

DEAD MAN WALKING

AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF THE DEATH PENALTY IN THE UNITED STATES



SISTER HELEN PREJEAN

Dead Man Walking

Dead Man Walking (published by Vintage/Random House) is subtitled "An eyewitness account of the death penalty in the United States," and that is precisely what it is. Sister Helen Prejean is a Louisiana nun who more than made her mark in working as a spiritual councillor for death row inmates at Angola State Prison in Louisiana. Her work has taken her into every dark corner of the trip through death row, right up to witnessing the actual executions of inmates she counselled. *Dead Man Walking* is her account of how the death penalty is administered in the United States and it is a forceful argument for its abolition. It is no surprise that a nun would take an outspoken stand against the death penalty, since the Roman Catholic Church is itself opposed to capital punishment. The surprise is her willingness to expose the political motives behind the policies that keep the death penalty on the books in so many American states. She shows no reticence about exposing the lack of moral deliberation taken by politicians and bureaucrats

enforcing the death penalty, and she names names. She never claims to be unbiased, and that is an important point to consider. After all, few people have met death row inmates or witnessed executions, spoken with the families of victims of death row inmates, spoken with the officials involved, or gone through decades of records related to the issue. Prejean has, and has no illusions about the subject she writes about. Perhaps death penalty supporters are even less objective than Prejean, and are blind to the real and continuing injustices propagated by maintaining the death penalty. This is what she sets out to demonstrate, and it takes a mighty strong stomach to keep turning the pages of her exposé. Trying to read *Dead Man Walking* and decide whether to support or oppose the death penalty is like measuring depths or evil. The evidence must be, and is, terribly graphic. She details the horrible crimes involved in death row convictions. She lists bungles attempts at executions in the United States, many from recent years, and there have been many more that we hear about through mainstream news. She also lists executed criminals who were either exonerated after death or about whose guilt a lot of doubt has been cast. Nonetheless, many people will still hold up the likes of Gacy or Bundy or Dahmer, sadistic killers with irrefutable evidence against them and no hope for rehabilitation. Why should the public spend money to maintain these criminals in jail, the argument goes, when they can simply be executed? With dangerous criminals who cannot be rehabilitated, the only thing at stake by keeping them imprisoned is the money spent during their lifetimes to keep them imprisoned. Prejean argues that the price paid by those unjustly executed is a far higher one for society to claim responsibility for. "I realize that I cannot stand by silently as my govern-

ment executes its citizens. Prejean shows that society is refusing to accept such a responsibility by ignoring the reality of administering the death penalty. Prejean spends most of the book relating two particular death row cases which she became involved with. They serve as two sides of a coin, examples of the type of cases that are held up by each side of the debate to bolster its argument. The first case is that of Patrick Sonnier, who was convicted, along with his brother, of brutally killing a teenage couple. It was never absolutely established which of the brothers actually shot the teens to death, yet Patrick was found guilty and sentenced to death, while his brother Eddie was given twenty-five years. In a stunning example of the American justice system at its worst, the brothers were tried separately, but before the trials, Eddie told Prejean, the brothers managed to meet briefly and came up with a plan, but each brother understood something different. Not knowing that a new law made them eligible for the death penalty, Patrick believed they had agreed to each confess so that the authorities wouldn't know who pulled the trigger. Eddie thought they agreed to each point the finger at the other and thus evade the more serious conviction. The plan worked for Eddie, but not for Patrick. A combination of an inexperienced lawyer and Patrick's gruff courtroom behaviour helped bring about his conviction. Eddie's confession after the fact wasn't taken into account, and the execution (by electric chair) went ahead. Prejean juxtaposes this case with that of Robert Lee Willie, who viciously raped and stabbed to death a teenage girl he's offered to drive home. Willie revealed no remorse to Prejean or anyone else, and out of her own desire to come to terms with the death penalty, she met with the victim's family, who supported the execution of Willie. She ultimately concluded that the relatives of the dead girl were motivated by a desire for revenge in their eagerness to have Willie put to death. But at the execution, she sees how even the seeming justice of revenge eludes the victim's tormented father, one of the witnesses. The execution of Willie (by lethal injection) proceeded in a clinical, efficient manner, and Willie went to his death as calmly and remorselessly as he had sat through his trial and his meetings with Prejean. Prejean brings together a staggering amount of data to support her contentions. She marshals out statistics showing that Americans sentenced to death are predominantly poor, black, and male, and that jury decisions are influenced by such factors as whether or not any executions have been carried out recently (in which case they are less

likely to sentence a convict to death). She also focuses on the simple proven fact that the use of the death penalty does not reduce the rate of violent crime, thus eliminating its usefulness as a deterrent: "In the USA the murder rate is no higher in states that do not have the death penalty than in those that do. In Canada, the homicide rate peaked in 1975, the year before the death penalty was abolished, and continued to decline for ten years afterward." It is one thing to argue about the morality of the death penalty from a theoretical perspective. It is quite another to see how it works in practice, as Prejean has done. Executions do nothing to ease the pain of murder victims' families and friends, but they are popular with a large portion of America's voters, who keep the death penalty in use in the so-called "Death Belt" states. *Dead Man Walking* is Prejean's weapon for countering capital punishment, which she shows to be serving as an ineffective weapon of the ignorant and the politically self-serving.

Mimi Cormier

NT



by W. T. Watson

The answer to the last bridge quiz is East/West should be in No Trump and North/South should be in clubs. East/West does not have any eight card fit so No Trump, in most cases, will be the best place to play. North/South have eight clubs between both of them so they should be in a club contract. Because of the order of bidding, North/South will have to play one level higher than East/West is willing to play. For example, if East/West bid 2NT, North/South will have to say 3♣'s or higher to take the contract.

Once a fit has been found, the level of the contract must be decided. In the last Bridge column, it was stated that North/South could not bid because they did not have enough of the high cards. In order to determine whether a partnership has enough of the high cards for a particular bid, they must first use one of the following methods.

1. High card points
2. Quick tricks
3. Losing trick count

The last two methods are more advanced methods and will be discussed

later. The first method is by far the most common method of the three methods listed and will be used here. High card points are as follows

Ace 4 points
King 3 points
Queen 2 points
Jack 1 point

Once a partnership has a fit, points can be counted for distribution if there is a trump.

Void 3 points
Singleton 2 points
Doubleton 1 point

A player has a void if he has no cards in a suit, a singleton or a stiff if he has one card in a suit and a doubleton if he has two cards in a suit.

In no trump, points are not counted for voids, singletons or voids as these are handicaps in no trump but points are counted for long suits. A long suit would be one of five or more cards. One point can be counted for every fifth or higher card in a suit if shortness (void, singleton or doubleton) points are not being counted.

In the hand below, what is the best contract? What happens in Notrump? What happens with spades as trump? What happens with hearts as trump? How many high card points does each hand have? How many high card points and distributional points does each hand have? The answers will be in the next Bridge column but you do not have to wait until then. You can join the UNBDBC (UNB Duplicate Bridge Club) meetings every Thursday evening in the blue lounge of the SUB at 7:00 pm.

North	
♠63	
♥T865	
♦QJ9743	
♣K	
West	East
♠AKQ8	♠JT9
♥K32	♥AQJ7
♦T85	♦AK62
♣975	♣82
South	
♠7542	
♥94	
♦	
♣AQJT643	



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ISSUE

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