

## SUICIDE, PROSTITUTION AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Earlier this year the International Red Cross demanded that Guantanamo prisoners be provided bed sheets that could be placed on the entrances to their cells to prevent their rights to privacy being violated by the guards. On June 10, three prisoners committed suicide by using the sheets to hang themselves.

The almost universal reaction to the suicides was outrage at the U.S. Self-righteous commentators and media editorials accused the Administration of perpetuating its tradition of torture and human rights violations. News reports were full of hints at conspiracies by the prison authorities, involvement of other prisoners in the deaths and a lack of appropriate supervision that might have to prevent the suicides. There were also scholarly reminders that the Koran considered suicide a deadly sin and that, therefore, the suicides could not have taken place at all and must have been staged; this, of course, conveniently ignored the existence of Moslem suicide bombers who in addition to committing suicide were also guilty of yet another mortal sin: the murder of innocents.

Walter White, an international lawyer who specializes in human rights, told the BBC the Guantanamo camp was likely to be considered a "great stain" on the human rights record of the US and a group of international lawyers announced that the dead inmates had been "driven by despair".

The camp commandant, Rear-Admiral Harris, disagreed saying that there have been dozens of suicide attempts since the camp was set up four years ago - but none successful until now and that he did not believe the men had killed themselves out of despair.

"They have no regard for life, either ours or their own. I believe this was not an act of desperation, but an act of asymmetrical warfare waged against us," he said.

President Bush expressed "serious concern" at the deaths and stressed that it was important to treat the bodies humanely and with cultural sensitivity. UK Prime Minister Tony Blair described the suicide as a "sad incident".

In short – outrage, criticism and sadness from just about everywhere.

I kept waiting for someone to say “Right on! I am glad that they are dead!” but, as far as I know, no one did. So let me say it now: “I am glad they killed themselves. I hope they will have set an example for many others to follow. Furthermore, I hope that we will stop trying to prevent them from killing themselves as we seem to be doing – I think that in the spirit of the *Roe vs. Wade* decision as well as the universal respect for human rights that support the right to privacy and the right to control one’s body, the decision to stop living should be left to the individual. And if the individual in question is probably a murdering thug who will continue murdering if released – well, so much the better.”

I feel the same way about the prisoners who go on hunger strikes and are force-fed to keep them alive. Why violate their right to control their lives – usually through painful and unpleasant procedures? Why not let them go to meet the 72 black-eyed virgins?

In its 1973 decision in *Roe*, the Supreme Court recognized that a woman's right to decide whether to continue her pregnancy was protected under the constitutional provisions of *individual autonomy and privacy*. *Roe* placed women's reproductive choice alongside other fundamental rights, such as freedom of speech and freedom of religion, by conferring the highest degree of constitutional protection -- "strict scrutiny"-- to choice.

I wonder why in a society as litigious as ours there hasn't been a movement for the right to *individual autonomy and privacy* to include not only abortion but also the right to suicide.

I also wonder why this right is not applicable to prostitution – a decision to use one’s body sexually, for remuneration. Currently private sex for money, between consenting individuals, is a crime, but well-paid sex between consenting individuals that is filmed and taped for exhibition on DVDs and in movie theaters is a road to fame and fortune for the participants. Why?

And why is it that racial profiling by law enforcement is not acceptable and to be condemned, while racial profiling by businesses, universities and government contract and hiring policies, as in affirmative action, are lawful, beneficial and admirable?

I can only hope that somewhere there will be attorneys who are willing to take up the fight for a more encompassing definition of the right of an individual to control his or her own body. But since the cause would be very politically incorrect and more than likely

there would be no money in it, I will not hold my breath waiting for this to happen anytime soon.

Meanwhile, I can only hope that the 2 Saudis and 1 Yemeni who decided to exercise their human rights by offering themselves will soon be joined by many of their colleagues.