See OMNI’s newsletters on Terror, Torture, and other related subjects.

Building a Culture of Peace Through Justice.
These materials enable us better to be WE, THE PEOPLE, informed citizens demanding a constitutional democracy.

“Life is no ‘brief candle’ to me. It is a splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment; and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.” G. B. Shaw.

SENATOR LINCOLN (202) 224-4843 Fax: (202) 228-1371.
Fayetteville office: 251-1380
Senator Mark Pryor: Phone: (202) 224-2353 Fax: (202) 228-0908
CONGRESSMAN Boozman: Lowell office: 479-725-0400.
DC address: 1708 Longworth House Office Bldng., Washington, DC 20515; 202-225-4301.

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I. UN UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHT 60TH ANNIVERSARY

Dear Dick,

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

“Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.”

“No one shall be held in slavery or servitude....”

“No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”

These fundamental principles are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the...
milestone document that for the first time set forth specific rights to which every individual is entitled. Although this year marks the 60th anniversary of the Declaration, its ideals remain far from reality in too many places.

This 60th anniversary year provides an important opportunity to renew America's commitment to the Declaration, and you can help by urging your Representative to cosponsor H. Con. Res. 332, which calls on all countries to reaffirm their commitment to the Declaration's principles of freedom and equality.

UNA-USA member Margaret "Molly" Bruce has a unique perspective on the Declaration, having worked with Eleanor Roosevelt and others in drafting the historic document. "Anniversaries," she observes, "encourage us to review the past, evaluate the present and assess the future in the light of history." While acknowledging the widespread human rights abuses that continue today, Mrs. Bruce nevertheless stresses, "Governments, however, can be pressured, they can change, and they can be swayed by the force of public opinion at home and abroad."

That Means You Can Make a Difference! To ACT NOW, click here.

HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

HUMAN RIGHTS FIRST (orig. Lawyers Committee for Human Rights)

Human Rights First is a human rights advocacy group working on issues related to: refugees, civil liberties after September 11, Darfur, discrimination, ...

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Founded in 1978, Human Rights First also works on a range of other issues, including asylum seekers in the United States, international refugee policy, ...

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Human Rights Watch - Defending Human Rights Worldwide

Home page for Human Rights Watch, an organization dedicated to protecting the human rights of people around the world. We stand with victims and activists ...

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**Human Rights Watch** - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

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**American Civil Liberties Union**

National organization advocating individual rights, by litigating, legislating, and educating the public on a broad array of issues affecting individual ...

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The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) consists of two separate non-profit organizations: the ACLU Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization which focuses on ...

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**American Civil Liberties Union**

This is the Web site of the American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU ... Learn more about the distinction between these two components of the ACLU. ...

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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL’S National Casework Program has some 600 groups in the US engaged on specific long-term cases. To learn more and join the Freedom Writer’s network, call 404-876-5661, or e-mail: casework@iusa.org

CONGRESSIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS CAUCUSES in both houses of Congress since at least FEBRUARY 15, 2006 according to http://harkin.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=251635

CONGRESSIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS CAUCUS BECOMES BICAMERAL

Washington, D.C. â€“ The Congressional Human Rights Caucus, a bipartisan organization in the House of Representatives, is expanding to the U.S. Senate for the first time in its 23-year history. Senators Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Sam Brownback (R-KS) will co-chair the Senate Caucus.

The Caucus, currently with 240 House members, was founded in 1983 by Co-Chairman Tom Lantos (D-CA) and former Co-Chairman John Edward Porter (R-IL). The Caucus welcomed Congressmen Frank R. Wolf (R-VA) as Co-Chair in 2001 when Porter retired. Porter continues to serve as honorary co-chair.

As a long-time supporter of human rights, I am delighted that the Senate will have a forum devoted to shedding light on human rights abuses around the world. It is my hope that this caucus will influence US foreign policy that will advance human rights throughout the world,â€ said Senate Co-Chair Harkin.

CONGRESSIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS CAUCUS (CHRC)

Created in 1983, the CHRC is the leading voice in Congress on human rights issues as defined in the UN DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

ACTION; Urge Rep. John Boozman to join the Caucus, at 202-225-4301. And write his staff; they follow Boozman’s limited vision, but because they can also influence him we need to educate them. Write Cong. Boozman and his staff regularly. They hear mainly from people who agree with his values.

II. USA and HUMAN RIGHTS

See OMNI’s Newsletters on Torture.

US WITHDRAWS FROM UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
Google news has at least 7 news articles about this matter at the following link

June 7, 2008 3:40 PM | permalink
The US has pulled out of the United Nations' Human Rights Council, "an international body within the United Nations System. Its stated purpose is to address human rights violations."
The news that the US has completely withdrawn from the Human Rights Council spread like wildfire Friday afternoon (June 6) through the corridors of the Palais des Nations in Geneva. There was general consternation amongst diplomats and NGOs. Reached by phone, the American mission in Geneva neither confirmed nor denied the report. Although unofficial, the news comes at a time of long opposition by the Bush administration to the reforms which created the Human Rights Council in June 2006. Washington announced from the beginning that the US would not be an active member but its observer status would mean that it could intervene during the sessions. To date even this has rarely happened.

Link (from Chris)

HRW slams US over disengagement from UN Rights Council
Hindu, India - Jun 6, 2008
New York (PTI): A prominent international human rights watchdog has slammed the United States for its decision to disengage entirely from the United Nations ...

US EXCEPTIONALISM
US policies can be better understood in the context of the old, deeply ingrained belief by the people of the US in the unique superiority of the USA. A good source for understanding is American Exceptionalism and Human Rights edited by Michael Ignatieff. This conviction, or hubris, enables our leaders to exempt the nation from international conventions and treaties by reservation, nonratification, or noncompliance; to employ double standards of judging the nation and its friends by more permissive criteria than it does its enemies; and to deny jurisdiction to international laws within its own domestic law. Recently a writer in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (4-14-08) justified the establishment of the U.S. military’s new African Command as necessary to “make [Africa] less vulnerable to extremists.” Obviously the writer did not consider the fact and the global perception of the US as itself extremist, itself the greatest example today of State Terror.

Subscribe to WILLIAM BLUM, Anti-Empire Report,
http://killinghope.org/aer57.htm

GUANTANAMO: January 11, December 5
Take Action, Defend International Law, the International Declaration on Human Rights, Geneva Conventions, the U. S. Bill of Rights

January 9, 2008
Dear Dick,

Last year at this time, the three of us were in Guantanamo, Cuba with former detainee Asif Iqbal and the mother and brother of detainee Omar Deghayes. Omar’s mother, Zohar, had not seen Call (202-353-1555)
or write
Attorney General
her son in five years. When we got to the gates of the U.S. Naval Base to stage our protest, she broke down. "It breaks my heart to think of my son in a cramped narrow cell without sunshine or fresh air, living for so many years in conditions not even fit for animals," she cried.

Omar grew up in Brighton, England, where he studied law. In 2001 he traveled to Malaysia, Pakistan and Afghanistan, where he married and had a son. When war broke out in Afghanistan, he fled with his family to Pakistan, planning to return to England. But he was arrested, reportedly for a bounty of $5,000, and sent to Guantanamo. Omar says he was beaten repeatedly and kept in solitary confinement for eight months. In March 2004, when he protested a body cavity search, five guards pepper sprayed him so badly, he lost sight in one eye.

After six years of horrendous detention without charges or a trial, Omar was finally released on December 18, 2007. While we join his family in celebrating his release, we know over 300 prisoners still remain in Guantanamo, subjected to the same abuses and utter disregard for due process.

January 11 marks the International Day to Shut Down Guantanamo. CODEPINK is organizing a protest in Miami outside the Southern Command, which runs the prison. For a list of dozens of local protests across the country, click here. If you can’t join a protest, please take a moment to call (202-353-1555) or write Attorney General Michael Mukasey. Demand that Guantanamo prison be shut down, and that all detainees either be charged and tried in US federal courts or released.

[Let’s make every day Shut Down Guantanamo Day. Dick]

Upon Omar’s release from prison, he wrote the following note to CODEPINK:

"I thank everyone from America who has written and emailed my family for my release. I do not have hatred toward Americans. I know that not all Americans are bad. Even inside the prison, some guards were not bad.

I thank you for your support and ask that you continue to work hard to ensure that due process is provided for all prisoners and to force the closing of the prison in Guantanamo."

If you would like to write a note of apology to Omar or his mother, Zohra, you can send it to info@codepinkalert.org.

Let’s begin the new year by demanding that our government respect the rule of law. [Let’s continue this protest here in Arkansas. Dick]

• With justice for all,
Guantanamo Detainees' Fates on Trial

Marjorie Cohn, AlterNet

**Rights and Liberties:** The upcoming Supreme Court case *Boumediene v. Bush* will decide whether Guantanamo detainees will still have a **right to habeas corpus.**

**Human Rights Crusader Michael Ratner: We'll Keep Going After Bush and Cheney When They Leave Office**

By Joshua Holland, AlterNet

As the Supreme Court prepares to hear the next major challenge to Bush's imperial power grab, AlterNet talks with Michael Ratner, who has been at the center of the battle over the administration's human rights assault. [Read more »](http://www.alternet.org/waroniraq/69421/)

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**GUANTANAMO AND HABEAS CORPUS**

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Dear Dick,

Tomorrow, December 5, the Center for Constitutional Rights will return to the Supreme Court for part III of what The New York Times has called "the most important civil rights case in 50 years." Please [go to our website](http://www.ccrjustice.org/) to learn more about the arguments and principles at stake in this Guantánamo case. You can also [listen to the arguments](http://www.ccrjustice.org/) in real time tomorrow on C-SPAN radio beginning at 11:15 EST.

In the lead up to this historic argument, CCR has been undertaking a **major campaign** to highlight the importance of this case. As part of this campaign we produced a television ad featuring actor and activist Danny Glover speaking about Bush administration's destruction of the Constitution. This ad was rejected by Fox News, their explanation being that we could "not document that Bush is in fact 'destroying' the Constitution." It is airing tonight in the DC area on CNN and MSNBC.

[Read more and watch the video.](http://www.ccrjustice.org/)

But the serious story behind the ad is CCR's historic case before the Supreme Court, which will in all likelihood determine once and for all whether there is a constitutional right to habeas corpus - that is, a fair hearing before a real court - for everyone detained by the U.S. government at Guantánamo.
Read more about Al Odah v. United States and Boumediene v. Bush here.

This new case goes Beyond Guantánamo - we are directly challenging President Bush's unprecedented power grab, his use of torture in violation of domestic and international law, and his assertion that he can hold anyone indefinitely anywhere in the world on his word alone. The case also challenges the 2006 Republican Congress's attempt to clear his way with its passage of the Military Commissions Act.

In 2004, CCR won the first Guantánamo Supreme Court case - Rasul v. Bush - when the Supreme Court ruled that the men at Guantánamo have the fundamental right to challenge their detention.

Even though you're not in D.C. to see the arguments, you can still take action to make sure that our rights - and our Constitution - are rescued from the hands of the Bush administration, where they have been systematically shredded for the past seven years:

- **Send President Bush a copy of the Constitution** (something he seems to have forgotten about);
- **Watch the controversial video** with Danny Glover that was rejected by Fox News;
- **Watch other videos** of Eve Ensler and Vanessa Redgrave speaking out against Guantánamo and forward them to your friends and family; or
- **Attend a local event tomorrow**, check our calendar of events for actions near you.

We need your help to restore the damage done to our most basic rights: join us today and take action to Rescue the Constitution. Let's move Beyond Guantánamo.

**To unsubscribe from this list reply to this email with "unsubscribe" in the subject line**

Center for Constitutional Rights 266 Broadway 7th floor NY, NY 10012 212-614-6464 www.ccrjustice.org

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GUANTANAMO

Heart-wrenching accounts of individual cases of U.S. violations of prisoner rights would fill a warehouse of volumes. The *Columbia Journalism Review* (July-Aug. 2007) recently told about Sami al-Haj. Read it and weep. "Prisoner 345: What Happened to Al Jazeera’s Sami al-Haj" by Rachel Morris. One day he was arrested and six years later he is still at Guantánamo along with other detainees asking why they have been held there for so long without trial; that is, without any way to fairly determine whether they belong there.

*Poems from Guantánamo*, ed. Marc Falcoff. Thousands of lines were censored out by US Army, yet these poems remain powerful
witnesses to the cruelty of that torture prison.

For the rest of this Newsletter go to OMNI’s website: www.omnicenter.org

Death Penalty. Here is the opening of an important move in ABA. At http://www.abanet.org/irr/hr/spring07/home.html, you will find links to the new issue of Human Rights, the magazine of the ABA's Section of Individual Rights and Responsibilities. The issue is devoted entirely to the subject of capital punishment, and includes the following articles:

A Thirty-Year Retrospective of the Death Penalty, By Stephen F. Hanlon
Monitoring Death Sentencing Decisions: The Challenges and Barriers to Equity, By Glenn L. Pierce and Michael L. Radelet
Mental Disability and Capital Punishment: A More Rational Approach to a Disturbing Subject, By Ronald J. Tabak
Will New Jersey Ban Capital Punishment? Understanding the Death Penalty Study Commission Report, By Eddie Hicks
ABA State Death Penalty Assessments: Facts (Un)Discovered, Progress (to Be) Made, and Lessons Learned, By Deborah Fleischaker
Raising the Bar in Capital Cases, By Talbot D'Alemberete
The Global Debate on the Death Penalty, By Sandra Babcock
Staying Executions: After Expanding the Death Penalty, the Pendulum Swings Back, By Andrew Cohen
A Journey to Abolition, By Virginia Sloan
Human Rights Hero: Anthony G. Amsterdam, By Ronald J. Tabak
And more.

DEATH PENALTY in TEXAS
The death penalty is intended for the worst of the worst, but it seldom turns out that way. In practice, capital and death penalty prosecutions enable prosecutors to optimize maximum punishments and look tough on crime regardless of justice. The result is state premeditated murder.

Example in Texas:
Maricio Brown is scheduled for execution for merely driving the car in which another man rode who left the car, got in an argument, and killed a man in self-defense. Texas is sickeningly fanatical for punishment and state killing.

DEATH PENALTY IN NW ARKANSAS
OMNI’S EFFORTS TO STOP JOHN THREET’S ATTRACTION TO THE DEATH PENALTY
DICK’S SUMMARY OF THE RECENT DIVERSE OPPOSITION TO THE DEATH PENALTY IN NWA
I want to emphasize our incremental, exceedingly civil, and so far ineffective approach to ending state use of the death penalty. For more than a decade many of us have vigiled during executions, and St. Paul's tolled its bell. For an equal number of years or probably more, Betsey Wright has struggled with the state penal authorities. Some of us are members of the Arkansas Coalition Against the Death Penalty, administered by Arkansas ACLU. Some of us were members of the local chapter of ACADP during its existence (meeting at St. Paul's). Some of us have written letters opposing state judicial killing. In June OMNI's Human Rights Committee at Mark Swaney's urging decided to focus on Prosecutor John Threet's repeated choice of the death penalty in capital cases. Committee member Melanie Dietzel's letter to Mr. Threet (see below) was written June 28, 2007. During the spring, summer, and fall of 2007 OMNI collected signatures on a petition to Mr. Threet asking him to stop resorting to the death penalty. On July 18, 2007 an OMNI Justice Committee met with Mr. Threet (Mark, Gladys, and others). Now in 2008 Mr. Threet has successfully prosecuted Mr. Decay to die for a drug crime. What might we do more to stop this apparent transplant from Texas?

GLADYS’ INTRO TO OMNI’S PRESS RELEASE ABOUT THE VISIT TO WASHINGTON COUNTY PROSECUTOR JOHN THREET
The attached press release was delivered to the Arkansas Democrat Gazette, The NWA Times, the Morning News, and the Free Weekly today. It is the report of the Omni Human Rights Committee, and the 4 friends who accompanied us when we went to talk to him
yesterday about too freely using the death penalty. Tom Kennedy, Frank Head and Lowell Grisham were there with Mark Swaney and I. They all spoke passionately and well. I was proud of our community yesterday. Karen Bell represented the Unitarian Fellowship's Social Concerns Committee, and she met us at the courthouse, but wasn't an official speaker, since we were only allowed 5 people total. Mr. Threet kindly invited her to sit in anyway. After the papers call him about our press release, he may not feel so kindly. We'll see.  Gladys

July 19, 2007

PRESS RELEASE

Arkansas Democrat Gazette
News Division
Fayetteville, AR

For more information:
Gladys Tiffany
973-9049

Dear Democrat Gazette:

On July 18 Omni Center’s Human Rights Committee asked several Washington County citizens to go with us to visit our new county prosecutor, Mr. John Threet, in his office at the County Courthouse. The delegation also delivered a list of organizations in Washington County that are on record with regard to the death penalty and about 160 names of citizens of Washington and Madison counties who have signed a petition that states that they consider the death penalty to be morally wrong, and asks for John Threet not to seek the death penalty in any case regardless of the circumstances. Our visit was cordial and interesting, but as a result of what we learned, we feel the discussion should be known to the public. Other citizens need to know that a distinct shift in policy has occurred with the recent change in prosecutors.

Even though Mr. Threet is an engaging and friendly man, we have questions about his thinking on using the death penalty. We’ve noticed that in the short 6 months since he’s become prosecutor, he’s called for the death penalty once already, and has banded it to the news media several other times. During our visit, the points he used in defense of the practice were (1) it’s a good tool to pressure a defendant to accept a lesser conviction, (2) because of that, the state doesn’t have to go to trial every time (frequently people plead guilty to avoid going to trial with possibility of the penalty hanging over them), and (3) the families of victims may want it, which carries considerable weight for Mr. Threet. He says he feels he’d be derelict in his duty to the state if he didn’t reserve it as an option.

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These are familiar points in this argument, but Omni Center and friends must point out that the case is being made for using the death penalty so (a) it can be cheaper and easier for the state; and (b) as a tool of retribution for aggrieved families. Both of those reasons are deeply inadequate. To keep from compromising human rights for state expediency, and to avoid bald revenge, are some of the reasons that the American Republic chose to become a nation of laws. If these are the reasons for continuing to use it, we wish to say to our state that it’s time to give up the practice. We can step into the 21st century with the rest of the human race by laying it aside. There are other ways to deal with criminal behavior that don’t force us to compromise ourselves morally.

“Since there can be no perfect justice, there should be no irrevocable penalties.”

DETAILS YOU WILL FIND INTERESTING:

Omni Center, and the friends who made the visit with us, are in the camp of people who feel that the death penalty is a policy of the past that needs to be scrutinized carefully. We’ve seen the growing body of statistics that show that the benefits supporters usually claim for using the death penalty don’t seem to measure up to what really happens. We’re also watching as the real costs of the death penalty keep adding up. What seems like a simple or cheaper solution then imprisonment turns out to be many times more expensive in financial cost to the state. Non-financial costs keep rising too. People can argue about whether it’s acceptable to execute an innocent man by mistake, but the moral implications of tolerating such an imperfect justice system seem to say that the racism embedded in this are acceptable too. 40% of death row inmates are low-income minorities - mostly Black. Since the Black population is only around 15%, there are stark race and class problems with the way the laws are administered that are glossed over when we say this is ok.

Worldwide, the death penalty is disappearing as a tool of justice systems. Of the developed nations, the United States is rather lonely as one of the few still sanctioning the death penalty. In maintaining it, we join such sterling examples of human rights abuse as China, Rwanda, and Afghanistan. Britain outlawed it in 1973, France in 1971, Germany in 1949, Australia in 1984. This adds to our shaky global reputation as having “cowboy” values.

Each of the citizens who visited Prosecutor Threet had their own unique feelings about the issue. Professor Tom Kennedy bases his objections on his conviction that human life is precious. He simply can’t buy the idea it’s ok to kill killers to show killing is wrong. Frank Head of Catholic Charities works with many domestic violence victims. He has worked with the prosecutor’s office many times and appreciates the help they’ve given his organization. He points out though, that Catholics value life from conception to grave, and cannot accept the idea that the state has a right to decide when that life will end. Only God holds that power. He also feels that the death penalty is dying as a justice tool. He notes that even in the states where it’s legal, it has been used with decreasing frequency. Especially as the difficulties with its administration have emerged in the past few years. That it remains ‘cruel and unusual punishment’ is apparent when the agony of the executed cannot be denied by witnesses, and lack of expertise by executioners prolongs the death beyond any acceptable limit.

Rev. Lowell Grisham of St. Paul’s Episcopal Church points out that his religion was founded by a man tried, convicted and executed unjustly as a criminal. The legal system is not omniscient. It cannot know with certainty that what it chooses to do represents real justice, and once a prisoner is executed, there’s no going back to say “sorry.” Lowell’s also ministered to men who’ve been executed. He feels that people change over time, no matter
what crime they've committed. The man who is finally executed is seldom the
same man who committed the crime. He has known criminals who have become
sane, thoughtful, compassionate and even holy men before their execution, and
he does not feel that justice was served by executing them for a crime they
have fully repented.

Mark Swaney spoke for Omni Center’s Human Rights Committee and the Green
Party when he said that Arkansas law does not require that a prosecuting
attorney ask for the death penalty. It merely allows the option. He also
quotes the Northwest Arkansas Times in saying that there has not been an
execution in Washington County since 1928, and no one has complained about
that. In other words, Washington County is not particularly hot to see the
death penalty applied. Mark also points out that there are more innocent
victims than the crime victim and their families. The family of the executed
criminal suffers innocently as well. Through no fault of their own his
family suffers the loss of that relationship. Even though he or she remains
in prison, relationship could continue through letters and visits.
Furthermore, the grief and shame for them over the method of their family
member’s death becomes a cost to society in other ways.

The reason Omni Center and friends felt this conversation with Mr. Threet is
important is that we’ve watched with concern that in the six months since Mr.
Threet took office he has already asked for the death penalty once, and has
bandied it about in the media other times. This seems to be a departure from
the practice of previous prosecutors. Former prosecutor Terry Jones believed
personally in the death penalty, but never once called for it in his many
years tenure in our county. Prosecutors before him, whatever they believed,
also used considerable discretion with the practice. At this meeting, we
asked Mr. Threet to consider carefully that there are significant numbers in
the area who find the death penalty reprehensible. Others who might accept
it have serious reservations about its use in different ways. These are part
of the community values of our county, and we expect our elected officials to
respect our community values.

We can acknowledge that Mr. Threet was very considerate during our
conversation. He listened attentively to everything we had to say. However
his response has left us uncomfortable with the outcome of our meeting. The
points he used in defense of the practice were (1) it’s a good tool to
pressure a defendant to accept a lesser conviction, (2) because of that, the
state doesn’t have to go to trial every time (frequently people plead guilty
to avoid going to trial with possibility of the penalty hanging over them),
and (3) the families of victims may want it, which carries considerable
weight for Mr. Threet. He says he feels he’d be derelict in his duty to the
state if he didn’t reserve it as an option.

Omni Center and friends must point out that the case is being made for using
the death penalty so (a) it can be cheaper and easier for the state; and (b)
as a tool of retribution for aggrieved families. Both of those reasons seem
deply inadequate. To keep from compromising human rights for state
expediency, and to avoid bald revenge are some of the reasons that the
American Republic chose to become a nation of laws. If these are the reasons
for continuing to use it, we wish to say to our state that it’s time to give
up the practice. We can step into the 21st century with the rest of the human
race by laying it aside. There are other ways to deal with criminal behavior
that don’t force us to compromise ourselves morally.

“Since there can be no perfect justice, there should be no irrevocable
penalties.” Omni Center and those who agree with us on this have asked Mr.
Threet to refrain from calling for the death penalty under any circumstance.
We feel we speak for a significant part of the population of our community when we say this, and look forward to other conversations where we can consider it.

Omni Center for Peace, Justice & Ecology is a Northwest Arkansas organization that works for a culture of peace in an earth restored. We believe that the world will find peace when there is social and economic justice for all people, and we deal with each other in respect, no matter what our language, skin color, cultural background, gender identity or economic class may be. We are willing to work to see that the earth is restored so that humans, and all life, can live in security and peace, and we welcome those who wish to work with us.

MELANIE’S LETTER TO THREET JUN 28, 2007

28 June, 2007

John Threet
Washington County Courthouse
280 N. College, Suite 301
Fayetteville, AR 72701

Dear Mr. Threet,

All of us want to see justice done, and when someone is a danger to society, we want to have her/him separated from society.

Since you have repeatedly called for the death penalty in capital cases in your jurisdiction, we wanted you to know that there are citizens who see no benefit to either justice or society in upholding the death penalty. Indeed, there is abundant evidence that the death penalty is neither justice nor a deterrent to crime.

The system is racially and economically biased. According to the ACLU people of color compromise 43 percent of total executions since 1976, while comprising only around 25 percent of the population. A death row attorney once said to me, “When there are rich, white men sitting on death row, we’ll talk about the justice of the system.”

When we look at the death penalty as a deterrent to crime, we see that studies show that, during the past decade, the murder rate in non-death penalty states has remained consistently lower than the rate in states with the death penalty. (Death Penalty Information Center).

And what about the premise that the death penalty brings closure to victims’ families? When we focus on the victim's family, we are talking about revenge and we are talking about retribution. There was once a right of revenge in our culture. A part of becoming “civilized,” was that we gave up that right of revenge. We turned the mechanism of punishment over to the state. When we seek closure for the victim's family by killing
a person at the state's expense, we are essentially reviving the right of revenge.

When we kill an inmate at the state's expense, it is final. However, what happens when later evidence proves innocence? It does happen. A study by Columbia University professor James Liebman examined thousands of capital sentences that had been reviewed by courts in 34 states from 1973 to 1995. "An astonishing 82 percent of death row inmates did not deserve to receive the death penalty," he said in his conclusion. "One in twenty death row inmates is later found not guilty." What do you say to the families of these victims, “I’m sorry, we made a mistake.”?

It comes down to a moral issue. Does any human being or any group of human beings have the right to kill in the name of justice?

The Human Rights Committee for the Omni Center for Peace, Justice and Ecology believes that we do not have that right. We are asking you to choose to seek life imprisonment, not capital punishment, in the capital cases that you prosecute. It is the just and moral choice.

Sincerely,
Melanie Dietzel

On behalf of the Human Rights Committee (Mark Swaney, Dick Bennett, Catrina Horton, Ian Horton, Betsy Wright, Melanie Dietzel)
Omni Center for Peace, Justice and Ecology


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**GLADYS’S COVER LETTER FOR JULY 18, 2007 MEETING WITH THREET**

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Mr. John Threet
Washington County
Prosecuting Attorney
280 N. College Ave
Fayetteville, AR 72701

Dear Mr. Threet:

Thank you for meeting with us today. Petitions are attached with the names of over 160 citizens who oppose the use of the death penalty. The citizens who participated in this conversation were:

Ms. Gladys Tiffany, Omni Center Co-Chair
Mark Swaney, Chair Omni Center Human Rights Committee, and Green Party of Arkansas
Prof. Tom Kennedy, University of Arkansas emeritus
Frank Head, Executive Director Catholic Charities
Rev Lowell Grisham, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church

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**Omni Center**
Creating a culture of peace
Christian and Disciple United Campus Ministry, 902 West Maple St., Fayetteville, AR 72701 • omnicenterar.org

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**Founder:**
Dick Bennett
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**Co-Presidents:**
Melanie Dietzel
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melaniedietzel@cox.net
Gladys Tiffany
479-973-9049
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Organizations mentioned as officially opposed to the death penalty in Washington County are:

American Civil Liberties Union
American Friends Service Committee
Amnesty International
Arkansas Coalition Against the Death Penalty
Catholic Charities
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Green Party of Arkansas
National Organization for Women
Omni Center for Peace, Justice & Ecology

Some religious organizations in our area officially opposed to the death penalty are:

Baha’i Faith
Catholic Church
Episcopal Church
Religious Society of Friends (Quaker)
Unitarian Universalist Church
Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Committee

Thank you for your attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,
Omni Center Human Rights Committee and Friends

Human Rights Awareness Week 2008

Sponsored by: STAND, Amnesty International, and Housing Initiatives for Student Success
Dates: April 14 - 18, 2008

Human Rights Awareness Week is a week in honor of Human Rights for people all around the world. There will be events going on all week for people to learn about human rights and take action on human rights violations that are going on around the globe today.

Monday, April 14, 2008 - 6pm - Peace Fountain - Recognition and Remembrance Ceremony
This event will kick off the week with a ceremony to remember those who have been victim to human rights violations in the past and suffer today from human rights violations. Presiding over the ceremony will be Reverend Lowell Grisham of St. Paul's Episcopal Church and Geshe Thupten Dorjee. ASG President Nate Looney will read a proclamation from Fayetteville Major Dan Coody announcing the week of April 14 - 18, 2008 as Human Rights Awareness Week. Come join us in honoring and remembering.

Tuesday, April 15, 2008 - 6:30 - 9:00pm - Arkansas Union Theater
>From 6:30 - 9pm several films featuring women's rights issues will be showing. Stop in at any time to see a film and take action to support women's rights.

Wednesday, April 16, 2008 - 6:30 - 9:00pm - Arkansas Union Theater
>From 6:30 - 9pm several films featuring children's rights issues, including "Invisible Children" will be showing. Stop in at any time to see a film and take action to support children's rights.

Thursday, April 17, 2008 - 6:30 - 9:00pm - Arkansas Union Theater
>From 6:30 - 9pm several films featuring human rights crises will be showing. Stop in at any time to see a film and take action to help stop human rights crises that are taking place right now.

Friday, April 18, 2008 - 7:30pm - From Dickson to Darfur - Chi Omega Greek Theater
At 7:30pm meet in the parking lot of St. Paul's Episcopal Church to march up Dickson St. to support increased international support for the UNAMID mission in Darfur. Marchers will receive a free "Human Rights Awareness Week" t-shirt!
At 8pm concerts and short presentations by U of A professors specializing in human rights will begin. Musical performances include i pedoni, Apartment 5, and Jonathan Taylor Rose. U of A presenters will include Dr. Sidney Burris.
Come out Friday night for a free t-shirt, free food at our Hunger Banquet, great music, and an opportunity to learn about human rights issues that are important to U of A
students. There will be informational booths and action centers. All events are free and open to the public. For more information or to volunteer to help, please contact stand@uark.edu. Check out our event on Facebook!

GRAFFITI: DISCUSSION PAPER FOR OMNI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE (by Dick Bennett)

POLICE PROSECUTION OF GRAFFITI PAINTERS
My main general source about police efforts to limit graffiti in Northwest Arkansas is mainly the report by Michelle Bradford with additional information by Bob Caudle, both cited below.

What is the crime of “committing graffiti”? Arkansas law defines graffiti as “criminal mischief, which is a misdemeanor when damages are less than $500.”

How frequent is it?
Reports, Complaints, and Prosecutions of Graffiti Writers and Painters in NWA
Springdale
The first conviction for a graffiti crime in Springdale was in 2002. Gilbert Villarreal (19) was convicted of “putting graffiti” on several streets and was sentenced to 30 days in jail.

Five years later, Jose Vargas (18) was convicted in 2007 of misdemeanor graffiti in Springdale. Although he was only the second adult convicted of the crime in Springdale’s history, District Judge Stanley Ludwig ordered Vargas to a year in jail and a $1,000 fine. City attorney Jeff Harper declared they were “going to ask for the maximum every single time.” For perspective, J. Steven Griles, the Interior Department’s former No. 2 official, was sentenced to 10 months in prison and a $30,000 fine for obstructing a Senate investigation into lobbyist Jack Abramoff. Griles lied to Senate Indian Affairs Committee investigators. That crime is a felony. Griles sought three months of home confinement, a smaller fine, and community service.

And not only Vargas. In April, 2007, Oscar Martinez, 18, pleaded guilty to “first-degree criminal mischief” and was sentenced to 14 months in jail and fines for a “graffiti spree.” He had “committed graffiti” in Springdale on the side of two buildings, on several privacy fences, on a vacant building, and in several locations in Murphy Park, two locations in Fayetteville. Revocation of a suspended 60-day sentence for earlier cutting up desks at Springdale High School was revoked, and he was also accused of “criminal trespass.” Springdale city attorney Jeff Harper said the city had decided “to seek the maximum sentence (one year in jail) for all cases of graffiti.” Deputy City Attorney Ernest Cate said Vargas pleaded guilty to two counts of first-degree criminal mischief” on March 27, “Cate told the judge ‘what a big problem graffiti has become in the city.’”

Irving Beltran (18) was also arrested in March 2007 for committing graffiti. “Police have arrested several minors, but their cases were assigned to juvenile court.”

Rogers
Rogers City Attorney Ben Lipscomb said: “it’s most juveniles” and “a serious problem,” but reported no prosecutions.

Fayetteville
Police has experienced “an increase in graffiti...65 cases in the past six months” (i.e., late 2006 and early 2007), and work is under way “to clean up graffiti on the bridge over the railroad at Lafayette Ave. and West St. City Prosecutor Casey Jones said “his office doesn’t keep statistics on the number of graffiti cases prosecuted,” but “It’s becoming a growing problem in Fayetteville and one we’re taking very seriously...It’s certainly one of those crimes where we’ll consider seeking the maximum.”

Fort Smith
A Problem Exists?
Rogers City Attorney says it’s mostly kids. Springdale claims “graffiti complaints are rising, with more than 150 reports in March alone.” Yet the police department “didn’t respond to requests for annual graffiti reports and arrests to illustrate an increase.”
Fayetteville police “have documented 65 cases in the past six months.” Yet the Prosecutor has no statistics of prosecutions.

Fort Smith “passed an ordinance in 2005 to punish graffiti makers,” but City Attorney Rick Wade “hasn’t prosecuted a single case.”

A Gang Problem Exists?

Springdale police have “stepped up enforcement” and “started a gang task force that will focus on graffiti.” A gang task force? Nowhere in the newspaper reports was there evidence of gang danger requiring a “task force.” Vargas’ graffiti, police said, “centered on the word ‘wizard,’” and “it’s often the work [word?] of youths who associate themselves with gangs and who mark their presence with signs, writings, and messages.” Youths where? In Springdale? What is the evidence? Yet Congressman John Boozman has drunk the police anxiety by assigning one staff member to the “problem” of gangs in NWA.

Or the Problem exists with the Police, and Especially in Springdale? Springdale District Judge Stanley Ludwig and City Attorney Jeff Harper seem to be experiencing a paroxysm or at least an effusion of fear and loathing of graffiti and graffiti artists. A year in jail for spraying paint. A 60-day suspended sentence for carving the name “Payaso” on a desk at Springdale High School. It’s illegal to possess markers or spray paint with the intent to make graffiti. Are they obsessed with punishment, without apparently first employing all of the benign methods our society provides to correct juvenile behavior?

Springdale’s harshness has punished even the victims: the city requires all graffiti be cleaned up by the property owner at property owner’s expense within 48 hours.

And Are ALL of the Graffiti Writers/Painters Vandalists?

Few of the local newspaper reports asked whether there were diverse kinds of graffiti artists. The state’s definition treats it as a crime. Several newspaper reporters reinforced this limited perception by interviewing only the police. Apparently no professor at the UofA’s Art Department, where the art of graffiti is well-known, if not taught. Neither the police nor the reporters made any effort to distinguish between criminal mischief destruction of property and political art. Nor were the sites of the graffiti distinguished. Property is property, whether it is abandoned buildings, old train cars, or underpasses.

To the author of TMN’s editorial, “Graffiti Art Is Still Vandalism, painting “images or words on someone else’s property without permission” is vandalism, regardless of the quality of the performance or the public’s acceptance. They concede that “well-done graffiti can be a visual step in the right direction for neglected buildings and overgrown infrastructure. Graffiti can be inspiring, interesting and attractive just like any other artistic work.” But since “it can be also ugly, profane, and disturbing” and “can be the media by which undesirable elements communicate with and threaten each other” (“ugly,” “disturbing,” “undesirable,” and “threatening” are not defined or examples or evidence offered, and “can be” sounds questionably vague), graffiti should be suppressed. Why? It’s in “the public’s interests,” but no explanation is given; indeed, “appeal of graffiti to the general public is beside the point.” Vandalism is vandalism and “property damage, even if most of the world thinks the graffiti looks better than a warehouse wall composed of rusted corrugated tin.” The public be damned, that is. So aroused is the editorialist that he compares “the band of thugs who broke thousands of dollars of windows at Rogers schools” to graffiti artists. The writer makes a triumvirate with Judge “Hammer” Ludwig and City Attorney “Tongs” Harper, who have vowed to protect us from the ugly, disturbing, threatening undesirables with names like Vargas and Martinez.

The ADG is even more enthusiastically celebrates seriously whacking people for misdemeanors. In “Crackdown: Springdale Says No to Graffiti,” the editorialist declares: “Springdale is cracking down on graffiti, and apparently not a moment too soon.” What? For wife and child abuse yes, but not for graffiti. The writer admits not only that “the police weren’t providing numbers,” the evidence is anecdotal (“A drive around town will generally reveal some new works of the vandals here and there”—and already the assumption of crime and guilt), that she or he can cite only one specific example (Jose Vargas), but that the crackdown is a moment too soon since “it’s not easy...to say whether there’s more graffiti around than there used to be.” The ADG editorialist also raises the possibility of gang origin of graffiti but cannot give a shred of evidence, and he admits that Springdale police recently mistakenly believed graffiti on Springdale’s east side was gang-related. And in its conclusion the editorial descends to the lowest legal and moral level by defending a “stiff penalty for a minor crime” to bring “this problem under control,” even though no problem has yet been shown to exist. What has been shown, however, is police and judicial
overreaction to a certain kind of misdemeanor involving property

One TMN reporter does try to make the art-vandal distinction in a report on Fayetteville (the TMN editorial is a reply to it). In “Graffiti: Vandalism or Art?” Christopher Spencer interviews people who like graffiti. One artist, John Lee, “used graffiti as a form of public expression while an art student at the Memphis College of Art,” and techniques he learned then “translated into a career.” Another artist, Toma Miller, “also got his start as a graffiti artist” in Louisiana. Both have shown and sold at the ddp gallery in Fayetteville. He considered his graffiti as beautifying “dilapidated buildings, train cars and underpasses.” But Fayetteville police spokesman, Sgt. Shannon Gabbard, countered with “police worry about associations between graffiti and violent gangs,” repeating the allegations from other cities without citing any evidence. (Gabbard has dramatically ratcheted up the fear.) Spencer reports: “Police in Fayetteville and Springdale...are concerned about where unchecked vandalism might lead.” It never occurred to any policeman to ask where unchecked art might lead. These police need to take a course in art history and appreciation.

In further contrast to police perception of criminal graffiti, Hunter Riley in his senior thesis at the UofA, Fayetteville, explores graffiti as an “underground art form” in which “there’s always a cultural or political message to be found.” He has documented graffiti in 20 countries. In Argentina his art professor turned out to be a graffiti artist who “wants to change the way people view their life and really speak out against their local government. She was adamant in her belief that the spaces she covered were meant for the people to use.” Riley “wishes more people would stop and look...and ‘think about what it means.’”

The documentary, Style Wars (1983) recounts the rise of teenage subway graffiti in New York City during the early 1980s. The film portrays the young painters and writers as naïve artists who want a voice and recognition within pop and hip-hop culture. Style Wars: Revisited catches up with the artists today. For example, Marc Ecko founded Ecko Unlimited apparel lines and created the graffiti video game Marc Ecko’s Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure (Atari).

Positive Alternatives to Police

“Graffiti” should be defined accurately: “markings, as slogans or drawings, written or sketched on a sidewalk, wall, or the like,” in order to keep clear the distinction between such acceptable public writings and drawings, and malicious, criminal mischief. At present, if newspaper reports give the full picture, all of the police seem to identify graffiti and their authors and artists with criminality.

Towns should establish public places where graffiti writers and artists can express themselves. Public property is available. Why are graffiti under the Lafayette St. bridge that some citizens consider interesting being expensively erased? Fayetteville Parks and Recreation removed graffiti from walls of the Walker Park Skate Park, requiring two full days. Why? Were they ugly, threatening, profane? Could they have been artistic? Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art sells caps with the message “Fear No Art.” Do Fayetteville’s officials fear art? I do not believe the citizens of Fayetteville are so apprehensive. Or are Fayetteville’s officials simply controllers who like to expunge?

A Citizens Graffiti Commission should be established in each large town to assess the threat of graffiti by helping the police distinguish between art and deliberate damaging of property, a process which would also involve the establishment of sentencing guidelines. Make the malefactors restore the damaged property. In cases where the authors of the writing/painting are not caught, have the city pay for the restoration, not the victim property owner. In addition to community service, counseling could replace jail punishment. The Commissions could function educationally in conjunction with the public libraries to educate the public, hold graffiti art shows, and encourage the study of graffiti in the schools.

The peril of graffiti seems wildly exaggerated. If our society is endangered by graffiti, compared to other crimes, such as family violence, corporate and business crime, and destruction of the environment, then the police should prove it. In the meantime, let’s drop the task forces, stop the frightening speculations, quit sending people to prison for spray painting, and learn to enjoy this public art.

International Context

By 1992 the United States had had over one million people incarcerated. While it had taken over two hundred years before one million people were jailed in the United States, the second million were incarcerated in little over a decade. At the end of 2005, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, there were 2,193,798 prisoners held in federal or state prisons or in local jails, and a record seven million people
incarcerated, on probation, or on parole. The International Center for Prison Studies at King’s College in London reported that more people were incarcerated in the U.S. than in any other country, ahead of China’s 1.5 million and Russia’s 870,000. And the U.S. imprisons a disproportionate number of people of color, with 3.15% of African-American males and 1.24% of Hispanic males in prison, contrasted with only 0.47% of white males.

Northwest Arkansas’ graffiti crackdown mirrors the national delirium.

Add:
Sher and I drove to three of the defaced neighborhoods. They are all new within 5-6 years, the fences and in some cases sides of homes were sprayed. The gangs deface without discrimination. Where they can have a private undisturbed place to work seems the preferred locales.

I’m sure you could call the chief of police, Kathy O’Kelley 201 N Spring St, Springdale, Arkansas 72764 (479)756-8200 and if she has time she will inform you or direct you to the proper personnel.

References:
Bradford, Michelle. “City’s Message to Vandal: Expect Maximum Jail Time.” ADG (4-2-07), 1B.
Caudle, Bob. “Man Receives 14 Months in Jail for Graffiti.” TMN (4-21-07). “Crackdown.” Editorial, ADG (4-3-07) 4B.
“Graffiti Gone.” TMN (6-5-07).
Spencer, Christopher. “Graffiti: Vandalism or Art?” TMN (4-30-07) 1A.

Tom Stoppard
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
(Redirected from Stoppard)
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Tom Stoppard

Pseudonym: William Boot (as a theatre critic)
Born: July 3, 1937 (age 70)
Zlin, Czechoslovakia
Occupation: Playwright and screenwriter
Nationality: British
Genres: dramatic comedy
Subjects
various, clever wordplay,
quick-cut banter

Debut works
Lord Malquist and Mr Moon (novel), Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead (play)

Influences
Henry James, James Joyce,
Samuel Beckett, Czech and Polish absurdists

• Sir Tom Stoppard, OM, CBE (born as Tomáš Straussler on July 3, 1937) is a British Academy Award winning screenwriter and Tony Award winning playwright. Born in Zlín, Czechoslovakia, he is famous for plays such as The Coast of Utopia, Arcadia, Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead, Rock 'N' Roll, and also for co-writing screenplays for Brazil and Shakespeare in Love.

CONTACT CONGRESSIONAL REPRESENTATIVES
SENATOR LINCOLN (202) 224-4843 Fax: (202) 228-1371.
Fayetteville office: 251-1380

Senator Mark Pryor: Phone: (202) 224-2353 Fax: (202) 228-0908
CONGRESSMAN Boozman: Lowell office: 479-725-0400.
DC address: 1708 Longworth House Office Bldng., Washington, DC 20515; 202-225-4301.

OMNI
SEEKS A WORLD FREE OF WAR AND THE THREAT OF WAR, A SOCIETY WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL, A COMMUNITY WHERE EVERY PERSON’S POTENTIAL MAY BE FULFILLED, AN EARTH RESTORED.
GRASSROOTS NONVIOLENCE, WORLD PEACE, HUMAN RIGHTS, SOCIAL and ECONOMIC JUSTICE, ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP PROTECTING SPECIES AND THE EARTH.

End of OMNI HUMAN RIGHTS NEWSLETTER #1 JUNE 8, 2008

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