

Norfolk Prison Debate Team
Beats
Boston College Debating Society
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Recently the Norfolk Prison Debate Team defeated the Fulton Debating Society of Boston College in a debate here at the prison on the topic of whether a "carbon tax" should levied upon businesses who emit greenhouse gasses.

The Norfolk Team won by a score of 86.7 to 86.2! A great victory!! I am please to report that two of the Norflk Team members also serve on The Lifers' Group, Inc. Board of Directors with me. Sitting in the audience I was so proud to see these men represent the prison population in such a positive manner.

David Boeri from WBUR radio covered the event and there will be some stories in the written press as well.

What follows are two stories relating to prison debating and The Fulton Debate Society respectively. I hope you enjoy them and are encouraged to contact the folks involved in their development.

Congratulations to the Norfolk Prison Debate Team! Thank you for clearly displaying the voice of the informed and educated prisoner to the out-side world who too often only hear the twisted viewpoint of the gulag official. May we never forget what Samuel Clemons (Mark Twain) said;

"If you want to see the scum of the earth and the dregs of humanity, go down to your local prison and watch the changing of the guard."

SUPPORT THE VOICE OF THE EDUCATED AND INFORMED PRISONER!!!

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ADAM BRIGHT '05 AND NATASHA
HAVERTY '08

Inmate Debate

Adam Bright '05 and Natasha Haverty '08 are collecting the history of one of the best debating teams of all time—a team made up entirely of prisoners.

IN 1951 THE OXFORD UNIVERSITY DEBATE TEAM, ONE OF THE best in the world, competed in a tournament against a group of inmates from the Norfolk Prison Colony in southeastern Massachusetts. The topic for the evening: should the United States have a free national health service for all its citizens?

As far as debate teams go, the one at the Colony was surprisingly good. Formed in the early 1930s as a way of improving the prisoners' minds, the team had a key advantage over Oxford students. Undergraduates move on after four years, while these inmates were serving terms that often lasted decades, giving them ample opportunity to hone their skills. Over the years, the Norfolk team beat Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and many other elite colleges. They beat Oxford that day in 1951, too. "They're extraordinarily good, you know," one of the Oxonians had to admit.

The history of the debate team at the Norfolk Prison Colony,

now known as the Massachusetts Correctional Institution in Norfolk, has recently been unearthed by Adam Bright '05 and Natasha Haverty '08. In June 2010, the pair received \$10,000 from Mass Humanities, which distributes money on behalf of the National Endowment of the Humanities, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and private donors. "The Scourge of New England: An Oral History of the Norfolk Prison Debate Team," as Bright and Haverty's project is called, will assemble interviews with former debaters, prison officials, and some competitors. The two researchers have so far compiled fifty-five hours of audio interviews, along with newspaper clippings, Norfolk Prison newsletters, and such memorabilia as the "certificate of parole" given to each college debater for "having superiorly and honorably acquitted himself in a debate between [his school] and the Norfolk Debaters."

The materials will be archived at the Harvard Law Library, the Boston Public Library, and the Emerson College Library. Bright and Haverty also hope to write an oral history book based on their research. "I wanted to get involved with the magic of people telling their own stories in their own voices," Bright says. He read about the Norfolk debate team in a biography of Leonard Cohen—the famed Canadian songwriter who competed at Norfolk while a member of McGill University's debate team—and then asked Haverty, a freelance writer in New York, to join him.

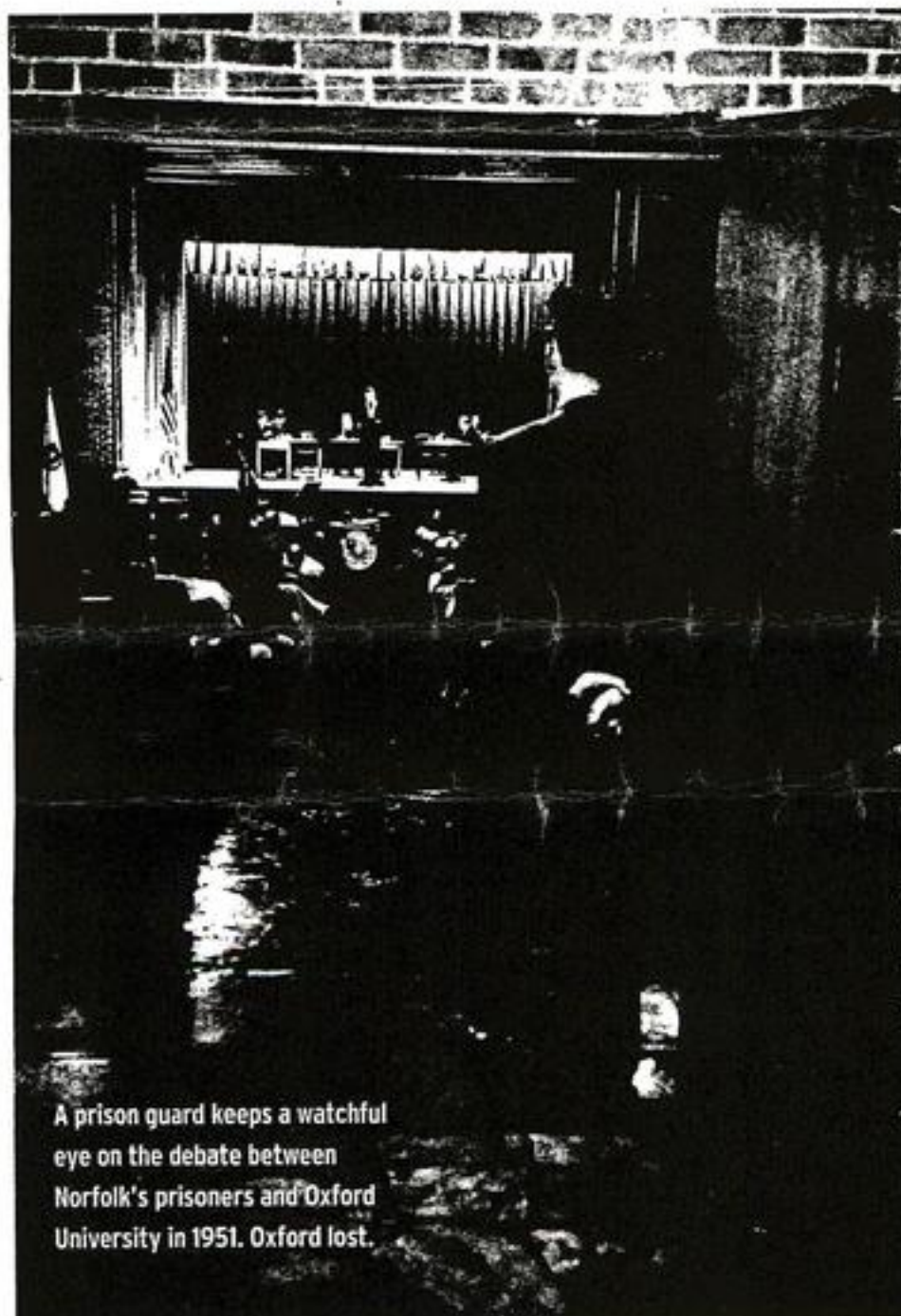
Haverty says her love of oral history and her interest in prisons started at Brown. Through the Swearer Center for Public Service, she was leading arts workshops for women at a Rhode Island prison and was simultaneously enrolled in an oral history class, *The Political Economy of Danish...* by economist GIERSTADT. Things sort of came together that semester, she says. After graduating, she enrolled at the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies, in Portland, Maine, where she created a radio feature about the only woman in the state serving in home confinement.

So far the two researchers have spoken to more than a dozen debaters from the Norfolk team. Some of the inmates have gone on to have productive lives and successful careers. Others, having landed back in prison, were interviewed over the phone. One former debater, Roy Shurger, remembers vividly the hours he and his partner spent preparing to argue the negative on the question, Should wiretapping be made legal? They researched the subject in the Norfolk prison's well-stocked prison library. Their teammates grilled them, while their coach—a fellow inmate whom everyone called Doc Richardson—corrected their pronunciation, their emphasis, and the way they projected their voices.

The Norfolk debate team came out of the belief that prisoners could be rehabilitated through education. "Did this program keep people out of prison? Did it keep people from coming back?" asks Haverty. "We are definitely not drawing any conclusions about that."

Still, she and Bright firmly believe that the debate team had merit. It "was the exemplification of the Norfolk philosophy," Bright says. "Get outsiders to interact with the men to make the men feel like men."

—BETH SCHWARTZAPFEL '01



A prison guard keeps a watchful eye on the debate between Norfolk's prisoners and Oxford University in 1951. Oxford lost.

Debate at Boston College

FULTON DEBATING SOCIETY



Rev. Charles Donovan, S.J., a Fultonian and author of this history of the Society.

"And now the Forum at University Heights beckons alluringly to the embryo orators, the shadowy forms of Demosthenes and Cicero hover like guardian genii over the rostrum and seats where, like the Senators of ancient Rome, the sages of succeeding generations will assemble to discuss the problems and shape the destiny of our country, to perpetuate the glories of the past, and by their deeds to make the Fulton of the future a credit to its traditions, to its founders, and to the Mother under whose guidance it has reached its place of honor among debating societies of this country."

--description of the Society in the 1913 edition of *Sub Turri* (the yearbook)

These words seem an appropriate tribute to the long and distinguished tradition of forensics at Boston College. Shortly after the institution was founded in 1863, a "Senior Debating Society" was formed over which Rev. Robert Fulton, S.J., presided. Under this name the Society continued its work until 7 November 1890, when, acting upon the suggestion of the Rev. A. J. Mullan, S.J., the Society voted to be known as the Fulton Debating Society of Boston College. A seal was chosen, and a Fultonian was entrusted the work of engraving it. The design embodied "an eagle surmounting a scroll and a shield containing the portrait of Father Fulton, surmounted by a laurel wreath, the name of the Society at the base of the scroll, the date of its foundation set in a rosette at the lower part of the wreath, and the space between the upper portion and the arms of the same filled by the motto 'Par Pari.'"

Throughout the early years, most of the Society's activities were debates conducted in a room reserved for members of the Society. Advocates were selected and each week they squared off with passionate dialogue. One of the most significant events of this era undoubtedly occurred in 1895, when the Fulton debated against Georgetown University in the College's first intercollegiate debate. This rivalry, one of the oldest in forensics, is reenacted each year when the Fultonians face Georgetown in tournament competition.

In 1913, after the College had relocated to Chestnut Hill, the Fulton was honored with its own room in University Hall (now room 305 in Gasson Hall). Perhaps most significantly, the front wall of the room was adorned with long columns to record the winners of the Fulton Prize Debate. In a prophetic statement about the future prosperity of the Society, the wall provided a place to acknowledge the winner of the Fulton Prize Debate up to the dawning of the twenty-second century. The ceiling was adorned with the words of great orators to "shed light" on the members of the Society. On one side, Demosthenes, Cicero, and Webster, in recognition of the civil; opposite them, the names of St. Paul, Bourdaloue, and Segneri, in recognition of the spiritual.

Throughout the 1920s, the Fulton continued to stage intra-Society debates on campus and to battle other institutions in public debates. The records of the Society reveal lists of opponents much like a modern day athletic schedule. Early opponents included Fordham University, Connecticut Agricultural College, Brown University, New York University,

Gettysburg College, St. Viator College (of Illinois), Rutgers University, Stanford University, Johns Hopkins University, Dartmouth College, Princeton University and the University of Pittsburgh. Perhaps the most legendary of these debates occurred in 1928, when Neal Scanlon, William Killion, and Joseph Doyle, defeated Harvard in a debate before thousands in Symphony Hall on the question of whether "Alfred E. Smith is eminently qualified as President of the United States." The strength of the Society in this era was evident in 1929-1930, when the Fulton won nine consecutive debates before losing in the final debate of the year to the College of the Holy Cross.

This tradition continued into the 1940s as Fultonians traveled throughout Boston and surrounding states staging debate exhibitions. The Fultonians delighted crowds by orating on issues of pressing public concern. Around this time, intercollegiate debate began to evolve to a tournament format. Instead of staging intersquad competitions or debating against a single school, colleges and universities began to invite several opposing institutions from across the country to their campus for weekend tournaments. Teams representing the competing schools debated against each other in a series of preliminary rounds with the outstanding teams advancing into the elimination rounds. This trend culminated, in 1947, with the creation of the National Debate Tournament.

While the Fulton Society was slow to switch to tournament debate, it began to compete in earnest in the early 1960s, when Dr. John Henry Lawton became Director of Forensics. The most successful of these teams, James Unger and Joseph McLaughlin, finished second at the 1964 National Debate Tournament. In addition to 1964, the Society qualified to attend the national championship in 1962, 1963, 1965, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1974, 1975 and 1979. In the early 1980s, however, interest in debate diminished and the Fulton began to compete more actively in contest speaking, qualifying for the National Individual Events Tournament in 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1989, and 1990. In the late 1980s, debate returned and the Society qualified for the National Debate Tournament from 1987 to 1996.

Editorial Note: This history is abstracted from an "Occasional Paper" written by Rev. Charles Donovan, S.J., in 1991. Father was a Fultonian who later rose to become Academic Vice President of Boston College. Although he lost the 1933 Fulton Prize Debate to Charles M. O'Brien, Father remained a devoted champion of the Society until his death in 1998. After retiring as Academic Vice President, Father went on to serve with distinction as University Historian and in this role he authored the definitive history of the Society.