custody on August 11th and sent to a Passaic County jail in Paterson, New Jersey, where she was held until September 13th. During that time she was unable to see her physician, missed crucial medications, and failed to get critical dietary supplements regularly.

Andrea Mortlock would face severe hardship and perhaps persecution if she was deported to Jamaica. As New York City Council member Kendall Stewart agreed recently, “This is like passing a death sentence on someone who committed an infraction years and years ago. This is so inhumane.”

## Broken System, Growing System

The immigration system is cruel, unusual and expensive, even without a lawyer. In early February 2007, the government announced plans to increase fees by an average of 66 percent. Congress requires the service to be financially self-sufficient, and to fund faster processing of applications the fee for a citizenship application is to rise from \$330 to \$595, an 80 percent increase. For an American wanting to bring a foreign fiancé to live in the United States, the cost will be \$455, up 170 percent from \$170. For immigrants seeking to become permanent residents, the fee will rise to \$905 from \$325. However, it is unclear whether this will speed up the rate of 135,000 security background checks per day.

The immigration system is

also notoriously politicized—and, some say, racist. Haitian undocumented immigrants are treated differently from Cubans. Certain national groups are awarded asylum status or waivers, but not others. Despite what the US calls genocide, few Darfurians have been granted asylum or refugee status. It is not enough to be a persecuted minority. Over 75 countries make same sex relations a crime; but this is not enough evidence to gain asylum—you have to show you personally will be targeted. This is often hard to document.

The immigration courts are notoriously backlogged and overburdened. The Appeals Court is worse. Attorney General Ashcroft reformed the system; in 2002 he fired 5 of 16 federal immigration judges and changed the rules—now only a single judge instead of a 3 judge panel reviews each decision. They vary enormously in their decisions, which often depend on knowledge of social and political conditions in the country of origin. Only 14 percent of asylum seekers without attorneys win the right to stay and, as we have seen, a high percentage of these detainees never have lawyers.

However, though the courts may be struggling, the prison system is growing. Private, for-profit jails for entire families have been built, as in Hutto, Texas, where 400 immigrants are being held by the Corrections Corporation of America. Half are children. “Prisoners” are kept in their cells for 22 hours a day. Attorney John Gibson represents two Palestinian families, including a pregnant woman and five children ranging in age from 2 to 17. Gibson says that the Palestinians entered the country legally, but have been denied asylum. After the families were detained in early November, the fathers were separated,

and the women and children sent to the Hutto jail. A two-year-old was put in foster care.

## Is There Hope?

Are the 12 million undocumented persons in this country really all going to be deported? Or is it enough to keep them in the underground plantation economy? In his 2007 State of the Union address, Bush urged lawmakers to support “comprehensive immigration reform” that included a temporary guest-worker program and beefed up security on the porous Mexico border. The National Council of La Raza said renewed interest on immigration from Bush, together with a shift to Democratic control of Congress, has created the conditions to move forward on the issue. But the League of United Latin American Citizens said Bush’s speech contained nothing new. It is not clear if the President has the political capital to influence this party’s hard-line right wing on this issue.

Moreover, increasingly strict enforcement of the status quo promises to exacerbate the present crisis. Moreover, only months ago [Editor’s Note: This article was submitted to *Fortune News* in early 2007] the House of Representatives passed a sweeping bill that would make “unlawful presence” in this country a felony and redefine “criminal alien smuggling” to include helping any immigrant without legal status.

While the Democratic party supports comprehensive reform, the new Congress must move carefully. Several new representatives of both parties won the recent elections on “get tough” platforms. In 2007, Republican leaders are expected to promote an “enforcement-only” or

“enforcement first” agenda. Representative Tom Tancredo (R-CO) also will take a leading role opposing reform and his run for President in 2008 highlights his views on immigration. Extremist groups like the Federation for Immigration Reform (the so-called FAIR) and its allies will use a variety of tactics to try to defeat reform in the public realm.

Immigration Rights advocates will seek to back the Kennedy Bill for passage before the election year of 2008 (which would grant legal status to undocumented persons); and work to prevent new restrictions from being added to other bills as little-noticed provisions. In addition, some activists will work to create an effective and fair employer verification system with civil liberties and privacy protections. Others will promote the DREAM Act for undocumented youth, work to restore drivers’ licenses and health benefits, and prevent community police from being deputized as immigration officers.

However, without new levels of coordination between civil rights and prisoners’ rights, immigrant rights and civil liberties advocates, success is far from sure. In a time of globalization and outsourcing of jobs, marginalized communities feel mistrust, resentment and exaggerated competition over local jobs. These feelings can easily be exploited. If the present system is allowed to continue its exploitations, creating a shifting but permanent underclass, rolling back human rights and profiting from prison expansion, it is unlikely that America will survive the next few years — not, at least, as the land of the free and the home of the brave. America will survive — but as a brand name for incarceration, competition and control.

ADEM CARROLL co-hosts the “War on Immigrants Report” on WBAI with Subhash Kateel of Families for Freedom. He can also be found at:

[www.americanmuslimadems.blogspot.com/](http://www.americanmuslimadems.blogspot.com/).

## SEEKING ANTHOLOGY SUBMISSIONS FROM INCARCERATED AND FORMERLY INCARCERATED WOMEN

Write about something that helped you and help someone else.

I am putting together a book of essays that are solution-oriented, to be distributed back to the same population.

Many things can help move you forward, whether it is reading, writing, exercising, religion, prayer, 12 step programs, helping someone else, cleaning, organizing, educating yourself, making clothes, meditating. Anything that helps to lift your spirit even if just for a moment, isn't that worth sharing with everyone? Some of the topics you may want to think about (but not limit yourselves to):

Dealing with children and family members (whether inside or outside): how do you keep your confidence as a mother, sister, daughter? What has helped in how you handled the discipline of your children, how have you dealt with being overjoyed or disappointed, when you feel anger or rage? When a loved one has died, whether you were or were not able to attend services, how did you handle the grief?

Nothing is too small to write about.

If it helped you somehow, it can help someone else.

Please send submissions to:

Rita Hickey  
Peter Stuyvesant Station  
PO Box 1516  
New York, NY 10009

You can sign the essays with your name, institution and state or just your name and state or not at all; it is entirely up to you.

# Immigration Reform: A Different Name, the Same Political Game!

BY JOHN PERRY

“Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to be free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tost, to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

These poignant words of American poet Emma Lazarus are elaborately inscribed upon the pedestal that supports the 152-foot Statue of Liberty perched in the New York Harbor. A welcoming symbol of “freedom from bondage and oppression,” Lady Liberty portrays the image of a woman who has escaped the chains. She holds a glowing torch high, leading the path to freedom for those who wish to follow.

This beautiful symbol greeted the twenty million immigrants who were processed through Ellis Island, which served as the U.S. Immigration reception center from 1892 until 1943.

The immigrants who land on United States soil today face a myriad of problems virtually unknown to the immigrants of the early 1900s. Instead of the hope and promise of future prosperity for themselves and their families, they all too often find themselves trapped in a bureaucratic quagmire of red tape that leaves them in a seemingly endless detention awaiting review for entry or deportation.

These lengthy delays in detainment can be attributed to numerous factors that include an antiquated, overworked and understaffed U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service and President Bush’s recent get-tough-on-immigration policies. The presidential push to close US borders under the guise of “stopping the import of terrorism” has resulted in an ever-increasing number of immigrant detainees being held in federal detention facilities.

A recent *New York Times* article stated that the biggest beneficiaries of President Bush’s immigration policies may be private corporations awarded contracts for the building, maintaining, and operating of private prisons to house an estimated 20,000 immigration detainees on any given day. With the current complexion of immigration policies, that number will certainly increase. The average U.S. citizen may not find this alarming, or it may seem a small price to pay for being secure in their homes from “imported terrorism,” but to those of us who have spent years behind the fences of this nation’s prisons, the current immigration reform policy reeks of a noxious odor that accompanied a previous presidential policy and legal reformation dubbed the “War on Drugs.”

In recent years, the federal prison population has grown from approximately 95,000 inmates in 1996 to a swollen 190,000 in 2006. During the same ten-year period, private contractors and prison-for-profit corporations have fattened their

coffers with funds from government contracts for the building, maintenance, and operation of private prisons to accommodate the overflow. (Not to mention the contracts awarded to private corporations that supply food, laundry, medical and psychological services, commissaries, vending machines, and telephone services at inflated rates.)

The “War on Drugs” has been predominantly directed toward US citizens who are protected by the United States Constitution – Amendment 14, Section 1, i.e., equal protection and due process of law – that is afforded to all persons born or naturalized in the United States. These individuals could address their detention and criminal sentencing within the nation’s court system. Today’s immigration detainees, however, are not afforded this constitutional protection as they are not yet citizens of the United States. This snag leaves them in a legal “no man’s land” when attempting to contest their detainee status, often causing them to languish in detention centers for lengthy periods of time with no hope of gaining their freedom. These individuals have often endured extreme hardships in reaching US soil, only to be imprisoned as if they are criminals when they cross the border.

Has it been so long that we have forgotten our nation was built on the very backs of immigrants? Our railroads, waterways, cities, even the nation’s capitol itself was created by the hardworking hands of Irish, Polish, Dutch, German, Italian, Chinese, and African immigrants that came to this nation seeking freedom from oppression and the hopes of prosperity. In fact, each of us who are not wholly Native American carries the blood of immigrants in our veins. I seriously question whether President Bush has considered his own family’s prior immigrant status or ethnic origin before enacting such a sweeping immigration reform policy on the premises of ensuring the “safety of United States citizens” and bringing order to the immigration process.

When reflecting on current policy concerning immigration, the words of another US President ring loud and clear: Thomas Jefferson’s declaration that “a society that will trade a little liberty for a little order will deserve neither and lose both.” The current Presidential policy of considering all immigrants as potential threats to the security of our nation runs afoul of the basic values of any free society.

**JOHN PERRY is a frequent contributor to *Fortune News*.**

# PEN Prison Writing Contest

Founded in 1971, the PEN Prison Writing Program believes in the restorative and rehabilitative power of writing, by providing hundreds of inmates across the country with skilled writing teachers and audiences for their work. The program seeks to provide a place for incarcerated men and women to express themselves freely with paper and pen and to encourage the use of the written word as a legitimate form of power. The program sponsors an annual writing contest, publishes a free handbook for incarcerated people, provides one-on-one mentoring to incarcerated individuals whose writing shows merit or promise, conducts workshops for formerly incarcerated individuals, and seeks to get incarcerated people’s work to the public through literary publications and readings.

## ANNUAL PRISON WRITING CONTEST

PEN American Center sponsors an annual writing contest for incarcerated people. Anyone incarcerated in a federal, state, or county prison in the year before the **September 1** deadline is eligible to enter.

Prizes of \$200, \$100, and \$50 are awarded for first, second, and third place, respectively, in each of the following categories:

### Poetry

Submit up to 10 poems, no more than 20 pages total.

### Fiction

Short story or excerpt, no more than 25 pages.

### Drama

Monologues, scenes, or plays intended for stage or screen, no more than 25 pages.

### Nonfiction

Essay, observation, journal excerpt, editorial, article, or memoir, no more than 25 pages.

## CONTEST GUIDELINES

PEN’s Prison Writing Contest accepts contest submission between **January 1 and September 1** of each year. Winners will be announced the following March. Manuscripts should be typewritten and double-spaced whenever possible, or legibly handwritten on 8.5-by-11-inch paper. All submissions should be accompanied by a brief cover letter with the author’s name, identification number, and complete mailing address.

Authors may not submit more than one entry in each category, except in poetry, which has a 20-page limit.

Only unpublished manuscripts will be considered, with the exception of pieces that have appeared in publications for the prison population only. Any subject matter will be considered.

Please be sure to send copies of your work, not the originals. PEN is unable to return manuscripts. Always include a return address.

Selected winning entries will be published by The Fortune Society in *Fortune News* and on PEN’s web site.

PLEASE SEND ENTRIES TO:

**PEN Writing Awards for Prisoners**  
PEN American Center  
588 Broadway, Suite 303

## 2006-2007 WINNERS

### Poetry

#### First Place

Steven Bullit  
Ontario, OR  
*Doing Time*

#### Second Place

John Yarbrough  
Rosharon, TX  
*Knowing a Place*

#### Third Place

Yvette Louisell  
Mitchellville, IA  
*Fried Mushrooms*

#### Dawson Prize for Poetry

Jah Chemistry  
Beacon, NY  
*Days of Our Lives*

### Memoir

#### First Place

Christina MacNaughton  
Litchfield, CT  
*Just Another Death*

#### Second Place

Joe Huffman  
Rosharon, TX  
*Day One*

#### Third Prize

Thomas M. Fox  
Corcoran, CA  
*A Family’s Ties*

### Drama

#### First Place

Keith Sanders  
Rosharon, TX  
*A Time to Forget*

#### Second Place

Eugene Williams  
Rosharon, TX  
*Turds*

#### Third Place

Clifford Barnes  
Rosharon, TX  
*Hiding Franz Fanon*

### Fiction

#### First Place

Clifford Barnes  
Rosharon, TX  
*Confessions of a Jack-Off Artist*

#### Second Place

Gail Leonard  
Northport, AL  
*Kitchen Workers*

#### Third Place

Michael McLean  
Beacon, NY  
*The Seventh Sense*

#### Dawson Prize for Fiction

Justin Montgomery  
Aberdeen, WA  
*Static Knight*

### Non-Fiction/Essay

#### First Place

J.E. Wantz  
Salem, OR  
*Feeling(s) Cheated*

#### Second Place

William Steed Kelley  
Huntsville, TX  
*Seeds of Jasper Hate*

#### Third Place

Jorge A. Renaud  
Tennessee Colony, TX  
*Convicts and Communities*

#### Dawson Prize for Nonfiction

Lisa Heavilin  
Mitchellville, IA  
*Ms. Body*

#### Dawson Prize for Drama

Gary Salinas  
Iowa Park, TX  
*Deadly Innocence*

# Life Facing Death:

## An Interview with Philip Andrew Stroud

BY STEPHAN P. SMITH

*I arrived at the Indiana State Prison on December 8, 1998. Shortly after my arrival, the institution was placed on total lockdown for an upcoming execution. That's when I realized: this was the only state prison in Indiana that carried out the death penalty. It didn't really affect me until I was watching the news late that evening. I started asking myself questions that I couldn't answer: What is on the mind of the condemned man? What is he really feeling at that moment? What did he think about his time on death row?*

*Fast-forward several years. My cell was located just next to death row and I was able to hear snippets of conversations and learn the rituals of this population. For instance, the men made a pact to never eat on a day that one of them was scheduled to be executed. My curiosity about the subculture was piqued again. Then one day I learned that one of these men had his death sentence overturned. Finally, an opportunity to get the answers to all of my questions! I had followed this young man's trial on the news and understood the media portrayal of him; now I wanted to know the man behind the images.*

*When I met Phillip Andrew Stroud (a.k.a. Akasha Popalani), he was soft-spoken, intelligent, and mature. I was shocked to realize that he already had an agenda for his incarceration. He wanted to make a difference. I asked him if I could interview him for Fortune News, and he quickly*

*agreed. What follows is the interview as it took place with the uncensored approval of the administration.*

**Smith:** What is the crime that you are incarcerated for, what was your age when you were first arrested, and what was the original sentence? What was your reaction when you were sentenced?

**Stroud:** I'm here for 3 counts of murder, 3 counts of robbery and 1 count of burglary. I was 21 at the time. My original sentence was the death penalty; I was sentenced to death plus eighty years. When I was first sentenced, I was scared, numb. I kept thinking about my family watching me get killed and wondering how it all got to this point. I knew that my family was relying on me for strength; I was crushed because I didn't know what was going to happen.

**Smith:** What was your first night on death row like?

**Stroud:** The first night that I got to death row they accidentally put me in the death cell, which is different from the death row cell house. The death cell is where they put people who have thirty days or less to live. It kind of shook me up a little bit.

**Smith:** How many people were executed during the time you were on death row?

**Stroud:** Seven were executed by the State; one guy was killed in the cellhouse out on the range. I had a chance to rotate with and get to know

four of the guys who were executed.

**Smith:** What was it like for you to see these people get executed when you had grown to know them, knowing that your fate was similar to theirs?

**Stroud:** Just sad. It's like in the neighborhood where I'm from – one minute you're growing up with your lifelong friends, and the next minute they're dead. But here, you get close to somebody and you know that on this one day they're going to take them away and you're never going to see them again. You're not thinking about what he's in for, what color he is – you're just thinking that this dude is breaking bread with me, we're laughing and they're teaching me things and I'm teaching them things, and we're just trying to make a better way.

**Smith:** Did you or do you think that race was a factor in your death sentence?

**Stroud:** I would like to say “no,” because I don't think anyone went in there looking to “kill the black guy.” But I think that subconsciously race plays a role in all of our lives, both negatively and positively. Growing up, we blamed the white man for everything. You chip a fingernail, it's the white man's fault. But when you live side by side and eat with dudes of every color – guys who claim to be Aryan brothers, Vice Lords, Muslim, Hebrews, and everything that you can think of – you realize that they're

just people. It's not the surface, it's the substance.

**Smith:** What's your assessment of the criminal justice system in this state?

**Stroud:** I think what goes on in Indiana is a microcosm of a larger societal issue as far as being able to buy a better form of justice. Victims' rights and defendants' rights, economic status, class, race – all these become factors. I think that everyone comes into it with good faith, but there's so much pressure to win or get their statistics right that it's like the ends justify the means.

**Smith:** How long were you on death row before being re-sentenced? What's your new sentence?

**Stroud:** I was on death row for about three years. My sentence was overturned by the Indiana Supreme Court based on contradictory jury instructions, because the judge gave the jury two sets of instructions: one instruction said the death penalty is only a recommendation if you recommend it, that he had the power to change it. Then, after six of them were seated, the law changed, so he told the rest of them that if you recommend death, we have to follow it. They reversed the sentence on that ground. So now I'm serving three life sentences plus eighty years.

**Smith:** Do you have any ideas or goals that you strive for?

**Stroud:** I try to find a way not to spend the rest of my life in prison, so I go to the law library three hours a week and stay healthy while I'm here. But the main thing is education. That they allow us prisoners to have serious education programs is a blessing that you really can't turn your back on. You got to try to utilize those

resources and get as much education as you can. I also keep mindful of where I'm from and try to live in a way that stops people from going through what I've been through – specifically about at-risk kids, growing up with the same struggles I went through, without having anyone to intervene, anybody to look up to, anybody with the credibility they respect enough to tell them, “this is wrong, this is not cool.” I try to de-romanticize the thug life culture that I've basically embraced my whole life.

**Smith:** Why do you think that the kids would want to hear that lesson from you? What do you think you have to bring to the table that others haven't been able to bring?

**Stroud:** For one, I have instant credibility. This is still my generation. I'm not some old man saying “look kiddies, you can't do that.” Those kids are me and I am them no matter where they come from. A lot of them are just afraid. They want to change, but they're worried about what someone else will think. They're worried that doing good in school somehow equates with “acting white.” There's a culture in the inner cities that tries to shame you out of doing good. So people just cave in and fall in with this pack mentality. And they'll be like “if this guy can change his mind, then that gives me cover to do it.” Dudes on the street looked up to me based on how I put it down, right or wrong. I want to use that credibility for the right reason.

**Smith:** When you were on death row, you knew that your life, no matter how long or short it might be, was going to end right there. Now you know that you're going to grow old in this place. Which do you really think is worse?

**Stroud:** I would rather fight. The more time you have, the better. When you're on death row it's like tick-tick-tick-tick-tick, then boom you're dead. I'd rather fight for everything that I believe in from population, where I'm more free. I'd rather get to socialize with people and do the best I can in this setting than be on death row, isolated and just counting down the moments to my death. You might have a development or something good come along seven years from now, where on death row I could be dead in five. It hurts either way cause it's like you're going to die. But I don't know when I'm going to die – I could die as soon as we leave out of here, fall down the stairs and break my neck. Anything could happen. So my main focus now is not on death. I just gotta make the most of my life while I'm living it.

**Smith:** If you don't get out of prison, what do you see yourself doing 10, 20 years from now?

**Stroud:** I'd love to have a serious program involving education and outreach to at-risk kids of different faiths and backgrounds where we could speak and listen to them. We don't listen to them enough, and we need to do that to be able to relate to them. Some of those kids, even though they're 13, 14, 15 – they're not children anymore. And they never had a childhood. So I'd like to be part of something that merges education and the arts. Even if I'm not out by then, that would really make me feel free, like I'm worth something and doing something with my life.

**Smith:** Do you feel that you have missed out on life by being given such an incredible sentence?

**Stroud:** A lot of this I brought on myself, so I'm not going to

play “I'm the victim.” There are real victims in this world: people who are really being persecuted and victimized every day for less than what I stand for and what I've been through in my 27 years on this earth. So I want to say that first. I just have to live the life that I have, play the cards in my hand. At this moment in time, I'm sitting here with you and we're trying to do something good.

**Smith:** One last question: what would you like the readers to take away from this interview?

**Stroud:** Don't give up on a person when they're down. Don't give up on a person

### Fried Mushrooms

My mother is the kind of woman who buys fried mushrooms with her last five dollars on the way home from a listless day waiting for nothing at the welfare office

One small bit of rich sponginess circles my senses cleansing filling

Or maybe what fills is the taste of futility

A few moments with a woman who spends her last five dollars on fried mushrooms to share with her child

Yvette M. Louisell  
Third Place, Poetry  
2006-2007 PEN Prison Writing Contest

when they're going through their darkest moment because after the dark night comes a brighter day. Redemption is a powerful thing, and if somebody is going through a dark moment or if you're going through a dark moment, just try to stay alive. Just try to listen and learn and don't condemn yourself, don't imprison yourself based on your darkest moment and throw away the rest of your life. Try to build from that moment; find a way to make it better.

# EYE ON FORTUNE

## THRU THESE DOORS WALKED

### Terrell Russell

Like many of our clients, Terrell had to come to Fortune a couple of times before he "got it" – before the words of our counselors took hold and he was able to make the decision to transform his life. This open-door policy is part of what makes Fortune unique; we realize that relapse is part of recovery and welcome clients back as many times as is necessary for them to make positive, lasting changes in their lives. But Terrell's story is different. A 9th grade drop-out, Terrell came to Fortune after spending his 18th birthday behind bars – meaning that he was able to make these spectacular strides



while still a teenager. Terrell is matter-of-fact about the circumstances that led to his arrest and incarceration: "they were the consequences that happened from the choices I made," he says. Like so many of our younger clients, he got caught up with the wrong crowd of people – a fate that even his family couldn't help him avoid. The youngest of four growing up in Spanish Harlem, Terrell's mother always encouraged him to finish school and go on to college. His oldest brother even tried to inoculate him against the dangers of peer pressure, warning him that "one day you're going to have to choose if you're going to go with your friends or if you're going to go your way." Although Terrell didn't understand him at the time, his brother's words began to make sense when his friends started to get into trouble. "That's when everything changed," he says. With a maturity far beyond his years, Terrell remembers how he was arrested for robbery at age 17 and brought to Rikers Island. A judge sent him to The Fortune Society, where he only spent a week in our Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) program before being remanded back to jail. "I didn't really get away from my neighborhood, even though I was trying to get back in school and earn my GED," he says. Terrell didn't realize that attendance in the program was mandatory and starting skipping days – which was when the judge sent him back to Rikers. Thankfully, he was given a second chance to come to Fortune, where his individualized ATI program focused on anger management, substance abuse treatment and education. Terrell quickly learned from his mistakes. "The second time around I was willing to listen to my counselor and take in whatever she had to say," he remembers. "At first I felt everything was all her fault. I blamed her for me going back. But in reali-

ty, I wasn't handling my business like I was supposed to. She recommended that I do school at Fortune. It's the best thing that ever happened to me. The Education Department was like my family."

After only 10 months in the program, Terrell passed his GED exam! He is currently working with his teacher on college entrance essays and hopes to one day attend the City University of New York. In the meantime, he's still taking classes at Fortune – both as a refresher and to ensure that he doesn't "fall off" and slip back into old habits. He has even been working with David Rothenberg, Fortune's founder, to inspire and mentor some of our younger clients. "It was the first time that anybody ever thought I could be an example to someone," he says proudly.

Terrell has big plans for the future and intends to study politics when he gets to college. "I want to travel to places that need help. I want to share everything I know, everything I've learned." But no matter what happens, Terrell remains proud of the strides he has made: "At Fortune, I'm trying. I'm not just sitting on the corner waiting for something to happen to me. I'm working to make my future."

*Photo and article by Kristen Kidder*

## CELEBRITY SUPPORT



Christine Ebersole recently won a Tony Award for her stunning performance in Broadway's *Grey Gardens*, the new musical that dramatizes the life of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis' eccentric aunt and cousin. Ms. Ebersole poses here with Fortune staff member Casimiro Torres and client Terrell Russell (featured left) while touring our Manhattan offices earlier this summer.

An enthusiastic supporter of Fortune's work, Ms. Ebersole is currently selling limited edition reproductions of Little Edith Bouvier Beales' iconic brooch, all proceeds to benefit The Fortune Society. For details, visit [www.christineebersole.com](http://www.christineebersole.com).

## VOLUNTEER PROFILE



Mary Jacker has been a volunteer tutor in the Education Program since 1993. She was born in Berlin, Germany of Austrian parents in 1927. Her mother died when she was 3½ years old, leaving her father, a CEO of a chain of 68 retail stores in the meat packing industry, to care for her. Feeling a sense of foreboding having his daughter in Germany under Hitler's reign, Mary's father sent her at the age of 5 to live in Czechoslovakia, where she was raised by her aunt and uncle.

By 1946, Mary had arrived in New York after living in Paris for several years. Shortly after her arrival, a friend introduced her to someone who was looking for a person to carry out clerical and filing duties at the French American Bank Corporation. She was hired and remained in that same department for the next 46 years, rising to the position of bank officer.

While training individuals at the bank, Mary realized that she had a talent for imparting information. When she retired in 1993, she decided to pursue this lifelong interest. A long-time donor to The Fortune Society, Mary learned the agency was looking for tutors for its education program through an issue of *Fortune News*. She decided to volunteer.

Mary has taught many Fortune clients over the last 13 years. She recalls one student, a man who wanted to write his memoir after reading the biography of Anne Frank. She recalls with a smile on her face how he was so concerned about copyright laws that he would not allow her to copy any part of what he had written. Mary encouraged him to continue to write, telling him, "Remember your dream, you are a writer."

Mary tutored her last class at the Fortune Society last September. She will be moving to a community in Gwynedd, Pennsylvania run by Quakers, where she plans on writing her memoir. Mary was drawn to the area by their commitment to volunteerism.

Mary will miss the work she has done at The Fortune Society dearly. She would like to tell people who are here for services and who will come here in the future to not give up. She says, "If you want a future, you can create it."

The Fortune Society and all the individuals Mary has touched over the years wish her all the best.

To learn more about volunteer tutor opportunities at the Fortune Society, please call 212-691-7554 or e-mail [jkefalas@fortunesociety.org](mailto:jkefalas@fortunesociety.org).

*Photo and article by John Kefalas*

For up-to-date information about Fortune's programs and events, visit [www.fortunesociety.org](http://www.fortunesociety.org)

## SUMMER ROUND-UP



Kenneth Harrigan, a formerly incarcerated Fortune Society staff member, was interviewed by Channel 9 News during the 2008 Reentry Roundtable Advocacy Day.



David Rothenberg, Fortune Society founder and longtime criminal justice advocate, led a team of advocates in meetings with NYS legislators.



During the 2008 Re-entry Roundtable Advocacy Day, Fortune Society staff and clients advocated for the removal of counter-productive barriers to reentry.

## FORTUNE MEDIA REVIEWS

**Fish: A Memoir of a Boy in a Man's Prison**

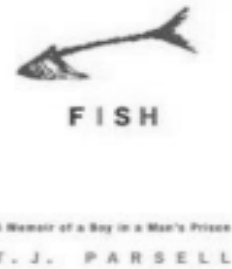
BY: T.J. Parsell  
Published by Carroll & Graf, 2006

Unfortunately, rape is a prison reality. The truth is that suppression and oppression dominate institutions. These tensions often manifest in the American prison system as outrageous displays of power, control and sexual lust. T.J. Parsell's haunting memoir, *Fish*, challenges the myths, denials and fear of both prisoners and their keepers.

At 17 years old, Parsell was sent to an adult Michigan prison. He was gang-raped in his first week and a coin-toss made him another inmate's sexual property. *Fish* describes how the game is played by incarcerated men and how prison officials look the other way under the delusion that they are maintaining calm. As Parsell tells in his chilling auto-biography (and how I have heard him relate it in public forums) his internal rage exploded as soon as he was released on the streets.

John Herbert, whose play *Fortune and Men's Eyes* served as the catalyst for the forming of The Fortune Society, told me a similar story 40 years ago. He stated that prison brutality had turned him into a walking time-bomb. He was never able to come to terms with what happened to him until, in a cathartic rage, he poured it out in his thinly disguised autobiographical prison drama.

T.J. Parsell's story is almost an emotional carbon copy of Herbert's. The geography and the players differ, but the inner warfare is identi-



cal. When Parsell talks with former prisoners, his tale resonates. Invariably, he meets men who secretly tell him that they experienced a similar experience and the shame, fear, and anger have dominated their lives.

*Fish* is a tough tale. It is not the story of the American dream in which a Midwestern kid overcomes obstacles to become President of the United States. To be sure, Parsell has done okay for himself. But he was forced to reinvent himself in the process. His birth name was Tim, but when he was released from prison he became T.J. and moved out of Michigan. This external alteration allowed him to function in society, but deep in his being, Tim — the child of alcoholics who received a 14 year sentence when any Alternative to Incarceration program would have done the job — has had to fight the inner demons.

That man-child still exists inside of him. Each day is a challenge to overcome the pain and fury of his past. No doubt his riveting book will help.

*David Rothenberg*

**Dark & Light: A Love Story**

BY: Michael Laser  
Published by Permanent Press, 2006

Michael Laser worked at The Fortune Society from 1991-94, writing grant proposals, annual reports, and other fundraising material. In order to give a human face to his fundraising appeals, Mike interviewed many Fortune staff members and clients about their lives. These stories made a deep impression on him—and eventually inspired a novel, *Dark & Light: A Love Story*, which was just published by the Permanent Press.

*Dark & Light* tells the story of Careese, a recovering alcoholic, temporarily homeless, who accepts an offer of shelter from Edmund, a lonely middle-aged computer programmer. In the publisher's words, "Good intentions on both sides give way to mutual distrust and resentments, but similar sorrows connect them. What begins as a clash of language and culture turns into something else entirely... As their attitudes change, this seemingly simple story becomes a complex exploration of America's unhealed wound." *Fortune News* recently spoke with Michael Laser about his novel and his experience as a Fortune Society staffer.

**Fortune News:** How did you come to work at Fortune?

**Michael Laser:** I'd heard about the agency long before, and admired the whole idea of it: helping people get their lives together after prison, so they didn't end up in trouble again. I started sending an annual donation (and still do). When I wanted to break into the field of grantwriting, I sent resumes to the nonprofits I contributed to; by luck, Fortune's Executive Director,

JoAnne Page, happened to be looking for someone to help write proposals.

**FN:** How did working at Fortune lead you to write this particular story?

**ML:** I'm a middle-class white man. When I arrived at Fortune, I'd never had contact with anyone like Fortune's clients and counselors. It was a case of culture shock. I'd never been in a place where not being a former prisoner—or African-American—put me in the minority. But as I got to know my co-workers — and especially as I interviewed them about their lives — I grew more comfortable, and came to like almost everyone there very much. They struck me as generous, decent people, who were trying to honor their responsibilities on very modest salaries.

I grew up in the Sixties—the time of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, the Black Panthers. No subject seemed as important to me as the tensions between blacks and whites in America. My experience at Fortune seemed to offer an interesting way to explore the subject. The book opens with Edmund seeing this young woman on the street and thinking she seems appealing, and just needs a little help... but then, when he hears her talk, he's put off because she's not the person he imagined. Their time together is full of ups and downs, of hidden prejudices on both sides — but, in the course of their conflicts, they come to know each other as people, and they get beyond most of their preconceptions.

**FN:** Did you find the raw material for Careese's life story in your interviews at Fortune?

**ML:** Yes—almost everything comes from those interviews. One of my favorite questions (not useful for fundraising, but



interesting to me personally) was, "What kinds of games did you play as a kid?" The answers ended up in the book, when Careese thinks back to childhood, playing Hot Peas and Butter, and hiding under a car during a game of Hide and Seek.

**FN:** Are the characters modeled directly on Fortune staff and clients?

**ML:** Yes and no. They're not direct portraits, but composites drawn from bits and pieces of Fortune people.

There's one exception, though: at Careese's treatment program, there's a petite, elderly volunteer named Sheila. Anyone who worked at Fortune in the 1990s will recognize this as a portrait of Sheila Maroney, who came to the office every day with her dog, G, until she passed away. She was a friend of mine at Fortune, and I wanted to pay tribute to her.

**FN:** The book is told from alternating points of view, and Careese's sections are in her own voice. Was that a challenge?

**ML:** It was harder than I expected it to be—and I expected it to be hard! At first, I tried to find an African-American co-author, so Careese's voice would be authentic, but that didn't work out, so I set out to try on my own. I met with one of my Fortune co-workers after work for two long interviews, and typed up the transcripts carefully, to make sure I recorded everything exactly as she said it. Then I marked

up the pages, trying to pinpoint the words and phrases that made her sound different from me. It took many drafts before the voice came together.

**FN:** *Library Journal* called the book "brutally honest about the difficulty of bridging the racial gap and the assumptions that even well-meaning blacks and whites make about one another." You focus sharply on the conflicts and differences between Edmund and Careese. Some would say that focusing on their differences is destructive. How would you respond?

**ML:** My feeling is that, in the desire to overcome our long, sad history of racism and conflict, many good people jump ahead and try to decree brotherhood right now, by denying cultural differences. "We're all the same under the skin." I agree that we are, deep down — but I also think that people's specific life experiences are important. It's a mistake to deny the dif-

ferences in our experiences and how they shape us. People so often dislike other people because they talk differently, dress differently, carry themselves differently—it doesn't help to pretend those differences, those frictions, don't exist. If people are to get beyond prejudices in a real way, I think they need to have close, prolonged contact with people who are different from them—and they can expect that contact to be uncomfortable at times. But if there's a desire on both sides to do better, it's possible to reduce the distance. At least, my own experiences at Fortune seem to point to this as a remedy.

**FN:** Where can people buy the book?

**ML:** They can either ask their local bookstore to order it or buy it from an online bookseller. I hope many *Fortune News* readers will check the book out, especially my co-workers from long ago.

*Kristen Kidder*

## Do You Enjoy Reading *Fortune News*?

Do you believe that formerly incarcerated individuals deserve a chance to lead healthy, productive lives?

Do you believe we can have a criminal justice system that provides for the public's safety and is also humane and cost-effective?

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE:  
*Re-entry:  
A Current Snapshot and  
Recommendations for the Future*

Please send us your stories, articles or artwork.  
SUBMISSION DEADLINE: OCTOBER 1, 2008

The Fortune Society recently launched the David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy (DRCPP) to institutionalize and advance its technical assistance, training, policy development, advocacy and community education initiatives. Look for the full-length article on DRCPP coming in our next issue.



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