

Spiritual Essence: Eddie Hartman's Execution

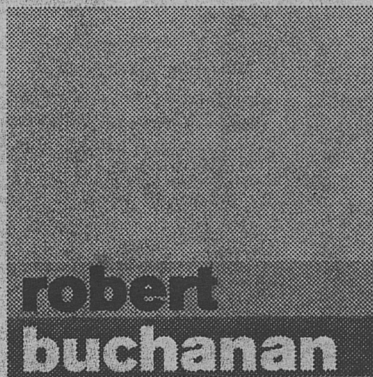
Is the State of North Carolina going to kill Eddie Hartman because he is gay? Some may not think this a fair question since Hartman admitted killing Herman Smith in 1993. However, there is serious question about the sentencing portion of his trial. Hartman is scheduled to be executed October 3, 2003.

The penalty portion of a trial is the step in the legal process where family members and others are given opportunity to plead for the life of a convicted murderer. Often they may present history of family problems and abuse. They may show how the convicted person had problems or events in life that may cause the jury to be sympathetic and allow life in prison rather than death.

Eddie Hartman's trial was no exception. His mother and aunt presented testimony to show a trou-

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bled life that may have helped influence the jury. Prosecuting Attorney David Beard decided to counter this



possible sympathy by injecting a bias into the deliberations.

Every time a family member asked for mercy by explaining that Hartman had a life of abuse, Beard responded by questioning whether Hartman was a homosexual. He played up to anti-gay bias in order to get the death penalty for Eddie Hartman. The judge asked the

jury to disregard Beard's statements, yet the bias was already introduced.

Beard admitted to emphasizing Hartman's homosexuality in order to get the death penalty. He discouraged the jury from considering that Hartman grew up in a violent and sexually abusive environment. He watched his own mother try to commit suicide twice, and he was beaten by three of his mother's six husbands — once so badly with a club that he was hospitalized for a week. Beard believed he was justified in asking the jury to overlook these critical facts because Hartman is gay.

The tactic of introducing bias in order to get the death penalty is nothing new in the U.S.

This case shows bias against sexual minorities, but a Justice Department reports shows that the majority of the

people on death row are racial minorities. Those who are not racial minorities are often sexual minorities. Overwhelmingly the people on death row are male and poor. Economic bias plays a critical role in whether someone will be put to death or simply receives life in prison.

Justice obviously isn't truly blind in America, in spite of all the rhetoric that says otherwise. Often the conservatives who support the death penalty quote Scripture to justify their cause. Yet this look at Scripture is selective.

The ancient prophet Isaiah warned that God would bring justice on political leaders who would not uphold the rights of the poor and those who are weak politically. Luke records a warning to Saint Peter in Acts 19 that he should not allow himself to be prejudiced, but that God makes every minority clean in God's eyes. Somehow, these passages are forgotten in favor of things like, "An eye for an eye."

No doubt Eddie Hartman's crime was horrible and few if any would argue that the state must uphold law and order. However to bias a jury is just as horrible, and to allow a man to be put to death because of prejudice simply compounds one evil upon another. Perhaps the State of North Carolina can find a way to charge Attorney Beard with a hate crime. He is no doubt guilty of hatred toward homosexuals. ▼

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Each Other

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followed them. In Amiens, Vita learned that there had been some sexual exchange between Denys and Violet just before they left England. There was a scene in a restaurant between the lovers while the husbands looked on. Vita was angry and jealous at Violet's betrayal, but it was

also the out she needed. She could never give up her life with Harold and their sons for one with Violet, no matter how much she loved her. In the restaurant she kissed Violet goodbye, and she and Harold got on a train for Paris.

The affair took another couple of years to completely wear out. Between the two of them they had made a wreck of Violet's life: her mother was fed up, neither her father nor her sister would speak to her, and

Denys insisted on divorce. She wrote in her last letter to Vita in 1921: "You have chosen, my darling; you had to choose between me and your family and you have chosen them." ▼

Francesca Susanna is a writer interested in lesbians through history. She lives in Burlington.

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