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## DEATH PENALTY INFORMATION CENTER

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### JOURNALISTS HONORED DURING SIXTH ANNUAL THURGOOD MARSHALL AWARDS

#### *DPIC Awards Given to Bill Kurtis, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, WNYC, and Sound Portraits Productions for excellence in coverage of capital punishment*

WASHINGTON, DC -- Bill Kurtis's A&E Network documentary "Investigative Reports: Death Penalty on Trial," an exceptional series titled "Uncertain Justice" by Rebekah Denn and Lise Olsen of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, and the groundbreaking program "The Executions Tapes" by Sound Portraits Productions and WNYC will receive honors during the Death Penalty Information Center's (DPIC) Sixth Annual Thurgood Marshall Journalism Awards at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. The program will also feature keynote remarks from Stephen B. Bright, Executive Director of the Southern Center for Human Rights, and a special greeting from U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.).

"As important death penalty developments continue to unfold across the nation, DPIC is honored to recognize these outstanding journalists for their significant contributions in educating the public about capital punishment," said Richard Dieter, DPIC Executive Director. "Their work has shed new light on an issue which had been mired in polarized division for years."

This year's Thurgood Marshall Journalism Award recipients will be introduced by Clarence Page, television commentator and Pulitzer Prize-winning writer for the *Chicago Tribune*, Scott Simon, host of National Public Radio's "Weekend Edition Saturday," and Frank Green of the Richmond Times-Dispatch and recipient of DPIC's first Thurgood Marshall Journalism Award.

Bill Kurtis will receive the award for excellence in television broadcast journalism. Inspired by the exoneration of 13 death row inmates in Illinois and the state's subsequent moratorium on executions, Kurtis's documentary "Investigative Reports: Death Penalty on Trial" aired on the A&E Network in October 2001. The thought-provoking two-hour program not only marked the 10th anniversary of "Investigative Reports," but it also offered a thorough examination of the way the death penalty is currently applied in the United States. Using four death row cases as examples of these problems, Kurtis and his team highlighted issues that continue to cause Americans of all

political thought to question capital punishment - incompetent defense attorneys, judicial misconduct, police brutality, and prosecutorial misconduct.

*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reporters Lise Olsen and Rebekah Denn will receive print journalism honors for their three-part series "Uncertain Justice," which uncovered flaws in Washington's justice system that were as troubling to supporters of capital punishment as they were to death penalty opponents. The series was the culmination of months of interviews and database analysis by lead reporter Olsen, who uncovered disturbing statistics and troublesome facts about the state's capital punishment system. These extraordinary findings were then linked to a timely case study by Olsen's reporting partner, Denn, who reviewed the case of Washington death row inmate James Elledge. Denn's coverage of the Elledge case highlighted his refusal to contest his sentence and raised the issue of death penalty "volunteers" in Washington. As a result of "Uncertain Justice," the Washington Supreme Court unanimously adopted higher standards for death penalty attorneys. The reforms, enacted by the Court under Chief Justice Gerry Alexander, require Washington judges presiding over death penalty cases to appoint defense attorneys who have been screened by a high court committee, or to offer an acceptable excuse for not doing so during a mandatory hearing.

Sound Portraits Productions and WNYC will share this year's radio broadcast award for the program "The Execution Tapes." Created by David Isay of Sound Portraits and a team that included producers John Keefe and Gary Covino of WNYC, "The Execution Tapes" gave national audiences a sober, straightforward, and unadulterated moment-by-moment recording of a condemned prisoner being put to death in Georgia. Heard by millions across the United States and around the globe, "The Execution Tapes" successfully sparked a national conversation about the death penalty on personal, social, and civic levels.

The Thurgood Marshall Journalism Awards are named in honor of the late Supreme Court Justice who believed that people would oppose the death penalty once they understood how it works in practice. "The question with which we must deal," Justice Marshall wrote, "is not whether a substantial proportion of American citizens would today, if polled, opine that capital punishment is barbarously cruel, but whether they would find it to be so in light of all information presently available." The Marshall Awards are bestowed annually in the categories of print and broadcast journalism.

The distinguished judges for this year's Awards were Hugo Bedau, professor and author of many books on the death penalty, Berkeley School of Journalism professor Lydia Chavez, and Constance Putnam, co-author of "In Spite of Innocence."

Among the previous winners of the Thurgood Marshall Journalism Awards are the producers of the television series "The Practice," ABC-TV's "Nightline," documentary film-maker Jonathan Stack, and writers for *The Tennessean*, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Dallas Morning News*, and the *North Carolina Independent*.

Entries for next year's awards must be published or produced in 2002, and should be submitted to the Death Penalty Information Center by January 31, 2003.

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