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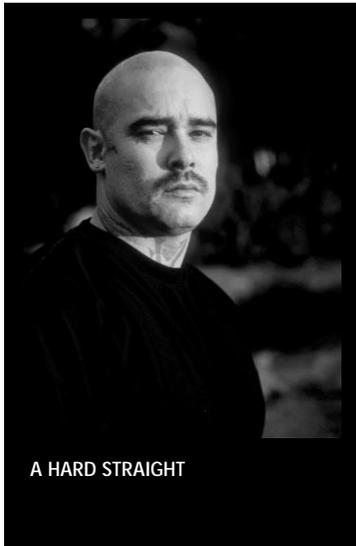
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*Pressroom for more information and/or downloadable images:*

*[www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos](http://www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos)*

*Program companion website: [www.pbs.org/ahardstraight](http://www.pbs.org/ahardstraight)*



**INDEPENDENT LENS's "A HARD STRAIGHT"  
PROFILES EX-CONS FACING THEIR BIGGEST  
CHALLENGE: DOING TIME ON THE OUTSIDE**

*Film by Goro Toshima*

*Premieres Nationally on "Independent Lens"*

*The Emmy® Award-Winning Series on PBS*

*Hosted by Susan Sarandon*

*Tuesday, January 4, 2005 at 10 P.M.*

*(check local listings)*

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*"It's easy to get in; it's hard to get out." —AARON SHEPARD*

(San Francisco, CA) — **Independent Lens's A HARD STRAIGHT** chronicles the lives of convicted criminals—a gang banger, a mother, and a small time dealer—as they face what may prove to be their biggest challenge: re-entering society after years of incarceration. Beginning on the day of their release from San Quentin, Solano State and Valley State Prisons, the film follows three former prisoners as they enjoy their newly regained freedom while negotiating the difficulties of returning to an uncaring and sometimes hostile society. Directed by Goro Toshima, **A HARD STRAIGHT** will be broadcast on **Independent Lens** on **Tuesday, January 4 at 10 P.M.** (check local listings).

**A HARD STRAIGHT** interweaves the stories of Regina Allen, Richard “Smiley” Martinez and Aaron Shepard in their attempts to construct new lives. We see them from the ecstatic moment of their first taste



of freedom, to the inevitable frustrations, joys and banality of life on the outside, as some move on to a successfully established life and others return to prison. The film focuses on what they must do to survive after leaving the prison gates with \$200 and little outside support, how an extended stay in an environment marked by racism, violence, severe regimentation and subjugation affects their ability to re-integrate, and finally, what sorts of resources, both inner and outer, are necessary, for them to make a successful transition.

Despite the huge numbers of individuals and their families involved in the corrections system, incarceration is an issue that flies below the radar screen of middle-class America, and is consequently of low priority in the nation’s conscience. Ironically, this lack of concern for the prison problem is paralleled by a public fascination with crime and criminals. The news media, film and TV shows exploit this curiosity and feed the public one-dimensional, often racist caricatures of “the criminal.” These distorted portrayals of convicts often serve as the main reference point for many when thinking of prisoners.

**A HARD STRAIGHT** was shot on location in San Francisco and Los Angeles over a nearly two-year period. From the hard streets of gangland San Fernando, to the desperate, unforgiving back alleys of San Francisco’s Tenderloin, to a drug rehab center teetering on the edge of survival—the film covers ground rarely featured in the debate over our country’s soaring recidivism rates. Director Goro Toshima shot extensively with each of the three parolees featured in the film, gaining entry into their private lives and documenting their successes as well as their almost inescapable mistakes.



Most importantly, **A HARD STRAIGHT** shows the re-entry process with a clear and direct eye. The film provides multi-dimensional portraits of the characters; their personal histories, observations, remembrances, hopes, and fears. This film sheds real understanding about the profound experience of doing time and trying to go straight.

Additional information and/or downloadable photographs from **A HARD STRAIGHT** are available at [www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos](http://www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos).

The companion website for **A HARD STRAIGHT** features detailed information about the film, including an exclusive filmmaker Q&A interview, filmmaker and cast bios, Learn More links and resources pertaining to the film’s subject matter. The site will also feature video previews and a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions.

## ON AIR PARTICIPANTS

**REGINA ALLEN** was born and raised in San Francisco and is the mother of three children. With her ready smile and infectious laugh, Regina spent her early years charming everyone she met and living life as a hustler. Throughout her 20s and 30s, she ran check fraud scams and eventually got convicted, resulting in a short prison sentence. Life becomes very complicated very quickly upon Regina's release from her second stay in prison for receiving stolen property. Increasing friction with her oldest daughter Tera, who is raising her two young siblings in their mother's absence, comes to a head over Regina's struggle with methamphetamine addiction. As Regina fights to stay clean, and Tera faces the possibility of losing her yet again, mother and daughter come to understand that getting out of prison and staying out of prison are two very different things.

**RICHARD "SMILEY" SALAZAR** has the soul of a poet and the scars of a gangster. He spent his childhood bouncing between foster homes, juvenile detention and life on the streets. His fellow gang members are the only family he has ever known. When he is paroled directly into the heart of gangland San Fernando, Smiley is drawn back to the only life he knows. Soon after, however, a real conflict arises within him between wanting to get out and not being able to escape the lifestyle. The one thing he knows for sure is that he is a two-striker and under California's three-strikes law, the next conviction will land him in prison for the rest of his life. Smiley is a truly talented artist and is able to earn a living doing tattoo work. But his gift and the financial security it provides is small consolation in his battle with the dangerous allure of gangster life.

Almost a decade ago, **AARON "SHEP" SHEPARD** was sentenced to one year as an accessory to armed robbery. Since then, he has spent more time in prison on petty parole violations than for his original conviction. A vivid illustration of the "revolving door" aspect of recidivism, Shep has no one on the outside and finds little help in the seemingly endless line of parole agents he must visit on a weekly basis. "My friends are few, and my world is cold," he confides, waiting on a street corner notorious for drug deals—the last place in the world someone like Shep should be waiting.

## FACTS ABOUT PRISON POPULATIONS

- Since 1980, the inmate population has quadrupled and recently surpassed the two million mark, the highest per capita in the world.
- Every year, over 500,000 people are released from prisons.
- Half of those return, the majority within 90 days of release.
- One-third of the African American male population is either in jail or on parole.



## A HARD STRAIGHT Credits

DIRECTOR  
PRODUCERS  
PROJECT ADVISOR  
PROJECT ADVISOR  
EDITOR  
CINEMATOGRAPHY

Goro Toshima  
Goro Toshima & Lindsay Sablosky  
Loni Ding  
Lourdes Portillo  
Kim Roberts  
Goro Toshima

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

**GORO TOSHIMA** (Director/Producer) has worked in media production for ten years, beginning with producing short news pieces for the Japanese network, NHK. Since completing the graduate program in documentary film at Stanford University, he has served in a variety of capacities on a range of programs.

**LINDSAY SABLOSKY** (Producer), has production and editing credits on several feature-length documentaries and has worked on numerous PBS series including *Frontline* and *Season by Season*, and the A&E cable series *Biography*. She is the co-producer of the award-winning documentary **DADDY & PAPA**, a story of gay fatherhood in America, which premiered at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival, and she is currently in production on a documentary about surrogacy for the Discovery Channel.

## ABOUT *INDEPENDENT LENS*

***Independent Lens*** is an Emmy Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. Hosted by Susan Sarandon, the acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. ***Independent Lens*** features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history, which prompted Nancy Franklin to write in *The New Yorker*: "Watching ***Independent Lens***... is like going into an independent bookstore—you don't always find what you were looking for but you often find something you didn't even know you wanted." Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites, and national publicity and community outreach campaigns. Further information about the series is available at [www.pbs.org/independentlens](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens). ***Independent Lens*** is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.

## ABOUT ITVS

Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the Emmy Award-winning weekly series ***Independent Lens*** on Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting [www.itvs.org](http://www.itvs.org). ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American People.

## ABOUT PBS

PBS is a private, nonprofit media enterprise that serves the nation's 349 public noncommercial television stations, reaching nearly 90 million people each week through on-air and online content. Bringing diverse viewpoints to television and the Internet, PBS provides high-quality documentary and dramatic entertainment, and consistently dominates the most prestigious award competitions. PBS is the leading provider of educational materials for K-12 teachers, and offers a broad array of educational services for adult learners. PBS' premier kids' TV programming and Web site, PBS KIDS Online ([pbskids.org](http://pbskids.org)), continue to be parents' and teachers' most trusted learning environments for children. More information about PBS is available at [pbs.org](http://pbs.org), one of the leading dot-org Web sites on the Internet, averaging more than 30 million unique visits and 380 million page views per month in 2004. PBS is headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia.



ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American People.

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