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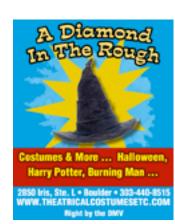
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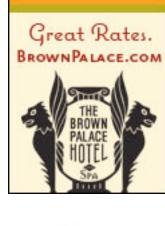
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The importance of being offensive by Dale Bridges

"If crime fighters fight crime and firefighters fight fire, what do freedom fighters fight?" —George Carlin

Shit. Piss. Fuck. Cunt. Cocksucker. Motherfucker. Tits.

These are the seven words that defined George Carlin's career, but you won't see them in any of the mainstream newspaper articles written about his death. Oh, sure, some rebellious columnist over at the Miami Herald might drop a piss or a tits in there to impress the office worker that he's banging in the copy room during his lunch break, but you won't see a fuck or a shit. This is because most journalists aren't allowed to use these terms, even when they're praising a man whose greatest legacy was battling censorship by saying the exact same words their publishers will not permit them to write. The irony of this is so poignant and surreal that it actually sounds like one of Carlin's own comedy routines. I can picture him up in Atheist Heaven right now, an eightball of coke in one hand and an underage prostitute in the other, laughing at all the timid assholes in The Media trying to reconstruct his punch lines with third-grader terminology: "What the F-word, mother-effer?"

In 1972, Carlin was arrested in Milwaukee after performing a comedy routine called "Seven Words You Can Never Say On Television." (There you have it, one more reason to never *ever* go to Milwaukee.) This was a philosophical diatribe that ran about 20 minutes or so and showcased Carlin's gift for deconstructing society by stringing together long, poetic sentences packed with offensive soliloquies. About a year after Carlin's arrest, a similar set of his jokes broadcast over the radio instigated a Supreme Court case that set the precedent for FCC regulations on "obscene" material. (These are the same regulations that would eventually inspire the infamous "It Hits the Fan" episode of *South Park* and force Howard Stern over to satellite radio.) These incidents helped establish Carlin as a counterculture icon and marked the beginning of his lifelong battle against censorship, a battle that ended on Sunday, June 22, when he died of a heart attack at the age of 71.

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These words all refer to anatomical parts, sex acts or bodily functions: Feces. Urine. Intercourse. Genitalia. Felatio. Matriphilia. Breasts.

I can think of hundreds of words more offensive than these in the English language: Lie. Murder. War. Politics. Fundamentalism. Apathy. O'Reilly.

Here's the deal with words: They are supposed to be symbolic representations of these little things you have running around in your head called *thoughts*. Language does not have its own agenda. The word *prick*, for instance, is just a combination of four consonants and one vowel that, when arranged in the correct order, can be used to represent a specific action or object. And that single word can take on numerous meanings depending on the context in which it is used. As Carlin notes, "On television, you can talk about pricking your finger, but you can't discuss fingering your prick." Language is the most sophisticated tool that we have for human expression, which is why certain groups are always trying to control it.

Now, I know what you're thinking, Hypothetical Reader. You're thinking, "Hey, cocksucker, what about offensive, exploitive words like *faggot* and *nigger*?" Well, you're right. These are terrible, hurtful terms that have been used by ignorant men and women throughout history to feed our fears and promote a culture of hate. And it makes perfect sense that members of the gay and African-American communities would want to take these words away from the fraternity homophobes and redneck racists who hide behind language instead of using it as form of articulation and transcendence. It is also reasonable that feminists wouldn't want to be called *cunts* by brainless, macho cockbags and Mexicans would take offense to the word *wetback* rolling off the tongue of some Beverly Hills housewife who has never worked a day in her goddamn life.

However, it's not the words themselves that are evil; it's the humans who use them. Carlin understood this, and that's why his comedy is important. He challenged the Orwellian demigods who constantly try to control our thoughts by outlawing the symbols that we use to express them.

It's not necessarily that our thoughts shouldn't be controlled; it's that we should be the ones controlling them.

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