

**15 August 2012
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**Clive Stafford Smith Asks His Book Festival Audience
to Dig Deep for Human Rights in America's Courtrooms**

The defence, and anti-death penalty lawyer, Clive Stafford Smith OBE appeared at the Edinburgh International Book Festival last night, in an event sponsored by Edinburgh law firm Murray Beith Murray, to make a plea for support for Reprieve, a charity which works towards enforcing human rights for prisoners across the world, in particular sourcing and providing legal aid for those facing the death penalty in the United States.

Stafford Smith spoke about the corruption, injustice and absurdity imbedded within the American legal system, a “system structured to make mistakes”. Citing the case of Kris Maharaj, a British businessman living in Miami who was wrongly convicted for the murder of two ex-business associates in 1986, Stafford Smith condemned a system which not only gives you ‘no right to a defence lawyer’ if you can’t afford it, but only gives you the ‘right to look at the prosecution file after you’ve been convicted’. On viewing Maharaj’s file, Stafford Smith found the case had been riddled with corruption, lies and bribery; from the ‘witnesses’ to the prosecutors to the judge of the trial itself, Maharaj was tragically condemned to his sentence from the start.

But despite collecting overwhelming evidence to prove his innocence, Maharaj remains in prison. Why? Stafford Smith exposed another horrifying Catch 22 of the American legal system: “If I suggested that Kris might be innocent I would go to jail, under Florida law.” He reasoned that, from an American legal perspective, if he were to juxtapose a sentence already passed, and challenge the conviction then “people would lose faith in the system”, and “there is no interest in getting the system changed”, despite it being designed to ignore innocence.

Because of the ingrained injustice within the American courts, Stafford Smith admitted that on occasion he has even resorted to inventing ‘more believable’ stories in the trials of his defendants, so that they

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would have a better chance of being acquitted. “Our mothers taught us to show compassion” he said, pleading to the audience, “so why do our governments teach us that we should exact revenge?”.

To find out more about Reprieve visit: reprieve.org.uk. Clive Stafford Smith’s book *Injustice: Life and Death in the Courtrooms of America* is available now.

The Edinburgh International Book Festival continues until Monday 27 August 2012. Tickets are still available for events across the programme and full details can be found at www.edbookfest.co.uk.

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