



First Friday News & Views

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Breakfast Club, Inc.*

When Knuckle Dragging Came Back Into Fashion

By Jonathan Wilson

Around the world we are engaged in a debate over the pros and cons of government-sanctioned torture. In the year of our Lord 2015. Sadly, this debate has been triggered by conduct admittedly committed in the name of the United States of America and not some despotic, terrorist regime.

Let your mind go back to a time before the advent of Jesus and the New Testament when he announced that the guiding moral principle for human interactions is to turn the other cheek. That was a civilizing improvement over the former guiding principle of an eye-for-an-eye and a tooth-for-a-tooth enunciated in the Biblical Old Testament and elsewhere.

That Old Testament principle was, itself, a civilizing improvement over the prior principle that countenanced utterly disproportional response to any slight or injury caused by another person. Proportionality is more civilized than disproportionality. And, if you will let your mind go back even further to early cavemen, even dis-proportional response was a civilizing improvement for a culture that embraced unprovoked aggression and violence.

Those dragging their knuckles out of a cave held to the view that "might makes right" and that "the ends justify the means." Over the course of thousands of years -- thousands of generations of humankind even -- those principles have been debated and tested. They've been found to be wanting. They've been found to be utterly wrong. They've been found to be uncivilized. Might does not make right. The ends do not justify the means. It is an affront to civilization itself to claim otherwise.

Enter then the current debate over the revelations of misconduct by the CIA. Not only uncivilized, but actually illegal under both United States and international law. War crimes and crimes against humanity, to put it bluntly. Things dealt with in places like The Hague.

Some have tried to obfuscate the issue by suggesting that, while "torture" is unlawful, "enhanced interrogation techniques" are in a different -- acceptable -- category of behavior. Lipstick on a pig. Obviously, they (read: Bush, Cheney, and others in that administration) want to avoid the "torture" label because they know that torture is a crime. They would have us believe that it's difficult to discern what is and isn't torture such that one can justifiably rely for cover upon a tortured memo written by a prostituted lawyer in the Justice Department. They are wrong and we should not be fooled by the obfuscation. Aside from historical

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▼ The next FFBC Meeting is 7:00am, Friday, February 6, 2015, at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland, Des Moines, IA

▼ RSVP by February 4 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com, or phone 515-288-2500

precedent that may be unfamiliar to non-historians, the person in the street knows full-well when something is torture. Here's the easy litmus test: if it were done to your captive son or daughter, would you consider it torture. It's as simple as that, and you'd be right.

Others have tried to "contextualize" the conduct in order to justify it. We've heard from numerous folks, who were involved first-hand, rehearsing the circumstances, conjuring up images that remain all too vivid of the attacks on 9/11/01 and the fear that followed in the aftermath. They claim that the legality, if not the morality, of what was done must be viewed "in context." If context mattered in such things, there'd be no such thing as a war crime or a crime against humanity. War is war; killing happens in war and is justified. Still, *civilized* countries recognize that even in the "context" of war, some behavior is unjustified and, accordingly, a crime. Here's the simple test: if someone has been taken captive and is under your control, it is a crime to torture them even though moments before they were trying to kill you and, if freed, would try again. In short, what you do unto others is likely to be done unto you or yours. If we are not to be held accountable, it's more difficult to hold others accountable without embracing unmitigated hypocrisy.

Some have tried to introduce a red herring to the debate, claiming that the enhanced interrogation techniques saved lives by extracting valuable information. For starters, it has not been established conclusively one way or the other whether the torture produced valuable intelligence not otherwise available. More importantly, it doesn't matter, which is why it's a red herring: get folks debating that issue and they're distracted from focusing on the crime that's been committed. Making the argument is a classic claim that the ends justify the means. Since civilization rejects that misguided notion, whether or not valuable intelligence was gained becomes irrelevant in determining morality and legality.

I served in the United States Army. Included in the basic training was the fact that subordinates are not supposed to obey an illegal order. Being ordered to commit a war crime or a crime against

humanity is illegal. Admittedly, disobeying an order, even though it's illegal, is fraught with peril. Get it wrong and punishment will follow. But that's what *civilization* is all about. It's more difficult than the law of the jungle, It's more challenging than the triumph of brute force, it's been more demanding of us as civilized human beings since we stopped dragging our knuckles out of a cave.

The lame attempts to justify the conduct are a heightened embarrassment beyond that of the conduct itself. I say, if Bush, Cheney, and others are so confident that they are right in what they admittedly authorized and did, let them make their case before The Hague. If they're right, they'll be vindicated.

If they're unwilling to do that, I'd suggest that they limit their international travel.

Briefs & Shorts

Be sure to RSVP for the February 6 meeting no later than February 4. Contact Jonathan at 288-2500 or email him at JonathanWilson@DavisBrownLaw.com. Our scheduled speaker will be Dr. Frank Filippeli, Medical Director at MECCA Services.

Thanks to Bruce Wilson for his introduction of our January speaker, Imam Ako Abdul-Samad.

Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. Book donations are always welcome. Thanks to Scott Kuknyo for helping coordinate the book exchange.



Consider a tax deductible contribution to the FFBC scholarship fund, or a tax exempt testamentary gift, or both. Contact Jonathan Wilson for details.

SAVE THE DATE: February 6, 2015. The FFBC Red Party fundraiser at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th and Woodland, Des Moines. Those who volunteer to help with set up and break down get free admission. Contact Byron Huff.

Reflections

By Rick Miller

It seems appropriate to stop for a moment and think about the gay community from time-to-time and at the beginning of 2015 what better occasion to take stock and look at the LGBT community and culture here in Des Moines. There has been an overwhelming surge of positive interest in gay issues in the last 40 years where at one time there was little hope of ever having good news printed in pages of the local papers. This, alone, has changed radically! Where is all this interest taking us and will it continue to lead to assimilation and attract a resilient minority with specific, profound social characteristics that pervade the society as a whole in a good way? Will it dismantle religious intolerance and misogyny, create new ways to think about our world, or simply be an integrated part of the whole Des Moines cultural scene?

Some members in our community would do nothing to enhance it and would decry even the concept of a community made up of sexual minorities. Others would sit on the sidelines and simply criticize anyone who would step up to organize a gay community. Others would work tirelessly to make the community work through events and organizations that bring people together. And a small group are simply here to live the good gay life and never give of themselves to the community in any way – no matter how small.

My work with the local gay community over the years has given me several insights that may be worth mentioning. First, Des Moines is a very small community. Living in the largest city in Iowa we sometimes lose this sense of ourselves. It always impresses me at the national festival called GALA (Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses) that most cities and regions that have choruses are larger than ours. It amazes me that Des Moines is able to have an established cultural scene that embraces theatre, visual arts, and vocal musicians in such a vital way for those that are interested. The myriad small groups that explore books, religion, and social networking also form integrated communities; as well as, bars, clubs, and sports teams. Our health community brings hope and light to those with HIV and addictions. Several years ago I met a young

man from Seattle that came to work at the Great Ape Trust. His friends told him there were no gays in Iowa and that he would be miserable. He found such an overwhelming presence that he virtually ran from the community as hard as he could. I never saw him again.

Second, someone was once asked what gay culture was like in Des Moines and they had trouble identifying it. I found this troubling. There are nearly weekly gay thematic events in the city and it is clearly adding to all creative aspects of the region. Whether movies, plays at the Civic Center, Social Club, StageWest, chorus concerts, sports teams, book clubs, music by gay composers, dance, and art shows in coffee houses, there is much to see and do here in the city. Events like Capitol City Pride, Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus, Matthew Shepherd Scholarships, FFBC's Red Party, The Benefit, OWL, and local drag shows entertain us during the year. The Prime Timers are an example of our community working to fulfill the needs of its older members.

Third, another aspect of culture is its ability to sustain itself and project into the future. We have a wonderful group of young people carrying on the formidable task of making this a great place to live, work, and play. Schools have never been more inclusive, scholarships prove academic excellence within our new generation of leaders, and the acceptance of marriage equality has made the world a better place to live with our families. Young LGBT leaders are at churches, in health institutions, and on school task forces, and legislative exchanges. They are informed, excited, and stretching the community in myriad ways. They are singing, acting, creating, and performing. They are leading in many ways – both personal and public.

But work still needs to be done. There is little integration between the L – G – B and T parts of our communities. We still need to press for full inclusion in the religious communities that are not on board, and we must not assimilate to the point where we no longer have an identity. We need a very active community center. The play **Angels in America** by Tony Kushner puts it best when one character says near the end, "The great work begins." And so it does. I wish you hard work and fulfilled dreams in 2015. Enjoy your community and culture!



NEW YEAR TO FOCUS ON JOB CREATION, FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

We capped off 2014 with promising news on the economy. That means we can continue to make both fiscal responsibility and job creation top priorities in 2015.

The latest review of state finances by the nonpartisan Revenue Estimating Conference points to steady economic growth for Iowa over the next couple of years. In addition, Forbes recently ranked Iowa 12th on its list of [2014 Best States for Business](#). Iowa's strengths include relatively low unemployment and a diverse economy in farming, manufacturing, financial services and biotechnology.

These indicators tell us that Iowa has rebounded from the national recession better than most states. Yet many working families are still struggling. A new report from [Pew Research Center](#) finds that the gap between the wealthy and everyone else is the biggest it's been in three decades. In addition, a survey of [Mid-America Business Conditions](#) shows that a shortage of skilled and qualified workers is limiting business growth in Iowa.

When the 2015 session begins on January 12, we will tackle these concerns with bipartisan efforts to boost the economy and expand Iowa's middle class. Our top priorities include:

- Making sure kids get the best possible education in our local schools with reliable funding, top-notch teachers and good preschool programs that provide a successful start.
- Freezing tuition at our public universities for the third straight year. The Board of Regents recently voted unanimously to work with us once again to make a tuition freeze a reality for resident undergraduate students in 2015-16.
- Investing in worker training at our community colleges, which have a solid reputation for collaborating with local businesses to ensure Iowans get the skills they need to fill job openings.

As we have shown in recent years, we can accomplish these goals and balance the state budget without raising taxes. If you have ideas that can help, please contact me. The 2015 session is just a week away and I want to know what you think.

Additional information

This is a legislative update from Senator Matt McCoy, representing west part of Des Moines, portions of West Des Moines and Cumming in northwest Warren County. For newsletters, photos and further information, go to www.senate.iowa.gov/senator/mccoy.

To contact Senator McCoy during the week, call the Senate Switchboard at 515-281-3371. Otherwise he can be reached at home at 515-274-0561. E-mail him at matt.mccoy@legis.iowa.gov.



Imam Ako Abdul-Samad
By Bruce Wilson

Our speaker on Friday, January 2, was Iowa State Representative and founder of Creative Visions Human Development Center Ako Abdul-Samad, but Ako was before us as Imam Ako Abdul-Samad to educate us with respect to Islam; and those who missed this meeting because of a long New Year's holiday weekend missed what I (and I think most, if not all, in attendance) felt was an

outstandingly informative and entertaining presentation. I strongly encourage those who missed the meeting to visit the [FFBC web site](#) to hear it.

Ako's a Des Moines native, but he wasn't always a muslim. That came after he'd left Des Moines for Denver with a friend, fell asleep, and found himself in West Memphis, Arkansas. He then went on to New Orleans and worked on the Delta Queen. One day while in New Orleans he was approached by a man he thought to be a panhandler. The man presented Ako with a book and refused Ako's offer of money, saying "You will need this."

Six months later, he opened the book, which he found to be the holy Koran. He opened it and the first thing he read said, "If you believe in the Christian scripture, the

Jewish scripture, the Islamic scripture, then you will go to the hereafter." Cool! He then read the rest of the book, visited a mosque, and accepted Islam.

He explained that Islam is based on five principles, four of which are one God, prayer, giving, and fasting, which he explained means to purge in order to get closer to God. His first Ramadan sun-up to sun-down fast came in June, while he was on the Delta Queen, serving six meals a day.

Ako said he learned that Islam is a religion of peace, but some people have taken it to an extreme. They took religion as an excuse for war and they took it as an excuse to judge others. He didn't want to do that and Islam never taught him to do so. He then went on to discuss the difference between Islam as a religion and Islam as a culture – customs and practices in Islamic countries that aren't supported by the Koran.

Speaking of an encounter he once had with an elderly woman at Target, Ako said to her, "The problem we have with religion, and a lot of the things in the world, is that we're so scared of differences that we end up focusing in on similarities, and our similarities then have no substance, so when they're challenged, they crumble and fall apart. Until we start understanding differences, our similarities will not have substance."

In response to a question, Ako said Islam teaches against homosexuality but it also teaches him not to be judgmental. It teaches him to let people live the way they want to live. It tells him he has no right to tell someone who they are to be with. Islam teaches him he has no right to discriminate against anyone.

Ponder This



A testimony to our societal decadence is the fact that there's ice hockey in Phoenix, Arizona.

You attract the right things for you when you have a clear sense of who you are.

Work for a cause and not for applause.

The best day of your life is the one on which you decide your life is your own. No apologies or excuses.

Be stubborn about your goals, and flexible about your methods, remembering always that the ends do not justify the means.

Not all discrimination is bad. It should especially be used when reading the Bible.

If there were no ambiguity in the law, there'd be no need for lawyers. If there were no ambiguity in the Bible, there'd be no need for theologians. If there were no ambiguity in life, there'd be no need for a brain.

If all we ever do or expect others to do is follow the law, there remains no place for compassion.

Is there another word for synonym?

The first thing to do in seeking the Truth from the Bible is to test whatever you read against your own experience.

"You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation."— Brigham Young

If you asked a librarian where the books on self help were would they tell you, or would that defeat the purpose?



FFBC

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MADE ON A  MAC

MY M.O. (MONTHLY OBSERVATIONS)

A Book Review by Steve Person

Wilde in America: Oscar Wilde and the Invention of Modern Celebrity

By David M. Friedman

The Kardashians are NOTHING compared to Oscar Wilde! On January 3, 1882, a young and as yet relatively unknown twenty-seven-year-old Irishman was asked by a federal customs agent in New York if he had anything to declare. Oscar Wilde's apocryphal answer: "Nothing. Nothing but my genius."

Thus began what David Friedman declares to be the beginning of "Modern Celebrity." At the time, Oscar Wilde had published next to nothing—a self-published and poorly received book of poems being his sole literary contribution—decided to take his message of aestheticism to the Americas. Encouraged to do so by Richard D'Oyly Carte as the living embodiment of the lampooned character Bunthorne in the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, **Patience; or Bunthorne's Bride**, Wilde accepted the commission to a series of lectures in the United States and Canada, an odyssey across the continent that would take virtually a year.

Wilde had made himself a much-in-demand dinner guest in the homes of London society after his glittering undergraduate days at Oxford where he promoted the ideas of Oxford's Slade Professor of Fine Art, John Ruskin. While London society hostesses feted Wilde with countless invitations, many notables deplored the aesthetic movement, Gilbert and Sullivan being among them. Their operetta brought their disgust to light.

But Oscar Wilde was not cowed by such criticism. "Somehow or other I'll be famous, and if not famous, I'll be notorious." At the time, he had no idea how prophetic those words would be. According to Friedman, "...Wilde was clearheaded about his goal, devising a groundbreaking formula for manufacturing fame—one that is still used by aspiring celebrities today, whether they know it or not."

Once in New York, Wilde sat for a series of photographs with the then-famous photographer, Napoleon Sarony. "Sarony was one of the first photographers in America to exploit the market for celebrity portraits, reproducing them in large quantities, then placing them with retailers, who sold them to the public."

Wilde's portraits portrayed him in various poses that caricatured his Bunthorne character in the operetta in addition to other dramatic poses that showed his six-foot-three-inch frame in interesting and arresting ways. The portraits sold in the thousands!

While the lecture tour garnered many scathing newspaper reviews, a number of them made positive comments about its author's ideas concerning beauty in everything from art and sculpture to home decoration. Wilde really didn't care as long as his reputation and name received attention. He became famous for being famous. Says Friedman, "Wilde understood that perception is reality, and that image trumps truth."

Wilde appeared in Des Moines on April 26, 1882, to a lukewarm reception. Trying to find newspaper reviews of his talk that day has proved a difficult task.

David Friedman also authored **A Mind of Its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis**. I can't wait to get my hands on that!

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