

**In the year 2000, Benetton is launching its worldwide communication campaign *about* capital punishment  
LOOKING AT DEATH IN THE FACE**

UNITED COLORS  
OF BENETTON.

Ponzano, 7th January 2000 - At the dawn of the new millennium, Benetton reveals the real faces of the prisoners on death row: the present of those without a future. Whether they are young or not so young, white or black, arrogant or anguished, fat or thin, remorseful or unrepentant, smiling or sad, healthy or ill, they all are guilty in the eyes of the human law. Many have their arms folded, one is reading the Bible and some are wearing eyeglasses. Almost all of them are looking straight at the camera, claiming, despite everything, their rights as human beings. These portraits of dozens of individuals sentenced to death, are the results of Oliviero Toscani's work for more than two years, in which he visited death rows in several American prisons. They constitute also the dramatic visual images for Benetton's Spring-Summer 2000 worldwide communication campaign.

The campaign is *about* the death penalty. Leaving aside any social, political, judicial or moral consideration, this project aims at showing to the public the reality of capital punishment, so that no one around the world, will consider the death penalty neither as a distant problem nor as news that occasionally appear on TV. Toscani's images aim at giving back a human face to the prisoners on death row, to remind those "*respectable people (who) are always so sure they're right...*" (1) that the debate concerns men and women in flesh and blood, not virtual characters eliminated or spared with a simple click as with a videogame.

The campaign will appear on billboards and on the pages of the major news publications in Europe, America and Asia in January 2000. In addition, the images in the United States will be collected in a catalogue attach to the issue of Tina Brown's magazine, *Talk*, released on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January. Alongside Toscani's photographs, a series of interviews by Ken Shulman, a free-lance journalist who works for *Newsweek*, can be found in the catalogue. In these, the death-row prisoners reveal their desires, fears, hopes and nightmares. Above all, they talk about a future which holds the certainty of execution and the end of their sorrowful and of their forgotten lives in prison. As Shulman wrote, they often acknowledged "*that having killed has changed them forever, and for the worst*".

This publication also includes a report written by Speedy Rice, on behalf of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NACDL), who has contributed to the campaign by patiently contacting and negotiating with prisons' authorities and inmates' lawyers. Mr. Rice mentions that during 1999 there has been a sharp rise in the number of executions in the United States. Of the 600 death sentences that were passed between 1976 and the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, approximately 100 executions were carried out in 1999.

With this new initiative, Benetton has once again chosen to look reality in the face by tackling a social issue, as it did in previous campaigns that focused on war, Aids, discrimination and racism. Bitterly attacked by some and internationally acclaimed by others, Benetton's campaigns have managed to tear down the wall of indifference contributing at raising the

awareness of universal problems among world's citizens. At the same time, they have paved the way for innovative modes of corporate communication.

(1) Barbara Graham's words, as she was going into the gas chamber where she was executed, some say unjustly, on 3 June 1955 (quoted in *Until You Are Dead: The Book of Executions* by Frederick Drimmer and used as an epigraph for the novel *The Crime* by Andrew Klavan).

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