

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Thursday, February 27, 7:30 PM.** Monthly Meeting. We meet at the Caltech Y, Tyson House, 505 S. Wilson Ave., Pasadena. (This is just south of the corner with San Pasqual. Signs will be posted.) We will be planning our activities for the coming months. Please join us! Refreshments provided.

**Tuesday, March 11, 7:30 PM.** Letter writing meeting at Caltech Athenaeum, corner of Hill and California in Pasadena. This informal gathering is a great way for newcomers to get acquainted with Amnesty!

**Sunday, March 16, 6:30 PM.** Rights Readers Human Rights Book Discussion group. This month we read "Mary Coin" by Marisa Silver.

## COORDINATOR'S CORNER

Hi All

Rob, Stevi, Joyce, and I attended the Troy Davis event at All Saints Church this past weekend. See Stevi's piece in this newsletter for a summary of the event. Thanks to Stevi and Joyce for obtaining a grant from AI to pay for Troy's family members to fly to Los Angeles and to Stevi for her efforts in helping to organize this. See Stevi's photos in this newsletter.

Con Cariño,  
Kathy

## RIGHTS READERS

Human Rights Book Discussion Group

Keep up with Rights Readers at  
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>

**Next Rights Readers meeting:  
Sunday, March 16, 6:30 PM**

**Vroman's Bookstore  
695 E. Colorado, Pasadena**

***Mary Coin: A Novel*  
by Marisa Silver**

## Book Review from the New York Times:

*A Knowing Eye*

'Mary Coin,' by Marisa Silver

By ANTOINE WILSON

Published: April 11, 2013

We know the photograph. A seated woman — hand at her jaw, skin etched with worry — looks into the middle distance.

Children rest their heads on her shoulders, faces turned away; an infant lies bundled in her lap. By capturing the plight of California's - Depression-era migrant workers, Dorothea

Lange's "Migrant Mother" transformed a nation's attitudes toward the poor from the moment of its publication in 1936. Today, its immediacy dulled by time and fame, it functions mainly as a visual metonym for the Great Depression. We look at it, but we no longer see it, to borrow a distinction made in Marisa Silver's phenomenal new novel, "Mary Coin."

Inspired by Lange's image, Silver's novel unfolds through the viewpoints of three characters: Walker Dodge, a present-day professor of cultural history who takes pleasure in exploring forgotten corners of quotidian history; Vera Dare, a polio-stricken photographer who ends up working for the Resettlement Administration, shooting portraits of people in poverty; and Mary Coin, an impoverished Cherokee mother of seven, subject of the famous photograph.

For Vera and Mary, Silver appropriates biographical details from the lives of Lange and her real-life subject, Florence Owens Thompson. Renaming these historical figures allows Silver to engage in a bit of speculative fiction — Walker's present-day research culminates in the discovery of a family secret related to the image. But this discovery plot only provides an armature to lend underlying shape to an otherwise entirely supple work of art. In rendering this alternate universe, Silver is clearly interested not in the question "What if?" but rather "Who?"



As we follow Mary from her childhood in Oklahoma to California through a series of births and deaths and couplings, we experience a portrait of poverty not through the dreary accumulation of gritty detail, but via a series of direct shots to the heart. Silver, author of two short-story collections and two previous novels, including "The God of War," writes with an unadorned impressionism that never feels self-conscious or fussy. And she handles the passage of time — one of the central themes of "Mary Coin," photographs stopping time as they do — so deftly it feels like magic. Part of what makes this novel so good is Silver's unwillingness to write facts free of the people living through them.

Vera's sections trace her development as an artist in search of a subject, from her childhood polio to her pseudo-bohemian life in San Francisco as a portrait photographer and so on. When she and Mary cross paths at the midpoint of the novel, they are divided not only by the significant difference in their material circumstances, but also by the lens that defines them as photographer and subject. And yet, in Silver's sharply humane reconstruction, we are privy to the concerns that bind them: survival, self-determination, the fate of their children.

Near the end of the novel, a museum visitor says of the iconic image, "You can see it all in her face." But what is it we see? Silver's novel breathes new life into "Migrant Mother" by reminding us that it is only a photograph, a glance fixed in time, a blip compared with the lives behind it. Or, as Mary puts it: "A person was just feelings that came and went like clouds drifting across the sky and decisions that sometimes ended up to be good and sometimes bad. But this woman in the picture was someone who looked a certain way and would never change. Like a table or a shoe."

History is not a succession of icons or frozen moments but of messy lives lived, of people doing what they can with what they've got. Therein lies the power of this novel, and the Novel; Silver wields it here with grace and devastating effectiveness.

*Antoine Wilson's second novel, "Panorama City," was published last year, as was his first book of photographs, "Slow Paparazzo."*

### **Author Biography**

Marisa Silver is the author, most recently, of the novel, [Mary Coin](#), a New York Times Bestseller, published in 2013 by Blue Rider Press/Penguin. Silver made her fiction debut in *The New Yorker* when she was featured in that magazine's first "Debut Fiction" issue. Her collection of short stories, *Babe in Paradise*, was published by W.W. Norton in 2001. That collection was named a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year and was a *Los Angeles Times* Best Book of the Year. In 2005, W.W. Norton published her novel, *No Direction Home*. Her novel, *The God of War*, was published in 2008 by Simon and Schuster and was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for fiction. Her second collection of stories, *Alone With You*, was published by Simon and Schuster in April, 2010. Winner of the O. Henry Prize, her fiction has been included in *The Best American Short Stories*, *The O. Henry Prize Stories*, as well as other anthologies.



**PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE**  
**Gao Zhisheng**  
 by Joyce Wolf

January 31 marked the beginning of the Year of the Horse. At Group 22's February letter-writing meeting, we signed a New Year card to Gao Zhisheng, our group's adopted prisoner of conscience.

2014 is supposed to be the last year of Gao Zhisheng's three-year prison sentence, but it is important to keep attention focused on his case. In January we wrote to Premier Li Keqiang and in December to President Xi Jinping, so this month it is probably the turn of the Minister of Justice. Following is a sample letter that you can send or use as a guide.

Minister of Justice of the People's Republic of China  
 WU Aiyang Buzhang  
 Sifabu  
 10 Chaoyangmen Nandajie  
 Chaoyangqu  
 Beijingshi 100020  
 People's Republic of China

Dear Minister,

I write regarding the case of Gao Zhisheng 高智晟, a highly respected human rights lawyer. He has been subjected to enforced disappearance, torture, illegal house arrest and detention as a result of his peaceful work. Gao Zhisheng 高智晟 is currently imprisoned in Shaya County Prison in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region in northwest China.

I urge you to secure his immediate release and to ensure that, while he remains in detention, he is not tortured or ill-treated. Please do everything in your power to free this admirable defender of human rights.

Just over one year ago, in January 2013, Mr. Gao's brother and father-in-law were allowed to have a brief visit with him. I hope to hear soon that Mr. Gao was permitted to have another family visit, or better yet, that he has been released from prison!

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,  
[your name and address]

Copies to:  
Ambassador Cui Tiankai  
Embassy of the People's Republic of China  
3505 International Place NW  
Washington DC 20008

**"We Are Still Troy Davis"**  
By Stevi Carroll

All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, California, hosted "We Are Still Troy Davis" Saturday, February 22. Author Jen Marlowe became interested in Troy Davis's case after reading Amnesty International's "Where is the Justice for Me?": The case of Troy Davis, facing execution in Georgia." For Ms Marlowe, the death penalty went from an abstract 'dinner table' discussion to an in-depth study of the impact of the death penalty on not only the condemned inmate but also others involved, including prison personnel and the families of the both the murder victim and the condemned person. Out of this developing interest in the death penalty came the book "I Am Troy Davis" by Jen Marlowe, Martina Davis-Correia, and Troy Anthony Davis. Sister Helen Prejean (author of "Dead Man Walking") wrote the foreword.



**Kimberly Davis** spoke passionately about her brother, Troy, and how his execution committed their family to work for the abolition of the death penalty. She asked people not to feel sorry for her family but rather to fight for an end to the death penalty. She believes that education is a powerful tool to be used.



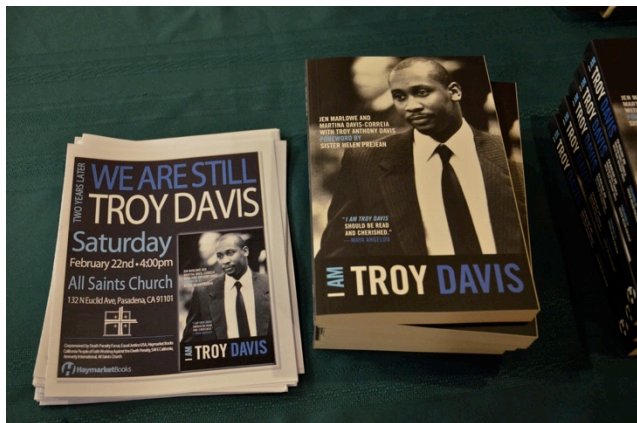
**Frankie Carrillo**, exonerated after 20 years in prison; **Ebony Davis**, youngest of the Davis children; **Patrisse Cullors**, founder and executive director of Dignity and Power Now; and **John Hanusz**, a Federal Public Defender who represented Troy Davis read excerpts from "I Am Troy Davis." Each section offered an insight into the complexities and humanity associated with the death penalty.



"We Are Still Troy Davis" was sponsored by Death Penalty Focus, Equal Justice USA, Amnesty International Local Group 22, All



Saints Episcopal Church, Haymarket Books, California People of Faith Working Against the Death Penalty, and SAFE California. As we all work together we can bring the death penalty in California to an end. Six states in six years have embraced abolition and recently the governor of Washington has suspended executions for the duration of his term. Abolition of the death penalty in the USA can happen.



"I Am Troy Davis" is available from Haymarket Books, <http://www.haymarketbooks.org/pb/I-Am-Troy-Davis>.

## DEATH PENALTY NEWS

By Stevi Carroll

### Dennis McGuire's family sues in federal lawsuit

When Dennis McGuire was executed January 16, 2014, his death took 26 minutes. According to a New York Times article, the lawsuit filed by his family states that "Mr. McGuire experienced 'repeated cycles of snorting, gurgling and arching his back, appearing to writhe in pain. It looked and sounded as though he was suffocating.'"

Officials investigating Mr. McGuire's distress during his execution have said that his lawyer, Public Defender Robert Lowe, coached him to act out the difficulties witnesses observed. The internal review failed to prove this allegation.

What this case does bring to light is the efficacy of the drugs now used in executions.

### The problems with getting the drugs

First, the European manufacturers of the drugs the US uses to kill our death row inmates refused to sell their drugs to state officials from states that employ executions. Companies in India and Israel followed. Now home-grown pharmacies are following suit. A pharmacy in Oklahoma that was scheduled to supply compounded pentobarbital for an execution in Missouri declined to provide the drug because "the substance is likely to cause 'ultimately inhumane pain.'"

This reality was brought to the fore with the execution of Michael Lee Wilson in Oklahoma January 9, 2014. Twenty seconds after Mr. Wilson received his injection of pentobarbital, he was quoted as saying, "I feel my whole body burning."

This shortage of execution drugs and the questionable results of their use may cause prison officials and governors to revisit other methods of executions. Utah retained the use of the firing squad. The last use of the firing squad was when Ronnie Lee Gardner requested it for his June 18, 2010, execution. Lawmakers in Missouri and Wyoming are considering the use of the firing squad. Wyoming state law also allows for the return of the gas chamber if lethal injection is unavailable.

Even as the means for state-sanctioned murder are in dispute, California voters may again visit the death penalty on their 2014 ballots.

### Death Penalty on the 2014 Ballot?

The death penalty may again come to California polling places near us. Three former governors, George Deukmejian, Pete Wilson and Gray Davis, have begun a signature-gathering effort to get an initiative measure on the November 2014 ballot to "limit appeals available to death row inmates, remove the prisoners from special death row housing and require them to work at prison jobs in order to pay restitution to victims." While the placement of inmates outside the special death row housing and the requirement of inmates to work to pay restitution are positive, the abridgment of the appeals process is not.

I have looked at the number of years inmates have spent on death row before their executions for as long as I've written this column, and I know that decades may pass before the condemned person is killed. I realize with that passage of time the person who is executed is

not the same person who committed the heinous crime for which he or, rarely, she is put to death. Nonetheless, shortening the appeals time does nothing to insure innocent individuals are not executed.

In 2013 alone, 87 people were exonerated of the crimes for which they were imprisoned. Forty of them were murder convictions. Had the appeals process been lessened and had these human beings been sentenced to death, exonerated people may well have been executed. This is unacceptable.

Should the supporters of this initiative drive be successful, I am sure Amnesty International USA, the ACLU, and Death Penalty Focus will be on the forefront of the opposition. As events unfold, I will present more information about how we can get involved.

From Death Penalty Information Center  
**Robert Redford's "Death Row Stories" to Premiere on CNN**

Posted: February 21, 2014

"Death Row Stories" is a new 8-part series premiering on March 9 on CNN that will examine actual death penalty cases. The show is produced by Robert Redford and narrated by *Dead Man Walking* star Susan Sarandon. Redford said, "This series is about the search for justice and truth, we are pleased to ... tell these important stories and give a voice to these cases." Prior to the premiere, CNN is offering interested parties an opportunity for a preview and the ability to participate in a Google Hangout featuring a discussion by the producers and law professors John Blume of Cornell and Robert Blecker of New York Law School. The Google Hangout will be held March 5 at 6 pm EST and is open to the public, but an RSVP is required. A promo for the show can be found at

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=LG3k7GC0UiA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LG3k7GC0UiA).

There are more details in this article:

<http://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/2014/01/13/cnn-announces-new-original-series-death-row-stories-with-executive-producers-alex-gibney-and-robert-redford/>

**Stays of execution**

February  
 5 Chris Sepulvado Louisiana

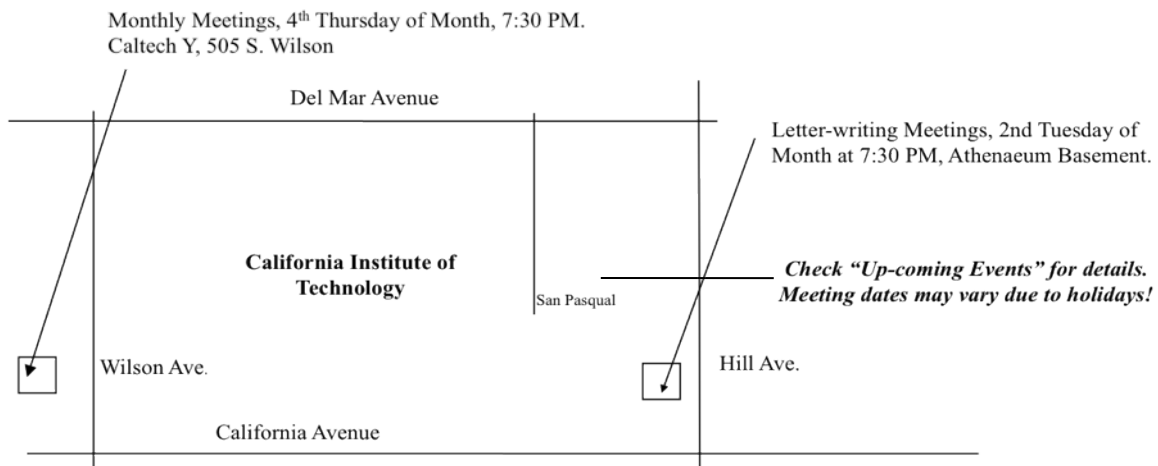
**Executions**

January  
 22 Edgar Tamay~ Texas  
 lethal injection 1-drug: pentobarbital  
 24 Kenneth Hogan Oklahoma  
 lethal injection 3-drug: w/ pentobarbital  
 29 Herbert Smulls Missouri  
 lethal injection 1-drug: pentobarbital

February  
 5 Suzanne Basso *f* Texas  
 lethal injection 1-drug: pentobarbital  
 12 Juan Chavez~ Florida  
 lethal injection 3-drug:  
 2/midazolam hydrochloride

~ Foreign Nationals - Tamay-Mexico; Chavez-Cuba  
*f* - female

<b>GROUP 22 MONTHLY LETTER COUNT</b>	
UAs	13
POC	2
Total	15
To add your letters to the total contact <a href="mailto:lwkamp@gmail.com">lwkamp@gmail.com</a> .	



From the 210 exit on Lake Avenue, head south, turn left on Del Mar  
From the 110 continue on Arroyo Parkway north, turn right on California  
Street parking is generally available.

Amnesty International Group 22  
The Caltech Y  
Mail Code C1-128  
Pasadena, CA 91125  
[www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/](http://www.its.caltech.edu/~aigp22/)  
<http://rightsreaders.blogspot.com>



Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.