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By Matthew Rothschild

I always rejoice at the death of a mass murderer, and Osama bin Laden was definitely a mass murderer. He killed 3,000 people here on 9/11, and he killed more than 300 in August 1998 in the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

So I understand the sense of relief or closure or even triumph that many Americans feel today.

But it's worth grappling with precisely what it is that bin Laden did, and why it is that Americans are chanting "USA, USA".

What bin Laden did was to use violence as a ready tool to advance his purposes.

What bin Laden did was to wantonly sacrifice the lives of innocent people in service of those purposes.

In this regard, bin Laden is no different a mass murderer than William McKinley was in the Philippines.

In this regard, bin Laden is no different a mass murderer than Harry Truman was when he dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In this regard, bin Laden is no different a mass murderer than Ronald Reagan was when he funded and trained the contras against Nicaragua or backed the Salvadoran military against the rebels there.

In this regard, bin Laden is no different a mass murderer than Lyndon Johnson was in Vietnam.

In this regard, bin Laden is no different a mass murderer than George W. Bush was in Iraq.

Oh, there is one big difference: bin Laden killed far fewer innocent people than any of those U.S. Presidents.

So, when you examine the righteous triumphalism than many Americans are feeling today, it comes down to this: We're not against using violence as a ready tool to serve our purposes; we're not against wantonly sacrificing innocent lives; we're not even against mass murder.

We're only against it when violence is used against us.

We're only against it when ours are the innocent lives being sacrificed.

We're only against it when we're not the ones committing the mass murder but are the victims of the mass murder.

This understanding puts a creepy edge on the rah-rahs of today.

Until we renounce violence as a convenient tool, until we stop sacrificing innocent lives, until we no longer excuse the mass murder that our own government commits, we're not in much of a position to celebrate.

And spare me Obama's talk of "justice" being done. That's exactly the same phrase Bush used after U.S. forces gunned down Saddam Hussein's sadistic sons, Uday and Qusay.

It's not "justice," as we've come to revere it in this country: a system that upholds due process and habeas corpus and assumes the innocence of the accused and allows for trial by jury.

No, what Obama and Bush were talking about was rough justice or frontier justice.

The word "justice" should not adorn an assassination.

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