

## Atlanta Investigative News Team Wins the Peabody Award for “The Cathy Harris Story”

[www.thecathyharrisstory.com](http://www.thecathyharrisstory.com)

### “Singled Out By U.S. Customs”

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Outspoken Federal Whistleblower Finds Closure in Her Retirement

Cathy Harris, an outspoken critic against the Department of Homeland Security was terminated from Customs on May 1, 2005 for filing discrimination complaints and blowing the whistle in 1999.

Ms. Harris says her July 27, 2005 retirement from the agency has finally given her closure.

As a 20 year Customs employee, 27 years total with the federal government, Ms. Harris has made great steps to rectify the injustices against international travelers within the Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

In October 1998, she formed her own non-profit organization to act as a watchdog group over Customs practices - Customs Employees Against Discrimination Association (CEADA), P.O. Box 870849, Stone Mountain, GA 30087, Phone: (800) 797-8663, Fax: (678) 254-5018, Website: [www.ceada.com](http://www.ceada.com) Email: [ceada@justice.com](mailto:ceada@justice.com)

Shortly after she became a federal whistleblower, she reported that her co-workers were carrying out demoralizing pat-downs, intrusive strip-searches, x-ray examinations, cavity searches and monitored defecations which included African American travelers being shackled to hospital beds. Some of these procedures lasted for up to four days for the sole purpose of Customs Inspectors collecting overtime money. She reported these findings to the media, Senate and Congress.

After an intense investigation, an investigative news team from Atlanta discovered that Ms. Harris' claims were true; Customs Inspectors were indeed targeting African American travelers particularly women for these humiliating and demeaning examinations. The Atlanta news team later won the Peabody award for her story entitled “Singled Out by U.S. Customs.”

A March 2000 General Accounting Office (GAO) report conducted an investigation and discovered that even though African American women travelers were the smallest group of international travelers, they were the largest group that were singled out by U.S. Customs Inspectors. Later on an Independent Panel report confirmed that the U.S. Customs Service had major flaws and needed outside help.

Initially, 1300 African American women came forward in Chicago and told of their horrifying experiences at the hands of U.S. Customs Inspectors at the O'Hare airport. Because of the statute of limitations, only 87 women moved forward to receive justice in a Class-Action Lawsuit filed in October 1997 by Attorney Ed Fox.

In 2006, the government agreed to pay the women \$21,000 a piece.

Because of Cathy Harris' whistle blowing activities, Congressional Hearings took place and major changes have been made to protect the American public such as: Two bills were introduced twice "Civil Rights for International Travelers Act" by Congressman John Lewis (D-GA) and "Reasonable Search Standards Act" by Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL). Other changes included the creation of new guidelines for the Personal Search Handbook such as: A GS-14 or GS-15, the highest ranking manager in the port, is now required to approve for travelers to be taken to the hospital instead of a GS-5 or brand new Inspector; a GS-12 supervisor now has to approve for travelers to undergo a strip-search instead of a GS-5 or brand new Inspector; the Customs and Border Protection Inspectors/Officers now wear name tags so they can be easily identified for complaints by the traveling public; a passenger now has the choice of using a body scanning x-ray machine instead of a pat-down inspection; after two hours of being taken into a search room a traveler can now have a supervisor notify an attorney, family member or a friend and inform them they are being held up in the Customs and Border Protection area.

These were all significant changes because of Cathy Harris' whistle blowing activities. But unfortunately Ms. Harris is no longer with the agency now; therefore, one way the public can be informed of their rights is reading Ms. Harris' upcoming book "The Failure of Homeland In-Security: The Government's Dirty Little Secrets from an Insider" [www.homelandin-security.com](http://www.homelandin-security.com) The book provides strategies and solutions on how to fight back if you become a victim of the Customs and Border Protection.

During Ms. Harris' tenure in Atlanta, she was subjected to internal abuses by the agency such as Sexual Harassment, Sex Discrimination and Sexism. Her story will be told in her upcoming book "The Cathy Harris Story: Courage Under Fire" [www.thecathyharrisstory.com](http://www.thecathyharrisstory.com)

Ms. Harris' fight against U.S. Customs was long, hard, and fierce. But she feels she was sent angels in the form of EEO and Whistleblower Attorneys, Civil Rights Leaders, Legislators, Community Activists and Media Entities. And because of these angels she was given the opportunity to open her own publishing company named Angels Press, P.O. Box 870849, Stone Mountain, GA 30087, Phone: (800) 797-8663, Fax: (678) 254-5018, Website: [www.angelspress.com](http://www.angelspress.com) Email: [info@angelspress.com](mailto:info@angelspress.com) to educate, inform and empower the community on how to take control of their own lives. She is also writing two series books entitled "How To Take Control Of Your Own Life" [www.howtotakecontrol.com](http://www.howtotakecontrol.com) and "Discrimination 101" [www.discrimination101.com](http://www.discrimination101.com).

Cathy Harris is also a Motivational Speaker, Syndicated Columnist and Discrimination Consultant and is available for Lectures, Seminars and Workshops and can be reached at (800) 797-8663 or through her website [www.cathyharrisspeaks.com](http://www.cathyharrisspeaks.com).



PEABODY AWARD:

Russell is a rarity among Georgia's TV journalists, a winner of the coveted Peabody Award, the TV journalist's Pulitzer or MVP. Russell, Carlin, producer Mindy Larcom, photographer Travis Shields and editor Robert Carr were honored for "Singled Out," an investigation of racial profiling by U.S. Customs at Atlanta's airport.