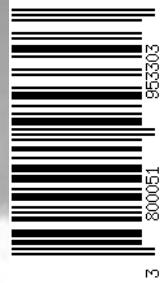
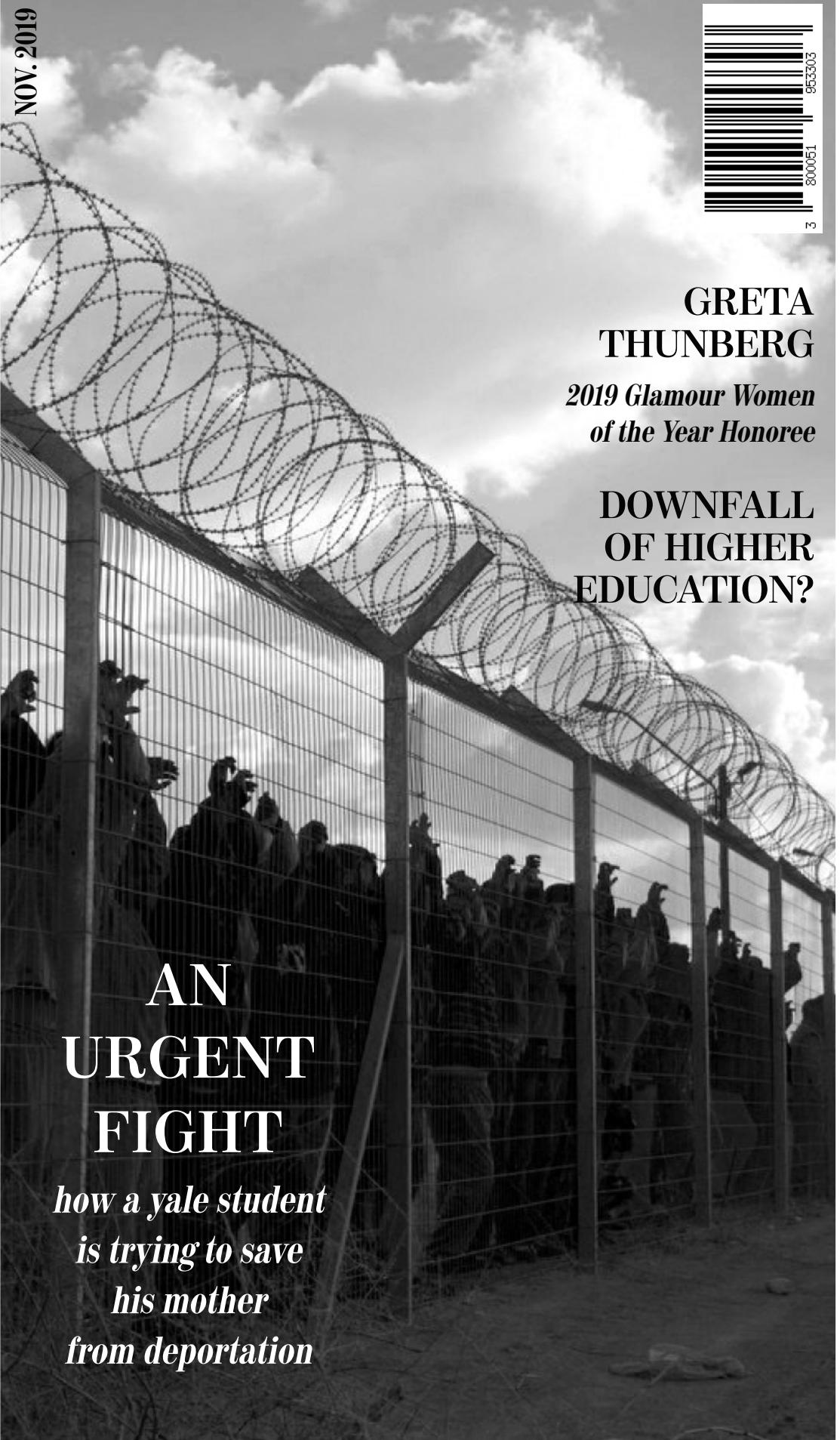


NOV. 2019



GRETA THUNBERG

*2019 Glamour Women
of the Year Honoree*

DOWNFALL
OF HIGHER
EDUCATION?

AN URGENT FIGHT

*how a Yale student
is trying to save
his mother
from deportation*

A YALE STUDENT'S URGENT FIGHT TO SAVE HIS MOTHER FROM DEPORTATION



Photograph by Anayansi Alatorre Romo

Cristian Padilla Romero, a student at Yale, has been campaigning on behalf of his mother, who is recovering from cancer and is at an ICE detention center.

By: Rachel Nolan



Photograph by Yale Daily News

Historians are frequently invited to give talks at other universities, and graduate students shoulder the burden of organizing them—e-mails, pickups at the train station, squiring visitors around to various Gothic towers for genteel exchanges. On Thursday morning, I took an early train from Boston to New Haven, expecting only to give an academic talk at the MacMillan Center, at Yale. The graduate student who picked me up at the station told me that one of the co-organizers of the event, Cristian Padilla Romero, a fellow Ph.D. student in the history department, couldn't come, because he had a situation: his mother, who is recovering from Stage IV cancer, was at an ice detention center outside of Atlanta, slated for deportation.

A phone bank had been organized on campus on behalf of Padilla Romero's mother. Someone had brought pizza, coffee, and doughnuts. Talking points were written on a whiteboard in case anyone got through to ice or an elected representative. Padilla Romero, a tall and gangly Honduran student, enrolled last fall. His mother, Tania Romero, has been detained for more than two months at Irwin County Detention Center, a facility run by the for-profit LaSalle Corrections, in southern Georgia. The facility has requested her paperwork from the Honduran Consulate, which means that she is scheduled to be deported any day. Padilla Romero decided to go public with his mother's case on Tuesday. Since then, he has been fielding phone calls, running a Twitter campaign, and keeping track of a petition (nearly twenty-five thousand signatures strong) and a GoFundMe campaign (which hopes to raise thirty-five thousand dollars for legal and medical expenses). His mother is

in remission. But, as a result of her cancer and chemotherapy treatments, she cannot open her mouth more than a few inches and has trouble eating. (An ice representative told me, "I can't speak to the specifics of her treatment, however, I can say that ice is committed to insuring the welfare of all those in the agency's custody, including providing access to necessary and appropriate medical care.")

Padilla Romero arrived in a white T-shirt and black jeans, with a brown jacket. He has cropped curly black hair, deep dimples, and an open manner. The first thing he did—polite to the extreme, but surreal, considering the circumstances—was ask how my talk had gone. Had it been well-attended? He was sorry that he couldn't make it. Coming to the phone bank was the first time he'd left the house since going public on Tuesday, he told me. (He is also undocumented, but he's protected from deportation under daca.) On Friday, he received a glimmer of hope: Representative Lucy McBath, a Democrat from Georgia, announced that she would meet with ice officials next week to discuss Tania's case. My interview with Padilla Romero, conducted in a small conference room in the Yale Center for the Study of Race, Indigeneity, and Transnational Migration, has been edited and condensed for clarity.

When did you come to the U.S.?

My dad was the first one here, in the mid-nineties. My mom followed after, in the same time frame. We're from a village called El Tule, in Olancho, Honduras. We're from rural Honduras.

We're not city folk. We all came to the U.S. eventually. We've settled in Atlanta, Georgia, after spending a few years in Orlando. We're all without status. My dad did have T.P.S. at some point, but he fell out of status as well. I have daca. Two of my sisters do as well. That's been our life, you know? Right now, it just so happens that my mom was pulled over for a speeding violation. She was arrested for having no license, which you cannot have as an undocumented person in the state of Georgia. When she went to jail, they called ice.

How did you go from being a young undocumented kid in Atlanta to being a graduate student at Yale co-organizing this event?

Yeah, I don't know; life is interesting. I'm fundamentally here because of my mom. She always worked multiple jobs to help pay for everything. She worked in construction, mostly in drywall and finishing. She worked as a housekeeper in a hotel and different staff in restaurants, in the kitchens. She's the single biggest reason I went to college, even when my parents were together. Which is not to minimize the role of my dad, but, you know, she took up all the different jobs to pay for things and all the very mundane stuff, like setting up a dental appointment in places that she knew they were giving free care for people who didn't have insurance.

And when was your mother diagnosed with cancer?

She was diagnosed late in 2016. I was in the fall semester of my junior year at Pomona. At first she got a big bump on her throat. Eventually, she went to the hospital and when it was checked out it was Stage II, and then later it was Stage IV. It went really, really fast. This is what made things really bad for her. She had immediate surgery. They literally cut her throat, her whole neck, from the back of the left side of her neck to the back of the right side. Since then, because there was a lot of skin cut off, and because of the therapies later, her mouth has had limited mobility. She can't open her jaw all the way down. Another thing is that her teeth have been severely damaged, some of them lost. She was starting to get dental care for that but now for sure she doesn't have any.

So when did she get stopped? How did this whole thing begin?

On August 15, 2019, she was pulled over for a speeding violation. She was arrested, and we paid her bail that same morning—my sisters [who live in the Atlanta area] did. I think around a thousand dollars. They kept that, actually. So we had to hire an attorney. And then she was transported to Irwin by that Saturday morning. That's where she is currently being held. She was still having regular checkups. Her next scheduled one was actually for the 11th of September. She wasn't able to go to that. So, once we hired an attorney, they argued on humanitarian grounds that she needed to see her doctor, but she wasn't released. Our lawyer filed a motion to reconsider, but she confirmed Wednesday that both the motion to reconsider

and another stay of removal has been filed. It's any effort to get the state to halt any attempt to deport, but that doesn't guarantee it.

How is her health in detention?

The biggest thing is that she had a very serious vitamin B12 deficiency and didn't receive any kind of medication for it until the attorney intervened. I'm concerned about the accommodations for her meals, for sure. After she finally got the injection for B12, I don't know if she will get extended mealtimes. The general rule is that everyone has staggered lunches, and they get ten minutes to eat. I don't know to what extent she's able to eat everything or feel comfortable. The other thing is that they are in a big room with a hundred other people, with bunk beds, and only turn off the lights for a few hours at night, maybe 1 to 4 a.m., so she doesn't get any profound or significant rest. I've found the other stories she's told

about people inside, like that a pregnant woman was chained and not given any medication. Like you are just another mule in the barn. And there is no kind of accommodation, whether you are pregnant or have a medical condition. They do have some medical staff and do checkups, but—my mom being an example—they don't always follow up.

Have you been talking to her this whole time?

One of the good things is that we are able to talk to her daily through phone but also video chat. I think for a fifteen-minute conversation it is four dollars, so we have just been adding funds throughout. She's always been a very talkative person on the phone in general.

Before she was in detention, were you talking to her on the phone every day?

No! No! This is the irony here,

and I also feel bad. Sometimes, you know, when you go to college, you stop talking to your parents as much. We didn't talk nearly as much as we do now. Now we talk every day, sometimes more than once.

You sound like you have just leaped into action. How are you dealing with this?

It's intense. The past three days, I've literally just been in my room, glued to my computer, sending more e-mails than I've ever sent in my life. I have a computer, and then a monitor, and an iPad, and I'm, like, thank God I have iMessage to send texts.

Because otherwise you would have tendinitis. It sounds like you are dealing with this technically and legally, but maybe not emotionally?

Yeah, there is not time for emotion at the moment, to be honest. And not in a bad way. I'm just running on—I actually haven't even had that much coffee, although it probably seems like it right now. I'm sorry I'm talking so fast.

The fact that you are able to get this story out there is at least in part due to the fact that you are a Yale student. How do you feel about that?

That's the unfortunate reality. If I was a roofer, I would never be able to have this kind of support or connections. I mean, I'm highlighting my mom's situation, but there are so many people in there. My mom made really good friends with another woman who has been there for I don't know how long, and she literally just wants to get deported. People celebrate every time someone leaves, whether that is being deported or released, because people just want to be out of there. Sunday night is when they gather the people to take them out. They bang on pots or make a little noise to celebrate, and have been punished for that, too.

How would your family be affected if your mother were to be deported?

Do you mean emotionally?

Yes. What would you do?

I personally haven't given it much thought. It would be heartbreak, because I've literally lived my whole life with her. Up until college, I came home to her every day, and even

in college I try to come home as much as possible. My sisters always say that I'm her favorite. I kind of believe it. I think it has to do with the fact that, since college, I haven't been home as much, so, when I come back for a week or a weekend, she's always making all the meals that she knows I like—pollo con tajadas [fried chicken with fried plantains], or my favorite is arroz frijoles fritos, with queso, mantequilla, and crema [rice and fried beans with cheese, butter, and cream]. I could eat that every day. Especially the way she does the eggs—kind of crushed up a little bit, not scrambled. The beans also have to be crushed, but not that much.

So you guys aren't thinking about the possibility.

I mean, it's always in the back of my head, but it would be devastating for us. We have two of our grandparents [in Honduras], but we worry about her life, primarily. There is no way that she would be able to get the care that she needs over there. Because we're undocumented, we wouldn't be able to see her, unless we decided to go back and not be able to come back to the U.S. To be honest, I'm not giving it much thought, because I'm focussed on the other alternative.

WHAT DOES "ICE" STAND FOR?

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

WHAT DOES ICE DO?

ICE promotes homeland security and public safety by enforcing U.S. federal criminal and civil laws concerning border control, customs, trade, and immigration.

WHAT DOES "DACA" STAND FOR?

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

WHAT DOES DACA DO?

DACA protects eligible immigrant youth who came to the United States when they were children from deportation



Photograph by John Moore/Getty Images



THE OFFICER
WHO ARRESTS YOU FOR
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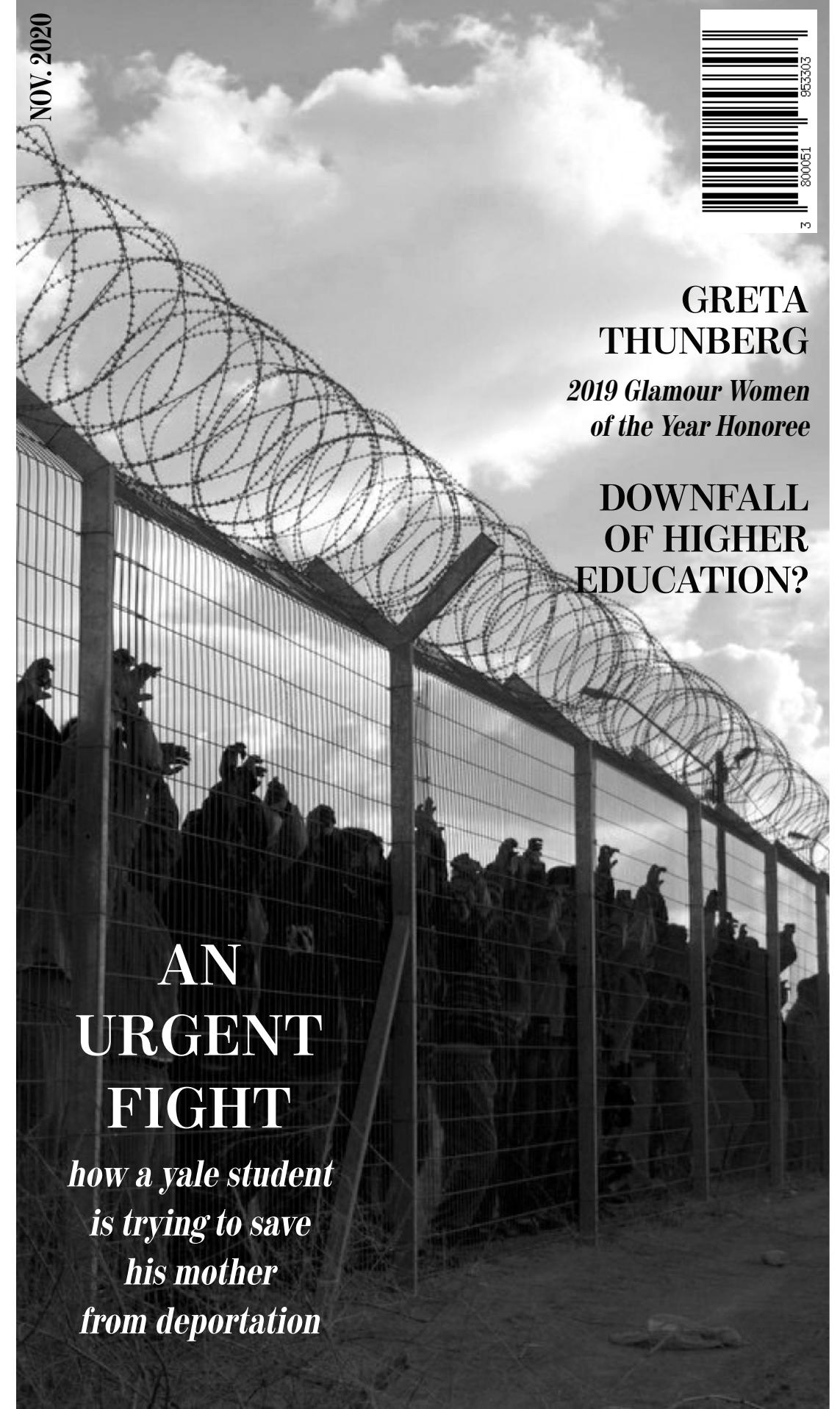
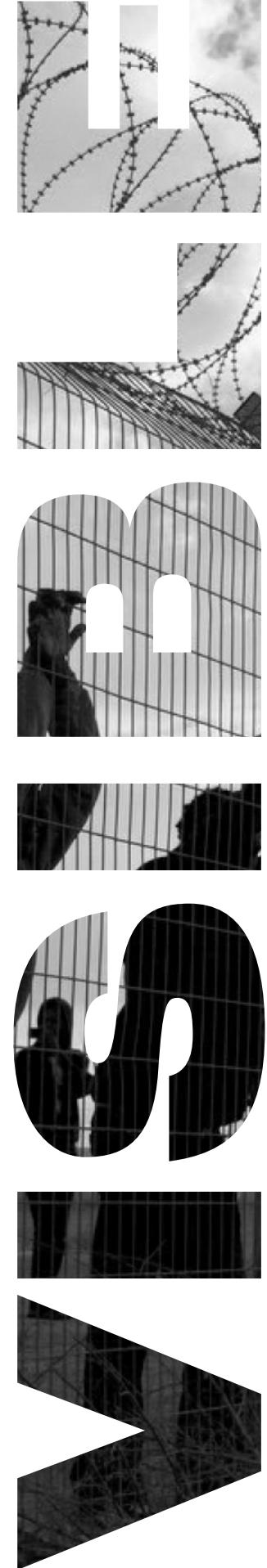
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DRINK DRIVE AND FACE THE CRIMINAL CONSEQUENCES

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