

Bill Bennett's Lapse Explained

In a recent article in the Washington Post, it was noted that former U.S. education secretary, Bill Bennett, was under fire for saying: "You could abort every black baby in this country and your crime rate would go down." We think a plausible explanation for this unfortunate remark is that Bennett was really trying to defame the abortion lobby and did not intend to insult black males -- despite their per-capita incarceration rate which is seven times that of whites. (Needless to say these statistics are linked to poverty, racism, discrimination, drugs, education, out of wedlock births and single moms.)

Keep in mind that two professors from the University of Chicago and Yale have argued convincingly that the widely acclaimed reduction in the nation's crime rate is due to 48 million abortions since 1973. Whether you believe this theory or not, it has common sense legs since most abortions are performed on socio-economically disadvantaged single women and teenage girls. Children of all races born under such conditions are more likely to be involved in crime. Meanwhile, the abortion rate per 1000 women is 18 for whites and 54 for blacks.

For some pro-choice advocates, the recent improvement in crime rates is viewed as a silver lining in the cloud that often surrounds abortion. Linking this benefit to a proposal the Ku Klux Klan would endorse, however, certainly tarnishes any suggestion of a silver lining. (The ironic sleeper in all this is a parallel thesis that abortions have so depleted the ranks of the economically-disadvantaged, who are mostly Democrats, as to insure Republican control of all three branches of government.)

After taking a whack at his pro-choice adversaries with his shocking remark, Bennett tried to strike a responsible note by observing that such a policy would be morally reprehensible/unthinkable. Something he no doubt fervently believes. But few were listening because his "thought experiment" was encumbered with all the emotional baggage of slavery, racism, lynching, the Tuskegee experiment and the forced sterilization of "undesirables" in our nation's checkered past.

Still, Bennett's assertion (however despicable) is technically true. Likewise, if every citizen were shot on their 75th birthday, the cost of Medicare could be cut dramatically. Indeed, a late-show comedian might get away with tossing out such a (racially pure) line -- even if someone took the joke seriously and exclaimed, "the ends don't justify the means."

In a recent interview with CNN, Bennett observed, "I was putting forward a hypothetical proposition.....To recommend abortion of an entire group of people in order to lower your crime rate is morally reprehensible. But this is what happens when you argue that the ends can justify the means."

Of course no rational person has argued that the goal of lowering the crime rate would justify employing the means of forced abortions. In most of our activities, however,

the ends do justify the means. It's just that worthy ends should not be used to justify deplorable means. Thus, a useful generalization is: The ends do not always justify the means but they normally will unless the participant is behaving irrationally or his goals are immoral. Indeed, most people will have an arm or a leg removed if it will save their life. The FDA will approve a drug that kills three patients while saving fifteen from an almost certain death.

But what about the goal of creating a climate in which religious fundamentalists can succeed in denying (or restricting) a woman's constitutional right to terminate an unwanted pregnancy by linking abortion to genocide. Thus, in Bennett's view the Constitutional right to an abortion doesn't exist. It is based on specious legal reasoning that extends privacy rights protecting the use of contraceptives (to avoid producing unwanted children by the carload!) to include a woman's right to terminate a single unwanted pregnancy that she abhors.

Moreover, from a deeply religious perspective, which Bennett no doubt shares, abortion is deemed indefensible because it destroys a human being (however incomplete and unaware of its existence) and interferes with the creation of immortal souls. The strong form of the argument even extends to contraception which interferes with nature's laws and the creation of souls as ordained by reproduction's astonishingly Intelligent Design.

In conclusion, we suspect it was his strong opposition to abortion and any defense of it that was on Bennett's mind when he made his infamous remark. Meanwhile, in his CNN interview, Bennett was asked if he owed the public an apology and replied, "I don't think I do. I think people who misrepresented my view owe me an apology." This essay has attempted to set the record straight.

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December 12, 2006