

On Torture and Its Disturbing Apologists

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Once upon a time, not so long ago, most people were civilized enough to consider it a no-brainer that torture is clearly wrong. Today, not so much. In light of media reports about the largely redacted CIA torture report, shockingly large numbers of US citizens have come out in support of the use of torture to supposedly save innocent American lives. While most of the information in the report was already available to the public, there was information made available about so-called “rectal feeding” of prisoners. According to law Professor Francis Boyle from the University of Illinois at Champaign, “It’s really rape – rape torture.” (*The Challenger*, Buffalo, December 17, 2014, p. 5.)

Christians were much more likely to support torture than non-religious people, and conservative Christians were most likely to support it. However, this is no reason for non-theists to feel so smug. There are certainly non-theists that support torture to supposedly save innocent lives. Sam Harris has long maintained this position.

It is not surprising that conservative Christians support torture, or “enhanced interrogation techniques” (Geez, how Orwellian can you get?) as it is euphemistically known when applied ostensibly in US interests. After all, conservative Christians believe that atheists, terrorists and other sinners will be tortured in hell by their perfectly loving God forever after they die. What’s a little torture in the here-and-now to keep sinners in check? This is in part why conservative and reactionary Christians have supported the Inquisition, the burning of alleged witches, etc.

To avoid being hypocritical and to shun cowardly double standards, pro-torture people must admit that if it is ok for agents acting upon behalf of the US to torture people, it is just fine and dandy for non-Americans to torture US citizens to thwart an imminent attack. This would have made Iraqis morally justified in torturing US citizens in attempts to thwart an attack upon Iraq after George W. Bush lied about Iraq possessing Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). But surprise, surprise. US defenders of torture do not believe that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. (Ironically, it is this frighteningly arrogant American exceptionalism that encourages anti-American terrorists to engage in acts of violence against Americans and to destroy American symbols of power and prestige.) This is not the common logical fallacy known as the slippery slope. This is what’s known as opening a serious can of worms.

During recent protests over the killings of unarmed Black males such as Mike Brown of Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner of Staten Island, New York, many protesters embraced the slogan, “Black lives matter.” However, those embracing American exceptionalism seem to believe that only *American* (mainly White) lives matter. I could be wrong, but I find it hard to imagine Dick Cheney and his ilk arguing in defense of torture to save the lives of the inhabitants of a Black ghetto.

If torture is right, then we got it wrong. The methods used during the Inquisition were justified, and we have no right to judge them by the standards of today (moral and historical relativism.) Perhaps in order to save American lives, Torquemada should be our primary role model. If torture is right, we were wrong to arrest, try, and harshly punish Japanese soldiers for using torture during WW II. If torture is right, we ought to get rid of our national and international laws prohibiting it, because these are unjust laws.

US citizens embracing the use of torture do not even seem to be bothered by the fact that some of the torture victims were not even guilty – including at least one that was tortured to death. Sometimes innocent people have to be tortured to death in order to supposedly keep Americans safe.

This raises other questions. For example, does torture work? According to most experts, it does not. But even if it does, defenders of torture must be saying that anything is ok as long as we supposedly save American lives. In that case, what if an alleged terrorist refused to talk even after torture? Would it be ok to torture his young child? Certainly the alleged terrorist would talk then. Or would he? Anything to save American lives and all that stuff.

Here is another question. Is it unpatriotic to oppose torture carried out in pursuit of supposed US interests? If so, what should be the proper response to unpatriotic citizens? Perhaps a better question would be is it un-American and an abandonment of American values to lower our standards and to embrace torture for any reason?

There might be other “good” reasons for embracing torture. After all, why limit ourselves to ostensible US interests? Should Black people be allowed to commit torture against sellouts to avert an imminent attack from the police, such as the one that led to the death of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton during the Black liberation movement?

It is sad that we have come to this. What a moral legacy to leave to future generations. “Torture is back where it belongs, baby! How sweet it is!”