Letters on “The Scott Peterson case: a new American tragedy”

15 December 2004

Below is a selection of letters from readers in response to the article “The Scott Peterson case: a new American tragedy,” *posted December 11*.

Dear Sir,

Your article hits the nail on the head. We are living in an indifferent, ruthless society. We are pawns being used by those who have the power. Thanks for a great article.

Sincerely yours,

WB Stratford, Ontario, Canada

12 December 2004

At the end of your insightful article about the Scott Peterson case and the tragedy of the American obsession with wealth and social advancement, you write: “If this question provokes a national soul-searching, then perhaps the Peterson tragedy might not have been entirely in vain.”

But will it provoke anything like soul-searching, or will it play out as just another “reality” show, like the O.J. Simpson trial? Will not the close followers of this saga have among their number those who see themselves represented by Scott Peterson’s yearning for “freedom” and a life without responsibility? And, unlike the people who wrote to Dreiser that his main character “might have been me,” they won’t be thankful for escaping his fate, but, on the contrary, they may wish they were him, except for the fact of getting caught, that is.

Here is a young man, as you say, from a comfortable family background, with a nice home and wife, about to become a father, and yet all this is not enough for him! Think of what the millions around the world living on less than two dollars a day, if that, would think if his life were theirs! In their dreams, if they are able to sleep in their cardboard shacks, in their tents in refugee camps, in their cells in the countless prisons everywhere, in their bombed-out homes amid smoking rubble and stinking corpses in places like Fallujah, a life like the one Scott Peterson had would seem a very heaven on earth. His crime would not be comprehensible to them. Indeed, they would conclude that he was possessed by an evil demon.

Perhaps that evil demon is America. Perhaps the dream has turned into a collective madness whose hunger is for blood and money and the prestige and notoriety that are never enough.

CZ

San Francisco

12 December 2004

This is a marvelously thought-provoking article. The case and other similar ones are something I have given a lot of thought to over the years. I have no answers; I can well understand the victims’ families’ desire for revenge, although it leads to nothing—no real, as they say today, closure. There is something foul in what we so cavalierly call The American Dream, which usually means monetary success and social approval from the “right” people. I read something today: a comment in an editorial by David Brooks, apologist for the Bush administration, and I quote: “Corruption is the price we pay for [economic] freedom.” Perhaps that explains it all.

CS

Maine

12 December 2004

Thank you, David. Once again you have eloquently gone to the heart of the matter of some current issue and put it in its proper historical and social context. Unlike your peers in the major media outlets who are cowards and obedient servants of power, your work sheds light, educates and gives hope for humanity. The Scott Peterson case is a terrible tragedy, just as our government’s actions in Iraq and abroad are, and to admit that requires courage and honesty. Once again, thank you for your work.

PA

12 December 2004

As usual with other items you’ve written, I really liked this article. In my discussions with people of a liberal orientation regarding current events and their connection with the culture of capitalism, I often get the argument that the (often horrific) events are simply the result of human nature. What follows is usually a sigh and an attitude of resignation that barbaric behavior is simply natural. Hence, it wouldn’t matter if we had a socialist system. Then, what follows from this is that all we can do is protest, promote education, and vote for the lesser of the two evils that the ruling class provides us, and hope for the best. Even though I know that such conclusions are erroneous, I have been unable so far to come up with fairly succinct and effective counter arguments for these people, who have been brainwashed by capitalist education and media.

Can you help me, David?

RH

12 December 2004

The governor’s race is the name of the Peterson case. Death Penalty Democrat Attorney General Bill Lockyer is running for governor with this case. His opponent in 2006 will be Death Penalty Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger (married to a Democrat). Scott Peterson is clearly innocent of the murder of one

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person, his pregnant wife. The anti-abortion fascists are using this case to repeal abortion, and have succeeded in passing a murder-of-fetus-as-a-person act based on this case. So now we have the death penalty State of California convicting people of a murder of a fetus as a person, which happened in this case. Death Penalty Democrat Lockyer has joined the Republicans in attacking our right to abortion. The only reason you hear about this case, one of thousands of capital cases tried in this country every year, is because of the abortion issue.

Your rule of thumb in these high-profile cases is to assume the accused is innocent and is being used for a political agenda. While Peterson is richer than most of us, he is still a pauper compared to the ruling class and its upper-middle-class lackeys.

Don't let yourselves get swept up by the capitalist press's publicity stunts. The capitalist press has so little news now that to call them advertising rags is to be polite. They reflect the complete collapse of the whole bankrupt society.

We need to abolish both the death penalty and the whole prison system, replacing them with serious rehabilitation programs that make the truly guilty productive members of society as quickly as possible, and in less than five years. This is the 21st Century Abolitionist movement, freeing us from the promotion of slavery that is the prison system. Prisoners are legally slaves according to the 13th Amendment.

California Abolitionist
12 December 2004

Well spoke, sir!! The media are the modern day equivalent of the old crones sitting with their knitting needles around the guillotine during the beheadings of the French Revolution. Too much attention is being paid to this one tragic case when there is so much going on around the world that should be occupying our attention, perhaps welcomed as a diversion in some quarters.

SD
12 December 2004

First of all, I have absolutely no idea what Mr. Walsh's article is about. It is so convoluted and presents so many half-argued theses that it is virtually impossible to discern its specific meaning. I can only postulate that Mr. Walsh is attempting to spread some form of extreme liberal propaganda.

So far as I can tell, Mr. Walsh, in his essay, argues against the death penalty, proposes that the reasons Scott Peterson murdered his wife and unborn child were actually justifiable, and attempts to further the so-called ideals of socialism. These arguments really do not prove Mr. Walsh to be an intellect. Rather, they only smack of bleeding heart liberalism.

Regarding the death penalty, Mr. Walsh proposes that if Peterson gets the death penalty, then so should members of the Bush administration for going to war in Iraq: "Peterson stands convicted of committing a horrible crime, but he is not in the same league as a Rumsfeld, a Bush or a Cheney, responsible for mass slaughter."

I'm not quite sure how the cold-blooded murder of Scott Peterson's pregnant wife equates to the defeat of the Saddam Hussein regime and the ongoing battle against Muslim terrorists who are trying to gain control of Iraq—many of whom are members of al Qaeda....

The indisputable fact is that there is one thing that Mr. Walsh's essay is lacking: the acknowledgment that people in society need to be accountable for their actions. And the veiled message that Mr. Walsh gives here is extremely disturbing on several levels: that because Scott Peterson faced the pressure of parenthood, he did not deserve to be accountable for murdering his wife and unborn son. It's absolutely appalling....

A final note on the death penalty: while I agree with Mr. Walsh that there is really no quantifiable way to determine whether someone deserves the death penalty, I do disagree with Mr. Walsh's veiled assertion that certain people should not be held accountable for certain crimes, especially murder. Mr. Walsh fails to point out that in a civilized society, people must be held accountable for their behavior. And there are certain crimes still that are so heinous, so wretched, and so abominable that, yes, they do cry out for vengeance, and they do cry out for the death penalty. And, by the way, I do use the word "vengeance" deliberately. I believe that with certain crimes, vengeance on a societal level is perfectly acceptable. I believe that in the case of certain heinous crimes such as murdering your pregnant wife and dumping her body in the ocean while the fetus of your unborn child may still be alive, warrants a cry for vengeance. I believe that the people of America have every right to stand up and say, "No. We will not accept that behavior in our society. We will not accept Mr. Walsh's opinion that certain people in this country are above accountability."

TS
12 December 2004

David, Thank you for your deeply insightful and well-written article.

In dynamic peace,
Rev. KM
14 December 2004

David... a very nice piece on the Peterson case. God, the hypocrisies are endless, no?

Yours
JS
14 December 2004

Your article on this case was wonderful and very thought-provoking. Media coverage on this terrible story has been relentless for months (probably longer), at the expense of the atrocities that we are committing in Iraq and elsewhere. On top of that, there has already been a movie made about this sordid tale.

I think it demonstrates the twisted priorities of our major media and, as a consequence, our population.

Thanks for the great article.

MF
Blanchard, Oklahoma
14 December 2004

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