



## **U.S. PROGRAMS**

**Improving Policy** The Open Society Institute's U.S. Programs, which celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2006, seeks to promote a fairer justice system, respond to attacks on independent institutions, and build a more humane, effective, and democratic U.S. approach to the world. In the area of justice, for example, OSI supports equal access to the courts, indigent defense services, sentencing policies that reduce incarceration rates, and assistance for people returning from prison. OSI also takes advantage of strategic opportunities to foster progressive leadership and organizations, to defend the integrity of evidence-based science, and to address the issues of race and class that underlie the continuing tragedy exposed by Hurricane Katrina.

**Helping People** In New Orleans, as the next story describes, OSI supported a safe place for students, returning after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, to talk and write openly about their feelings and experiences. Other grants also tried to help low-income people in New Orleans by improving policies to deal with basic inequities. In states throughout the country, OSI grantees helped exonerate innocent people after years in prison and restore voting rights for people with felony convictions. Support for an environmental group helped students who wanted to fight greenhouse gas pollution on their campuses. In Baltimore, fewer students were suspended and more students participated in after-school programs.

## U.S. PROGRAMS

## STUDENTS RETURNING TO NEW ORLEANS:

# “EDUCATION ISN'T JUST FOR ME.”



Students Brittany Philson and Deborah Carey with teacher Jim Randels, above. On the following four pages, photographer Clarence Williams, an OSI Katrina Media Fellow, captures scenes from Brittany's life and neighborhood in New Orleans' Ninth Ward: the beauty parlor, the used tire shop, Frederick Douglass High School, and the funeral of her brother-in-law.

FEW CHILDREN lived in New Orleans in November 2005, just a few months after Hurricane Katrina had devastated the city. The public schools were closed with no clear date to reopen, so families who couldn't afford private school had to stay away. That included most students from Frederick Douglass High School in the Upper Ninth Ward. So to see a dozen or so teenagers milling around the school's crumbling Art Deco building in the autumn sun was a remarkable, even moving sight. They had traveled hundreds of miles in car pools and caravans from Georgia, Oklahoma, Texas, and other sites of the Katrina diaspora for a homecoming.

There was no DJ or decorations; the school was locked and abandoned. But some students managed to get inside the band room and drag out instruments, the ones that were up on shelves that the flood waters didn't reach. They banged out drum cadences that bounced off the school's three-story walls and echoed for blocks. The sound carried a simple message, "Hey, we're here," even if only for a little while, for most had to return to their new homes of exile the next day.

The homecoming was organized by Students at the Center, or SAC, an independent media and writing program led by Jim Randels and Kalamu ya Salaam. Randels is a veteran New Orleans public school teacher who



created SAC 10 years ago when he saw the city’s approach to failing public schools—creating outposts of refuge through selective-admissions and magnet schools—as a “separate and unequal” system. He aimed to show that even the city’s poorest, lowest ranking schools could produce successful, engaged students if afforded the resources to do so. In his English and creative writing courses, Randels cut class sizes in half. He also treated students as a resource for peer teaching and feedback. By teaching them to teach each other, SAC has fostered a community of students invested in their own learning.

Writer, arts producer, and civil rights leader Kalamu ya Salaam joined the program in 1998. He is now codirector. In addition to teaching every day, Salaam has used funding from the Open Society Institute to help students create audio and video projects that have been distributed across the country.

*“Showing up every day and changing the system from within is hard.”*

Randels and Salaam, asked for samples of SAC’s work, supply a thick stack of material, including a book on Homer Plessy (the Creole man arrested in 1892 for boarding a train as a white, just a few blocks away from Douglass), a video in-progress of a performance poem about sexual abuse, and an article on the 50th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that won a Louisiana Press Award. Both men pointed out that SAC’s goal is not to “pump out cool media projects,” but to invest in the lives of students.

“Making the work is the easy part,” says Randels. “Showing up every day and changing the system from within? That’s hard.”

At the Douglass homecoming the two men’s rapport with the students was immediate, despite the months of being scattered. Out on the asphalt in the shade of the school, the small group formed a circle. They always hold class this way, encouraging teachers, students, and guests to participate as equals. The conversation leaned toward weighty topics like the future of New Orleans schools and



racial inequities exposed by the storm, but talk of romance and parents and hair-do's bubbled up alongside. The strongest writings from SAC reflect this mix, with students using their life experiences to highlight the social issues, history, and literature they explore in class.

Maria Hernandez, then 17, took her turn in the circle to read about her first day as a senior at Douglass, just days before Katrina hit. She told how hard she worked to convince her family to enroll her little brother and sister at Douglass rather than a magnet school:

For the first time in almost four years I'm early. I can usually walk right up to the metal detectors, but today is the first day of school. At 8:05 the line is longer than the line at the welfare office . . .

On this steaming August day, surrounded by the buzz of excited conversation, sweaty foreheads and eager faces, I'm glad to be bringing my siblings to our neighborhood school rather than running away from it. And for their sake and the

sake of all the other ninth graders, it's important for me to be on time.

One reason I'm on time and at Douglass is because of the history I'm studying. In New Orleans, many enslaved Africans escaped plantations but stayed in the area. These maroons knew, like Frederick Douglass knew, that none of us can be free unless all of our people are free. My education isn't just for me it is also for my fellow students.

Maria was supposed to read her essay on National Public Radio, but as she said, "Katrina blew that chance away." Katrina also blew Maria and her family to Tulsa, Oklahoma, where they were bused from the Superdome after being stranded by the storm. It looks like the family is going to stay in Tulsa. Maria's vision of making Douglass a school where her family could thrive has dissolved. As for herself, by now she imagined she'd be a Douglass graduate, attending the University of New Orleans



with her SAC classmates, and serving as a SAC alumnus mentor.

Since she's been in Tulsa, Maria says, she hasn't written anything. She's been held back a year in school, due to the days she missed in the chaos of relocation and the different state education requirements. Her chances of graduating a year late are shaky. While the school in Tulsa is more racially diverse, Maria said that she gets into fights with other students, often over slurs about her Cuban background. There's no outlet like SAC, where she could talk openly about issues like race, and turn her frustration into something productive through writing.

Maria treated Students at the Center "like it was her job," says her best friend in New Orleans, Brittany Philson. Brittany, 18, didn't go to Douglass. She used to take the bus across town to hang out with Maria after school and on weekends. Maria, according to Brittany, would "always be wanting to read me something, or talk about going to meetings, or stay home and write instead of running around." Brittany respected her friend's interest, but didn't understand it.

*"If you were ever to get into trouble, she would help you out."*

"The truth? I thought y'all was boring," Brittany now says with a sly smile from a circle of desks. Fast forward to spring semester 2007 at a reopened Douglass high school, and Brittany's sitting in a SAC writing class. She wound up at Douglass by default, assigned there when her old school didn't have room. A lot of the school's nearly 850 students got there the same way. Brittany's a gifted writer who's taken Maria's role as the tough, sharp-tongued girl in the group. Every week she has something new to read, writings she works on at the bus stop or during class breaks. Brittany's work is lyrical yet straightforward, taken right from her life.

One recent story described her last memory of her mother:

It was two weeks after my eighth birthday, when I decided to give myself a reality check about the importance of family. Well, not really me, it was my mom who decided. She wanted to talk to me about family on this particular day, since she



noticed that I was constantly getting into fights with my sister who's one year older than me.

She wanted me to come lay down with her while she talked to me. I wanted to tell her no, because she was going to make me lay on her saggy breast that she had all out, and put my leg over her loose booty. But she wasn't going to let me go outside if I said no, so I lay next to her. I knew I wasn't in deep trouble, because I brought home a good report card the day before, so I wasn't really worried about getting my ass whipped. All she told me was "listen to Michelle, because if you were ever to get into trouble she would be there to help you out." And now when I look back all I can say is damn, because she was right about that.

Her mom died later that day, of an aneurysm, and since then Brittany's bounced around between her eight siblings. ("I like to say I raised myself," she says.) All of them now have kids of their own, and one reason she's taken so

strongly to writing with SAC is the attention she gets that's missing at home. The only other place she found that level of encouragement and structure was in Houston, Texas, after Hurricane Katrina, where military recruiters urged her to join the Marines. It's something she still considers, as a way to leave town, get out of poverty, maybe pay for school down the line. Jim Randels and Kalamu ya Salaam are helping her explore other options, from college to work, that could better foster her newfound voice as a writer.

They point out that talent like Brittany's all too often slips through the cracks of the education system, a system that disinvests in schools like Douglass and gives up on poor students all too easily. It shouldn't be left to chance for strong, valuable perspectives like those of Maria Hernandez and Brittany Philson to be heard—not just as teenagers, but as successful, engaged adults.

"The lesson is not to just find the quote-unquote good ones and whisk them away," Randels says. "Every student deserves a class like Students at the Center, every day."

## U.S. PROGRAMS: BRIEFS

### Justice Fund

#### Civil Liberties

##### ***Court Rules Guantánamo Military Tribunals Illegal***

In a landmark legal decision, the Supreme Court ruled that the special military commissions established by the Bush administration to try detainees held at Guantánamo Bay were illegal under military justice law and the Geneva Conventions. With OSI support, Georgetown University's National Security Fund brought the case, *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld*, challenging the constitutionality of the president's policies regarding detainees.

##### ***Groups Defend Privacy Against Government Intrusion***

The Transportation Security Administration abandoned Secure Flight, a program that would have checked the name of every domestic airline passenger against commercial databases and terrorist watch lists, following criticism from the Center for Democracy and Technology and other groups concerned with the civil liberties violations of counterterrorism tactics. The center, supported by OSI, was also successful in persuading a federal court in Texas to block the government from tracking the location of a cell phone unless it first obtained a search warrant based on a showing of probable cause.

In addition, the center, along with other advocates, has helped to prevent congressional authorization of warrantless domestic surveillance and immunity for telecom abuses.

#### Gideon Project

##### ***Wrongfully Convicted Prisoners Are Released***

DNA evidence, presented in the courts by the Innocence Project, an OSI grantee, exonerated six men who had spent years and decades in prison for crimes they did not commit. One man, who had a history of mental health issues, was convicted of homicide on the basis of a false confession coerced by police. The Innocence Project New Orleans obtained the release of five innocent men, including a man who had been behind bars for 37 years after pleading guilty to avoid the death penalty. OSI supports efforts to expose and address the problem of wrongful convictions.

##### ***Katrina Exposes Louisiana's Broken Criminal Justice System***

Hurricane Katrina caused the evacuation of some 8,000 mostly indigent pretrial detainees, including 6,375 from the New Orleans jail. Because of Louisiana's systemic failures in tracking detainees and providing them with access to counsel, many pretrial detainees spent more time in jail than they

would have if convicted of the crimes with which they were charged. A number of OSI grantees made indigent defense reform a priority in Louisiana. As a result, the governor has more than doubled the state's budget for indigent defense assistance, and reforms are underway.

#### Immigrants' Rights

##### ***Immigrants Rally for their Rights***

Hundreds of thousands of people from immigrant communities demonstrated in cities across the nation for recognition of their rights as people living and working in the United States. Alliances of immigrants' rights groups, faith-based organizations, civil rights groups, and others helped mobilize the massive rallies that increased immigrants' visibility and highlighted their economic and political power. They also had a positive influence on the debate over illegal immigration in Congress, changing its focus from almost exclusively enforcement to also including opportunities for immigrants to legalize their status and reunify family members.

##### ***Immigrant Rights Groups Secure Major Supreme Court Victory***

Several OSI grantees, including the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, the Immigrant Defense Project of the New York State Defenders Association, and the National Immigration Project

of the National Lawyers Guild, mounted a coordinated litigation effort that culminated in a major U.S. Supreme Court victory in the case of *Lopez v. Gonzales*. The Court rejected the overly harsh position taken by the U.S. government that noncitizens convicted of a first-time offense of simple drug possession have committed a “drug trafficking” aggravated felony and are therefore subject to mandatory deportation. The ruling allows immigration judges to consider the family, employment, and personal ties of such persons to this country and permit them to remain.

***A Country of Immigrants: Millions of immigrants marched for their rights during the spring and summer.***

## Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights

### ***Mixed Outcomes in Marriage Equality Litigation***

The New Jersey Supreme Court ruled unanimously that denying same-sex couples the right to marry is unconstitutional, leaving it to the state legislature to craft an appropriate remedy. The New Jersey legislature then enacted a compromise civil unions law providing all the comparable protections while continuing to deny equal access to the institution of civil marriage. Local advocates, led by Garden State Equality, a grantee of the Civil Marriage Collaborative,

in which OSI participates, vowed to continue their campaign for true marriage equality. High courts in two other closely watched states, Washington and New York, also ruled it was up to their respective state legislatures to address the issue of marriage equality.

### ***Antidiscrimination Protections for Transgender People Advance***

New Jersey became the ninth U.S. state, joining California, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, New Mexico, Rhode Island, and Washington, to make discriminatory practices based on gender identity or expression illegal. A coalition of transgender and LGBT



rights organizations supported by OSI has worked to educate Americans about legal problems confronting transgender people, who face rampant harassment and discrimination in finding and keeping a job, attempting to secure housing, and accessing everyday public accommodations, such as hospitals, schools, shops, hotels, restaurants, and theaters.

***Putting a Face on Guantánamo:*** Attorney Sarah Havens shows two pictures of detainee Abdulaziz Al Swidi as a boy and young man (top).

## **Racial Justice**

### ***Campaign Helps Win Reauthorization of Voting Rights Act***

OSI partnered with the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York to support a national education campaign on the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. The act works to eliminate racial discrimination in voting and increase civic participation among minority groups in the United States as guaranteed by the Fifteenth Amendment. The campaign's public education, research, and scholarship efforts contributed to support for reauthorization. The reauthorization

act that was signed into law included an increase in language access at the voting booth.

### ***Coalition Fights Baltimore Housing Segregation in Court***

The Citizens Planning and Housing Association in Baltimore led a coalition that successfully sued the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department for years of policies that effectively segregated poor minority families in Baltimore City. The ACLU of Maryland and the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund won a favorable decision in late 2005 and argued the remedy phase of the trial in the summer of 2006 with a final decision expected in 2007.



## Sentencing and Incarceration Alternatives Project

### **Aggravated Battery Charges Reduced in Peoria Schools**

From the 2004/05 school year to the 2005/06 school year, Peoria, Illinois, saw a 35 percent reduction in the number of youth referred to juvenile detention upon a charge of aggravated battery. The reduction resulted from policy and data analysis funded by OSI that bolstered efforts of a coalition of nonprofit groups committed to reforming the city's juvenile justice system. Aggravated battery is the most frequent charge that removes youth from school and sends them into the justice system.

### **Report Documents High Cost of Drug War**

A new report, *Treatment Instead of Prisons: A Roadmap for Sentencing and Correctional Policy*, found that substance-related offenses accounted for 60 percent of prison population growth over the past half-decade in Wisconsin. African Americans were imprisoned for drug offenses at nearly 40 times the rate of non-Hispanic whites. The study concluded that Wisconsin could reduce its nonviolent prison population by up to 1,500 prisoners and create annual savings of \$43 million by expanding the availability of quality treatment, supervision, and services for nonviolent drug defendants. *Treatment Instead of Prisons* was released by OSI grantee Justice Strategies in collaboration with the Drug Policy Alliance and

WISDOM, an interfaith advocacy organization.

## Soros Justice Fellowships

### **Film Draws Attention to Wrongful Convictions**

Soros Justice Fellows Ricki Stern and Annie Sundberg, both filmmakers, brought the issue of wrongful conviction to the big screen with their documentary *The Trials of Darryl Hunt*, which premiered at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival. The film played across the United States and internationally, educating policymakers and the public about the role of race in criminal justice outcomes and the inadequacies of an underfunded indigent defense system. OSI supports efforts that draw attention to the prevalence of wrongful convictions and the myriad other problems plaguing the criminal justice system.

### **Conference Discusses Safeguarding of Human Rights in Prisons**

Soros Justice Fellow Michele Deitch, a scholar and advocate, organized a conference of over 100 U.S. and international advocates, policymakers, corrections officials, lawyers, judges, journalists, scholars, and formerly incarcerated people to discuss ways of safeguarding human rights in U.S. prisons. OSI works to reduce the United States' overreliance on incarceration as a response to complex social, economic, and public health problems, such as

racial inequality, poverty, and addiction.

### **Crime Survivors Organize for Public Safety**

Progressive justice reform advocates and crime victims' advocates have typically stood on opposite sides of the crime policy spectrum. Soros Justice Fellow Arwen Bird, a crime survivor herself, organized progressive crime survivors in Portland, Oregon, to participate in policy discussions about sentencing and public safety. Her group, Crime Survivors for Public Safety, facilitated dialogues between disparate groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union and Families and Friends of Violent Crime Victims, the largest conservative advocacy organization in the state of Washington, in an effort to build bridges and promote public safety.

## The After Prison Initiative

### **Census Bureau Counts Incarcerated People in the Wrong Communities**

A compelling report—commissioned by the Census Bureau and authored by the National Academies' National Research Council—found that the Census Bureau's practice of counting people in prison as residents of the communities in which they are incarcerated created "political inequities in redistricting." The National Research Council called for the Census Bureau to begin collecting the home addresses of people in prison and to study



***Growing Up:*** A young father, who did not finish high school and spent time in prison, struggles to raise his daughter.

whether home addresses should be used in the census. The report's recommendations were informed by the Prison Policy Initiative, an OSI grantee, whose research demonstrates how the Census Bureau's policy undermines democracy by unfairly depriving high incarceration communities of political representation while overrepresenting rural prison communities.

***“Million Dollar Blocks”  
Spur Move to Reinvest  
Justice Resources***

Columbia University's Spatial Information Design Lab and the Justice Mapping Center, both OSI grantees, created maps of the geography of incarceration and return in New York, Phoenix, New Orleans, Wichita, and New Haven. The maps included “million dollar blocks” in Brooklyn, New York, single city blocks in which the incarceration of residents is so dense that the state spends in excess of a million dollars a year to incarcerate people from

that block. At a full-day workshop on justice mapping, government officials and civil society advocates discussed how excessive prison spending might be reallocated for reinvestment in the civil institutions and infrastructure of such neighborhoods.

***Voting Rights Restored for  
People with Felony Convictions***

An estimated 5.3 million Americans denied the right to vote by felony disenfranchisement laws won a series of victories restoring their voting rights. Voters in Rhode Island, legislators in Florida, New York, and

Tennessee, and courts in California and Washington all lifted restrictions on the voting rights of people with felony convictions. The California case, brought by the ACLU of Northern California, an OSI grantee, and the Social Justice Law Project, restored voting rights to as many as 100,000 people. The Sentencing Project, an OSI grantee, released a report showing that, since 1997, 16 states have reformed state laws that limit voting rights and more than 600,000 people in seven states have had their voting rights restored.

#### ***Government Provides Public Service for People with Criminal Records***

For the first time, federal agencies are bringing people with criminal records into public service through funding for the Civic Justice Corps (CJC), whose members work with other community residents on revitalization projects in high incarceration neighborhoods. The Corps Network, an OSI grantee, is managing sizeable grants from AmeriCorps and the U.S. Department of Labor for CJC sites in 14 cities, paving the way for institutionalization of CJs across the country. Seeded by OSI, the CJC provides education, work, and public service opportunities to currently and formerly incarcerated people, promoting an alternative to normal probation and parole policies that are punitive and oriented toward surveillance.

## **Strategic Opportunities Fund**

### ***Documenting Oral History in the Gulf Region***

In May 2006, StoryCorps, an organization that inspires and trains people to record their oral histories, took a mobile recording booth to New Orleans, Louisiana, and other locations in the Gulf Coast to document the experiences of residents affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. With the help of local radio stations and local educational institutions, StoryCorps reached out to and collected stories from over 175 individuals. OSI's support of StoryCorps is part of nearly \$3 million in grants awarded to rebuild the region.

### ***Katrina Prompts Dialogue on Inequality in U.S.***

A year after Hurricane Katrina and other storms devastated the Gulf Coast, OSI's U.S. Programs awarded 31 media grants to promote and sustain a national conversation on racism and inequality in America. In addition to the Katrina Media Fellowships, which include print, radio, film, photography, and youth journalists, OSI is supporting 15 Gulf Coast nonprofits working to rebuild and revitalize the region.

### ***Students Speak Up on Global Warming***

With support from OSI, the Energy Action Coalition launched the Campus Climate Challenge to stop global warming by fighting for 100

percent clean energy policies at colleges and high schools across Canada and the United States. As a result of pressure from students, several institutions—including New York University, Duke's Fuqua School of Business, Central Oregon Community College, and Bowdoin College—have pledged to purchase at least 75 percent of their power from clean sources.

### ***Youth Leaders Force Florida to Act on Boot Camp Death of Teenager***

In January 2006, 14-year-old Martin Lee Anderson died after a brutal beating by authorities at a publicly funded boot camp in Florida. A second autopsy, forced by the release of a videotape, concluded that the cause of death was suffocation. A lack of state action prompted student leaders Monique Gillum and Gabe Pendas to help organize a sit-in at the state capitol, forcing the resignation of Florida's law enforcement commissioner and the closing of juvenile boot camps in the state. Gillum is a fellow of Young People For, a program of the People For the American Way Foundation, an OSI grantee. Pendas is the vice president of the United States Student Association Foundation, also an OSI grantee.

### ***Campaign Helps Save Critical Census Bureau Data***

President Bush's 2007 budget called for the elimination of the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), a longitudinal data set that is critical

for assessing the effectiveness of government programs that enable families to maintain a decent standard of living and achieve some degree of financial security. The Center for Economic and Policy Research, with OSI funding, initiated a campaign to save the program, obtaining the support of the conservative Heritage Foundation and hundreds of economists and policy analysts. Congress chose to maintain funding for SIPP in the 2007 budget.

***Report Draws Attention to Economic Inequities***

The Economic Policy Institute released its annual *The State of Working America 2006/2007* report, which drew national attention to the failure of U.S. wages to match increases in productivity. The report received coverage from the *New York Times*, CBS Radio, Public News Service Radio, *Marketplace*, *Good Morning America*, the *Today Show*, and the *Colbert Report*.

***Magazine Creates Oral History of Journalism in Iraq***

OSI grantee *Columbia Journalism Review* was a finalist for a National Magazine Award for “Into the Abyss: Reporting Iraq 2003–2006.” The article from the November 2006 issue, the magazine’s 45th anniversary issue, is an oral history of the journalism of the war, based on interviews with 45 reporters, producers, and photographers who covered it. “Into the Abyss,” which will be published in an expanded book form in fall 2007, describes the



***Reporting the War: New York Times correspondent Richard A. Opiel, Jr., runs for his life in Iraq.***

obstacles and dangers journalists faced while covering the war.

### ***Scientist Protests NASA's Censorship Attempts***

James E. Hansen, the director of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies at NASA, protested attempts to silence him after officials at NASA ordered him to refer press inquiries to the public affairs office and required the presence of a public affairs representative at any interview. The Government Accountability Project, a whistleblower protection organization and OSI grantee, came to Hansen's defense by providing legal and media advice. The campaign on Hansen's behalf resulted in a decision by NASA to revisit its media policy.

### ***Report Documents Special Interest Meddling in Judicial Elections***

A report issued by the Justice at Stake Campaign, an OSI grantee, warned that special interest pressure is "metastasizing into a permanent national campaign against impartial justice." Judicial campaign fundraising records were shattered in five states. Median fundraising by judicial candidates also reached an all-time high, while special interest groups poured millions of dollars into independent ad campaigns. Special interests also stepped up efforts to pressure candidates into making statements on the campaign trail that could appear to bias the judges before they take their seats on the bench.

### ***Voters Reject Political Tampering with the Courts***

Voters in five states soundly rejected measures that would have limited judicial independence after civic and legal organizations supported by OSI mounted education campaigns about the importance of an independent judiciary. In South Dakota, an egregious "Jail 4 Judges" measure would have stripped judges' legal immunity against lawsuits and established "special grand juries" to consider criminal charges against judges. In Montana, a measure would have enabled recall of judges for any reason. In Colorado, Hawaii, and Oregon, voters considered measures affecting term limits and judicial districting widely understood as ways to "rein in the judges."

### ***Ethnic Media Recognized in National Awards Ceremony***

New America Media, an OSI grantee, launched the first ever National Ethnic Media Awards with a powerful tribute to ethnic media's role in American journalism before an elite Washington, D.C., audience of journalists, media policymakers, politicians, and advocates. Dennis Romero of *Tu Ciudad* magazine and Ray Hanania, an Arab American columnist for a Jewish publication and website, were among the 23 first-place winners. "Ethnic media has come to Washington," said Sandy Close, executive director of New America Media. "Our challenge is to make mainstream media more ethnic, and ethnic media more mainstream."

## **OSI–Baltimore**

### ***New Effort Seeks to Reduce School Suspensions***

OSI–Baltimore and its partners initiated a \$1.5 million effort to reduce the city's more than 22,000 school suspensions by introducing programs that improve the school environment and provide positive conflict resolution alternatives to the destructive disciplinary tool of suspension. Funding went to an initiative for recess in schools, restorative justice programs, and mental health counseling.

### ***After-school Programs Reach 8,000 Children in Baltimore***

To increase the quantity and quality of after-school programs in Baltimore, the Safe and Sound Campaign launched BLAST, Baltimore's Literacy in After School Time program, a research-based effort shown to increase children's skills in and enthusiasm for reading. The campaign, supported by OSI, resulted in more than \$5 million in new city funding. Safe and Sound–sponsored after-school programs reached nearly 8,000 or 10 percent of Baltimore's public school children in 2006, providing them with safe, enriching activities and improving their attendance and attachment to school.

### ***Drug Treatment Efforts Expand Citywide and Nationally***

Funding a series of grants in community drug treatment centers and hospitals, OSI–Baltimore supported efforts to

use buprenorphine, an effective medication for heroin addiction. The Baltimore City Health Commissioner implemented a new, citywide program to recruit and train doctors to prescribe the medication. In light of Baltimore's success, George Soros pledged \$10 million for a national drug treatment initiative. Coordinated by OSI–Baltimore, the initiative will focus on the treatment gap and enable qualified cities and states to build upon effective strategies. At a conference cosponsored by OSI–Baltimore, participants from around the nation shared best practices in drug addiction treatment.

#### ***New Parole Guidelines Lower Prison Population***

Maryland's revised parole guidelines and risk assessment instrument have increased the rate of parole grants and helped lower the state's prison population. OSI–Baltimore worked in partnership with the Maryland Parole Commission to engage the research center JFA Associates to evaluate the old guidelines and recommend reforms that would lead to a more rational system of determining parole eligibility and more accountability in the parole grant process.

## **OSI–Washington, D.C.**

### ***Defense Department Issues Guidelines to Comply with Geneva Conventions***

The McCain Amendment, passed by Congress in late 2005, imposes a worldwide ban on cruel and inhumane interrogation techniques and requires that all Department of Defense interrogations be conducted in accordance with the U.S. Army Field Manual. OSI–D.C. and other groups demanded full, good faith implementation of the law and defeated proposals that would weaken the field manual. Their efforts resulted in the Defense Department announcing that the treatment of all detainees would comply with the minimum standards required by the Geneva Conventions.

### ***Democratic Nations Elected to UN Human Rights Council***

OSI and its partners encouraged democratic states with positive human rights records to seek membership on the UN's new Human Rights Council and to support democratic candidates in the competitive elections. Many influential nations announced that they would only vote for countries with good human rights records. As a result, 37 of the 47 members elected are democracies. OSI continues to work with human rights advocacy groups from every region to help move the new council in a constructive direction.

### ***Court Drops Case Against Zimbabwe Radio Station***

When Bella Matambanadzo, a staff member of the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa and a trustee of Zimbabwe's Radio Voice of the People, came to Washington, she and other radio station trustees were facing trumped-up charges for illegal broadcasting. During her visit, arranged by OSI, Matambanadzo spoke to a wide range of groups and gave interviews about the censorship and repression of independent media in Zimbabwe. OSI wrote to the African Union's Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression to investigate the charges. The case was dropped after the radio station's trustees appeared repeatedly in court to defend themselves only to find that government lawyers were not yet ready to prosecute.

### ***OSI Calls Attention to Discriminatory Crack Law***

According to the nonpartisan United States Sentencing Commission, no single law has contributed more to the racial disparity in U.S. incarceration rates than the grossly disproportionate sentences established 20 years ago for the use of crack and powder cocaine. These laws created a 100:1 disparity between the amount of crack cocaine and powder cocaine required to receive identical sentences. OSI has organized a coalition to educate policymakers and the public about the extraordinarily negative impact of the crack/powder cocaine law.

GARA LAMARCHE:

# PARTING WORDS

Gara LaMarche, who directed OSI's U.S. Programs since its beginnings in 1996, resigned in March 2007 to become president and chief executive officer of The Atlantic Philanthropies. These "parting words" are excerpted from the U.S. Programs' Tenth Anniversary Report, which can be found at [www.soros.org](http://www.soros.org).

It has been an extraordinary privilege to serve as the director of OSI's U.S. Programs for more than a decade. We accomplished a great deal in that time. We helped create a vibrant network of urban debate leagues. We helped change the way American culture, policy, and medical practice deals with the end of life. We opened up a debate about drug policy and its consequences, including an appallingly high rate of imprisonment. We sparked and helped to sustain a movement to restore full voting rights for former prisoners. We helped to create mapping tools to document, and then to incubate the concept of "justice reinvestment"—capturing criminal justice spending for social investments that deter crime and incarceration.

We have been instrumental in the beginning of a turnaround for one American city, Baltimore, and in so doing have modeled an approach that other cities, and other philanthropies, might emulate. We have fostered a network of youth media practitioners whose voices have improved the way society looks at young urban people of color, contributed new perspectives to public policy debates, and sowed the seeds for the next generation of journalists. We provided backing for an immigrant rights movement that is one of the most exciting and inspiring examples of civic engagement in the United States today. We stood with those seeking to uphold civil liberties in the dark days after September 11, and helped them hold the line in many ways.

We were critical in helping bring into being several new and promising organizations that fill important gaps in the progressive policy infrastructure—organizations such as the American Constitution Society for Law and Policy and the Brennan Center for Justice.

There are, of course, a few things that I regret. I wish we had embraced an explicit racial justice analysis much earlier in our criminal justice and other work, since no strategy that fails to take account of this reality can be truly effective. I wish we had done the same with gender, too often ghettoized in our extremely important work to protect abortion rights and promote emergency contraception and other measures to change the dynamics of the reproductive rights debate. I wish we did more to recognize and harness the role of culture, particularly popular culture, as a tool for social change.

The good work we accomplished came through the support of our farsighted trustees, the expertise, energy, and strategic savvy of our terrific staff, and the passionate commitment and honest advice of hundreds of grantees, fellows, and advisers. I am grateful to all of them. I know that they and OSI will rise to the new challenges that emerge in the decades ahead.