

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

April 23, 2007

Quiz

Filed under: [media, quizzes & assignments](#) — alecsothblog @ 10:31 pm



Textbooks covered in blood, Photo by Wathiq Khuzaie/Getty

Questions:

#1) The photograph above was taken following the brutal murder of dozens of college students and professors. Where did this horrific event take place?

- A) Blacksburg, Virginia
- B) Baghdad, Iraq

#2) For whom did George Bush recently order flags to be flown at half-staff?

- A) The 33 victims of Seung Hui Cho
- B) The 3312 U.S. troops that have died in the Iraq war and the 337 in Afghanistan.

Answers:

#1) **B.** [In January](#), Baghdad's Mustansiriya University suffered a double suicide bombing that killed at least 70

people, including students, faculty, and staff. A month later, another suicide bomber struck at Mustansiriya, killing 40.

#2) **A.** Today an Army sergeant complained about the U.S. flag being flown at half-staff at the largest U.S. base in Afghanistan for those killed at Virginia Tech. The same honor has not been given to fallen U.S. troops in Afghanistan and Iraq.

22 Comments

1. I was driving around today here in Chicago thinking about this subject this evening. No disrespect to the families of the V.T. students. But I have to wonder if this "moment of silence" isn't just another diversion from what's going on in the larger context of the American experience. Calling once again for us to blindly follow – and not ask questions. Everyone inside the beltway is the same – not to be trusted.

Kindly.

Comment by [Don Guss](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [11:08 pm](#)

2. Thanks for drawing attention to this, Alec. The real frustration for me is the hours of television coverage devoted to the Virginia Tech shootings in the past week as compared to the coverage devoted to Iraq in the past year (or four). I think these stories (the Sago mine story was another relatively recent example of this) cater to our collective short attention span. A weeklong soap opera in which we get to know the "characters" and Anderson Cooper is the *Our Town*-type Stage Manager is right up our alley.

Meanwhile, the students at Baghdad Technology University are displaying a banner in solidarity with the students at Virginia Tech. It reads, "We, the students of Technology University, denounce the attack at Virginia Tech. We extend our condolences to the families of the victims who faced a situation as bad as Iraq's universities do. The sanctity of campuses must be protected around the world."

Comment by [Liz](#) — April 23, 2007 @ [11:40 pm](#)

3. Very clever indeed, however, let us not weigh tragedy.

Though I must admit, these days they all seem to blend into one.

Comment by [Mark A. Sperry](#) — April 24, 2007 @ [12:04 am](#)

4. There is a certain kind of oblivion perpetuated by the images that are consumed in the political new media... but I wonder what kinds of images you might point to consider that are different – slower perhaps and less easily consumed?

Comment by [Matt Niebuhr](#) — April 24, 2007 @ [4:26 am](#)

5. "the ballad of world wide injustice?"

Comment by [pj](#) — April 24, 2007 @ [6:37 am](#)

6. Tragedies like the aforementioned are happening all throughout the world.

Thirty-two people died in the Virginia Tech shootings and the event turned into a field day for the mass media. Over 200,000 people have died in and around the Darfur region and no great mass media coverage exists in America. A percentage of the American public know about this conflict but it is quite awful that atrocities like this exist in our world today. Bush continues to recognize that the killings are taking place but has made few steps forward to do anything about them.

That being said and as Mark Sperry said, let us not weigh tragedy. The families and friends of the Virginia Tech shootings have my sincerest condolences.

Thank you for bringing light to this not-talked-about-enough topic, Alec.

Comment by [David Wright](#) — April 24, 2007 @ [10:32 am](#)

7. i blogged the day following the VT tragedy of the network's 1st day coverage feeling reminiscent of sports reporting. brian williams continually reminding viewers that it was a "new mass murder record" at every single break took on the air of the redundant olympic posturing that NBC does every four years. believe me, i understand the enormity of this event, we all do but we as a nation hear daily of car bombings, suicide bombings and the like with similar and greater casualty numbers and it doesn't slow our day down one single iota, yet the actions of a single troubled killer brings us to a nationwide standstill of shock, grief and curiosity. for the families of all involved their very personal pain is played for newsie edification. it teaches us nothing. think, people, think.

Comment by [tread](#) — April 24, 2007 @ [2:56 pm](#)

8. while it is true we hear daily, we do not see daily. the visual images are controlled and we see few signs of the war. we do not see the carnage of the bombings, suicide bombings, the return of dead bodies, or grieving family members. the brave tillman family and jessica lynch remind us of little we know.

it is the images that lead to the end of the war in vietnam and the legislative changes of the civil rights movement. decent people could not ignore the burned and mangled bodies of children on both sides dying in far away places or the beaten and hosed bodies of african americans at home.

we do not demand the missing images as they are too harsh.

Comment by [aem](#) — April 24, 2007 @ [3:18 pm](#)

9. The difference with Vietnam was that it was your, or your neighbors sons who were coming home in body bags. It was personal, hence the eventual rejection of that enterprise. In addition the press took their role as witnesses seriously. Karl Rove has learned those lessons well: shut off the press (embedding), keep the cameras away from the caskets, forgo the draft (regardless of its cost to the mission at hand). So we have been well trained to be numb to something brutal happening to another nation and somebody elses' sons and daughters far away. Meanwhile a tragedy at home brings shock and grief because it "could have been our kids there, on our soil."

Comment by [Chuck](#) — April 24, 2007 @ [5:05 pm](#)

10. [...] Quiz concerning this image via Alec Soth's blog [...]

Pingback by [Like Art » Quiz](#) — April 24, 2007 @ [5:32 pm](#)

11. From the blog of a friend of mine:

ON ETHNOCENTRISM:

at the memorial service for the virginia tech shootings, one speaker said "this is a national tragedy. it's a GLOBAL tragedy."

but i think, at similar services after equal numbers of people die in baghdad while shopping for vegetables, no iraqi is so bold as to proclaim it a global tragedy. yes, as a nation, we mourn. but the global tragedy is that human beings care so little for anyone different than them.

Comment by [Nate Twedten](#) — April 25, 2007 @ [8:28 am](#)

12. Oops, the address for her blog is: <http://rannk.blogspot.com/>

Comment by [Nate Twedten](#) — April 25, 2007 @ [8:29 am](#)

13. I cannot belive the scratching of heads and soul searching that goes on in the US when an awful occurance such as the VT shootings happen.

It is unbelievable to us in the UK that the US still does not understand the fact that while it continues to value the rights of the individual over that of the welfare of the majority this will happen again and again. The right to bear arms! I feel scared for the future of your young people.

Comment by Leo — April 25, 2007 @ [10:00 am](#)

14. Leo- the logical response would be to make this a gun control issue. But you must be well aware that America operates on a different logic. The kind that says guns don't kill people, crazy lunatics do.

The governor of VA's "got nothing but loathing" for people who are talking about gun control while families are trying to heal.

There is a great piece on this in the current issue of the New Yorker:

http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2007/04/30/070430taco_talk_gopnik

Comment by [Annabel](#) — April 25, 2007 @ [12:01 pm](#)

15. I understand the point but crazy lunatics can only shoot someone if they can get a gun. Gun control will not stop a lunatic offending but they will kill a hell of a lot less people with a knife. And also there are degrees of firearms, i mean nobody but nobody is in need of any form of automatic rifle except the military. just to say that i am no head in the clouds idealist having been a member of the armed forces myself but you guys need to do something. The problem is you say that the US operates on a different logic therein lies the problem, there is no such thing as a 'different' logic it is either logical or not. Arming a largely inexperienced and untrained (shooting at targets once a month is not training) public is not logical no matter what.

Comment by Leo — April 25, 2007 @ [6:27 pm](#)

16. Annabel- just read the new yorker article and i hope that someone in power takes note cause you guys have a beautiful country and i have met great people on my many visits but your government is really starting to scare the rest of the world.

Comment by Leo — April 25, 2007 @ [6:33 pm](#)

17. I am curious if Alec can provide us with a set of rules for determining when to lower flags to half-staff that would appropriately rule in and rule out tragedies.

Comment by Peter — April 25, 2007 @ [9:12 pm](#)

18. I think the way Americans place value on the lives of Americans over the value of the lives of citizens of other countries is a dark measure of how enmeshed capitalism is in our very identity. We commodify ourselves vs. others.

I think tragedy (nationally observed via television) has become the "town square" of this country in this era. It is a moment when Americans, who are on average overworked and economically behind, feel a caesura of the pressure to produce. There is a moment when everyone sits down and looks into the television – almost symbolically looking into the eyes of everyone else – and does nothing. A shared moment that can later be discussed, traded and exchanged with others. Thus a lot of the swirling about that accompanies these events has little to do with the event itself and more to do with a larger societal neediness.

The combination of the two is very powerful. That's why television likes it so much.

Comment by J Ake — April 25, 2007 @ [9:53 pm](#)

19. J- I actually meant that the individual rights of the US citizen over the greater good of the community of which he is part is the problem. Sorry if i was unclear.

Comment by Leo — April 26, 2007 @ [6:16 am](#)

20. hmm....sounds about right!

Comment by [sharky](#) — April 26, 2007 @ [9:32 pm](#)

21. It feels reassuring to know that myself and my friends aren't the only ones who think like this. It was one of the first things I thought of when this happened, I was appalled and saddened by the shootings , but I thought immediately that Americans are going to fixate on this tragedy that hit so close to home, when dozens of people die every day in just as incomprehensible acts as the Virginia Tech shootings. And many of these acts are sanctioned and carried out by governments across the world.

Thank you for posting this.

Comment by [chris](#) — April 27, 2007 @ [1:00 am](#)

22. It confuses me that any Americans i have met or spoken with like on this blog for example, all have the same concerns as the majority of the rest of europe and yet the government and people in power are on a completely different planet. I cannot fathom how they are getting elected.

Comment by [Leo](#) — April 27, 2007 @ [11:12 am](#)