



After Guantánamo, Another Injustice

August 10, 2013

This [After Guantánamo, Another Injustice] is the title of this op-ed by John Grisham in the Sunday, August 10, *New York Times*.

It will tell you about Nabil Hadjarab, who is a 34-year-old Algerian who grew up in France. He learned to speak French before he learned to speak Arabic. He has close family and friends in France, but not in Algeria. As a kid growing up near Lyon, he was a gifted soccer player and dreamed of playing for Paris St.-Germain, or another top French club.

He has been at Gitmo for 11 years, having been sold to the Americans when we were paying bounties for any Arab found in Afghanistan. He has been cleared of any wrongdoing several times, and yet we have refused to set him free.

How did Grisham come to know this man?

About two months ago I learned that some of my books had been banned at Guantánamo Bay. Apparently detainees were requesting them, and their lawyers were delivering them to the prison, but they were not being allowed in because of “impermissible content.”

Because of curiosity, Grisham followed up and thus began to know about Hadjarab.

Please keep reading.

You may wonder why detainees at Guantanamo would be interested in the work of Grisham. Perhaps this paragraph from the column will help you understand:

In the past seven years, I have met a number of innocent men who were sent to death row, as part of my work with the Innocence Project, which works to free wrongly convicted people. Without exception they have told me that the harshness of isolated confinement is brutal for a coldblooded murderer who freely admits to his crimes. For an innocent man, though, death row will shove him dangerously close to insanity. You reach a point where it feels impossible to survive another day.

Here let me stop and remind readers about a few people

Jose Padilla, the so-called "dirty bomber" taken into custody (without bombs) in Chicago, has been held incommunicado in a military brig, and his mind has basically been destroyed. You can read what a fellow at the CATO Institute had to say about his case.

Bradley Manning - the UN Torture Reporter was barred from testifying at his court martial about how the treatment of Manning would be viewed under the responsibilities of that Reporter.

The idea that someone who has not been convicted of a crime can be held under conditions normally reserved for the worst of felons, and even then in the eyes of much of the world conditions that are human at perhaps breaching what should be acceptable in civilized society should shock the consciences of all feeling people.

I want you to read all of Grisham's powerful piece.

Then I want you to raise a ruckus with your elected federal Representatives and Senators - it is long past time to close Gitmo, and merely rendering those held there to other nations where they will be subjected to abuse or worse is unacceptable.

Moreover, it is past time that this nation face up to the idea that how we treat those in custody needs to be reexamined. We have recently heard of another series of abuses involving isolation, and if you have not yet done so you should read this diary by jpmasser

I have known a few very unusual humans who could live without regular contact with other people - almost all were serious monastics who chose that path after serious spiritual testing.

To impose it on people is abusive.

To impose it upon those accused but not convicted of a crime seems to me a clear violation of the intent of the 8th Amendment.

Hell, in the vast majority of cases, it would be a violation of the 8th Amendment for those convicted of serious felonies.

It is inhumane, it is uncivilized, it dehumanizes not only those subjected to it, but to some degree those who subject them.

Yet we are applying to people who have been cleared of any potential charges.

And then we are prepared to wash our hands, not admit our responsibility for the wrong we have done.

For this our government taxes us.

This is the result of the "war on terror" that is used as a justification for violation not only of the rights of those in custody, but the rest of us in the NSA's dragnet approach to our data and communications.

Guantánamo has been a huge injustice, and continues to be a blot on our nation.

Read the Grisham.

Get angry.

Get involved.

