FINAL WORDS.

EXECUTED OFFENDERS
TEXAS STATE PENITENTIARY
USA



"At 6 pm sharp, the prisoner is taken from the holding cell outside the execution chamber. He is walked into the chamber and strapped to the execution table, face up, his arms extended on supports... The warden usually stands behind the prisoner. The chaplain stands at his feet, with his hands on the prisoner's ankle. This is when the prisoner is allowed to make a last statement. He speaks into a microphone suspended just above his head."

— Texas Execution Information Center

## ABOUT FINAL WORDS

Since 1982, the State of Texas has put to death 515 convicted inmates. This translates to a rate of more than one person executed every month for thirty-one years. Strapped to a gurney awaiting the lethal saline solution, the condemned is allowed to speak their last words into a microphone suspended above their heads. These recorded final statements are then catalogued by the Texas Department of Corrections, rendering both the person and their final statement facts archived by the very institution that put them to death. Neverland Publications has appropriated these final statements in order to share these visceral last moments and words with the public in hopes of inspiring a new dialogue.

Final Words is a haunting collection of the final statements by condemned men and women on the verge of a forced death. Collectively, these words remove a silence inherent within the conversation surrounding capital punishment, literally embodying the humanity systematically undermined by state-sanctioned death. Each page and each prisoner instills in the reader a sense of the complexity and nuanced individuality being snuffed out, standing in stark contrast to the dehumanization, racial inequality, and general indifference of the American Criminal Justice System. Final Words, the first publication by Neverland

Publications, is far more than just a book or a collection of records; it is ultimately the beginning of a new dialogue, an injunction to our national consciousness and international debate highlighting the negated humanity brought about by statesanctioned death. Speaking to each reader's personal conscience, Final Words places the individual and their inherent humanistic rights back at the center of the conversation, changing the focus of the debate from criminal justice to human rights.

Yes sir, I would like to say to all of you — the Thornton family and Jerry Dean's family that I am so sorry. I hope God will give you peace with this.

Baby, I love you. Ron, give Peggy a hug for me. Everybody has been so good to me.

I love all of you very much. I am going to be face to face with Jesus now. Warden Baggett, thank all of you so much. You have been so good to me. I love all of you very much. I will see you all when you get there. I will wait for you.

What does it mean for the United States of America to not only condone, but actively facilitate state-sanctioned killings in the 21st Century? How will history judge us and what exactly will our legacy be? These are unavoidable questions that must be addressed. Final Words highlights the glaring contradictions found in a society that champions itself as a progressive protector of human rights. yet continues to allow the systematic execution of its own citizens, even with the unavoidable cost of innocent lives that inevitably are swept up in the criminal justice system.

Although **Final Words** stems from the center of state-sanctioned executions in America, its impact and message is universal. Whether lethal injections administered in confined out-of-sight state-run facilities or public hangings and stonings in the center of the city, the principle behind state-sanctioned executions is the same. Our goal with this interactive and multi-disciplinary project is to bring the human cost elicited by the death penalty back to the forefront of the conversation.

Final Words will be a grass-roots crowd-funded project that stands as a testament to the millions of voices throughout the world who no longer want state-sanctioned executions done in their name. By teaming up with Proof, a non-profit media organization for social justice and

education, Neverland Publications intends to design a comprehensive curriculum for **Final Words** to serve as a tool for discussion, education and action. Alongside the book will also be multi-media based traveling exhibition that features layouts from the book as wall-mountable displays that will be made available free of charge to schools, religious communities, local community centers, and university galleries across the country in an effort to expand the conversation surrounding the death penalty in a direct and immediate way.

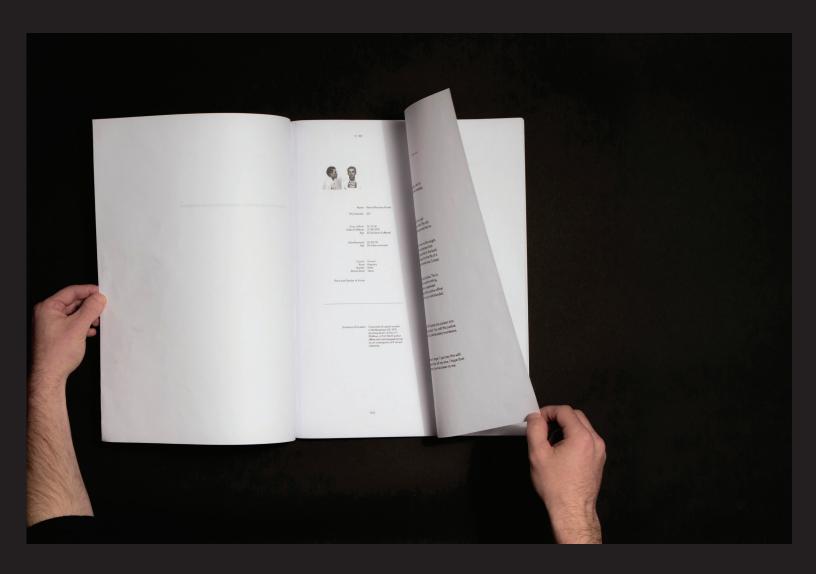
We intend for Final Words to create an insightful and humanisticbased dialogue around the world in various forums, including student associations, lawyer associations, academic colloquia bringing leading public figures together for education and debate, as well as public discourse in high schools, community colleges, and religious institutions. The first such instance with be a two-day symposium hosted at Tufts University by the Institute of Global Leadership with **Final Words** as the centerpiece. Neverland Publications also aims to provide a free book and accompanying curriculum to each high school in America, totaling between twenty and twenty-five thousand copies, to facilitate insightful, honest, and local debate. With the support of the masses, we expect to change the minds of the few.

# THE BOOK

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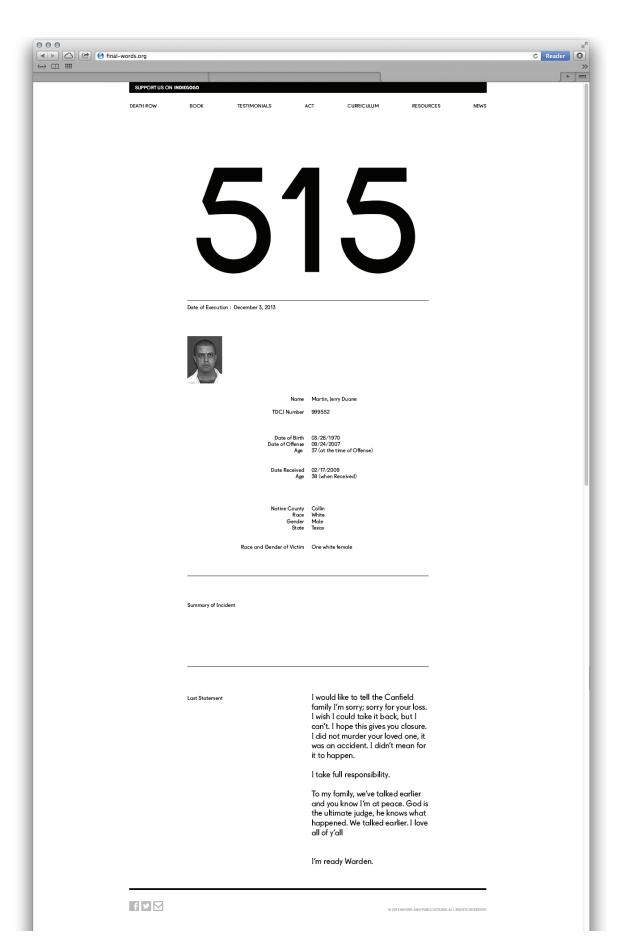


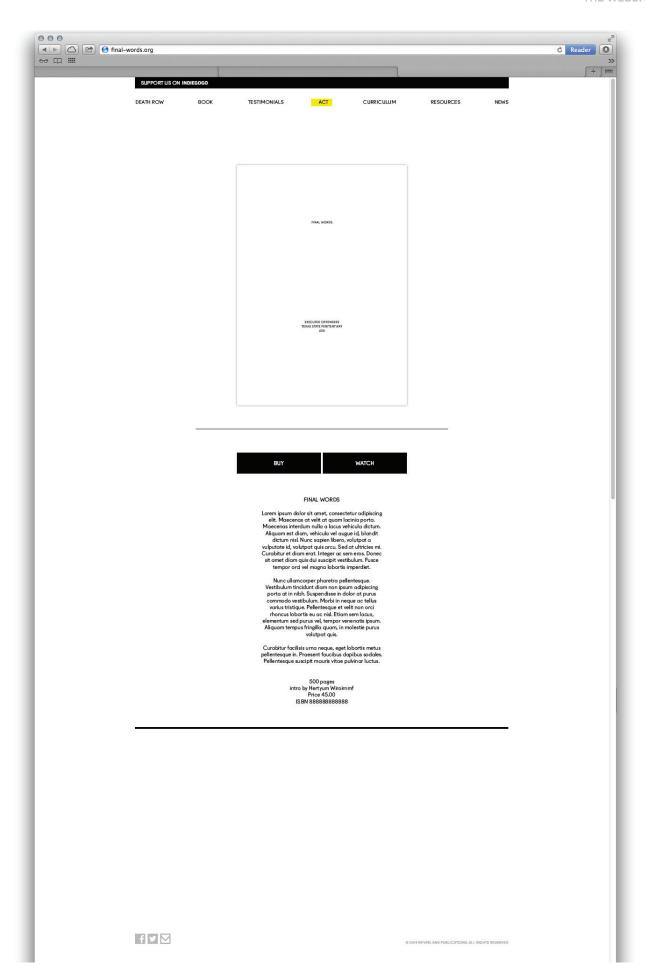


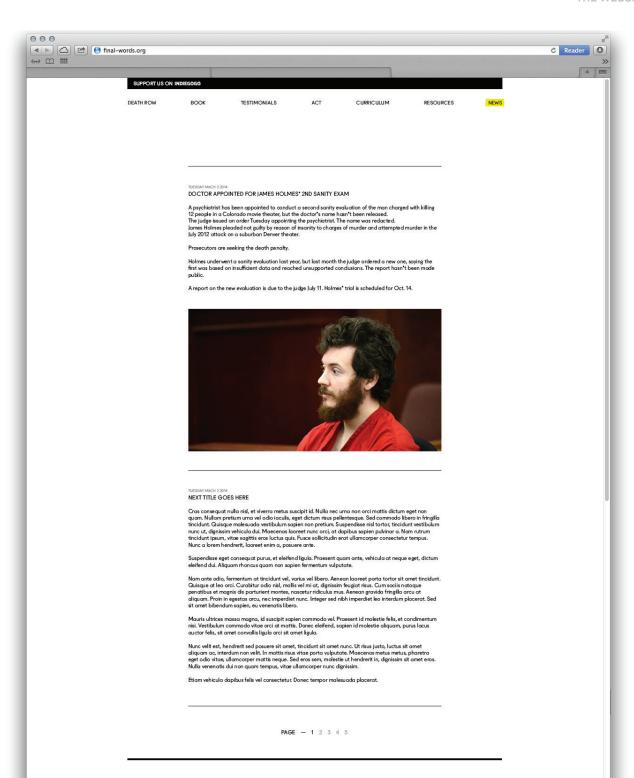


## THE WEBSITE

The Final Words website is an interactive tool dedicated to facilitating conversation, educating the public, and ultimately humanizing the debate surrounding the death penalty. With downloadable educational curriculum, customized letters addressed to state legislators, and featured layouts from the book, our website seeks to empower and inspire people interested in learning more about the Death Penalty and equip them with tools for facilitating more humane conversations about capital punishment.







I am innocent, innocent, innocent.

Make no mistake about this; I owe society nothing. Continue the struggle for human rights, helping those who are innocent, especially Mr. Graham.

I am an innocent man, and something very wrong is taking place tonight. May God bless you all.

I am ready.

# THE FINAL WORDS

Date of Execution May 20, 1992



Name Jesus Romero, Jr.

TDCJ Number 801

Date of Birth 02/03/65 Date of Offense 12/24/84

Age 19 (at time of offense)

Date Received 07/27/85

Age 20 (when Received)

Native County Cameron
Race Hispanic
Gender Male
State Texas

Race and Gender of Victim Hispanic female

Summary of Incident Convicted in the December

Convicted in the December 1984 rape-slaying of 15-year-old Olga Berales near San Benito. Romero and three co-defendants drove Perales to a remote location 1.3 miles west of State Highway 2520 where she was raped repeatedly and then beaten around the head with a pipe and stabbed twice in the chest with a knife. Her nude body was found the same day in a brushy area off Kilgore Road.

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When his attorney came into the witness room, he said, "Tell Mom I love her."

The attorney said back to him,

"I love you, too."

Date of Execution February 21, 2013



Name Carl Henry Blue

TDCJ Number 999151

Date of Birth 01/09/65 Date of Offense 08/19/94

Age 29 (at time of offense)

Date Received 06/14/95

Age 30 (when received)

Native County Brazos
Race Black
Gender Male
State Texas

Race and Gender of Victim Black female

Summary of Incident

Convicted in the murder of Carmen Richards-Sanders. Blue who once dated his victim, went to her apartment on George Bush Drive in College Station with a cup of gasoline. When Richards-Sanders opened the door, Blue doused her in gasoline and ignited her clothing with a lighter. Blue then threw the remaining gasoline on a second person in the apartment. Larence Williams, when he attempted to come to the aid of Richards-Sanders and ignited his clothes. Richard-Sanders died of her burns at Herman Hospital in Houston on

September 7, 1994. Williams survived his injuries. Blue turned himself into police, saying the incident was a prank and the victims death accidental.

Hey mom and pop. I love ya'll, all of you people in there. You know, ya'll have to come together, you too Terrella. Ya'll work on that. We all have to stand before God at the end of the day. Don't ever think you're perfect, none of us are perfect.

God is the only one that is perfect. Jesus is perfect. I did wrong, now I am paying the ultimate price, even though it's a crooked way. I don't hate ya'll. Don't judge, I'm not judging. God has to judge those people. I forgive. Always remember, Romans 12:19 is for real, hell is for real. If ya'll don't have your life right, get it right. We all have to die to get to heaven. Get your life right with Christ; it's coming to an end. I'm talking to each and every soul in this building, in this room. I don't hate nobody, you're doing what you think is your job. God's law is above this law.

Hang on. Cowboy up, I'm fixing to ride. Jesus is my ride. Tell my babies daddy will look down on them. Put a "C" in his name for Carl. Tell my boys and tell Tracy to keep on keeping on. Love one another, go to church, change your life for Christ, live your life for Christ.

All right, Warden.

Terella, I feel it babe, love.

Date of Execution November 14, 2012



Name Ramon Torres Hernandez

TDCJ Number 999431

Date of Birth 11/08/1971 Date of Offense 03/31/2001 Age 29 (at time of offense)

Date Received 10/21/2002 Age 30 (when received)

Native County Bexar Race Hispanic Gender Male State Texas

Race and Gender of Victim Hispanic female

Summary of Incident On 03/31/2002, in San Antonio, Texas, Hernandez and 2 co-defendants abducted, robbed, sexually assaulted, and murdered a 37-year old Hispanic female, later transporting her body to a wooded area and burying her in a shallow grave. Hernandez asked one co-defendant to purchase the shovel used to dig the grave while the victim was still alive and being assaulted.

# Can you hear me?

Did I ever tell you, you have dad's eyes? I've noticed that in the last couple of days. I'm sorry for putting you through all this. Tell everyone I love them. It was good seeing the kids. I love them all; tell mom, everybody. I am very sorry for all of the pain. Tell Brenda I love her. To everybody back on the row, I know you're going through a lot over there.

Keep fighting, don't give up everybody

# WORDS OF SUPPORT

"Too often, we think of the death penalty as an abstraction. Final Words replaces statistics with voices, reminding us that each execution represents the end of a human life. This is an important and haunting book about a shameful practice."

Kerry Kennedy

President of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights "A stark, unflinching, yet uniquely human, compassionate and sensitive perspective on the brutalizing reciprocity of crime and punishment. Final Words, is a powerful contribution to the critical discourse we must engage in, as citizens over what are "the evolving standards of decency" regarding our Constitution's Eighth Amendment prohibition of "cruel and unusual punishment." Hopefully it will influence us all hasten the progress of a "maturing society" to restrict, and hopefully to ultimately abolish the death penalty."

Sherman Teichman

Founding Director, Institute for Global Leadership, Tufts University

"The struggle against the death penalty, although based on the very simple idea that the State should not punish by killing, is extremely complicated when confronted by nondemocratic political systems, economic crisis, public insecurity, or a weak judiciary. In our main battle, together with States, NGO's, victims' families, diplomats, judges, parliamentarians, journalists and others, we sometimes find need for a pause. Final Words is one such pause. The simplicity and elegance of the presentation, the written words we take the time to read, the very realistic picture and individuals whom give us a strong sense of life in incarceration, all of this forces us to stop and return to the very simple arguments against the death penalty. On the long road to abolition, I hope that these words will not be final and that all over the world, in Japan, Taïwan, Nigeria, Sudan, the Caribbean, Belarus artists such as those making this book will be inspired in this same way to give voice to a hidden world, without pathos and effect, but with sensitivity."

Florence Bellivier

President, World Coalition Against the Death Penalty Deputy Secretary General of International Federation for Human Rights Law Professor at Paris Ouest, Nanterre University "This book will reveal real men with real feelings accepting their faith, in the execution chamber... A bone chilling account of men taking their last breaths to say goodbye to the rest of the world."

**Anthony Graves** 

Former Death-Row Inmate, Public Speaker & Advocate "People around the world have long had a fascination with the final words of notable people, from Jesus to John Lennon. But nothing will brace the soul, pierce the heart and spark the mind like Final Words, a beautifully uncomplicated yet profound project of the final utterances - and occasional shattering silence - of men and women on death row whose lives were extinguished by the State. The death penalty is only possible through the dehumanization of "Others", no matter how heinous their crimes, thereby turning us all into what we say we abhor. Final Words forces us to confront this brutish reality of our continued complicity with a fatally flawed system, by giving a platform to the final words of people whose lives were snuffed out in our name."

Witness to Innocence Project

"Sometimes we forget that prisoners are still a part of our world, a part of our humanity. Some of them are innocent, many of them are guilty. But they are all members of our shared humanity... Their final words express this shared humanity perfectly. I happily support this wonderful book Final Words in order to bring the issue of the death penalty to a larger public in a way that serenely questions, with equanimity and dispassion, the reality of this barbaric sentencing."

Raphaël Chenuil-Hazan

Executive Director of Ensemble Contre le Peine de Morte Vice-President of the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty

"An ancient Jewish parable tells of two identical twin brothers. One took the hight road and became the king. One made bad choices and became a murderous bandit. Finally, the police caught the criminal and executed him, as the law provided. They hanged his body on a stake for everyone to see. As citizens walked by the bandit's corpse, they recognized his face, and said: "Look, they've killed the king." This parable powerfully expresses the Bible's claim that every human being bears the image of God. Even a person who has done unspeakable things remains God's identical twin brother or sister. So whenever we see a debased human body, we see the broken image of God and sense that in some way the king is dead. This stark and arresting book brings the Talmud's parable to life in modern Texas. Although these mean and women committed grave and horrid crimes, they remain human, like you and me. They are afraid, remorseful, bitter, loving, angry, hopeful, grateful and sad. Like you and me. May we learn to recognize the humanity in every one."

Rabbi Jeremy Kalmanofsky

Committee on Jewish Law & Standards Author of Participating in the American Death Penalty "When George Orwell served as an officer in the Burma Police he was assigned to supervise a hanging. It seemed like just another dreary distasteful duty until, forty yards from the gallows, the condemned man stepped aside slightly to avoid a puddle. "Till that moment," Orwell wrote later, "I never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man...I saw the mystery, the unspeakable wrongness of cutting short a life in full tide." Final Words drives home that terrible recognition with every entry. On facing pages the institution's mugshot representation of the condemned aims to turn him into a thing; his final words prove that this is a thinking, feeling man, reaching out when we kill him. Every conversation about capital punishment has to begin right there."

James Doyle

Lawyer & Author of
True Witness: Cops, Courts,
Science, and the
Battle Against Misidentification

# THE TRAVELING EXHIBITION

The traveling exhibition for Final Words, curated by Mack McFarland, will begin with the captivatingly designed layouts from the book. These spreads will be produced as wall mountable displays, and designed in a manner to keep the components very modular, so that the exhibition can be fitted to various space scenarios. These printed displays, along with wall mounted didactics, will be made available for shipment to organizations and institutions wishing to exhibit the project.

In elucidating and expanding Final Words as a book the exhibition will utilize multimedia displays, in the forms of documentary and experimental videos, and sound pieces that bring voice to the executed. These coupled with the displays will present a rousing take on our justice system's tool known as the death penalty.

To create a deeper dialog regarding capital punishment the host organizations will be encouraged to reach out to local artists and activists to display or create work to be exhibited along side the images and text of **Final Words**. The exhibition will strive include works from national artists dealing with issues of the prison industrial complex and capital punishment.

Mack McFarland is an artist and curator who makes a home in Portland, Oregon. McFarland has served as curator for the Feldman Gallery and Project Space at the Pacific Northwest College of Art since 2006.

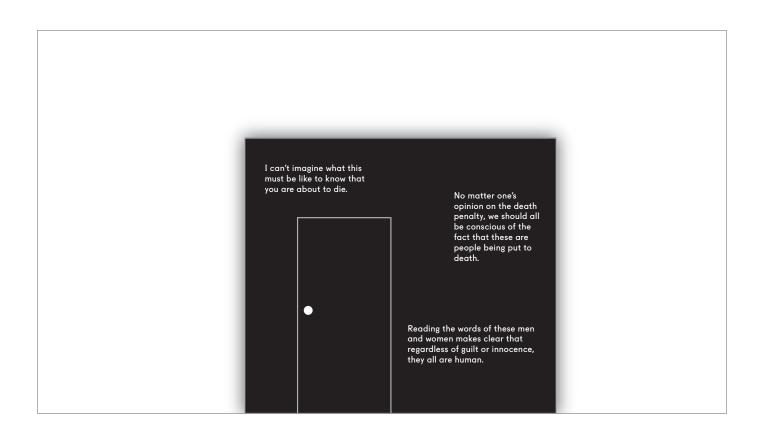
curatorsintl.org/collaborators/mack\_mcfarland

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pnca.edu/studentlife/facilities/c/feldman/

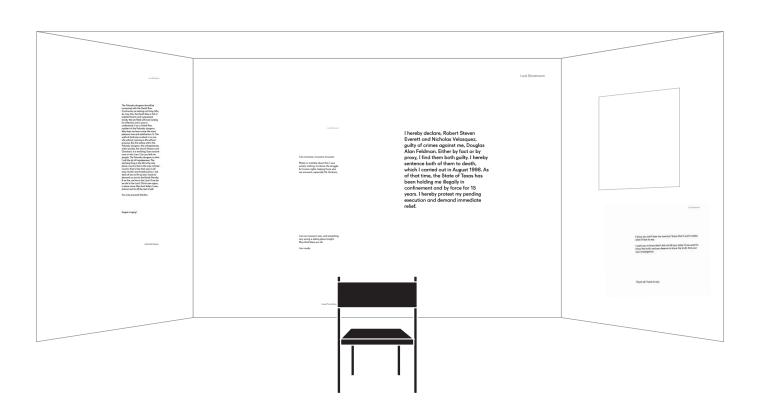
#### View from outside "The Room"

"The Room" is a place for solitary reflection where individuals go one at a time to hear and read the Final Words. The outside is covered in blackboard paint where participants will be able to write their thoughts and create a running dialogue with other viewers.



#### View from Inside "The Room":

Inside "The Room" will be a projection of Final Words, an audio recording to accompany the projection, as well as Final Words installations on the surrounding walls to wrap the viewer in the words of the past executed. There is also a one-way window in "The Room" where other viewers are able to look in and observe, but the individual within the room can't look out, creating the experience of being observed and monitored.



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guys like them got tied up in something like this. Thank
Chaplain Taylor and Jane. I just got your letter. Thanks to
Carolyn and Gloria, who have been my friends for over four
years. I want to remember Patsy Buntion, Gladys and a lot
more friends. I want to thank the prosecutor in my case; it took
courage for him to do what he did but he did what he did
because he believed in the judicial system.

I'm not ready to go, but I have no choice; I sent several letters to my family; they'll be very moving when you get them. I want to say goodbye again to my boys. I know I'm missing somebody, but if there's anything I have left to say, it would be that I wish I had a Shakespearean vocabulary, but since I was raised in TDC, I missed out on some of my vocabulary.

(I gave Warden Hodges the phone at this time and he listened for 5-10 minutes. When he returned the phone to me, I could hear Kinnamon talking but evidently the phone was not close to the mike, because I could not understand him.)

# THE ADVISORY BOARD

#### Florence Bellivier

Deputy General Secretary International Federation for Human Rights

#### James Doyle

Lawyer & Author of <u>True Witness:</u>
<u>Cops, Courts, Science, and the Battle</u>
<u>Against Misidentification</u>

#### **Anthony Graves**

Former Death-Row Inmate, Public Speaker & Advocate

#### Raphael Chenuil Hazan

Executive Director, (ECPM)
Together against the Death Penalty

### Rabbi Jeremy Kalmanofsky

Ansche Chesed Synagogue Committee on Jewish Law and Standards,
Author of <u>Participating in the American</u>
Death Penalty

### Steve Krueger

Catholic Democrats

#### Ien Marlowe

Author of <u>I Am Troy Davis</u> (Haymarket Books, 2013)

#### Sherman Teichman

Founding Director, Institute for Global Leadership, Tufts University

#### Witness to Innocence

### **OUR GOALS**

- We will disseminate copies of the book at no charge to public high school students in the 32 states that still deem the death penalty legal including the curriculum from the Death Penalty Information Center.
- Final Words traveling exhibition to visit community colleges, high schools, and religious institutions for free.
- A grass-roots crowd-funded project that makes an unmistakable statement that statesanctioned executions should no longer be permitted.
- Inspiring insightful dialogue focused on the humanity undermined by capital punishment through symposiums working with universities and international organizations.

- Books and other materials given to supporters of the project.
- Books sent with customized letters to policy-makers and politicians across the U.S. from supporters of the project.
- To create a broader dialogue focused on the humanity inherent, yet often neglected, in the debate surrounding the death penalty in America.

## CONCLUSION

In short, Final Words is about creative resistance and change. It is about giving a voice to those that have been summarily silenced by an inhumane system of purported justice and in doing so, broadening the conversation surrounding capital punishment. It's about reasserting the primacy of humanity in the debate surrounding state-sanctioned death. It's about calling into question the core values of society in general and the resulting contradictions of misguided policies. Final Words is a call for social change in the language of personal conscience.

JOIN US. BE HEARD.
INDIEGOGO.COM/FINAL-WORDS

FINAL-WORDS.ORG

Help make this happen. Spread the word about Final Words.

Take to your social media channels and ask everyone to support the Final Words project at:

indiegogo.com/final-words

Contact us through final-words.org and we'll give you materials you can distribute to your networks of friends, family, and supporters.

Send emails to your supporters, family, and friends.

Use our social media links and posts:

facebook.com/ finalwordsdeathrow

twitter.com/finalwords

vimeo.com/finalwords



final-words.org neverlandpublications.com

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