There was nothing easy about Tookie's death

STANLEY Tookie Williams didn't die easily. The first catheter inserted to carry the deadly mix of drugs into his veins spurted so much blood it soaked a cotton swab. The medical technician struggled for 11 minutes to insert the second one. It took more than three times the normal time for the drugs to accomplish their task.

He didn't abide by the protocols that attempt to mask a state execution as something other than murder. He refused a last meal, a last statement to prison officials. He stared down the witnesses from the media. His witnesses stood up and spoke to him. After the deed was finally done, they shouted, "The state of California just killed an innocent man."

There was nothing easy about Williams' death. And there shouldn't have been. There shouldn't be anything easy about any execution.

Our society gives the state the right to execute people, but we want to pretend it is done humanely. That it doesn't hurt. Or at least we don't have to see the evidence that it does.

Recent medical studies have found the anesthesia is often inadequately administered. Prisoners are unable to move because of the paralyzing effect of the pancuronium bromide. But without adequate anesthesia, they likely experience the feeling of suffocation and excruciating pain without being able to move. The studies concluded the practice doesn't meet the veterinary standards for putting animals to sleep.

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Any execution is a waste, snuffing out the potential of the human being. In the case of Williams, it was even more so because he was demonstrating his value as a anti-gang advocate. As a co-founder of the Crips who had renounced his past, he was one of the most effective voices against gang life and violence. Who could speak with as much authority to a young man on the verge of being pulled into the life?

Instead, his execution reinforced the injustice of our system, the belief that an African-American man will not get a fair deal. Young African-American men interviewed since Williams' execution have said it intensified their belief their own lives are hopeless.

The tragedy of the execution was magnified by the political motivation of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's refusal of clemency. He may not have said it was calculated to appease conservatives upset with his job performance, but everyone else did. It is particularly shameful because of his upbringing in Austria, where the death penalty is reviled.

He's said he has an American brain and an Austrian brain when it comes to the death penalty. He may not have meant it that way, but it's not a very flattering depiction of his adopted country; American equals politically expedient.

That is just one of the fallacies of the death penalty. It becomes intertwined with and tainted by politics,
just as any human endeavor. The decisions can't be made objectively and fairly because they are being made by human beings with their range of biases, blind spots and personal agendas. Human beings aren't infallible. We make mistakes. The system of justice we've created has a variety of failings that have resulted in the conviction of innocent people.

A recently released book, "Surviving Justice: America's Wrongly Convicted and Exonerated" by David Eggers and Lola Vollen, explores the cases of people who were exonerated after serving time for crimes they didn't commit. Most have been unable to put together a normal life.

The authors point to several procedural flaws contributing to wrongful convictions. For one, eyewitness identification is highly unreliable and the lineup makes it more so. It becomes a comparative process; people look for the person in the group who looks most like the suspect. Serial identification, showing the person one possible suspect at a time, is more reliable.

The inequity of representation is another structural problem particularly damning and immoral in death penalty cases. Many of the death row inmates who have been exonerated had woefully inadequate legal representation. Money or the lack thereof determines whether a person gets the death penalty. How do we stomach that?

Williams didn't die easily. His death exposed the barbarity of state executions.

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