

JANUARY 18

The crime of giving the orders

A prosecutor explained that "he masterminded the murders of three innocent young people and conspired to attack the heart of our criminal justice system." And California's governor was stern when he denied a clemency request for the 76-year-old prisoner.

"The passage of time does not excuse Allen from the jury's punishment," Arnold Schwarzenegger said. Allen had been convicted of enlisting a fellow prisoner to kill witnesses against him in 1980.

On Jan. 16, according to unnamed "officials" cited in a San Francisco Chronicle account, the condemned man "ordered a final meal of buffalo steak, Kentucky Fried Chicken, sugar-free pecan pie, sugar-free black walnut ice cream and whole milk."

Allen "was blind and mostly deaf, suffered from diabetes and had a nearly fatal heart attack in September only to be revived and returned to death row," the Associated Press recounted. His last breath would be determined by the state's timetable.

Around midnight, Allen "was assisted into the death chamber by four large correctional officers and lifted out of his wheelchair" – just before the lethal injection. Righteously deploring murder, the state murdered again.

To recap, the prosecutor said that Clarence Ray Allen "masterminded the murders of three innocent young people" and "conspired to attack the heart of our criminal justice system." What could an intrepid prosecutor say about the machinations of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney as they pushed ahead for the U.S. war effort in Iraq? And why shouldn't rigorous investigations be underway to probe evidence that Bush and Cheney have engaged in systematic lawbreaking?

Such questions should be loud, public and insistent. While people in Washington's highest places demand endless benefits of countless doubts, we need to insist on accountability at the top of the U.S. government.

A jury condemned Clarence Ray Allen despite the fact that he did not pull the trigger on the sawed-off shotgun. The charge was that he got someone else to do it.

President Bush doesn't pull triggers. He commands. Like the official lying that pre-

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ceded the Iraq war and sustains it, the killing is nonstop. And a constant media barrage conveys the deceptive assumption that legitimate authority is giving the orders.

Norman Solomon's latest book is "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death." For information, go to: www.WarMadeEasy.com