

HOSPITALITY

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910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE, Atlanta, GA 30306-4212 * 404/874-9652

vol. 11, no. 1

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

January 1992

Warren McCleskey 1948-1991



MARLENE KARAS

Warren McCleskey was executed by the State of Georgia at 3:18am on September 25, 1991. He spent thirteen years on death row, convicted of participating in an armed robbery in which Officer Frank Schlatt of the Atlanta Police Department was killed. Minutes before he was electrocuted, Warren spoke these last words.

I would like to say to the Schlatt family I am deeply sorry and repentant for the suffering, hurt and pain that you have endured over the years. I wish there was something I could do or say that would give comfort to your lives and bring peace to it. I pray that you would find it in your heart to forgive me for my participation in the crime that caused the loss of your loved one. I want you to know that I have asked God to forgive me and pray in my heart that you will forgive me. I pray that you will come to know the Lord Jesus Christ and receive his peace that passes all understanding. I know that is the peace that you are looking for; I know that is the peace that you desire; I wish that this execution could give it to you, but I know it won't. It will give you temporary satisfaction. The only peace you will forever have, that is lasting, that will never depart, is found in the light of God with Jesus Christ.

Also, I would like to say to all my attorneys and the defense team, thank you for a job well done. Do not believe in your heart that you did not give your best efforts. You all are the victors. I am deeply grateful for all that you have done to try to save my life. I pray that you will continue on and struggle to try to fight against the death penalty and injustice. I also pray you will remain strong in faith and not allow what is about to occur to weaken your faith in God. Do not allow it to alter your life style in any way.

I want to say to my family, be strong, courageous, and remember the things I shared with you today. Do not hold any bitterness toward anyone; do not have any resentment toward anyone. This is my request for you, that you be forgiving to all. I pray that you will go on with your lives and that you will keep God at the center so that he can direct your paths.

To all the brothers whom I leave behind, I pray that you will remain strong in faith, and I pray also that you will not forsake the faith for what is about to occur to me. Stay strong and focus on God and on God's words; continue to fight and keep your hope alive and know that this is not the end for me. This is only the beginning to all blessed hope for eternal life. To all my brothers, take care. I love you all.

The thirteen years I have been here on death row have been very productive years--years in which God has moved in my life and has inspired me to touch other lives. That is the service that will never be forgotten; that is something that will always live on. I know that many people have been longing and waiting for this moment in which the McCleskey case will end, but I would like to say to you that the McCleskey case will never end. . . .

HOSPITALITY



910 Ponce de Leon

HOSPITALITY is published 11 times a year by The Open Door Community (PCUS), Inc., an Atlanta community of Christians called to ministry with the homeless poor and with prisoners, particularly those on death row. Subscriptions are free. A newspaper request form is included in each issue. Manuscripts and letters are welcomed. Inclusive language editing is standard. For more information about the life and work of The Open Door and about others involved in ministry to Atlanta's homeless, please contact any of the following:

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Layout--Gladys Rustay
Circulation--Phillip Williams, and a multitude of earthly hosts and guests
Subscriptions or change of address--Elizabeth Dede

"The majority of those on death row are poor, powerless, and educationally deprived. . . This reflects the broad inequities within our society, and the inequity with which the ultimate penalty is applied. This alone is sufficient reason for opposing (the death penalty) as immoral and unjust."

—American Baptist Churches
in the U.S.A.

Warren McCleskey's Last Will and Testament

by George Wirth

Editor's note: George Wirth, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, visited and befriended Warren McCleskey for a year before his execution. At Warren's funeral George shared these words that Warren spoke on the afternoon before his death.

Tuesday, September 24, 1991, 3:45pm
Jackson State Prison, Georgia

"I want to thank you and Paul Cadenhead and Bob Reinhardt and Jack Boger and Bob Stroup and Bill Kinnaid and Murphy and Ed and my family and everybody else for all that you did. . . and I want you to tell them that this wasn't something we lost but rather a great victory, because the light still shines in the darkness and we have prevailed over the powers of evil. . . please tell everyone that we don't have to be bitter; we don't need to seek revenge--we just need to do what Jesus did and remember those words He said from the cross, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do'. . . all we have to do now is put ourselves in God's hands and know that He is 'working all things together for good,' and that 'nothing can ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord'. . . I also believe that just as there has been a reason for my living, there will now be a purpose in my dying--this is not the end, but a new beginning for me and hopefully for all of you. . . it could be that my execution will help to change things for other people in the future, and I trust in God's will to help that happen. . . between now and then, may God comfort you and continue to work through all of you. . . I love you. . . the victory is ours!"

As the guards came to take Warren away, the Rev. Ed Loring looked at him and shouted out what all of us were thinking--"Hey! You look like Jesus! Praise God!"

Warren smiled, waved at us, then turned around and, in the company of the guards, he led the way as he walked toward eternity. □



Warren McCleskey:

A Faith Refined

by Murphy Davis



The ups and downs of Warren McCleskey's journey through the courts was enough to make mincemeat of anybody's mind and spirit. Sometimes I think that losing one's mind is a most reasonable response to life on death row and to the vagaries of court decisions.

In many ways at the beginning, Warren was like most others. He arrived on death row dazed, confused, hurt, and overwhelmed with pain and remorse. He had a tentative hope for his legal appeals and began the long process of waiting day after day, month after month, year after year, for relief.

Relief, he learned, comes and goes. When a federal judge overturned his death sentence, Warren was exhilarated. When a higher court reinstated the sentence, Warren was stunned. Again a federal judge overturned his case. Again it was reinstated. He saw relief no more. Sure, there was hope along the way, but the machinery of death was grinding slowly and steadily toward its goal.

I knew Warren over the period of those years and I am a grateful witness to the fact that he was a stronger and more vibrant human being all the way toward his death than he had been earlier. On the day before his death he literally glowed with inner peace as he comforted the many friends and family members grieving around him.

Warren had learned, he explained to me on several occasions, that he had been too vulnerable to the ups and downs, the twists

and turns, of court decisions. Whether or not he had relief was determining whether or not he could be a happy person. He decided that he simply could not let the courts have that much power in his life. He could only be pushed around if he was off center.

Warren had accepted the fact that his life--however damaged it had become--was a gift from God. God had given it and only God could really take it away. He had deeply wanted to be forgiven for the pain and suffering he had caused others, and he came to understand that God had forgiven him. Those two realities--God's gift of life and the love and forgiveness he came to know--became the center for him. He began through prayer and daily discipline to focus. Gradually the courts, the media, the prison officials, the threats, and even death itself lost power in Warren's life. He moved toward a peace and serenity I have never seen in another human being.

Perhaps this sounds like a description of a person who has lost touch with reality. But Warren stayed in touch. He was engaged, funny and thoughtful to his friends and family. He followed his case closely and clearly wanted to live. Warren lost his fear. Death lost its sting.

On Tuesday, September 24, we sat in a small visiting room in the prison. We knew word would come soon from the Board of Pardons and Parole: Warren would live or Warren would die. We were all tense; we had been waiting so long. Everything that could have been done had been done. Countless numbers of people from all walks of life had come forward as advocates for Warren. New lawyers joined those who had fought for him over the years and argued passionately on behalf of Warren. Nobody could think of anything that could have been done that wasn't done. Now we waited and talked.

An agonized wail cut the air, and I realized that Warren's family had arrived in the same moment with devastating news. Jack Boger stood on the other side of the steel mesh door, his face gray. "They turned us down," he said grimly.

There were many tears in what remained of that day. But Warren was the one who never flinched. He was steady and calm; he was ready and at peace.

The fight went on through the night and didn't end until Warren was dead at 3:18am. But he never changed. As much as he had wanted to live Warren McCleskey was ready--and had been ready for a long time--to die. That is why, I believe, Warren was able to live so fully. Isn't it strange? Warren was one of the most joyful people I've ever known.

I guess this is what Jesus meant about abundant life. It comes **after** death loses its sting. And it goes on after the machinery of death spends all the power it has.

Thank you, Warren. You will live in my heart forever as one of the best teachers I will ever know. □

Warren and the Warden

by Ed Loring

Warren McCleskey had coffee-colored skin, short black hair and blue-black eyes like ink. He wore no glasses and his teeth were white and strong. His body bulged with muscles. He was 5 feet 10 inches tall. Warren listened and he spoke. His soul life did not begin until he was in prison. Warren told me that his prison experience was great and wonderful, the best life he ever knew. In that hell-hole he found love and friendship, purpose, and a time to reflect upon his life. Most important, Mac, as his prison family called him, was led by the life and witness of Billy Neal Moore to Jesus the executed Christ.

September 24, 1991

We sit in this place of grief, this hole in the heart of hell. We wait for a word: the written or verbal symbol of the forces of modern America on the soul of one Black man. "Yes" or "No."

"They can't kill life," Warren sings in antiphonal response to the steel clamor of iron bars banging behind paid prison personnel who slide toward the parking lot but who can never find freedom for the price paid to be paid for caging men and women is the human freedom given to be human but renounced when freedom is spent caging others. . . .

So even in hot little pick-ups with confederate flags adorning the grille, running at 70 mph on Highway 36, the Warden and the guards know they are trapped in trapping others, and though Warren sits in the electric chair, they are the dead men. Deader than Warren will ever be for he seeks forgiveness and they have never done a thing to need forgiveness for they only follow orders. Sad orders, death orders, lonely tearless orders: who next to burn? who yet to chain? They feel no sin only orders down from the Atlanta office.

So homeward they fly in just a bit too much of a hurry to see Warren seek forgiveness on TV. The Warden and the guards dream of a moment in their own lives that could bring them to a cry for forgiveness, but there is no forgiveness for locking up 2000 poor men or killing death row prisoners, for in the USA that is a right, not a wrong.

So who will cry and stand vigil against the Demon of death when the Warden's soul is clasped between his iron jaws on some evening when it refuses to rain and no songbirds sing? Even the prison parking lot will be empty of everything but cars and dirty pick-up trucks with only the faint odor of Jeb Stuart in the cabs.



*"I tell you the truth
whatever you did
for one of the
least of these
you did for me" Matt 25:40*

And coffee-colored Warren is insightful for those who are able to see within: The Warden and his chair cannot kill life; only 165 pounds of beautiful Black flesh. (Back in Atlanta at 7:00pm the rain rushes groundward. Horace Tribble who 15 years ago lost 35 pounds of beautiful Black flesh, which was not enough to take him down, climbs with agony the slippery cement steps under the wet shadow of the madman Tom Watson's statue to hold a piece of cloth, signing, "Stop the Death Penalty," to sad folk on their way to the Braves game. "Play Ball!!")

It is finished.

The Warden, finally free to leave the prison at 4:00am, walks past his office and gets into his immaculately washed American made car with no little dixie flags attached and heads to his house. His home, his home? Well, over the years his home has shifted place from where his wife and children sleep to the prison. There he feels like a man, in control, with guards politely bowing and prisoners. . . well, you know. How he loves to walk the corridors and hear the clank of bloodless steel rattle behind him. Just once in a twist of wind he wished he could sin and seek forgiveness but then how could he be Warden and Master of a prison if he tasted the life for which Warren McCleskey now sings in trees along the banks of the Towaliga River?

Remembering Warren

by William Neal Moore

Editor's note: Billy Moore spent sixteen years on death row and was a close friend of Warren McCleskey. In 1990 Billy was given a life sentence, and in November 1991, he was released from prison.

It was in the month of November 1981, when I first met Warren McCleskey at Jackson on death row. I realized that this was someone special because one of the officers called me to the small window and said, "Moore, take care of him and look out for him, okay?" In all my time on the row no officer had ever expressed any outward concern for another inmate.

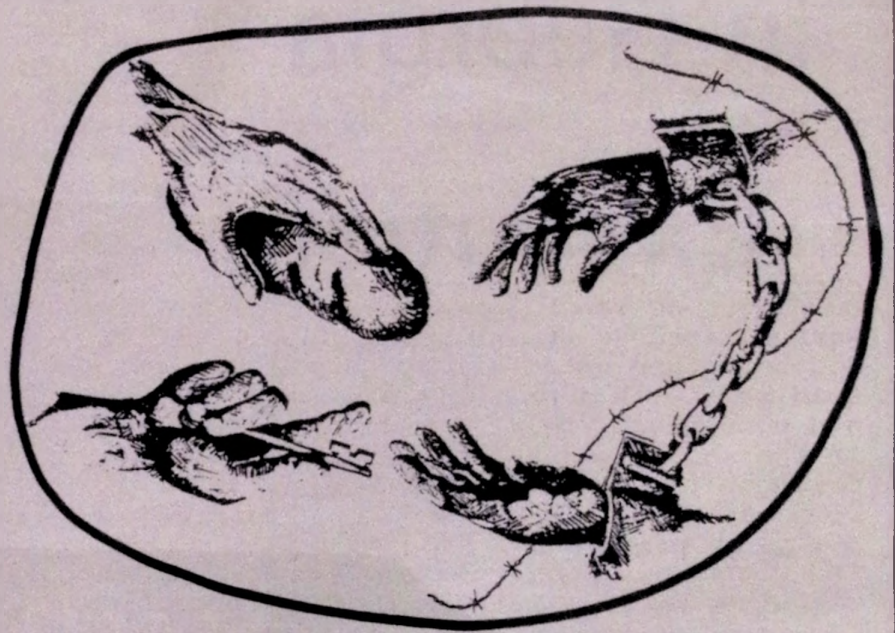
I went down to Warren's cell, asked him if he needed anything, and introduced myself. While Warren was making his bed, he asked me how long I had been on death row. When I told him that I had been on the row for seven years, he mentioned that he thought it was amazing that a person could be on the row for so long and not appear to be in any way insane.

Warren asked me, "How in the world do you handle being here knowing that the State wants to kill you?" I answered, "It all comes from the peace of Christ being in my life, and that is the only difference." Warren told me that he was not Christian and that he was unsure of everything with the sentence that he had.

Warren had a lot of questions about the Bible. On the third day when I went to his cell he told me that he was planning to give his life to the Lord because he realized that he had really messed it up and didn't know what else to do. Warren expressed his perceptions of me as one that didn't have a worry in the world and also expressed his desire to have that sort of peace.

It was after a few months that Warren really started to catch on fire. He faithfully attended our Bible study group and contributed from what he was learning. It always impressed me how he was able to see some truths from his past experiences where he had taken wrong turns in life and how such directions led the whole group to their present situation: doing time on death row.

The greatest desire of Warren's heart was to be able to help others see that a life of crime only pays out despair and heartache for everyone involved. With that overwhelming burden, he would use all the patience that God had given him to reach the lives of the younger men who came to the row and really didn't understand the seriousness of their sentence. They thought that the death sentence was some sort of game the state was playing with them and that, in the morning, all of this would be over. Warren could talk to anyone, sharing Christ with



them in the face of all sorts of foolishness that was a part of the life on the row.

Through another inmate, Warren and I were told of an inmate poor fund that was set up at Reidsville State Prison in the old days. This fund provided the basic necessities for inmates who didn't have any funds. In starting such a group ourselves we provided for these inmates by pooling our resources and buying the things needed, laying them in store for those who had need of them. It wasn't any problem to determine who didn't have anything because in the cellblocks you could easily see the possessions of another. All of the items were kept in Warren's cell because he had the best ability to reason with the ones who were abusing the program. Warren would always say that the Lord did bless us and allow us to be in the position to be a blessing to others even in the midst of all the terrible circumstances that we lived in daily.

On September 24, 1991, at around 5:00pm, I was called to the prison chapel. Chaplain Thomas told me that he was setting up a call to death row so that I could talk to Warren. While the chaplain dialed the number, we talked about how I had spent three days in the deathwatch cell, where you can see the electric chair. Warren came on the line after a few minutes and said, "Hello, is this William Moore?" Blessed and overjoyed to hear my friend's voice, I responded, "How are you my brother and friend?"

We talked for 30 minutes and it was a wonderful gift. I am thankful for the encouragement that Warren provided for me during that phone call. I thought it rather funny: here I was, expecting and desiring to support my brother hours before his execution, and as it ended up, he provided the blessings; he provided the encouragement.

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Rights Die Too In Georgia Execution

by Leigh Dingerson

Editor's note: Leigh Dingerson is executive director of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. We are grateful for her permission to reprint this article, which appeared previously in the October 30 issue of The Guardian.

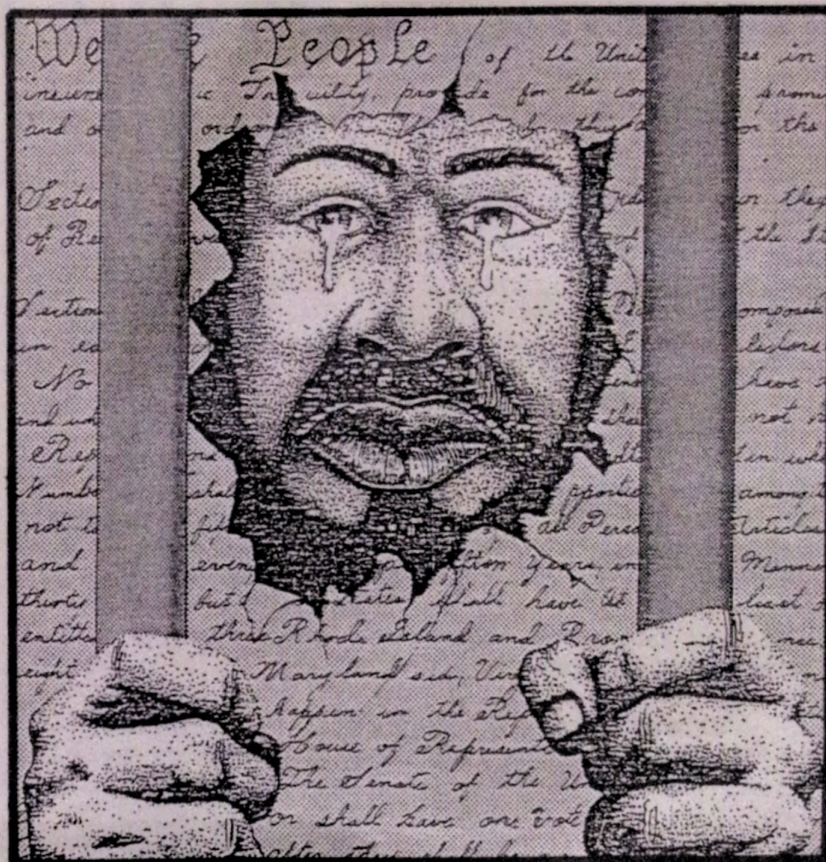
The killing of Warren McCleskey in September did not set off a night of protest in Atlanta. There were no mass marches, no angry denunciations of the organized mob that killed him.

McCleskey was put to death by the state of Georgia at 3:18am on September 25. One hundred and fifty-four others have shared his fate, have been strapped down and killed by the government in the last two decades. But his execution was different. Not because of his background or anything extraordinary about him, but because of what it says about us.

A 44-year-old African American factory worker, McCleskey was convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of a white police officer during the 1978 robbery of an Atlanta furniture store. McCleskey and three accomplices were arrested and confessed to participating in the robbery. But all denied shooting Officer Frank Schlatt, and no evidence pointed conclusively to any of the four men. While his accomplices were convicted of the robbery and sent to prison, McCleskey was convicted of murder and sentenced to death.

The Supreme Court considered aspects of McCleskey's case twice. Each time, McCleskey challenged his death sentence based on long-established constitutional rights. Each time, his challenge led to the overturning, not of his sentence, but of those rights. The court's decisions—one in 1987 and one earlier this year—signaled the beginning and then the apex of the dismantling of the Bill of Rights for the purpose of getting prisoners strapped down and snuffed out.

In his first appeal, McCleskey challenged the way Georgia hands out death sentences. Through an exhaustive analysis of



the use of the death penalty in that state, McCleskey demonstrated that of all the factors that might lead a jury to recommend a death sentence, the single most significant in the pattern of death sentencing was not the brutality of the crime or the prior record of the murderer or any of over 200 other factors. It was the color of the victim's skin.

Racism in criminal justice is nothing new. Not too long ago laws specified different sentences depending on the race of the crime victim. Men accused of raping white women have historically faced much harsher treatment than those charged with raping Black women, and the same racial double standard has applied to other crimes.

In 1972, the Supreme Court overturned the death penalty on the basis of evidence—far less extensive than McCleskey's—that the imposition of the death penalty was influenced by race. But this is a different time and a different court.

The justices' response to McCleskey's evidence was stunning. Accepting the evidence of discrimination as valid, the Court ruled 5 to 4 that racism is an unfortunate but acceptable factor in death penalty cases. "Apparent disparities in sentencing are an inevitable part of our criminal justice system," wrote Justice Lewis Powell for the majority.

Turning discrimination law on its head, the court ruled that unlike plaintiffs claiming job or housing discrimination, prisoners facing execution must show intentional bias on the part of specific players in the process. McCleskey found the smoking gun but failed to produce the hand that held it.

Many saw the 1987 decision as a sign that broader civil rights laws might be in danger. And they were right. At every turn, the Justice Department and the Supreme Court have signaled their frustration with equal opportunity, with affirmative action, with remedying centuries of racism. And when it comes to stripping away basic rights, what better place to start than among the condemned--those least likely to garner sympathy as the ax falls?

Stunned, angry and facing the imminent execution of their client, McCleskey's attorneys went back to the case files, poring over prosecution documents turned over to them for the first time.

As they reviewed the new materials, they learned that the prosecution had made a deal with one of the trial witnesses, Offie Evans. In jail facing escape charges, Evans had testified at McCleskey's trial that McCleskey had confessed to shooting Schlatt during the robbery.

At the trial, the prosecutor and Evans denied any deal had been cut to secure Evans' testimony. Ten years later, the prosecutor's notes revealed that Evans had intentionally been placed in the cell next to McCleskey's and coached on getting a confession from him in return for lenient treatment on his own case. Furthermore, it was clear that the arrangement between the prosecutor and Evans had been intentionally hidden from the defense team.

Once again, McCleskey took his case to the Supreme Court. Once again, the court chose to overturn, rather than uphold the law.

The court ruled 6-3 that McCleskey should have raised the claim earlier and was now barred from offering new evidence. McCleskey's lawyers should have known about the deal, Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote for the majority, despite denials from both the prosecutor and Evans and the failure to provide the defense with any evidence of the arrangement until 1987. Even if it was misleading, said the court, Evans' testimony was "harmless."

McCleskey's legal team, frantically trying to forestall an execution, met with two of the jurors in McCleskey's trial. Had they questioned the credibility of Evans' testimony? Had the prosecutor's misconduct in concealing Evans' deal affected the jury's sentencing of McCleskey?

The jurors' responses were unequivocal. Yes, they had spent considerable time debating Evans' believability. His was the only testimony that fingered McCleskey as the shooter.

Jurors were reluctant to sentence McCleskey to death, the two said, unless they were sure he had actually killed Schlatt. However, assured by Evans and by the prosecution that Evans had nothing to gain by testifying, and without any signal that the defense team believed him to be an informant, the jurors believed his account. If the jury had known the whole story, they would not have brought in the death penalty, the two jurors said.

The prosecutor's misconduct was far from harmless--it was fatal. But the Supreme Court was uninterested.

At a hearing before the Georgia Board of Pardons and Parole just 24 hours before the execution, the board heard the two jurors, who asked that the death sentence be set aside. "I believe if you take a life, death is the right punishment," juror Robert Burnette told the *New York Times* after the hearing. "But," the 49-year-old postal worker continued, "when you take that person's life you have to be sure beyond a shadow of a doubt that person committed the crime, and I don't feel that way about this case."



The board also heard evidence that one of McCleskey's co-defendants was the likely killer--testimony that had been brushed aside during the trial on the strength of the jailhouse informant's story. But despite the jurors' pleas, the board turned down the clemency request.

At the scheduled execution hour, 7:00pm, September 24, McCleskey's case was still in a flurry of last-minute appeals at various courts. Over the next several hours, McCleskey received seven stays of execution before finally being put to death in the darkness of any early Georgia morning.

People in this country don't like to stick up for murderers. But no one is suggesting that we should. The Supreme Court's stunning decisions in McCleskey's cases go way beyond the narrow parameters of death penalty jurisprudence. They are about the court's readiness to scrap any and all laws that might get in the way of the electric current surging toward prisoners on death row. They are about reversing long-fought victories that make Black lives as precious as white lives, that require prosecutors to follow some rules when seeking to take the life of a convicted criminal.

The court's fetish for the death penalty is disturbing and ghastly enough. That their fetish is also dismantling other aspects of the law is appalling.

The Supreme Court's decisions in McCleskey have not gone completely unanswered. In 1987, civil rights organizations drafted the Racial Justice Act, which would have specifically allowed death row prisoners to challenge their sentences based on evidence of a statistical pattern of discrimination. Introduced in Congress the

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A Time To Weep

by Ed Weir

The state of Georgia planned to execute Warren McCleskey on Tuesday, September 24, at 7:00pm. On Monday morning we at New Hope House began to prepare for providing hospitality over the next few days. Lora and Mary Ruth bought and prepared food, Bill spent time trimming up the yard, and I rumbled around from one thing to another without much reason. I really wanted to skip what was coming. I tried to steel myself. Somehow I had to live this week.

Monday afternoon and into the early morning hours of Wednesday people called to ask about Warren or about us and to let us know they cared for us. Sometimes Mary Ruth answered these calls and before she was finished, she had out her handkerchief, wiping tears away. I envied her. I wanted to cry, but I didn't.

Tuesday afternoon Becky White and her month old son Elijah came to the house. They had just spent their last hours with Warren. Becky shared through her tears how Warren continued to live the life of the "peace that passes all understanding," even the understanding that he would soon be executed. I felt calmed by Becky's tears, but they were not mine.

Murphy Davis and Ed Loring from the Open Door Community were next to come to the house. They had seen Warren McCleskey for what they knew was their last time. Ed and Murphy visited Warren on death row for nearly ten years. The three of them were family. Murphy held baby Elijah close, and then she raised him in the air and said, "What a gift of hope!" And Ed sat with Elijah on his lap and told Elijah how fortunate he was to have such a name and that God would bring Elijah food in the beak of a bird. And baby Elijah laughed. Ed told Elijah that because baby Elijah spoke God's truth, Elijah would suffer much persecution. And baby Elijah cried.

Time came for Ed and Murphy to leave for Atlanta to be part of a vigil at the state capitol. I could see, maybe feel, the lines on Murphy's face reflecting grief and pain and anger. I wanted to scream, but it was not my time.

On Tuesday night the lawyers managed to gain some time. But at 3:30am Wednesday, a state official came and told us, "The condemned was pronounced dead at 3:18." I regret I didn't shout my "who are the condemned?" Reverend Fred Taylor, a person who has experienced much grief and sorrow as an African American involved in the Civil Rights struggle, walked away from our group. Then he stopped and bent over. His body was shaking as he sobbed very loudly. And I was



very glad that I had spent that night with Fred. But I did not weep.

Some people left, but a few remained. I wanted to see the hearse leave with Warren McCleskey's body. I wanted to tell Warren goodbye. Twenty minutes later the hearse went by under the glare of the TV lights. I said out loud in what had been a very silent vigil, "Goodbye, Warren. You have been a good friend to us all. Now you are free." I said that without crying.

The next morning I got up about 10 and sat at the computer to write about Warren for the next New Hope newsletter. I was alone. Our good friend Howard Johnson from the Deer Spring Bruderhof returned my call to talk about another death row prisoner. Howard asked about Warren, and I talked a lot. And then I sensed my time for weeping had come. Howard also understood the moment, and he shortly released me from the phone. Thank you, Howard Johnson.

And I cried. I lay down on the floor and I covered my head and I sobbed. I beat the floor and I pulled my hair and I wept.

This was an important event for me. I went through almost the exact same process two and a half years ago when my close friend Henry Willis was executed. I now know that this is God's way of carving Henry and Warren into my heart. Over the past two years I have talked to groups and always have included Henry in that talk. And always I either have to stop to shed a tear or cry or be silent. Now that will happen when I talk about Warren.

I rejoice that God is still willing to move around in this scarred soul. □

New Resident Volunteers



Sue and Marc at the computer, where they have spent many hours with volunteers, helping straighten out our mailing list.

Sue and Marc

Susan and Marc Worthington are new resident volunteers who joined us from New Mexico in September. Sue is a registered physical therapist who left institutional rehabilitation settings 7 years ago in favor of community organizing among medical professionals and low income families to gain access to quality medical care and the housing, food, and other necessities upon which good health is based. Prior to her arrival at the Open Door, she was in charge of volunteers at a thrift store serving the low income population of the semi-rural town of Las Vegas, New Mexico.

In Las Vegas, Marc led the formation of an interdenominational religious lending library designed to provide books normally not available locally which would help in making the connection between one's faith and daily life. Marc, like Sue, has been engaged in medical/community organizing for over 10 years, ever since he decided the reasons for his intended career of medical research were better served through professional organizing.

Both Sue and Marc come to the Open Door with the expressed interest in making the most of this first opportunity to live and work in an intentional Christian Community; sharing and learning from our graces, joys, sufferings, strengths and weaknesses, and carrying that experience back into the organizing they will resume next spring.

Thank You!

Many thanks to all of you for the turkeys, hams, desserts, and other foods that helped make the holidays special for our homeless friends.



Eddie giving a charge to those who stayed out during our Festival of Shelters.

Eddie Torres

I was born in Manhattan and raised up in the South Bronx.

I found that in the time I've been here, this is where I needed to be. The Open Door has provided something I've needed in my life--family. It's given me something constructive to do. I've been able to find good in my brokenness and healing for my addiction.

Thanks!

We are very thankful for all of you who made the celebration of our Ten Years on Ponce a joyous time!

A Note On Donations

We appreciate all your donations that keep us going. Please help us by bringing them only to our front door. We suggest you park in our side driveway, lock your car and come ring our doorbell. We will get folks inside to help you bring your gifts in.

Donations left at our back door usually do not get to us. Folks in our front yard may offer to help, but this causes problems for us, so we ask you to ring the bell and let us help instead.

Many thanks!

It's Easy To Believe In The Death Penalty-- All You Have To Do Is Ignore The Facts

Fact #1

Murder rates are lower in states that have abolished the death penalty.

The FBI Uniform Crime Reports Division publication, "Crime in the U.S." shows that states which have abolished the death penalty averaged 4.9 murders per 100,000, while states still using the death penalty averaged 7.4 murders.

Fact #2

Innocent people are executed.

A recent national study of murder convictions since 1900 found that in 326 cases, homicide was attributed to the wrong person. Of these innocent people, 23 were executed.

Fact #3

Many family members of murder victims don't want the death penalty.

Victim's families often express, publicly or privately, their opposition to the death penalty. One victim's father said, "It won't change what happened to my son. Two wrongs do not make a right." The death penalty prolongs the agony of the victim's family by requiring them to struggle through years of legal battles over a celebrated crime. And it implies that our duty to the survivors of murder is finished once another life is taken.

Fact #4

The death penalty does not deter crime.

In no state has the number of murders diminished after adoption of the death penalty. Comparing states with similar population densities, murder rates in states that have the death penalty are no different than in those that do not. Executions may even encourage violence by signaling that it's okay to kill. A 1980 study by Northeastern University of 700 executions in New York found that on average, the brutalizing effect of an execution resulted in two additional murders. Statistics show that police and prison guards are no safer in states with the death penalty than in those without.

Fact #5

The death penalty is arbitrary and discriminatory.

Only one out of 100 convicted murderers is sentenced to death. Half of all death sentences are overturned on appeal. Only rarely can the crimes of those who are killed be distinguished from those who are spared. Instead those convicted of the death penalty tend to be poor, people of color, and have victims who are white. Most of those on death row were unable to afford private legal counsel. Since 1972, 85% of executed prisoners were convicted of killing white persons. Yet in that same period, almost half of all homicide victims were black. And blacks who kill whites are up to 11 times more likely to be given the death penalty than blacks who kill blacks. The last time in the U.S. a white person was executed for killing a black was in 1944.

Fact #6

Every western democracy except the United States has abolished the death penalty.

The only other industrialized nations that still have the death penalty are South Africa and the Soviet Union. Since abolishing the death penalty in 1976, Canada has witnessed a lower murder rate.

Fact #7

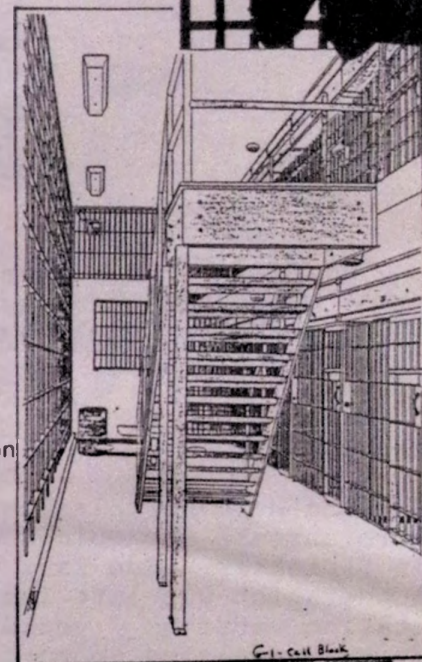
Public opinion favors life imprisonment without parole to the death penalty.

Poll after poll reveals that the vast majority of respondents prefer life imprisonment without parole and restitution to the victim's family over the death penalty. Endorsing the death penalty is a popular way for politicians to appear "tough on crime," however, the death penalty has been proven worthless as a solution to the problem of violent crime. States whose resources and energies are not drained by the use of capital punishment have more of those resources available to develop effective methods of reducing violent crime.

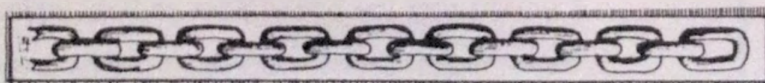
Fact #8

The death penalty is more expensive than life imprisonment without parole.

Because of the irrevocable nature of the sentence, trials for capital punishment cases take much longer and are more costly than noncapital murder proceedings. Jury selection takes days or weeks; sentencing must--by law--occur in a complicated second trial; appeals are more numerous and more successful. The time between initial proceedings and execution often runs 10 years or more. Some appellate courts, like California, spend half their time on capital cases. Court costs for Texas' 26 executions between 1980 and 1986 totaled \$183 million--an average of \$7 million each. In Massachusetts, the average automatic life imprisonment without parole sentence costs about \$900,000 per conviction. Prisoners on death row simply wait. Those with sentences of life imprisonment work; in fact, if paid a wage commensurate to their work, many would be self supporting.



**KILL
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(RIGHTS continued from page 4)

following term, the measure continued to gain support, passing the House of Representatives in 1990. But this year the House yielded to veto threats from the president and removed the fairness provisions from the anti-crime bill passed on October 22.

A series of investigations in death penalty states has confirmed and illustrated the racism McCleskey documented in 1987. These studies point to the deep-seated influence of race in the criminal justice system. It is pernicious at all levels. It is deadly when the end of the line is execution.

But given the current atmosphere of toleration for racism and the emotional pitch of the debate on crime and criminals, claims of injustice are unlikely to advance very far.

Instead, the impetus for change must come from the streets. Citizens should demand that lawmakers stop manipulating people's fear of crime and develop programs to prevent it. Politicians must desist from seeking to divide voters into a safe, white "us" and a dangerous, darker "them."

As the 1992 election season picks up speed, we can expect to see candidates selling the death penalty like snake oil in races for offices from local district attorney to the presidency. We must reject the rhetoric and demand useful debate. When the public stops buying, the salespeople will stop selling.

"It is tempting to pretend that minorities on death row share a fate in no way connected to our own, that our treatment of them sounds no echoes beyond the chambers in which they die," now-retired Supreme Court Justice William Brennan wrote in his dissent from the first McCleskey decision. "Such an illusion is ultimately corrosive, for the reverberations of injustice are not so easily confined. . . . The way in which we choose those who will die reveals the depth of moral commitment among the living." □

Excerpt of a letter from a friend in prison:

. . . This is where I'm going to die, and I'm hoping that doesn't take too long because living in fear is just as bad as death itself. I know you can't really understand what I'm saying because you've never lived life in prison. You can't know what day to day life is like in this place. It is a sad and terrible thing. I can't even say that I'm a man anymore because I've forgotten how a man feels or what his needs are. Instead I feel more or less like a zombie. I don't blame anyone for what has happened in my life. I just wish that someone knew that a man needs a chance to live again after being dead for so long.

Name Withheld

(REMEMBERING continued from page 5)

Warren shared many things, all of which I wish to remember for as long as I live. He said, "Billy, I want you to know that the Lord has given me all the grace that is needed in this situation, and far beyond my own expectation. I never would have dreamed that I could be here and not be afraid, falling apart and scared." Warren was far from being insensitive to anyone's needs. God had given him an abundance of grace in order that he would be able to reach out to others that came to him, especially to the members of his family as they went through this ordeal, and to the many friends that came to visit with him. Warren expressed his love for me and his appreciation for all that we, as brothers in the Lord, shared over the years.

Our friend and attorney, Jack Boger, witnessed the actual execution because he wanted someone in the room who Warren knew. Even though Jack and Warren had previously talked about and agreed on this, it was not easy for Jack to do. I thank God that Jack was there. The words of Jack Boger will never fail to provide further comfort, inspiration and encouragement for me. I talked with him a few hours after the execution. He said, "Most people would think that I would be sad because of Warren's execution. But to see how God was moving in his life as they put him through the entire ordeal--being put into the chair, taken out of it, and then put into it again--where most others would have broken down, Warren did not waver in his faith. Warren remained noble, and I am proud to have been his friend."

Warren said to me, "Even though the State is about to kill my physical body that will not stop the truth from going forth. Trying to erase the name of McCleskey will not end the fight against the evil of capital punishment. The fact of the matter is this: because the State has used such illegal methods to put me on death row, and because it took years for it to come to light, the people of the country will and should be outraged about how their 'good and just' system works for all people." We agreed that if there was ever going to be any real fight in this new age of government control it must come from the people. □



WE ARE OPEN. . .

Monday through Saturday, telephones are answered from 9:00am until noon, from 1:30 until 6:00pm, and from 7:00 until 8:30pm. The building is open from 9:00am until 8:30pm those days. (Both phone and door are not answered during our lunch break from noon until 1:30.) Please call in advance if you need to arrange to come at other times. On Sunday we are open from 7:00am until noon. Sunday afternoon our door is answered until 5:00pm.

OUR MINISTRY. . .

SOUP KITCHEN--Wednesday-Saturday, 11am-12 noon

SUNDAY BREAKFAST--Sunday morning at 910, 7:15am

BUTLER ST. CME BREAKFAST--Monday-Friday, 7:15am

SHOWERS & CHANGE OF CLOTHES--Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 2-4pm
(Be sure to call; schedule varies)

USE OF PHONE--Monday-Saturday, 9am-noon, 1:30pm-5pm

SHELTER REQUESTS--Wednesday-Friday, 9am-noon

BIBLE STUDY--Alternate Tuesdays, 7:30-9pm.

WEEKEND RETREATS--Four times each year (for our household and volunteers/supporters),
May 1-3.

Our Hospitality Ministries include: visitation and letter-writing to prisoners, anti-death penalty advocacy, advocacy for the homeless, medical services, and daily worship and weekly Eucharist.



NEEDS

JEANS

Men's Work Shirts

Men's Underwear

Quick Grits

Cheese

Mayonnaise

Multi-Vitamins

MARTA Tokens

Men's Large Shoes (12-14)

Coffee

Non-Aerosol Deodorant

CARPET

LAMPS

SWEATERS

WINTER COATS

75 Cup Coffee Maker

TRUMPET

From 11am til 1:30pm, Monday through Saturday, our attention is focused on serving the soup kitchen and household lunch. As much as we appreciate your coming, this is a difficult time for us to receive donations. When you can come before 11:00 or after 1:30, it would be helpful.

Open Door Community Worship

*We gather for worship and Eucharist at
5:00pm on Sunday evenings
followed by supper together.*

Join us!

- | | |
|------------|---|
| January 5 | Worship at 910
5:00pm Eucharist
5:30pm Music Night |
| January 12 | Worship at Antioch Baptist
Church North
540 Kennedy St., NW
Interfaith Service
3:30pm |
| January 19 | Worship at 910
Robert & Carolyn Abrams, preaching |
| January 26 | Worship at 910
Mary Ruth Weir, preaching |

Four times each year the Community has a weekend retreat outside the city. This replaces our evening worship at 910 Ponce de Leon Ave.



Mailing List Changes

We are updating our Hospitality mailing list, and in the process, we may have lost part of your name or address. Please check your label and let us know if we need to make changes. Send changes to:

Hospitality
E. Dede
910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE
Atlanta, GA 30306