



Mr Ebert welcomed Mr Graham

## *The death penalty – a talk by exonerated death row inmate Shujaa Graham at Max Planck Gymnasium*

by Elisabeth Maier, 10 a

On Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> November, Mr. Graham visited our school to tell the tenth grade students about his time in prison and especially about his life on death row in California.



“We got to know the story of Mr. Shujaa Graham step by step.”



“It was sad to see Mr Graham’s tear rolling down as he told his story “

These were the photos that Mr. Lemoigne, our English teacher, showed us in class before Mr. Graham’s visit. He asked us what we could see in these two pictures, and he wanted to know what we thought about the expression this man wears on his face. In the next few lessons, we got to know the story of Mr. Shujaa Graham step by step.



“Three years on Death Row and declared innocent by the California Supreme Court”

Mr. Graham was born in Lake Providence, a poor suburb of L.A. As a teenager he had to deal with the fact that courts would punish blacks more severely than white offenders, which was undoubtedly a relic from the period of segregation. As a teenager he already spent a lot of time in institutions for juvenile delinquents, and at the age of 18 he was sent to prison for minor offenses. There he joined the Black Prison Movement. After some time he was accused of being involved in the murder of a prison guard and consequently the court sent him to death row, where he spent approximately three years before the California Supreme Court finally overturned the verdict and declared him innocent.

It was a very emotional presentation: Mr. Graham told us about his life and about what life was like in prison. When he started telling us about his time on death row, he was moved to tears. But even though he was crying, he answered all of our questions, and he was upfront with us, telling us about his feelings and fears.

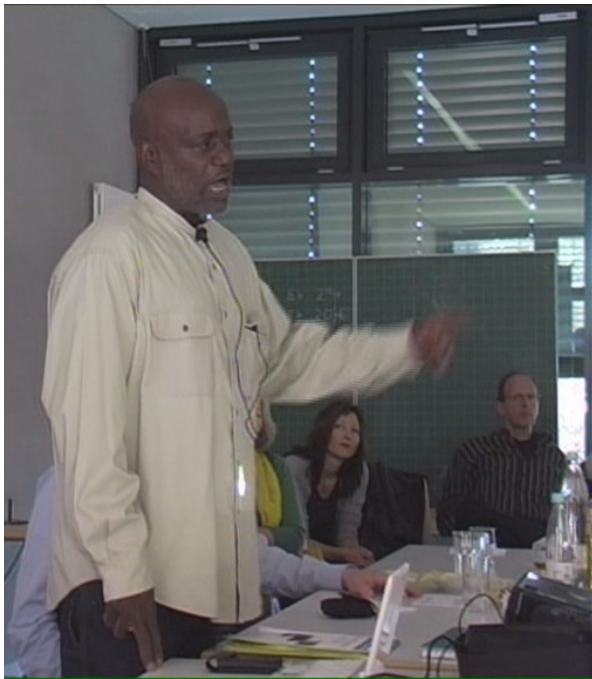


“It was a very emotional presentation for all of us “



“It was an interactive session in English. Since his words were so obviously sincere, urgent and heartfelt, it was impossible to miss his message !”

He grabbed the attention of the students and everyone was listening to his words very closely. Actually, we had all known what the topic of the talk would be, and I suppose all of us had heard about the death penalty in America before, but this presentation was amazing. Mr. Graham put so many emotions into his talk, telling us about the institutionalized racism that informs the way in which the American courts seem to judge black and white people; about the feelings he had while being on death row and about his gratefulness to the people who worked hard to get his conviction reversed when he himself had no means to do so. Since his words were so obviously sincere, urgent and heartfelt, it was impossible to miss his message – the motto he lives by now: “To serve, to serve, to serve [your community of fellow human beings] and expect nothing in return.”



“To serve, to serve, to serve [your community of fellow human beings] and expect nothing in return.”

I suppose he convinced the whole tenth grade that the death penalty is not a solution when dealing with criminals. He gave us to understand that killing people, even if they had committed murder, puts you on a par with the murderer.

In my opinion nobody deserves the death penalty even if he or she has killed another person. Being in prison is hard enough, and it can change you over the years. There is no need to put delinquents to death. We need to rethink the death penalty in America completely, and things must change lest more innocent people are killed – since death is irreversible. That is what Mr. Graham’s talk made us understand.



“Getting involved with Sant’Egidio special Christmas campaign”

In order to show Mr. Graham that we really understood his message about serving our community and helping the people who do not have anybody who cares for them, we lent our support to the charity organization that aids Mr. Graham in his mission to fight for the abolition of the death penalty. This charity is called Sant’Egidio. Every year they have a special Christmas ‘campaign’, and this year, on 17<sup>th</sup> December, we were proud to be able to help this organization by collecting, bringing and wrapping presents for senior citizens and homeless people of Munich. Mr. Rohde, who works for Sant’Egidio, collected the presents for December 24<sup>th</sup>.



“Herr Rohde’s organization helped Mr Graham to survive and to fight against this injustice. Mr Graham has never forgotten and he does all that he can to help others.



“On 17<sup>th</sup> December, we were proud to be able to help.” by collecting, bringing and wrapping presents for senior citizens and homeless people of Munich”



”We collected, brought and wrapped presents for senior citizens and homeless people of Munich”

It was an extraordinary experience to listen and talk to Mr. Graham and we would like to thank him for that. We also hope very much that he will be able to achieve his aim and help people who are on death row right now.



“Thanking Mr Graham and saying goodbye”