

## PROJECTS

**This issue we report on two Web sites that cleverly combine text and graphics with photography but, most importantly, have a clear educational function. [www.360degrees.org](http://www.360degrees.org) aims to raise public awareness on America's huge prison population, while [www.quest.classroom.com](http://www.quest.classroom.com) is an interactive geography lesson for the 21st century.**

### **A Panoramic VR View of Justice**

The interactivism of 360degrees by Scott Tillitt

[www.360degrees.org](http://www.360degrees.org)

Not everyone joined the money culture, though. Alison Cornyn and Sue Johnson, who met at New York University's famed Interactive Telecommunications Program, founded Picture Projects in 1995 to "create an online space for voices traditionally overlooked by mainstream media." The interactive documentarians' latest project is 360degrees.org, billed as the first interactive Web site to explore the criminal justice system and its prison population.

The 360degrees site grew out of a concern: that there are over two million Americans in prison today—four times the prison population just 20 years ago. Cornyn and Johnson believe the social policies that put them there are based on fear and a lack of understanding, so they took to the Web to spur dialogue and challenge perceptions of the system.

Activism isn't easy, but 360degrees is giving it the old NYU college try, using Web applications such as Quick-Time Virtual Reality (QTVR), Flash, streaming audio and databases as well as good old-fashioned journalism to make it as accessible, compelling and interactive as possible.

The stories section, the heart of the site, presents poignant accounts of life behind bars and of the lives touched by the system—parents, judges, lawyers, victims—to challenge cultural misconceptions and stereotypes. *The stories were developed in tandem with National Public Radio series Prison Diaries through interviews and tape-recorded diaries.* Each story is centered on a specific case, in the perspective of those involved, and includes streaming audio interviews, photos and—this is where the 360degrees comes into play—panoramic QTVR views of each speaker's personal space.

"We wanted to put viewers in someone else's shoes, whether in the cell or the judge's chambers or a family member's living room. And also to get people thinking of the hard-core surveillance of the panopticon, the traditional layout of a prison," explains Cornyn, who serves as designer for the site. She further explains that "360degrees also refers to the multiple perspectives within the stories, and the Web is a great venue to tell these nonlinear stories."

Johnson worked as a docu-

When the Net, and particularly the Web, first entered public consciousness, its pioneers envisioned open global discourse and accompanying social and political change. The revolution will be computerized. But then the carpetbaggers smelled opportunity, money poured from the heavens and commerce overshadowed utopia.



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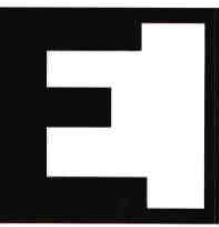


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mentary photographer before meeting Cornyn. Her work has examined the impact of economics on rituals within different cultures: quinciénra ceremonies, pilgrimages, marriages and debutante balls, for instance. For 360degrees, she used her skills to create an intimate experience. "Even in a stark prison cell, there are small touches of humanity that stand out in stark relief to the cement and metal spaces—jackets hung a certain way, birthday cards perfectly lined up, photographs pinned to a locker," she says.

"We are shooting high-speed color film and trying to capture the fluorescent lighting, the muted paint, the old carpet and the details of each space in all their glory," Johnson continues. "We set up the tripod in the place normally occupied by the speaker. We see what the inmate, judge, lawyer, victim or family member sees."

But 360degrees is more than personal stories. The site also boasts an impressive amount of interactivity and data and resources—for which Picture Projects relied upon a vast team of experts for research and advice—to further highlight different perspectives on crime and punishment.



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## Follow "The Quest"

Hitting the Trail of Interactive Education with Photographer David McLain

By Dana E. Rouse

[www.davidmclain.com](http://www.davidmclain.com)  
[www.quest.classroom.com](http://www.quest.classroom.com)

is funded by subscriptions through [www.classroom.com](http://www.classroom.com). Twice a year, armed with digital cameras, computers and satellite phones, they put on an interactive expedition in a different part of the world. Together, a photographer, a videographer, a Harvard archeologist, an MIT biologist, a writer, an adventurer and a Flash designer head for remote destinations. From these locations they post content to the Web site every day, which teachers around America then use as a vehicle to teach history, science, biology and geography to students from elementary to high school.

David McLain made his first trip as a Quest photographer three years ago as part of AsiaQuest, enabling American children to experience China firsthand along with him. "About half a million kids follow along," McLain says. "Each day, rather than opening up their textbooks, they log on and, in real time, join our adventure." Since then, he's been to places like Japan, Australia, the American Southwest and Central America.

Based in San Francisco, the Adventure Learning division was conceived and created by a man named Dan Buettner, who McLain describes as "a crazy mix of adventurer, journalist, entrepreneur and six-year-old juvenile delinquent." McLain himself is 1 of 20 Quest photographers, and his enthusiasm for this project is as boundless as the confines of the universe. Essential as the team is on these trips, it is the equipment, most of it digital, that makes all the magic possible. Every night, the team sets up a hub using an Ethernet connection. They can sit around a campfire in the Australian outback or the middle of the Sahara, and network. One computer will act as the server, and everyone will exchange information to determine what gets posted.

"All of the images are shot with a Nikon D1," McLain says. "We run Macs and PCs in the field, and we have two superpowerful Norwegian-made satellites that keep us in contact. We can daisy the two of them together and get a 128-baud connection. In the middle of nowhere, we can transfer data to make video Flash pieces."

Sometimes finding a power source presents a problem in the desert or on a mountaintop, where The Quest team must resort to old-fashioned ingenuity. "We've had everything from a bicycle generator to a car battery of a Land Cruiser," McLain says. "Then sometimes, since the phones have batteries, we'll take day trips where we won't have any power, and we'll just go on battery power."

McLain gave this interview over the telephone in a crowded airport, jubilant and ready to fly. He's circled the globe doing this job he loves, and unlike The Quest project, magazines have a time lag. By the time this article hits the newsstands, McLain will be deep in the Amazon somewhere, but he will be followed as he goes by countless kids from their classrooms. Lands still considered virtually impenetrable just a generation ago are, for the new generation, at least "virtually" penetrable. PIX

Design plays a key role in the presentation of the stories and data. Clean, engaging and accessible in both Flash and HTML versions, design serves as metaphor, as ubiquitous circles represent not only 360 degrees but also the interconnectedness surrounding the justice system. The Flash design of the Timeline section represents the fluidity of theories and policies. Although the goal was not design awards, 360degrees has received its fair share of acknowledgments, including the short list in the Flash-forward 2001 NYC festival.

The response to the site? Although it's hard to measure exactly how much of a difference a Web site can make on such a complex, controversial issue, the seeds of change have shown some signs of growing. According to Cornyn, the site is drawing an average 10,000 hits a day—in less than a year. "Professors of social justice have come calling, and it's become a resource for students," she says. That's a good sign since universities are often where the theories that drive policies are hatched. Changing public perception is a long, arduous process, but to paraphrase a wise Chinese philosopher, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single story.

When President Richard Nixon went to China in 1972 and extended his hand to Premier Chou En-lai, he was executing one of the most historic handshakes in diplomatic history. At the time, his visit was almost unimaginable. China was still in the throes of its Cultural Revolution, a terrible era for a quarter of the world's population. And yet for most people who grew up during the 1970s in American classrooms, China was a black hole in our education. Things are vastly different for American schoolchildren now, who can ride The Quest, a program *The Washington Post* called "the most successful experiment in interactive education to date."

The Quest, part of the Adventure Learning division of Classroom Connect,



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