

Unfinished business

Pinochet's release sends clear message to all countries

During Augusto Pinochet's 17-year reign in Chile, which ended in 1990, more than 3,000 people died or disappeared. Many in the international community and in Chile have called for his prosecution.

But after a 503-day detention in England, Pinochet was released last week because he was determined too ill to be extradited to Spain for trial.

Now Pinochet is back in Chile in his luxury mansion. His return to the country was marked by demonstrations both celebrating Pinochet's return and demanding he face trial.

There are some in Chile who consider Pinochet a hero for saving the country from Marxism with his bloody 1973 coup.

Others in Chile and abroad assert that the former dictator should be imprisoned for human rights violations.

According to CNN, polls show that most Chileans think Pinochet should be tried but not abroad. But most in Chile believe Pinochet will never stand trial because of the tremendous influence he still wields.

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Pinochet currently serves as a life senator, which is a post he created for anyone who is president for at least six years. The job includes immunity from prosecution, which in the past has halted inquiries into his conduct while president.

Before Pinochet could be prosecuted, the courts would have to decide to strip him of his immunity.

Though Pinochet was not extradited to Spain, his arrest and detention send a clear sign to others worldwide such as Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic, who has been indicted internationally for his crimes.

In October of 1998, Pinochet was arrested while on vacation in Great Britain after a Spanish judge issued a warrant alleging gross human rights abuses, including the torture and murder of thousands.

In the aftermath of World War II, the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted to set a standard.

But nations must be willing to uphold those standards and hold leaders of other countries accountable for their actions.

As the UN's World Court in the Hague continues to gain power, this kind of arrest and prosecution will become more common.

Pinochet's fate is now in the hands of his countrymen, but the world can learn from this experience. Countries must follow through on their commitment to human rights.

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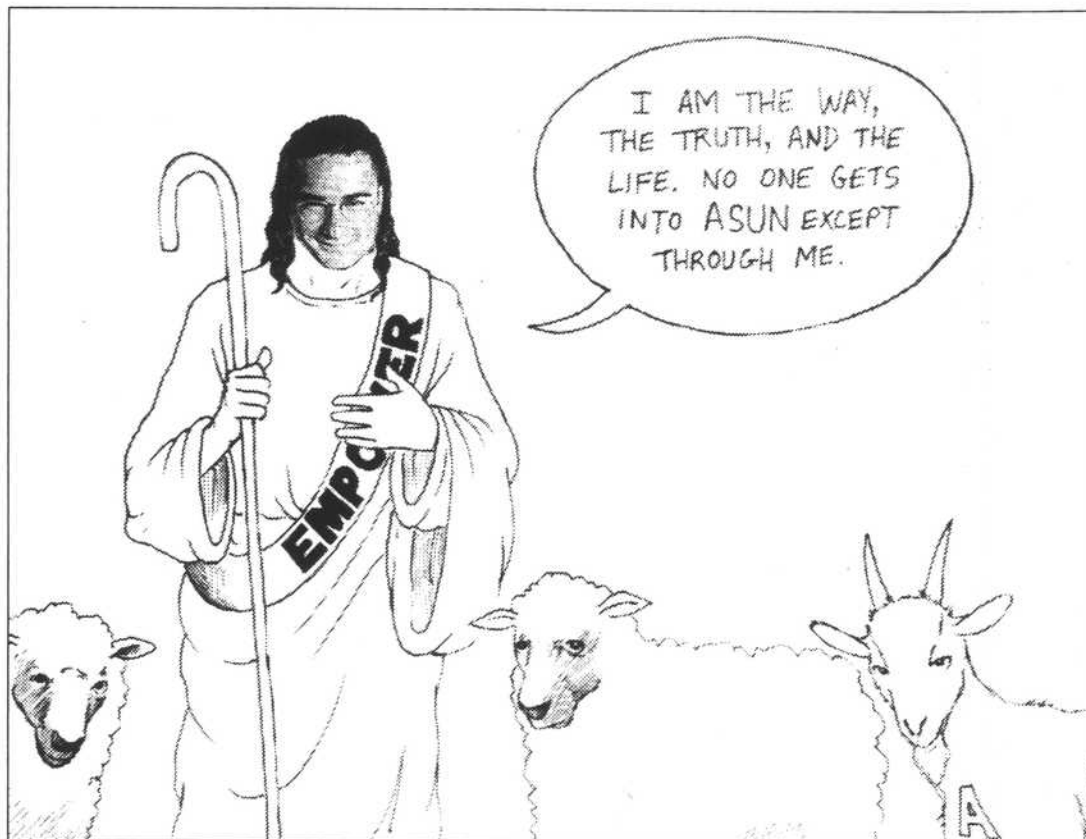
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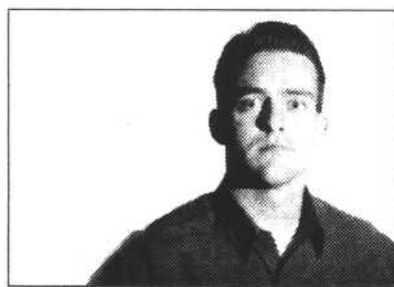
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Obermeyer's VIEW



Watching the detectives

Police officers need to be closely monitored



The emblem of this gang was a grinning skull wearing a cowboy hat, with poker cards played in the foreground. The cards? Aces and eights; the dead man's hand. Men have stalked Los Angeles, boldly displaying this moniker and forcing their will upon those they encountered since 1979.

A recent LA Times story described these rouge outlaws as "macho, insubordinate and cliquish." The chief of the LAPD announced this gang is soon to be no more.

Who are the dastardly villains on the receiving end of a death warrant? The Bloods or the Crips? The Latin Kings? Nope, the Los Angeles Police Department special anti-gang outfit: CRASH (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums).

You may have read about the growing police corruption scandal in California. On Friday, the Los Angeles Police Chief issued a statement that sealed the fate of L.A.'s famous CRASH units. Chief Bernard C. Parks announced a plan for Los Angeles to "start from scratch" with regard to its specialized gang task force.

Hundreds of cases are now being reviewed and many have already been overturned because the members of the CRASH unit abused their police powers to an alarming extent. The ACLU has come out and declared this to be a "positive step", while the attorney for several complainants sees this step as useless, because officers are not being terminated, only reassigned.

As a society we need to rethink

the position we have entrusted to the police. Sure, our gangs in blue are necessary, but their role needs to be fundamentally altered. Hopefully Americans understand social interactions well enough to see more adequate controls put in place to control the behavior of police. Not only in the specialized task forces like CRASH, but every person we put on the street to serve and protect us.

While serving my time in the Air Force, I was given the pain of sitting in a patrol car and listening to the high-pitched whine of the radar system as cars zoomed by. I also witnessed first-hand the effects the role of police officer has on an individual.

As enforcers of regulations we saw ourselves as morally superior to "normal" citizens. We stood straighter and had shinier boots. There was no question we were a higher evolution of humanity and that, my friends, is a dangerous attitude. Haughty egotism is rampant in many police forces and particularly in these specialized, supposedly elite units, and this attitude has led to unneeded and preventable abuses of power.

If you have spent too many late nights watching reruns of "NYPD Blue" or "Homicide," you may think police are white knights out there protecting your rights. One piece of evidence against the white knight hypothesis is a study conducted by Douglas Smith and Christy Visser that found all the same human failings in police that exist in each of us.

Their biases were found to disadvantage minorities and those with criminal pasts — even when details of crimes are held constant. It should be no surprise that police officers are just as vulnerable to mistakes as anyone else. After all, they are only human and have a tremendously difficult job. We need to make their job easier on them.

Preeminent lawyer Walt Bachman, in his recent book "Law v. Life: What Lawyers are afraid to say

about the Legal Profession," went so far as to imply that all police lie, and everyone in the criminal justice system knows it. It is their job to get as many arrests and convictions as possible, so they give accounts of arrests in the most negative way they can, no matter if the incident happened that way or not.

Whether all police lie or abuse their authority is another matter, but many do, so we must strive to take the human factor as far out of crime detection as we can. Many police cars now have video — that is a good thing. America needs to take this a step farther.

All police cars should have video on at all times and police should wear audio recorders while on duty. This will solve some of the problems with stereotyping and give us a clearer picture of the life of a police officer. We will be able to view or listen to the patrolman's entire shift. Many may argue that I want to take police discretion out of policing — they would be right. Do we really want police out on the beat playing God? Letting some people go while systematically targeting others?

But we must be careful of what we ask for. Many criminal researchers believe almost all of us commit some act that, if observed by authorities, could result in our arrest. In America we like to think of ourselves as the good guys, no matter what we've done in our lives, and the people in courts and prisons are the bad guys. The picture of a white knight valiantly serving justice is more pleasant imagery than fallible humans shaped by difficult circumstances, capable of making mistakes. The reality is we all break the rules from time to time; some more than others.

Do we really want a fair crime detection system? Or would we rather just center our law enforcement efforts on the poor and minority areas and sleep better at night, because we are the good guys.

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