

Know Your Presidents

Bloodlust seems the only plausible explanation. The lame duck (outgoing) presidential administration of Donald Trump, with little regard for either law or justice, and even less for human life, executed three federal prisoners in the week preceding President Biden's inauguration. In the six months prior, with the help of then Attorney General William Barr, the (in)Justice Department lawyers, BOP officials, two college professors, and five U.S. Supreme Court Justices, then others had been executed also. Donald Trump's final days as President will live in infamy.

Contrary to his demonstrated stance on the death penalty during thirty years of senatorial service, Joe Biden, on the presidential campaign trail, professed to the public that he had had a change of heart on the issue. Do you smell a political fish? It seems ironic, doesn't it, that nearly all of those killed in former President Trump's last minute execution rampage suffered that ultimate fate through the vehicle of laws that Joe Biden, as a U.S. Senator, not only supported but also had a hand in architecting.

The (in)Justice Department then, attempting to justify this barbaric and Draconian punishment, claimed that it was enforced as a public safety measure. But is this justification itself not suspect? If a person is locked away in isolation, as death row prisoners typically are, and kept under vigilant guard, also as they are, how much and what kind of a public safety concern can genuinely exist? The (in)Justice Department further claims that enforcing the death penalty is not politically motivated, but this declaration is also suspect: For how much "Tougher on Crime" can one get than executing people who are labeled criminals? Being tough on crime has overshadowed being just and smart on crime. Donald Trump, long before he became President, adamantly supported the death penalty, going so far, in fact, as taking out a full-page ad in the New York Times advocating the punishment for the Central Park Five who, as it turned out, were not the perpetrators of the crime they were convicted of and were later exonerated. Dustin Higgins, the last prisoner executed under the Trump administration, maintained his innocence through his last breath.

It is for you to decide: Was his execution justice served or was it an atrocious miscarriage of justice? Perhaps it would be easier to follow the former if there weren't more than 2,500 known exonerations, 170 from death row.

These are America's most recent Presidents: One (Joe Biden), as a U.S. Senator, architected the laws that sent people, in record numbers, to death row; another (Donald Trump) executed those laws to execute 13 people—at least one of which was potentially innocent—in his last six months in office; three as a lame duck. The former, then, assumes the office of President presuming to disavow the very laws that he himself created. This is fine U.S. leadership, indeed.

Of the 13 people executed by the outgoing Trump administration, no less than four were mentally ill or impaired:

Alfred Bourgeois had an IQ of 70-75. His lawyers argued unsuccessfully, that he was intellectually disabled.

Wesley Purkey suffered from schizophrenia, dementia, Alzheimer's disease, and was unable even to understand why he was being executed.

Lisa Montgomery suffered from bipolar disorder, temporal lobe epilepsy, complex PTSD, dissociative disorder, psychosis, and traumatic brain injury.

Corey Johnson had an IQ of 69. Like Alfred Bourgeois, his lawyers argued, unsuccessfully, that he was intellectually disabled.

This all sounds hauntingly familiar; does it not? Hitler was also determined to exterminate the mentally ill and others with disabilities, among others. Biden now says that he is opposed to the death penalty, but is he, really? What has he done to abolish it? What more than talk, that is? To date, he has done nothing at all, which is the same thing he has done to end mass incarceration, systemic racism, and the laws and criminal justice policies and practices that prey upon the poor.