



Lee Gelernt '75

Director, Immigrant Rights Project, American Civil Liberties Union

Lee Gelernt graduated from Columbia Law School in 1988, where he was a Notes and Comments Editor of the *Columbia Law Review*. He then served as law clerk for Judge Frank M. Coffin of the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit. A senior lawyer at the national office of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in New York, where he has been since 1992, he currently works on national security and immigration issues. Lee has litigated groundbreaking civil rights cases at all levels of the federal courts, including the United States Supreme Court; he is a nationally recognized expert on issues involving federal court review. He credits his family and his experiences at MCS for his professional life in law.

Among his many cases, Lee represented media outlets and a member of congress in challenging the government's post-9/11 policy of holding secret immigration hearings. As the lead attorney for the ACLU in these "secret hearing" cases, he argued before the United States Courts of Appeals for the Third and Sixth Circuits. His victory in the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals was the first major decision by a federal appellate court against one of the national post-9/11 policies. It eventually resulted in the Justice Department's announcing in the Supreme Court that it intended to abandon its secret hearing policy. The cases covered were front page news in newspapers worldwide—including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times*.

Over the past decade, Lee has also worked vigorously to prevent the Justice Department and Congress from denying ordinary immigrants access to our courts. He was co-counsel in a landmark decision by the Supreme Court in 2001 rejecting the government's attempt to deport immigrants—many of whom had been here for decades—without any meaningful review by the federal courts. In April 2005, Lee testified before the Senate on the right of all individuals, including immigrants, to obtain access to our court system through the historic Great Writ of habeas corpus.

Lee has received numerous honors for his work at the ACLU, including the 13th Annual Columbia University Public Interest Law Foundation's Public Interest Achievement Award. He has twice received the national Jack Wasserman Award from the American Immigration Lawyers Association for excellence in litigation.

He is an adjunct professor at Fordham Law School, where he teaches a seminar on national security, September 11, and the rights of noncitizens. He has volunteered his time tutoring disadvantaged children and teaching classes on discrimination in public schools throughout New York City.

An ardent basketball fan, Lee is married to Risa Meyer, founder of the thriving Internet business PlumParty.com; they have two children: Charlie, 1, and Cal, 5, who will enter the 5-6s at MCS this fall.

I know that a few may argue that you are working under relatively favorable conditions with a more than relatively willing group of parents, so that your accomplishments and experiences may not be representative enough to provide universal insights. I very much disagree with that.

If we cannot demonstrate at least in some model situations the necessary conditions for the full development of the communal sense and the personal self-expression of a well integrated variety of children, we would not know what to aim for when we attempt to apply our findings to a wider scene.

Erik H. Erikson (1971)
Educator, developmental
psychologist, after a three-year
study at MCS