

Real Time with Bill Maher (HBO)

Episode 316, September 9, 2005 – partial transcript

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MAHER: ... we have Kurt Vonnegut. Right, I spoke to him earlier. I forgot, because we already did this today. He is the legendary author of *Slaughterhouse Five* and *Breakfast of Champions*. His latest book is *A Man Without a Country*. Kurt Vonnegut, everybody. Kurt Vonnegut! [applause] [cheers]

How are you doing?

KURT VONNEGUT [via satellite, segment taped earlier]: Well enough, thank you.

MAHER: Well, I'm thrilled you're here. When all this went down the last couple of weeks, you know, a flood is kind of biblical, and I thought, let's get someone on here who can – who has really seen it all, and who can compare this to other – how would you compare this to other fiascos and disasters that this country has seen?

VONNEGUT: Well, this country was already financially and spiritually ruined before the hurricane ever hit New Orleans. I thought about the tsunami hitting Indonesia. Nature was a piker compared to human beings when it comes to killing people. The tsunami killed, I think, I calculated about 3% as many people as the Holocaust killed.

MAHER: Well, what do you, as a writer, when you see President Bush, is there something tragic there? Is that a story that appeals to a writer? Because here's a guy, like most tragic figures, who is trying very hard to avoid something. In his case, he was trying very hard to avoid the fate of his father. And then he's undone by a war in Iraq and a hurricane.

VONNEGUT: Yes. [scattered applause] It's a tragedy for me that he's president of my country. [applause] And he doesn't – you know, my book is called *A Man Without a Country*. Well, I've still got a passport, but if I showed this now in Portugal or Spain or Italy or Germany or France, or Denmark, or Japan or even Communist China, what it would say about me is that I am not only from the richest country in the world, but the dumbest country in the world. [laughter] [applause] Is our president a tragic figure? Perhaps, but he doesn't know diddly-squat about economics or history or science, even how to speak well. [laughter] [applause]

MAHER: Yeah. Well, you're not going to get a fight out of me there. [laughter] In your new book, you make a very interesting point about how the Republican right is always wanting to post the Ten Commandments in public places, which, of course, is from the Old Testament. But they never ever seem to want to post the sayings of Jesus, like the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the meek.” “Blessed are the merciful.” “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

VONNEGUT: Yes.

MAHER: They're such Christians, but they never want to put up what Jesus said.

VONNEGUT: Well, I don't think they've ever paid any attention to him. [laughter] [applause] And if he were to show up now with that kind of talk, I think he would probably be given lethal injection rather than crucifixion. [laughter] [applause] No, I don't think they know anything about Jesus.

MAHER: Yeah, you said this in the new book, you said about the planet, "We could have saved it, but we were just too damn cheap and lazy."

VONNEGUT: Yes. We are killing the planet as a life support system. And we may have gone so far already that there's no recovery from it. The game may be over. Just to cheer you up. [chuckles]

MAHER: Right. And would that be a bad thing? Would that be a bad thing? I know you've said things like—

VONNEGUT: No, look, I think it's – I think the earth's immune system is trying to get rid of us, and it's high time they did. My goodness, we are a disease on the face of this planet. You know, after two world wars and the Holocaust, and Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and, well, the Roman games and the Spanish Inquisition, and the burning of women in public squares. It's time we got out of here, and I—

MAHER: You left out "The Gong Show." [laughter]

VONNEGUT: Yeah, but we are a disease on the planet. And I think we ought to become "syphilis with a conscience" and stop reproducing. [laughter] [applause]

MAHER: Well, I'm going to do my part. [laughter] And I know you'll do yours. Kurt Vonnegut, I thank you very much for making time out to talk to us. And good luck with the book. [applause] [cheers]

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MAHER: ... And finally, New Rule: America must recall the president. [applause] [cheers] That's – that's what this country needs. A good, old-fashioned, California-style recall election! [applause] [cheers] Complete with Gary Coleman, porno actresses and action film stars. [laughter] And just like Schwarzenegger's predecessor here in California, George Bush is now so unpopular, he must defend his jog against... Russell Crowe. [laughter] Because at this point, I want a leader who will throw a phone at somebody. [laughter] [applause] In fact, let's have only phone throwers. Naomi Campbell can be the vice-president! [laughter]

Now, I kid, but seriously, Mr. President, this job can't be fun for you anymore. [laughter] There's no more money to spend. You used up all of that. [laughter] You can't start another war because you also used up the army. And now, darn the luck, the rest of your term has become the Bush family nightmare: helping poor people. [laughter] [applause]

Yeah, listen to your mom. The cupboard's bare, the credit card's maxed out, and no one is speaking to you: mission accomplished! [laughter] Now it's time to do what you've always done best: lose interest and walk away. [laughter] [applause] Like you did with your military service. And the oil company. And the baseball

team. It's time. Time to move on and try the next fantasy job. How about cowboy or spaceman?! [laughter] [applause]

Now, I know what you're saying. You're saying that there's so many other things that you, as president, could involve yourself in...Please don't. [laughter] I know, I know, there's a lot left to do. There's a war with Venezuela, and eliminating the sales tax on yachts. [laughter] Turning the space program over to the church. [laughter] [applause] And Social Security to Fannie Mae. [laughter] Giving embryos the vote. [laughter] [applause] But, sir, none of that is going to happen now. Why? Because you govern like Billy Joel drives. [laughter] You've performed so poorly I'm surprised you haven't given yourself a medal. [laughter] You're a catastrophe that walks like a man. [laughter]

Herbert Hoover was a shitty president, but even he never conceded an entire metropolis to rising water and snakes. [laughter]

On your watch, we've lost almost all of our allies, the surplus, four airliners, two Trade Centers, a piece of the Pentagon and the City of New Orleans...Maybe you're just not lucky! [laughter] [applause] [cheers]

I'm not saying you don't love this country. I'm just wondering how much worse it could be if you were on the other side. [laughter] So, yes, God does speak to you, and what he's saying is, "Take a hint." [laughter]

All right, that's our show. I want to thank our fabulous panel. [applause] [cheers] George Carlin, Cynthia Tucker, Jim Glassman, thank you for putting up with us. And Joe Scarborough, Walter Maestri. Thank you very much, folks. Appreciate you, too. Good night. [applause] [cheers]