

# Apathy pervades generation

Last week, in a slightly different reality, the chaos theory butterfly beat its wings one fraction of one indeterminate measurement harder, faster, higher, whatever, and we all wound up collectively choking on an Archduke Ferdinand sandwich — a rousing chorus of entangling alliances. I unleashed a hypothetical shudder and wondered what would have happened on another day, with another killer. Thank God Yitzhak was shot by one of his own. I don't think the U.S. has another World War left in it.

Sister's not a virgin anymore. Sometime in the post-Baby Boom years, the fashionability of patriotism ran out. It became exceedingly difficult to put your faith in the system and still stare in the mirror while holding your vomit. Outside, I heard the people of America coughing up all of their war-mongering karma.

The light blue column of the abacus is not needed to calculate that many of us, despite our attempts, can no longer care; that few of us still perceive the honor in dying for a country — or at least our country.

Moslem hordes could come crashing through our cities and we would probably keep on shopping in the mall, maybe even offer them some Haagen Daaz.

Do not purr my words; I hold nothing but the highest respect for the vets of any war, my grandfathers and the grandfathers before them. I pity them for having been sent into the fires of hell. My twinges of pride come, not at their expense, but from my belief that the current generation is too terrified to allow itself to be sent to the ovens over politicians' words again. The boys crying democracy will eventually find the eager soldiers won't come running anymore.

Our new pacifism is not grounded in intelligence, but scared shitlessness. If the World War II veterans had seen "The Deer Hunter," or read "Jonny Got His Gun," they probably wouldn't have gone abroad.



**Aaron McKain**

*"Maybe we're all pawns in a global Risk game that Michael Eisner and the Pepsi corporation are playing."*

This is a world where battle cries of hegemony, democracy, and containment go unheeded in the wind. Oh, the humanity.

How many of us would still give it all for speculative god and tyrannical country? We'd be Max Klingering out of the 4077th at the speed of light. "Yeah, believe me, Uncle Sam, I'd really like to be disemboweled over some intangible bits of ideology and all, but, ah, I got this really nasty carache, and I just don't think I can napalm little kids this morning."

Ask not what you can do for your country. Ask what your country did for you.

Little skirmishes like the Gulf War are afternoon Triskets that can be handled by the (relative) few and the proud, but what about the next Big One? The inevitable exercise will require thousands of soldiers to run the war machines and millions of grunts to die unspectacularly.

Militarization of industry, unification of people, sacrificing of sons: all ingredients for success that we no longer have access to. I don't think the fight's left in us, with each of us trapped in our claustrophobic little cages surrounded by neon lights flashing race, sexual orienta-

tion, class and gender. We think about our small paychecks, step over the homeless man in the street, avert our gaze from an AIDS baby, witness the shooting gallery that our precious suburbia has become and abruptly stop giving a f—k.

This round, I think even those with the most amoebic of educations will understand the socially Darwinistic ulterior motives lurking behind the rationale that sends the lower class and minorities to fight for the nation that otherwise doesn't care if they live or die.

We no longer possess a common cause to unite us all under the same flag. The American Dream has become an increasingly unwieldy blanket, difficult to gain a firm grip on. So many aspirations lie dormant and unfulfilled, so many needs that cannot be met. The covers are flung back and some of us don't like who we're in bed with; a naked tangle of innocence, an orgy of despair.

We don't want body counts anymore, just Nielsen ratings.

Patheticism at its most glorious. Hollywood created our national agenda. A little box in the living room told us when to make love and when to make death. The Duke died in Vietnam. Our M-16 aim is now directionless because Audie Murphy isn't showing us how wonderful it is to be good little soldiers. Our eyes are opened to the other side of America's favorite pastime.

Maybe we're all pawns in a global Risk game that Michael Eisner and the Pepsi corporation are playing.

Holiday in Cambodia. During 'Nam, the red-blooded, kill-for-your-country machismo was an endangered species; as we enter the 21st century it is becoming virtually extinct. Our presidents used to win our admiration for being war heroes; now they capture our hearts for being draft dodgers.

I can barely sit in a classroom with my fellow man, let alone being sent to die with them.

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## All deserve death with dignity

It's been over two weeks, and the image still hasn't left me.

I turned on the evening news expecting the usual doom and disaster, only to hear Peter Jennings say he had some footage which might be shocking. I still wasn't prepared for what followed.

The 30-second video clip depicted a Chinese execution in which a field of men each received a rifle shot right to the back of their heads. A stadium full of people watched and roared in approval as these men died, publicly humiliated for whatever they had done.

While we could dismiss the footage as foreign and irrelevant to our society, seeing it has forced me to reconsider my views on the death penalty. It wasn't much over a year ago when Willie Otey died in the electric chair. From the words of witnesses, death was not particularly merciful to him either.

I think of mercy killings as those done to put terminally ill patients out of their misery. Dr. Kevorkian assisted with his 26th death Wednesday, ending the life of a 53-year-old California woman suffering from terminal cancer. Although his methods have caused a great deal of controversy, I believe such patients have a right to choose death.

I have no problem with euthanasia. And in the wake of ABC's decision to air the questionable footage, I'm beginning to wonder whether the right to die with dignity should be extended to others, namely those on death row.

No one should have to see others cheering on their death. The manner in which someone lived their life should not affect their death. It's petty to think someone should die a horrible death because they lived a less than desirable life. Shouldn't everyone be allowed to die as comfortably as possible?

By the time prisoners on death row have exhausted all their appeals



**Krista Schwarting**

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and accept the fact that the governor probably won't call with a last-minute pardon or stay of execution, it's time to go quietly. I understand the obvious need for prison personnel and witnesses to be present, but beyond that the prisoner should be allowed to die quietly.

What I mean by quiet is a calm way of dying. Incidents have been reported where electric chairs malfunction and cause death to take much longer than it should.

Truly, this is what is meant by cruel and unusual punishment.

A prisoner also can't go quietly if surrounded by a media circus the way Otey was. With camps on both sides of the death penalty hanging out in the penitentiary parking lot,

the death took a back seat. Such displays certainly didn't help the prisoner, nor were the participants likely to change the mind of anyone else there that night.

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Why did the spectators show up to watch the men die? Certainly they didn't do it out of compassion, as their cheers would attest. Had they really felt any sort of sympathy for their dying countrymen, the reaction would have been silence, not shouts of derision.

I am not necessarily against the death penalty in all circumstances. With the issues of prison costs and overcrowding prevalent around the United States, we have to put emotion aside and realize we cannot keep people in prison forever. Nor can we, in many cases, rehabilitate repeat prisoners.

There are exceptions, and only in rare cases should the state take life and death into its own hands. But in the cases where it appears there are no other options, all I ask is that those people be allowed to die quietly and peacefully. We need to rethink death penalty methods and not allow a lost life to become a tool for demonstration.

Most of all, death should not be a time for vindictiveness.

The 16th and 17th century poet John Donne wrote,

"Death be not proud, though some have called thee, Mighty and dreadful..."

In my slightly less elegant translation, everyone has a right to a dignified death no matter what they've done.

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