

The First American Freedom Fighter

A half millennium ago this Feb. 2, the Spaniards felt they had put an end to the first major resistance to the European/Christian conquest of the Americas by executing Hatuey, an Indigenous freedom fighter who fought them on Hispaniola and Cuba. But Hatuey's spirit of independence survived, as William Loren Katz notes.

By William Loren Katz

Little is known about Hatuey, a Taino Cacique [leader], not his date of birth, nor exactly when he first led his forces into battle. But key elements of his story have come down to us from Bishop Las Casas, the Dominican priest who became Spain's "Defender of the Indians." On Feb. 2, 1512, Las Casas was in Cuba when Hatuey died at the hands of the European invaders.

Hatuey's armed resistance had begun on the island of Hispaniola [today's Haiti and the Dominican Republic] during the age of Columbus and probably increased after 1502 when a fleet of 30 Spanish ships brought over the new Governor Nicolas de Ovando along with hundreds of Spanish settlers and a number of enslaved Africans to pursue Spain's search for gold.

But oppression rarely goes as planned. Before the year was over Governor Ovando complained to King Ferdinand that the enslaved Africans "fled among the Indians, taught them bad customs, and could not be captured."

The last four words reveal more than his problem with disobedient servants or his difficulty of retrieving runaways in a rainforest. Ovando is probably describing the formation of the first American rainbow coalition: Hatuey and his followers are greeting and embracing the runaway Africans as allies.

In 1511, after about a decade of armed resistance in Hispaniola, Hatuey and 400 of his followers climbed into canoes and headed to Cuba. His plan was not escape but to mobilize fellow Caribbean islanders against the bearded intruders, their lust for gold, and the slavery, misery and death their invasion brought.

In Cuba, Hatuey's clear message was recorded by Las Casas: the intruders "worship gold," "fight and kill," "usurp our land and make us slaves" For gold, slaves and land, "they fight and kill; for these they persecute us and that is why we have to throw them into the sea."

Hatuey's forces had no sooner begun to mobilize Cubans when well-armed Spaniards under Diego Velázquez landed in Cuba. (One was Hernán Cortés who would conquer Mexico.) Hatuey's strategy to attack in guerrilla fashion and then retreat to

the hills and regroup for the next attack kept the Spaniards pinned down at their fort at Baracoa for at least three months.

But finally a Spanish offensive overwhelmed Hatuey and his troops. On Feb. 2, 1512, Hatuey was led out for a public execution. Las Casas described the scene:

“When tied to the stake, the cacique Hatuey was told by a Franciscan friar who was present something about the God of the Christians and of the articles of Faith. And he was told what he could do in the brief time that remained to him, in order to be saved and go to heaven.

“The Cacique had never heard any of this before and was told he would go to Inferno where, if he did not adopt the Christian faith, he would suffer eternal torment. [He] asked the Franciscan friar if Christians all went to Heaven. When told that they did, he said he would prefer to go to Hell.”

Hatuey was then burned alive.

As the first freedom fighter of the Americas, Hatuey not only united Africans and Indigenous people against the invaders, but in bringing his fighters from Hispaniola to Cuba, he initiated the first pan-American struggle for independence from colonialism.

Today a statue in Cuba celebrates Hatuey as a national hero, its first great liberator. He was more than that. He was the first of the heroic American freedom fighters whose contributions led to 1776, to the revolution in Haiti, and to Simon Bolivar who also sought to liberate all of the Americas from Spain.

One could argue that Hatuey was the first to have ignited a spirit of liberty and independence that would circle the globe for the next 500 years.

William Loren Katz adapted this essay from his just published and updated edition of *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage*. His website is: williamlkatz.com

Murdoch's WSJ Misleads on Climate

Exclusive: Despite a broad consensus among scientists that global warming is real and dangerous, Rupert Murdoch's Wall Street Journal and other right-wing media have made climate-denial a central tenet of U.S. conservatism, requiring endless distortions, as Sam Parry observes.

By Sam Parry

The recent op-ed in Rupert Murdoch's Wall Street Journal signed by 16 scientists, "No Need to Panic About Global Warming," is less surprising in its denunciation of global warming science the Journal's editorial page seems incapable of dealing in reality-based climate journalism than it is in its bush-league analysis.

Memo to op-ed writers: When you resort to using Russian gulags to describe how modern scientific debate in the U.S. is conducted, you may want to adjust your hyperbole filters.

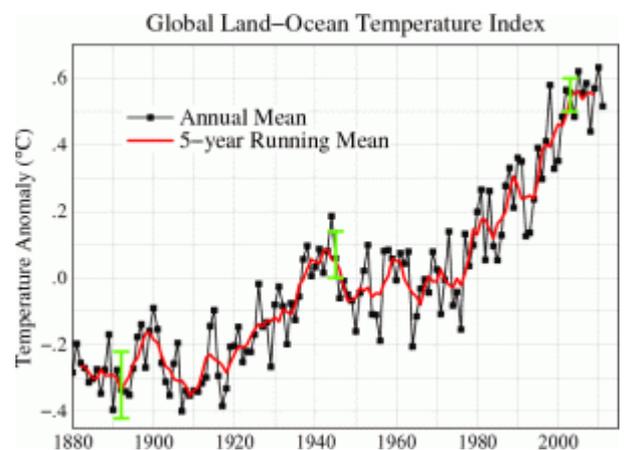
The only direct scientific claim made in the entire op-ed is the assertion that the planet hasn't warmed in the last ten years. How could climate change be happening if the planet isn't warming?

But anyone who has spent even a day researching climate change on the Internet will discover two points about this claim:

1) It isn't really true. 2) Even if someone really thinks it is true, it's irrelevant.

On the first point, just look at the average global temperatures since 1880 and you tell me if the planet is warming

(http://data.giss.nasa.gov/gistemp/graphs_v3/):



The claim that the planet hasn't warmed over the last 10 years bizarrely ignores the fact that the last ten years have all been well above normal. We've reached a new plateau in global temperatures that is significantly hotter than historical averages.

It also ignores the fact that global temperatures don't go straight up every single year. No one has ever claimed that to be the case. Indeed, climate

scientists have bent over backwards to explain how we should focus on longer term trends and the big picture rather than looking at one specific year or a single weather event.

Global warming is like putting the climate on steroids. It doesn't by itself determine the weather in any given year. But the more we juice the atmosphere with heat-trapping gases, the longer warming term trends become painfully obvious.

Greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere are but one of many factors affecting the planet's climate. In any given year, events like the El Nino and La Nina Southern Oscillation cycle (ENSO) can have a much more immediate impact on average global temperatures.

We haven't had a strong El Nino which tends to cause warmer average global temperatures since late 1997 to early 1998. That El Nino event helped spike 1998's average global temperature, as you can see in the chart above. If you take the El Nino enhanced 1998 out of the chart, the average increase in global temperatures from the mid-1990s to today would be even more pronounced.

So this no-warming-in-the-last-decade claim is spurious. But, even if for the sake of argument you were to accept the point, it would still be completely irrelevant.

There is no denying that the accumulation of carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere has increased about 40 percent since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. We are now at 392 parts per million (ppm) CO₂ concentration compared with about 280 ppm pre-industrial levels.

This is a higher concentration of CO₂ in the Earth's atmosphere than anytime in at least hundreds of thousands perhaps millions of years. In fact, CO₂ concentrations have not exceeded 300 ppm at any time in at least the last 650,000 years. Considering that human civilization began roughly 15,000 years ago, we are already in uncharted territory.

But, this is just the prologue to what's in store. The current atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ are expected to explode in the coming decades. Even the most aggressive climate pollution reduction policies proposed and debated both in the U.S. and globally have been designed to limit CO₂ concentrations to 450 ppm.

Given the power of the denial-o-sphere in American media like the Wall Street Journal and the political gridlock in Washington, America is still probably years from taking the serious national steps to even hit the 450 ppm goal.

Globally, we continue to add CO₂ into the atmosphere much faster than the planet can absorb. We are averaging 33.5 billion metric tons of CO₂ emissions every year. The planet can absorb some of these CO₂ emissions by processing carbon out of the atmosphere in natural carbon sinks, such as growing forests and phytoplankton floating near the surface of the ocean.

But these natural processes have limits. It's hard for the world's forests to act as carbon sinks, for instance, when humans are simultaneously deforesting the planet. While it's true that some of these forests are regenerating and growing forests absorb more carbon than mature forests, the current balance of deforestation rates make the world's forests a major source of carbon emissions, rather than a net sequestration resource.

Even the planet's vast oceans have their limits. Right now, oceans absorb up to a quarter of all anthropomorphic sources of CO₂ emissions. But, recent research suggests that oceans are becoming less efficient at absorbing CO₂ as the concentrations of ocean CO₂ levels increase.

The results are all too obvious. The concentration of CO₂ in the Earth's atmosphere is growing at roughly 2-3 ppm per year and increasing. This rate of growth is overwhelming the planet's ability to absorb CO₂. And, according to some experts, we are currently on pace to hit an unheard-of 1000 ppm by the end of the century.

The last time the Earth saw CO₂ levels at 1000 ppm was 35 million years ago when the planet was about 30°F warmer than today, there was little or no ice on the planet, and the seas were 250 feet higher than today.

This is roughly what the U.S. would look like with seas 250 feet higher:



Granted, this level of sea level rise is not going to happen in our lifetimes even under the direst climate models. Even if we hit 1000 ppm by the end of the

century, it will take a long time to melt all the ice on the planet.

That said, scientists are very concerned that once we exceed 450 ppm, we could lose the ability to control future warming and that we will set the planet on a kind of runaway train course that will make this level of future warming inevitable.

The larger point is that we are not talking about trivial, manageable events. Global warming is a massive global experiment with obviously catastrophic implications beyond our ability to control.

Those who seek to deny the science and delay action really don't have a response to this bigger picture argument. What do they think the world looks like at 500 ppm? Or 1000 ppm?

Yes, they can play statistical games to claim that the Earth hasn't warmed in the last 10 years. But their protestations sound a lot more like children grabbing at excuses not to take a bath or brush their teeth. We certainly shouldn't make governing decisions based on this puerile nonsense.

For a more thorough take-down of the Wall Street Journal's silly 16 "scientists," please check out [Climate Progress](#).

Sam Parry is co-author of [Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush](#).

Foolish Suspicion of Political Islam

American neocons have long criticized Arab countries for lacking democracy, but now are complaining that some of the new Arab democracies are electing parties with Islamic affiliations. Former CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar finds some of that alarm unnecessary.

By Paul R. Pillar

As Arab countries and especially Egypt continue to struggle their way into a new and hopefully more democratic political order, a persistent theme in commentary in the United States about this story has been suspicion of any political actor identified with political Islam.

Some such actors warrant such suspicion. There is, for example, Abdel Hakim Belhadj, head of the Tripoli military council in Libya. Belhadj is also a

founding member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which the United States still officially lists as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.

Belhadj stresses his focus on overthrowing Muammar Qaddafi's regime, but his career as an international jihadist has involved violent activities elsewhere, especially South Asia. Someone like Belhadj deserves suspicion, not because he is Islamist but because of his history.

Now consider the history of the political Islamist actor that probably is receiving more attention than any other these days: the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. That history is one of decades of remarkable forbearance and endurance in the face of different degrees of repression by different Egyptian regimes.

The Brotherhood has a long record of commitment to nonviolence, a record that has made it the target of vehement denunciation by the likes of al-Qaeda. What is there about the Brotherhood, beyond its Islamist coloration, that should make it any more the object of suspicion than other parties, movements and groups vying for influence in a new Egypt? How else should it have behaved to make us less suspicious?

Ask also why parties such as the Brotherhood (or more properly, the Freedom and Justice Party, which is the Brotherhood's political arm) that have an Islamic identity should be viewed differently from parties with some other religious identity. Christian democratic parties have been an accepted part of the political mainstream in many European countries. How are Christian democratic parties different from Muslim democratic ones?

It is easy to think of religiously identified political parties that have caused problems, for stability, for sound policy and for democracy itself, but they are not just Islamist ones. In important respects, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party in India, for example, has not been good news for peaceful communal relations in that country, just as some religiously identified Jewish parties in Israel have not been good news for any hope of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

David Pollock of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy had an opinion piece in the *Washington Post* on Friday that exemplifies the automatic suspicion that gets directed at a group such as Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, which is the subject of his article.

Pollock wants to warn us about falling for what he describes as "new signs of moderation" by the Brotherhood, which is a misleading formulation by Pollock given that what is new is not the direction of the Brotherhood but instead the

political environment in which it is now operating.

The main substance of the piece involves comparing what the Brotherhood says on Arabic and English language versions of its websites. Some subjects that get significant attention on one version do not on the other. There are not inconsistencies, just differences in attention and emphasis.

Pollock concedes that “some might note that all political parties, to at least an extent, engage in mixed messaging.” Well, that’s for sure. In fact, the Brotherhood’s mixed messaging that he describes seems pretty mild compared to, say, Republican candidates’ English and Spanish language advertising in Florida.

Pollock takes other whacks at the Brotherhood for things that really reflect larger political realities in present-day Egypt. He mentions the organization’s position on the issue of “supraconstitutional” guarantees of individual freedoms, which is really part of the overall balance that all Egyptian political players need to struggle with in trying to combine the liberal and democratic parts of liberal democracy. In fact, the Brotherhood’s position could be said to be the most uncompromising prodemocracy position.

Pollock also portrays an escalating set of Brotherhood ambitions about what offices it hopes to occupy as if this were some kind of hidden plan, whereas it is best described as a logical response to the organization’s popularity and conformity with the beliefs of other Egyptians.

That conformity is what is involved in Pollock’s inaccurate reference to “the Brotherhood’s hostility toward U.S. policies and interests.” He cites as support for that phrase a section in the Freedom and Justice Party’s platform that rejects the Mubarak regime’s approach of “supporting occupiers and colonizers, through its presence in the so-called axis of moderation, which is sponsored by the United States.”

This doesn’t reflect any peculiar position on the part of the Brotherhood. It reflects views held by most of the Egyptian people, who still give the United States favorable ratings of only about 20 percent. The problem is not that an Egyptian party reflects those views; the problem is with the occupiers and colonizers, and with the groundless idea that support for occupation and colonization could be the basis for some kind of moderate axis in the Middle East.

Arguments such as Pollock’s partly reflect attitudes of the Israeli government, which (contrary to Israel’s own long-term interests) fears Arab democracy, especially in Egypt, more than it welcomes it. More democracy means more outspoken opposition to Israeli policies, more attention to the absence of

popular sovereignty for Palestinians and less claim by Israel to getting extraordinary treatment by the United States because it is the “only democracy” in the region.

Beyond this influence, it is hard to imagine such arguments based on anything other than Islamophobia. As a test of that proposition, consider what the arguments would sound like if the organization in question (i.e., the Brotherhood) were associated with any religion other than Islam.

These attitudes and arguments matter as an encouragement to possible U.S. policies that would be damaging to U.S. interests. Ostracism or rejection of movements that have remained peaceful, have played by democratic rules when they have had the opportunity to play by them and have garnered substantial popular support would be a mistake, especially insofar as the rejection was for no other reason than the Islamist coloration of the groups.

It would be a mistake partly because it would be antidemocratic. It would be an encouragement to abandon democratic methods. It would hinder important U.S. relationships with important countries such as Egypt. And it would put the United States on the wrong side of what is going on in the Middle East.

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Bush’s My Lai

From the Archive: Last week’s decision by a U.S. military court to give no jail time to the sergeant in charge of troops at the Haditha massacre of 24 unarmed Iraqis means no serious penalties for anyone associated with what, in 2006, Robert Parry called “Bush’s My Lai.”

By Robert Parry (Published on May 30, 2006)

The alleged murder of two dozen Iraqis by revenge-seeking Marines in the city of Haditha appears likely to follow the course of other Iraq war-crimes cases, such as the prisoner abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib some low- or mid-level soldiers will be court-martialed and marched off to prison (although it turned out, by 2012, even that didn’t happen).

George W. Bush will offer some bromides about how the punishment shows that the United States honors the rule of law and how the punishment is further proof of America's civilized behavior when compared with the enemy's barbarity. It's also likely the U.S. news media won't place too much blame on Bush.

(Update: Five years later, even those bromides weren't necessary because of the eight Marines implicated in the killings, only Staff Sgt. Frank Wuterich was punished at all and only for dereliction of duty which carried a reduction in rank but no jail time.)

But the common thread from the bloody invasion of Iraq in 2003 through Abu Ghraib to Haditha is that Bush cavalierly sent young Americans into a complex and frightening conflict with false and alarmist rhetoric ringing in their ears.

Through clever juxtaposition, Bush's speeches linked Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein to the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks and later blurred the distinctions between Iraq's home-grown insurgency and the relatively small number of al-Qaeda terrorists operating in Iraq.

Again and again, in 2002-2003, Bush rhetorically fused the names Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, as Bush rushed the United States into war. Then, in fall 2005 around the time of the alleged Haditha atrocity on Nov. 19, 2005 Bush was framing the Iraq conflict as a war to stop terrorists from creating "a radical Islamic empire that spans from Spain to Indonesia," which would threaten the American mainland.

Though these claims lacked credible intelligence Hussein and bin Laden were bitter enemies and al-Qaeda remains a fringe player in the Muslim world Bush's messages apparently sank in with impressionable young soldiers and Marines trying to understand why they needed to kill Iraqis. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[Bush's Latest Iraq War Lies.](#)"]

As a result of Bush's incessant propaganda, a poll of 944 U.S. military personnel in Iraq taken in January and February 2006 found that 85 percent believed the U.S. mission in Iraq was mainly "to retaliate for Saddam's role in the 9/11 attacks." Seventy-seven percent said a chief war goal was "to stop Saddam from protecting al-Qaeda in Iraq."

Bush had not only misled the American public, but he had confused the American troops assigned to carry out the complicated occupation of Iraq, a nation with a history, language and culture foreign to the vast majority of U.S. soldiers. By exaggerating the threat that Iraq posed to the United States, Bush also set the conditions for atrocities.

Milosevic Precedent

While every soldier is responsible for his or her own actions in a war, it is the duty of the top levels of the chain of command including the Commander in Chief to take every possible precaution to ensure that troops on the ground do not commit war crimes.

Indeed, commanders and politicians who lay the groundwork for abuses often are held responsible along with the actual perpetrators. The late Yugoslavian leader Slobodan Milosevic was put on trial at The Hague not for direct participation in the slaughter of Bosnian Muslims and Croats in the 1990s, but for aiding and abetting the crimes.

Milosevic's violent rhetoric and deceptive propaganda were two factors cited in his indictment. One count alleged that the fiery Serb leader "controlled, manipulated or otherwise utilized Serbian state-run media to spread exaggerated and false messages of ethnically based attacks by Bosnian Muslims and Croats against Serb people intended to create an atmosphere of fear and hatred among Serbs."

In Bush's Iraq case, his legal responsibility is parallel though the facts are far from identical. The Yugoslavian conflict was essentially a sectarian civil war which involved ethnic cleansing and massacres.

Bush's Iraq invasion violated international law and longstanding principles, including the Nuremberg ban on aggressive war and a similar prohibition in the United Nations Charter to which the United States was a founding signatory.

In 2002, however, claiming a unilateral American right to invade any country that may pose a threat to U.S. security in the future, Bush took the law into his own hands. He brushed aside requests from allies, even from British Prime Minister Tony Blair, to get clearance from the U.N. Security Council before launching the invasion.

Bush and his neoconservative advisers judged that U.S. military preeminence in the post-Cold War world put them beyond the reach of international law and that public acclaim for a successful conquest of Iraq would silence any remaining critics.

But Bush's actions put U.S. troops in a particularly difficult and dangerous predicament. Not only would the entire U.S. chain of command be implicated in an illegal aggressive war, but there would be fewer legal safeguards in the event civilians were killed, a certainty given the level of firepower.

Though rarely mentioned by the major U.S. news media, this additional danger for U.S. troops was noted by some Internet outlets, including Consortiumnews.com, which published an editorial on March 17, 2003, two days before the invasion,

stating:

“If George W. Bush orders U.S. forces to unleash his ‘shock and awe’ onslaught against Iraq without United Nations sanction, he will be opening American servicemen to a kind of double jeopardy. First, they will be risking their lives in a combat strategy far riskier than is publicly acknowledged. Second, any significant taking of civilian life could leave both officers and enlisted men liable for future war-crimes charges.”

Civilian Slaughter

Not surprisingly, there were violations of the rules of war from the outset, such as the aerial bombing of a civilian Baghdad restaurant where faulty U.S. intelligence suggested that Hussein might be having dinner. As it turned out, Hussein was not there, but the attack killed 14 civilians, including seven children. One mother collapsed when rescue workers pulled the severed head of her daughter out of the rubble.

Other U.S. bombings inflicted horrendous death and destruction on civilians. In one attack, Saad Abbas, 34, was wounded, but his family sought to shield him from the greater horror. The bombing had killed his three daughters Marwa, 11; Tabarek, 8; and Safia, 5 who had been the center of his life. “It wasn’t just ordinary love,” his wife said. “He was crazy about them. It wasn’t like other fathers.” [NYT, April 14, 2003]

The horror of the war was captured, too, in the fate of 12-year-old Ali Ismaeel Abbas, who lost his two arms when a U.S. missile struck his Baghdad home. Ali’s father, Ali’s pregnant mother and his siblings were all killed. As he was evacuated to a Kuwaiti hospital, becoming a symbol of U.S. compassion for injured Iraqi civilians, Ali said he would rather die than live without his hands.

The slaughter extended to the battlefield where the outmatched Iraqi army sometimes fought heroically though hopelessly against the technologically superior U.S. forces. Christian Science Monitor reporter Ann Scott Tyson interviewed U.S. troops with the 3rd Infantry Division who were deeply troubled by their task of mowing down Iraqi soldiers who kept fighting even in suicidal situations.

“For lack of a better word, I felt almost guilty about the massacre,” one soldier said privately. “We wasted a lot of people. It makes you wonder how many were innocent. It takes away some of the pride. We won, but at what cost?”

Commenting upon the annihilation of Iraqi forces in these one-sided battles, Lt. Col. Woody Radcliffe said, “We didn’t want to do this. Even a brain-dead moron

can understand we are so vastly superior militarily that there is no hope. You would think they would see that and give up.”

In one battle around Najaf, U.S. commanders ordered air strikes to kill the Iraqis en masse rather than have U.S. soldiers continue to kill them one by one. “There were waves and waves of people coming at (the U.S. troops) with AK-47s, out of this factory, and (the U.S. troops) were killing everyone,” Radcliffe said. “The commander called and said, ‘This is not right. This is insane. Let’s hit the factory with close air support and take them out all at once.’”
[Christian Science Monitor, April 11, 2003]

Bloody Occupation

Three weeks into the invasion, Hussein’s government collapsed, but Bush’s short-sighted plan for the occupation left U.S. forces stretched thin as they tried to establish order. Sometimes, jittery U.S. soldiers opened fire on demonstrations, inflicting civilian casualties and embittering the population.

In Fallujah, some 17 Iraqis were gunned down in demonstrations after U.S. soldiers claimed they had been fired upon. Fallujah soon became a center of anti-American resistance.

As the Iraqi insurgency began to spread and Americans began dying in larger numbers military intelligence officers encouraged prison guards to soften up captured Iraqis by putting them in stress positions for long periods of time, denying sleep and subjecting them to extremes of hot and cold.

Some of the poorly trained prison personnel like those on Private Lynndie England’s night shift at Abu Ghraib added some of their own bizarre ideas for humiliating captured Iraqis, like forcing them naked into pyramids.

But even some of those strange techniques, such as adorning Iraqi men with women’s underwear, could be traced to wider practices against other detainees. Army Capt. Ian Fishback and two sergeants alleged that prisoners were subjected to similar treatment by the 82nd Airborne at a camp near Fallujah and that senior officers knew. [See [Human Rights Watch report](#).]

Fishback blamed the pattern of abuse on the Bush administration’s vague orders about when and how Geneva Convention protections applied to detainees, a problem that extended from the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to a network of shadowy U.S. prisons around the world.

“We did not set the conditions for our soldiers to succeed,” said Fishback, 26, who served tours in Afghanistan and Iraq. “We failed to set clear standards, communicate those standards and enforce those standards.” [NYT, Sept. 28, 2005]

Rape Rooms

Even Bush's boast that he closed Hussein's torture chambers and "rape rooms" lost its moral clarity.

A 53-page classified Army report, written by Maj. Gen. Antonio M. Taguba, revealed that abuses at Abu Ghraib from October to December 2003 included use of a chemical light or broomstick to sexually assault one Iraqi. Witnesses also told Army investigators that prisoners were beaten and threatened with rape, electrocution and dog attacks. At least one Iraqi died during interrogation.

"Numerous incidents of sadistic, blatant and wanton criminal abuses were inflicted on several detainees," said Taguba's report. [See The New Yorker's May 10, 2004, issue.]

Bush's contempt for international law has long been an open secret. On Dec. 11, 2003, when asked by a European reporter about the need for international law to govern the U.S. occupation of Iraq, Bush joked, "International law? I better call my lawyer."

In 2004, Fallujah was back in the news after Iraqi insurgents killed four American security contractors and a mob mutilated the bodies. Bush ordered Marines to "pacify" the city of 300,000 people.

The U.S. assault on Fallujah transformed one soccer field into a mass grave for hundreds of Iraqis many of them civilians killed when U.S. forces bombarded the rebellious city with 500-pound bombs and raked its streets with cannon and machine-gun fire. According to some accounts, more than 800 citizens of Fallujah died in the assault and 60,000 fled as refugees.

In attacking Fallujah and in other counterinsurgency operations, the Bush administration again resorted to measures that critics argued amounted to war crimes. These tactics included administering collective punishment against the civilian population in Fallujah, rounding up thousands of young Iraqi men on the flimsiest of suspicions and holding prisoners incommunicado without charges and subjecting some detainees to physical mistreatment.

But the Abu Ghraib scandal, with its graphic photos of naked Iraqis posed in fake sexual positions, became the iconic representation of American mistreatment of Iraqis. When the photos surfaced in 2004, the images fueled anti-Americanism across the Middle East and around the globe.

Back in Washington, the Bush administration tried to defuse international outrage by blaming a few "bad apples." Bush said he "shared a deep disgust that those prisoners were treated the way they were treated."

The Abu Ghraib scandal led to military convictions against nine reservists who were sentenced and marched off in shackles. Lynndie England, a 22-year-old single mother who had been photographed holding an Iraqi on a leash and pointing at a detainee's penis, was sentenced to three years in prison.

Bush has continued to cite the Abu Ghraib case as one of a handful of mistakes that he will concede occurred during the Iraq War. At a joint press conference with Tony Blair on May 25, 2006, Bush said, "We've been paying for that for a long period of time."

Haditha Atrocity

Now comes the Haditha atrocity in which several Marines are alleged to have gone on a killing spree in the insurgent-dominated town on Nov. 19, 2005, after one Marine died from an improvised explosive device.

According to published accounts of U.S. military investigations, the Marines retaliated for the bombing by pulling five men from a cab and shooting them, and entering two homes where civilians, including women and children, were executed. Some of the victims reportedly were praying or begging for mercy when they were shot.

The Marines then tried to cover up the killings by claiming that the civilian deaths were caused by the original explosion or a subsequent firefight, according to investigations by the U.S. military and human rights groups. One senior Defense Department official told the New York Times that of the 24 dead Iraqis, the number killed by the bomb was "zero." [NYT, May 26, 2006]

The Haditha killings are likely to draw comparisons with the Vietnam War's My Lai massacre on March 16, 1968, when a bloodied unit of the U.S. Army's Americal Division stormed into a village known as My Lai 4 and slaughtered 347 Vietnamese civilians including babies.

Though the number of dead at Haditha is less than one-tenth the victims at My Lai, the scenarios are eerily similar: U.S. troops fighting a confusing conflict against a shadowy enemy lash out at a civilian population, killing unarmed men, women and children.

If the Marines at Haditha are found guilty of committing the atrocity, they can be expected to receive severe punishment for murder, which under military statutes could include their own executions. Yet, while these Marines may face severe punishment for violating the laws of war, the political leadership back home up to and including George W. Bush remains immune from any meaningful accountability.

[Update: As it turned out, the cases against six Marines were dismissed, one was acquitted, and Sgt. Wuterich admitted to a relatively minor infraction and thus avoided jail time.]

For his part, President Bush even won sympathy from some commentators for joining Blair at the May 25, 2006, news conference at the White House where the two leaders took turns admitting a few errors in the Iraq War. Bush focused his self-criticism on a couple of tough-talking comments, including his taunt to Iraqi insurgents in 2003 to “bring ’em on.”

The New York Times noted that when Bush mentioned the Abu Ghraib scandal, “his voice was heavy with regret.” [NYT, May 26, 2006]

But the scales of justice may demand more from Bush and Blair than a few limited apologies that ignore the original crime of launching a war in violation of international law against a country that was not threatening their nations.

As the war’s chief instigator, Bush would seem to bear the heaviest blame. To justify the war, he also stoked up the emotions of Americans both civilian and military with false claims about Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, Hussein’s links to 9/11 and connections between Hussein’s secular regime and al-Qaeda’s Islamic fundamentalists.

Bush’s lies also didn’t stop after Hussein’s regime fell. On June 18, 2005, more than two years into the war, Bush used a radio address to tell the American people that “we went to war because we were attacked,” continuing the subliminal connections: Saddam/Osama, Iraq/Sept. 11.

False Rhetoric

Bush’s rhetorical excesses, though primarily designed to build and maintain a political consensus behind the war at home, had the predictable effect of turning loose a thoroughly propagandized and heavily armed U.S. military force on the Iraqi population.

Pumped-up by Bush’s false claims linking Iraq to 9/11 and his later warnings about al-Qaeda’s scheme for a global terrorist empire, U.S. soldiers have charged into Iraqi towns and cities with revenge on their minds. Bush thus put both American soldiers and the Iraqi people in harm’s way.

In the first three-plus years of war (as of May 2006), nearly 2,500 U.S. soldiers had died along with tens of thousands of Iraqis. Thousands more have been grievously maimed.

As the laws of war require the punishment of any individual soldier who murders

civilians, international principles also call for holding accountable their superiors both military and political who contribute to the crime.

In that sense, the atrocity at Haditha and the tens of thousands of other unnecessary deaths in Iraq can be laid at the door of Official Washington, where some Democrats and nearly all Republicans voted to authorize the invasion and where leading news organizations uncritically transmitted administration propaganda to the American people.

But the principal blame must rest at the feet of George W. Bush, the self-proclaimed “war president” who considers himself beyond the bounds of any law. In that larger sense, Haditha and all the other carnage in Iraq can be viewed as Bush’s My Lai.

[For more on related topics, see Robert Parry’s *Lost History, Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a three-book set for the discount price of only \$29. For details, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & ‘Project Truth’* are also available there.

No Justice for Haditha Massacre

In 2003, President George W. Bush launched a “preemptive” war against Iraq, citing imaginary threats to the United States. The invasion inflicted massive loss of life, including massacres like the one at Haditha, but with very little accountability in the field or in Washington, writes Marjorie Cohn.

By Marjorie Cohn

They ranged from little babies to adult males and females.

I’ll never be able to get that out of my head. I can still smell the blood.

This left something in my head and heart.

-Lance Cpl. Roel Ryan Briones

Last week, Staff Sgt. Frank Wuterich was sentenced to a reduction in rank but no jail time for leading his squad in a rampage known as "The Haditha Massacre." Wuterich, who was charged with nine counts of manslaughter, pled guilty to dereliction of duty. Six other Marines have had their charges dismissed and another was acquitted for his part in the massacre.

What was the Haditha Massacre? On Nov. 19, 2005, U.S. Marines from Kilo Company, Third Battalion, First Marine Division killed 24 unarmed civilians in Haditha, Iraq, execution-style, in a three- to five-hour rampage. One victim was a 76-year-old amputee in a wheelchair holding a Koran. A mother and child bent over as if in prayer were also among the fallen.

"I pretended that I was dead when my brother's body fell on me and he was bleeding like a faucet," said Safa Younis Salim, a 13-year-old girl who survived by faking her death. Other victims included six children ranging in age from 1 to 14. Citing doctors at Haditha's hospital, *The Washington Post* reported, "Most of the shots ... were fired at such close range that they went through the bodies of the family members and plowed into walls or the floor."

The executions of 24 unarmed civilians were apparent retaliation for the death of Lance Cpl. Miguel Terrazas when a small Marine convoy hit a roadside bomb earlier that day. A statement issued by a U.S. Marine Corps spokesman the next day claimed:

"A U.S. Marine and 15 civilians were killed yesterday from the blast of a roadside bomb in Haditha. Immediately following the bombing, gunmen attacked the convoy with small-arms fire. Iraqi army soldiers and Marines returned fire, killing eight insurgents and wounding another." A subsequent Marine version of the events said the victims were killed inadvertently in a running gun battle with insurgents.

Both of these stories were false, and the Marines knew it. They were blatant attempts to cover up the atrocity, disguised as "collateral damage." Rep. John Murtha, D-Pennsylvania, a former Marine, was briefed on the Haditha investigation by Marine Corps Commandant Michael Hagee.

Murtha said, "The reports I have from the highest level: No firing at all. No interaction. No military action at all in this particular incident. It was an explosive device, which killed a Marine. From then on, it was purely shooting people." Marine Corps officials told Murtha that troops shot a woman "in cold blood" as she was bending over her child begging for mercy. Women and children were in their nightclothes when they were killed.

The Haditha Massacre did not become public until *Time* magazine ran a story in

March 2006. *Time* had turned over the results of its investigation, including a videotape, to the U.S. military in January. Only then did the military launch an investigation. These Marines “suffered a total breakdown in morality and leadership, with tragic results,” a U.S. official told the *Los Angeles Times*.

Murtha said, “Our troops overreacted because of the pressure on them, and they killed innocent civilians in cold blood.” Many U.S. troops suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

Lance Cpl. Roel Ryan Briones, a Marine in Kilo Company, did not participate in The Haditha Massacre. T.J. Terrazas was his best friend. Briones, who was 20 years old at the time, saw Terrazas after he was killed. “He had a giant hole in his chin. His eyes were rolled back up in his skull,” Briones said of his buddy. “A lot of people were mad,” Briones said. “Everyone had just a [terrible] feeling about what had happened to T.J.”

After the massacre, Briones was ordered to take photographs of the victims and help carry their bodies out of their homes. He is still haunted by what he had to do that day. Briones picked up a young girl who was shot in the head. “I held her out like this,” he said, extending his arms, “but her head was bobbing up and down and the insides fell on my legs.”

“I used to be one of those Marines who said that post-traumatic stress is a bunch of bull,” said Briones, who has gotten into serious trouble since he returned home. “But all this stuff that keeps going through my head is eating me up. I need immediate help.”

Murtha told ABC there was “no question” the U.S. military tried to “cover up” the Haditha incident, which Murtha called “worse than Abu Ghraib.” His high-level briefings indicated to him that the cover-up went “right up the chain of command.”

The Bush administration set rules of engagement that resulted in the willful killing and indiscriminate slaughter of civilians. In particular, U.S. troops in Iraq operated in “free-fire zones,” with orders to shoot everything that moves. Attacks in civilian areas resulted in massive civilian casualties, which the Bush administration casually called “collateral damage.”

Like other grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions, these acts of summary execution and willful killing are punishable under the U.S. War Crimes Act. Commanders have a responsibility to make sure civilians are not indiscriminately harmed and that prisoners are not summarily executed.

Because rules of engagement are set at the top of the command chain, criminal liability extends beyond the perpetrator under the doctrine of command

responsibility. George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld should be charged with war crimes.

A few days after the story of The Haditha Massacre became public, U.S. forces killed 11 civilians after rounding them up in a room in a house in Ishaqi near Balad, Iraq, handcuffing and shooting them. The victims ranged from a 75-year-old woman to a six-month-old child, and included three-year-olds and five-year-olds and three other women as well. A report by the U.S. military found no wrongdoing by the U.S. soldiers.

Allegations that U.S. troops have engaged in summary executions and willful killing in Iraq have also emerged from other Iraqi cities, including Qaim, Abu Ghraib, Taal Al Jal, Mukaradeeb, Mahmudiya, Hamdaniyah, Samarra, and Salahuddin. There are similar accusations stemming from incidents in Afghanistan as well.

Many people in Iraq are outraged as the legal books close on The Haditha Massacre. They are also perturbed at the U.S. drones flying over Iraqi skies in Baghdad to protect the largest U.S. embassy in the world that, even after the United States "pulled out" of Iraq, still houses 11,000 Americans protected by 5,000 mercenaries.

"Our sky is our sky, not the U.S.A.'s sky," Adnan al-Asadi, acting Iraqi interior minister, said. The U.S. military left Iraq because the Iraqis refused to grant US soldiers immunity for crimes like those at The Haditha Massacre.

The 24 Haditha victims are buried in a cemetery called Martyrs' Graveyard. Graffiti on the deserted house of one of the families reads, "Democracy assassinated the family that was here."

Marjorie Cohn, a professor at Thomas Jefferson School of Law, is former president of the National Lawyers Guild. She is author of *Cowboy Republic: Six Ways the Bush Gang Has Defied the Law* and co-author of *Rules of Disengagement: The Politics and Honor of Military Dissent*. Her most recent book is *The United States and Torture: Interrogation, Incarceration, and Abuse*. Read her blog at www.marjoriecohn.com.
