Atrocity envy and moral equivalence

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On Feb. 3, in the middle of negotiations between Daesh (the Islamic State) and Jordan for the exchange of captured Jordanian pilot Lt. Moaz al-Kasasbeh for an Iraqi woman failed homicide bomber, Daesh chose to release a very high-production-value propaganda video – a video showing the captured pilot being burned alive.

Daesh negotiated and manipulated the hopes and feelings of this man’s family, tribe and country while knowing all the while that he had been dead for a month.

World reaction was unusually swift. King Abdullah of Jordan vowed justice and revenge, while the head of Al-Azhar – the most influential religious educational institution in Sunni Islam – mildly suggested that Daesh fighters should be executed by either crucifixion or the less labor-intensive method of simply chopping off their arms and leaving them to die.

President Barack Obama, never one to let an injustice go unacknowledged – nor a crisis to go unviewed – chose to take this opportunity to stand up and warn us of the grave crimes committed by the Crusaders and other Christians:

“...And we get on our high horse and think this is unique to some other place, remember that during the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ. In our home country, slavery and Jim Crow all too often was justified in the name of Christ.”

Now, I would be the first to agree that the sack of Beziers was a bit excessive, but it took place in western era 1209. As for the Crusades in the Middle East, they were a rather belated response to the Muslim capture of the dioceses of Africa, Egypt, the East, Asia, Pontus, Thrace, etc. The “invading Crusaders” actually waited several hundred years before attempting to recapture what was once a major portion of the Christian heartland.

Mind you, the Crusades were a nasty, bloody business, but then the original Muslim conquest wasn’t always particularly nice and polite, either.

I am quite sure that both sides would have preferred to kill off the other side by peaceful means, but even today no such methods have been found.

As for slavery and Jim Crow, while the descendants of slaves brought to the United States are citizens with rights, these descendants of slaves in parts of the Muslim world, such as Mauritania, are slaves. The government in Mauritania has been so troubled by allegations and proofs by anti-slavery advocates that slavery still exists in Mauritania – despite legal abolition in 2007 – it has found it necessary to arrest, prosecute and imprison anti-slavery advocates.

There is no such thing as a team.

To be fair, one slave owner has also been arrested and prosecuted. I am still unclear on the relationship between the Crusades, Jim Crow and the actions of Daesh; does our president truly believe that he has felt compelled to commit greater and greater acts of horror out of envy over the atrocities committed by long dead Christians? Do IS terrorists sit around and wish that they could top the horrors of the sack of Beziers?

Given the moral equivalence inherent in President Obama’s statement, I wondered if he intended to offer U.S. assistance to Daesh, or simply remain neutral; after all, Christianity had a head start of 600 years over Islam in the race to commit the most atrocities, and perhaps it could be considered unfair to interfere before Muslims had a chance to close the gap.

One of my greatest fears is that as people accept moral equivalence, and respond to news of any atrocity with the sage statement that someone, somewhere, possibly one of our own ancestors, has done as bad or worse, and that we must not judge nor criticize, that we will descend into a barbarism that will leave future generations viewing Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot as humanitarians.

CAMPUS COMMENT

What lessons have you learned from movies?

SHARON CHEN
English

“A Korean drama movie helped me learn Korean”

BEN PAN
Computer Science

“I learned to have fun from movies... learned different cultures and experiences”

TYLER TATE
Kinesiology

“The Rookie: How to work as a team”

SHENGHAIANG ZHANG
Computer Science

“Watching English movies taught me English”