

Medieval America

When did torture become American policy?

Good news! The body count from Iraq and Afghanistan indicates we're winning. Torture deaths, us, 26, beheadings, them, 24. The scary thing is, if 26 torture deaths are confirmed in a program that is under the highest levels of classification, there are probably a lot more. Think about that. We're torturing people to death or standing by while foreigners, at our behest, do.

In this war to bring our values to the world, we have descended on the scale of human development, and the moral rhetoric in the face of murder contradicts our national ethos. Not even the apologists for this conflict are saying that our heinous actions serve the greater good. To do so would be to condone barbarism, a term so freely used to describe those conducting the beheadings, and expose American moral corruption.

I can remember reports from Vietnam where American prisoners were tortured, stirring a wave of moral indignation in this country. We thought that we were a people that would never stoop to such barbaric behavior. Don't look now, but we have



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stooped and no one seems to care.

You can delude yourself into thinking it has all been done by rogue enlisted personnel, or a few people acting independently, but the facts don't substantiate that theory. Military prisoners (a Defense Department responsibility) are handed over to the CIA and/or the FBI and whisked away into a friendly country (it is a State Department responsibility to gain access clearances to foreign nations) that uses torture with our approval. We provide the questions we want answered, then try to distance ourselves from the responsibility.

In Washington, activity involving more than one agency is coordinated either by a lead agency or a higher authority. There is only one higher authority in this country, and it ain't Sergeant Joe Blow from the East Bejip National Guard.

When did torture become American policy? The timing coincides with the rush to do away with Geneva Convention provisions. Without those restrictions, rationalized as non-applicable by the Justice Department in our war on terror, we wrote ourselves a blank check to proceed as we wished in handling POWs and people in vague combatant statuses. Without restrictions, zealotry has replaced morality as the governor of human actions.

The American interrogators involved in killing people aren't from the dregs of our society. The military and other agencies pick their interrogators from the more intellectual among their candidates. What does this say about us as a people, when the most intelligent among us willingly commit horrific crimes against other humans with impunity? More concerned with doing their job than with doing right, interrogators have discarded ethical values to wartime expediency.

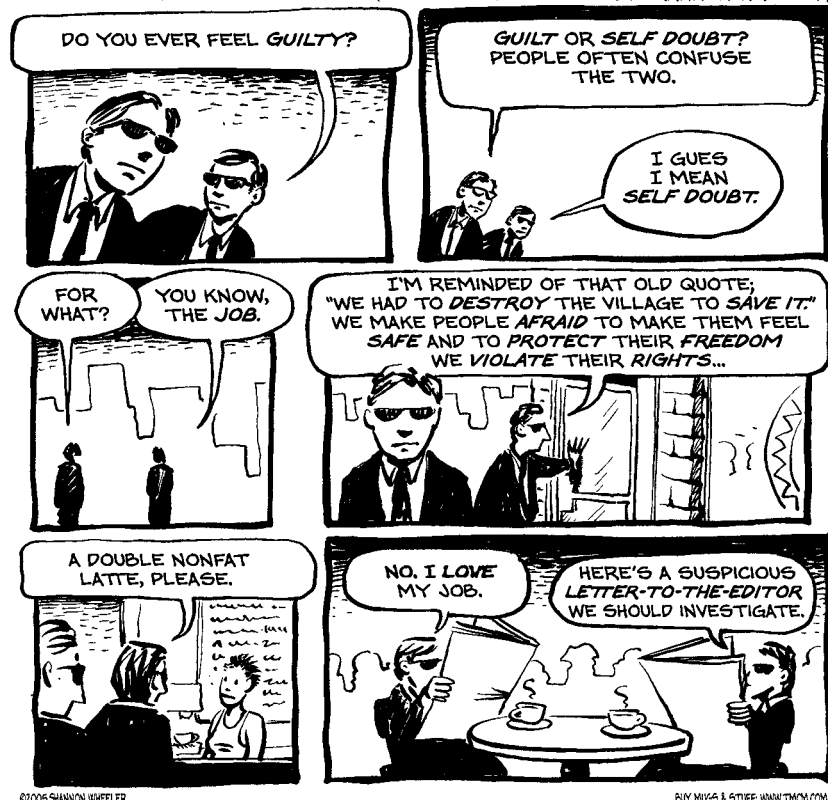
As a nation, our presumed religiosity and moral superiority is being exposed. We lied our way into war, and under the rubric of national security we are condoning acts in contravention to our stated philosophical principles and redefining our character. Unfortunately, without moral limitations, people follow the path the government lays out for them, and in this instance, the administration has willfully discarded the values placed on human life developed through centuries of civilization.

Beheading people as our enemies do is barbaric, but is torturing a person to death more humane? Certainly neither practice can be justified by a nation that considers itself the most advanced in world history.

We are on a slippery slope. We have a Congress that calls special sessions to save a person in a vegetative state, or to save baseball, but only sits by while people are tortured at the hands of Americans. Where is the outcry of the moralists who become aroused over the sanctity of life and the decline of American culture? Is their outrage reserved for Christian Americans? None of those who say they revere life and are worried about the decline of the American culture has raised a voice in regard to documented torture and death of other peoples. If that isn't a decline in American culture, even worse, if that isn't a regression in human development, what is?

John F. Cronin of Depoe Bay is a retired military officer and author of Signs Hanging on the Wire, a novel about Vietnam inspired by his experiences in the war.

TOO MUCH COFFEE MAN BY SHANNON WHEELER



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NOVEL APPROACH

I've just got to respond to the April 21 *EW* article "Up in the Air" about LRAPA. The article wasn't news; it was more like a novella. When I read something like "Former board member ... sitting behind me coughs: a deep loud, phlegmy hack from the depth of his body cavity" as a part of a serious new article, I am skeptical. Is the author trying to give us news or describe her biased first impressions of everyone remotely involved in the covering the news?

Yes, LRAPA is having organizational problems, and yes, they are newsworthy. However, the *Weekly* did not present the actions the board has taken to correct serious deficiencies in our leadership. We are looking for a new environmentally conscientious executive director who can lead the agency in keeping Lane County's airshed clean. The board is fully supportive of the goals of clean air and we look forward to the new director leading the way. My goal is that LRAPA won't be "Up in the Air," but with our feet on the ground looking up at clean air.

Gary Rayer
LRAPA Board Vice-Chair

WHO GETS TO KILL

I don't doubt that Christians intend to make the world a better place. I just disagree with the selective morality of some Christians.

For example, many of them are against a woman's right to choice. They claim abortion is killing innocent people. They forget that America, in part, is based on the legality of killing innocent people. National politics from the "Trail of Tears" to the current Iraq War have killed hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of innocent people. Individual killings by civilians and police of unarmed people have taken thousands of innocent lives.

The only discussion is about who can kill who and for what reasons. If women should be denied a right, then men should be denied the same right.

One legal reason for killing innocent people is if you are truly afraid for your life, whether you are actually in danger or not. The most dan-

gerous time in a woman's life is when she is pregnant or has small children. She is more likely to be assaulted or killed at this time. This is particularly true if the pregnancy or children are unwanted by one or more people. I think these women have a reasonable expectation to be afraid for their lives, not to mention medical complications of pregnancy that may put a woman at risk.

I would love to discuss making it illegal to kill innocent people. However, it is my experience that many Christians want to keep the right to kill innocent people. They just want to have their choice of victims and impose that choice on everyone else.

It is fine to have faith. But let's not enshrine anyone's faith in law.

Charles Dalton
Eugene

PRE-COMPETENT

Native American researcher Terry Cross describes becoming culturally competent as a developmental process. The cultural competence continuum has six stages. Each describes an attitude and has associated actions or inactions: cultural destructiveness, cultural blindness, cultural incapacity, cultural pre-competence, cultural competence, and cultural proficiency. The stated intent of Federal Indian Education was essentially to "kill the Indian in the Indian, and make him white" i.e. cultural destruction.

A million dollar grant to a predominately white institution (UO) to train Native American teachers does not make that college more than culturally pre-competent at best. The college is at least culturally blind if it doesn't root out its historically culturally destructive DNA.

While we're waiting, cultural competency must work both ways. A culturally proficient person of color must assume that white people due to white privilege by default will be culturally incapable or blind. The Native person who can't "cultural code shift" and look white folks in the eye and give a firm handshake must assume that the white person will not take anything else as a sign of cultural respect. While it's nice to want to hold white people to a standard