



Wade R. Sanders: The Greatest Country In The World

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May 17, 2004

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By Wade Sanders

How many times have you heard it since the shameful events of Abu Ghraib prison were publicized? "America is the greatest country in the world; we don't do things like that." Well, the fact is that we do, and we have, just like nearly every other country in time of war or conquest. The German final solution rounded up those they deemed "Untermenschen" and murdered them. Those Native Americans we did not exterminate we forced onto reservations on worthless ground, the Wild West version of concentration camps. The British, the French, the Belgians, the Russians, etc. all brutally established empires, snatching sovereignty and repressing those they dominated. We practiced the art of taking other nation's empires, wresting Panama, the Philippines, the Dominican Republic, American Samoa, Hawaii, etc., from their conquerors and then practiced many of their techniques of dominance and repression. Yet we believe ourselves to be the "greatest country in the world."

It is our hubris, a "holier than thou" attitude that permeates our national psyche, and infuriates the rest of the world. It isn't that we are worse than everyone else; it is that we continually crow that we are better than everyone else and this hypocrisy grates on the international community. They know our history better than we do. Those who turn off their a.m. radios, get off their couches, and actually read our history, appreciate our relationship to the rest of the world, and know that we are a third rate, and even worse, nation in such vital areas as education, childcare, healthcare, and criminal justice. The irony is that we have the talent and the ability to make this country as great as we think it is, rather than expending our energy crowing about it. We have many things to be proud of, but we need to temper that pride with reality.

I believe this attitude of superiority may be at the core of the horrors committed within our Iraqi prisons, which continued for over a year after they were reported to our military command structure. Our disbelief and denial resonates in our mantra, "We are Americans; we don't do that sort of thing." Well, of course we do, and we have, just as other countries have from time to time. To cite a few of many examples, we did it in the Philippines, when our troops surrounded and slaughtered men, women, and children who dared to seek independence, and ordered Muslim prisoners of war executed by bullets dipped in the blood of pigs slaughtered in front of them (to eat pork or to touch its meat is to be denied paradise), and then buried their bodies in the offal. General William Tecumseh Sherman justified the slaughter of Native American children by declaring that "in order to eliminate lice, you must kill the nits."



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About the Author



*Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy, distinguished combat veteran, and retired Navy Captain, **Wade Sanders** is much published on matters of national security in major newspapers and the Naval Institute Proceedings. He*

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unarmed enemy prisoners in the Second World War, and LT William Calley oversaw the slaughter of women and children at My Lai. Now we have prison interrogators who held themselves above international and moral law, some of whom are still being trained right here at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, where the terms "Raghead" and "Sand Nigger" are used by instructors in referring to citizens of Middle East. (Does that mean that our friends in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, etc. are "Sand Niggers" too?). To paraphrase General Phillip Sheridan, is the only "good 'Sand Nigger' a dead 'Sand Nigger'?"

Our history is no different from most, a mix of shame and glory, and we would be well served to work on improving our future while we humbly acknowledge the latter. Of course the beheading of Nicholas Berg was barbaric and reprehensible. However, what many Americans seem incapable of appreciating is that to all peoples there are fates worse than death, and to Muslims the perverted acts we forced them to participate in were just that: they condemned them to hell.

When Senator Inhofe and others go on about how "99% of our soldiers in Iraq" don't commit atrocities, and Brigadier General Kimmet says "This is wrong and reprehensible, but it is not representative of (US) soldiers over here," I say "of course, that's a given." We have nearly 150,000 troops, and an unknown number of civilians, I wonder what the other 1,500 or more are up to? If the real American hero or heroes who blew the whistle on the atrocities hadn't recognized the wrong we were doing and reported it, forcing the military command structure to deal with it, it might still be going on.

Training American soldiers and civilians to stretch, work around, or ignore the Geneva Conventions, is repugnant and contrary to every principle our country was founded upon, and certainly not characteristic of the greatest country in the world. Have we adopted the word according to Kenneth Lay, that the end justifies the means? The events at Abu Ghraib should sober this country up and slap it out of its false pride. The United States should pick itself up, acknowledge its failure, and set a new path representative of the ideals it purports to sell. Then, maybe, we will be closer to the truth when we crow about our country.

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