

SPEAKING OUT

Break the binary political divide on death

Your Turn

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Guest columnist

Recent news about the possible use of the death penalty for the man convicted in the racially motivated Tops supermarket massacre in Buffalo, Peyton Gendron, was disconcerting.

Because Gendron's charge violates a federal hate crime, he can be executed under a federal statute. During President Trump's four years in office, an exorbitant 13 federal executions took place.

And despite President Biden's appointment of an attorney general who is not setting execution dates, his administration has not addressed the 43 inmates currently on death row or impeded capital punishment cases already decided during his term.

Nearly 700 persons had been executed in New York state after the 1890 advent of the electric chair, which at the time was considered more humane than previous execution methods. In 1995, Gov. Pataki reissued capital punishment in New York after a 32-year hiatus. Groups like the American Civil Liberties Union Feminists for Life of New York and the New York Catholic Conference fought in tandem to make capital punishment illegal under the state Constitution.

Both the left and the right often accept death as the answer to our most serious problems. Conservatives often defend the death penalty just as vehemently as liberals cheer lead for abortion. According to Gallup, 55% of the public supports capital punishment for convicted murderers. It also reports a

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similar percentage of the public is pro-choice on aborting human beings before birth.

Both camps legitimately express concern about the disproportionate number of Black persons killed in both abortion and capital punishment. In the United States, while approximately 13% of our population identifies as Black, Pew Research reports that 39% of all women who had abortions in 2020 were Black.

The Death Penalty Information Center reports an astounding 34% of those executed were Black.

Abortion opponents, who know the unborn are innocent, should consider the 195 persons since 1973 who have been wrongly convicted and exonerated from death row. There are courageous voices breaking the binary political divide. Marietta Jaeger of Journey of Hope from Violence to Healing and Shane Claibourne of Red Letter Christians all walk in reconciliation with murdered victims' families to oppose the death penalty. They are among the nearly 200 organizations and 300 lead-



Opera singers Joyce DiDonato, left, and Ryan McKinny perform during the dress rehearsal of "Dead Man Walking" at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. The story focuses on a nun's efforts to save the soul of a man condemned to die.

AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

ers who are part of the Consistent Life Ethic Network taking literally the commandment "Thou shall not kill" without concern for what single-issue advocacy will be offended.

Prominent pro-life evangelicals like the Rev. Pat Mahoney of the Christian Defense Coalition, and Joan Andrews Bell, currently convicted for an anti-abortion sit-in, believe in a radical God that both protects and forgives. Other radical opponents of the selective

choice mentality are actor Martin Sheen, leading death penalty abolitionist Sister Helen Prejean, Quaker peace psychologist Rachel MacNair and civil rights legend Dorothy Cotton all make the case for protecting life whether innocent or guilty, whether born or unborn. No message is more powerful, more effective than this straightforward consistency.

Carol Crossed is president of Feminists Choosing Life of New York.