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The paradox of our time

BY GEORGE CARLIN

The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints. We spend more, but have less; we buy more, but enjoy it less. We have bigger houses and smaller families; more conveniences, but less time; we have more degrees, but less sense; more knowledge, but less judgment; more experts, but more problems; more medicine, but less wellness.

We drink too much, smoke too much, spend too recklessly, laugh too little, drive too fast, get too angry too quickly, stay up too late, get up too tired, read too seldom, watch TV too much, and pray too seldom. We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values.

We talk too much, love to seldom, and hate too often. We've learned how to make a living, but not a life; we've added years to life, not life to years. We've been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbor. We've conquered outer space, but not inner space. We've done larger things, but not better things.

We've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul. We've split the atom, but not our prejudice. We write more, but learn less. We plan more, but accomplish less. We've learned to rush, but not to wait. We build more computers to hold more information to produce more copies than ever, but have less communication.

These are the times of fast foods and slow digestion; tall men, and short character; steep profits, and shallow relationships. These are the times of world peace, but domestic warfare; more leisure, but less fun; more kinds of food, but less nutrition.

These are days of two incomes, but more divorce; of fancier houses, but broken homes. These are days of quick trips, disposable diapers, throwaway morality, one-night stands, overweight bodies, and pills that do everything from cheer to quiet, to kill. It is a time when there is much in the show window and nothing in the stockroom.

I only did my duty

BY PATRICK H. BRADY

When the call went out for Black soldiers to fight for the union, William Carney, a 23-year-old ex-slave put his preaching plans on hold and became a soldier. "I felt I could best serve my God," Carney said, "by serving my country."

William Carney's unit was the 54th Massachusetts Colored infantry. He saw his first action on July 18, 1863, at Fort Wagner, South Carolina—a battle recently depicted in the movie "Glory"

Early in the assault on the Confederate stronghold, a bullet struck the 54th's color bearer. As the wounded soldier staggered and fell, Sergeant Carney dropped his own weapon and grabbed the flag before it touched the ground.

A rebel bullet tore through Carney's right leg, but he charged onward, unarmed, with his country's colors hoisted high.

Finally, Carney planted the U.S. Flag in the shadow of fort, as his comrades rushed the stronghold. But the tide of Battle turned. A half-hour later, the 54th was forced to withdraw with heavy losses, the rebel in hot pursuit. Yet, before Carney retreated—at great personal risk to his own safety—he retrieved his flag. As he limped and struggled across a marsh in waist-high water, a bullet tore into his chest and another one ripped through his right arm.

Bleeding badly, he pressed on,

refusing to fall. As he emerged from the ditch, Sergeant Carney took yet another bullet in the leg. Still mustering extraordinary strength and courage, he staggered on, clutching the flag to his chest.

Then a bullet creased his head, momentarily stunning him. A New York soldier offered to take the flag, but Carney waved him off. "No one," he said, "no one but a member of the 54th will ever carry these colors."

When Carney finally dragged himself into the Union camp—the flag still in tact—his comrades cheered, but Carney himself was embarrassed.

"Boys," he said, "I only did my duty. Our flag never touched the ground." For heroism under fire, Williams Carney was one of 23 African American soldiers awarded the Medal of Honor. But it's significant that our nation's highest honor was awarded for protecting the United States Flag—something the Supreme Court says we can no longer do.

Like Sergeant William Carney, we too have a mission to protect our country's flag. Unlike Carney, our battlefield is the United States Senate, and our mission is to pass S.J.R. 14, the Flag Protection Amendment, which would return to "We the people" the power to protect our flag from acts of physical desecration.

The passage of the Flag Protection Act on March 28th would be a fitting tribute to William Carney and the millions of other Americans who fought and died protecting Old Glory.

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Halting the machinery of death

BY DR. MANNING MARABLE

The cruelest example of human rights violations in the United States today is the death penalty. Everyone knows that the death penalty is not now, nor has it ever been, a deterrent of violent crime. Social scientists for decades have long established that the death penalty is inherently racist. African-American defendants found guilty of the identical crime as a white defendant are statistically at least four times more likely to be given the death penalty. Black people currently comprise more than 40 percent of death row inmates. Regional differences make it 160 times more likely that a person convicted of a capital offense in the South will be executed than one in the Northeast. And of course, the capital justice system can never guarantee that innocent people won't be executed by the state. For these and other reasons, the U.S. Supreme Court, in the 1972 case of *Furman v. Georgia*, outlawed capital punishment.

Since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976, there had been mounting legal evidence that capital punishment cannot be implemented in a fair and impartial manner. The state of Illinois, for example, currently has 161 people on death row. Since 1977, 12 people in Illinois have been executed, but 13 on death row were proven to have been wrongly convicted. Several death row prisoners in Illinois were innocent and that others had actually committed the crimes.

The Chicago Tribune recently examined the almost 300 cases in Illinois during the past 23 years, in which the death penalty was rendered. About one half of the 260 cases that were appealed were ultimately reversed in favor of new trials or sentencing hearings. In at least thirty cases, the *Chicago Tribune* uncovered that defendants in capital cases had been represented by attorneys who were disbarred or suspended from legal practice.

This overwhelming evidence that innocent people were being executed in the state prompted Illinois Governor George Ryan, a Republican, to order a halt on the use of the death penalty. Ryan is a long-time supporter of capital punishment. But as he explained to the press, "I now favor a moratorium, because I have grave concerns about our state's shameful record of convicting innocent people and putting them on death row."

The opposite extreme on the political spectrum from Ryan is represented by another Republican, Texas Governor George W. Bush. A self-proclaimed

"compassionate conservative," Bush has been downright vicious in his implementation of capital punishment. In six short years, Bush has presided over the execution of more than one hundred people—and according to him, every single one of them was guilty.

A recent New York Times article by Stephen B. Bright, the director of the Southern Center for Human Rights in Atlanta, illustrates how the Texas "assembly-line process" for dispatching people to the "execution chamber" works. Texas has no public defender system, and attorneys who have little or no experience in the defense of capital cases are assigned. They are often unable to retain independent investigators to review the evidence necessary to provide proof of a defendant's innocence. Bright notes, "The Texas courts do not even require that defense counsels remain awake during trials." In several capital cases, defense attorneys actually fell asleep, and the defendants were sentenced to death. One of those convicted, Carl Johnson, was executed in 1995.

The struggle to halt the execution of America's most prominent political prisoner, African-American journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal, has helped to spark a grassroots movement to end capital punishment. Legislatures in 16 of the 38 states with death penalty laws have or are reviewing moratoriums on executions. Eight cities have called for a halt to capital punishment, of which the most significant is Philadelphia. Last month, in a 12 to 4 vote, Philadelphia's City Council approved a resolution demanding a two-year moratorium on implementing the death penalty, and called for the creation of a new state commission to study Pennsylvania's capital punishment.

Democratic City Councilwoman Donna Miller, who introduced the resolution, observed that "90 percent of the people on Pennsylvania's death row are people who cannot afford legal counsel, and 90 percent of those from Philadelphia are people of color."

In Congress, Democratic U.S. Senator Russ Feingold has called on the Clinton administration to issue a similar moratorium on all federal executions. Feingold explained that "the problems of inadequate representation, lack of access to DNA testing, police misconduct, racial bias and even simple errors are not unique to Illinois."

These are problems that have plagued the administration of capital punishment around the country since the reinstatement of capital punishment almost a quarter century ago. Several months before Feingold's public challenge, Attorney General Janet Reno authorized a review to determine if racial disparities exist in federal capital punishment cases.

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