



Behind the Walls

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The death penalty is an emotional issue. It is a reaction to the atrocious and hideous crimes committed by a handful of individuals. The death penalty is vindictive, discriminatory and final. As it stands, it is bad law.

One would imagine, considering the foregoing statements, that the man behind this pen is opposed to capital punishment. Personally, I favor it, but for different reasons and under different circumstances than those written into law.

Many articles and letters to the Editor have been written both for and against capital punishment. Certainly, every person should and does have an opinion, and should be encouraged to express it. There are a few facts, statistically supportable, which should be received, however, in light of recent statements.

One statement dealt with the removal of a dangerous element from society, permanently. On the surface it makes sense. If those who commit capital crimes receive the death penalty, they'll never kill again! That logic cannot be argued.

But let's look deeper. Who are the people who receive the death penalty? What are their backgrounds? And how many of those who have committed capital crimes ever run afoul of the law again? Then there is the question of where and how the emotion is generated which resulted in the death penalty reinstatement.

Most capital crimes are crimes of passion. They are committed generally by husbands, wives, bar-room antagonists, and victims of violent acts. Most of those people were faced with circumstances they were unable to cope with and became responsible for another's death. They are people from all walks of life, from cities and from rural areas. They are people who believe it could never happen to them, but it did.

Some of these "killers" were caught up in circumstances they had no control over and made a wrong decision. Others have felt such guilt for circumstances which led to another's death that they were willing to admit to anything to relieve the dual pressures of conscience and police interrogation. And some who are here were wrongly convicted.

This is not in defiance of capital crimes, or in denunciation of our criminal justice system. The system has its faults, but all in all it does a job that must be done in the best way known or accepted. Capital crimes, like all crimes, should and must be punished.

Much has been written concerning recidivism, or the tendency for an offender to return to prison. Statistics have been quoted that show anywhere from 30% to 70% of ex-convicts return to prison within 5 years. When you remove parole and probation violations, the 30% figure is probably very close to accurate.

Frightening? Yes and no. Most of those who do return, return on property related crimes; burglary, robbery, and drug related charges. How many of the people convicted once of capital crimes kill again? Less than 3%. That means that more than 97% of the killers are perfectly safe to return to public life. Punishment is another matter. Capital crimes are serious. Serious penalties should and are levied against them.

The news media often carry stories of brutal and horrible crimes. Let's face it; it's good material for newspaper sales. There is a strange and grizzly attraction to a tale of hideous brutality. Few stories are considered news-worthy of the successes of those who are released from prison. The people who never become emersed in the wheels of justice again.

Had there never been a Carl Bowles, or a Marquette, would there be a death penalty today in

Oregon? It's very doubtful. Those incidents, committed by only two people, created the foundation on which capital punishment was built. It's sad that the actions of so few have had so drastic an effort on the life of so many.

There are some, though few, justifications. Some crimes are so hideous as to truly question the value of imprisonment as punishment. There are also times when it is more humane to offer death as an alternative to life spent as a prisoner. And perhaps those who have proven they cannot learn, returning again with a capital crime, have chosen for themselves. But so long as a man's bank balance can indicate his likelihood of receiving life...or death, and so long as the color of a person's skin or the accent of their voice can determine when and where their life will end, justice is not served by imposition of the penalty of death.

If we caught the facts, known and accepted nationwide, that capital punishment is not a deterrent...that it's victims are historically poor, or minority members, or both...that the odds against a person once convicted of a capital crime becoming involved in one again are about 50 to 1...the conclusions are obvious. As it stands today, capital punishment is vindictive, wasteful, and very, very final.

On the strength of these few facts alone, where is there justification for the position, "at least they'll never kill again?" Obviously, there is none.

The issue of capital punishment rode the crest of a wave of emotion, and understandably so. Control of crime is a very necessary element of law. But in its own right, control must be controlled. Many legislators and even a number of judges question the legality as well as the value of this law. While capital punishment may be useful, humane, and just tool, it must be used with great care...and a lot of very serious thought.

CELL TALK

By Asmar Abdu Seifullah
aka Joe West #40404

I've been trying to write this article for three days. For some reason other than the fall of my creative abilities, the visions in my mind refuse to take form. They defy the stroke of my pencil, elude the focus that's so crucial in expressing the thoughts that formulate cohesive patterns. I've contemplated at length, seeking the probable cause to this perplexing situation. I can only deduce that this cell is closing in upon me; that it's somehow hampering the completion of the word pictures that sway in the corridors of my mind.

The cell has taken a form other than that of concrete, steel and immovable fixtures. It almost seems to have life...a will of its own and nothing I do discourages its independent action. "Perhaps I've become a part, attached to the umbilical cord of time, to the very space that confines me; I can feel my identity slipping away; the me has become lost in the shuffle of five digit numbers and correctional statistical print-out sheets that count men lives in blinking lights of computerized madness; emotions are ripped, torn, shattered into fragments of cold; smiles have faded, laughter hollowed, emptied out, devoid of merriment, joy seems to have left me for the cyclops that guards the sanctuaries of desolation. This infamy is appaulingly real. Hell has materialized and the devil is my keeper!

"This prison cell that confines the soul and spirit of me is creeping into my consciousness; it is my consciousness and I struggle to maintain a semblance of who I am, who I want to be! I'm filled with the gnawing reality that this day, this night could be my last...damn this infamy! Damn this reality! Who is less guilty than I?"

There comes a time in the life of every man when he questions the validity of his lifeless direction,

when he realizes that he's chased one too many rainbows, that time is upon him like the final seconds of the big game and there aren't anymore time outs left, when there are only two alternative left, "hold on or turn loose!" Hold on to the pattern that's been established or turn loose, start all over again, seek new dreams, happier endings before death claims its dues. All that flashes through the confined man's mind is that "I don't want to die here! I can't die trapped in this desolate mass of forgotten men, concrete walls and iron bars!!! Not when I haven't yet tasted life, loved or been loved...not when the horizon promises to be more than withdrawal pains and painted whores."

Prison is a graveyard. It houses the shells of men long dead, long forgotten, still posing as life forms. Prison which is a representative of the punitive attitude of our society, is only a recycling factory -- melt them down -- recast them in old molds and lets resell them. Never mind what goes into them, just get them ready for purchase. Keep the wheels turning, keep the pay checks coming. Prison perpetuates a capitalistic attitude by allowing men, states, governments and nations to become wealthy by capitalizing off the social conditions that manifest criminal mentalities. Its gotten to the point where society -- the people are saying, we don't want anymore recycled defects, keep them locked up -- close the factory down but for God's sake we don't want to see anymore of our mistakes. So all the reform programs were shut down, men now vegetate behind the walls for X number of years without any bonified efforts made toward rehabilitation.

They sit here and become bitter, cold, distant in humanism. One day they're cast out into the world and told to make it -- act right -- behave

yourself, when in effect they still have the same social problems that lead them to prison.

It's not just the prisoners in maximum security institutions that are confined, it's the whole social structure of our country that's in jail; it's the poor, the Black, Brown, and Red people that suffer most at the hands of capitalist minds (men).

Prison as it exist in this society, is a very moral issue when you stop to think about who goes to prison and who doesn't. It's a moral issue when people have to steal because the fat cats won't get up off the knowledge necessary to survive. It's a moral issue when the constitution isn't enforced because law enforcement is big business, it's a moral issue when the people prey off the conditions that cause other people to go to prison and it's even more immoral when the very prisons that are suppose to solve the problems of men like myself, refuses to address itself to the pertinent moral issues of my confinement. "Man does not survive on bread alone."

I'm reminded of a parable in the Bible where Prophet Jesus came upon the people beginning to stone a whore and the whore pleading for mercy -- redemption. Prophet Jesus in his wisdom said, "let he who is without sin cast the first stone."

"Men will always commit crimes and other men will lock them up. There isn't any excuse for either party when both parties are wrong. Remember that there was a time when the people of this country openly advocated the enslavement of Black people and the genocide of the true native American. The klan is back on the move and the Shah is protected by the representatives of our government. Can anybody say with surity that law enforcement isn't designed to keep the slaves enslaved and master with the stones to stone the dreams of...?"

Lucid walls of time

Edited by Julius D. Snowden, 38013

THE OPTIMISTIC

By Julius D. Snowden

My existence is nothing more than particles of dust being blown in the winds of time, restlessly traveling no where fast -- no chance to see where I've been and programed through life idiosyncrasies not to care where I go, yet...

This time around I will become a microscopic organ within the sphere of consciousness, compounding forgotten memories and deeds, pondering new concepts upon the winding road of action...to the newness of tomorrow become what right is to wrong,

I will become the thought that once slept...
I will become not only the spark, but the fire as well...
I will become life's seeker of not man pigmentation but rather humanity...
I will become a truth even if it is only to self...

Knowing that with the passing of time my moments in existence will along with those within the same domain...seeking the riddle to Ms Justice blindfold, be kicked down stairs into a cellar darkness of unconsciousness, locking doors that even the key called memory will never open...again.

BADBYE

By Gary Wm. Holt
41300

You know it wasn't easy to say goodbye to you such a small word that word goodbye but so final the meaning so final...
such a sad word that word goodbye and so hard to speak why is goodbye a goodbye?
maybe 'i'll change it to it's definite meaning change it to
badbye or
sadbye or
don't cry...

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Time is our friend, a friend to be appreciated. Time will cure all hurts and it too will prove the value of most anything. A fruit tree will bear only with the passage of time. A ship becomes proven when it has had time to weather a few storms. Love's first day is unproven love. When time allows love to continue to grow, then love is blessed with the approval of time.

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REPORT

Exodus Forums are becoming Community Forums. During the month of January many community citizens joined our forums, seeking to share our concerns on making our community a better place to live. ENLIGHTENMENT and ENRICHMENT is the food for better understanding our own responsibility to our own community.

GENERAL STATEMENT TO BLACKS OF OUR COMMUNITY

Black History Month should make us aware of our responsibility to ourselves, to our families and to our community.

We should at this time evaluate our progress and growth as a people and most importantly as individuals. All too often we sit back and reflect off of those who have succeeded and demonstrated their responsibility to our society, and in many cases without our help.

Let's recognize them and celebrate their accomplishments but let's remember to pull our own weight responsibly.

We should at this time set new goals and objectives by which to guide our direction for individual accomplishments.

A first priority goal should be to began pushing in the same direction toward personal family responsibilities and associated community responsibilities. Each community in the whole world reflects the total image of the people who live in it regardless of circumstances.

Another first priority goal should be to commit our energies to setting a good responsibility example for our children; remembering that it is we who are writing Black history today, but, it is our children who will write it tomorrow.

Nationally, we need to demonstrate collectively more responsibility to our personal families and to our associated communities, but this must be done by every able Black pulling his/her own weight responsibly.

Thomas Boothe Ph.D