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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***Unveiling The Innocents***

An Exhibition of Photographs and a  
Documentary by Taryn Simon  
Opens at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center,  
a MoMA affiliate, New York, NY  
May 9th, 2003

*The Innocents documents the stories of individuals who served time in prison for violent crimes they did not commit. At issue is the question of photography's function as a credible eyewitness and arbiter of justice.*

*Taryn Simon, Peter Neufeld, Barry Scheck and 30 of the wrongfully convicted featured in the exhibition and book attend May 9th Opening event.*



**May 9, 2003, NY, New York** - Umbrage Editions is very pleased to announce the opening of Taryn Simon's exhibition, *The Innocents* at P.S.1 Contemporary Arts Center, a MoMA affiliate museum in New York City. This collection of 20 color mural prints and a documentary by Simon will be on display through August 2003.

The exhibition coincides with the publication of the book *The Innocents*, containing additional portraits along with interviews by Simon and a commentary by civil rights attorneys Peter Neufeld and Barry Scheck of the Innocence Project (published by Umbrage Editions, 2003.) Both the exhibition and the book offer the audience compelling insight into the lives of the wrongfully convicted.

Simon traveled across the United States photographing and interviewing individuals who were convicted of heinous crimes of which they were innocent. The primary cause of wrongful conviction is mistaken identification. A victim or eyewitness identifies a suspected perpetrator through law enforcement's use of photographs and lineups. This procedure relies on the assumption of precise visual memory. But, through exposure to composite sketches, mugshots, Polaroids, and lineups, eyewitness memory can change. In the history of these cases, photography offered the criminal justice system a tool that transformed innocent citizens into criminals. Photographs assisted officers in obtaining eyewitness identifications and aided prosecutors in securing convictions.

Of photography's importance to our judicial system, Simon says, "The high stakes of the criminal justice system underscore the importance of a photographic image's history and context. This project stresses the cost of ignoring the limitations of photography and minimizing the context in which photographic images are presented. Nowhere are the material effects of ignoring a photograph's context as profound as in the misidentification that leads to the imprisonment or execution of an innocent person."

Simon photographed these men at sites that had particular significance to their illegitimate conviction: the scene of misidentification, the scene of arrest, the scene of the crime or the scene of the alibi. All of these locations hold contradictory meanings for the subjects. The scene of arrest marks the starting point of a reality based in fiction. The scene of the crime is at once arbitrary and crucial: this place, to which they have never been, changed their lives forever. In these photographs Simon confronts photography's ability to blur truth and fiction—an ambiguity that can have severe, even lethal consequences.

The exhibition and release of the book *The Innocents* also coincides with the tenth anniversary of the Innocence Project. The Innocence Project is responsible for most of the post-conviction DNA exonerations in the United States today, many of which are included in the exhibition and accompanying book. On the ten-year anniversary of its founding, the Project continues to free the innocent, striving to transform criminal justice into a more equitable and reliable system. The failings of the criminal justice system and the use of the death penalty in this country are currently under scrutiny and an important topic of public debate. The images and voices of *The Innocents* mark this historic turning point in America.

Taryn Simon's photographs and documentary of *The Innocents* will go on to tour major museum venues. This work has been supported by a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship in Photography and the Innocence Project.

*Taryn Simon: The Innocents* is organized by P.S.1 Chief Curator Klaus Biesenbach and P.S.1 Exhibition Coordinator Amy Smith Stewart.

**P.S.1 Contemporary Arts Center is located at 22-25 Jackson Ave at the intersection of 46th Ave in Long Island City.**

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