

“Worthy and Unworthy Victims”

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Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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Economist and media critic Edward S. Herman and social and political critic Noam Chomsky note two kinds of victims in their classic 1988 book “Manufacturing Consent.” So does journalist and documentary filmmaker John Pilger in his writings. “Unworthy” ones are the many unmentioned tens of thousands killed in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and all other places by US, Israeli and other rapacious imperial warring and occupying forces. “Worthy” ones, however, are those prominently mentioned who died or were hurt on September 11, 2001 in the US, on July 7, 2005 in a dubious London “terrorist” bombing, on March 11, 2004 in the Madrid train bombings, and the Israeli corporal practically the whole free world still knows about since he was taken captive in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) last summer and is still being held. More recent “worthy” victims are the 15 British Royal Navy seamen arrested by Iranian armed forces, now released, and BBC journalist Alan Johnston, also apparently abducted and held captive in the OPT since March 12 when his employer reported he was forcibly seized from his car by gunpoint driving home from work in Gaza City.

The Royal Navy and Johnston instances particularly stand out with the kind of steady BBC and western media reporting on the incidents usually reserved for figures of note but common as well for ordinary types when it serves a propaganda purpose.

First the Persian Gulf incident involving the British seamen. Iran claims geographical coordinates showed they were 0.5 km inside Iranian waters while the Brits claimed otherwise, but it hardly matters in waters where it’s hard to tell. More important are CIA, Defense Department and former US and other officials admitting to years of covert and other incursions into Iranian territory on land, sea and by air. Iran is aware they’re still ongoing and justifiably views them as hostile acts likely committed as prelude to planned future greater provocations or military action.

Up to now, Iran showed great restraint and patience, but had every right to defend its territory by seizing the intruders March 23. They were held for interrogation until ceremonially released April 5 following their 15 day captivity during which time it appeared they were well treated even though Britain’s Ministry of Defense instructed them to say otherwise once they were back home.

Compare that to how British and US forces treat their captives in torture-prisons. Sent there are innocent men, women and children, held in most cases on administrative charges indefinitely, and subjected to harsh punitive treatment only revealed later by the few lucky enough to get out and go home to talk about their ordeals. Try hearing about them in the dominant western media deafeningly silent.

Economist, activist and web editor Michel Chossudovsky is never silent and reported more

information on the British seamen April 6 on his Global Research web site. He wrote that British "Royal Marine Captain Chris Air told (British) Sky News TV that the object of their mission (in the Persian Gulf) was to 'gather intelligence' on Iran" in a pre-recorded interview done prior to his capture, but aired only after his release. Chossudovsky reprinted the interview on his web site and included a video link to Sky News TV so readers could watch and listen to it ending any doubt what British forces are up to repeatedly in the Gulf and Iranian waters. Chossudovsky also included a BBC TV video link and reprinted a transcript of BBC's interview with Captain Air and Lt. Felix Carman during which Carman admitted this operation "followed approximately 66 similar (ones) over the previous four weeks" done to conduct boardings of ships stopped to be inspected or crews interrogated in an intrusive (and likely illegal) operation called IPAT - Interaction patrol.

In spite of this, the 15 Royal Navy personnel got impressive and disingenuous headline coverage throughout their captivity during which time UK officials and Prime Minister Blair denied what Air and Carman admitted on British television so we all now know what only could be previously surmised. They're now released, back home unharmed, regarded as heroes, at first allowed by Britain's Ministry of Defense to sell their stories (as obvious propaganda) to the media for profit until public outrage got the Ministry to change its mind meaning the seamen can still do it but only for free.

Now the case of BBC Gaza reporter Alan Johnston. Dozens of foreigners have been abducted in Gaza in the past, but none held as long as Johnston or given the kind of publicity he gets daily in the UK. Why? Because he's from the West and works for BBC that reports it has no knowledge where he is or who may be responsible for his apparent abduction. BBC also notes 6500 people worldwide have signed a petition calling for (in fact, demanding) his release. On April 9, rallies were held in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and London on his behalf. Prayer vigils as well since. BBC reports Palestinian officials insist they're doing all they can to locate and free him, and have ordered their security services and interior ministry to take "all necessary measures" on his behalf. BBC further notes, with irony, Johnston's Gaza posting was to have ended in March, but, of course, has now been involuntarily extended indefinitely.

There's more. In a show of solidarity, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ - representing over 500,000 journalists in more than 100 countries) called for Johnston's immediate release, and Palestinian journalists held a three day strike protesting what happened. IFJ General Secretary Aidan White noted that "Every day that passes jeopardises Alan's safety even further and we support our Palestinian colleagues (working for Johnston's release) quickly and unharmed." And he added "It is unconscionable that the Palestinian government has not done more to secure Alan's release." Try imagining that kind of statement if Johnston were Muslim and worked for an Arab publication or news service, especially one "unfriendly" to western imperial interests. Can readers name any Arab journalists targeted, abducted or willfully murdered in Iraq by US military forces since March, 2003?

The IFJ affiliate Palestinian Journalist Syndicate (PJS) can and shows as much concern for Johnston's safety. It already held numerous demonstrations on his behalf and set up a protest tent in front of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) demanding the government do more to free him quickly.

There's more still. The IFJ, PJS, and British affiliate National Union of Journalists of the UK and Ireland combined to publicly call for Johnston's immediate release unharmed. IFJ pressed its

demands in writing to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh asking them to intervene personally on Johnston's behalf. The Arab Media Forum and International Association of Press Clubs have also publicly called for Johnston's release, and BBC's web site petition has registered 50,000 names supporting Johnston's release with more added each day.

And there's still more as astonishingly the European Parliament in Strasbourg passed an "emergency resolution" April 26 calling for the immediate release of Johnston with an accompanying statement that MEPs of all political stripes back it. Try imagining a whiff of sympathetic parliamentary support (let alone congressional) for the many thousands of illegally held and tortured Palestinian, Iraqi, Afghan and all other political prisoners held anywhere unless they're "worthy" ones from the West.

There's no end to this as even noted British journalist Robert Fisk now is "demanding the release of Alan Johnston" in his April 28 London Independent column adding "as long as he is held, how can we (other journalists) cover the atrocities of Iraq and Afghanistan as well as Gaza?" Simple, as Fisk surely knows - do your job. If not you and other independent journalists, then who? However, Fisk's concern is understandable as he, as much as anyone, puts himself in the eyes of the Middle East storms he covers. He has good reason to be concerned and in the past had a few close calls.

Nonetheless, all this support just cited was for "one" journalist (likely unharmed), now almost as well known in the UK as the organization he works for. For many weeks last summer, the same was true in Israel and the West for the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) corporal (left unnamed here) who also had, and may still have, strong name recognition on every continent. This is how he, Johnston, the 15 UK seamen, and other "worthy" victims are treated - elevated to celebrity status, pleas made on their behalf through the media, welcomed home on release ceremonially on national television and treated like heroes because they're from the West and can be exploited for maximum propaganda value.

Another "worthy" victims example also deserves mention - the ones attacked, killed and injured by one or more apparent suicide bombers April 12 inside Baghdad's heavily fortified, fortress-like, four square mile Green Zone on the left bank of the Tigris River surrounded by thick blast-proof concrete wall protection against such attacks or other type bombing attempts to penetrate inside it. To enter what's called the "ultimate gated community," visitors must pass through up to eight checkpoints depending on where they're heading, and once inside security is intense including full body searches, dogs sniffing for explosives, electronic scanners and every other human and high-tech measure imaginable to guarantee safety inside no longer guaranteed.

The April 12 attack was "Tet"-like in impact in a country where every day is like "Tet" proving war there is unwinnable to everyone but Bush hard-liners yet to come around as well as being blind to see nowhere and no one in Iraq is safe. One thing, however is - the hero status of the attack's dead (eight apparently, including three lawmakers) and injured. They got instant media-manipulated elevation to "worthy" victim status with the number eligible changing daily then as the count did depending on what side of their mouth US military spokesmen spoke from in an effort to turn a calamity into what Condoleezza Rice brushed off as just a "bad day." In Iraq, every day is bad, and no amount of manufactured heroics or "worthy" victims will change things.

The most recent instance of "worthy" victim "made-for-TV" coverage happened April 16 in

Blacksburg, VA, southwest of Roanoke, on Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University's campus. It was falsely reported to be the deadliest shooting incident in modern US history conveniently ignoring state-sponsored ones and others of greater magnitude only one of which was the 1923 Rosewood, Florida massacre of up to 150 "unworthy" innocent black people.

Add bombings to shootings, and there was the May 18, 1927 dynamiting of a school in Bath, MI killing 45, mostly children; the Oklahoma City April 19, 1995 bombing killing 168; the 51 day state-sponsored (US Army Delta force-FBI Hostage Rescue Team) terror siege and immolation of the Branch Davidian's Mount Carmel Waco ranch compound killing 84 innocent men, women and children; not to mention the 9/11 attacks killing several thousand or more cited above. And these attacks pale in significance to 500 years of state-sponsored genocidal terror attacks still ongoing against Native Indian peoples in all the Americas killing an estimated 100 million plus as many as 50 million black African captives perishing during a Middle Passage voyage never reaching shore for them. And this leaves out many millions more murdered by American imperial marauding on six continents with US presidents trying to best the appalling records of their predecessors and George Bush racing to the top of the charts.

Still, the Virginia Tech attack was horrific leaving 33 dead including five professors and the apparent shooter who reportedly shot himself in the head. For several days, this story preempted all others. It got round-the-clock blitzkrieg coverage (and is still considered newsworthy) for maximum effect highlighting "worthy" victims politically important enough for George Bush to deliver a pathetic grandstanding address in their honor to an April 17 convocation at the school's Cassel Coliseum.

This incident especially stands out as a prominent instance of anointing victims "worthy" hero status just because they died. It's also a setup for a criminal administration to gain maximum political advantage from a tragedy that should highlight the need to curb our out-of-control gun-crazed culture in which getting even violently today with lethal weapons is as common as ordinary fisticuffs once were decades back. But bloody noses don't make headline news in an age of mass communication when, more than ever, "worthy" victims are needed to do it. It lets a mass-murderer like George Bush honor the dead for maximum political gain and gives him cover to deflect attention away from his far greater crimes of war and against humanity. "God bless America('s) worthy victims" deserving better than to be defiled by George Bush's presence at a solemn occasion in their honor.

The Unknown, Unseen, Nameless, Faceless "Unworthy Victims"

In a recent article, John Pilger quotes historian Mark Curtis' characterization of "unworthy victims" as "unpeople" while Herman and Chomsky explain the "propaganda system," played out in the dominant media, characterizes people abused and victimized by us or our client states as "unworthy." They're everywhere in numbers so huge choices to cite are limitless. None, however, stand out more prominently than those in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) where beleaguered Palestinians have endured six horrific decades under harsh Israeli rule and occupation. Their desperate state rarely gets media coverage, and when it does it's inadequate, demeaning, hostile and falsely reported turning victim into victimizer. Unmentioned is that Palestinians face daily constant Israeli-imposed assaults, restrictions and severe hardships creating nightmarish conditions for them living in virtual open air prisons enduring the cruelest kinds of endless collective punishments ignored in the West.

Consider the attention on a single captured Israeli corporal, BBC's Alan Johnston, 15 UK seamen, and the Virginia Tech dead. Compare it to the virtual media blackout on life in occupied Palestine overall and for 10,000 or more Palestinian prisoners. They were forcibly abducted by Israeli forces, are kept indefinitely under harsh conditions in prisons, held mostly on administrative charges as political hostages, and are routinely tortured according to Israeli human rights monitoring group B'Tselem in flagrant violation of international law banning the use of torture or degrading treatment under any circumstances.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights outlawed it in 1948. The Fourth Geneva Convention then did it in 1949 banning any form of "physical or mental coercion" and affirming detainees must at all times be treated humanely. The European Convention followed in 1950. Then in 1984, the UN Convention Against Torture became the first binding international instrument dealing exclusively with the issue banning torture in any form for any reason. Israel ignores international laws and norms and gets away with it because the US and West do nothing to hold its governments accountable for their actions. Why should they? Israel is a valued ally, and its crimes are against "unworthy victims" allowed no rights in a state where only Jews get them. Further, the US notably does the same things to many thousands of unknown "unworthy" prisoners in its torture-prisons where those held have no rights either and are treated any way their captors wish out of sight and mind and virtually ignored in the West as "unpeople."

For long-suffering Palestinians, their struggle for recognition, freedom and justice has gone on for six decades with little interest, redress, or aid from the West or even much of it from Arab neighbors willing to sacrifice Palestinian rights for their greater political and economic interests building western political and economic alliances, particularly with the US. As a result, over 5.3 million Palestinians (including 1.4 million Arab Israeli citizens) are denied all rights Israeli Jews get, are subjected to constant abuse and neglect, 3.9 million of them are virtual prisoners in the open air camps, cities and villages of Gaza and the West Bank (OPT), and over 10,000 are held and brutalized inside Israeli prison hellholes. They're all nameless, faceless, and ignored in the West because they're "unworthy" Palestinian Arab Muslim victims, so who cares if they're forced to endure a hostile occupier's unrestrained harshness against them.

"Unworthy" Iraqis

In March, 2003, US forces came, saw and "liberated" 26 million Iraqis from their freedom in a war beginning in January, 1991. They destroyed a once prosperous nation, the most advanced in the Middle East, leaving in its wake a surreal lawless armed camp wasteland with few or no essential services like electricity, clean water, medical care, fuel or most everything else needed for sustenance and survival. They also burnt, looted or destroyed most of Iraq's institutions of higher learning; plundered the nation's archeological museums, historic sites, libraries and archives - all part of a barbaric planned effort to destroy the country's cultural identity, control its vast oil resources, eliminate all opposition through daily land and air rampages through cities and neighborhoods assassinating targeted victims and randomly killing anyone including women and children sometimes for sport or out of anger. It's called democracy, US-style, through the barrel of a gun, where the law is what the occupier says it is and "unworthy" victimized subjects have no say in their own country known as "the cradle of civilization" now disappearing at the dawn of the 21st century.

Then there are the prisons. An unknown number of US-run ones are in Iraq and Afghanistan plus other proxy ones throughout the greater Middle East, Eastern Europe, parts of Africa and wherever else Washington can bribe or coerce other nations to be our enforcers to treat prisoners sent there the way we do in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib hellholes and the lesser known but equally infamous one at Bagram airbase near Kabul, Afghanistan.

Two Iraq prisons (Camp Bucca in the south and Camp Cropper near Baghdad) alone reportedly hold 18,000 captives among an official 34,000 known held throughout the country with the true number likely much higher. It's called justice, US-style meaning none whatever for our targeted nameless, faceless, unknown "unworthy victims" the West ignores with rare exceptions like the case of Australian David Hicks.

Other "Unworthy" US Victims

Hicks was held over five years at Guantanamo where he was abused, tortured, and one of only four prisoners there ever charged with an offense (using a cooked up charge of "material support for a terrorist group") after he agreed to a (Republican party official's politically arranged) plea bargain, was tried in a military tribunal kangaroo court Stalinist-type show trial, convicted unjustly and will now return home to serve nine more months in an Australian prison. As an "unworthy" prisoner, western media coverage was pathetic and inadequate failing to explain what was most important. He was a terribly abused innocent young man whose ordeal continues.

He won't be treated with laurels and a hero's welcome back home if Australian Prime Minister and Bush lap dog John Howard's view prevails. After the verdict, he echoed Rupert Murdoch's "Australian" calling Hicks a "confessed terror trainee." Howard told reporters Hicks is a dangerous terrorist who "pleaded guilty to knowingly assisting a terrorist organization." In spite of it all, Hicks, his family, friends and supporters hope one day he'll be able to resume a normal life that never can be that way again for him, thanks to US "justice."

Nor will it be for countless numbers of Iraqis and Afghans whose lives we changed forever, many of whom now want redress and have filed legal claims to get it. On April 11, the ACLU released information on hundreds of them obtained from the Pentagon after filing a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to get them in June, 2006. It's for 479 Iraq claims and 17 from Afghanistan that in total comprise a tiny fraction of the number of innocent civilians entitled to compensation for damages or loss of loved ones but who'll end up getting nothing.

So far, 198 claims have been summarily denied on grounds of "combat exclusion" meaning the incident cited was "from action by an enemy or resulted directly or indirectly from an act of the armed forces of the United States in combat." Other claims were rejected for "lack of evidence (or) lack of proof of US involvement." Another 10% were as well because incidents cited hadn't been reported in the US military's "SIGACT" (significant action) database.

Of the 496 claims ACLU knows of (there are likely others or will be), only 164 resulted in cash payment compensation to surviving family members in total amounting to \$32 million that can't begin to make up for the human loss, immense suffering still ongoing, and permanent impairment to those on whom it was inflicted. Nor does it begin to address the pain, suffering and loss for millions of nameless, faceless "unworthy victims" of US

aggression and occupation whose lives won't ever be the same again if they survive. How can they be as out-of-sight, out-of-mind demonized Muslims under US occupation in the age of George Bush's wars against them that "won't end in our lifetime."

Nor will Jose Padilla's life improve as a US citizen held as an "enemy combatant" in military confinement for nearly four years and since then by the Department of Justice (DOJ) even though no corroborating evidence justifies his guilt on anything, let alone his original charge of being part of a terrorist plot to detonate "dirty bombs" inside the country. Nonetheless, he's been kept in brutalizing solitary confinement and tortured there awaiting trial just begun April 16 on a lesser vague charge of "supporting terrorism (by being) part of a vast international movement of foot soldiers, recruiters and financiers who foment violent jihad around the globe" with no evidence to make this case or any other on an innocent man.

Occasionally a brief story pops up about him as it did when wire services like Reuters reported his trial began in Miami. It then quickly disappears as this "unworthy" abused, victimized and emotionally turned to mush young man is left to the whims of DOJ justice meaning he'll get none. Nor will the media explain he experienced some of the mind-altering treatment common at Guantanamo and Human Rights Watch says goes on at Kabul's US-run "prison of darkness" where detainees are so abused a lucky former one reported he "could hear people knocking their heads against the walls and the doors (in a delusional state)." The Pentagon knows what it's doing and even puts it in writing. The current Army field manual states: "Sensory deprivation (or extremes) may result in extreme anxiety, hallucinations, bizarre thoughts, depression, and anti-social behavior (and) significant psychological distress."

John Walker Lindh got his share of it too. He's a US citizen former Attorney General John Ashcroft labelled an "American Taliban." He was captured, held and tortured in Afghanistan in 2001 based on false claims he was a Taliban terrorist fighting US forces. In fact, he only arrived in the country four weeks before 9/11 and went to help the Taliban fight the brutal Afghan warlords at a time Washington was still providing the Taliban financial aid. Under torture at Baghram Airbase, he confessed to crimes he never committed, for which there was no corroborating evidence, and while there was denied legal counsel. Lindh is an innocent man, should be freed, and likely is as bad off emotionally as Padilla.

Instead, he's been moved to the federal supermax prison in Colorado where he's held in brutalizing solitary confinement, forced to undergo sensory deprivation, other periods of extreme noise, routine beatings, mindless strip searches and more because that's what goes on in these hellholes designed to destroy human beings and doing a pretty good job of it. The public only got false and misleading reports and media images of Lindh portrayed as a "dangerous Taliban terrorist" now in custody and unable to commit further crimes. He never committed any. More injustice for another "unworthy victim" of it.

The Case of Lynne Stewart's Struggle for Justice As An "Unworthy Victim" Targeted by Bush's DOJ

Lynne Stewart's courageous struggle for justice is followed, discussed and will be remembered by growing legions of supporters everywhere in spite of the dominant media's blackout on almost all of it. DOJ indicted Stewart on four counts of aiding and abetting a terrorist organization April 9, 2002 under the 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA). She was unjustly accused of providing material support for terrorism and violating Special Administrative Measures (SAMS) imposed by the US Bureau of Prisons

including a gag order on Sheik Abdel Rahman whom she represented in his 1995 trial and who now is serving a life sentence for “Seditious Conspiracy” in connection with the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Because the so-called “radical” cleric was so radioactive, his case was high-profile enough to make Stewart herself a target that began with her arrest, indictment and trial using her case to threaten other lawyers not to represent unpopular clients in the age of George Bush’s witch-hunt “war on terrorism” against them.

It was the beginning of Stewart’s long ordeal that included her battle with breast cancer, de facto court disbarment following her conviction February 10, 2005 on all four counts of her indictment – made official April 25, 2007 when she was formally (and unjustly) disbarred by the New York Bar Association. October 17, 2006 was her sentencing date that could have been for life for a 67 year old woman if presiding Judge John G. Koeltl handed down the 30 years DOJ prosecutors asked for. Judge Koeltl, however, had other ideas effectively vindicating Stewart in his 28 month sentence, allowing her to remain free pending her appeal to a higher court which he acknowledged might overturn the case that was clearly a gross miscarriage of justice for a woman whose her long career was dedicated to fighting for justice.

Stewart spent 30 years as a civil rights attorney representing the rights of those in society never afforded due process unless they’re lucky enough to have an advocate like her. For that and representing Sheik Rahman, she became a targeted “unworthy victim” whose struggle for exoneration continues. Both she and DOJ are appealing Judge Koeltl’s sentence with Stewart’s fate hanging on the outcome that likely will be appealed to the Supreme Court whichever way it goes with final resolution on it still many months away.

And it may not end there. If the High Court rules for Stewart or affirms her maximum 28 month sentence, DOJ may decide to reindict her on new charges meaning a new ordeal would begin where the present one leaves off. In the age of George Bush, that’s how things work for society’s “unworthy” targeted victims including those representing due process rights of others when DOJ doesn’t want them to have any.

For now, Stewart’s appeal to the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit and DOJ’s will be heard and likely ruled on together by a three-judge panel at a date so far unannounced. Stewart’s appeal challenges the validity of the charges, the application of statutes used, the constitutionality of pre-trial tactics plus the conduct of and various rulings made at trial. Her hope is for what she deserves – a verdict reversal and full exoneration, case closed at the appellate level.

Stewart also opposes DOJ’s objections to her sentence and has a January 22, 2007 US Supreme Court decision in *Cunningham v. California* to bolster her case. In the 6 – 3 ruling, the High Court affirmed the district judge’s exercise of discretion in imposing sentence. The Court struck down California’s tiered sentencing system under which judicial findings of fact resulted in higher sentences. That, in turn, bolsters the notion that prosecution Sentencing Guidelines are only advisory and aren’t to be used as a line in the sand benchmark basis for imposing sentence.

Two other cases before the High Court may also bear on Stewart’s appeal. One is *Claiborne v. United States* on whether extraordinary circumstances are needed to justify a sentence substantially different from Guidelines. The other is *Rita v. United States* on a sentence within Guidelines. Here the issue is whether Guidelines sentencing is presumed reasonable, or whether a court must still examine other factors justifiable enough to warrant a lesser

sentence. Lynne Stewart's fate hangs on all these issues along with whatever DOJ has in mind for her ahead – whether to let her case end in the courts or continue its witch-hunt persecution of her. It may be a good while yet before it's known.

Other Examples of “Unworthy” Victims

In the age of George Bush, all Muslims are “unworthy,” and those singled out for targeting are its victims. Citing national security, thousands were and still are hunted down witch-hunt style, rounded up, held indefinitely on administrative charges or none at all, denied bail, restricted or denied their right to counsel, tried in secret courts with no right of appeal, and incarcerated or deported. They're invisible save for their broad brush demonization in the major media as “Islamofascists” to justify the “long war on terror” against them because of their faith and ethnicity. They're its innocent victims.

Along with them are “unworthy” Latino immigrants here in the US undocumented because NAFTA, CAFTA and other predatory trade agreements destroyed their ability to survive at home leaving them no other choice than to come north. US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) feels otherwise targeting them as criminals and terrorist threats. Its agents seize them at the border or in workplace raids separating parents from children, holding thousands in detention where they're harshly treated and denied any rights. The rest are deported, but will just return to face ill-treatment as exploited workers or by ICE if caught because of their race and ethnicity. More “unworthy” nameless, faceless victims.

The US-based Gulag Prison System's “Unworthy Victims”

Few people in the country know anything about the US prison system and who's held there because almost nothing about it gets reported in the major media. Most in it are many tens of thousands of “unworthy victims” because of oppressive statutes on the books incarcerating huge numbers unjustly, many innocent of any crime, and most come from society's most vulnerable and unwanted so who'll care or notice. The result is the largest prison population in the world at over 2.2 million, growing by over 1000 new inmates a week. Half or more are black, about two-thirds including Latinos, over half are there for non-violent offenses, and half of those are drug related.

Then consider how they're treated. What goes on at Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, Bagram and other overseas hellholes happens here at home as well in US-based ones at both federal and state levels. It includes constant harassment, savage beatings by prison guards; attacks by fierce dogs inflicting painful bites; severe shocking with cattle prods and 50,000 volt-emitting Taser electro-shock guns strong enough to kill and often used multiple times making victims (who survive) shake in pain for hours; assaults by toxic chemicals like pepper spray inflicting severe discomfort or pain; and for many 23 hour lockdowns in rat and roach-infested windowless cells under 24 hour artificial light with alternating periods of sensory deprivation and extreme noise and kept in painful hand and feet shackles whenever outside their cells.

There's more including denial of medical treatment or poor quality when received even though prisons are known hotbeds of diseases including contagious ones. In September, 2006, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) estimated over half the prison population suffers mental problems, mostly related to their incarceration and for many it's severe. It includes serious melancholia, mania and hallucinations. In addition, an astonishing 1.5 million inmates are released each year afflicted with threatening contagious diseases like TB and

HIV/AIDS. In prison, these and other diseases cause 7000 mostly preventable reported deaths yearly plus a rising level of suicides and many more unsuccessful attempts.

In addition, prison sexual assaults are commonplace, and victims of it have virtually no effective defense against predators. The UN Committee Against Torture reported the numbers conservatively estimating in May, 2006 it happens to at least 13% of inmates with many more suffering frequent sexual abuse. The UN Committee believes around 200,000 current inmates were or will become sexual assault victims and that over the past 20 years the number exceeds a shocking one million.

Then there are the political prisoners in the many hundreds in a nation where the very notion of them is repugnant and appalling. The Prison Activist Resource Center web site lists over 100 names it focuses on (mostly unknown to the public) including a few that are like framed American Indian activist Leonard Peltier, imprisoned 30 years unjustly, and internationally known journalist and former Black Panther activist Mumia Abu-Jamal on death row for 25 years for a crime he didn't commit. Most others there include former Black Panther members and other black activists; Native American activists; Puerto Rican freedom fighting activists; Muslims and undocumented immigrants because of their faith and ethnicity; and others (men and women) who dared fight for rights, principles and causes America rejects.

Palestinian refugee, scholar, academic, community leader, civic activist and freedom-fighting advocate Dr. Sami Al-Arian stands out as a dramatic example of injustice in post-9/11 America with its climate of state-induced fear and harsh repression targeting all Muslims, distinguished ones included. Following 11 years of investigations and harassment, he was arrested and imprisoned February 20, 2003 on trumped up charges, held in oppressive 23 hour lockdown solitary confinement in rat and roach-infested windowless cells under 24 hour artificial light even after being tried and acquitted December 6, 2005 on eight of 17 false charges with the jury deadlocked 10 - 2 in his favor on the other nine.

On March 2, 2006 he agreed to a plea agreement to bring closure to his case and end his long ordeal. Under its terms, the prosecution stipulated Al-Arian committed no violent acts or had knowledge of any; that he would not be required to "cooperate" further by providing prosecutors more information; and that he would be released for time served and be willing to be voluntarily deported.

It didn't happen because prosecutors subpoenaed Al-Arian to testify before a grand jury investigating an Islamic think tank violating his plea agreement that he no longer would have to cooperate in further government investigations. Al-Arian rightfully refused to testify knowing doing so might involuntarily entrap him in possible or interpreted perjury leaving him vulnerable to endless government opportunities to harass and reincarcerate him.

As a result Al-Arian's sentence was extended, and he remains imprisoned where, as a diabetic, he underwent a 60 day life-threatening hunger strike in protest requiring his transfer to the Butner, North Carolina medical facility where he remained until being transferred to the Alexandria Detention Center in northern Virginia. Before arriving, he endured a 30 hour stopover at the Federal Correctional Institution in Petersburg, Virginia where, still recovering from his hunger strike, he was placed in a tiny, freezing cold windowless cell with pools of water on the ground and extremely cold air fed in through a vent, given no additional clothing or cleaning supplies to clean his cell, and no clock or watch to tell time or ability to know the proper direction to perform his Muslim prayers. In

addition, guards illegally seized his legal documents and then claimed they misplaced them. They've yet to be found or returned.

This is how extra harshly Muslim political prisoners are treated post-9/11 as Al-Arian's long ordeal for freedom, justice and full exoneration continues. He's well represented by William Mitchell College of Law professor and past President of the National Lawyers Guild Peter Erlinder as his lead attorney, but his struggle ahead is daunting. Al-Arian is up against a rogue administration determined to resist efforts to free him and is ready to file new charges to keep him imprisoned as long as DOJ wants him there. Today, that's the state of judicial fairness in America endangering anyone daring to speak out and dissent in an age of state-sponsored terrorism targeting innocent victims.

Another noted one is Dr. Rafil Dhafir, a Muslim American of Iraqi descent and practicing oncologist until his license was suspended following his politically motivated conviction in a DOJ-run "kangaroo court" trial. He was charged with violating the Iraqi Sanctions Regulations (IEEPA) using his own funds and what he could raise through his Help the Needy charity to bring desperately needed essential to life humanitarian aid to Iraqi people unable to get it because of US/UN-imposed punitive sanctions from 1990 - 2003.

For his "Crime of Compassion" (see dhafirtrial.net, Katherine Hughes), he was convicted of violating the sanctions and a total of 59 of 60 trumped up total charges including tax fraud, money laundering, and mail and wire fraud resulting in a 22 year prison sentence he's currently serving in Terre Haute's special illegal secret "Communications Management Unit" (CMU) targeting Muslims. Its existence was first revealed in a breaking news story February 16 by lawyer and legal analyst, academic, author and journalist Jennifer Van Bergen in an online article in The Raw Story. Van Bergen reported the CMU is for so-called "high-security risk" Muslim and Middle Eastern (Arab) prisoners to severely limit or cut them off entirely from contact and communication with the outside world violating federal law prohibiting such action.

Sami Al-Arian was exonerated by a jury and Rafil Dhafir is an innocent man never charged with or convicted of "terrorism" or any act of violence. Neither is a "high-security risk" but both are treated like them because they're high-profile Muslims in the witch-hunt "war on terror" targeting them unjustly. These distinguished men are also "trophy" prisoners for the Bush administration using them especially, but all demonized Muslims as well, as scapegoats because of their faith and ethnicity and are treating them with extreme harshness as a result.

These examples aren't happening at Guantanamo or Abu Ghraib, but right here at home in prisons everywhere where mostly non-violent human beings are locked in cages. It's often for offenses deserving little more than a reprimand or fine or that never should have been criminalized in the first place. Or in the case of Al-Arian, Dhafir and many others it represents a state crime against humanity, against innocent men, women and even children unjustly imprisoned for political reasons only. The result is victims of injustice are forced to serve hard time, and for repeat offenders or political targets it could be life without parole because society judges them "unworthy," punishing them in ways never done to the "worthy" afforded special treatment because of their privileged status. In the age of George Bush, we're all potential Sami Al-Arians and Rafil Dhafirs, and far too many targeted end up unjustly in the heart of prison darkness on death row as the "unworthiest" of this country's "unworthy victims."

Today, the US is the only western country still using the death penalty as a punitive measure. Since 1985, over 50 countries abolished it and of the approximate six dozen still using it just a small handful account for nearly all executions. Amnesty International 2005 data showed 94% of known ones were carried out in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the US.

The US-based Campaign to End the Death Penalty (CEDP) is a “chapter-based grassroots organization dedicated to the abolition of capital punishment in the United States (with) active chapters in cities and campuses across the country.” It reports more than 3500 people now on death row in the country, the largest number ever and growing listing five reasons why it’s wrong and must end. It’s racist, punishes the poor, condemns the innocent, doesn’t deter crime, and is “cruel and unusual punishment” nearly always targeting “unworthy victims” of our criminal justice system under which those on death row get the worst of it.

Since 1973, 123 or more US prisoners were released after evidence found them innocent. It concerned former Illinois Governor George Ryan enough in 2000 to declare a moratorium on all state executions after the 13th death row prisoner was found to have been wrongfully convicted since the nation’s death penalty was reinstated in 1977. Ryan then pardoned four death row inmates and commuted 167 other sentences.

The ACLU reported the results of a disturbing study conducted by Columbia University professor James Liebman in which he examined thousands of US capital sentences reviewed by courts in 34 states from 1973 - 1995. His shocking conclusion was “An astonishing 82% of death row inmates did not deserve to receive the death penalty (and) One in 20 death row inmates is later found not guilty.” Reasons why were that someone later confessed to the crime, key witness testimony was later found to be illegitimate, or new evidence supported innocence.

Investigations like this and others prove the death penalty is this country’s ultimate punitive measure used almost exclusively against “unworthy, unpeople victims” to eliminate the unwanted, and those targeted are largely defenseless against it. Only the fortunate innocent few survive also proving our criminal justice system is irreparably broken and shamefully unjust in nominally democratic America for the “worthy” alone.

America the Beautiful - Only for the Privileged “Worthy”

“Worthy and unworthy victims” live in different Americas, highlighted in the age of George Bush in blazing starkness. Those anointed “worthy” are named, known, seen media-manipulated heros while the “unworthy” are mostly nameless, faceless unknown abused “unpeople” targets of the administration’s “war on terror,” the poor and anyone “in times of universal deceit” courageously daring to dissent. Above are case examples of injustice portraying America’s dark side in contrast to those qualifying as special because Washington gets propaganda value from their misfortune. Add to them the privileged few, always special and “worthy” in a nation beholden to them at the expense of all others.

Boosted as well in the process is what Edward Herman calls our “indispensable state” image and essential goodness giving us special dispensation to wage perpetual wars for an elusive peace in the name of democracy, human rights and justice for all we preach but don’t practice. They’re easily justified by manipulating false notions of exceptionalism and moral superiority giving us special rights and obligations to spread our way of life to others hiding our darker imperial agenda to impose it on them through the barrel of a gun, like it or not.

This essay shows its effects on real people – those going along are “worthy” and those who don’t or don’t matter are “unworthy unpeople.” Wellesley College English professor Katherine Lee Bates wrote the famous words to American the Beautiful on a trip west in 1893 but never could have imagined her “spacious skies...amber waves of grain...and purple mountain majesties” would become George Bush’s ugly America for the “worthy” alone uncrowned by any of the “good” or “brotherhood” she wrote about “from sea to shining sea” everywhere.

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