

OPINION

We Allow the Execution Madness

There was no mercy for Troy Davis

BY REV. SALA W.J. NOLAN GONZALES

On Sept. 21 at 11:08 p.m., the state of Georgia executed Troy Anthony Davis for murdering police officer Mark Allen MacPhail in 1989.

No physical evidence linked Davis to the case. He was convicted based on testimony from nine witnesses. Seven recanted, saying police coerced them to name Davis as the shooter; one is questionable; the last is suspected as MacPhail's killer.



The original judge and prosecuting attorney questioned the verdict.

This conviction was a wrongful conviction and the world knows it.

I waited through the night at the prison in Jackson, Ga., as Troy was strapped to a gurney, preparing a fourth time for his death. After a four hour delay, the curtains opened to give the MacPhail family, police and Troy's two attorneys a clear view of the man on the table. He raised his head, looked directly at Officer MacPhail's son

and brother and said, "I'm sorry for your loss. I did not personally kill your son, father and brother. I am innocent." He asked those present to continue to search for the truth.

To prison officials, he said, "May God have mercy on your souls. May God bless your souls."

I sat with Troy Davis. I believe in his innocence. I know what he had to offer. He understood this execution was not really about him, but about a system that kills people based on race and poverty, one that supports institutional lynching and genocide.

Troy Davis was a black man. Officer MacPhail was a white man. In Georgia, less than 40 percent of homicide victims are white, but in 87 percent of death penalty cases, the victim was white.

In Georgia, 22 percent of blacks convicted of killing whites are sentenced to death, compared to 8 percent of whites killing whites, 3 per-

cent of whites killing blacks, and 1 percent of blacks killing blacks. In the U.S., blacks make up 13 percent of the population and 42 percent of the people on death row.

Among countries with state-sanctioned executions, the U.S. is fifth, after China, Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. We have exonerated 130 death row inmates since 1973, but we execute even though we know some are innocent. Clemency from death row usually means a life sentence of solitary confinement, also internationally recognized as torture.

Prison is not about fair punishment. It condemns people to destroyed potential, poverty, and separation. The likelihood that a black man will go to prison in his lifetime is more than 32 percent; if the man is

white, 5 percent; Hispanic, 17 percent. Visit any prison and you will see poor people, low-hanging fruit for "get tough on crime" politicians. Any prisoner will tell you life is not fair. You just do what you can to stay sane.

Troy Davis was buried but unjust "justice" will not be buried. There will be more wrongful convictions, more executions, more incarcerations for minor offenses while serious offenders walk free.

We allow this.

There was no mercy for Troy Davis. May God have mercy on our souls.

Rev. Sala W.J. Nolan Gonzales is the minister for Criminal Justice and Human Rights in the United Church of Christ.

Immigration Enforcement was Shocking

Common sense approach was MIA

BY MATIAS RAMOS

Now that the electronic shackle is off, it's really nice not having to listen to the eerie computer-voice commands regularly broadcast from its plastic speaker.

For 10 miserable days, I had to wear a thick rubber and plastic cuff around my ankle for 24/7 GPS monitoring. Every few hours, it would bark out strange comments and commands until I pressed a button to make it stop. Some were clear: "Call your officer." "Recharge the battery." But it also would sometimes declare "Leaving your master inclusion zone."

What does that even mean? Beats me. But then, the fact that I had been shackled by an employee of a private company with a lucrative Department of Homeland Security contract made no sense either.

On the other hand, now I get what it really means to experience abusive government intrusion into your life. And I know firsthand that the Obama administration isn't yet upholding its pledge to exercise some common sense when it comes to deciding whether a specific deportation case is a priority.

Under a new policy instituted in August, immigration agents and judges are supposed to use more discretion when deciding whether to deport someone. They're supposed to weigh such factors as how long the person has lived in the United States, as well as whether he or she has obtained or is pursuing a college degree, or has dependents

who are citizens. This new directive was supposed to free the government to focus on deporting people deemed to be criminals or national security threats.

As a college-educated, 25-year-old undocumented immigrant with

after President Barack Obama announced this new initiative, and a dozen years after I arrived in the United States, I was placed on a supervision-intensive program run by a private company called BI Inc.

Under this program, a BI employee shackled me with a GPS-enabled monitoring device on my ankle that

Washington, D.C. area.

Thanks to a petition drive by friends, colleagues, and supporters, ICE eventually relented and had the shackle removed. But thousands of other undocumented immigrants aren't so lucky.

The experience was shocking and upsetting. But as a veteran immigrant rights activist living in our nation's capital, I was no stranger to the facts about the massive and inhumane deportation system that has defined the Obama years when it comes to immigration policy.

More than a million people have been shipped out over the last three years, putting the Obama administration on track to potentially deport more people in one term than Bush administration did in two.

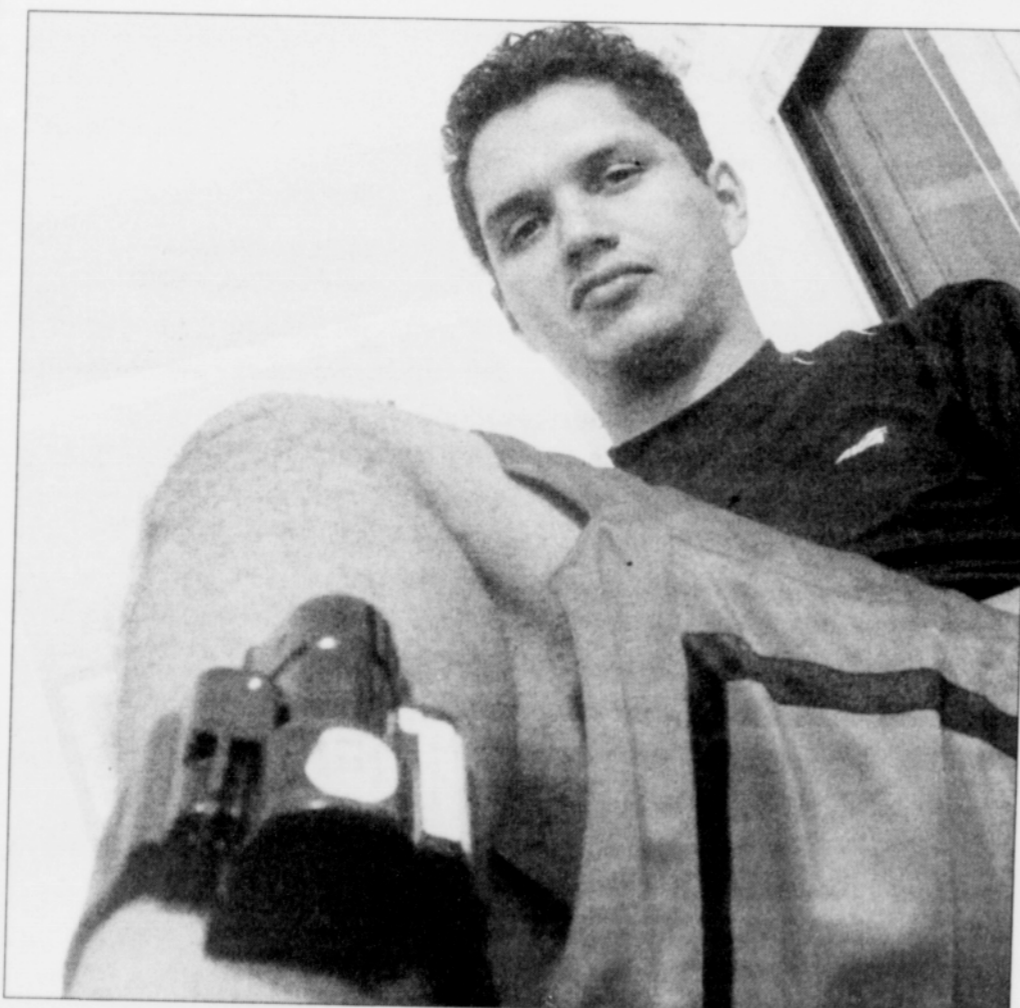
I am an undocumented American. I came to this country with my parents at the age of 13, and after a dozen years of legal limbo, my attachment to this country is undeniable. I learned English as a teenager reading Catcher in the Rye, watching World Wrestling Entertainment, and enjoying Top 40 hits. But to the

government contractor that suddenly became charged with my case, I was apparently just fodder for a profiteering scheme.

When Obama addressed Latino voters at the National Council of La Raza in July, he said he needed a "dance partner" to fix the nation's immigration failures and that he couldn't act alone. The new policy, announced in a letter from Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano to Sen. Dick Durbin, seemed to be playing a more danceable tune.

After my ordeal, I have some advice for Obama. One thing he could do to show that he wants the nation's largest minority group to embrace him is to cancel the Bush-era contracts with unethical and profiteering companies like BI. Then he should tell immigration authorities to actually follow his new, common-sense approach.

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Matias Ramos and the ankle monitoring device he had to wear for 10 days.

an active deportation case and no criminal record, I welcomed this change — until I learned the hard way that Immigration and Customs Enforcement field offices are actually becoming even more ruthless than before.

On Sept. 13, less than a month

I'd have to wear at all times, even in the shower. Another called me a week later, telling me I should buy a plane ticket in two weeks. BI agents were free to make unannounced visits to my home, and my girlfriend and I had no right to refuse them entry. Nor was I allowed to leave the

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