



Agitate

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TORTURED LOGIC

It is a national disgrace that at the turn of the 21st century we are debating the legitimacy of torture. That citizens of the post-modern world are expected to swallow medieval dictates in the name of defending freedom is an insult to our intelligence and a slap in the face of all that is moral.

Torture is morally indefensible from the perspective of any civilized standard. It's been delegitimized by countless laws and treaties detailing the rights of man, not the least of which is the US Code Section 113c. The US has also signed the Geneva Convention, the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Convention Against Torture. Approved by the Senate, and signed into law by the president, these treaties are the law of the United States according to Article 2 of our own Constitution.

Of course, the Constitution is not the guiding principle of the American Power Elite (APEs). The Eighth Amendment of the Constitution forbids the use of cruel and unusual punishment, which most reasonable people would suggest includes torture. Unfortunately, most reasonable people do not have seats on the United States Supreme Court. Antonin Scalia does. During an interview with Lesley Stahl, Scalia offers a galling example of semantic hocus pocus when he claims that torture is not punishment. (60 Minutes 4/27/08) By insinuation, the Eighth Amendment does not protect against the use of torture.

Scalia's is just another example of how the power elite is trying to sell its abhorrent practices to the public. And, for the most part, the public, being steeped in fear, is buying the product. When reason and morality is applied as a resolution to fear, the claims of the APEs are empty. The current debate on torture should not be at issue as its legitimacy has long since been contradicted.

Claims: Framing Torture

For instance, when the President and his administration make the claim that torture is an invaluable tool in the war on terror they are lying. Professional intelligence analysts and even former members of the Pentagon

recognize that torture is not an effective tool for gathering information. Victims of torture have very little knowledge of terrorism, even in the unlikely event that they are terrorists. If they happen to be terrorists with significant information their respective organizations simply change plans. In the likely event that the torture victim is innocent, he quickly learns the information that is expected of him to make the pain stop. He offers that information...regardless of its validity. Even in the event that the victim of torture wants to comply, the very techniques used to coerce him also adversely affect judgment, memory and communication, making any information gathered that much more questionable. (ISB, Human Rights First)

The ticking bomb scenario offered by torture defenders exists only on episodes of 24 and in the hypothetical minds of policy wonks and lawyers trying to spin sinister policy. It is long recognized that torture has no value as an investigative tool.

In another venue, the APEs claim that the techniques used are not torture. Things like solitary confinement, fear tactics, sensory deprivation, water boarding, sexual assault and humiliation, even beatings just short of organ failure or nothing more than "enhanced interrogation" and are no more serious than hazing performed

by college fraternities. (Media Matters) It's just all in fun? Hazing is an inclusion ritual, used by many institutions as a means to legitimize its membership. It is a means, however archaic, of creating identity. As such, most membership based institutions condemn hazing as being unnecessarily cruel.

Regardless, there's no reasonable comparison between a hazing ritual and the breaking of mind, body and spirit that is integral to torture. The torture victim knows that he/she is an outsider, and will never be an inclusive member of the torturer's group. Through torture the victim's identity, personality, sense of self are destroyed with no hope of repair. Torture defines the separation between those who have



Can America be a world leader in the light of such images? Is this how you want your country represented to the world?



power and those who are disempowered.

Nor is it true, as the APEs would have us believe, that torture makes us safer from terrorism. Indeed, terrorist groups have benefited from the wide knowledge that the US uses torture toward its hegemonic ends. American barbarism becomes a recruitment tool as family members watch their loved ones being taken away, only to return as broken individuals—if they return at all.

These enhanced interrogation techniques are also used by terrorist organizations as a justification for the torture and execution of American prisoners. In essence, our own loved ones are less safe because of torture. (Retired Generals Against Torture) Also, using torture to make the world safe from terrorism has certainly not had the desired effect, as the threat of terrorism continues to grow. (AP, Glasser, Strobel and Landay)

The Function of Torture

The above should come as no surprise. Torture has no history as an investigative tool. Nor is torture a means of securing liberty. Torture has always been, and remains, a tool for perpetuating power. It is a tool used to break the individual to the yoke of institutional power, be that institution a church, a dictatorship or an empire masquerading as a representative democracy.

Torture is a demonstration of the ultimate power of the state over the individual; a grotesque assertion of the state's ability to shape the body. The broken body and the frayed mind become the symbols of the futility of resisting the will of power. It is, in short, a method of fascism. (Foucault)

The use of torture, illegitimate arrest, detention and such is indicative of more than just the application of power, however. Torture reveals underlying weakness in the authority of power institutions. Historically, torture becomes the most pronounced during times of desperation. When the legitimacy of authority is challenged the willingness of the institution to use torture becomes overt. Think of the Inquisition, challenged by the Reformation, or the tenuous position of the colonists in Massachusetts Bay during the witch hunts for support of this thesis. So torture isn't just a tool for instilling fear. It is also a reaction to fear on the part of power institutions.

And what do power institutions fear the most? Losing power, of course.

To justify the use of torture the state must endeavor to instill an equal amount of fear in the citizenry. A free and rational people never submit to torture; but a fearful, desperate people are easily manipulated. So the focus of the state becomes the production of fear. The people must be made afraid; afraid of the Old Deluder Satan leading them astray, or radical ideas subsuming them into chaos, or the spread of communism—or terrorism.

The terrorist is the ultimate boogey man contrived by the state. He is such a fearsome villain that all of the virtues of five hundred years of enlightened thought must be shelved

until the terrorist is defeated. But terrorism will never be defeated as long as the world is defined by archaic thinking and profound power discrepancies—the very things perpetuated by the APEs. And while we fear the terrorist we must seek security in the state, an institution that may, in turn, torture us if given the right provocation. A beautifully constructed cycle of self destruction!

The Evil Empire

My formative years of youthful political awareness were spent criticizing President Reagan. Reagan, near the climax of the Cold War, referred to the Soviet Union as an evil empire. (Reagan) The USSR, in its never ending attempt to enslave the world, arrested and held its citizens without trial. It tortured its citizens and often executed the innocent. The Evil Empire lavished disproportionate resources on its military and nuclear arsenal to perpetuate its power. It had a secret police that spied on its citizens without warrants. The Soviet Union was intent on spreading its slimy tentacles all over the world, controlling its resources and not allowing room for any other world view to exist.

Well, if the old Soviet Union was evil for the above reasons, contemporary America must be...?

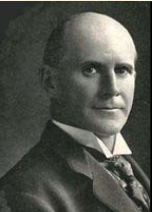
The Soviet Union is an apt example of the consequences of the use of fear in society. When people are in a constant state of fear, this anxiety is often manifest into anger, alienation and resentment. Millions of people living under the anomie of fear are a crucial step toward societal collapse. Typically, power institutions respond to this instability by using more intensive fear tactics. There is only one possible end to this schizophrenic cycle.

The best resolution to fear is reason. Reason should be the foundation for enlightened society. Power institutions, however, tend to be wary of a reasoned citizenry, as reasonable people will not accept tyranny or abuse either upon themselves, or in their name. Reasonable people are interested in limiting the power of the state, or the church, or the corporation. Reasonable people are appalled by torture and false imprisonment. Thus, we cannot count on power institutions, the APEs, to cultivate the seeds of reason. Such a harvest must be sown by the people.

In the face of all that is reasonable, the debate over torture can only disappear. A reasonable people could never be induced to purchase such a dubious product. Let's show our leadership that the legitimacy of torture is not open to debate. That Americans are a reasonable people.

Take Action!

Many organizations are struggling to end the use of torture. Please check out the links to Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Human Rights First at The Journal of a Mad Sociologist to participate in this immeasurably important issue.



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