

A Great Gag for the Airport

BY PENN JILLETTE

THE FEDS HAVE TAKEN OVER AIRPORT SECURITY. If you want to fly, get ready to run fake safety feel-up. It's become an embarrassing nightmare version of the Beach Boys' "Surf City," except it's "two goons for every boy" (and we're all paying for them).

The Penn & Teller crew (made up entirely of freedom fighters) was having so much trouble at the airport that we decided to get off the road and "sit down" at the Rio Hotel in Vegas. One-nighter gigs used to be way stupid fun and we all loved the road, but getting tossed like cheesy criminals at the start of every day wore us down.

Penn & Teller gave up. We accepted that we now live in the "Land of the not-as-free-as-we-used-to-be and the home of the, well, a-little-too-scared-to-be-brave-right-now." But some people are fighting against the airport police state. And the weird thing is that, as far as I can tell, those fighters mostly are comedians.

Comics have often been on the front lines of the civil liberties battles. Artists try to claim they've done some fighting on behalf of free speech, but Karen Finley and her artsy *New York Times* liberal lollipop squad fought only for the government to redistribute some of the wealth to loser artists. Remember, no one ever tried to stop any of those NEA artists from showing anything to anyone; some spoilsports just didn't think that people who didn't like the art should be forced to pay for it. (I'm not saying it's not good art; when David Wojnarowicz lost his NEA grant for doing "obscene" and "anti-Catholic" art, I was at his apartment the next day with my checkbook. I love his art, but people who like it, like me, should be the ones to pay for it.) The artists thought that everyone should pay for it. That's not freedom of speech, that's taking money from people against their will. In the battle for civil liberties, the artists whine for more money while the jokers fight the real battles.

Lenny Bruce fought to the death just to say what he wanted (and do some drugs, but let's glaze over that). Howard Stern had his company pay fines to the government for saying what he wanted. Bill Mahar had real, no-kidding, government employees reprimand him on our dime for point-

ing out that maybe "coward" wasn't the EXACT right word for dead terrorists.

Jokers care about the Fourth Amendment, too. Kevin Meaney got in the papers for the slightly funny crime of getting peeved when the airport pigs felt up his wife. David Brenner got seriously scolded for the way funny bit of carrying pictures of the terrorists with him so he could show security that those were the kind of people to look out for, not Jewish comics traveling with their families.

Dean Cameron isn't exactly a comic, but he's an actor who's very funny. We all remember him as "Chainsaw" in *Summer School* (if you don't think you remember him, TiVo it one of the dozen times it's on cable this week). He's kept working since then and you'll see him in guest star roles on TV and in movies. (I hope he'll forgive me for still loving the work he did as a teenager.) Dino is one of the funniest people I've ever met and, on top of that, he came up with the perfect piece of political performance art that you should try yourself the next time you fly. He had the Bill of Rights printed on pieces of metal the size of a playing card, and he sells



them to flyers on his website, www.securityedition.com.

Get it? When you carry one through airport security, you set off the pig's wand.

"Do you have any metal in this pocket?"

"Oh, yes, it's my constitutional rights. Here you go, take them."

And you hand it to them. That's it. You don't get arrested. It's a personal piece of performance art.

Dino sells the "Frequent Flier Pack" of five cards for 15 bucks. I'm best buddies with him, so I get them stupid cheap. I give them out to everyone. Hey, it's worth a few extra bucks every time you fly, even if it's just to remind yourself of what you're giving up.

I had a pig say to me, "I fought in Vietnam for those rights" and I said, "Yup, and now you're taking them away. Read them again on your break." Did it make a difference? Probably not, but it's funny.

Dino's girlfriend just got the idea of printing the Fourth Amendment on the bottom of socks, so the website may soon have a line of sportswear.

We can laugh all the way to the police state.

Penn Jillette is the louder, bigger half of the magic/comedy team of Penn & Teller. He is a Cato Institute H.L. Mencken Research Fellow and a longtime libertarian activist.

KEVIN TUMA

R