



THE  
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# First Friday News & Views

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## PAINTED INTO THE PROVERBIAL CORNER

by Jonathan Wilson

One of my favorite Far Side cartoons features a guy with a paint brush in front of his house. He's painted on the house, "House," on the fence, "Fence," on the bewildered-looking dog, "Dog," and on a beleaguered tree, "Tree." With his brush still dripping with paint he says, "There now that should clear some things up around here."

The testimony of Eric Holder, the nominee for US Attorney General under the Obama Administration, was just such a moment. He stated the obvious and stated it clearly and without any reservation. Testifying as the probable next chief law enforcement officer in the country, he said that waterboarding *is* torture. Pure and simple. No equivocation. None of the ifs-and-or-buts previously uttered by the Bush lackey, Attorney General Mukasey. It was true, as every human being in touch with reality has known for decades, if not centuries. It was nonetheless refreshing. It needed to be said by someone with, or about to have, responsibility for prosecuting crimes. But it creates a dilemma.

By stating that simple truth, that waterboarding is torture, Holder may have painted the Obama Administration into a perplexing, proverbial corner. Torture is illegal under the laws of the United States and under international law. Torture is a crime in this country and around the world. A crime. A serious crime. A crime that has been committed in the name of the United States. A crime that cannot be ignored. A crime that cries out for prosecution and time in the slammer.

We've all heard it before, and we're starting to hear it again, that we should be forward looking; that it profits us not as a nation to look back and dredge up past wrongs; that we should be moving on from the ugly past. But that's the old way of doing things. That's the traditional good-ole-boy ploy. Calls for ignoring what's happened in the past usually follow statements during a crisis, during an incident, or during unfolding events, that there's no need to assign blame at that time; there will be plenty of time later for assigning blame and holding people accountable. It happened after the 9/11 attacks, it happened with the ill-conceived, "preventive" war against Iraq; it happened with the Katrina debacle; it happened with the financial meltdown; and it's happening with the unapologetic criminality of the Bush Administration.

Obama has promised something different. His most difficult first test will be to decide whether the same old free pass will once again be given to members of the establishment fraternity, or whether the rule of law really will be allowed to operate unimpeded. Not a tough choice philosophically, but a truly tough choice politically for someone who wants perhaps too much to be popular, and who (it would be an understatement to say) has a lot of other things on his plate. But, as Obama aptly observed when McCain suspended his presidential campaign to "solve" the financial crisis, "The President is supposed to be able to do more than one thing at a time." One reason is because a President has lots of people helping, such as a chief law enforcement officer. The President is not expected to do that himself.

It might be justice, even poetic justice (which is sweeter), for the Department of

(Continued on page 2)

### INSIDE

February Speaker Review by Bruce Carr	2
<b>Gran Torino</b> Movie Review by Gary Kaufman	3
Briefs & Shorts	3
From the Editor	4

### CALENDAR

▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, March 6, 2009 at Hoyt Sherman Place.

Our speaker will be the bishop of the First United Methodist Church, the Rev. Dr. Julius C. Trimble.

▼ R.S.V.P. by Wednesday March 4 to [JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com) or 288-2500 by phone.

(Continued from page 1)

Justice to actually hold Cheney and Bush accountable. Especially Bush who, as the consummate insider, turned railing against the establishment into an art form. Being held accountable would turn that paradox into poetry.

Bush, in his final address to the nation, tried to paint his conduct in the most favorable light, claiming that what he did was to keep the nation safe from another attack. But when the light is shown on that “defense,” it is nothing more than claiming that the ends justify the means. We know that’s indefensible. When we, as a people, buy into that philosophy, the rule of law is lost, the Constitution is rendered meaningless, our individual freedoms are held for naught, and we become indistinguishable from the terrorists who hold that same view.

Consider this: Torture is a serious crime, in this country and internationally. Serious crimes should be prosecuted no matter who commits them. Those who commit them should answer for them. When they’re done doing so here, they should, in the name of Noriega and Pinochet—in the name of Nuremburg—be extradited for criminal prosecution abroad—the ultimate “extraordinary rendition.” ▼

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*Everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion, but none of us is entitled to our own facts.*

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**O**ur featured speaker at the February meeting was the vivacious and inspiring Alice Hoagland, chief of the Mark Bingham Foundation named in honor of her son who died in the crash of United Flight 93 in central Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001. Mark gave her a farewell call on his cell phone that morning, evidently just before he and several of his fellow passengers mounted an assault on the terrorists who had hijacked the plane—by then aimed at Washington DC—and brought it down.



Mark—who at the time of his death—was CEO of The Bingham Group, a strategic public relations firm with offices in San Francisco and New York. He was born in Phoenix in 1970 and lived his life in Miami and in and

around San Francisco. He was graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 1993, where in 1991 and 1993 he helped the university earn national titles in rugby. Jack Clark, the rugby team’s coach, said, “He marched to his own beat. This guy was anything but a follower [well, he was 6’5” tall]. I don’t know if we’ll ever know what happened in that airplane, but it would not surprise me that Mark would resist.” (You can read this and lots more at [www.markbingham.org](http://www.markbingham.org).)

One of the many celebrations of Mark’s heroism and leadership was the founding of the Mark Bingham Leadership Fund Scholarship, established at the California Community Foundation in his honor. The scholarship’s mission is to help a U.C. Berkeley student with tuition, room and board, or other school-related expenses. Since its inception, the fund has raised over \$50,000. The address is Mark Bingham Leadership Fund Scholarship, c/o The Mark Bingham Foundation, P.O. Box 2182, Los Gatos CA 95031-2182.



**From left to right: Board member Byron Huff, Alice Hoagland, and board member Rick Miller**

Alice Hoagland—whose father, she said, hailed from Center Point, Iowa—was both touching and amusing in her presentation, which culminated in a plea for us all to work together for acceptance of every kind of diversity, including all colors, genders, gender orientations, and religious faiths. Hoagland, who is clearly a committed Christian, particularly included Muslims in this plea—even as she remembered that the 9/11 hijackers were motivated by a viciously radical form of Islam.

Flashes of her intense humor dotted Alice’s speech, as in the story she recounted of Mark’s coming out to her while he was still in college. At first she cried, of course. Then she began to protest his insistence on being honest: “But...,” she said, “but ... if you keep *telling* everybody, then they’ll *know!*” It was a supremely recognizable moment for us all in a highly moving and entertaining presentation.

You can write to Alice Hoagland at [alicehoagland@aol.com](mailto:alicehoagland@aol.com).

—Bruce Carr

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*Duct tape is like ‘The Force.’ It has a light and a dark side, and it pretty much holds the universe together.*

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*A truly happy person can enjoy the scenery on a de-tour.*

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**2** *Experience is something you don’t get until just after you need it.*

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# Gran Torino

Review by  
Gary Kaufman



Clint Eastwood's current film, **Gran Torino**, explores a common theme among human beings; we don't like those "who aren't like us," regardless of who the "us" is. The film begins with Walter Kowalski (Clint Eastwood) standing up in the front for his dear wife Dorothy's funeral; he had been coughing blood—never a good sign. Walter finds most of the aspects of the funeral irritating. One grandchild shows up wearing a Lion's sweatshirt, and his cousin wears a bare midriff outfit which displays a stud in her belly button. The preacher, 27 years old, talks about how death is bittersweet, while Walter is tormented by the killings he did in Korea and feels the preacher knows nothing of life and death. Walter worked all his life as an automaker for Ford Motor Company, one of his sons, to his dismay, sells foreign automobiles. His sons complain that "there is nothing any member of our family could do that would not disappoint him." Walter is distant from his family and relatives and pretty much just wants to be left alone— independent, and on his own.

Walter lives in a neighborhood that is changing. Walter's neighboring household is headed by an old Hmong Vietnamese lady who lives with her children and grandchildren. Walter and the neighbor mutually sit on their front porches despising each other. He wonders why all these gooks want to live in the Midwest; she wonders why that old white man hasn't moved out yet, like all the others. He also lives in a neighborhood that is beset by racial gangs—black gangs, Chicano gangs, Hmong gangs. The Hmong gang is trying to get the neighbor lady's grandson, Thao, to join—for his "protection." Thao is reluctant to join the gang. A fight ensues as the Hmong gang is trying to kidnap Thao. The fight rolls over onto Walter's property, and that is where he draws the line. He brings out his rifle and orders the Hmong gang members to leave. When they do leave Walter discovers he has become a hero among the Hmong, with them leaving flowers and food and gifts on his porch. He rejects these offers but is eventually won over by the Hmong generosity and Hmong cooking, and he finally befriends the family next door, especially Thao. Walter teaches Thao how to be a man, how to be productive, and how to have self-confidence and a sense of self-worth.

This film has a lot more humor than most Clint Eastwood films. The banter of Walter's racial epithets strangely, eventually, warms the viewer. Walter discovers a relationship with his Hmong neighbors that he has not been able to have with his own family. The film has a lot of the

old Clint Eastwood machismo but it's delivered in an older man's body. He gives the Hmong community strength, and they give him the warmth he never had from his own family. ▼

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*The early bird may get the worm, but it's the second mouse that gets the cheese.*

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(EDITOR from page 4)

terested in winning internal battles than in preserving our state's heritage. How sad! At least one state senator—William Dotzler of Waterloo—is willing to take them on. I urge all of you to contact Senator Dotzler and let him know that while the ignorant think they can ignore history, the enlightened of this state want to preserve it. If any of you have had the urge to contribute or support the SHSI, I recommend that you not do so. They are not responsible people and will squander your contribution. I know because the money I sent there and thought was going to the preservation of the battle flags has gone elsewhere. They are not to be trusted.

—Steve Person

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*The quickest way to double your money is to fold it in half and put it back in your pocket.*

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## BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the March 6 meeting no later than March 4. E-mail [JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com) or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Iowa United Methodist Church Bishop, the Rev. Dr. Julius C. Trimble.



Thanks to Rick Miller for his introduction of our February speaker, Alice Hoagland and also for acting as her host during her visit to Des Moines.



Planned Parenthood of Greater Iowa Lobby Day is on March 4, 2009. For details, contact PPGI at 515-280-7004. (FYI: PPGI representatives participated in the Marriage Equality lobbying day).



Thanks to all who made the February 6 Red Party's scholarship fund raiser such a success. Those who have not done so can still contribute. Contributions are appreciated and tax deductible.



# FFBC

*First Friday  
News & Views*

*Des Moines, Iowa*

**MARCH 2009**

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## From the Editor

### Currency Affairs, Current Affairs, and an Update

I. Why is Andrew Jackson on the twenty dollar bill? That is a question that, until recently, I never thought much about. It is now my considered opinion that he shouldn't be.

I recently finished Jon Meacham's excellent biography, **American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House**. When studying American History in undergraduate and graduate schools, I never thought too highly of Andrew Jackson. Even at the college level I never went too deeply into learning about him. After reading Meacham's book, my opinion of Jackson dwindled even more, even though that was not what I believe the author intended.

Jackson fashioned himself as a man of the people, and it was during his presidency that the Bank of the United States (originated by Alexander Hamilton) was dissolved. Jackson believed the bank to be a tool of the American aristocracy and that the nation's money belonged in various state banks. Upon dissolution of the Bank of the United States during his second administration, other countries of the world lost confidence in American finances, and an international banking crisis resulted. It was up to Jackson's successors to deal with that problem (sound familiar?). Additionally, Jackson's treatment of Native Americans was reprehensible even though he adopted a Native American child after helping to massacre his mother in Florida before he became president. Meacham's book went to great pains to point out the private and public man was a person of great contradictions. Jackson helped to create the presidency as we know it, for better or worse.

The decision to put portraits of noted Americans on our currency is up to the Department of the Treasury. Whoever made the idiotic decision to put Jackson on the twenty dollar bill in the 1920s I hope will forever rot in hell. Also, it is time to re-vamp our currency. Get rid of the one dollar bill and replace it with a one dollar coin. Coins last much longer than paper. Also, all the major currencies of the world differentiate the size of their bills (see the British pound or the euro). The various denominations make it easier for blind people to distinguish what they have in their wallets.

II. As for the current financial crisis, I am, like most Americans, not too sure what to believe. The "information" we receive from various American media is so insular that making any rational decision about what is happening is nearly impossible. We are extremely poorly served by what is supposed to be a free press. Instant analysis amounts to nothing more than instant confusion. Believe what you will.

III. A few issues ago I reported that the Iowa Battle Flag Preservation Project was in jeopardy. It is now even more so. The so-called "curators" and unqualified middle management of the State Historical Society of Iowa, along with the executive branch, have made sure that the project will be scuttled. The SHSI is apparently more in-