



OPINION: THE BEAUTIFUL HUMANITY ON DEATH ROW

- ANN COULTER

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The New York Times is weeping over the death penalty again, publishing a glowing review of Nashville reporter Steven Hale's book "Death Row Welcomes You." Obviously, it's an important book, since only 1 million journalists have already written about their touching and personal relationships with men sentenced to death.

Although I am generally a hate-reader -- having, for example, at least skimmed nearly every book about Trump (he's a Russian asset, a threat to democracy, a conman and sociopath) -- I can't in good conscience contribute to an author who waxes on about his "friends" on death row, their "beautiful paintings," and how supporters want to "celebrate" the life of men who just happened to mercilessly torture and kill helpless human beings.

So this will be a review of the Times' review, with supplementary information from Amazon's book sample, plus news reports and court records about the crimes that put Hale's friends on death row.

Hale, the Times writes, gives an insider's account of death row -- a place "shrouded by myths of monsters and abominations."

Myths?

Yes. For example, the Times starts with three paragraphs on Billy Ray Irick, such as the "abuse" he suffered as a child. (If you've ever been spanked, the media will turn you into the star of "Mommy Dearest.") We also get Hale's description of Irick's response to lethal injection: "He jolted ... His face turned almost purple."

Hey, does anybody know what landed Irick on death row? The Times says, "Irick raped and murdered a girl."

A girl.

Her name was Paula Dyer, and she was 7 years old.

While babysitting Dyer, Irick raped her -- anally and vaginally -- then suffocated her, busting blood vessels in her face and eyes. When the police arrived, she was lying on the living room floor with blood pooling between her legs. She was still alive, so we know she suffered.

Lead investigator Don Wiser told The Knoxville News Sentinel: "I saw her body at the hospital that night -- just a beautiful little girl. You had to wonder who could do something like that to a 7-year-old child."

Irick's only explanation: "I lost it."

I stand corrected. It's totally a myth that death row is full of monsters.

Suggestion for the one-millionth and one reporter to write about his pals on death row: If you're going vomit out prose like this, please don't:



"I heard far more about the grace of Jesus Christ growing up than I did the state's duty to repay killing with killing. I suppose this is why, at some point in my teenage years, I came to the belief that an earth as it was in heaven would not include the execution of prisoners if it had any prisoners at all."

But as long as Hale has graced us with that paragraph, we absolutely do not "repay killing with killing." We repay unimaginably hideous murders with 30 years of free room and board, including time for exercising, reading, socializing, making friends, dating, getting married, having children and telling your life story to gullible reporters -- all while your victims are in the ground being eaten by worms -- and then, being delivered a quick and merciful death.

Hale says his book will reveal "the true horror of executions and the full beautiful and painful humanity of the condemned."

How about the painful humanity of Lee Standifer and the horror of her execution? In 1981 -- yes, that's how swift and certain the death penalty is -- this 23-year-old mentally disabled girl was on a date with David Earl Miller, whom she'd met at the library. He got her drunk, took her home and smashed her head with a fireplace poker so hard it fractured her skull and burst one of her eye sockets. He then dragged her outside, undressed her, tied her up and stabbed her over and over again in the neck, chest, stomach and mouth.

A brisk 37 years later, the "beautiful ... humanity" who did that to Standifer finally got the electric chair.

Another piece of beautiful humanity, Donnie Johnson, refused his last meal, asking that instead his supporters "feed the homeless." Gosh, what a great guy.

He'd killed his wife, Connie, by stuffing a 30-gallon garbage bag so far down her throat that only two inches protruded from her mouth. One of the officers who found her body told the Commercial Appeal that if the governor had "made the scene with us that night, he wouldn't grant any clemency."

But Hale is more interested in the last moments of the beautiful humanity. He bemoans Stephen West's "violent death" in the electric chair. Violent death? A quick jolt of electricity is a full body massage compared to what West did to Wanda Romines and her 15-year-old daughter, Sheila.

After telling his pregnant wife he was going fishing, West and a teenage accomplice entered the Romines' home, tied up mother and daughter and, for hours, forced them to watch each other being tortured and, in Sheila's case, raped by both men. Wanda was stabbed more than 40 times. Worse, she had to watch helplessly as her daughter was raped and slowly stabbed to death.

What kind of moral ghoul could read about Wanda and Sheila's murder and decide to write a book honoring West's life?

Hale claims "support for executions, or indifference to them, could not survive a ... night with the men facing them." Tell us the facts of the case first, and most people would pay to watch the executions on Netflix.

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