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**On the death of George Carlin
In Struggle Spotlight
By Bill Fletcher, Jr.
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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I turned on the TV this morning only to hear that one of my favorite comedians, George Carlin, had died at the age of 71, apparently from a heart attack. I was stunned and very saddened.

I feel as if I have grown up with George Carlin. Always irreverent, one could always count on George Carlin to challenge his listeners on a host of issues. He could sound like a Black man, yet I never felt condescended to through his mannerisms or comedy, in part because he seemed to 'get' so much about the construction of race in the USA.

I was always worried that Carlin would die before his time. His life was something akin to a high speed "Funny Car " that takes off and can blow up before it reaches the finish line (as happened, quite ironically, this past weekend in a race). Carlin led the fast life and worked his body over. Alcohol, cocaine plus an intense schedule certainly shortened his life. Yet, George Carlin did not quite seem to age. Certainly he aged physically, but there was something almost eternally youthful about him.

In a segment of a past interview broadcast upon his death this morning, Carlin noted that he always judged the line in terms of what was acceptable comedy, and then

made a conscious effort to cross it! This was the quintessential Carlin. Whether in his discussions of race, war, the rich, or sex, Carlin made no attempt to provide comfort for his audience. He wanted his listeners to laugh, but he certainly wanted them to think.

The courage to cross that line is what made him not only a comedian but an expert political satirist. No wonder he was the recipient of the Kennedy Center Mark Twain Prize for American Humor, an honored bestowed on him just before his passing.

I will certainly miss George Carlin. There was a rare niche that he and comedians such as Richard Pryor have occupied, a niche that is very difficult to fill.

BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor, Bill Fletcher, Jr., is a Senior Scholar with the [Institute for Policy Studies](#), the immediate past president of [TransAfrica Forum](#) and co-author of the **just released** book, [Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path toward Social Justice](#) (University of California Press), which examines the crisis of organized labor in the USA. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Fletcher.

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