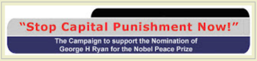
The Nobel Peace Prize to George Ryan

George Ryan has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for 2007

FRIDAY, JANUARY 28, 2011

2011 Nobel Peace Prize Nomination of Governor George H. Ryan



2011 Nobel Peace Prize Nomination of Governor George H. Ryan

University of Illinois College of Law Professor Francis A. Boyle nominated retired Illinois Governor George H. Ryan for the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize because of his courageous, heroic, and principled opposition to the racist and class-based death penalty.

The Illinois General Assembly just voted to abolish the death penalty--a life-long objective of Professor Boyle, a Native Illinoisan. See his article "Teaching Against the Death Penalty," 21 J. Development Alternatives & Areas Studies, No. 1 & 2, at 90-96 (March-June 2002), which recounts his experiences at teaching against the death penalty since his arrival at the College of Law in August of 1978.

Together with his former student Karen Conti and her partner Greg Adamski, they served as Co-Counsel to prevent the execution of convicted mass-murderer John Wayne Gacey by then Illinois Governor Jim Edgar. The three of them won a Request for a Stay of Execution by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to Governor Edgar on the grounds that the Illinois lethal injection procedure constituted torture, cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment. Nevertheless, Governor Edgar violated this Request and illegally tortured Mr. Gacey to death over a period of eighteen minutes.

But thanks to Governor George Ryan there have been no similar executions by the State of Illinois for over a decade.

Boyle was elected by the 200,000 members of Amnesty International USA to serve two two- year terms on their Board of Directors from 1988 to 1992. The Nobel Peace Prize Winning Amnesty International is an abolitionist organization that will work to prevent the execution of any human being for any reason. So will Professor Boyle. Amnesty International also opposes the torture of human beings for any reason. So does Professor Boyle.

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Posted by sisselnor at 9:01 AM 2 comments: Links to this post

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SATURDAY, JANUARY 9, 2010

George H. Ryan is nominated for the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize

"Stop Capital Punishment Now!"

The Campaign to support the Nomination of
George H Ryan for the Nobel Peace Prize

http://www.thenobelpeaceprizetoryan.com/2010nobel.htm

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – JANUARY 6, 2010

George H. Ryan is nominated for the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize

Francis A. Boyle, long-standing, distinguished Professor of International Law and Human Rights, announces his nomination of retired Illinois Governor George H. Ryan for the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize.

“The lives of about 3297 people on death rows throughout the United States of America stand in the balance. For the sake of them all, I respectfully request that you award the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize to George Ryan,” Boyle states in nominating Ryan.

The former Illinois governor’s courageous opposition to the death penalty initiated the groundwork for the Moratorium Movement when in the year 2000 he declared the Illinois death penalty moratorium and emptied Illinois’ death row, the first such action in this country.
Due directly through Gov. Ryan’s pioneering efforts, the number of death sentences and the number of executions carried out in this country has reached a historical low, and has given promise to the end of the death penalty in the United States.

The year 2009 marked a historical landmark with the publication of The Death Penalty Information Center’s report "The Death Penalty in 2009: Year End Report" on December 18, noting that the country is expected to finish 2009 with the fewest death sentences since the U.S. Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976. Eleven states considered abolishing the death penalty this year, a significant increase in legislative activity from previous years, as the high costs and lack of measurable benefits associated with this punishment troubled lawmakers. In 2009 New Mexico became the 15th American state to repeal the death penalty.

According to Boyle: "Nothing could strike a more powerful blow against the death penalty in the United States and around the world" than for the Nobel Peace Prize Committee to give their 2010 Award to Ryan.

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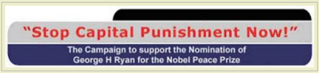
Posted by sisselnor at 3:33 PM No comments: Links to this post

TUESDAY, JANUARY 5, 2010

George H. Ryan is nominated for the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize



"Stop Capital Punishment Now!"

The Campaign to support the Nomination of
George H Ryan for the Nobel Peace Prize

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - JANUARY 21, 2009

George H. Ryan is nominated for the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize

Francis A. Boyle, long-standing Professor of International Law and Human Rights, has nominated retired Illinois Governor George H. Ryan for the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize.
George Ryan's courageous opposition to the death penalty initiated the groundwork for the Moratorium Movement when in the year 2000 he declared the Illinois death penalty moratorium, the first in this country.

The moratorium placed on all executions by the United States Supreme Court in 2007 can directly be attributed to Ryan's principled vision and tireless work to guarantee human rights by abolishing the death penalty both in the United States and around the world.

Although the monumental development of a moratorium was a short-lived reality, the number of death sentences and the number of executions carried out in this country have reached a historical low, and has given promise to the end of the death penalty in the United States -- all thanks to the inspired and driven dedication of one man, retired Illinois Governor George H. Ryan.

In the US 37 executions took place in 2008, marking a 14-year low and continuing a downward trend that began in 2000.

95% of all executions occurred in the South in 2008; 49% were in one state - Texas.
As stated by Professor Boyle, "George Ryan is the beginning of the end of the death penalty in America. Thanks to George Ryan, the death penalty is on its last legs here in the United States. It is up to the rest of us to kill it off!"

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Posted by sisselnor at 4:52 AM No comments: Links to this post

SATURDAY, JULY 5, 2008

Healing

"The death penalty is about revenge and hate, and revenge and hate is why my daughter and those 167 other people are dead today."

Bud Welch, father of Julie Marie Welch,
victim in the Oklahoma City bombing

"I have come to believe that the death penalty is not what will help me heal. Responding to one killing with another killing does not honor my daughter, nor does it help create the kind of society I want to live in, where human life and human rights are valued. I know that an execution creates another grieving family, and causing pain to another family does not lessen my own pain."

MVFHR board member, Vicki Schieber, testifying to the Subcommittee on the Constitution,
Civil Rights and Property Rights; Committee on the Judiciary; US Senate, February 2006

Posted by carie at 7:58 AM No comments: Links to this post

THURSDAY, JANUARY 10, 2008

Deadline - The movie

Governor George H. Ryan

During a single term as governor of Illinois from 1999 to 2003, Republican George H. Ryan made a name for himself by advocating for the reform of his state's troubled capital punishment system. As a state legislator, he voted to bring the death penalty back to Illinois in 1977 after the Supreme Court's Gregg v. Georgia decision. In 2000, after major problems in the system came to his attention, Governor Ryan issued a moratorium on all executions in Illinois and established a commission to evaluate Illinois' entire capital punishment system. In 2003, after the commission issued its exhaustive study that documented serious flaws, he ordered special one-hour clemency hearings for every person on death row. At the end of his term as governor, he pardoned 4 death row inmates with strong claims of innocence, and commuted to life in prison the sentences of the remaining 167 inmates awaiting execution in Illinois. This was the first time any governor of any state in the union had issued a "blanket clemency�? of this magnitude, and it underscored Governor Ryan's fear that the flawed administration of Illinois' capital punishment laws might some day lead to the execution of an innocent man or woman. A one-time pharmacist from the small town of Kankakee, Governor Ryan retired from politics after the end of his gubernatorial term in 2003. He was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 and 2004.

Learn More

The Center on Wrongful Convictions
One of the driving forces behind Governor Ryan's decision was this organization which is dedicated to identifying and rectifying wrongful convictions and other serious miscarriages of justice in Illinois and around the country. The organization consists of lawyers, professors, and Northwestern Law Students dedicated to identifying and rectifying wrongful cases of criminal justice.

The Center's website also includes information about each of the Illinois' innocence cases, including Anthony Porter whose exoneration influenced Governor Ryan's decision to place a moratorium on the death penalty. Download the brief that was co-written by one of Northwestern's journalism students, Shawn Armbrust, who is featured in the film.

The Death Penalty Information Center's Section on Illinois' Commission on Capital Punishment
The Death Penalty Information Center has assembled press materials and Web links to provide easy access to information regarding the work of the Illinois Commission on Capital Punishment, a blue-ribbon panel that has recently completed the nation's most comprehensive state review of the death penalty. The Commission's findings and recommendations captured the attention of lawmakers and legal experts throughout the nation who are watching closely to track the impact of this review beyond Illinois. The Commission's recommendations aim to address problems Illinois Governor George Ryan identified including potential safeguards to prevent the possible conviction and execution of innocent inmates.

The *Deadline* DVD features more of Governor Ryan, including additional excerpts from his interview with the directors and his clemency speech, as well as a "Ryan and the Death Penalty�? timeline.

Read more about Illinois in our state by state map.

Posted by sisselnor at 6:49 AM No comments: Links to this post

TUESDAY, JANUARY 8, 2008

Supreme Court Looks At Death Penalty

Last updated 1:29 pm CT January 08, 2008

Supreme Court Looks At Death Penalty

The US Supreme Court is hearing arguments Monday about whether lethal injections violate a constitutional ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

Attorneys for two Kentucky death row inmates argue the injections cause undue suffering. If the court agrees. Illinois along with 13 other states would have to change their laws before resuming executions.

Executions nationwide are on hold until the Supreme Court rules. Sarah Heyer sits on the board of the Illinois Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. She questions whether executions give closure to victims and their families.

"It's more painful for the families to have to be brought back in again and again, where with life without parole you can just put them away and shut the door," said Heyer.

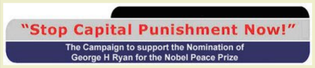
Former Governor George Ryan stayed more than 170 executions before leaving office. and placed a moratorium on the death penalty after more than a dozen inmates were exonerated.

According to the FBI- the climb in violent crime the past two years is over. The agency reports violent crime, including murders, rapes and robberies, dropped by nearly 2% between January and June of 2007.

The data shows that violent crime dropped dramatically in cities of a million or more residents.there murders decreased by 6.5% and rapes by 14%. Smaller cities and rural areas, however, saw a slight one percentage point *increase* in violence.

Posted by sisselnor at 12:13 PM No comments: Links to this post

George H. Ryan is nominated for the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - JANUARY 6, 2008
George H. Ryan is nominated for the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize

University of Illinois Law and Human Rights Professor Francis A. Boyle has nominated George H. Ryan for the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize. The current growing moratorium movement spreading across the United States is a reality directly connected to Ryan's courageous opposition to the death penalty both in the US and around the world, and to his visionary action to impose the first US moratorium against the death penalty in 2000.

Due to George Ryan's commitment to humanitarian principles and his tireless efforts to create dialogue in support of seeking justice for the 3,350 men and women warehoused on death rows throughout the US, the United States Supreme Court has in effect imposed a nation wide moratorium on executions. George Ryan's dream to end governmental killing has temporarily come to fruition.

The growing momentum for the outright abolition of the death

penalty in the United States is due to the heroic efforts of George H. Ryan. He has done more effective work against the death penalty than the entire American Abolitionist Movement put together. For that reason the world should award him the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize.

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Posted by sisselnor at 8:35 AM No comments: Links to this post

SATURDAY, JANUARY 5, 2008

Chicago Near Police Torture Settlement

VIEWIMAGES™

Chicago Near Police Torture Settlement

14 hours ago

CHICAGO (AP) — The city is near approval of a $20 million settlement that would end lawsuits brought by four former death-row inmates whose claims of police torture led to a re-examination of capital punishment.

Final paperwork has been approved, and the City Council can vote on the settlement next week, city law department spokeswoman Jennifer Hoyle said Friday.

The council was supposed to vote last month, but paperwork problems postponed the action.

The four inmates — Aaron Patterson, Leroy Orange, Stanley Howard and Madison Hobley — claim they were tortured by police and wrongly convicted. George Ryan, governor at the time, pardoned them in 2003 and commuted the sentences of every death row inmate in the state.

Posted by sisselnor at 8:27 AM No comments: Links to this post

FRIDAY, JANUARY 4, 2008

George Ryan is nominated for the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize

I just nominated George Ryan for the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize because of his courageous and heroic opposition to the death penalty, that has now culminated in the National Moratorium that we now see in the United States.
fab.

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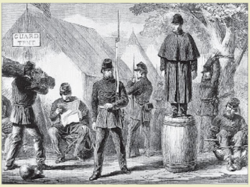
Posted by sisselnor at 1:09 PM No comments: Links to this post

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2007

Torture, American style



A 19th-century image shows federal troops employing several forms of torture. One man stood on a barrel for several hours; another carried a large log, his leg weighted with a ball and chain; a third was bound to a tree with his arms raised above his head; a fourth sat on the ground, tied. (Corbis)

By Darius Rejali
December 16, 2007

NEARLY EVERY MONTH, it seems, news reports carry disturbing revelations about torture by American soldiers, intelligence officers, or allies. Just by reading the news we learn things we never wanted to know about waterboarding, forced standing for hours, and sleep deprivation; most recently the CIA has destroyed videotapes showing a suspected terrorist being interrogated with techniques that an agent called torture.

more stories like thisBehind these disclosures, as they reach our ears, runs a powerful current of disbelief and shock: it is hard to imagine that such things would be done by Americans.

We think torture is mainly the province of dictators and juntas - the kind of thing that happens behind the iron doors of repressive regimes. In a democracy, with open courts and a free press, torture should be a relic. In the words of an American World War II poster, torture is "the method of the enemy."

But a closer look at the modern history of torture suggests that exactly the opposite is true. Torture isn't an alien force invading our democracy from the benighted realms of dictatorships. In fact, it is the democracies that have been the real innovators in 20th-century torture. Britain, France, and the United States were perfecting new forms of torture long before the CIA even existed. It might make Americans uncomfortable, but the modern repertoire of torture is mainly a democratic innovation.

In one instance after another, democracies developed new torture techniques, refined them, and then exported them to more authoritarian regimes. Americans didn't just develop electric power; they invented the first electrotorture devices and used them in police stations from Arkansas to Seattle. Magneto torture, a technique favored by the Nazis involving a portable generator, was actually developed and spread by the French. Waterboarding and forced standing owe their wide use to the Americans and British.

None of this is to say that democracies have a worse record of torture than authoritarian states: dictators deserve their reputation for violence and cruelty. But the role of democracies is central. Painful as it is to confront, knowing how - and why - democracies have played such an important role in torture also has a hopeful side: it suggests that democracies can also halt torture. In fact, they have a special responsibility to do so.

. . .

The word "torture" still evokes medieval images - the rack, the iron maiden, thumbscrews. Authoritarian states historically chose torture techniques that were as painful as possible, and torturers often scarred their victims deliberately, using their damaged bodies as a deterrent and an advertisement of state power. Kings used torture to demonstrate that they could take lives or show mercy as they willed.

For centuries, the whip was the preferred tool of state torture, and some were nastier than others. The Great Russian Knout, for example, had a hook on the end of it that tore out chunks of flesh with each blow. Even the Nazis, well into the era of modern torture, favored whips, as they scarred their way across thousands of victims in prisons and concentration camps during World War II.

In recent times states have outlawed open spectacles of torture, and torture has ceased to be an exhibit of kingly power. But its basic uses remain the same: extracting information, forcing false confessions, and keeping prisoners docile and compliant.

So torture hasn't really disappeared in the modern age. What have disappeared are forms of torture that leave marks. The police, military investigators, and governments in democratic societies can count on the press and people watching. They know that if a prisoner can't show any marks of torture, people are far less likely to believe his or her story. So as societies have become more open, the art of torture has crept underground and evolved into the chilling new forms - often undetectable - that define torture today.

Take electrotorture. In the early days of electric power, most authorities avoided using electricity for torture because it was too dangerous: it tended to kill its victims, and dead subjects yield no information. But in 1899, two research teams, one American and one Swiss, correctly identified the biological processes that caused electrical death. This knowledge proved to be critical: A proper torture device, it appeared, had to deliver painful high voltages with low amperage.

The earliest recorded electortorture device was an American machine called the "hummingbird" (1908), likely nicknamed because it hummed with electrical current as it was applied to the body. We know little about it; it appears in the writings of the anarchist philosopher Emma Goldman, who received letters from prisoners describing its use.

Early 20th-century America was a breeding ground for new ideas in electric torture, many documented by American Bar Association investigators in their 1931 Report on Lawlessness in Law Enforcement. Between 1922 and 1926, the Seattle police chief got his confessions from a cell with a wall-to-wall electrified carpet. "The prisoner leaps, screaming in agony, into the air....It is not fatal, its effects are not lasting, and it leaves no marks," remarked the ABA report. And until 1929, the police in Helena, Ark., used an improvised electrical chair to extract confessions. At the time, the sheriff testified that the chair came with other office furniture, and he had inherited it from "a long line of former county sheriffs."

Still, these devices were rather crude compared with what electrotorture would become. The most famous electrotorture device was adjustable, portable, and based on the magneto, a simple generator that produces a high-voltage spark. The idea of using a magneto generator for torture came to be closely associated with the Nazis, who employed it ruthlessly in France and Belgium during World War II. But it wasn't the Germans who developed it: It was the French colonial police, the Sûreté, who pioneered the technique and used it throughout the 1930s fighting Vietnamese nationalists. The Nazis learned about the technology from a Vichy police officer, Inspector Marty of Toulouse, in 1942.

Although the Gestapo carried magneto torture to Paris and Belgium, the key distributors of magneto torture after the war were the United States and France. The French resumed magneto torture in Vietnam as early as 1947, passing it to the South Vietnamese, who passed the technique to American military interrogators during the Vietnam War. The Americans introduced magneto torture into Brazil in the late 1960s, and - just as the French had - the Americans eventually brought it home. Chicago police used magneto torture in the 1970s and 1980s to extract confessions. Most alleged incidents implicated Commander Jon Burge, a decorated veteran of the Vietnam War, and the detectives he supervised.

Electrotorture is only one example of how torture spreads via democracies. "Forced standing" is a technique used in the Soviet Union and made famous by the hooded men of Abu Ghraib: They were forced to stand for hours, balanced on a box with the threat of electric torture if they collapsed. It is not nearly as harmless as it sounds: Humans are not designed to stand utterly immobile, and accounts of the practice from Soviet-era victims and psychologists hired by the CIA describe immense pain.

Though forced standing is often associated with the interrogations of Stalin's secret police, the British had already refined the use of forced standing to intimidate and coerce prisoners. From 1910 to 1930, the practice was well known in Irish prisons and in British Indian penal colonies in the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal. The British colonial police also used it in Mandatory Palestine, where they were especially concerned about keeping torture "clean": They knew scarred victims would create a scandal at home, and they knew the Nazi publicity machine would use evidence of torture for German advantage in the Middle East. Forced standing was also known in French contexts, and, in the United States, was a standard slave punishment that by the 1920s became part of American police interrogations and prison punishments. Before the 1930s, then, forced standing was the special province of democratic, not authoritarian states. W.G. Krivitsky, an Soviet secret police agent who defected, described Soviet interrogation techniques in 1939 as "improved by Stalin on the model of the latest American methods."

Some techniques date to well before the 20th century, but still owe their modern forms to the innovations of democratic states. The use of water in torture, for example, is quite old, but most historical autocrats liked to boil their prisoners. The modern use of waterboarding can be traced back to the Philippines, where in 1902 American troops were fighting the insurgency. Returning soldiers brought water torture back to their civilian jobs as policemen in the 1910s, and it soon appeared in military prisons and police stations in large cities and small towns, especially in the American South.

By the 1920s, one can find the full encyclopedia of modern water torture already written up in American newspaper accounts and trial transcripts. One technique involved choking the victim, either with full body immersion, by covering the face with a handkerchief, or simply ladling water on the face of a prisoner as he is tilted head downward. This is the basis of modern waterboarding, and it would subsequently appear worldwide.

When we examine the history of modern torture technique by technique - and there are dozens of examples - we find that newer, "cleaner" tortures first appear in conditions of public monitoring, usually in democratic states. It is only afterward that we find authoritarian states adopting them.

If the spread of torture techniques suggests a blurry line between "us" and "them," it also teaches that there's no real boundary between "there" and "here." It would be ignoring history to assume that what happens in an American-run prison in Iraq will stay in Iraq. Soldiers who learn torture techniques abroad get jobs as police when they return, and the new developments in torture you read about today could yet be employed in a neighborhood near you.

In Chicago, in the decade after Vietnam, the use of magnetos and other clean tortures left a disaster: At least 11 men were sentenced to death and many others given long-term prison sentences based on confessions extracted by torture, and in 2003, Governor George Ryan of Illinois commuted the death sentences of all 167 death row inmates. Earlier this month the City of Chicago agreed to pay nearly $20 million to settle lawsuits filed by four former death row inmates who claimed they were tortured and wrongly convicted.

Everything torture represents - intimidation, abuse of public trust, extraction of false confessions, the blind eye of officials - is antithetical to the way democratic societies are supposed to work. But "clean" torture, leaving few marks and practiced behind closed doors, permits a kind of public silence or amnesia. The facts of Abu Ghraib were already known through testimony, but there was no public outcry until the scandalous photographs made it impossible to ignore. Even after Abu Ghraib, lawyers for Guantánamo detainees doubted allegations of torture until FBI e-mails confirmed them. Today, American authorities still shy away from the T-word, preferring terms such as "abuse" and "enhanced interrogation."

The disturbing political implication of clean torture is that we are less likely to complain about violence if it is committed by stealth. Indeed, we are less likely even to have the opportunity to complain. This is not because we are indifferent (thought it is certainly possible), but because we are often uncertain whether violence occurred at all. We are, in effect, illiterate in stealth torture, and this has political consequences. When people can't speak intelligently about cruelty, they aren't likely to be able to protect themselves against tyranny at home.

Still, history shows that the cycle of torture can be broken. Americans put an end to most domestic torture between 1930 and 1950. We did this, in part, by exposing torture. The American Bar Association's 1931 report transformed American law and policing. The document was cited in court decisions; newspapers and true crime books drew on the group's investigations to educate the public as to what the modern face of torture was. And police chiefs instituted more checks on police behavior, including clear punishments for violations of the law and regular medical inspections for detainees.

Many European states now have reasonably good records on torture precisely because they call torture techniques by their proper names, give them histories, and institute strong domestic and international monitoring of police, prisons, and asylums. The French have a far better human rights record now than they did in the 1960s, even if it is by no means perfect. There is no reason why America cannot restore its own reputation.

The biggest surprise, perhaps, is that torturers care what the public thinks. For more than a century torturers have voted with their hands: Governments that continue to use torture have moved to techniques that leave little trace. The same public pressure - built on unequivocal disapproval - should eventually be able to bring an end to this sorry history. Strange as it may seem, torturers and their apologists really do care.

Darius Rejali, a professor of political science at Reed College, is the author of "Torture and Democracy," out this month.

Posted by Serena at 10:29 AM No comments: Links to this post

UN Assembly calls for death penalty ban

New York (dpa) - The UN General Assembly on Tuesday voted 104-54 to adopt a
moratorium on the death penalty, defeating vocal opposition from countries
that maintain the practice does not violate human rights.

Countries that favour ending the death penalty are a uniformed bloc, arguing the practice "undermines human dignity" and that a moratorium "contributes to the enhancement and progressive development of human rights."

"There is no conclusive evidence of the death penalty's deterrence value and that any miscarriage or failure of justice in the death penalty's implementation is irreversible and irreparable," the proponents said in the resolution adopted by the 192-nation assembly. There were 29 abstentions.

The resolution submitted by more than 90 countries, including most Europeans nations, voiced concern about the continued use of the death penalty and demanded that the UN "establish a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty."

It called on countries that still apply the death penalty to respect international standards that provide safeguards guaranteeing the rights of sentenced prisoners and to "progressively restrict the use of the death penalty and reduce the number of offences for which it may be imposed."

Countries that opposed the moratorium renewed their criticism before the vote, a replay of the debate last month in the human rights committee of the assembly. Opponents included the block of 13 Caribbean nations and others like Singapore, which accused Europeans of imposing their values on other sovereign nations.

There are 134 countries that have abolished the death penalty.

But countries that continue to use it, like the United States and China, have remained mostly silent during the whole debate.

Despite Washington's official stance on maintaining the death penalty, New Jersey on Monday became the first US state to abolish the sentence in more than 40 years, as Governor Jon Corzine signed into law a measure eliminating it.

New Jersey joined 13 other US states that do not allow executions.

"Today New Jersey evolves," Corzine, a Democrat, said in a statement. "This is a day of progress for us and for the millions of people across our nation and around the globe who reject the death penalty as a moral or practical response to the grievous, even heinous, crime of murder."

Before the final vote in the UN General Assembly Tuesday, the human rights committee voted 99-52, with 33 abstentions, last month to approve the moratorium, and sent the draft to the 192-nation assembly for a final vote.

The issue split the committee into two camps, with the Europeans, led by Italy, on one side against mostly small countries in the Caribbean, Africa and the Middle East that said the death penalty is not a human rights issue.

Posted by Serena at 10:24 AM No comments: Links to this post

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2007

Chicago Deal to Pay $20 Million in Police Torture Case Hits Roadblock

The City of Chicago’s landmark decision to pay nearly $20 million dollars to four former death row prisoners tortured by Chicago police has hit a roadblock. The four men—all African American—sued former Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge and more than twenty officers who worked with him, alleging that they were coerced into falsely confessing to murder in the 1980s. We speak with John Conroy, the investigative reporter who brought the story to the fore eighteen years ago. He was recently laid off from the Chicago Reader. [includes rush transcript]

Guest:

John Conroy, investigative journalist and author. He brought the torture story to light eighteen years ago and has covered it since for the Chicago Reader. He was laid off five days ago. He is also the author of "Unspeakable Acts, Ordinary People: The Dynamics of Torture."

JUAN GONZALEZ: The City of Chicago's landmark decision to pay nearly $20 million to four former death row prisoners tortured by Chicago police has hit a roadblock. The four men are all African American. They sued former Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge and more than twenty officers who worked with him, alleging that they were coerced into falsely confessing to murder. The City had agreed to a $19.8 million settlement on Friday. But on Wednesday, last-minute legal complications arose in settlements with Stanley Howard and Aaron Patterson, two of the former prisoners involved in the lawsuit. Initial reports suggest this could cause a lengthy delay in all four cases.

AMY GOODMAN: In 2006, special prosecutors released a long-awaited report stating there was proof beyond a reasonable doubt that Burge and four other former officers abused suspects to extract confessions in the '80s. Charges have never been filed against Jon Burge, who oversaw the torture.

John Conroy was the investigative reporter who brought the story to the fore eighteen years ago. He has consistently covered it ever since. However, Conroy was among four reporters at the Chicago Reader dismissed last week in a cost-saving measure by the paper's parent company, Creative Loafing.

John Conroy joins us now from Chicago. Welcome to Democracy Now!, John.

JOHN CONROY: Thank you very much.

AMY GOODMAN: Can you talk about the significance first? We'll talk about the roadblock to the agreement in a minute, but the $20 million, how was it arrived at? Who does it go to? What happened to them?

JOHN CONROY: Well, it went to—it's supposed to go to four survivors of the torture, all of whom had served time on death row for crimes they hadn't committed. And the roadblock, I don't think, is terribly significant in the grand scheme of things. This case has been—these cases were filed in 2003. And I don't think that a month or two in the grand scheme of things is going to matter a great deal.

However, one complicating factor is that one of the former prisoners, who is now back in prison, Aaron Patterson, had signed a loan agreement based on—there are companies out there who make loans to people, highly speculative loans, high-risk loans, you might say, at verified interest rates, and Patterson took out one of these loans early on. I don't recall the exact figure, but it might have been $50,000, and it's now way up in the hundreds of thousands, perhaps nearing a million or more. So the longer there is a delay in settling Patterson, the higher the price tag could go. So that is one thing adding pressure on the Patterson people to settle and on the city to wrap it up.

I think it's another month, and it will be wrapped up. The things that are blocking it right now weren't that significant.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And, John Conroy, for those of our viewers and listeners who may not be familiar with the specifics of these four cases, could you talk a little bit about how the cases developed and the nature of the torture that they were subjected to?

JOHN CONROY: Yes. These four cases, they're four men who were pardoned by Governor Ryan in 2003, but they are just the tip of the iceberg, really. There were more than a hundred men who were tortured using electric shock with either a cattle prod, a hand-cranked device much like an Army field phone, or a third device which I believe was a now-extinct medical device called a violet ray machine, which was once a cure-all. Hundreds of thousands of them were manufactured here in

Chicago. And in addition to that, some men were suffocated. Some were hung by handcuffs. Mock executions were conducted on others. Some were subjected to severe beatings.

And these four were able to file civil suits now, many years after the torture. The last man who was tortured, of the four, was tortured in 1987, so twenty years ago. And he's only able to file, because of the pardoning by Governor Ryan. There are many men who served time and are out now who are not able to file, because of the time that has passed, and there are twenty-five men, approximately, who are still inside, whom nobody is paying much attention to, who are there on the basis of suspect confessions.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And there's been no effort to reopen some of these convictions, based on the nature of the confessions that were obtained under torture?

JOHN CONROY: No. This is remarkable to me, but it's Chicago, and there is a consistent pattern, same officers appearing in different cases, telling the same story that they didn't do this thing that they're accused of, men telling stories about having been tortured with these strange machines, one of which they cannot name, they cannot describe. They can describe it, rather, but they can't name it, and—which gives the men a credibility, when they're describing a machine that nobody—few people know it exists. And they've described it, but can't name it.

Anyway, they have—there's a lot of consistency to the reports, no effort to reopen their investigations—the investigations into their crimes. Now, some of these men are guilty. Many of the men who were tortured were guilty. Nonetheless, this isn't a country where we have that standard of human rights, where we torture people into confessing to crimes.

AMY GOODMAN: The numbers, John Conroy, some—more than 135 people saying they had bags placed over their heads, guns forced into their mouths, electric shocks applied to their genitals. What has happened to Jon Burge since then, the police commander in charge?

JOHN CONROY: Well, in 1992, police board hearings began in the single case of Andrew Wilson, who had shot dead two police officers and emerged from the police station with very distinct marks on his ears and nose from alligator clips. And it was really an employment hearing; it was not a criminal hearing. And the police board decided, in a very vaguely worded decision, that Burge should no longer be on the force. At that point, he was fired, and he retired to Florida, where he lives today and collects his pension. Other than that, there has never been any criminal proceeding—

AMY GOODMAN: Collects his police pension?

JOHN CONROY: Yes. There has never been any criminal proceeding against any of the officers. And now, there is a glimmer of hope among those who had hoped to see something like that. Patrick Fitzgerald has announced that he—our US attorney here in the Northern District of Illinois—has announced that he is investigating the possible obstruction of justice and perjury committed not in the torture cases themselves, but in these civil suits. These officers testified that no torture had taken place, they didn't know about any torture, they never heard about any torture. And it's possible that they can be indicted for perjury and obstruction of justice now. But we have to wait and see.

The deadline for Fitzgerald is really November of this coming year. That's the latest date by which he could possibly indict Jon Burge, because Burge took the Fifth Amendment for everything, except some written answers he gave in November of 2003 in the Madison Hobley civil suit, which is now trying to be settled.

JUAN GONZALEZ: Now, you've been covering this story for eighteen years. What was the initial reaction to your stories when you first started writing about this, and especially by the other commercial press in Chicago? And how does it feel, that long on a story, to get these kinds of results so long afterward?

JOHN CONROY: Well, the initial reaction was dead silence, really, on the part of the mainstream media, but the—interestingly, the internal investigative arm of the Police Department, the Office of Professional Standards, used this story to—as a starting point for their reopening of the investigation. And it was that—there were actually two investigators assigned, and each—one was assigned to review the Wilson case, and one was assigned to review the big picture at Area Two. And they concluded, separately, that torture had taken place, one, in the Wilson case and, two, that it was a pattern at Area Two and that the command officers had known about it.

So, many years—well, actually, in 1993 then, and as a result of those reports, there were police board hearings, which resulted in Burge being fired, but strangely, that was treated sort of as a one-day story: Burge was fired over torture. But nobody said, “Well, what about the victims?” And so, the next piece I did in 1996 pointed out that—it was called “Town Without Pity,” and it was really about the lack of public reaction to the fact that there were men on death row who were going to die if something wasn’t done about their cases.

So, fast-forward to today, four of the cases may wrap up with some kind of financial reward for these men, but it’s, you know, a drop in the bucket compared to what could have been paid and should be paid, really, in remuneration for the damage done to these men’s lives, not just those four men, but the more-than-hundred men who were tortured.

AMY GOODMAN: Finally, John, you’ve been laid off?

JOHN CONROY: I was laid off last week. Four writers from the Reader were given the boot. We don’t fit into the future plans of the company which purchased the Chicago Reader last summer. The company is based in Florida.

AMY GOODMAN: What will you do now?

JOHN CONROY: I’m not sure.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, I want to thank you very much for being with us, John Conroy, investigative journalist and author. He is author of the book Unspeakable Acts, Ordinary People: The Dynamics of Torture.

Posted by Serena at 8:34 AM No comments: Links to this post

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2007

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Dear Friends

Fifty-nine years ago today the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The opening sentence of the Preamble of that document speaks a fundamental truth and timeless aspiration:

"(R)ecognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world."

We are getting closer to the day when the world recognizes that a state execution, the ritual killing of a human being by agents of a government, is a human rights violation, not a criminal sanction. I look forward to the time when International Human Rights Day is celebrated in a world where nations and people live without executions.

Below is the International Human Rights Day posting from "For Victims, Against the Death Penalty," MVFHR's blog. MVFHR's staff, board and members honor all who work daily for human dignity and for human rights, and to end capital punishment. And are grateful to all who, today and every day, support the work of Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights.

In solidarity,

Renny Cushing
Renny Cushing, Executive Director
Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights
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For Victims, Against the Death Penalty
The web log of Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights

Monday, December 10, 2007
Happy Human Rights Day and Happy Birthday MVFHR
Today is International Human Rights Day and the third anniversary of the founding of Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights. I'm remembering the ceremony at the United Nations Church Plaza on December 10, 2004, when several victims' family members spoke powerfully and movingly about their reasons for working against the death penalty and several allies and friends saluted the new organization. All who were present signed a document pledging their commitment to working to end the death penalty.

It's been a full and busy three years, during which we've been moved and energized and enraged and determined and so many other feelings that this work engenders. Now we're full of plans and hopes for the next three years, but today is a day to pause and thank everyone who makes MVFHR the powerful voice for victims and against the death penalty that it is. If we haven't heard from you in a while (or even if we have!), take a moment to drop us a line and let us know how you are and what you've been up to. (You can send email to sheffer@aceweb.com)

In celebration of Human Rights Day, here is an excerpt from Sister Helen Prejean's book The Death of Innocents:

It was to be expected when Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was debated back in the 1940s that such a declaration, which granted everyone the right to life without qualification, would provoke debate, and one of the first proposed amendments was that an exception ought to be made in the case of criminals lawfully sentenced to death. Eleanor Roosevelt urged the committee to resist this amendment, arguing that their task was to draw up a truly universal charter of human rights toward which societies could strive. She foresaw a day when no government could kill its citizens for any reason.

And here is the U.S. Human Rights Network's inspiring statement about the importance of focusing on human rights work in the United States:

Underlying all human rights work in the United States is a commitment to challenge the pernicious belief that the United States is inherently superior to other countries of the world, and that neither the U.S. government nor the U.S. rights movements have anything to gain from the domestic application of human rights. Rather, in the view of a growing number of U.S. activists, the U.S. government should no longer be allowed to shield itself from accountability to human rights norms.

Finally, here is a snippet of what Renny Cushing wrote in the first issue of MVFHR's newsletter, Article 3:

In the human rights community, there is talk about how to integrate respect for universal human rights with recognition of the harm suffered by victims. There is talk of the need to hold accountable those who violate the human rights of others. How do we hold nations - or individuals - accountable? How do we respond to one violation of human rights without involving ourselves in another such violation? How can we apply an ethic of respect for people's humanity consistently to those who have committed crimes and to those who have been victimized?
These questions drive our work at Murder Victims' Families for Human Rights and they will inform the stories we publish in Article 3. We decided to name this newsletter Article 3 knowing that a lot of people might at first wonder about its meaning. But this name - like our work in general - is an act of faith that people can be invited to look closer, to consider more

deeply, to ente r into new ways of thinking. We believe people can come to see that the death penalty is a violation of basic human rights and that it is time for nations across the world to abolish it.

Posted by Serena at 11:33 AM 1 comment: Links to this post

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2007

City to settle Burge case

Jon Burge

4 alleged victims to get share of up to $19.8 million under tentative plan

By Gary Washburn and Jeff Coen Tribune staff reporters
December 8, 2007

Closing one major chapter in the long-running saga of disgraced former police Cmdr. Jon Burge, the city tentatively has agreed to pay as much as $19.8 million to settle the cases of four African-American men who allegedly were tortured into confessions while in his custody.

The total settlement, which is expected to be considered by the City Council next week, could exceed the $18 million paid to the family of LaTanya Haggerty, whom police mistakenly shot to death in 1999.In typical City Hall fashion, news of the big payout came late Friday afternoon, while Mayor Richard Daley was out of town and unavailable for comment. The mayor's in Italy, but the Daley administration insisted the timing was coincidental.

Aldermen who for months have been pressuring Daley to settle the torture cases welcomed the news.

"I am euphoric," said Ald. Ed Smith (28th). "We have been pushing for a long time."

Now, Smith said, officials must find a way to bring criminal charges against Burge and strip him of his city pension.

"These [victims] will have to live with what this man did to them for the rest of their lives, and he is living off the fat of the land."

Burge, who was fired by the city in 1993 and now lives in Florida, long has denied any wrongdoing. Nevertheless, in a deposition videotaped in 2004, he repeatedly invoked his 5th Amendment right against self incrimination.

The settlement would cover the high-profile cases of four men convicted of murder after allegedly being subjected to electric shocks, beatings and other brutality by Burge and officers in his command. Leroy Orange, Stanley Howard, Madison Hobley and Aaron Patterson all were pardoned and released from Death Row by then-Gov. George Ryan.

Plaintiffs' lawyers contended the city agreed to a $14.8 million settlement with Orange, Howard and Hobley last year and then backed out. But Daley insisted he never signed off on such a deal.

In September, Corporation Counsel Mara Georges disclosed why not: Hobley is under federal investigation for events surrounding the fatal 1987 fire that had led to his conviction.

Under a settlement very different from the others, Hobley is to receive an initial $1 million. Another $6.5 million will be paid only if he is not indicted and convicted for the alleged arson, which killed seven people.

Orange is to get $5.5 million, Patterson $5 million. Both will be responsible for paying their attorneys. Howard will get $800,000 from the city, his lawyers $1 million.

"I think it has reflected very badly on the city of Chicago not only that this took place but that it has been almost 20 years since we have known about it and we finally are moving to settle," said Ald. Toni Preckwinkle (4th). "It is possible that people who were tortured were guilty, but that is irrelevant. They shouldn't have been tortured."

Accuser back in prison

Four years after his release from prison, Patterson was convicted earlier this year of trading in guns and drugs. He was sentenced to 30 years and is serving time in a high-security federal prison in Kentucky, according to federal prison records.

But attorney Frank Avila Jr., who represented him in his suit against the city, said it is difficult to compute what Patterson is owed for the years spent behind bars unjustly after his abuse.

"How do you compensate a man who is imprisoned for 17 years for something he didn't do, and for 15 years on Death Row?" Avila said. "Money is the only analogous system, but how do you do it? Per day? Per week? Per hour? How do you compensate a man for being tortured?"

Ald. Robert Fioretti (2nd), a lawyer who won $9 million from the city for a client in an earlier wrongful conviction case, said the big money also is justified to help the men adjust to life outside prison.

"They are so downtrodden, they can't lift themselves up," Fioretti said.

The city's legal tab for outside attorneys in the four cases to date totals $6.6 million, said Jennifer Hoyle, a spokeswoman for the city's Law Department. And police wrongdoing judgments and settlements cost the city a total of about $26.4 million last year; $20.6 million in 2005; $31.3 million in 2004; and $26.7 million in 2003.

In a still unresolved Burge-related case, convicted murderer Darrell Cannon is seeking to add to the $3,000 settlement he agreed to when he represented himself in a case against the city in 1986.

The city is "worried about the precedent it's going to set [to pay more now]," said G. Flint Taylor, the attorney who now represents Cannon. "Well, what kind of precedent is it going to set if they go to trial?"
Taylor contended the city faces $3 million in legal costs to fight the case. Hoyle disputed that amount, saying taxpayers have paid about $520,000 in legal fees thus far.

City defends timing

As for the timing of the announcement -- with Daley abroad -- Hoyle said the four settlements are "something we have been finalizing over the last few weeks" and finished only on Friday, in time for presentation to the council's Finance Committee on Monday.

On another police-related front, city officials are seeking the right to conduct drug and alcohol testing after all shootings involving officers as part of contract negotiations with the Fraternal Order of Police.

The Tribune reported this week that the Police Department in some cases has administered tests hours after shooting incidents in which there are indications of impairment and, in other cases, not at all.

After an eight-month investigation of police shootings, the newspaper highlighted the questionable fatal shooting of a would-be car thief by Officer Phyllis Clinkscales. Records and interviews indicated that no test was administered, though the off-duty Clinkscales was returning at 3 a.m. from a wedding reception held at a tavern.

An FOP official declined to comment on the city's contract proposal.

- - -

Legal costs

$7.2 million

Estimated amount that the City of Chicago and Cook County have spent on investigations and settlements related to the cases of Jon Burge and his associates.

$531,277

Cost (included in the total $7.2 million) for outside counsel for proceedings to fire Burge from the department.

$6.2 million

Cost to Cook County taxpayers for the special prosecutor's investigation and 292-page report.

City of Chicago, Special Prosecutor's Office

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Posted by Serena at 2:20 AM No comments: Links to this post

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2007

Bill Moyers Talks with Thomas Cahill

http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/11092007/watch2.html

Bill Moyers Talks with Thomas Cahill

BILL MOYERS: I'll introduce you now to someone I've long wanted you to know. He's steeped himself in thousands of years of history trying to figure out who we are in the 21st century.

His name is Thomas Cahill. Much of the year Thomas Cahill lives and works here in New York City where he was born to Irish-American parentsgraduated from Fordham University with degrees in classical literature and philosophyand went on to immerse himself in Hebrew and Greek, scripture and theology, film and drama.

In 1995 he published the first of a series of best-selling books on the "hinges of history." Pivotal moments and people in the rise of western culture: HOW THE IRISH SAVED CIVILIZATION, THE GIFT OF THE JEWS, DESIRE OF THE EVERLASTING HILLS (The World Before And After Jesus), WHY THE GREEKS MATTER and his most recent, MYSTERIES OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

But right now Thomas Cahill has stepped out of the distant past and is writing a book about the death penalty. There are 3350 people on death row in America, and the debate over their fate is back in the news.

SISTER HELEN PREJEAN: People are not close, they're kept away from seeing it

BILL MOYERS: Last week, Sister Helen Prejean, who wrote the best-selling book DEAD MAN WALKING and filmmaker Mario Marazziti of Italy, presented the President of the General Assembly with five million signatures calling for an end to the death penalty. And Amnesty International urged the UN to pass a resolution for a moratorium on capital punishment declaring that it 'has never been shown to deter crime more effectively than other punishments.'

Not so, said this op-ed on the editorial page of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, arguing that 'capital punishment works.'

The American Bar Association has also called for a moratorium on capital punishment. And last Tuesday, just moments before a prisoner in Mississippi was scheduled to die by lethal injection the Supreme Court issued a stay of execution.

Since the Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976, 1099 people have been executed. Texas leads the waywith 405 — four times the nearest state.

One of those executed in Texas was Dominique Green — put to death three years ago by lethal injection.

NEWS ANCHOR: Inside the Walls Unit, the execution started. Outside, the victims son...

BILL MOYERS: It was a big story on local news.

NEWS ANCHOR: Green was executed after a last minute ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court.

NEWS ANCHOR: When he was sentenced to death for robbing and killing a man in a Houston store.

BILL MOYERS: During his stay on death row Dominique Green had written a letter to a newspaper in Italy, asking for help. Because of Italy's opposition to the death penalty, the Roman Coliseum is lit up when a death sentence is commuted somewhere in the world or when a country abolishes capital punishment.

Across the Tiber River from the Coliseum is an international community of social justice known as Sant'Egidio, in the very neighborhood where Tom Cahill and his wife Susan live when they're not in New York. And that's how Cahill heard of Dominique Green.

Here in the states he arranged for his friend Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa to visit Green at the prison in Texas. They talked for two hours in private and Tutu then issued a plea in behalf of Green, calling the death penalty 'an absurdity that brutalizes society.' It didn't matter. Domninique Green was put to death at 7:59 p.m. On October 26, 2004.

Dominique Green is the subject of Thomas Cahill's next book. Cahill's work chronicling the roots of western civilization is a pageant of events and personalities. But right now he is absorbed with the story of one man's life and death. Welcome to THE JOURNAL.

BILL MOYERS: Tom Cahill, thanks for joining me on the JOURNAL.

THOMAS CAHILL: Bill, it's always a pleasure to be invited.

BILL MOYERS: Tell me, what was Dominique Green's story? Where did he come from and where did he wind up?

THOMAS CAHILL: He came from an alcoholic drug-using household. He was sexually abused several times. He was put in juvenile homes. He was-- just about everything that could be done to him that anyone could imagine being done to a child, was done to him. When it says in the Old Testament that the sins of the fathers will be visited on the children into the third and fourth generation, I think that's correct, that these terrible things that go on in families go from one generation to another to another.

BILL MOYERS: So, what happened on the night that he wound up being accused of murder?

THOMAS CAHILL: They were robbing people in a number of different situations--

BILL MOYERS: He and a group of kids?

THOMAS CAHILL: Yeah.

BILL MOYERS: And there are people in Texas who swear that Dominique Green pulled the trigger that killed the man for whom he was convicted of murdering.

THOMAS CAHILL: Right. But what actually happened was-- and it's in an instance of how badly this is done in Texas, there were four kids. One of them was white. He was not charged with anything. Ever. And you cannot interview him til this day.

BILL MOYERS: Why?

THOMAS CAHILL: You can't find him. But he exists. I know his name. And the other three were black. Dominique was the youngest. And the two others turned against him to get lighter sentences, it looks to me. And they decided that he would take the rap. He was certainly guilty of robbery. I don't think he was guilty of murder. But even if he was, I don't think that's not what I see in this. What I see in this is that we as a country are actually sacrificing children to an evil God, to the God of whatever this justice is that we-- instead of take-- instead of doing something for Dominique Green who grew up without the aid of civilization, we condemn him to death, and to the torture of 11 years on death row.

There was a trial. There was very bad representation. The judge that Dominique came up before was the same judge who in a slightly earlier appeal had been asked to reverse a decision because the lawyer who represented this kid in this earlier trial, had slept throughout the trial. And everyone had seen that and everyone knew about it. And the judge, in his decision, said, "The Constitution gives you the right to a lawyer. It doesn't say whether he has to be awake or not." So, I mean, this sort of-- there is, I think throughout the country but especially in the state of Texas, there is a kind of collusion among lawyers whether they're prosecutors or defenders, and judges, and an awful lot of horrible things happen in order to get as many people as possible executed.

BILL MOYERS: But there is the question of a crime and of justice as some people see it.

THOMAS CAHILL: The crime is secondary. Crime is secondary. There are no millionaires on death row nor will there ever be. Almost everyone on death row is poor. And do you really think that no millionaire ever committed a capital crime?

BILL MOYERS: So what are you saying?

THOMAS CAHILL: I'm saying that there are certain people in our society that we are willing to offer up. And not others. And they're the people who have no power. We're not killing Dominique Green because he committed murder. We're killing Dominique Green because we want to kill somebody.

BILL MOYERS: How do you deal with people who say what would Tom Cahill write if he were part of the family of someone who'd been killed by someone on death row?

THOMAS CAHILL: I understand very much the feeling of somebody who has lost a person through murder. I understand very much why they would not necessarily be willing to sign on to Texans Against the Death

Penalty or any other such organization. But however difficult it may be the only way you are going to gain closure is to let go of your hatred. Holding on to it is never going to get you out of it. It's never going to get you out of the bind, the knot that you're in. I don't see how it can. The widow of Andrew Lastrapes, the man who was killed in the incident for which Dominique was executed said to me, "Of course, I forgive Dominique. And I forgive them all."

And I said, "How do you do that?" And she said, "Isn't that what we're supposed to do?" She's an extremely bright but simple woman. But she had no doubts about where her values lay. That doesn't mean that I would be able to say that if such a thing had just happened to me. I understand very much the rage, all right. I'm full of rages myself, you know.

BILL MOYERS: How do you explain that most of the democratic world has given up capital punishment? You know, there's a new movement internationally to ban it.

THOMAS CAHILL: And that's true. Throughout Italy, when we-- though it doesn't happen here, you won't see the name in the New York Times, when we-- you may see it on a back page. But when we actually execute someone, it's front-page news throughout Italy.

BILL MOYERS: Why is that?

THOMAS CAHILL: They care deeply about-- because they consider it to be a terrible injustice that people are still being executed. You know, you cannot join the European Union as a country if you execute people

BILL MOYERS: Have you seen those photographs of the Iranian hoisting their targeted prisoners up on a crane while thousands of men and women shout, "God is great-- God is great." What does that mean?

THOMAS CAHILL: Well, it wasn't all that long ago that we did things like that. Now we execute in private or, you know, out of the public square. But, it wasn't all that long ago that in the west, we were executing publicly and people would come. It was a big deal. They'd bring a picnic lunch and sit there with their children and watch some guy be strung up. I mean, how long ago was that?

BILL MOYERS: The Taliban do it. Al-Qaeda does it. The IRA in Ireland did it. Bin Laden says that chopping off heads is a justified form of punishment. And what does it say that violent death becomes a policy option? That in the name of life, we take life. What does that say to you?

THOMAS CAHILL: I think that there are many things within the human soul or within the human character that we ignore. There's a tendency to violence in all of us. There's even, I believe, a prehistoric desire for human sacrifice. We see it in all ancient cultures. I refer to it in how the Irish saved civilization. The Irish knew-- the Irish sacrificed children and-- victims of war and all that sort of stuff before Christianity came in. The Jews seemed to have been doing it in the time of Genesis when so many anthropologists believe that the *aqedah* — the near sacrifice of Isaac — is an example of the Jews finally rejecting human sacrifice.

BILL MOYERS: Is the death penalty important for historians looking at civilization as you have done? Does it tell you something that you wouldn't get anywhere else?

THOMAS CAHILL: Well, getting rid of it is a very new phenomenon. You know, it wasn't very long ago that all civil-- all societies had the death penalty. So, it's a little early to say how important it's going to be. I mean, a historian really wants a few hundred years to elapse before he makes a statement about anything. But I think it will be important. I think it's among the touchstones-- right now of where different societies are going. The crueler societies, China, Saudi Arabia, the United States support the death penalty. The easier, more open, more generous societies, like Western Europe do not.

BILL MOYERS: And yet that's the continent that was ravaged by one war after another for so long.

THOMAS CAHILL: They finally learned something. I really do believe that that — thanks especially to what happened in the First and Second World Wars in which they behaved abominably they learned that it was time not to do that anymore. And that's basically what at the end of the 17th century the original Anabaptists were doing. The people who became the Quakers and the--

BILL MOYERS: Mennonites--

THOMAS CAHILL: Mennonites--

BILL MOYERS: And the Amish and all of those.

THOMAS CAHILL: You know? They were saying, "No, no, this is--" they were the first people against capital punishment. They were the very first people to oppose it and to try to reform prisons so that they would not simply be places where people were punished. They were to be put in penitentiaries. Places where people could repent.

BILL MOYERS: Yeah. Penitence was to--

THOMAS CAHILL: Yeah!

BILL MOYERS: ...happen there. As you say happened in the case-- you really believe it happened in the case of Dominique Green.

THOMAS CAHILL: Oh, yeah, yeah. Very much.

THOMAS CAHILL: I mean, a man who goes up and down death row and gets everybody to forgive and be forgiven is not a-- is not somebody we have to be afraid of.

BILL MOYERS: Dominique Green requested that he be cremated and that the ashes placed in that marvelous church Santa Maria Church in the district of Rome, where you and your wife have a second home. Did that happen?

THOMAS CAHILL: Yes, he could not be buried within the Basilica of

THOMAS CAHILL: Yes, he could not be buried within the Basilica of Santa Maria, itself, because of laws against interment within those churches that are secular laws of the Italian state. But, he has been interred in a beautiful anteroom within the Piazza of Santa Maria. That's where he is. He wanted to be taken out of Livingston. And well, he actually would have been buried not in Livingston. But in Huntsville. The death row is in Livingston. But, the night before their executions, they are brought to Huntsville. And there's an enormous burial ground there. It goes on for miles.

BILL MOYERS: We were in Rome in the spring. We were in your neighborhood. But we also went over to the Coliseum where the lions used to tear the gladiators to shreds. And you can't help but think about how this cockpit of cruelty has become one of the world's great tourist attractions. Now, what does that say to you?

THOMAS CAHILL: Yeah, well, it says something that we don't, again, want to look at. But-- you know, it is the single largest monument to human cruelty in the world, the Coliseum. Now the Coliseum is on the list of the seven wonders of the world, the new seven wonders.

BILL MOYERS: What is it? Help me understand that psychology.

THOMAS CAHILL: Why have there been so many movies about Romans sitting in the Coliseum going like that? We get a kick out of it. The real evil in the world, it seems to me, is cruelty. That's-- to me the word evil equals cruelty. It's human cruelty that is evil. And you-- we all have to deal with that. We all have a tendency to that that we're not willing — we're not willing to acknowledge that this is inside of us. It's there.

BILL MOYERS: You write in the beginning of Desire of the Everlasting Hills, quote, "The history of the world, like the history of its hills is written in blood, has there ever been any period when that wasn't so that you've studied?

THOMAS CAHILL: There are times, I think, when that does happen. There are-- it's hard to find in Greco-Roman civilization. But you find it, for instance, in the communities set up by Francis of Assisi. You find it in among the Quakers. Now none of those people have been able to transform whole societies. But they did create a moment-- what I would think of as a Shangri-La moment.

BILL MOYERS: What's their characteristic? What do they share in common?

THOMAS CAHILL: People who were able to, I think, recognize what human cruelty is about and renounce it. It doesn't really matter whether they said explicitly, "I renounce human cruelty." What was was important is that they begin to treat one another-- Francis of Assisi said that the best thing you can do to any other person is to say to him or her, "May the lord give you peace. And that's how we should go about our business. May the lord give you peace." Well, that all-- that already puts you in a completely different mindset it seems to me. And he said, "You do that with everybody." You know, it doesn't matter whether he's a leper or a heretic or a Muslim. May the lord give you peace.

BILL MOYERS: You've studied history enough to know what works for the individual in a small realm of relationship isn't a rule that the nation state can live by is it?

THOMAS CAHILL: I don't think that real civilization ever occurs because of anything that a nation state does. It occurs because of movements within the nation state that are led by sometimes one individual or a series of individuals. Desmond Tutu is an excellent example of that. And in fact, I'll tell you something I've never told anybody before. In each of the books that I've written, I-- when I come upon a great historical figure that I'm trying to deal with I try to think of someone I know who is like that person. And my model for Saint Patrick is Desmond Tutu. Which I think he would be surprised to hear too, but Tutu in South Africa and his wife, who should not be forgotten Leah Tutu and their children, their four children, they live-- the whole time those children were growing up, 25, 30 years, they were under-- they were in danger of being assassinated. The entire time those six people were in danger of death by hatred.

Nelson Mandela is always credited with so much. And I don't mean to take anything away from him. But he was in prison for 27 of those years. He he wasn't on the scene. It was Tutu who was on the scene. It was Tutu who would say-- who would stand up to these horrible South African guards and say, "You don't know what you're talking about. Our God is a God of resurrection. You're not going to do us in." This little guy is five feet four standing up to all the forces of-- that really have-- of cruelty and evil.

BILL MOYERS: So, it's the individual who acts--

THOMAS CAHILL: And his wife and his children--

BILL MOYERS: Well, they--

THOMAS CAHILL: --and Steven Biko and all the different people that were part-- it isn't just one man.

BILL MOYERS: I'm still wrestling with this abrupt change in your subject matter. I mean, isn't the story of Dominique Green, one individual executed for a crime way off your beaten path?

THOMAS CAHILL: Yes, it is different from what I've been doing for sure. But I don't think that ...well, why am I doing the Hinges of History? What I'm really interested in is what makes for civilization and what does not. So, the people that I'm looking for in the series asks the question, how did we become the people that we are? And why do we think the way we do and feel the way we do and perceive the way we do?

But underneath that, what I'm really interested in, is what's good about us. What do we do that's good? I started with HOW THE IRISH SAVED CIVILIZATION which is not the beginning of western history by any means for a reason. It was the simplest book-- simplest story that I had to tell. And it was about this guy named Patrick who had been a Roman citizen on the Island of Britain who was kidnapped at the age of 16 and taken to Ireland and made into a slave for six years after which he escaped. Then in middle age he returned to Ireland which was a rough, rough place, not a place anybody would willingly return to. And he came back, at that point, with the gospels. And he became the evangelist of the Irish.

And what he did in doing that which was a great act of generosity because he spent the last 30 years of his life in Ireland-- among these very crazy people who practiced human sacrifice, who had no problem with slavery in its most awful form, who believed in really dark gods. This was quite a group to come and be-- decide to spend your life with willingly. In that great act of generosity he also realized that though he was never going to make them Romans or Athenians, he had to teach them to read and write.

And so he taught them to read and write from these simple little lives of the saints of the period which are really lives of the martyrs. It was the early Roman martyrs. And it was all the terrible things that the Romans had done to the early Christians, you know. They were eaten by lions. They had their eyes plucked out. They had-- you know, they were slowly eviscerated. They were all these different things that had been done to them. Saint Lawrence was burned on a griddle, you know, on one side and then on the other side, all that kind of stuff.

The Irish loved these stories. They thought they were dandy. And the only thing that made them sad was that Christianity came into Ireland without any martyrs. Because the Irish just kind of rolled over and accepted it and said, "Yeah, well this really does...this makes more sense than what we were doing." It was so much more-- it was so superior. But what Patrick also did in teaching them to read and write was they ended up setting themselves the task in the sixth, seventh and eighth century of copying out all of western literature, the whole of the western library which was in danger of extinction at that time because the Germanic barbarians had invaded the Roman Empire and within a century almost no one could read or write. Literacy itself was gone.

BILL MOYERS: So, civilization can be taken away.

THOMAS CAHILL: If there are no books there's no civilization. That's for sure. And that of course, the Germanic barbarians thought that the only thing books were good for was as kindling. They had no other use for it. So, at this period you have these very simple people who had been great warriors and crazy kidnappers and all that sort of stuff sitting down and deciding what they would do is copy out Plato, which, of course, they couldn't understand. But they thought it was important. And they had learned the alphabet. And damn it they were going to do this. It was difficult. And that was one thing that the Irish did like. They liked things that were difficult.

So, they copied out all of Latin and Greek literature. And they added to it in the margins. Because they couldn't understand the Plato very well. And it was kind of hard for the scribe to copy page after page of Plato without understanding it very well. He started doodling in the margins. And that's the beginning of the great books like the Book of Kells, the great decorated books. And you have all these funny little medieval people peeping through in the margins. And then he would sometimes put in little comments or jokes or a little poem that had been part of the repertoire of the wandering bards. And so, that Irish becomes the first vernacular literature to be copied out and written down.

BILL MOYERS: You start that book on the Irish with a chapter on the fall of Rome. What do you think about these analogies between the fall of the Roman Empire and the fall of America? Do you think there's anything to that from your wide sweep of studying history?

THOMAS CAHILL: I would say in some ways yes and in some ways no. You know, there's-- history never repeats itself. That's one thing you can say about it. It never happens again exactly the same way. So, there are tremendous differences. But we can look into the past and learn things. I think, for instance, why did Rome fall? Because of things interior and exterior. The interior part was less and less just taxation. More and more it was the poor and the middle class that bore the burden of taxation. And the wealthy and very wealthy pretended to pay but didn't actually.

And I think we are in a very similar situation with regard to that. Then the other thing was-- the external thing was that you had all of these Germanic barbarians who we think of as marauders and all that. They just wanted in. They were on the wrong side of the river. And they knew it. They wanted to have farms and vineyards like the Romans had. They thought it looked great. They wanted to cross the river. You know, what they were? They were immigrants. That's who they were not at all unlike the situation today at the borders of our country and the borders of Europe.

THOMAS CAHILL: And what happened was despite the unjust taxation or despite-- taxation in any form, the Romans could not pay to keep them out. No matter what they did they couldn't make that border guard and those walls high enough and strong enough to keep out the barbarians. If people really want to get in they're going to find a way in.

BILL MOYERS: How did Christians learn tolerance over time?

THOMAS CAHILL: I think it all has to do with Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries where both sides, both Protestants and Catholics, eliminated one another to their heart's content. I mean, they couldn't have been-- they liked nothing better than a bonfire and putting somebody in the middle of it. And that was happening on both sides. You know, the-- as somebody said at one point, in Papal Rome, there were more heads on the bridge that led out of the Vatican than there were melons in the market. And that was-- but you could have said that about Geneva. You could have said that about London. You could have gone on and on with all of them.

What finally happened with people like Voltaire who were-- at least expressly sort of outside religious circles, they began to say, "Do we really have to keep doing this? Do we really-- is this the only way? You know-- does the religion of the monarch have to be the religion of all his subjects? Is that really necessary?" And the answer they gave was no. And you begin to have enlightened monarchs who say no. You know, we're going to get rid of a few of these disabilities here, you know. But that's the beginning of steps being taken in a new direction until you get the United States of America, the first country on earth in which the-- the-- that is built on tolerance. It starts with tolerance.

BILL MOYERS: Well, unless you were an indigenous American or--

THOMAS CAHILL: You bet.

BILL MOYERS: --Native American or a slave-- or an African brought over-- four million-- several million --

THOMAS CAHILL: Or unless you were even, you know, late 19th century Irish immigrant. So, there are plenty of exceptions. Plenty of things were-- plenty of times where it doesn't work. And yet it's a new idea.

BILL MOYERS: You once said that Christianity's dark history of crusades, inquisitions and pogroms lies not as far in the past as we might prefer to think. Because, going back to the Constitution, you said a country's finally emerged, our own, that officially refused to play the old game of whose religion was true. That America fostered a generously agnostic view of religious truth. You may believe what you like, Tom Cahill. And I may believe as I want. And we don't impose our beliefs on each other. Is that changing?

THOMAS CAHILL: It may be changing somewhat in the face of militant Islam. I think we are going to have to find a way of dealing with Islam that is better than the way that we have constructed so far.

BILL MOYERS: And they with us.

THOMAS CAHILL: Absolutely, absolutely, but we already have gone through that process. It was called the Enlightenment. And the result of the Enlightenment was the American Constitution. We-- that was the process by which we said, "Do we really have to keep killing one another?" No, now the Muslims have not gone through that. And the Sunnis and the Shiites still think that they have to keep killing one another. And God knows that the Wahabis and any number of other sects have-- you know, hate one another with far greater ferocity than they hate us.

Religious history shows you over and over again that you hate most of all the people that are closest to you but just a little bit different. Protestants and Catholics throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, you know, if you were a Martian coming you would have said, "Well, what are they arguing about? What-- they seem to believe the same things more or less. What's the problem here? Why do millions of people have to die?"

You know and as Jonathan Swift said, it was really about how you set an egg on the table, you know, with how you got at the meat of the egg. You know-- some people did it one way and some people did it another. And that was enough reason to kill. And it more or less does come down to that. You know, I mean, there's still plenty of people who feel that way. But we have essentially gotten beyond that. It would be a dreadful tragedy if we fell back into that.

BILL MOYERS: Do you think that what's going on now between the Shiites and the Sunnis in Iraq is comparable to what went on between the Catholics and the Protestants in 16th century--

THOMAS CAHILL: It's so parallel it's amazing.

BILL MOYERS: In what sense?

THOMAS CAHILL: Because from our point of view, not being Muslims, we look at them. And we say, "What are they arguing about? What's the big difference between--" you know, well, I can tell you what some of the differences are. And you would begin to lose interest. Anyone would if they weren't Muslim. And the same thing about the differences between Catholics and Protestants. I remember once giving a talk in a church. And a guy stood up and said "Do you believe we are saved by faith alone?" And I said, "Well, I believe we're saved by faith. But I believe with Paul the apostle that we're saved by faith, hope and charity and the greatest of these is love or charity." And he walked out. And he's not going to pay attention -And once I gave the wrong answer-- he was leaving. And he wanted me to know that he-- I had nothing more to say to him.

BILL MOYERS: -- suppose Thomas Cahill is incarnated 1,000 years from now and decides to pick up writing The Hinges of History. What would be the, as of now, the defining characteristic of the American society you would write about in the 20th and 21st century?

THOMAS CAHILL: That all societies have a dream and a nightmare. And our nightmare has been, I think, our racism. We practically committed genocide on the people who were here, the Native Americans. We enslaved another race of people, the Africans. And then we dropped the atom bomb on Asians. We would have never dropped that bomb in Europe in my view. And I think that's what proves the racism of it. That's the nightmare of America.

The dream of America is enunciated by the great speech by Martin Luther King I Have a Dream. The dream is that there is no country on earth that has tried to actually embrace all the people that we have tried to embrace. All you have to do is walk through New York City to see that or any of our cities and not a few of our country sides at this point. We could be called the most racist. Or we could be called the least. We are both. And it always remains a tension and a question as to which side of us, the good side or the bad side, will win out in the end. And I think that's true for every society.

BILL MOYERS: Let me come back to Dominique Green's storyDid you find Dominique Green to have turned that prison cell and death row into a zone of peace?

THOMAS CAHILL: Well, you see in somebody's body and their face and their eyes, in the way they move what they're about. This was somebody who was deeply at peace with himself. Who was perfectly happy to go out toward another person and be in communication, who embraced you with his language if not with his body since he couldn't get through the glass partition.

BILL MOYERS: You've got to help me understand that. Because I'm imagining you seeing him through that glass partition. This is a man everybody down there thinks has killed another man. And something communicates itself to you through that glass partition.

BILL MOYERS: So, what struck you?

THOMAS CAHILL: Instead of talking about himself and --what the poor conditions he had to live in and all the things that I already knew about, he wanted desperately to talk about books and writing. And he had become a great reader in the 11 years that he had been in prison. The book that he had read most recently that he really cared deeply about was Desmond Tutu's book NO FUTURE WITHOUT FORGIVENESS, which is Archbishop Tutu's book about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But what also came out was that even though they're all in solitary confinement and you would think they can't communicate with one another, they manage. Because human beings are incredibly resourceful in situations like this. And Dominique was able to send that book after he had read it, up and down that death row.

BILL MOYERS: Tutu's book?

THOMAS CAHILL: Yeah. And most of the inmates on death row agreed that they had to forgive all the people who had hurt them and ask for forgiveness from all the people that they had hurt if they could, insofar as they could. So, there was this tremendous-- I think you'd have to call it a conversion. That's certainly what it sounds like to me, all these guys on death row that nobody cares about and everybody wants to execute offering forgiveness and asking forgiveness on the basis of a book.

BILL MOYERS: How did that play out practically? I mean, did Dominique Green ever get to communicate that to the families of the victim in that crime?

THOMAS CAHILL: Well, the victim was a man named Andrew Lastrapes, who was I think he was still in his 30s when it happened. And he had two small children — two sons — who became intimate friends of Dominique in his last days. Dominique, of course, you don't have an awful lot of things to give away on death row. Dominique gave Tutu's book to one of the sons of Andrew Lastrapes. And the other son received a rosary that Dominique kept around his neck. And each bead on that rosary was a reminder of one of the people on death row who had been executed before Dominique and who had helped Dominique to become the person he became.

BILL MOYERS: But he was a different man after 11 years from--

THOMAS CAHILL: Well--

BILL MOYERS: --the 19-year-old who was arrested for the killing, right? THOMAS CAHILL You know that was his -- That cell in that prison became the means of his transformation.

BILL MOYERS: Thomas Cahill, thank you for joining me on THE JOURNAL.

THOMAS CAHILL: Thank you, Bill.

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